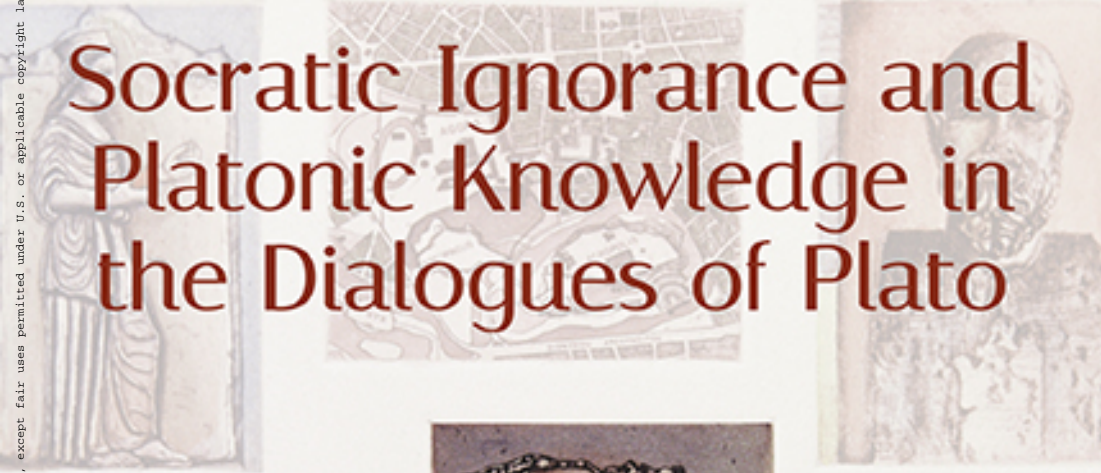


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# Socratic Ignorance and Platonic Knowledge in the Dialogues of Plato



Sara Ahbel-Rappe

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SUNY series in Western Esoteric Traditions

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David Appelbaum, editor

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Sara Ahbel-Rappe



**SUNY**  
P R E S S

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## PREFACE

# SOCRATES AS AN ESOTERIC FIGURE

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This book constitutes a reading of the figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues. It starts from what I take to be a promise to the reader, embedded in the *Apology's* revelation that "no one is wiser than Socrates" (21a4). The promise, as I understand it, is that this revelation will bear fruit in the reading of the dialogues; it will turn out not to be merely an ironic statement. Socratic wisdom will prove in some way worthy of this distinction as the highest wisdom. Now, the way that this promise does bear fruit in the reading of the dialogues depends on how we understand the Socratic persona. What I want to show in this book is that the statement "No one is wiser than Socrates" amounts to the claim that no one can be wiser than Socrates, since Socrates stands in for the inherent wisdom of the reader's own mind. Thus, it turns out that the reader can be no wiser than the reader is willing to be. The extent to which the Socratic persona puzzles the reader, troubles the reader, interrupts the reader, awakens the reader into a search for wisdom will, then, function as a gauge of the reader's wisdom. And so, in this sense, "No one is wiser than Socrates" is a statement that can not only bear fruit in the reading of Plato's dialogues, but it can also bear fruit in a much larger way, in the very life of wisdom that each reader is likely to pursue.<sup>1</sup>

I argue that this Socratic persona represents wisdom, and as such it is the larger container within which Plato constructs his philosophy, which operates as a form of knowledge. Socratic wisdom contains Platonic knowledge. But how do we get at the meaning and contents of Socratic wisdom, especially in light of Socrates's infamous disavowal of both wisdom and knowledge? What is Socratic wisdom, and how does it differ from knowledge? To begin to answer this question, I invoke a distinction between an inner and an outer Socrates. There is an outward aspect of Socratic philosophy, which might be what Socrates himself, alluding to the Delphic oracle, refers to in the *Apology* as the appearance of Socrates, when he says, "[The god] appears [φαίνεται] to mention this man, Socrates, whereas he is availing himself of my name ..." (23a9–b1).<sup>2</sup> So, Socrates and his name are an appearance. At once the reader is alerted to the Platonic language of appearance and reality. In fact, Socrates goes on to say that



the god makes him a paradigm,<sup>3</sup> thus employing the two terms of the Platonic metaphysical spectrum: paradigm (form) and appearance. At the outset, then, we are introduced to “this man, Socrates,” a particular individual living in the world at particular place and time, and to the paradigm, the eternal Socrates. Plato portrays “this Socrates” as a street philosopher, whose primary intellectual tools are inductive logic, universal definition, and moral reasoning.<sup>4</sup> In Plato’s *Apology*, this Socrates avers that he has neither knowledge nor wisdom and, consistent with this disavowal, employs philosophical techniques that might seem similar to those employed in modern analytic philosophy, involving sampling the views of others, pointing out inconsistencies in those views, and refining the conceptual networks associated with major ethical categories.

Yet there is also an inward aspect of Socratic philosophy, which might be what the oracle references in the *Apology* when it indicates that no one is wiser than Socrates (21b5).<sup>5</sup> This paradigmatic Socrates stands for the inner mind present in everyone. This philosopher does not transmit knowledge to others, just because he attempts to foster self-knowledge. He accordingly employs a philosophical technique that involves introspection—the reader’s own introspection—or self-inquiry. Only by assuming this particular stance of self-inquiry, can the reader meet this other Socrates, the one who appears in her own mind, and not in the streets of Athens. In summary, by the “inward Socrates” I mean within the reader. So, to say that “no one is wiser than Socrates” is to say that this highest wisdom can only be accessed as self-knowledge, is only available through self-inquiry.

This book addresses many of the major appearances of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues, and attempts to show how they foster the practice of self-inquiry. I argue that Plato’s dialogues present a contemplative orientation by means of the figure of Socrates. Accordingly, as with other such contemplative traditions (i.e., certain forms of yoga or of Buddhist meditation), so in the Platonic dialogues there is an assumption that the raw ingredients of wisdom are furnished by the mind itself, considered as field of study and exploration. I will draw attention to the way in which the Socratic aspect of Plato’s dialogues purports to teach the student how to investigate the mind and its objects directly. According to this interpretation, the Socratic element of the dialogues aims to point to a unique kind of awareness, which Socrates refers to as the “awareness that he possesses no wisdom, great or small” (*Ap.* 23b3; ἐγὼ γὰρ δὴ οὔτε μέγα οὔτε μικρὸν σύννοϊδα ἑμαυτῷ σοφὸς ὄν). There will be more to say about this idea of no wisdom, great or small, as the book unfolds.

I will be arguing, then, for an esoteric Socrates, not so much one that appears hidden within the lines of the dialogue or even orally transmitted outside

of the dialogues,<sup>6</sup> but one with whom the reader becomes familiar just by holding open the space of self-inquiry as she encounters the figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues. In this book, I argue that it is this open space of self-inquiry that is the larger ground within which all constructions of Platonic philosophy ought to be held. Yet in speaking of the esoteric Socrates through a kind of calque based on the word *esoteric* (e.g., inward, inner as opposed to outer), I risk running into associations made with the word esoteric as it is frequently applied to Platonic studies. In one common use, the idea of the esoteric suggests doctrines that circulated within the Academy. For example, Krämer (1990) both surveys the evidence for and makes a case for the existence of Plato's "unwritten doctrines," a term that is borrowed initially from Aristotle's *Physics*, where Aristotle mentions certain principles of Plato's metaphysics revealed in his "so-called unwritten doctrines" (209b14; ἐν τοῖς λεγομένοις ἀγράφοις δόγμασιν). As evidence for this idea of the esoteric Plato, it is founded on ancient testimonia purporting that Plato's metaphysics is rooted in a system of principles, the monad and the dyad, which themselves are iterations of Pythagorean ideas.

Another important association with the idea of an esoteric Plato lies in the quasi-political concept of "esoteric writing." Melzer (2014) touches broadly on this more political understanding of esoteric writing. According to Melzer, "esoteric writing" is commonly characterized by three intentions of the author: to convey truths to a select group of disciples; to conceal these truths from the majority of readers; and to replace or disguise the esoteric core of the teaching with a "fictional doctrine—the 'exoteric teaching'" (1). The idea of deception, withholding, and selective transmission here has nothing to do with the particular construction of the unwritten doctrines that is founded on evidence from the early Academy. Instead, this method of construing the idea of the esoteric rests largely on historical, external factors that might influence an author to mislead the larger reading public about what his genuine views actually imply. Melzer's book owes much to the earlier interpretations of the political philosopher Leo Strauss.

As we have seen, this idea of a Platonic or Socratic esoteric is not novel. The word *esoteric* has many associations for twenty-first-century readers of Plato. It might appear to be an oxymoron to suggest that there is a *popular esotericism*, but Straussian interpretations and the unwritten-doctrines interpretation of the Tübingen school are examples of well-known constructions that sometimes link themselves to the idea of a Platonic esoteric.<sup>7</sup> As these particular elaborations of the esoteric are quite common in certain strands of Plato scholarship, in this preface I also want to distinguish my approach from them. First, Strauss's use of an esoteric system of writing consists in the practice of dismissing doctrinal

formulations as masking the inner meaning of Plato's dialogues: the best way to read Plato's dialogues is to insist on the irony of Plato's metaphysical and political formulations. Second, according to the Tübingen unwritten-doctrines hypothesis, only those who have become familiar with a particular scheme of metaphysical principles can understand the dialogues. The scheme is adumbrated in a few dialogues but made explicit in later doxographical traditions concerning Plato's inner circle in the Academy. Even so, these two camps, while both suggesting the idea of an esoteric Plato, clash profoundly over the existence of metaphysical theses or even dogmas within Platonism. The Straussian interpretation valorizes Socrates precisely as the figure of contemplative engagement who suspends judgment about metaphysical commitments, whereas the unwritten tradition hypothesis valorizes the Academy as an historical community heir to the teachings of Plato.

There are attractive elements in both of these readings, as, for example, the importance of Socratic aporia as a prevailing motif within the dialogues, or the metaphysical interpretation of the dialogues as belonging to the Academic inheritance of Plato and Platonism.<sup>8</sup> I am not here treating the question of the existence of an implicit metaphysical system circulating in the Academy as an oral teaching in terms of how it relates to the Socratic dialogues in particular.<sup>9</sup> Rather, my position, to be argued fully in what follows, is that Socratic wisdom, in contrast to Platonic knowledge, is neither a set of explanatory principles of the kind that we might associate with the unwritten doctrines nor a crypto-political position conveyed by the very figure of the apolitical Socrates.

When I assert that Socrates belongs to the Western esoteric tradition, I mean something else altogether. I mean to suggest that Plato uses the Socratic persona in order to promote an overall orientation to his philosophy: profound commitment to the cultivation of self-knowledge on the grounds that the self to which the Socratic persona points is accessible to each and every reader of the dialogues as the presence, certified by the very light of his or her own intelligence, of the intellect (*nous*), discerned through intuitive wisdom, which Plato equates with the presence of the divine in one's midst.

What I am saying is that Socrates' esotericism leads us in a direction that is precisely not a system of principles or "thick descriptions" of a reality that is outside the reader, or that can be captured by means of any such set of ideas, whether orally circulating or written down. The encounter with Socratic wisdom is a lived experience. Even oral teachings can be written about in books, but that genuine experience of "having no wisdom, great or small," is more like a revolution in thought—more like a reversal of consciousness—than it is a theory about metaphysics. Therefore, although Socratic wisdom does indeed belong

to the history of philosophy, what makes it an esoteric teaching is not a historical position as much as an attempt to engage the reader at any point in history. In other words, the esoteric aspect of Socratic wisdom is realized in the reader, who then functions as the Socratic presence in the reading of the dialogues.

Further, Socratic wisdom is not exactly a constructive epistemology, moral philosophy, or psychology. By virtue of its relationship to Platonic knowledge, it has applications in these areas, but in itself Socratic wisdom remains in some ways prior to all such constructs. Thus while the dialogues create the verisimilitude of being situated in fifth-century Athens, dramatizing the thought worlds (pre-Socratic physics, the Sophistic movement, the metaphysics of Parmenides and Heraclitus, the mystery religions, Pythagoreanism, and Orphism, to name the major ones) in which Socrates (and, later, Plato) practiced philosophy, they simultaneously invoke and attempt to awaken the reader's own intellect. Therefore, the only way to stage an encounter with this Socrates, this inner Socrates, is by following his cues to the cultivation of what we might call self-presence.

Because this dimension of the Socratic persona, its power to hold open space for the reader's own inquiry, is in a sense common ground for anyone reading Plato's dialogues, reading them through the figure of Socrates might seem to offer at most a banal starting point. Nevertheless, in what follows, I rely on the obviousness of this invocation of Socrates as an invitation to the reader to enter the dialogues herself. While my reading is grounded in this Socratic invitation, I explore in depth just how Plato approaches the nature of the self that is invited along, and how Plato uses this Socratic persona to facilitate self-knowledge. The Socratic self, the one that is invited into the picture through the shock and awe of the Socratic presence, does not so much occupy a theoretical space but instead invokes the real presence of the reader's own awareness, calling the reader to (self-)attention.

Plato's dialogues are the subjects of interpretations with which, just as the jury was long familiar with the "old accusers" (*Ap.* 18e; τοὺς πάλαι) against whom Socrates defended himself on the day of his trial, many modern readers have grown up. Such readers may well be familiar with interpreters who construe Plato's Socratic dialogues through the lens of developmentalism,<sup>10</sup> eudaimonism, or even egoistic eudaimonism.<sup>11</sup> There are approximately 2,500 years of Socratic reception that lie between the reader and the Socratic presence in Plato's dialogues. There is the further difficulty that Socrates wrote nothing, that, from the beginning of the Socratic movement,<sup>12</sup> Socratic philosophy has always been the practice of Socratic receptions. Finally, there is the problem that Socrates funds the Western philosophical tradition. How to separate or even imagine what constitutes the original Socrates and what his later imitations? What I am suggesting

is that almost nothing separates the reader from the Socratic persona that Plato tries to invoke, since that Socratic persona is simply the reader's own capacity to perform the work of Socrates, of calling on her own nature as a knower, as intelligent presence.

Yet another dimension that runs throughout this book is the appeal to notions of the Socratic that compete with other ancient interpretations of Socrates (such as that of Aristotle) primarily culled from later (Middle and Neo-) Platonist interpretations of the dialogues.<sup>13</sup> So, for example, I argue that the Neoplatonic conception of virtue as essentially contemplative, rather than as oriented toward action in the world or even as a construct belonging to moral philosophy, can help us understand the Socratic claim that virtue is knowledge. Or, again, I acknowledge the fifth-century philosopher Proclus's tendency to read the dialogues under the scope of the Neoplatonic conception of the symbol, an aesthetic phenomenon that, according to Proclus, has dynamic properties capable of helping to transform the very soul of the person who encounters it, just because it functions as a synecdochical, rather than representational, device. Originally, the etymological background of the word *symbol* indicates that two *symbola*, or shards, fragments of a whole, are brought together to make the structure of each such token legible. Proclus believed that Plato presented his Socrates as a token, a paradigm, not just of the ideal human being, but rather as the *eidos*, the form of the human intellect, the inner mind, or higher soul. Presumably, then, according to Proclus, by encountering the figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues, the reader simultaneously contacts and even awakens the intellect, the intuitive faculty within her own mind. Proclus's work on the Socratic persona in Plato's dialogues asks us to understand that figure as a mirror for the reader's mind. Socrates and the reader—each perform the work of becoming such a *symbolon*, a token, each of which makes the other legible.<sup>14</sup>

Another way that I try to help the Socratic presence come into view is through the use of extra-Platonic philosophical analogues. In addition to offering close readings of the dialogues and addressing issues pertinent to the original Greek, I engage in some comparative philosophy. I not only utilize interpretations of the later Platonists but also include in each chapter a comparative divagation intended to bring out the contours of a Socrates who is not necessarily shaped by the familiar scholarly debates invented in the annals of analytic philosophy. Each chapter includes an excursion into the territory of either later Greek or else non-Western contemplative traditions. We shall have recourse to some decidedly non-Socratic literature, culled from later Greek philosophical traditions (Aristotle, the Stoics, the Neoplatonists, and Christian Neoplatonists) as well as from non-Greek traditions, including Mahayana Buddhism of the first

century CE in India; the Theravada or Pali Buddhist canon; a later Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit composition by the poet Shantideva; the *Upanishads*; and even the eleventh century CE Persian philosopher Suhrawardi's most important philosophical work, the *Philosophy of Illumination (Hikmat al ishq)*. For the most part, I use these works to view such well known and even foundational Socratic texts as the *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Parmenides*, *Lysis*, and so on, through a significantly foreign lens, for the purpose of projecting a very different conceptual trajectory for Socrates than that with which the modern academic audience interested primarily in Greek philosophy can be supposed to be broadly familiar. In general, the point of introducing these comparisons both to later Platonic thought and to Indian-Persian thought, is to help the reader imagine a different approach to the very activity of thinking. Generally, we think we know what it is to think. But, I argue, the kind of thinking with which the figure of Socrates permits us to engage is not at all obvious. It does not just involve argument, syllogism, logic, and inference. Because Socratic thinking does involve activities of thought that are not fully confined to such analytic techniques, I have found it helpful to use other traditions of philosophy, sometimes non-Western, to document and to illustrate appeals to what I assert is a Socratic challenge to what is often called thinking. Ganeri (2007) speaks of a tradition in Indian philosophy that he calls "a practice of truth" (1). This art of unveiling the soul, of uncovering the nature of the mind, is something that runs deep throughout the Indian tradition. Also running through the Greek tradition is that current that expresses the nature of truth as concealed, as requiring search in the direction of a self that is not yet known. As Heraclitus has it, "Nature loves to conceal itself" (frag. 123). And, he adds, "I searched out myself" (frag. 101).

At some point in the second century CE, a collection of hexameter writings emerged, purporting to be the divine revelations given to a seer who had succeeded in channeling Plato's soul. These oracles, the *Chaldean Oracles* as they are now called, were a Middle Platonist invention that attempted to insinuate Eastern wisdom into the Platonic tradition inasmuch as, although they were written in Greek, they presented themselves as Babylonian. They were written in hexameters to convey the language of the oracular. Although their Eastern origins are dubious, their significance remains as a ritual text that testifies to the living traditions of Platonism in the Roman Empire. Perhaps one could think of the present book as making a similar kind of move by pointing beyond the Western tradition of philosophy in order to recuperate, not Plato's soul but, rather, a kind of thought process that is difficult to excavate from the pages of the Platonic dialogues. The poem that is now considered the "First Chaldean Oracle" (found in the writings of the last head of the post-Platonic academy in

Athens, Damascius) urges the reader to investigate the question of just what it is to think. It begins as follows:

There is something to think, which you should think with the  
flower of your mind. For if you incline your mind toward it and  
think of it as something, you will not succeed in thinking that.  
(lines 1–2)<sup>15</sup>

It might not be going to far to say that Socratic wisdom functions, in the very words of the “First Chaldean Oracle,” to activate what the oracle calls “the sacred backward turning eye” of the soul; this wisdom shines the light of thought back onto the very mind itself. Thus, I hope to suggest that Socratic wisdom, in its refusal to pronounce on doctrines of natural philosophy, metaphysics, and psychology, is related to Platonic knowledge in a specific way. Primarily, Socratic wisdom refers to a perspective that is more interested in understanding the relationship between any objects of thought and the person who creates those thoughts. The Socratic orientation requires the learner to take ownership of her very own mind, and so, perhaps, for a time at least, to abstain from sophistry, that is, thinking that is other-oriented, persuasive thinking, or thinking vulnerable to persuasion. Often in the Socratic dialogues (*Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, *Theaetetus*, *Greater and Lesser Hippias*, *Republic* book 1), Plato portrays Sophists together with their followers occupying the role of Socrates’s adversaries.<sup>16</sup> That tension between Sophistic commitments and the Socratic freedom from entanglement in views is also recursive within the Platonic corpus as a whole, given the abiding presence of Socratic wisdom within the constructions of Platonic knowledge.

It is time now to specify more precisely what configures Socrates as introducing the esoteric within the realm of Plato’s dialogues. For Plato, then, Socrates’s presence in the dialogues revolves around these two aspects already discussed: the esoteric and the exoteric Socrates. Socrates’s wisdom, the highest wisdom, consists in the “awareness” that he has no wisdom, great or small (*Ap.* 21b). I take this statement to signify what Augustine referred to as uncreated wisdom, the same now as ever was and ever will be.<sup>17</sup> That is, it refers to eternal, infinite, unconditioned wisdom rooted in the absolute, or to what different traditions have referred to as the transcendent aspect of reality. Naturally, much more needs to be said about the nature of this transcendence and about the language that Plato (and the whole of the Platonic tradition) uses to signal it. Damascius, the sixth-century head, or diadochus, of the post-Platonic Academy, spoke of the transcendent as that which cannot be spoken. He called it the ineffable, the *arrheton*. The highest wisdom that Socrates announces in the *Apology* is “no wisdom,” precisely because of its transcendence. This insight into the

transcendent ground of being, what Plato calls the form of the good “beyond essential nature” (*Resp.* 509b6), is behind Socrates’s esoteric disclosure in the *Apology*, that “no one is wiser than Socrates.”

The other dimension of Socrates, his exotericism, one might say, is captured in Plato’s portrait of Socrates’s life and death. Socrates apparently lives a very ordinary life. Not by belonging to a secret society or by cultivating hidden rites or rituals, but by living his life in the open, fully and publicly affirming what Apollo endorses as the highest wisdom, Socrates lives as an embodiment of the very truth he has come to serve.

In addition, the Socratic paradigm represents a dimension of Plato’s philosophy that is not captured in the Tübingen approach. That dimension, revealing the exemplary force of the life and mission (his “service to the god,” *Ap.* 30a7; τῷ θεῷ ὑπερησίαν) of Socrates, is an object of study for the Neoplatonic commentators. According to the Neoplatonists, the figure of Socrates in Plato’s dialogues can be interpreted both as an event, that is, as a divine commission, and allegorically, as alluding to the higher soul, the immanent intellect, of every human being. For example, Hermias begins his *Phaedrus* commentary with these very arresting words: “Socrates was sent into the world of birth and death for the purpose of benefiting the human race and especially the minds of young people” (2012, 17.1). That higher soul, the leading light of humanity who serves the divine as well as his fellow human beings, is also present immanently in humanity as the higher self, innately wise, the inner light whose presence can only be detected via the path of self-inquiry. As an example of this kind of interpretation, we can turn to Proclus’s commentary on *Alcibiades I*. Proclus writes:

Socrates, because he is an inspired lover and is on the ascendant track of pure intelligible beauty, has established himself as an analogy to the intellect of the soul. For what else is capable of making contact with the intelligible beauty than intellect and all that has intellectual life. (43.7–10)<sup>18</sup>

The last successor of Plato’s Academy, the scholar Damascius, writes about the life of the true philosopher in his lectures on the *Phaedo*. He takes Socrates as his model of the philosophic life that frees itself from all social roles and disdains ceremony or badges of office. If the philosopher finds that he is called on to perform such a role, he still carries out all his activities “in search of purification.” If he should need sacred robes for this purpose, “he will wear them as symbols, not as garments.” This stripping away of the unnecessary is dictated insofar as the philosopher aspires to a genuine life, “meeting his own pure self” (Dam., *In Ph.* 67, 71–72; trans. Westerink [Damascius 1977, 54–57]).



In the *Symposium* of Plato, Socrates wears the hoplite armor of the ordinary citizen when he goes into battle; at least in the *Symposium*, Alcibiades describes him as “hopla echon,” or “wearing armor” (*Smp.* 221a1). Intellectually, Socrates also eschewed the label, “wise” (*Ap.* 21b3: “I am aware of being wise neither in great nor small measure”), and instead presented himself as equal in rank to all of those he encountered: “I share your ignorance,” he tells his interlocutor.<sup>19</sup> Thus the esotericism of Socrates is more or less disguised by means of his very ordinary appearance. Socrates does not hide within the enclaves of a closed community, but comes out into the open, wearing the clothes of the ordinary citizen. Plato made sure that this esoteric teaching was transmitted as widely as possible, using the living figure of Socrates to initiate others into the same love of wisdom.<sup>20</sup>

In the pages that follow, we shall rely on the entirety of Plato’s intimations about the true nature of Socratic teaching, keeping in mind what Plato himself says about Socrates’s deceptive appearance. Perhaps it is in the otherworldly vignettes that Plato wants to leave us some egress by which to escape the Socratic stereotypes Plato himself generates. (Alcibiades tells us that Socrates most resembles a Silenus, a lascivious semihuman creature on the outside, while his interior opens up to reveal a divinity [*Symp.* 216e]).

Another framework for the idea of the esoteric Socrates might involve the Western esoteric tradition as it has been interpreted by historians of religion, particularly scholars who specialize in uncovering traditions operating at the margins of mainstream religions or philosophies. Often these practices require initiation for entrance or are in some other way hidden or secretive. Versluis (2003) quotes what he terms a “functional definition” of esotericism that goes back to late antique classification of Aristotle’s dialogues:<sup>21</sup>

The word “esoteric” derives from the Greek *esoterikos*, derived from *esotero*, comparative of *eso*, meaning “within.” Although its first known mention in Greek is in Lucian’s ascription to Aristotle of having “esoteric” (inner) and “exoteric” (outer) teachings, the word later came to designate the secret doctrines said to have been taught by Pythagoras to a select group of disciples. In this context, the word was brought into English in 1655 by Stanley in his *History of Philosophy*. Esotericism, as a field of academic study, refers to alternative, marginalized, or dissident religious movements or philosophies whose proponents in general distinguish their beliefs, practices, and experiences from public, institutionalized religious traditions. (par. 2)

Other modern scholars of esotericism start with the *Hermetica*, a syncretistic collection of texts that originate in Hellenistic Alexandria and feature dialogues with Hermes Trismegistus, often identified with Theuth or Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom (Goodrick-Clarke 2008, 15–33). The idea that the esoteric begins at a certain point in time that can be located in a certain movement or group, or in a set of teachings, is one way to understand the idea of the Western esoteric tradition (see also Hanegraaff 2012).

Plato's dialogues themselves evince a preoccupation with the idea of the esoteric in just this functional sense outlined by Versluis: namely, a distinction between those who are admitted as the audience of a teaching and those who are excluded, either by dint of inner qualifications or by dint of membership in a circle of initiates.<sup>22</sup> For example, the first time we meet young Socrates (following a dramatic dating of the dialogues), Zeno indicates to him that the lesson he is about to undergo under the tutelage of Parmenides is not for “ordinary people” and can't be demonstrated “in front of a crowd” (*Prm.* 136d–e). Likewise, Alcibiades prefaces his recounting of his failed seduction of Socrates with language from the mysteries.<sup>23</sup> His audience, fellow “sufferers” from the snakebite of Socrates, are “Bacchants,” that is, initiates: “As for house slaves and for anyone else who is not an initiate, my story's not for you: Block your ears!” (*Symp.* 218b7). In conversation with Crito, Socrates indicates that there “are only a few people” who hold the Socratic view that wronging another is always prohibited (*Cri.* 49d3). Socrates also treats the doctrine that men are “as in a kind of prison” in this life as an esoteric or, rather, secret (ἐν ἀρρήτοις) teaching (*Phd.* 62b3–4).

We might even think that by virtue of not publishing, by his very silence,<sup>24</sup> Socrates becomes in this functional sense an esoteric figure: remote, not accessible through words that circulate in the open but through some other means involving the transmission of his wisdom to others, who then report his “words.” The silence of Socrates resonates with Pythagorean lore that relates the importance of distinguishing between the initiates and the probationaries, both of which are spiritually segregated from the community of outsiders. For example, Iamblichus reported that Timaeus, the fourth-century Pythagorean, distinguished between members of the Pythagorean initiatic societies (*hetairiai*) based, as Horkey relates, “on their proximity to the master: those who were real or ‘esoteric’ Pythagoreans (οἱ ἐσωτερικοί) who received their name because they were ‘inside the curtain’ (ἐντὸς σινδόνοϋ), and those who were ‘outside’ (ἐκτόϋ; ἔξωθεν), who were rejected by Pythagoras and publicized the secrets of the Pythagoreans” (2013, 115; citing Iambli., *VP* 41.15; 52.14–18).

Horky remarks on the likeness of these Pythagorean rankings to certain tendencies prevalent in the Socratic circles (115). Even Xenophon distinguishes between the inner and outer circle of Socratic associates, detailing an elaborate recruitment effort or selection process for those who would become intimates or genuine Socratics.<sup>25</sup>

By default, we awaken to the Socratic presence through public circulation of the *Sokratikoi logoi*, which were authored, as we shall see, by members of just this inner circle (*Phd.* 59d). Yet the silence of Socrates himself, his lack of writing, begs the question of whether or not we are fully able to rely on those same representations. Ought we not take heed of that very silence, curious as to what it might signal? Silence in the ancient world was always the most powerful code for mystery; what a tradition chooses not to convey is as important as what it chooses to convey. On the other hand, one could object that this argument from silence forms the most telling objection against the positing of an esoteric Socrates: All we have is the varied abrogation of this silence, none of which can be said to be either authored or authorized by Socrates. Therefore, the questions of who can be initiated into the esoteric teachings of Socrates and what then constitutes the obligation of such an initiate must be answered. The answer, as I hope to show, is that every reader of the Socratic dialogues is a worthy candidate for initiation. The only obligation placed on such a reader is to acknowledge her own intelligence. Socrates's suggestion might just be, "occupy yourself," be present to the reality of what you are bringing forth into the world: Be a guardian, be the daimonion, be the midwife, be the Socrates, so to say, within your life. Play the part of Socrates to your inner Crito, the "best friend" who would have you advance your own cause at the expense of others; play the part of Socrates, for that matter, to your inner Alcibiades, the young person in your charge whose ambitions and appetites you accompany into the market place.

In the *Phaedo*, the dialogue in which Plato tells the story of Socrates's death in prison, we learn that Socrates dies surrounded by those who presumably were his close associates—Apollodorus, Critoboulos, Hermogenes, Epigenes, Aeschines, Antisthenes, Ctesippus, Menexenus, Simmias, Cebes, Euclides, and Terpsion. Crito was present, though not listed at *Phaedo* 59b–c, and two other followers, Plato and Aristippus, are absent from the company: Plato was ill, and Aristippus was out of the city; *Phaedo*, in addition, was present, as he narrates the dialogue. Thus Plato mentions seventeen members of the "Socratic circle": of these, fully nine were known to have written Socratic literature, while others were known from Plato's works and elsewhere, as "imitating" Socrates. For example, in the *Symposium* we are told that Apollodorus, "the most fanatical in his day about Socrates" (173b3–4), adopted the Socratic habit of going shoeless.

This catalogue is Plato's record of perplexity concerning the meaning and transmission of the Socratic philosophical legacy. It is also an indication that there existed aspects of Socrates's teaching that were difficult to transmit. Again, the deathbed scene of the *Phaedo* 59, with the Socratic circle gathered about Socrates as he utters his final words, is a succession story.<sup>26</sup> In the *Phaedo*, Plato alludes to the multiple representations of Socrates as well as to the numerous imitators of Socrates. Although Plato's Socrates is also such a representation or imitation, Plato is able to insinuate that his Socrates occupies a space that cannot itself be occupied through representations. Plato was absent from that company on the day of Socrates's death. Socratic wisdom is a cipher that nevertheless contains the whole of Platonic knowledge, and this is why Plato brings Socrates so far along on his philosophical journey past Socratic ethics and into the wilderness of his metaphysics.

Here is a guide to what I take up in each chapter. In the introduction, "Socratic Ignorance and Platonic Knowledge," I argue for a more inward or even contemplative understanding of Socrates, and show how Socrates can be said to belong to the Western esoteric tradition. I suggest that in some sense Plato conceives of Socrates as possessing an initiatory function, insofar as the Socratic persona indicates a certain orientation to the study of philosophy, which is rooted in self-knowledge. In the second half of the introduction, I survey the Socratic persona in Plato's dialogues insofar as it resonates with certain initiatory traditions, within the compass of ancient Greek religiosity.

In chapter 1, "Socratic Philosophy," I elaborate some key pointers to the nature of what I understand by Socratic philosophy, emphasizing its origins in self-knowledge and elaborating an interpretation of the Socratic "axiom" that virtue is knowledge through the orientation of self-knowledge. I also emphasize its freedom from doctrinal ambitions or formulations, just because of this primary orientation. I compare some Pali texts from the *Majjha Nikaya* or *Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha* to highlight how freedom from doctrinal formulations does not entail the skepticism associated with the New Academy or indeed any modern forms of skepticism.

In chapter 2, "Socratic Receptions," I discuss the archaeology and stratification of Socratic representations, from the time of Plato himself through Aristotle and the Hellenistic or Socratic schools. I suggest the possibility of carving out room for a Neoplatonist interpretation of the Socratic persona in Plato's dialogues. Or, rather, as the Neoplatonist reading of the dialogues approaches the topic of virtue through the avenue of contemplative virtue, I suggest that Socrates pursued a contemplative understanding of virtue starting with the beginning of his rounds in the streets of Athens.

In chapter 3, “Socrates and Self-Knowledge,”<sup>28</sup> I argue that self-knowledge in a specific sense, the realization that the person is most fundamentally the intellect, is in keeping with what Plato elsewhere says about the true identity of the person but also has implications for how the person can come to know genuinely what his self is. I focus on the *Charmides’s* puzzles about knowledge of knowledge. I try to show that these puzzles imply a positive construct insofar as they hint at the realization of the true self, intellect, as the ground of awareness and not as an object or particular to be known. I compare Aristotle’s discussion of the similar collocation, *noesis noeseos*, that is, intellection of intellection, as a description of divine knowledge at *Metaphysics* 1074b34. I also discuss Aristotle’s invocation of the puzzles introduced by the *Charmides’s* conceit of self-knowledge as *episteme epistemes*, or “knowledge of knowledge.”

In chapter 4, “*Euthydemus*: Native and Foreign,” I argue that this seed idea of knowledge of knowledge has practical implications for a life. It informs the goal of the elenchus, which is to help the interlocutor work with whatever states of mind arise—desires, thoughts, and passions—and to see them as not to be identified as the self. The elenchus, the practice of bearing witness to whatever arises as not self, as *allogrion*, helps the interlocutor to see into the distinction between what is “me” and what is “mine.” I center on the *Euthydemus* as reiteration of Socratic philosophy. I end with the Socratic philosopher, Antisthenes, as reported by the later Roman Stoic Epictetus, and his distinction between what is up to us and what is not up to us. I use this distinction to illuminate the practical import of this Socratic collocation: *oikeion* (native) and *allogrion* or *allogrion* (foreign).

In chapter 5, “*Alcibiades I*: The Mirror of Socrates,” I continue the study of the distinction between what is me and what is mine in terms of the *Alcibiades I’s* collocation, “the self itself” (*auto to auto*), arguing that this construct is crucial to the Socratic persona as it appears in Plato’s dialogues. Ultimately, whether or not this dialogue is seen as wholly or entirely spurious, the formulation of self-knowledge as divine knowledge is crucial to the entire Socratic enterprise. I compare the eleventh-century Iranian self-professed Platonist, Suhrawardi, and his understanding of divine knowledge as self-knowledge, to the fundamental intuitions of *Alcibiades I*.

In chapter 6, “*Lysis*: The Aporetic Identity of the First Friend,” I discuss the *Lysis’s* formulation of the “first friend” (*proton philon*) and argue that this first friend is the form of the good. But since the good, according to the definition offered in the *Lysis*, excludes nothing and lacks nothing, the good must include myself as well as all selves. Hence, Plato moves us toward the idea of an impersonal self, one not limited to the particular individual. I end the chapter by

comparing this idea of an impersonal or true self to formulations in the philosophy of the *Upanishads*, in which the egoistic or individual self is distinguished from the original, universal self. I suggest that in Western philosophy, it is almost inconceivable for us to talk about an “impersonal” or “universal” self, since by self, we just mean what is unique, individual, limited to a particular.

In chapter 7, “From Virtues to Forms in the *Phaedrus*,” I discuss the *Phaedrus*’s myth of the discarnate soul and argue that in this myth we see the equation of Socratic virtues and Platonic forms. Specifically, the *Phaedrus* shows that Socratic self-knowledge is the prerequisite for knowing the forms. Moreover, the virtues are not just ways of behaving or descriptions of principles governing action; they are actually names for the divine. To lead a godlike life consists in the intellect’s knowing the forms, as a consequence of which virtue informs the entire soul (247b). In the appendix to the chapter, I survey Neoplatonic interpretations of the myth of the charioteer, arguing that the Neoplatonists understand the myth as pointing to a kind of unitive knowing, in which the knower and the object of knowledge become one.

In chapter 8, “The *Theaetetus*: Socrates’s Interrogation of Platonic Knowledge,” I turn to the *Theaetetus*, contrasting the frame of the dialogue, in which Socrates emphasizes his intellectual barrenness, with the subsequent development of the dialogue as a whole, which surveys the entire range of possible objects of experience. In this dialogue, I suggest, Plato offers us a metaphysics of experience that nevertheless remains cognizant, in some sense, of the Socratic ground of wisdom, which is again free of all objects of knowledge. Here I introduce a comparison between the Suttanta and the Abhidhamma literature of Buddhism, to get at the relationship between Socratic emptiness and the experiential fullness that is the subject of the dialogue’s investigation. The Suttanta literature, or Sutta literature of early Buddhism, like the Socratic dialogues themselves, focuses on the person and dialogues of the sage who discourses on the nature of his supreme wisdom with various interlocutors who occupy states of mind and points of view in dire need of illumination by this fundamental wisdom. By contrast, the Abhidhamma literature of Buddhism (Sanskrit: *Abhidharma*) explores the nature of and elements that constitute conscious awareness. The appendix to the chapter discusses the Socratic metaphor of “birth pangs” (*odis*) in late Neoplatonism.

In chapter 9, “‘He Who Is Wisest among You’: Socratic Ignorance between the *Parmenides* and the *Apology*,” I consider the nature of the Apollonian pronouncement, that he is who wisest knows he has no wisdom, great or small, and show its resonance with the structure of the *Parmenides*. From this resonance I suggest that the dramatic chronology of the dialogues is relevant to

understanding the function of the Socratic persona, which is the larger space that contains the world of Platonic knowledge within it. I compare the Buddhist text, the *Prajna Paramita Hridaya Sutra*, a concise meditation on the meaning of the perfection of wisdom in the Sanskrit Mahayana tradition, to Socrates's proclamation that he is aware of having no wisdom, great or small.

The Conclusion of the book summarizes the various ways in which the Socratic persona in Plato's dialogues functions as a paradigm, a figuration of the perfect person, a model for emulation, and an avatar of the divine generosity that extends its providential nature into the world of space and time. In a similar way, Socrates operates as a kind of demiurge within the dialogues, assimilating his interlocutors to the good, which is to say, approaching them in their more divine aspects as intellectual beings capable of achieving virtue via the avenue of self-knowledge. I also address one of the most prominent of what I take to be myths about Plato's Socrates, namely, that he espoused the philosophy of egoism. It is here more than anywhere else that the inner Socrates who is essentially contemplative, and the outer Socrates who is a moral philosopher and possibly an empirical psychologist, sharply diverge. I compare Socrates with the twelfth-century Indian Buddhist philosopher, Shantideva, in terms of the purport of the precept that everyone wishes to be happy and free from suffering. This comparison, I argue, allows us to see that the fundamental Socratic insight, that everyone wants the good, is compatible with a radically altruistic perspective that rejects egoism.

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## INTRODUCTION

# SOCRATIC IGNORANCE AND PLATONIC KNOWLEDGE

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### The *Apology* and *Parmenides* as Bookends of Socratic Wisdom

Socrates, son of Sophroniscus (*Euthyd.* 297e; *La.* 180d, *Hp. Mai.* 298b), born in 469 BCE in the deme of Alopece and executed in 399 by the Athenian democracy, wrote nothing in his lifetime. He was the consummate public intellectual, someone who denied he ever taught anyone in private.<sup>1</sup> He was a philosopher so popularized that even in his own day he gave rise to an entire genre of literary portraits, the *Sokratikoi logoi*.<sup>2</sup> Socrates's life, his death at the hands of his fellow citizens, his infamous disavowal of knowledge, his ironic dissimulation—all of these are so very well known, and the stuff of such common treatment, that they would certainly seem to rule Socrates out as an esoteric figure.<sup>3</sup> And then we add the specific remarks that Socrates makes on the occasion of his trial—that he has no knowledge of virtue and that he is not a teacher at all. He consorted with public figures: politicians, tragedians, and shopkeepers, not to mention courtesans, generals, and especially Sophists, known for their retail merchandizing of public education. How could these associates be the audience for an esoteric teaching—if by esoteric we mean the inner arts, the ways of self-knowledge or of linking the divine in the human being to the divine principle, source of all?<sup>4</sup> It would seem that no philosopher could be less eligible to be secreted away under the mantle of the Western esoteric tradition.<sup>5</sup> Still, in this book I make just that claim: Socrates belongs to the Western esoteric tradition by virtue of his radical (yet admittedly public) declaration to the effect that he was aware of having no wisdom, great or small (*Pl., Ap.* 23a5). The present book may be defined as a careful elaboration of the implications of this statement, of what this Socratic awareness consists in, in light of the Socratic persona in Plato's dialogues.

As I detail in chapter 9, the *Parmenides* and the *Apology* delimit the trajectory of Socratic wisdom over the course of Socrates's life. In terms of the dialogues' dramatic chronology, we first meet Socrates in the *Parmenides* at

nineteen or twenty years old and at the very beginning of his philosophical life. He undergoes initiation into Eleatic philosophy under the tutelage of Parmenides and Zeno. The lessons young Socrates learns, particularly in the second half of the dialogue, where Parmenides elaborates his training in the dialectics of the one and many, allow Socrates an entryway into the first principle of (what would become) Platonic metaphysics, the One beyond being. The One of the *Parmenides*'s first hypothesis must be denied all predicates: past and future; place, time, and change; any characteristic or identity; and, above all, being itself. Here, in confronting the One that is not (*Prm.* 137b–142e),<sup>6</sup> Socrates is introduced to the path of radical negation, the *via apophatica*, what the Vedanta calls *Nirguna Brahman* (god without attributes).<sup>7</sup>

Plato represents Socrates as undergoing this initiation into the One at the dramatic starting point of his dialogues. When in the *Apology* we meet Socrates at the age of seventy, he has fully developed and found a way to live in the wake, so to say, of this One; he understands the highest possible wisdom as the realization that he has no wisdom. That initial awakening to the ground of wisdom is something Socrates has lived with—we are meant to understand this within the dramatic development of the Socratic dialogues. Socrates's first glimpse, portrayed so vividly in the *Parmenides*, of the reality that is nowhere, no place, not this, not that, is both the starting point for Socrates's own journey, and the space within which the entire drama of the dialogues unfolds.

The *Parmenides* and the *Apology*, then, are bookends. The former marks the initiation of Socrates into the heart of wisdom and forms the dramatic incipit wherein his philosophical journey begins. The latter marks the completion of Socrates's life in wisdom as well as the dramatic date that signaled the approach of Socrates's death. Again, it is the *Apology* that proclaims Socratic wisdom, the wisdom that is no wisdom, as the highest wisdom. By inserting the philosophical trajectory of Socrates in between these two plateaus, or perhaps even nadirs of negativity, Plato reveals that Socratic wisdom is the not quite empty space that somehow contains Platonic knowledge, in other words, whatever else unfolds within the span of the dialogues.<sup>8</sup> If Socratic wisdom is the highest wisdom, then all other forms of knowing, including the metaphysical theories that we understand under the banner of Platonism, are subsumed within it.

By associating this wisdom with Delphi, Plato also links Socratic wisdom to the precept *gnothi seauton* (know thyself) and in this way intimates from the very outset that Socratic wisdom is at its core derived from or identical to self-knowledge.<sup>9</sup> The esoteric teaching of Socrates via the avenue of self-knowledge remains central and vital within Plato's overall corpus. All subsequent forms of philosophical discovery are permeated with the Socratic reminder that the true

ground of knowledge is just this highest wisdom that is without measure, that is to say, neither great nor small. Hence Socrates lingers in the dialogues, sometimes in the background, but always representing Plato's own self-interrogations. At the same time, this Socratic wisdom cannot be disclosed as a doctrine precisely because it is grounded in self-knowledge. In this sense, then, Socratic wisdom is esoteric: It is beyond any form or formulation, being in fact formless. It is the highest wisdom because, in the very words of Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, it consists in "assimilation to god, insofar as possible" (176b1), and so admits in a way of the possibility of divine knowledge, since, as Socrates says, "to become like god is to become just and pious, with wisdom" (176b1–2; Sedley 2004, 74).

For Plato, at least, Socrates embodies the highest human wisdom as he also attempts to allow others access to this wisdom, to assist them in their own development. For the would-be learner, this ripening is ideally a journey from being self-seeking and identified with or even exalting one's doxa, one's appearance or projection into the world, into being a seeker of truth, one who is willing to risk every doxa, a circumstance that the confrontation with Socrates actually facilitates.<sup>10</sup> Intellectually, or spiritually, the evolution takes place as the person becomes aware of the primacy of his knowing, "epistemic" self over the objects of thought, the priority of the knowing self over the opinions harbored by this same self. As Socrates puts it in *Alcibiades I*, to care for the self is not the same as caring for what belongs to the self. What then is the self, apart from all of its accouterments? The true person, according to Socrates in *Alcibiades I*, the self itself, is the *ophthalmos* (132a5) or "pilot" of the soul (cf. *Phdr.* 247c–d): that is, the aspect of the soul that is the subject or seat of knowledge (*Alc.* 132c2) and as such is not identical with any of the things known. Moreover, not only is this the highest form of human wisdom, the realization that one has no wisdom, great or small. It is also divine knowledge, just because god is what one sees upon looking into the mirror of self: "[Is not the mind] therefore like the divine, and one who looks into the mind, on seeing the complete divine nature, that is, sees god and wisdom, would thus also know himself most?" (132c2–5).

Therefore, the Socratic conception of self-knowledge must be strictly qualified. We read in *Alcibiades I* that when looking into the mirror of the teacher's soul, the disciple sees his self, but also that god alone is in reality the only adequate mirror for the self. In other words, to know the self is to know the divine. Ibn Arabi, the famous thirteenth-century Sufi (and, some would say, Platonist philosopher),<sup>11</sup> wrote a book whose title was purportedly a hadith, or saying of the prophet Mohammed: "He who knows himself knows his lord."<sup>12</sup> This motto could do for a summary of esoteric wisdom. This wisdom then might be described from two points of view: on the one hand it is the self-realization of

the human being of her own reality that is not separate from the ultimate source of all reality. On the other hand, it is a realization that functions in tandem with the self-disclosure of the divine as not other than the very self who wakes up. This realization and this disclosure, and nothing less, form the basis, heart, and purpose of the esoteric tradition.<sup>13</sup> And it is here that the exoteric tradition in the West has the nasty habit of silencing, censoring, imprisoning, and even executing those who have made their way to this experience and accepted the mission, as Socrates did, of disclosing the nature of their experience for the sake of ripening others. Socratic esotericism is no secret, then.<sup>14</sup> To postulate this Socratic esotericism does not presuppose any undisclosed doctrines that were entrusted to an inner circle, for, even if there were such doctrines, the meaning of Socratic esotericism is not lost in the pages of an oral history that we can never reconstruct.<sup>15</sup> On the contrary, the drama of the Socratic dialogues enacts with meticulous clarity the struggle of the human soul to listen to the highest wisdom, to cultivate self-knowledge, and to see through the externally derived false identity, the individual ego whose supreme end is limited merely to his or her own well-being. That this drama circulated freely and even became a popular form of literature in the fourth century suggests that what is esoteric about Socrates is nevertheless hidden in plain view. In sum, then, in stark contrast to the idea of secret teachings only intended for the few, Plato's Socratic persona circulates widely and openly; the streets of Athens, a public space, forms the setting for this figure, but he travels forward in time, into the minds of the everyday reader, taking subways, airplanes, and making Wi-Fi connections. Far from being a secret, Socrates has made his way through Christian, Jewish, and Muslim civilizations to modernity and postmodernity.<sup>16</sup>

### On Not Being Deceived by Appearances

To place Socrates at the beginning of the Western esoteric tradition is already to commit an act of appropriation on the grandest scale; so much must be confessed. Those who like to read their texts in a more literal way—focusing on the bare-bones sketches afforded in the elenctic dialogues, where we find Socrates humbly discoursing in the streets of Athens, investigating human action, and pointedly denying having any wisdom—have every right and reason to be suspicious or even dismissive of this attempted appropriation. Such an objection must be faced seriously.

Plato's writings are filled with warnings to us: Don't be deceived by appearances. Nowhere is this caveat to be taken more seriously than in the appearance

of Socrates, who seems on the outside concerned with the affairs of this world, whose discourse is colored over by the pretensions and ambitions of his interlocutors, and who looks every bit the earthly philosopher that Cicero reports.<sup>17</sup> Nowhere is this deception more apparent than at his trial, where we find the beleaguered Socrates assimilated to the ranks of sophists and physical reductionists, his enemies radical democrats who make him the scapegoat for the unavenged deaths of the loyalists to the constitution, and in the irony of the charges themselves: teaching foreign gods and corrupting the youth (ironic because Socrates's god lives within each and every one of the youths he purportedly corrupts). Socrates attracts the animus of a group who fundamentally misunderstand him and have no idea how radically his vision indicts the public institutions the Athenians have made responsible for their corporate soul-rearing. Socrates's intervention in the business as usual in Athens—by which I mean his interrogation of the reign of greed, of the philosophy of pleonexia, and of the intelligentsia who theorized human nature as precisely ungoverned and ungovernable by any law other than self-interest—was quite literally outrageous for institutions founded on this principle.

In the Western traditions we find the figure of the sage associated with the figure of the martyr. Later, especially Christian (Justin, *Apol.* 5; see Edwards 2007), writers understood Socrates as a martyr for truth, and it was his scandalous death at the hands of the democracy that catalyzed the explosion of literature meant to commemorate him. Especially in the French Enlightenment, the death of Socrates inspired literary imitations and artistic representations, as litterateurs belonging to the age of philosophes celebrated Socrates in the battle against censorship, even as the subject of Socrates's death became enormously popular in painting. Diderot, the beleaguered encyclopedist, translated Plato's *Apology* into French while imprisoned for his atheistic pamphlet, *Lettre sur les aveugles*. Voltaire invoked the name of Socrates in a letter to Diderot concerning the case of a young “blasphemer” (Jean Francois de la Barre) who was mutilated and beheaded and then burned on a funeral pyre along with a copy of Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique*, writing, “One simply has to write to Socrates [i.e., Diderot] when the Meletuses and Anytuses are soaked in blood and are lighting fires at the stake” (trans. Goulbourne [2007, 229–30]).

Silencing is a political technique and those who aspire to achieve their political ends by defrauding the world of its truth-tellers rarely understand what is genuinely at stake in the transgressions they seek to curb. Plato sets about correcting the record in his *Apology*, mentioning the Socratic daimonion, his divine sign, portraying Socrates as a soldier of Apollo, and, finally, investing Socrates with the unconditioned awareness that is the highest form of human wisdom.<sup>18</sup>

We could compare Suhrawardi, the twelfth-century founder of the Ishraqi school who understood himself to be a proponent of Platonic *Dawk*, intuitive knowledge, martyred at the age of 38 (Walbridge 2000). We could compare al-Hallaj, who was martyred for saying “I am the Truth” (Massignon 1994). Or we could compare countless other sages whose silences happened to postdate their deaths: Origen, who had anathemas pronounced against him for teaching that all souls are equal to the soul of Christ; or Meister Eckhart, who like Socrates defended himself against heresy in public, February 13, 1327, but died before he could answer the papal commission (Senner 2012).

But what is most remarkable about Socrates is not his death; rather, Socrates’s life is the more remarkable, exemplary for his humble service to the people of Athens, drafting them into the exalted life of philosophy, turning his hometown into a city of sages. We ought not to be fooled by appearances into thinking that Socrates was engaged in idle chatter, that, lacking the confidence to affirm he knew anything, he prodded his fellow citizens into discontent and reflection about the humdrum business of how to get ahead in this world. Socrates encountered people precisely as they went about their daily affairs; but a face-to-face encounter with Socrates was always and everywhere a face-to-face encounter with oneself.

In Plato’s dialogues, we meet with a side of Socrates’s life and personality that perhaps anticipates a form of Platonist hagiography, in which philosophy is represented as an initiatory tradition. Although there are affinities between the Socratic teaching of a true, impersonal self and the later, Stoic idea of the purely rational self that is the *apospasma*, or fragment of cosmic reason, Plato points the reader backwards, framing the Socratic quest for self in the light of religious, particularly Pythagorean, teaching that stressed the affinity of the self and the divine. Plato emphasizes the religious aspects of Socratic teaching by narrating Socrates’s relationship with Apollonian wisdom, by marking the place of dream, oracle, and vision in the formation of Socrates’s philosophical career, and by associating Socrates with initiatory traditions (as, for example, his acquaintance with a doctor of Zalmoxis in the *Charmides* [156d–e]).<sup>19</sup> How are we to account for these affinities with sources of wisdom that perhaps do not arise from the rational or discursive formulations commonly thought to comprise the whole of Socratic method?

Socrates even looks a little more than human in the portraits that Plato draws. Later philosophers in the Platonist tradition tried, on the basis of the division of souls that Plato makes at *Phaedrus* 248c, to create a theoretical space for the idea of the superior soul, one that is precisely not concerned with his own well-being. In his *De anima*, Iamblichus distinguishes between the purposes for

which each class of soul (as signified in the *Phaedrus's* birth order) undertake an embodied life:

Furthermore, I actually think that the purposes for which souls descend are different and that they thereby also cause differences in the manner of the descent. For the soul that descends for the salvation, purification, and perfection of this realm is immaculate in its descent. The soul, on the other hand, that directs itself about bodies for the exercise and correction of its own character is not entirely free of passions and was not sent away free in itself. The soul that comes down here for punishment and judgment seems somehow to be dragged and forced. (sec. 29; Finamore and Dillon, 57)

In fact, the fifth-century Neoplatonic commentator Hermias interprets the figure of Socrates in the *Phaedrus* as just such a higher soul, an avatar, sent to human beings to turn their souls toward philosophy. Hermias writes that Socrates “was sent down into coming-to-be for the sake of benefitting the human race and especially the souls of the youth” (Hermias 1.2; Ὁ Σωκράτης ἐπὶ εὐεργεσίᾳ τοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους καὶ τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν νέων κατεπέμφθη εἰς γένεσιν). In speaking of Socrates’s descent into the world of becoming, Hermias is obviously alluding to Socrates’s own self-description in the *Apology*, where he says that “I believe the god has attached me to the city, since I am such as to wake you up” (30e6).

## Socrates and Initiatory Traditions

Socrates’s life (a life that gave rise to a new genre of literature, the *Sokratikos logos*) is replete with exemplary force. But he also accomplishes the task of initiating those with whom he converses into the life of philosophy. Plato dramatizes this initiatory duty as the rude awakening, the intense and sudden interruption of business as usual, in the word trade with Socrates; he uses the language of initiatory ritual to punctuate Socrates’s role as guide in the journey that is philosophy. Plato narrates and at times mythologizes the journey from ignorance and desire to wisdom and beneficence as the journey out of the cave, the hyperouranian flight, the emergence upon the true surface of the earth. Initially, that is, in the Socratic dialogues and according to the best lights of the interlocutors, virtue appears in its outermost manifestation as a kind of behavior, or even a discreet moment of action. Yet later, as the philosophical journey continues, virtue reveals itself as a form, a facet of wisdom, even, a name for the divine. The contemplation



of the form at the lower level begins with the qualities or virtues that make us human. Yet these same qualities, virtue, wisdom, beauty, justice, also show up in the *hyperouranian topos*, for example, or at the summit of the ascent to beauty or the good, in their more divine, eternal manifestations. Plato depicts this transition from an outward orientation or conventional understanding of a virtue, or, indeed, of a vice, to a nonvulgar or philosophical understanding of the same phenomenon in the terms of initiation. Describing the setting of the dialogue in the idyllic setting on the banks of the Illissos, Hermias suggests that an initiation is about to take place:

His going barefoot denotes [Socrates's] easily cleansed and simple nature as well as his fitness to assist in the elevation [of souls], qualities that always belong to Socrates, but belong to Phaedrus at that time in particular, owing to the fact that Socrates was getting ready to initiate him.

Τὸ δὲ ἀνυπόδητος τὸ εὖλυτον καὶ ἀπέριττον σημαίνει καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἀναγωγὴν ἐπιτήδειον, ὅπερ Σωκράτει μὲν αἰεὶ ὑπῆρχε, τῷ Φαίδρῳ δὲ τότε διὰ τὸ μέλλειν ὑπὸ Σωκράτους τελειοῦσθαι.  
(Hermias I.29.24)

Contemplation, framed as the initiation of the soul into a sacred wisdom tradition, is a prevailing theme in the *Phaedrus*:

Then we were all initiated into that mystery which is rightly accounted blessed beyond all others; whole and unblemished were we that did celebrate it, untouched by the evils that waited us in days to come; whole and unblemished likewise, free from all alloy, steadfast and blissful were the spectacles on which we gazed in the moment of final revelation. (250b8–5; trans. Hackforth [Plato 1952, 93]).

From the *Charmides*, we learn that Socrates met a doctor from Thrace while he was stationed at Potidaea. This shaman taught Socrates an incantation along with a cure for headache, stipulating that the person to be healed must agree to submit his entire self, body and soul, to the Thracian rites. However, these rites are not likely to be very pleasant. The doctors of Zalmoxis, Socrates reports, “are said to immortalize” (156d5). In the *Charmides*, Socrates remains coy about the nature of these ceremonies, but in Herodotus we read that every five years the Getae send a messenger to Zalmoxis by impaling the messenger on javelins:

Once every five years they choose one of their people by lot and send him as a messenger to Salmoxis, with instructions to report their

needs; and this is how they send him: three lances are held by designated men; others seize the messenger to Salmoxis by his hands and feet, and swing and toss him up on to the spear-points. (Hdt. 4.94.2)

It is hard to understand what Socrates means when he says he met this mysterious physician, the disciple of Zalmoxis. As has been pointed out, Socrates himself functions like Zalmoxis in returning from the field of the dead with his message of divine wisdom. One additional clue is found in Herodotus, who informs us that “Salmoxis was a man who was once a slave in Samos, his master being Pythagoras son of Mnesarchus” (4.95.1). Thus, the doctor himself was initiated by Zalmoxis, who was in turn a disciple of Pythagoras. According to Plato, then, Socrates learned how to heal his students within a line of teachers that can be traced back to Pythagoras.

Why does Plato invent this mysterious lineage for Socrates? Recent work has done much to uncover Plato’s own appropriation of Orphic and Pythagorean teachings, and Kingsley (1995) has devoted an important book to establishing this connection through a close reading of the mythic passages in Plato’s *Phaedo* and *Gorgias*. The discovery of the Derveni papyrus has confirmed scholarly conjecture about the Orphic setting or tone of the myths in both these dialogues, since this papyrus “consists of the allegorical interpretation of a poem ascribed to Orpheus” (Kingsley 1995, 116).<sup>20</sup> But what this quotation from the *Charmides* suggests is that Plato himself is the initiator of the tradition that associates Socratic philosophy and the traditions of Orphism and Pythagoreanism, precisely by hinting about this Thracian lineage of Socrates’s teacher. Burkert (1972) long ago came to the conclusion that “Plato’s disciples join him in taking their place within the Pythagorean tradition. . . . Plato’s school sees in its own philosophical treatment of the problem of ultimate principles a continuation of Pythagoreanism. . . . This Platonic interpretation of Pythagorean philosophy became dominant in the ancient tradition. Aristotle was the only one to contradict it, and show us thereby what had been there before Plato; and in fact what Plato presupposes is what Aristotle criticizes” (91–92).

Sometimes Socrates is accompanied by a dream consort, one who guides him in between worlds. Such is the anonymous white-garbed lady who calls Socrates from the prison cell in Athens: “I dreamed that a beautiful, fair woman clothed in white raiment came to me and called me,” he says (Pl., *Cri.* 44a). Another such consort is Diotima. The *Symposium* is the site of one of Socrates’s most important dreams. Here the “action” takes place after Socrates has fallen into a dream or trance state: “Socrates was left behind along the way, when he entered into a concentration on himself” (174d5). Like the *Protagoras* and

*Republic*, the *Symposium* is staged as a *nekuia*—a mytheme involving a visit to the abode of death for the purpose of consultation. In this tale Socrates himself plays the role of Orpheus (note the references to Socrates’s enchanting music at 215c5), who enters into a kind of underworld for the purpose of rescuing his beloved (Alcibiades) but notably fails in his mission. Phaedrus refers to the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice in the middle of his speech (179d2), casting Orpheus in a negative light, as someone who failed in his mission because he was unwilling to die on behalf of his beloved. Alcibiades takes on the role of Eurydice when he refers to his painful wound as more fierce than a snakebite (218a5). These scattered Orphic references take us to the ritual level of the myth, with its initiatory associations.

The central Orphic myth narrates a cosmogony in which the androgynous being Phanes springs from a cosmic egg and gives birth to the world through a miraculous act of autoprocreation, whereupon Zeus promptly swallows the creation. It also includes a sequence in which the Titans consume the infant Dionysus (later repaired by Apollo) and then pay dearly for their crime with a blast of Zeus’s thunderbolt. Their blood falls to the earth and spawns the human race. In all likelihood, this myth implied the ritual death, dismemberment, and reconstitution of the initiate, hence its association with initiatory ritual.

In the *Symposium* (189ff.), we are told that originally the human race consisted of three sexes, male (descended from the sun), female (descended from the earth), and the androgen (descended from the sun). These originary beings conspired to inveigh against heaven with their might and Zeus in punishment, divided them like eggs. After Apollo healed the scars of these half-people, they were condemned to a lonely search for their other half. In Plato’s version, the ancestors of the human race must represent all the players of the original Orphic cycle: the egg itself (note the comparison to eggs at *Symp.*190c), the god Phanes (at least, the androgen resembles the bisexual Phanes; and note that the name Aristophanes contains the word Phanes), the Titans (they scale heaven and are punished for it), Dionysus (they are dismembered and then healed by Apollo), and, finally, the living members of the human race. The roles assigned to Zeus as divine nemesis for the hubris of an original race, to Apollo as restorer of the human species, and to a kinder, gentler, postlapsarian humanity, in Plato’s myth, seem closely modeled on the Protogonos narrative, the Orphic theology described in the Derveni papyrus. Plato’s Aristophanic parody invokes the Orphic cosmogony.<sup>21</sup>

Alcibiades is one initiatory candidate in our dialogue, and he complains bitterly of the voice of the demoi that, siren-like, calls him away from the vocation of philosophy.<sup>22</sup> Conspicuously wearing an initiate’s crown, he recounts

his spiritual death at the hands of Socrates using language borrowed from the mysteries (μανίας τε καὶ βακχείας; “madness and [Bacchic] frenzy”; *Symp.* 218b4). By quoting the Orphic proem just before he describes the cloaking scene, Alcibiades intimates that an initiation took place. Here, for the first and evidently last time, he experienced a loss of self. At that moment, Alcibiades tells us, Socrates’s persona was cleft and the brilliance of his virtue shone forth.

Notwithstanding the external, historical reasons for linking Alcibiades to initiation rites, I think it important to emphasize the ritual associations of the *stephanos*, or crown of garlands, which marks Alcibiades as the candidate for initiation. The symbolic role of the *stephanos* is complicated by its diverse usage outside of the mainstream celebratory occasions of victory festivals, which is of course the obvious explanation for Alcibiades’s crown in the *Symposium*. Initiatory expectations are fulfilled as we encounter the ritual dismemberment often associated with Shamanic religion. As Eliade explains, the Shaman undergoes a complete dismantling of the physical body, often at the hands of a goddess who will at once remove his human identity and invest him with a visionary or spiritual function. Eliade quotes a recounting of a Tibetan Bon ritual that relates to the spiritual dismemberment of the one who seeks such a vision:

To the sound of the drum made of human skulls and of the thighbone trumpet, the dance is begun and the spirits are invited to come and feast. The power of meditation evokes a goddess brandishing a naked sword; she springs at the head of the sacrificer, decapitates him, and hacks him to pieces; then the demons and wild beasts rush on the still quivering fragments, eat the flesh and drink the blood. (Robert Bleichsteiner, as quoted in Eliade 1964, 470)

Enter Diotima, who, in her dissection of self-identity (*Symp.* 208), accomplishes her first task as mystagogue, namely, to destroy the initiand’s old self. No one can survive Diotima’s scrutiny: mind and body arise together as mutually conditioned constructions. Self-identity ebbs away in the flow of memory while consciousness disappears without a trace of its previous contents. Disclosing this radical dissociation from a stable selfhood is what Diotima aims at in her dialectical antidote to the delusions generated in conventional discourse.

After Socrates’s identity is shattered and there is no trace of self left, Diotima reveals the dream ladder to him, and Socrates becomes the shamanistic counterpart to Diotima. He now is given access to worlds that hitherto were closed to him. The dream ladder leads the Shaman out of his *pholos*, his lair; by means of an ethereal body, he is able to track the presence of a herd, and thus recover *trophē*, the wherewithal to nourish the other members of his tribe.

After showing him the ladder of love, Diotima teaches Socrates the art of *theoria*; she teaches him to track the divine herd, the eternal kine, that is, the forms. Thus Socrates is also the mystic initiate of Diotima, priestess of the Eleusinian mysteries. (Recall that Alcibiades himself was accused of profaning these same mysteries). Diotima uses initiatory language: “Even you, Socrates, could probably be initiated into these rites of love. But as for the purpose of these rites when they are done correctly, that is the final and highest mystery and I don’t know if you are capable of it” (210a; trans. Nehamas and Woodruff [Plato 1997e, 493]).<sup>23</sup>

Among the nomadic peoples of the North, the Shaman is said by means of a dream to be able to see the herd grazing at a great distance from the tribe of hunters. Orphic lore, too, is associated with Thrace, since Orpheus originally came from Thrace. While on campaign in Potidaia, near Thrace, Socrates practiced entering into deep trance states (*Symp.* 220c7). Plato describes this state as “concentration on himself,” when Socrates falls behind at the party.<sup>24</sup> Near Thrace, too, we see Socrates inhabiting an ethereal or dream body, as he is able to traverse ice with his bare feet, among other signs. After Alcibiades’s attempt to seduce Socrates, from Alcibiades’s narrative summation, we learn what happened in Thrace:

All this had already occurred when Athens invaded Potidaea [a city in Thrace allied to Athens] where we served together and shared the same mess. . . . Socrates went out in [wintry weather] and even in bare feet he made better progress on the ice than the other soldiers did in their boots. (219e7)

I suspect that Socrates, when he learned the spell from the “doctor of Zalmoxis,” did not after all meet a human teacher, but that he is alluding to another sort of helper, perhaps encountered during one of those visions Plato describes in the *Symposium*.

So far we have seen that Socratic wisdom is associated with initiatory traditions: in the *Charmides*, Socrates meets a mysterious doctor of Zalmoxis who teaches him a method of healing; in the *Symposium*, Socrates falls into trances, descends into the netherworld, inhabits an ethereal body in which he performs superhuman feats, meets a dream consort who shows him a ladder to a heavenly realm, and, finally, initiates Alcibiades into the sacred tradition of philosophy, infusing the venom of self-awareness into Alcibiades’s life, but not quite killing him off.<sup>25</sup> In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates alludes to the nomads who practice a form of dismemberment, gilding the skull of their victim and flaying the flesh—all magical acts that recall the motif of *sparagmos*, of initiation, of destroying the self; in the *Phaedo*, Socrates, accompanied by the youth of Athens, finds his way into

the labyrinth, there to confront death itself. We can add to this catalogue other details, such as the place of dream and vision in his philosophical career, the offering to Asclepius at the end of his life, the function of the oracle in launching his philosophical practice, as well as his associations with Artemis. This placing of Socrates in the shroud of mystery religions, of traditional Athenian religion, including the Eleusinian Mysteries, and of exotic religions that may or may not have been incorporated into Hellenic traditions—all of this is something that has generally been relegated to the end of the Platonist tradition. What purpose does its appearance have here, at the very beginning of what we may now think of as Platonism?

It is the thesis of this book that Plato marks Socrates as the initiator of an esoteric tradition, suggesting that Socratic wisdom is the larger vision within which Platonic knowledge, via the study of metaphysical and ethical doctrines, develops. From the silence of Socratic wisdom, Plato articulates the written, rationally developed philosophy that spawns the tradition of Platonism. Yet, at the same time, interwoven into the fabric of Plato's text is the space of Socrates, ever breathing the life of wisdom into the program of philosophical formulations. Always the Socratic silence punctuates the Platonic word; always the Socratic mirror shines back to remind the reader to take up this text in the spirit of self-inquiry. Therefore, the Socratic intervention still interrupts the interlocutor, acts upon the psyche of the interlocutor, in this case, Plato's reader, who desires the good. He aspires to the good precisely because he lacks the good; what he sees in Socrates is the paradigm of the philosopher. Socrates, if he is to benefit the interlocutor, cannot bestow knowledge or even act on the interlocutor. He can only help to reveal the true nature of the interlocutor; the self itself, the knower, free from and not dependent on any of the conditions known for his ultimate felicity. This is the person to whom Socrates addresses his words, the "beautiful boy" of the erotic dialogues.

Socratic aporia, the vivid experience of somehow, however dimly, knowing, yet failing to define, the virtue, an experience that shines a spotlight on the subject engaged in the inquiry, leads the interlocutor in an interior direction, pointing him toward the very light of knowledge, reorienting him. This moment of turning around and asking the question, "By what means do I know anything at all? What is knowledge?" is mapped onto the journey as epistrophe, the prisoner's detachment from the shadows and his discovery of their source. What is knowledge? How do we know that we know? In the *Theaetetus*, which constitutes a reprise of Socratic philosophy, Plato describes the entire Socratic enterprise as spiritual midwifery, of helping others to bring forth the vision of the soul, showing the primacy of the knower. In the *Republic*, the truer self is represented

by the sea-god Glaucus, once his outer shell has been removed; Plato speaks in this dialogue of the “man within the man,” the inner man. Likewise, Socrates’s message to his interlocutor is literally, “shed your skin”; in other words, let your soul appear, and behold yourself in the mirror of wisdom. Plato uses a plethora of literary devices to convey the moment of epistrophe, retreating from identity with doxa, what we might call the “visible self,” the all-too-common, assumed self and its desires, and finding the genuine person: the Socratic doppelgänger of *Hippias Minor*, the flaying of the skin in the *Euthydemus*, the drinking of hemlock of the *Phaedo* and being released from prison.

We must be careful, then, not to mistake what is only the Socratic persona, literally, the mask of Socrates, for the Socratic self. We can remain open to the always surprising fact that a conversation with Socrates, than which nothing, on the surface, appears more ordinary, gives rise to a revolution in self-identity. The message of Socrates, conveyed in such an ordinary way by such an ordinary fellow is to care for one’s soul. But that commitment involves an astonishing journey, as we’ll see, past all of the conventions that themselves masquerade as virtues, into the heart of virtue, the adornments of wisdom that in their highest manifestations are none other than the names of the divine.

## CHAPTER ONE

# SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY

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I am making two strong claims about how to read the legacy of Socratic philosophy as adumbrated in the Socratic dialogues. The first claim relates to what is known to most students of Plato as the Socratic denial of akrasia, in other words, to the thesis that virtue is knowledge. This thesis forms the basis of a whole interpretive tradition in contemporary Socratic studies, generally associated with the thesis of egoistic eudaimonism. Thus Penner and Rowe (2005) specify that what human beings are after, again according to Socrates, is the “maximum happiness available to one in one’s particular circumstances, over a complete life” (264).<sup>1</sup> It is in this sense that virtue can be equated with knowledge of the good; having more knowledge, I am better able to bring about this happiness that I desire.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, I am going to suggest that, for Socrates, there is no such state of affairs in the world that can bring about the ultimate satisfaction of desire and that this strategy is entirely unsuitable if the agent wants to bring about the good that, according to the prudential principle (everyone desires the good), she desires. I am going to suggest that, when Plato references the thesis that virtue is knowledge, one, and possibly even the one most crucial, component of this knowledge is self-knowledge. At the outset, then, I suggest that Socrates’s philosophy takes an inward turn. He does not encourage, or, rather, he actively discourages, the pursuit of states of affairs in the world as determinative of happiness as such. Instead, the elenchus, Socratic examination, and the thesis that virtue is knowledge signal a practical orientation to the objects of mind. According to this version of the thesis that virtue is knowledge, then, all states of mind—appetitive states, emotions, desires, opinions—are in another sense objects of knowledge. At least they are treated as such in the practice environment of the elenchus, the inner examination. In bringing forth the mind that seeks wisdom and truth, which attends to desire and aversion, or pleasure and pain, not as one’s own nature, the wisdom of the knower shines through the conditions of the psyche. Socrates refers to the virtue of self-knowledge as guardian temperance, which keeps watch on, protects against, and even rules over the passions of the soul.



The second claim I make is that the division of Plato's dialogues into Socratic ethics and a distinct and separate Platonic metaphysics, an approach that sometimes also coincides with developmentalism (the idea that the Socratic dialogues are early and represent the teaching of the historical Socrates), is not helpful if we want to understand the figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues. Rather, the Socratic quest for virtue is in fact an entry point into the art of *theoria*,<sup>3</sup> of contemplating the nature of reality. We must begin by healing the cleft between Socratic ethics and Platonic metaphysics that has dominated our understanding of Socrates ever since Aristotle offered his testimony, to the effect that Socrates was (solely) a moral philosopher, interested in questions of definition (*Metaph.* 1078b22–33; Vlastos 1991, 80–106). Readers familiar with the history of Socrates scholarship will recognize the extent to which this testimony has provided a platform for developmentalism, the interpretation of those who believe that the Socratic disavowal of knowledge, Socratic aporia, and Socratic psychology can be extracted from Plato's philosophy, as representing the philosophy of the historical Socrates (Vlastos 1991, 45–80). It will be one of our tasks to rethink this dichotomy, for the simple reason that the Socratic path and the Platonic path converge in their attempted discovery of the good. Socrates tracks the good through his approach to the definition of virtue as knowledge of the good, whereas Plato tracks the good through his metaphysics, which posits the form of the good as the source of existence and knowledge. Despite this convergence, developmentalism, the separation of the Socratic from the Platonic, describes two distinct paths of inquiry that have come to be seen as failing to be asymptotic: Socratic ethics and Platonic metaphysics. One assumption I make throughout this book is that Plato's metaphysics directly informs, from its very inception, the exemplary or ethical function of the Socratic figure in Plato's dialogues, as that figure resonates with Plato's characterization of the nature of the divine. At the same time, Socratic wisdom, the capacity to assimilate all doctrinal constructions into the open ground of wisdom that never loses its own self-awareness, is always present even in what seem to be the least Socratic of the Platonic formulations.

Most important for understanding the passage from aporia to theoria, is the meaning and location of virtue in the life of the philosopher. Socrates's mission, to convert the ordinary person to the life of philosophy, starts with each person as she is and not as she ought to be. This insight allows us to view the egoism (commonly touted as Socrates's great psychological discovery) that Socrates apparently assumes in or assigns to his interlocutors in its proper perspective. Socrates does not endorse this egoism nor does he find it normative. Rather, as he finds human beings, their desires and their knowledge are woefully

amiss; they mistake the search for the good as the pursuit of self-interest, and yet are at a complete loss as to the nature of the self to whose interests they are apparently committed. The disparity between people as they are and people as they could be is similar to the disparity between paradigm and particular that we find in Plato's metaphysics. Socrates is also the exemplar or paradigm; Socrates reveals that he does not share in the ubiquitous egoism that so engulfs the people he encounters. On the contrary, everything Socrates does is directed, as Plato tells us in so many words, toward "the common good," as he strives to make his fellow citizens "actually be happy," and even defends himself against the capital sentence "for the sake" of those same citizens. In the reading program of the dialogues, we are meant to notice the inversion of the Socratic desire—to benefit all—in the interlocutor's desire for his own good. The difference between them has to do with the difference between being the cause of good, as the form is the cause of the good and benefits, and being the recipient or participant in that cause, as the particular participates and receives its good from the form, with which it is not identical.

To take one example of how Socratic and Platonic proximity works once we set aside the distraction of developmentalism, let us think for a moment about the *Timaeus*, certainly a dialogue in which Socrates hardly figures and one that is, by developmentalist standards, not even remotely Socratic. Throughout the dialogue, Plato characterizes god as possessing absolute and complete benevolence, generosity, and lack of envy; god desires all things to be as good as possible.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the receptacle, wet nurse of becoming and matrix of birth and death, is hardly real, and has nothing, literally, to offer, except its neediness: *τίν' οὖν ἔχον δύναμιν καὶ φύσιν αὐτὸ ὑποληπτέον; τοιάνδε μάλιστα: πάσης εἶναι γενέσεως ὑποδοχὴν αὐτὴν οἷον τιθήνην* (49a7). What power and nature must one understand it to possess? Surely only this, that it is the receptacle, as it were the wet nurse of all becoming). Metaphysically, then, there are two poles: absolute generosity and absolute poverty.<sup>5</sup>

Contemplating these two poles—one of extreme need and poverty and the other of abundant wealth and generosity—it is hard to miss the parallel to the ethical language of Plato. After all, don't all people "want the good"? And isn't all desire due to lack? (*Symp.* 201a–c). So, this intrinsic poverty, the lack of possessing the good, haunts the human psyche. All people seek their own good, necessarily, because they lack the good. Yet in the Socratic dialogues, especially in the *Apology*, we see the virtues embodied in Socrates. He is not afraid of death; he serves his fellow citizens; he obeys the god; he is the wisest of all human beings. Socrates is exemplary, above all, by devoting himself to the well-being of his fellow citizens. He lives in order to make them happy. He does

so by sharing the good of truth-telling equally with all he encounters. In this generosity, Socrates is actually quite unlike his fellow citizens; he is more like the god Socrates himself invokes, the god who only brings about the good. Socrates is not motivated by the pursuit of his own individual good; he seeks to bestow the good, and not merely as something subordinate to his own interests. It is legitimate, then, to refer to the *Timaeus* to understand and trace how these two lines of inquiry, Socratic ethics and Platonic metaphysics, converge in terms of the ethical slogan from the *Theaetetus* that defines virtue as assimilation to god.

In virtually all of the Socratic dialogues, Socrates formulates something like the prudential principle, that all people wish to be happy, that they desire the good. But what is the status of this principle? Is it descriptive or normative? If it is descriptive, then what is normative? All individuals necessarily seek their good, and this is a metaphysical need, based on their status as individuals. What then does it mean to seek one's own good? Again, from the perspective of Plato's metaphysics, to seek one's good as an individual is to seek the form: true being. What will this good be like? It could not further be a state of the individual, as this would be simply more of the same (metaphysical and epistemological) poverty.

Socrates, then, seeks to motivate his fellow citizens to understand that lack-based erotic impulse cannot in itself arrive at the good, though it certainly is true that all beings strive for the good. Instead, what is needed is recollecting who they are and what they already know. They are already in possession of the form, even the form of virtue, which nevertheless they so painfully fail at articulating in conversation with Socrates. So, the progression is from feeling lack and seeking outside themselves to recollecting and seeking within themselves. Socratic aporia and Platonic recollection are really two aspects that must be integrated into the total conception of wisdom.

This commerce between the (so-called early) dialogues of discovery that seek after the definitions of virtue and the (so-called middle) dialogues that study the metaphysics of form is on view when Plato makes Socrates in some sense responsible for the theory of forms. Readers of the dialogues stumble onto this relationship when they encounter the inexplicable articulation in Plato's *Parmenides* of Plato's "theory of forms" by a virtually adolescent Socrates who (cf. Arist., *Metaph.* 1078b22–33) could not have been acquainted with them.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, there are a number of books focusing on Plato's "early theory of forms," and unitarian readers of the dialogues have all along read the Socratic dialogues of definition as providing outlines, early formulations of, or, more recently, prolepses (Khan 1996, 38–42) of the metaphysical or ontological theories elaborated in longer and possibly later dialogues. My point, rather, is that self-inquiry is

approached in the dialogues of search for definition as an inquiry into ethics, and that this ethics, which assists in or aims at the assimilation of the self to the knowing self, by virtue of the establishment of the priority of the knower over the conditions known, in turn becomes the ground for a more mature consideration of wisdom in its own right, and allows Plato a more nuanced articulation of the contours of being.

To come now to a specific articulation of the project at hand, it would be best to couch the study in terms of its narrative dimensions. In these pages, the reader will find a story about the Socratic quest for knowledge of virtue, for knowledge of the good, and about how this quest then led Socrates to discover that virtue could not arise without satisfying a fundamental condition. The inquirer had to begin with herself, and to study the question of just who, initially, was inquiring into virtue. Who is it that wishes to be happy, to attain virtue, to know the good, in the first place? The inquiry into virtue, then, leads into an inquiry into the self. It is in this sense that the Socratic life is the examined life. Socrates is not, therefore, a dogmatic teacher. He does not, for example, have a theory of motivation that can be described as egoistic eudaimonism. He does not propound any theories about human nature nor does he inculcate his teachings in a doctrinal form. Instead, he encounters his interlocutors and allows them to articulate the way things seem to them. He is a guide into the life of philosophy, which both begins in and culminates in self-knowledge. This is why the Socratic dialogues show Socrates reflecting back the views, prejudices, and assumptions of the interlocutor. Nevertheless, this initial encounter with Socrates is not the final stage of the journey. Indeed, several of the interlocutors clearly won't be accompanying Socrates very far into the depth or height of the philosophical path.

How does self-knowledge become foundational to the practice of philosophy, and why is philosophy approached via the path of self-inquiry? These are, broadly speaking, the questions that this book addresses. To answer them, we need to revert once more to the Socratic paradigm, recalling that Socrates extends his teaching to all in his friendship and that his approach to others is in terms of their fundamental nature as knowers. At the same time, his actions are performed in service to the good, which is to say that he wills the good and wills the good for others. Yet there are some facts about the nature of the good and hence about the well-being that Socrates wishes to promote that make it impossible for him to extend well-being to others, to impart knowledge of virtue or of the good. Instead, Socrates must rely on others' cultivation of their own self-knowledge if he is to benefit them. To clarify, then, Plato's Socrates is not so much the purveyor of doctrine, although he certainly is the author of a number of

paradoxes or astonishing theses that have been interpreted doctrinally. Socrates does not transmit any doctrinal knowledge to others, much less any doctrinal formulations that allege or even assume the truth of psychological eudaimonism.<sup>7</sup>

In the *Clitophon*, Plato (or a Platonic author) means to call attention to the problem of how Socratic ethics can endorse the supremacy of virtue while at the same time apparently offering no definite views as to what constitutes virtue. Clitophon is an erstwhile conversant of Socrates, one of many such men who, having his views rejected too many times, is no longer a member of the Socratic circle. The dialogue begins with the revelation that Socrates has overheard Clitophon disowning his former association with Socrates in the company of Hippias. Clitophon has been captious concerning Socrates in his teaching evaluations; Socrates confronts Clitophon about the purport of the latter's criticisms. Socrates in fact meekly submits to the young man's complaints, which come to a climax with Clitophon's assertion that Socrates "gets in the way" of his happiness, since his instruction does not lead to knowledge of virtue:

I finally asked you yourself these questions and you told me that the aim of justice is to hurt one's enemies and help one's friends. But later it turned out that the just man never harms anyone, since everything he does is for the benefit of all.

When I had endured this disappointment, not once or twice but a long time, I finally got tired of begging for an answer. I came to the conclusion that while you're better than anyone at turning a man towards the pursuit of virtue, one of two things must be the case: either this is all you can do, nothing more . . . there are only two possibilities, either you don't know or you don't wish to share it with me. (410a1–c10)

For I will say this, Socrates, that while you're worth the world to someone who hasn't yet been converted to the pursuit of virtue, to someone who's already been converted you rather get in the way of his attaining happiness by reaching the goal of virtue. (410e6–10)

The upshot of this conversation is that Clitophon, unable to obtain the instruction he seeks from Socrates, has become a student of Thrasymachus. Clitophon proceeds to give a display of a typically Socratic protreptic speech—the kind to which Socrates in the *Apology* refers: "I was always concerned with you, approaching each one of you like a father or an elder brother to persuade you to care for virtue" (31b). Clitophon's point is not that Socrates is mistaken in his exhortation to virtue, but that the elenchus offers its participants no doctrinal answers to its questions (Clitophon says he "got tired of begging for an answer").

The present book offers an interpretation of Socratic philosophy that does not assume that there is something substantively missing from Socrates's insistence on the pursuit of virtue, even though Socrates says he knows "practically nothing" (*Ap.* 22d1). Instead, it claims that Plato uses the figure of Socrates to suggest what virtue consists in, though, as it turns out, the kind of knowledge that begins to disclose virtue is not the sort of knowledge that can be taught to another, since, according to Socrates, virtue begins in self-knowledge. Therefore, Socratic ethics is rooted in the very practice of the elenchus, understood both as truth-telling and, just as importantly, self-investigation. Socrates authorizes what I will call an ethics of wisdom that fundamentally calls into question the nature of what the self is by investigating the boundaries between self and not-self. It is this opening up of self-knowledge that results in the release of the narrowly construed desires, opinions, and habits, which drive a constant engine of wanting, acquisition, and, inevitably, dissatisfaction.

Because Plato portrays Socrates as lacking in moral knowledge, as not being a teacher and not espousing doctrines, and as continually engaged in self-inquiry, this aporetic aspect of the Socratic persona also comes to have exemplary force. At *Phaedrus* 230, Plato has Socrates allude to the Delphic inscription "Know thyself." Because he has not yet attained self-knowledge, Socrates has no time to investigate extraneous matters (*ta allotria skopein*). This passage I take to be a programmatic statement about Socratic philosophy: It does not investigate external matters and is principally concerned with self-knowledge. My point is not only that Socrates himself was interested in the question of self-knowledge, but that Plato and other writers of the Socratic literature (among whom we can include the author of *Alcibiades I*, if it is not Plato) regularly link Socratic wisdom to the practice of self-inquiry. Plato presents Socrates as a kind of avatar of Apollonian wisdom, repeatedly associating Socrates with Delphi and the inscription "Know thyself!"

In the Socratic dialogues, we are supposed to realize that virtue is self-knowledge, that is, knowledge of oneself qua knower. In pursuing this argument, I try to clarify the relationship between self-knowledge, happiness, and virtue. The Socratic self, the self to whom Socrates grants access via the elenchus, is the knower. Yet the knower as such should not seek her good in the conditions she knows, just because she cannot find her good in those conditions. Everything that conditions the knower as its object of knowledge is transient: It comes and goes. It is this fundamental understanding, the primacy of the knower with respect to the conditions known, that restores the proper nature or fundamental identity of the human being. It is this identity that can be called the beginning of wisdom or happiness, that is, well-being. For it is the recognition

of the primacy of wisdom as good fortune (per the *Euthyd.* 280a4) in the sense of putting fortune in its proper place. The good, well-being, is not adventitious; it is not something that one can acquire, but only discover or perhaps cultivate. Other names for this condition of felicity are absolute poverty—that is, not owning anything but freely releasing it—and, the virtue that Xenophon attributes to Socrates, *karteria*, or self-reliance. Both of these traits, poverty and self-reliance or resilience, characterize the Socrates of Plato's Socratic dialogues but also the Socrates portrayed in the works of other Socratics.<sup>8</sup> Now, only this condition, the condition of detachment from the objects of knowledge and the objects of desire, allows real friendship to flourish. It is only with a nonegoistic understanding of the world as a whole, in which I am not fighting for what is mine with respect to what is yours, that friendship emerges. And this refusal to fight for what is mine and mine alone belongs both to intellectual proprietary concerns (views, opinions, and the like) and to the larger sense of identity (reputation or *doxa*) that is contested in the gamesmanship of traditional public-sphere discourse in Athens.

Not a few scholars have understood the Socratic dialogues as offering either a proleptic discernment of the “forms” or an early theory of the forms. We find the virtues that are the initial subjects of inquiry in the Socratic dialogues: justice and temperance, for example, with their counterpoints in the world of the forms. The dialogues of definition employ the same vocabulary (*hen eidos*, *mia idea*) that shows up in the dialogues that detail the theory of forms in terms of the one-over-many thesis. Moreover, there are dialogues that explicitly link the cultivation of self-knowledge or self-inquiry to the philosophy of the forms. For instance, the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue that announces its theme as Socratic self-inquiry in the prologue, enshrines the traditional Socratic virtues, *sophrosune* and justice, as objects of vision in the narrative of the soul's hyperouranian ascent. Likewise, the *Phaedo*, a dialogue that adumbrates the philosophy of forms in their causal role as essential natures that explain the properties of their participants, begins with the more familiar Socratic theme, according to which all virtues can be assimilated to wisdom.

Self-inquiry, then, as the practical dimension of Socratic philosophy, is foundational in two ways. It becomes in itself a method of cultivating virtue, in the sense that virtue resides in self-knowledge, and it also leads to the discovery of the qualities that, we might say, adorn wisdom: justice, temperance, and steadfast endurance, qualities that Plato explores in the Socratic dialogues through a consideration of the unity of virtue. This association of the forms with the Socratic dialogues was perhaps more standard in the history of scholarship before Vlastos's radical severance of the so-called Socratic dialogues from

Platonic philosophy per se. This book emphasizes, rather, the continuity between the search for a single *eidos* that corresponds to the virtue to be defined and the forms that are not always associated with virtue kinds in other dialogues.

In keeping with the severance of the Socratic, aporetic dialogues and the isolation of a nonmetaphysical Socrates, there is a danger that the result is a downward pull on the whole of Platonic philosophy. For example, it creates a tendency to construe the form of the good in the *Republic* as a kind of “Socratic” good: that is, a good in someone’s interest, as self-benefit (Penner 2007a). But, instead, what if we assimilate the Socrates of the aporetic dialogues and the later Socrates, by seeing the aporetic dialogues as part of a staging effort, seamlessly integrating the Socratic into the Platonic by creating an Athenian city of sages, which is not so much a utopia as a philosophical interchange between different parts of the soul?

The Socratic exhortation to virtue, to realizing and manifesting wisdom in one’s own life through identification as the knower, as intellect, can be associated with the academic ethical formulation, *homoiosis theo*, assimilation to god. When understood as a trajectory, beginning from *aporia*, proceeding to recollection of the virtues, and, finally, to the discovery of oneself as intellect, as *nous*, the meaning of *homoiosis theo* is seen to describe the journey of the philosopher toward self-realization. The results of this investigation, this discovery of oneself as intellect, are then presented as the journey develops: especially in the *Phaedo*, with its emphasis on the likeness of the soul to the forms, and in the *Phaedrus*, with its myth of the soul’s discarnate journey and assimilation to the forms of the virtues. After the transformation of self, from needy and greedy, from egocentric and entirely selfish, the person is able to imitate the attitude of the divine, described in the *Timaeus*, to the effect that the signature of the divine is to benefit.

In the argument that follows, I try to show that the figure of Socrates allows Plato to emphasize the primacy of intellect as immediately present, determining the real identity of the person as a knower, and, therefore, that metaphysics is not so much absent from what Plato presents to us as Socratic philosophy, as consequent upon and grounded in that same philosophy. Admittedly, this integration of the Platonic and the Socratic, achieved by subsuming Platonic knowledge within the larger space of Socratic wisdom, goes against the predominant developmentalist or historicizing account of Socrates as well any alternative kinds of revisionism that see an academic Plato as always hedging, deploying the *aporia* of Socrates and fundamentally never truly embracing metaphysical theses. In this book, I am talking not about the historical Socrates but only about the Socratic persona in Plato’s dialogues. I am trying to ascertain a philosophical



reason for the placement of Socrates at the periphery, center, or core of almost every dialogue and, in so doing, suggesting that Socrates is the inwardness of the Platonic enterprise, and not a historical influence that Plato somehow outgrew.

Owing to the primary philosophical orientation of Socrates, self-knowledge, we do not find dogmatic pronouncements characteristic of the Socratic viewpoint. But to say that dogmatic positions do not characterize the Socratic viewpoint does not mean that Socratic aporia is merely purgative of falsehood or empty of wisdom. Socrates does not pronounce on psychology or on cosmology or on ontology owing to his direct insight into the conditions of felicity, into the very ground of wisdom, from which all knowledge arises. Owing to his orientation to the various objects of thought, he teaches his interlocutors rather to give up fixed views rather than helping them to enthrone a whole set of psychological or ontological theories.

This mirroring function, wherein Socrates adapts himself to the ideological and intellectual stances or language of the interlocutor, often results in the views of the interlocutor becoming attributed to Socrates himself. Accordingly I would argue that even the pretense to discerning the nature of the human psyche, its motivations and inherent egoism, is a discovery of the Sophistic intellectual milieu as portrayed in the Socratic dialogues, and not actually something that Socrates endorses.<sup>9</sup> Socrates comes onto center stage in the *Apology* offering a contrast to the teachings of the Sophists, a group of people who rely more or less on certain brute, empirically observable “truths” about human nature and its social manifestations. Socrates delivers his riposte to any who would assimilate him to these teachers, and rather than pronouncing some ultimate psychological truth, Socrates denies that he has any such doctrine to purvey (21d). By contrast Plato represents the Sophists as making claims about this very capacity, to discern human nature and to understand human motivation along the lines of a psychological theory.

For illustration, take the scene (315a–b) in the *Protagoras* where Socrates and Hippocrates, the latter functioning as psychopomp, make their way to Hades, that is, to Callias’s house, as the Sophist Protagoras is temporarily in residence, having much difficulty in persuading the doorkeeper to let them in. There they behold Protagoras, in procession with a train of devotees, “in the manner of Orpheus, attracting them with his voice” (315c1), among the otherworldly spectacles. Socrates marks the whole mission as a *nekuia* with the Homeric exclamation, “My eyes beheld Tantalus” (*Od.* 11.582).

One has the feeling that this scene is not so much based on the underworld visit qua consultation myth, though indeed Plato quotes from Odysseus as he

goes sightseeing in Hades in *Odyssey* 11. Instead, other elements point to the warding off of magic. For example, Hermes meets up with Odysseus in *Odyssey* 11 to administer the prophylactic moly, while Socrates warns Hippocrates before they arrive at the house of Callias that he should be wary of what he consumes in the company of Protagoras.

Anything he hears will have to be carried away in his soul. Socrates here is protected from the harmful and bewitching effects of Protagoras's discourse, while those already in his company are following him about zombie-like in the courtyard of the house; they are already fast asleep. Before Socrates gets down to the business at hand, encountering the Sophists, he issues a dire warning to Hippocrates: "Can we say then, Hippocrates, that a Sophist is really a merchant or peddler of goods by which a soul is nourished?" (313c5). "Indeed the risk you run in purchasing knowledge is much greater than that in buying provisions" (314a1; trans. Guthrie [Plato 1956, 44]). Having entered this underworld of Protagoras and company, Socrates describes what he sees and hears as follows:

After that I recognized, as Homer says, Hippias of Elis, sitting on a seat of honor in the opposite portico, and around him were seated on benches Eryximachus, son of Acumenus, and Phaedrus of Myrhinus and Andron, son of Androtion, with some fellow citizens of his and other foreigners. They appeared to be asking him questions on natural science, particularly astronomy, which he gave each his explanation ex cathedra and held forth on their problems. (315c)

The Sophist Hippias is pontificating here on the subject very generally of nature (the word that Plato uses in the passage is *physis*). Hippias relies on his claim to understand nature as a basis for the teaching that is on display for purchase by the young men of Athens.

After him the wise Hippias spoke up. Gentlemen, he said, I count you all my kinsmen and family and fellow citizens—by nature, not convention. By nature like is kind to like, but custom, the tyrant of mankind, does much violence to nature. For us then who understand the nature of things, who are the intellectual leaders of Greece ... (337c5–d5; trans. Guthrie)

Hippias uses the word nature (*physis*) three times in this short speech. Clearly then, the Sophists in this dialogue have definite views about human nature: about the nature of the psyche as it is in itself and as it is shaped by convention, and about social order as a whole. Hippias suggests that the entire

company hold definite views about these matters and are justified in doing so because they understand the nature of things; they possess such knowledge, and it is this knowledge that gives them the license to dispense ethical teaching above all.

In sum, when we step back and look at the figure of Socrates from the perspective of the history of philosophy, it is easy to see his place in the Western tradition in the terms of its subsequent philosophical developments. Vlastos famously compared Plato's development as a philosopher to the earlier and later Wittgenstein. Ryle again famously invokes the logical atomism of early Wittgenstein and of Russell in attempting to explain the theory behind "Socrates' dream" of elements and composites at *Theaetetus* 201d8–202d7 as a model of (propositional) knowledge (Ryle 1990). Of course, as Plato funded this tradition, it makes perfect sense to see the reflexes of Platonism in its later stages, especially, for example, in the case of Wittgenstein who, we know, was actively reading and commenting on a translation of the *Theaetetus*.

Where, then, do we find a reading of Socrates as a figuration within Plato's dialogues that is neither skeptical nor coherentist, neither eudaimonist nor deontologist, that remains legible not as an item that points forward to a rationalist foundation for an ametaphysical perspective? I have already suggested that the Neoplatonist formulation of Socrates as the presence of intellect within the particular soul can offer us such a reading. We turn to this reading in the next chapter on Socratic receptions.

### Appendix: Socrates and Dogmatism from a Comparative Philosophical Viewpoint

I would also suggest that we might compare the figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues to the figure of Buddha in the early Pali sutra literature. In this branch of Buddhist philosophy—in the so-called Discourses of the Buddha—we find the person of the sage talking with various members of his inner circle, the disciples, as well as with people outside the circle, including laymen and practitioners from other philosophical schools, concerning questions about how to lead a good life, how to obtain happiness and well-being, and how to train the body and mind (what we might think of as questions of *askesis*).<sup>10</sup>

Like Socrates, the Buddha of these early Pali writings confronts a variety of interlocutors. Unlike Socrates, however, this Buddha is clearly marked as a perfect sage and as supremely enlightened. He is called, "incomparable leader of persons to be led, the teacher of gods and humans." Even though he is presented

as all-knowing, endowed with every virtue, the Buddha of the *Majjhima Nikaya* or Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha, like the Socrates of the aporetic dialogues, refrains from metaphysical speculations. In “Aggivacchagotta, To Vacchagotta on Fire,” the Buddha explains to a wanderer why he does not hold any speculative views. This discourse opens with a series of questions:

How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: “The world is eternal: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong”?

Vaccha, I do not hold the view, “The world is eternal: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong.”

How then does Master Gotama hold the view: “The world is not eternal: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong”?

Vaccha, I do not hold the view, “The world is not eternal: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong.”

How is it Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: “The world is finite: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong”?

Vaccha, I do not hold the view, “The world is finite: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong.”

How then does Master Gotama hold the view: “The world is infinite: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong”?

Vaccha, I do not hold the view, “The world is infinite: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong.”

How is it Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: “The soul and the body are the same: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong”?

Vaccha, I do not hold the view, “The soul and the body are the same: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong”?

How then does Master Gotama hold the view: “The soul is one thing and the body another: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong”?

Vaccha, I do not hold the view, “The soul is one thing and the body another: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong.”

How is it Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view “After death a Tathagata exists: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong”?

Vaccha, I do not hold the view, “After death a Tathagata exists: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong”?

How then does Master Gotama hold the view: “After death a Tathagata does not exist: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong”?

Vaccha, I do not hold the view, “After death a Tathagata does not exist: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong.”

How then does Master Gotama hold the view: “After death a Tathagata both exists and does not exist: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong”?

Vaccha, I do not hold the view, “After death a Tathagata both exists and does not exist: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong.”

How then does Master Gotama hold the view: “After death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true, anything otherwise is worthless”?

Vaccha, I do not hold the view, “After death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong.”

How is it, Master Gotama, when Master Gotama is asked if he holds the view “the cosmos is eternal . . .” . . . “after death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true, anything otherwise is wrong,” he says “. . . no . . .” in each case. Seeing what drawback, then, is Master Gotama thus entirely dissociated from each of these ten positions?

Vaccha, the speculative view that “the cosmos is eternal” is a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a writhing of views, a fetter of views. It is accompanied by suffering, distress, despair, and fever, and it does not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation; to calm, direct knowledge, full Awakening, Unbinding. (MN 72; trans. Bodhi [1995, 590–91])

In this discourse, the sage Gotama refrains from pronouncing on cosmological, psychological, and eschatological doctrines owing to their pernicious effect on the psyche of the interlocutor. In particular he warns that were he to espouse the cosmological position under dispute he would then be contributing to the student’s “fetter of views.” In other words, the mere holding of views is potentially hazardous to the soul, as in the case of Socrates’s warnings about the Sophists who claim to understand human nature. The Buddha elaborates

the dangers lurking in the subscription to such a view, calling it a “thicket” and “wilderness.” For the sage, the manufacturing, dispensing, and especially cherishing of speculative views (Pali, *Ditthi*; Sk., *drsti*; view, belief, dogma, theory, speculation) are not conducive to the primary purpose of teaching, which as Gotama states is “direct knowledge” and “unbinding.” By contrast, the Pali text uses compounds of the word *Ditthi*, including “wilderness of views,” “thicket of views,” and “fetter of views,” to suggest that the development of and investment in this kind of speculative natural philosophy and metaphysics leaves the mind in greater turmoil and generates a kind of philosophical entanglement that traps a person in her own thoughts. The sage wants to teach people how not to be trapped by their own thinking; how not to be fooled by their own creations.

Again, in the Culamalunkya Sutta, or “Shorter Instructions to Malunka,” a monk threatens to leave the order unless the Buddha answers certain metaphysical questions:

Then, as Ven. Malunkyaputta was alone in seclusion, this train of thought arose in his awareness: “These speculative views have been left undeclared by the Blessed One, set aside and rejected by him—‘The world is eternal,’ ‘The world is not eternal,’ ‘The world is finite,’ ‘The world is infinite,’ ‘The soul and the body are the same,’ ‘The soul is one thing and the body another,’ ‘After death a Tathagata exists,’ ‘After death a Tathagata does not exist,’ ‘After death a Tathagata both exists and does not exist,’ ‘After death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist’—The Blessed One does not declare these to me, and I do not approve of and accept the fact that the Blessed One has not declared them to me. So I shall go to the Blessed One and ask him about the meaning of this. If he declares to me either that ‘The world is eternal,’ that ‘The world is not eternal,’ that ‘The world is finite,’ that ‘The world is infinite,’ that ‘The soul and the body are the same,’ that ‘The soul is one thing and the body another,’ that ‘After death a Tathagata exists,’ that ‘After death a Tathagata does not exist,’ that ‘After death a Tathagata both exists and does not exist,’ or that ‘After death a Tathagata neither exists nor does not exist,’ then I will live the holy life under him.” (MN 63; trans. Bodhi [1995, 533]).

This part of the Pali dialogue might remind us of the *Clitophon*, which stages, as we saw, Clitophon’s desertion of Socrates as well as his recruitment by rival Sophists for the very reason that Socrates will not share definite views with those who converse with him. Clitophon says that he finally got tired of begging for an answer. Likewise, in his frustration, the ascetic depicted in the

Sutta, Malunkya, demands that the Sage Gotama rescue him from doubts by producing a definitive natural philosophy.

This brief excursion into the Pali texts that purport to convey the authentic conversations of the Buddha with various interlocutors throughout his teaching career has been an attempt to take the disavowal, the lack of dogmatism, outside of the debate between doubt and dogmatism that dominates Western interpretations, both ancient and modern. Readers may or may not appreciate the uses of comparative philosophy as a way to step outside of our Western conceptual habits and provide a platform from which to view the great monuments of philosophical antiquity from a distance. The refusal to pronounce on questions of eschatology that we find in the *Apology*, the lack of a definitive statement about the fate of the soul after death, and even the fact that Socrates, on trial for his life, is not forthcoming about any theological views he holds, puts one in mind of these Buddhist dialogues.<sup>11</sup> This repeated emphasis on the disavowal of wisdom both puts the onus on the interlocutor/reader, to examine her own relationship with all of her views, with the whole realm of doxa, and reveals the remedial aspects of Socratic teaching. By “remedial,” I mean, functioning as the remedy for the entanglement or commitment to doctrinal positions at the expense of self-knowledge.

## SOCRATIC RECEPTIONS

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Readers of Plato are by default constrained to choose between the interpretive strategies left to us by the ancients. In the case of Socrates, this choice is even more salient, since of course Socrates wrote nothing. One must, in other words, always already choose a Socrates at a given distance from the original, if it even makes sense to talk about the original.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, from time to time, it is necessary to excavate the archaeology of all Socratic constructs, to see what is bedrock, what is foundational, and what is new construction. Especially in studying the Socratic search for virtue, the reader is led into the labyrinthine ways that virtue itself ramifies through the layers of philosophical sediment bequeathed to him or to her.

The science of happiness and the art of living offer two ancient templates for characterizing the Socratic quest for virtue. According to the former (sometimes associated with Aristotle's interpretation of the Socratic dialogues), Socrates attempts to locate a craft knowledge (virtue) that will enable the agent to assemble the constituents that belong to a happy life. According to the latter (sometimes associated with the Stoic and other Socratic schools), the Socratic life becomes a paradigm for the virtuous life. In this book, I will make use of another model altogether, one that has a rather more contemplative orientation, and emphasizes the Socratic quest for virtue as already involving *theoria* and with it, the valorization of wisdom as the highest good, for its own sake. We can perhaps call this approach the ethics of wisdom. It too has an ancient pedigree. In what follows, I make use of the interpretations of Plato's dialogues presented by late antique philosophers such as Plotinus, Porphyry, and Proclus. They understood the ethical motto offered in the *Theaetetus*, "assimilation to god," as the goal of Platonic virtue.<sup>2</sup> For them, assimilation to the divine means intellectual conformity with the divine, and the ancient Platonists understood the divine as nous, as eternal intellect.<sup>3</sup> Hence, actualizing the human person by awakening the faculty of intellect and achieving contemplation of the intelligible objects through a unitary mode of knowledge is the central meaning of virtue according to this Platonist tradition. The Neoplatonists understood the quest for virtue as



a contemplative quest; and they understood Socrates as a contemplative philosopher. In this book, I want to claim that, for Plato as well, the Socratic search for virtue is in fact an entry point into the art of *theoria*, of contemplation.

The Socrates that I will be focusing on in these pages is primarily the figure of Socrates as we find him in the Socratic dialogues of Plato and to a lesser extent that figure as it emerges in the work of Socratic authors. Let me then outline what I take to be some initial observations about the relationship between Socrates, an historical figure who died in 399 BCE, and the Socrates that we today have inherited as readers of ancient and modern Socratic literature. While the Socratic *bios* is a literary innovation that exploits various conventions, including mime, tragedy, and philosophical prose, nevertheless, at some level it must be understood as occasioned by an event or series of events, the uniquely towering presence of Socrates's activity in late fifth-century Athens. Authors such as Xenophon, Aeschines, Phaedo, Antisthenes, and, of course, Plato, wrote Socratic dialogues because the life of Socrates was for them exemplary (Clay 1994, 28; Kahn 1996, 1–36). Indeed, in the fifth century and arguably in later eras as well, it was possible to be an imitator of Socrates merely by imitating his life, a phenomenon that we encounter everywhere from the Platonic dialogues to Epictetus's own brand of Socratism. Only some of those who belonged to the Socratic circle were "literary imitators" (Clay 1994, 26). And, finally, we must note that those who recorded, imagined, or interpreted the philosophy and words of Socrates in the ancient world were thinkers in their own right; Socrates quickly became a source of authority, a founding figure for a variety of later self-styled Socratics.

What is at stake in this rehearsal of the obvious is not just a reprise of the Socrates question that is necessarily raised by the fact that our earliest sources for Socrates "conflict at the most basic level."<sup>4</sup> Instead, it is meant to alert the reader to the difficulty that attends what might seem to be a very natural assumption: that is, that one ought to begin the study of Socrates with an examination of Socratic tenets and philosophical doctrines. In fact this approach was not typical of the philosophers who constitute what one book has called the "Socratic movement" (Vander Waerdt 1994). In addition to any Socratic doctrine, if such there was, it was Socrates the man, or even the Socratic way of life, that engendered literary and philosophical engagement with Socrates during his life and in the direct aftermath of his life, and, later, as a philosophical ideal in the Hellenistic schools.<sup>5</sup> Socrates was many things—sage, martyr, possibly magus or even prophet—to previous centuries, yet, by contrast, Socrates's meaning as a philosopher today is measured by an almost exclusive focus on the discovery of a Socratic doctrine worthy of the man. Many students of Socrates today are, at least since the pioneering work of Gregory Vlastos,<sup>6</sup> in search of a doctrine

that can satisfactorily answer how a seemingly ironic or at least philosophically banal figure came to be identified as the founder of Western philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

Therefore, Socrates is the paradigm. Like the form, functioning as a guide to life, the all-giving beneficence of the divine that he points to in his actions is a recommendation for others to move in this direction, to adopt just this trajectory. The aporetic quality of Socratic wisdom is presented at the outset as a stimulus to this recovery, which can after all, only be claimed by the aspirant through self-knowledge. In this sense, Plato's presentation of Socrates is perhaps at odds with a recent interpretation that suggests that Socrates is the unique individual, like no one, incapable of transmitting his virtue, a puzzle and enigma that Plato could not explain (Nehamas 1998, 90: "[Plato] always regarded Socrates as a divine accident"). Rather than being a uniquely inimitable individual, Socrates is exemplary; we are meant to imitate him. This paradigmatic force is indicated in the *Symposium*, in the imitation of Apollodorus, and in actual life, through the circle of Socratic imitators. People first begin recording their versions of the Socratic life, or, as in Greek, the Socratic bios, which in fact became an entirely new genre of literature—an Athenian literary innovation that exploited various conventions including mime, tragedy, and philosophical prose (Kahn 1996). Yet ironically it is just this powerful exemplary status of the Socratic life that in some ways exerts pressure or occasions a growing expectation for a Socratic philosophy that can be expressed either in terms of method, à la Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, or in terms of doctrinal formulations, à la Aristotle's *Ethics*, or both, à la Vlastos's elenctic method and elenctic precepts.<sup>8</sup>

What work, then, does the figure of Socrates do in the dialogues of Plato and how does this role accord or not accord, incidentally, with other representations of Socrates, some contemporaneous but many rather dependent on Plato's Socrates for their own inspiration? In coming to some conclusions about the figure of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues, I am led to reassert the importance of Socrates's life as it is portrayed by Plato, and to balance the doctrinal commitments that Socrates is represented as making with the narrative frames in which they are reported. One might well ask, "Character or doctrine—what difference does it make?"<sup>9</sup> All of it is "fictional"<sup>10</sup> in the sense that Plato's literary portraits of Socrates are astonishingly convincing works of art that purport to let us overhear the very conversations that Socrates had in his most private moments, minutes before his death with his wife and friends, alone in bed with a worldly youth, as well as more public moments, as for example his trial before a jury of five hundred Athenian citizens. In answer to this objection, I trust it will be enough to notice that there is no other tenet for which Socrates is today credited that so glaringly illustrates the difference between the doctrinal and what we might call

the exemplary Socrates than the *egoistic eudaimonism* that Vlastos averred was the linchpin of Socratic ethics. The narratives that Xenophon, Aeschines, and above all Plato create surrounding the life and death of Socrates feature a Socrates who is supremely selfless, sacrificing his material possessions and his very life for the sake of continuing his god-given mission, that of awakening his fellow citizens from their nightmarish pursuit of wealth and power at the expense of virtue.

Thus we are left with the question of how, in Hayden Ausland's words, the dominant portrait of Socrates has become the figure of a man who is seen as "conspicuously failing in the duty of love for his fellow man,"<sup>11</sup> while his ancient biographers stressed Socrates's sacrifices on behalf of his service either to gods or men, or both. We as readers of the Socratic dialogues inevitably look at these works through the various lenses of Plato's readers: Aristotle's treatment of Socrates as an ethical philosopher who held firm doctrinal positions has had an enormous influence on our understanding of Socrates. But it is important to see that Plato looked at Socrates in the light of his contemporary intellectual milieu, and also that he framed the figure of Socrates in terms of traditional literature, heroic legend and myth, and even religious iconography. The richness of the Platonic portrait can be lost when filtered through the lens of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which understands the elenchus as primarily a search for definitions of the moral virtues (1078b17). So much is this the case that some scholars have arrived at the view that the elenctic principles are foundational to a Socratic moral system, or Socratic theory of action.

At the core of these principles lies the *eudaimonist axiom* or the proposition that "happiness is desired by all human beings as the ultimate end of all their rational acts." According to Vlastos (1991), Socrates stakes this principle out, "whereupon it becomes foundational for virtually all subsequent moralists of classical antiquity" (203). This suggestion, that the Greeks generally made happiness the summum bonum of life, the main end toward which all other action is subordinate, has for some scholars achieved the status of a truism. Aristotle's reading of the Socratic dialogues understands the goal of Socratic philosophy as a science of happiness, which will enable the one who is expert in it to generate the maximum amount of good in her life, overall. Indeed, it is precisely this identification of virtue with knowledge for which Aristotle criticizes Socrates in the *Eudemean Ethics*:

Socrates the elder thought that the end of life was knowledge of virtue, and he used to seek for the definition of justice, courage, and each of the parts of virtue, and this was a reasonable approach, since he thought that all virtues were sciences. (1.1216b2–4)

Ironically, Aristotle misses a point of connection with the Socratic dialogues understood as exemplifying the life of virtue. In this passage, Aristotle continues that Socrates is mistaken in his approach, since our goal is “not to know the definitions of virtue, but to be virtuous; not to know the definition of justice, but to be just.” Aristotle’s approach exclusively emphasizes Socratic doctrine, having nothing to say about the life of Socrates and its exemplary status. Instead, Aristotle explicitly attributes doctrines to Socrates, that is, that virtue is knowledge, that wisdom is a craft.<sup>12</sup> Now sometimes Plato’s Socrates does say things that make it seem as if he is looking to discover a science or craft of happiness. The Greek word that Plato frequently uses in these contexts is *techne*, a word that tends to refer to practical or productive arts. For example, at *Charmides* 172a3, Socrates says that “once error is eliminated, and precise correctness prevails, then necessarily those who are in this condition must fare well, and those who fare well are happy.” But Socrates always denies that he has achieved an error-free life, that he has acquired this technology of happiness, and that he has anything to contribute to such a science. For all of its appeal in terms of locating a specific set of Socratic formulations and techniques that neatly map onto the history of Western philosophy, the Aristotelian interpretation of the Socratic dialogues leaves us with very little by way of understanding one crucial feature of the Socratic enterprise, so to speak. The phenomenon, not discussed by Aristotle but consistently emphasized by other Socratic writers, is the extraordinary life of Socrates, most evident in what he calls his “service to the city” and in his care for all members of his community, citizen and noncitizen alike.

There is another ancient way of reading of the Socratic dialogues, one that tends to counter the science of happiness approach. For one thing, it studies features of the elenctic dialogues that emerge alongside the consideration of doctrine. For example, one could say that the skeptical academy of Arcesilaus or the New Academy as revealed through Cicero’s *Academica* (Long 1996, 1–34; see also Annas 1993)<sup>13</sup> offer an example of this approach, constructing as it were a life based on exemplary Socratic values, since the skeptics valorized Socratic aporia as *epoche*—suspension of belief, the essential prerequisite for a life of tranquility. Or, again, some scholars aver that the Stoics and Cynics valorized the force and significance of Socratic self-mastery, *enkrateia* (Dorion 2006). This Hellenistic way of reading the Socratic dialogues suggests more the art of living than the science of happiness model bequeathed by Aristotle.<sup>14</sup> It is through the art of living approach to Socrates that we can begin to complement the Aristotelian reading of the Socratic dialogues, and especially to appreciate the figure of Socrates as paradigmatic.<sup>15</sup>

Seneca's Socrates underlines for us the tradition that makes of Socrates's life a model to imitate:

If you desire a model, take Socrates. That much-suffering old man was buffeted by every difficulty but still unconquered both by poverty (which his domestic burdens made more serious) and by labors (he also endured military service). He was harassed by these troubles at home, whether his wife, with her untamed character and impudent language, or his unlearned children, who were more like their mother than their father. . . . (*Ep.* 104.27)<sup>16</sup>

The Roman Stoic Epictetus, who lived some six hundred years after Socrates, still took Socrates to be the guide of life; Epictetus's *Handbook* ends with a kind of paraphrase of the *Apology*: "Anytus and Meletus may kill me, but they cannot arm me" (*Ench.* 53; trans. White [Epictetus 1983, 34]).<sup>17</sup>

Thus the art of living model of Socratic wisdom considers Socrates more in terms of his exemplary life and death: his courage in the face of death, both at the hour of his execution and in warfare, his indifference to material well-being, his self-control, and, above all, his willingness to sacrifice his very life on behalf of his duties to his fellow men, leading them tirelessly in a search for truth. Sometimes, this art of living approach is thought to be given more prominence in the Socratic schools, that is, the Hellenistic traditions of Cynicism and Stoicism that are closely linked to the ethics demonstrated in Socrates's life: his self-reliance, his care for others, his outspokenness, and his exhortation to virtue.<sup>18</sup>

Generally, these two approaches might encourage us to think of Socrates as asking a moral question: the question of how we ought to live.<sup>19</sup> At least, readers of Plato ever since Aristotle have thought of Socrates as a moral philosopher: "Socrates, however," says Aristotle, "was occupying himself with the moral virtues, having been the first to search for universal definitions of them" (*Metaph.* 1078b16; trans. Vlastos [1991, 91]).<sup>20</sup> And, surely, one important way of understanding Socrates is as the founder of ethical philosophy, in the spirit, for example, of Cicero's famous remark to the effect that Socrates brought philosophy down from the heavens to earth. Yet in writing as he did about Socrates, Aristotle recognized moral virtue as distinct from intellectual virtue. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle suggests that the life in accordance with understanding is the highest life and, "secondarily, the [life] in accordance with the other [i.e., moral] virtue" (1178a6–10).<sup>21</sup> No doubt Socrates allows, through his life, teachings, and lack of writing, that wisdom must above all function in the world without giving up its sovereignty at every turn of fate. But we must not

understand Socrates as trading down, settling for a mundane wisdom in favor of action, nor even for a philosophy of action. Of course, we do meet Socrates acting in the world—marrying, having children, being a citizen, a warrior, a party-goer, a friend, and a lover—and at ease with himself, whether on the porch, or staying awake all night in contemplation (Bussanich 2006),<sup>22</sup> or in a crowded, sweaty gymnasium. Many of his actions are exemplary, as, for example, his courage in the retreat at Delium, recorded in the *Symposium*, or his noble conduct at his own trial, recorded in the *Apology*. Yet what I hope to show is that the Socratic search for virtue is in itself the awakening of the contemplative life. Socratic virtue, whether enacted in battle or in the elenchus, is not so much concerned with action as with wisdom. What shows up in Plato’s visionary passages (*Phdr.* 247; *Resp.*, bk. 7) as a face-to-face encounter with the forms, the literal theoría of the soul’s flight from the cave or from the marketplace, nevertheless begins humbly in the streets of Athens, and can be understood even there as an initial contemplation of the form.

In late antiquity, Neoplatonists read the dialogues of Plato according to a cycle that corresponded to the student’s progress in the philosophical curriculum. We know that Porphyry’s younger colleague, the Syrian born Iamblichus promoted this curriculum, which correlated closely with the Neoplatonic system of ranking kinds of virtue. *Alcibiades I* (a dialogue often not recognized as genuine among scholars today),<sup>23</sup> came first in the schedule since it promoted self-knowledge. It was followed by *Gorgias* (constitutional virtues) and *Phaedo* (purificatory virtues). Porphyry, Plotinus’s editor, discusses the higher forms of virtue in his treatise *Sententiae ad intelligibilem ducentes*:<sup>24</sup>

The civic virtues are different from those leading to contemplation, and on account of this called “contemplative” virtues; again, the virtues of the one who has attained contemplation and already is a contemplative are different from those that belong to intellect, that is to say intellect when it is entirely freed from the soul. (32.1–5)<sup>25</sup>

Porphyry next discusses the “purificatory” virtues treated, according to him, in the *Phaedo*:

The virtues belonging to the person who is developing contemplation consist in detachment from the things that belong to this world; they are called “purificatory” because they involve renunciation of bodily action and of attachment to the body; the contemplative disposition in virtues lies in detachment, whose end is likeness to the divine. (32.10–15)

According to Porphyry, virtues are virtues to the extent that they tend to support contemplation, and, at last, to express the full realization of *theoria*, intellectual activity. For Neoplatonists, the same virtues (justice, courage, moderation, and wisdom) operate in two dimensions: civic or constitutional virtues and purificatory virtues, based respectively on *Republic* 430c and *Phaedo* 69b–c. Civic virtues relate to preservation of the soul’s constitution,<sup>26</sup> an interpretation that falls in line with the conventional reading of the *Republic* as a psychological and metaphysical treatise generally popular among late antique Platonists (Annas 1999). I would hasten to add that Porphyry’s is not an outlandish reading of the *Republic* by any means, as Socrates concludes the elaboration of the city-soul analogy in the *Republic* with the admonition that the just person engages in politics “only in the city of himself” (592a–b). Thus civic virtues govern the proper ordering of the soul according to the guidance of the philosophical disposition over the ambitions of *thumos* or the desires of appetite.

In the *Sententiae*, Porphyry seems to be paraphrasing Plotinus; both of them are concerned to elaborate the Platonic idea of separating the soul from the body, that is, of pursuing death. Plotinus writes:

[Soul] will be good and possess virtue when it no longer has the same opinions [as the body] but acts alone—this is intelligence and wisdom. (*Enn.* 1.2.3.15)

Of interest in Porphyry is the phrase “detachment from the things that belong to this world” (*ἀποστάσει κείνται τῶν ἐντεῦθεν*), which suggests a path away from active engagement, almost a kind of renunciation of action. In this paragraph, we read that virtue does not aim at, is not for the sake of, action as such; rather, the goal of virtue is likeness to the divine. Virtue is for the sake of wisdom. In this late antique interpretation of Platonic ethics, the watchword from the *Theaetetus*, likeness to god, is taken as programmatic. The meaning of virtue as understood in the *Phaedo*, *katharsis* or purification of the soul, is an intermediary step.

Plotinus puts it rather strikingly in his treatise “On Eudaimonia,” when he says, “Our concern, though, is not to be out of sin, but to be god” (1.4.6.2). These two kinds of virtue, constitutional and cathartic, are the initial virtues, which enable one to progress until the fulfillment of virtue, its completion in the contemplation of reality. Plotinus discusses what he calls the higher virtues in the soul, calling justice “activity towards intellect; self-control, inward turning to intellect” (1.2.6.24–25). Here Plotinus follows Aristotle, agreeing that virtue as such is not in the divine (*Eth. Nic.* 7.1.1145a25–27); likeness to god is what the soul has. Intellect is god.<sup>28</sup>

This late antique ethics of wisdom, rather than conceiving of ethics as belonging to a moral domain that operates in the sphere of action and is governed by practical wisdom, offers an ethics that is inherently theoretical. But by “theoretical,” the late antique Platonists meant, engaged in *theoria*, that is to say, contemplative. In alluding to late antique interpreters of Socratic virtue (called Neo-Socratics by one group of scholars; see Layne and Tarrant 2014), I am not suggesting that Socrates per se was the central figure for Neoplatonic conceptions of virtue, or that the distinction of a separate Socratic philosophy was even consistent with their exegetical project. Instead, I am suggesting that their reading of what we think of as the Socratic dialogues (aporetic dialogues, elenctic dialogues, “early” dialogues: e.g., *Gorgias*, *Alcibiades I*) and also dialogues that feature biographical traditions concerning Socrates (*Phaedo*) or are erotic (*Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, *Alcibiades I*) configure virtue as spiraling upwards through degrees of contemplative adeptness. For these interpreters (Porphyry, Iamblichus, Plotinus, Proclus, Damascius, and Olympiodorus, to name the significant ones) ethics is not a separate, moral sphere that governs behavior, action in the world, measures deeds good or bad, or aims at states of affairs that accrue or do not accrue. According to them, the grades of virtue approximate to the fullness of wisdom, so that virtue turns out to be assimilation to the divine, understood as *nous* (intellect). They also embrace Socratic paradeigmatism (that Socrates represents the authentic self, that Socrates acts with a view to benefit all people), either in his role as inspired lover (Johnson and Tarrant 2012) or in his symbolic function as the higher aspect of the soul (Taki 2012).<sup>29</sup>

This ancient approach to Socratic ethics is worth studying insofar as it diverges greatly from the historical narratives that we find so often in the Western tradition, saying that Socrates founds moral philosophy, or, more recently, saying that Socrates is not even a moral philosopher but an action theorist who recognizes the “truth” of egoism (Reshotko 2006). Far from embracing this outward Socrates, we can also appreciate him as a philosopher who creates puzzles out of words that signify, in their most ordinary sense, actions, ways of acting, and states of affairs in the world, precisely for the purpose of directing our attention away from the transitory conditions that constitute this or that circumstance. He draws us away from the surface play of language and conduct, into the heart of virtue.

Nevertheless, I do not equate Plato’s contemplative ethics or the figurations of Socrates in his dialogues with these late antique interpretations, verbatim. Instead what I have sought to do in this chapter is to offer various templates through which ancient readers of Plato have understood the meaning of Socratic philosophy. I want to offer the reader a larger palette than the



Aristotelian interpretation. What emerges most strongly from the late antique (in contrast to the Aristotelian or Hellenistic) perspective is that wisdom and not action is the goal of ethics: in other words, that Platonic ethics is essentially an ethics of wisdom. I understand Socratic philosophy as making available the space of wisdom, instilling a certain orientation to contemplation: namely, that true contemplation is insight; that the discovery of virtue is actually the development of contemplative awareness, an awareness that arises when the seeker discovers that the definition of virtue lies not in a logical formulation, but is not found in a definition at all. Action here in the Socratic dialogues involves the cultivation of the qualities of the soul that allow the person to function in the world without thereby compromising the activity of wisdom. From my point of view, such an ethics of wisdom is not just a late antique interpretation of Plato. It is still a valid method for reading the figure of Socrates today—as valid as the science of happiness approach or the art of living model.

What I am arguing is that the Socratic quest for virtue, insofar as it can be conceived as an ethics at all, is precisely that effort to align the person with intellect, to bring wisdom alive as one's very life. Plato has Socrates say that the unexamined life cannot be, must not be lived by any human being. Elaborating this Socratic remark, Plotinus, in his treatise "On Eudaimonia," writes:

Since it is our view that happiness exists among human beings, we must inquire how it comes about. My view is as follows: that the perfect life belongs to him who has not only sensation, but also reason and genuine intellect, has already been made plain from many sources. But does he have this as being other than intellect? Rather he is not even entirely human, unless he does possess this, either potentially or actually, and him we also call eudaimon. (*Enn.* 1.4.4–11; trans. Armstrong [Plotinus 1966–89])<sup>30</sup>

It is perfectly reasonable to ask, What does any of this have to do with Plato's Socrates (i.e., not Aristotle's Socrates, not Epictetus's Socrates, not Plotinus's Socrates)? How valid can it be to embrace the conception of virtue belonging to the late antique Platonists or to claim that Plato represents Socrates in terms of such an ethics of wisdom? In fact, I would argue, there are plenty of things that Plato does to mark this sapiential orientation to ethics as Socratic. Sedley (2004) writes persuasively that the "most important single legacy of Socratic ethics to Plato" is a value system, in which wisdom alone is "underivatively good," whereas moral virtues are simply "externally good habits" (75).<sup>31</sup> As Sedley goes on to say:

[Plato's] standard marker-phrase for authentic, because intellectualized, virtues is "with wisdom" (*meta phroneseos*; sometimes *meta nou*, "with intelligence")—exactly as here in the *Theaetetus*, where to become like god is to become "just and pious, *with wisdom*." (75; emphasis in original)

Socrates, then, in Platonic terms, is there to point us toward the person within the person; and to help us see with the eye of the soul. This dimension of Socrates, his strengthening, fostering, and awakening the human capacity for intellectual activity, for self-knowledge, is the meaning of "assimilation to god." To recollect oneself is the primary directive that Socrates imparts. "Don't forget who is here," Socrates seems to say. Is there anyone here who is not a sage, who can opt out of the human vocation? In answering the question for everyone he meets in the negative, Socrates fills the streets of Athens (or New York, or Beirut, let us hasten to add) with aspirants to wisdom. At the same time, this forceful recruitment is a preface to all of Plato's works. Socrates is the psychopomp, the guide to the philosophical life; meeting up with Socrates is meeting one's own true self.

In this respect, the lens of Aristotle, which as we saw paints Socrates as a moral philosopher, while it has been profoundly influential on contemporary studies of Socrates, is a view that can be enlarged by looking at Socrates through the perspective of both Plato himself and later Platonists. We have seen that by engaging the late antique interpretation of virtue as contemplative, we were able to augment an entrenched understanding of Socrates as primarily a moral theorist. The fruits of this interpretation are yet to be realized in an extended reading of the Socratic dialogues via a contemplative approach. Another way that the late antique commentators augment our understanding of Socrates is by emphasizing in their studies of the divinely inspired lover, that this idea of divinization, of assimilation to the divine, in itself has profound implications for ethics. For not only does perfect wisdom characterize Plato's divinity, *nous* (intellect), but Plato also tells us that god is entirely free from envy and desires to assimilate whatever is inferior to the good, to bring about its perfection. According to the late Platonist Hermias, "Socrates was sent down into generation for the benefit of the human race and of the souls of young persons" (1.1–2; Ὁ Σωκράτης ἐπὶ εὐεργεσία τοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους καὶ τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν νέων κατεπέμφθη εἰς γένεσιν).

Through this engagement with the ancient Platonist understanding of Socrates, we come to see a Socrates who is a divinely inspired lover, beneficent, almost an avatar, an embodied god, an *imago* of the true self, and a supreme

altruist. Nothing could represent a starker contrast with the rational egoist who has come to represent the standard view of Socrates.

But in addition to this approach to Socrates through the contemplative ethics just sketched, the late Platonists also engage Socrates more directly, usually by focusing on two dimensions of the Socratic. The first is as erotic guide; the second is as emblem of self-knowledge. As the late fifth-century Platonist Olympiodorus writes in his *Alcibiades* commentary:

ὁ Σωκράτης οὐ μόνον ἀνάγειν σπουδάζει τὰ παιδικά, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τῆς αὐτῆς ὁδοῦ ἧς καὶ αὐτὸς ἀνήχθη· λέγεται δὲ πρὸς φιλοσοφίαν ἔλθειν ἐκ τοῦ Πυθικοῦ γράμματος τοῦ ‘γνώθι σαυτὸν’ (4.5–8)

Socrates is not only struggling to lead the beloved on the upward path, but he also does so through the very path upon which he himself ascended. And he is said to have come to philosophy through the precept of Pythicus: “Know thyself.”

According to Proclus, “Socrates, as being an inspired lover, and elevated to intelligible beauty itself, has established himself as corresponding to the intellect of the soul” (*In Alc.* 43.7–8). Thus, Socrates attracts the soul of Alcibiades to wisdom, kindling the light, or rather merely pointing out the light, of Alcibiades’s own intelligence (44.12). The inspired lover then facilitates self-realization in the beloved, insofar as the soul is most authentic when it thinks according to intellect. For Olympiodorus, Socrates is the self within the self (see Renaud and Tarrant 2016, 236–41). Hence, Socrates operates as the engine of personal transformation, the guide who leads us to our truest selves (Renaud and Tarrant 2016, 237).

Proclus’s treatment of Socrates also involves seeing him as a paradigm, an object for imitation, as the Stoics understood. But Socrates cannot be imitated through action in the world: we are not trying to “be Socrates,” as some of his less acute followers attempted. Instead, according to Proclus, Socrates is the inner person; he represents the authentic self. In fact the Neoplatonist Proclus understood the figure of Socrates as representing, wherever he appeared in the dialogues, the highest part of the soul—its intellectual function, the most divine aspect of the individual human being. In his *Parmenides* Commentary he discusses what the character of Socrates signifies in terms of a kind of pagan typology, wherein certain figures come to function as analogies for the different degrees or ranks of states of being. Proclus writes:

And Socrates could be compared to the particular intellect, or absolutely to Intellect, whereas of the other two, the former (*Parmenides*) is ranked analogically with Being, the latter (*Zeno*) with Life. This is why

he is associated so closely with Parmenides and Zeno, and together with them makes up the first conversation, which we said bears the likeness of genuine being, as Intellect is itself the fullness of indivisible being. Socrates is also portrayed as especially confident of the theory of ideas, and what other role is more fitting for the particular intellect than to see the divine Forms and declare them to others? So these three personages seem to me to satisfy the analogy, the first to Being, the second to Life, the third to Intellect; or the first to complete and unparticipated intellect, the second to intellect that is participated, and the third to the individual and participated intellect. Indivisible nature stops with these grades of being; for intellect is either universal and unparticipated, or universal and participated, or particular and participated. For there is no intellect that is particular and unparticipated. (*In Parm.* 628.18; trans. Morrow and Dillon [Proclus 1987, 27])

Again, in his *Alcibiades* commentary, Proclus understands the interlocutor as under examination by his own inner deity (intellect) insofar as the soul's activity of thinking through philosophical puzzles posed in the elenchus constitutes an opportunity for the "realization of the innate ideas" previously latent in the soul (15.12–16). Therefore, the soul recollects its prenatal knowledge during the elenchus. Socratic method then equates with self-knowledge (Taki 2012). The Neoplatonic understanding both of Socrates and of the virtues takes a decidedly contemplative turn. Proclus indulges in an almost allegorical reading of the Socratic dialogues, applying what would no doubt strike the modern reader as a dubious principle of interpretation: namely, that each Platonic dialogue is a kind of plenary microcosm into which the elements of reality are fully assembled (Coulter 1976).

Is it Proclus's view that the Socratic persona in Plato's dialogues can summon forth elements within the individual's own mind that perhaps lie dormant or inactive, or that the exemplary activity Socrates displays in the dialogues demands the self-reflection or self-scrutiny that he himself facilitates in others? Are these ideas so unlikely? According to the Neoplatonic interpretation, Socrates comes to occupy the place of the inner self, what Plato calls "the eye of the soul." His fundamental activity is really no activity at all; it is rather the function of the mirror, the vehicle by means of which the interlocutors come to see themselves. Socrates is then the vessel into which the reader deposits her attention: the imageless surface that allows the thoughts to appear beneath it. According to this interpretation, it is not that Socrates does not pursue definitions of virtue or ask his interlocutors to attend to their souls. It is rather that

this soul tending—keeping watch over the mind, seeing what arises within it, separating oneself from that activity of *doxa*, of generating opinions—is the Socratic function that each of us must perform within our own lives. In that same way, Plato represents Socrates as required to answer to an inner divinity, his *daimon*, to the oracle of Apollo, to a savage roommate who subjects him to beatings. Socrates, the center of the conversation and the mirror of the interlocutor, of course plays a dramatic role in the dialogues, a role, however, that Plato himself is happy to metaphorize. Gadfly, midwife, Silenus, mirror, lover, it seems that Socrates would have to be everywhere, all the time, to keep his citizens from harm, from what he considers the worst life of all, the unexamined life. In saying that Socrates occupies the function of the individual intellect, Proclus suggests that we cannot find Socrates outside of ourselves, as an item in the history of thought. Proclus's radical method of reading Socrates, which takes Plato's Socrates outside of the historical register and into the realm of the symbolic, a consequence of his suspending the external world or material circumstances of the dialogues, results in a "universal Socrates." Students of religion could compare the elevation of Gautama Shakyamuni to the cosmic Buddha or Philo's elevation of Moses to the position of universal sage. For the Neoplatonists, then, Socrates enjoys a ubiquitous presence as the intellect of every individual. Therefore, in keeping with their insight into what the Socratic paradigm of Plato's texts conveys, it is fair to say that a genuinely Socratic exhortation can still be heard today, as there are plenty of candidates available to each of us to occupy the role of Socrates, but only one who can genuinely fulfill that role, and this person can only be oneself.

## CHAPTER THREE

# SOCRATES AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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In chapter ten of Cicero's *De fato*, we read of an encounter between Socrates and Zopyrus, a Persian physiognomer who visits Athens and claims that he is able to read the character of a person from his countenance.<sup>1</sup> When he meets Socrates, he pronounces the latter "stupid, dull and . . . also a womanizer." In his reply, Socrates admits that although these are quite possibly his native vices he has been able to uproot them. This tale is related in one of two dialogues attributed to Phaedo of Elis, a member of the Socratic circle and most famously the companion portrayed in Plato's eponymous dialogue. Socrates here is made to recognize a colleague, a professional who studies human nature. But it is only owing to his self-knowledge that Socrates can admit, before an audience of his admirers, that Zopyrus is an adept. One of the themes treated in this tantalizingly brief quotation from the *Zopyrus*, a dialogue that was read well into late antiquity, is the extent to which both Socrates and Zopyrus, who are both engaged in the same profession, diagnosing the condition of the human soul, rely on their clients' self-knowledge for confirmation of their skills.

Of course Phaedo is not the only author of Socratic dialogues to portray Socrates as devotee of self-knowledge. At *Phaedrus* 230, Plato has Socrates allude to the Delphic inscription "Know thyself." Because he has not yet attained self-knowledge, Socrates has no time to investigate extraneous matters (τὰ ἀλλότρια σκοπεῖν). This passage I take to be a programmatic statement about Socratic philosophy: It does not investigate external matters and is principally concerned with self-knowledge. My point is not that Socrates himself was only interested in the question of self-knowledge, but that Plato and other writers of the Socratic literature, among whom we can include the author of *Alcibiades I*, if it is not by Plato, regularly link Socratic wisdom to the practice of self-inquiry.

For some contemporary readers of the dialogues, Socrates is in search of a scientific knowledge, one that will enable us to control more precisely "what befalls us," since this knowledge will be necessary if human beings are to maximize the ultimate good that they can achieve in their lives overall. While it is true that Socrates frequently alludes to a universal knowledge of good and evil,

in fact he raises doubts about its relationship to the art of happiness and finally insists that he has no time for such knowledge because he is busy obeying the Delphic inscription. If we are to use Aristotle as a key to understanding the philosophy of Plato's Socrates, then we need to discover a convergence between Aristotle's primary orientation to the Socratic dialogues, conveyed in Aristotle's claim that "Socrates was occupying himself with the moral virtues, having been the first to search for universal definitions of them" (*Metaph.* 1078b17) and the programmatic statement of the *Phaedrus*, that Socrates does not investigate what is extraneous. In the first part of this chapter, I argue that Plato himself represents the elenchus as originating in the pursuit of self-knowledge. Yet whatever the origin of the elenchus may be, my interpretation also demands that it must aim primarily at the development of self-knowledge rather than at the production of definitions.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, we should emphasize self-knowledge in the elenctic dialogues, even though what Socrates is apparently after are good definitions of moral terms.<sup>3</sup> In the second part of this chapter, I argue that the practical result of the elenchus (*viz.*, self-knowledge) coincides with the intellectual goal of the elenchus (the answer to the question, What is virtue?). Virtue turns out to be equivalent to self-knowledge. In the third part of this chapter I make two suggestions as to why this equivalence prevails. I suggest that Socrates anticipates the Platonic teaching that one is most truly the knowing or intelligent self. Socrates also leaves open the possibility that identification with this intelligent self enables one to transcend the confinement of her concerns to her own individual self-interest.

Of course, the elenchus in its primary meaning in Classical Attic as "refutation,"<sup>4</sup> or even "to impugn the honor of,"<sup>5</sup> is more than just a doctrinal elaboration or system of inculcating, disseminating, or even investigating ethical principles (indeed, if it can be understood as doctrinal at all). But, apart from any supposed ethical structure derived from the so-called Socratic precepts (*viz.*, no one errs willingly, virtue is knowledge, etc.), what exactly could the elenchus offer Socrates's interlocutors? Socratic elenchus is fairly destructive. At least, it results in the interlocutor's realization that he doesn't know what he thought he knew. The effect is felt by willing participants and unwitting victims alike.<sup>6</sup> For some interlocutors, impasse is providential, spurring them on as it does to turn within for the truth in question. Scholars who agree that self-knowledge is the primary goal of elenctic conversation have found little else on which they agree, while candidates advanced for the contents of this self-knowledge proliferate. Among the nominees we find, for example, innately correct beliefs, a self-consistent set of beliefs, the so-called Socratic precepts, virtue itself, and even knowledge of knowledge. Yet with few exceptions, one candidate is sometimes

absent from the ballots; self-knowledge in the context of the Socratic elenchus is rarely taken to be knowledge of the self. The Socratic elenchus is a method whereby Socrates attempts to reacquaint his interlocutors with themselves. It proves to be a thankless task, not least because the one person uniquely qualified to perform it is finally the interlocutor. Rather than attempting to explain or to describe it, Socrates, by means of the elenchus, resorts instead to invoking and summoning forth the genuine self that he hopes his interlocutors will encounter. An encounter with Socrates turns out to be an encounter with the self.

As stated above, scholarly opinion concerning the meaning of the term *self-knowledge* varies widely. On a literal reading of certain texts, we might construe self-knowledge as knowledge of what one does or does not know.<sup>7</sup> “Whoever realizes, as Socrates does, that he has in reality no worth with respect to wisdom is wisest among you” (*Ap.* 23b1). Self-knowledge in this passage is presented as a second-rate attainment that at most delivers one from that even worse condition, the pretense to wisdom.<sup>8</sup> In this chapter, I interpret self-knowledge to mean not only knowledge of one’s knowledge, but also knowledge of oneself, *qua* knower. That is, self-knowledge means not only knowing what you know, but also, and just as importantly, that you know: that is, that you are by nature a knowing being, by virtue of being a human being. This isolation or emphasis on the epistemic aspect of the self recalls the identification of the wisdom-loving element as the true self, a doctrine that some have argued informs Plato’s tripartite psychology. However, the elenctic dialogues place greater emphasis upon practice, upon care of the soul. As Socrates narrates in the *Apology*:

I tried to persuade each of you not to be concerned with any of the things that belong to you before you concern yourself with how your self can be in the best possible and wisest condition. (36e1)

Because wisdom is singled out as the exemplary feature of this self that is to be cultivated, it looks as if Socrates is asking us to regard the self as primarily characterized by the ability to know. Socrates also tells us here that the elenchus is the way that he persuades people to attend primarily to the self.

Six dialogues—two elenctic dialogues, two dialogues that feature what one might call Socratic moments in a kind of diptych with the rest of the dialogue, and two whose dating and authenticity present greater problems, provide us with evidence that the elenchus is primarily intended to elicit self-knowledge, and that Plato consciously links the character Socrates with this theme. Five of these dialogues—*Apology*, *Charmides*, *Theaetetus*, *Phaedrus*, and *Alcibiades I*—emphasize Socrates’s connection to Delphi and to the precept “Know thyself,” either through direct allusion to Delphi, or through mention of a divine



patron who sponsors Socrates's activity. The sixth, *Euthyphro*, lacks a connection to Delphi. It is important to go through the evidence briefly but systematically to show that these dialogues demonstrate a self-consistent conception of the elenchus.

In the *Apology*, Socrates's chief witness for the defense is Apollo. Of course, the specific testimony to which he alludes during the trial is the oracular dispensation that "no one is wiser than Socrates," but it is clear that Socrates associates this response with the Delphic precept *gnothis sauton*. Socrates interprets the statement that "no one is wiser than Socrates" to mean, "Whoever realizes, as Socrates does, that he has in reality no worth with respect to wisdom is wisest among you" (23b1). This interpretation amounts to the admission that Socrates in fact possesses self-knowledge in at least this respect, that he knows he has no wisdom.

It is evident that Socrates's interpretation of the oracle is dependent upon his possessing this self-knowledge, since he falls into a state of *aporia* when confronted with the oracle precisely because he knows he has no wisdom.<sup>9</sup> Thus the *aporia* marks his own self-admission that he has no knowledge, but, at the same time, it helps him to recognize the value of his self-knowledge. By means of the oracle, Socrates comes to believe that it is the distinctive mark of one who possesses wisdom to know that he has no wisdom. That is, Socrates becomes the delegate of the Delphic injunction "Know thyself," extending both his own self-inquiry and his peculiar brand of wisdom to his successive interlocutors. That the elenchus is his recommended method for self-inquiry is supported by the fact that the most important procedural requirement for the elenchus is that the respondent says what he believes to be true. Thus the elenchus originates as an inquiry into knowledge, producing self-knowledge even as it relies upon self-knowledge for its continued operation.

It might be worth noticing that this analysis of Socrates's activity as recounted in the *Apology*'s digression takes the Socratic disavowal of knowledge at face value. In rejecting an ironic interpretation of the disavowal,<sup>10</sup> I am claiming that the *aporia* related in the Delphi story is a kind of miniature representation of the Socratic method. Socrates succeeds in transmitting his own realization to his interlocutors only by provoking a similar experience in them (Mackenzie 1988).

Socrates's interpretation of the oracle's response aligns it with the original precept, "Know thyself," although the Socratic exhortation is more restricted in scope. The kind of self-knowledge that Socrates seeks to elicit in his elenctic encounters is distinctively focused on one and only one aspect of the individual: the cognitive level of identity. This epistemic approach explains why Socrates is

so eager to examine those who have a reputation for wisdom. Socrates responds to the oracle by approaching citizens whom he selects because they possess three distinct types of knowledge; *phronesis* (moral wisdom), *poiesis* (mimetic artistry), and *techne* (technical expertise). These three kinds of knowledge are only false contenders for the title, *Sophia*, which turns out to be legitimately bestowed only upon self-knowledge.

The same division between knowledge as technical expertise and the self-knowledge that is equated with knowledge of one's knowledge is drawn in the *Charmides*. At 162c, Socrates and Charmides discuss the definition of *sophrosune* as τὰ δὲ ἑαυτοῦ ἕκαστον ἐργάζεσθαι τε καὶ πράττειν, whereupon Critias is suddenly called up to defend the thesis. Critias construes "one's own deeds" to mean only those actions skillfully performed. Now Socrates challenges this thesis on the grounds that it does not specify that the expert must be capable of predicting when he will obtain successful results. In short, the expert craftsman can still lack knowledge of his own knowledge.

At this juncture, Critias introduces the traditional maxim that the virtue in question is none other than self-knowledge (164d), "for this is exactly my definition of temperance, to know oneself." Next, Socrates asks Critias what the distinctive object of this knowledge is, to which Critias replies that self-knowledge is knowledge of itself as well as of other knowledge. Why doesn't Critias just say that as, for example, *iatrike* is knowledge of what is healthful, so self-knowledge is knowledge of the self?

Critias has previously attempted to define *sophrosune* as "doing one's own," or performing the task appropriate for oneself. In this case, performing one's proper function as a knower is to know oneself as a knower, which means to be aware of one's knowledge and its limitations. Critias in amending his former statement is trying to take into account Socrates's suggestion that self-awareness—that is, a condition upon the epistemic state of the agent, and not just a condition upon his state of behavior—is an essential feature of temperate action.

At this point in the dialogue, Socrates, who has refuted every previous definition by reference to an example fitting the proposed definition but violating the interlocutor's own intuitions about the nature of *sophrosune*, shifts his strategy. He proceeds to examine, not the appropriateness of the definition, but rather the question of whether or not there really is such a thing as self-knowledge, and, if so, what possible use it might have.

The rather abrupt transition in the *Charmides* between the two definitions of *sophrosune*, as self-knowledge and as knowledge of knowledge, can be explained as Plato's attempt to convey the meaning of self-knowledge in the special sense of knowledge of what one knows. The practical equivalence between

the two ways of describing this knowledge is adduced at 167a5–7: “So this is being temperate, and temperance or knowing oneself amounts to this, to knowing what one knows, and what one does not know.” In other words, if the self just insofar as it has knowledge or does not have knowledge is the self we are talking about, then it makes sense to call self-knowledge a knowledge of knowledge.

At 164d5, Cratylus links Socratic knowledge to Delphi:

And I agree with the inscription to this effect set up at Delphi. Because this inscription appears to me to have been dedicated for the following purpose, as though it were a greeting from the god to those entering.<sup>11</sup>

What is the connection between elenctic procedure, the requirement that the interlocutor say what he believes to be true, and the final goal of the elenchus, knowledge of virtue? The traditional interpretation of the elenchus as the search for moral knowledge fails on this score. On the one hand, the claims that Socrates makes for its results seem overly ambitious. How can the elenchus prove or disprove a given thesis? The most it can do is to show that within the context of a certain belief set the thesis must be rejected, not because it is false but because it is inconsistent with a given interlocutor’s other beliefs. On the other hand, Socrates’s reliance upon the elenchus seems anything but ambitious. How certain can it be that the elenchus will ever advance our moral knowledge?<sup>12</sup> It is a purely contingent affair as to whether Socrates will stumble upon somebody whose answers will provide a solution to the puzzles of a lifetime.

Behind the pattern of search and *aporia*, another dynamic is underway. The very way in which the conversant confronts the world takes on a verbal shape. Socrates catches the process as it happens. Socrates reflects back to the interlocutor what the interlocutor shows to Socrates. A Socratic encounter is, so to speak, a confrontation with the self, by the self. This interpretation of the elenchus does not make of Socrates a dogmatic teacher of any kind, nor does it impute to him a set of beliefs that he either holds to be true or invariably discovers that his successive interlocutors hold to be true. For the conclusion of the elenchus will not simply be a proposition descriptive of what the interlocutor knows or does not know, nor will it simply be a state of belief, whether that state be true or false. In fact, this interpretation does not make of Socrates a moral teacher, in the sense of one who wishes to impart or to discover moral tenets. If we are to take Socrates at his word when he claims to have no knowledge of virtue,<sup>13</sup> then there is a strong temptation to follow Socrates’s own strategy, when he shows that without such knowledge moral instruction is mere pretense.

Perhaps we can begin to see why Socrates might have found it worth his while to engage in the elenchus with others, whether or not their opinions

might assist him in his own search. Since the elenchus is a process of continually refining one's self-inquiry, Socrates makes sure that any answers obtained during the course of it do not displace the living reality of the person who makes the inquiry. There is no reason to think that Socrates cannot promote virtue, even if he lacks definitional knowledge of virtue. In fact, virtue is not a matter for definition at all; as self-knowledge, it relies on a practice. The practice is that of the examined life. Since he is not a dogmatic teacher, Socratic opinions cannot be parroted successfully; Socrates must, if presented with formulaic Socratic answers, continue past them to a seeming impasse.

For example, at *Charmides* 166c5, Critias cites what is evidently a well-known Socratic formula, that sophrosune is self-knowledge. Socrates indicates that it is because he holds this belief that he insists upon investigating its truth. Another text in which Socrates refutes a belief that is attributed to him by the interlocutor is *Laches* 194d1. Nicias says, "I have often heard you say that each of us is good at those things in which he has wisdom, but bad at those in which he is ignorant." To this Socrates replies, "You are right, Nicias," and then proceeds to refute the statement. The answer as such is not the final goal of the search, since the elenchus continues even though what is very likely a correct answer has been obtained by means of it.

Socrates, to engage in the elenchus, does not have to have any special definitional knowledge of virtue. What is required for its success is knowledge of oneself as knower. But Socrates cannot give this knowledge to another in the form of a definition; he can only point to its operation in practice, that is, in elenchus, which is just the practice of self-inquiry. In beginning to receive the benefits of Socratic elenchus, one must undergo a kind of reversal. Rather than looking outward at the objects of desire or forward to the fruits of action, the learner is asked to redirect attention inward, toward his states of mind. It is this readjusted orientation to life rather than any doctrinal system that Socrates seeks above all to inculcate by means of elenctic practice. As Socrates puts it:

I do nothing else besides go around trying to persuade the young and old among you alike, not to be attached to your bodies nor to your possessions nor to anything except to the effort to make your souls as virtuous as possible. (*Ap.* 30a7–b1)

What still remains to be accounted for is the relationship between the kind of definitional knowledge that Socrates is apparently seeking, and the self-knowledge that seems to accrue at the expense of the former. If it is self-knowledge and not definitional knowledge that enables one to become virtuous, then why does Socrates expend so much effort in trying to distill moral definitions?

In part, I have already answered the question by suggesting that it is just the aporetic realization that virtue cannot be defined but only lived, that the elenchus is designed to bring about. Nevertheless, as they stand, the texts apparently show that Socrates considers a certain kind of objective knowledge to be requisite for virtue.

In the Socratic dialogues, the theme that virtue is knowledge underwrites Socratic intellectualism. In the *Laches*, Nicias's definition of bravery is "knowledge of things terrible and confidence inspiring" (194e11–195a1). At *Gorgias* 460b9 Socrates gets Gorgias to agree to the inference that "he who has learned justice is just." Again, in the *Meno*, Socrates says that "virtue, either in whole or in part, is wisdom" (89a4). Generally in the dialogues Socrates fills out the conception of virtue as knowledge by alluding to a "science of good and evil," or a "science of the advantageous." Although the calling card of Socratic intellectualism, his thesis that virtue is knowledge, in the elenctic dialogues usually refers to knowledge of the good simpliciter,<sup>14</sup> in the *Charmides* we are presented with two competing versions of the Socratic formula: virtue is self-knowledge and virtue is knowledge of the good. A last-ditch effort to reconcile them fails. Perhaps we should have expected as much; the exponential ambition of this projected science of the good seems out of keeping with the equally ubiquitous ignorance that Socrates professes. It seems doubtful that Socrates embraces this science of utility as a serious enterprise. For one thing, it conflicts with the programmatic statement we saw in the *Phaedrus*, that Socrates has no leisure to inquire into *allotria*, into external matters; it sits poorly with the disavowal of knowledge (*Apology*, *Lysis*, *Laches*), and it is also the subject of an internal critique in the very dialogues in which it is espoused. In the *Charmides* Socrates shows us two flaws with Critias's epistemocracy: Successful action does not necessarily make us happy (173d6), nor is wisdom, qua wisdom and not qua craft, to be valued for its utility (175d2).

At 174d5, Critias tries to advance the argument that if sophrosune is knowledge of knowledge, then it will be beneficial by governing other kinds of knowledge, including knowledge of the good. Socrates counters by asserting that only productive knowledge can be beneficial. Thus Socrates brings his examination of sophrosune to an end by explicitly criticizing the definition of self-knowledge as knowledge of knowledge, on the grounds that he has discovered it to be useless:

We granted that [sophrosune] was knowledge of knowledge, although the argument refused to allow it and even denied it. And to this knowledge we granted the knowledge of the productions governed

by the other knowledges, even though the argument would not allow this either, in order that our temperate person might know that he knows what he knows, and that he does not know what he does not know. (175b6)

The upshot is that Socrates will admit that, in the end, knowledge of knowledge cannot be a worthwhile pursuit, at least in terms of the utility it might provide:

I am very sorry on your behalf, Charmides, if you with your looks and your great modesty will enjoy no benefit from this temperance, nor will its presence in your life assist you. (175e1)

Yet the emphatic position that this irresolution occupies at the end of the dialogue suggests that, when it comes to obtaining happiness, Socrates does think there is some important relationship between knowledge of the good and knowledge of the self. The elenchus points out an incommensurability between the goals of the individual, who necessarily must choose a good relative to his own perspective, and the goal of the self qua knower, to whom Socrates makes an appeal for the existence of an absolute good. Expert knowledge spills into the brink of uncertainty precisely because it does not prepare the expert to tell us what it is that makes his enterprise not merely successful, but truly beneficial. A notional confrontation between the limited aim of a particular skill and the appeal to an absolute good is present not just in such overt texts as *Laches* 196: “But whether the suffering or not-suffering of these things will be best for a man is a question which is no more for a soothsayer to decide than for anyone else.” It is also implicit when Socrates asks whether virtue can be taught, whether there is a science of human advantage, a knowledge that covers this absolute good as distinct from particular goods. The good is never good for me, but bad for you. However, our interests necessarily diverge insofar as we are individuals, and ethical conflict consistently arises precisely when we identify exclusively with our individual interests. If virtue can be construed as knowledge of the good, if knowledge is sufficient for virtue, then the good in question cannot be limited to the interests of any given individual. Such a good would not be the good, but only a good.

In the *Charmides*, Critias imagines a world that is governed by expertise; Socrates explodes this fantasy when he shows that only an expert can detect and disarm someone else’s pretense to expertise (170e3–171c10). Indeed, knowledge of knowledge if this is the meaning of *sophrosune*, does not offer the great benefit that perhaps Critias aspires to: a life free from error, a life governed

precisely by the science of happiness that, distressingly, is apparently the art actually attributed to Socrates in several instrumentalist accounts of Socratic ethics (e.g., Reshotko 2006). What is off the mark in this conversation to begin with, is Critias's talk of ruling others, managing their affairs for them (and the self-certainty involved in the possession of expertise, rather than Socratic self-knowledge).<sup>15</sup>

In the *Charmides*, Socrates deliberately echoes the words that sounded so promising to Critias:

What we were saying just now, about temperance being regarded as of great benefit (if it were like this) in the governing of households and cities does not seem to me, Critias, to have been well said. (172d3–6)

Critias's fantasy of controlling others and managing their affairs, using knowledge over them—this is exactly the opposite of what Socrates intends to foster in the discourse ethics of the elenchus. The elenchus does not put one person in an advantageous situation owing to the presence or absence of expert knowledge. Were it not so, Socrates would always end up being defeated in the elenchus of experts, those with justifiably high reputations in a field of expertise. Knowing what one knows, the virtue of temperance, is not, it turns out, expert knowledge that allows one to examine another's claims to expertise, nor is it expertise in the science of happiness that allows one to control more or most situations. Socratic knowledge asks its interlocutors to develop from controlling others (using expertise on them) to controlling (knowing) oneself, from fighting with weapons to caring about truth. In making this transition, the interlocutor catches what one might call a glimpse of the knower.

I have tried to indicate in what direction we might begin a search for this conception of an impersonal self, by thinking about the self as a knower. This knowing self always scrutinizes whatever state one happens to be in. No matter how firmly convinced one may be of the truth of one's beliefs, the epistemic self can always reassess or withdraw assent from any such belief state. I believe that the *Charmides* tries to sketch a picture of such a self, in its digression on the possibility of self-reflexive knowledge.

At *Charmides* 167c5, Socrates is discussing the meaning of the Delphic injunction in company with Critias, future leader of the military coup d'état of 404: to know oneself is to know knowledge. Socrates asks if there is a vision that is not a vision of anything, but that sees itself and all other visible things; a hearing that hears itself and all other sounds, but is not the hearing of anything; a love that loves itself and all other loves, but is not the love of any good; a knowledge that knows itself and all other knowledges, but is not the knowledge of anything.

Socrates describes self-reflexive knowledge at 167b10 as “a single knowledge which is no other than knowledge of itself as well as of the other knowledges.” When he proceeds to examine the structure of this kind of knowledge, he turns for the purpose of comparison to a list of other human faculties. He begins by discussing vision, hearing, and sensation in general:

Is there any perception of sense-perceptions and of the faculty of sense-perception, which does not perceive the objects of sense-perception? (167d10)

The negative answer to this query should not be taken for the end of the matter. Indeed the same sequence is repeated three times before Socrates turns to the other items on his list: appetite, wish, sexual desire, fear, and opinion. Included on the list are virtually all of the possible states that comprise human experience, at least on a Platonic view: *epithumia*, *thumos*, *doxa*, and *aesthesis*.

If we regard them as faculties, then sensation, appetite, and so on, are always associated with their respectively unique objects. But considered as states of experience, there is a sense in which they in turn may be seen as objects for what I have been calling the cognitive self. One way of viewing the elenchus in relation to epistemic self-knowledge is as a method whereby the interlocutor comes to be aware that he has the desires, opinions, fears, and appetites that he in fact has. But once aware that he has them, he can begin to exercise his autonomy as an epistemic self, to scrutinize their value, and to begin to free himself of those he deems pernicious. The *Charmides* suggests a kind of priority of the epistemic self; this priority is realized both as self-determination and as self-knowledge.

When Socrates questions whether or not *epithumia*, *thumos*, *doxa*, and *aesthesis* are forms of (self-)knowledge, he implicitly underwrites a psychology that the Stoics attribute to Socrates, that there is only the rational soul; all irrational states can be treated as functions of the same part of the soul, the *hegemonikon*, that governs rational activity.<sup>16</sup> This interrogation in the *Charmides* is also consistent with the Socratic denial of *akrasia* and with Aristotle’s reports about Socrates’s cognitive theory of desire and emotion generally.<sup>17</sup>

In this chapter, I have argued that Socratic philosophy is associated with self-knowledge and that one dialogue, in particular, the *Charmides*, adumbrates the structure of Socratic self-inquiry. Above all, knowing oneself means knowing oneself qua knower. But it would seem that if this is all that Socratic wisdom amounts to, the recognition that one is aware of one’s states, that there is the possibility of self-awareness that underlies all forms of awareness, it is a very shallow accomplishment. Nothing could be more obvious—indeed, self-awareness is



at once obvious to anyone who is conscious, yet hardly anyone has the kind of knowledge that Socrates is seeking. Moreover, what this “discovery,” if we may use that term, could possibly have to do with virtue is also entirely unclear. How does this kind of self-knowledge help one to gain any purchase on the subject of virtue, much less become the foundational enterprise that I am suggesting it is for Socrates?

### Conclusion: Now I Know You!

There is knowledge that leads to successful action, and there is knowledge of the self. They are not the same art. Socrates puts a positive spin on or inverts the negative results of the *Charmides*'s inquiry into self-knowledge. There, as we saw, knowledge of knowledge seemed to be a candidate for rejection as a definition of temperance, because it afforded no utility to the one who possessed it. In the *Apology*, under the auspices of Delphi, Socrates asks, upon being told that Socrates is wisest, Whatever can the god mean? For, as he says, he is conscious of his ignorance; he knows that he has no wisdom (21b, 21d). When Socrates says that he is aware of not knowing anything, whereas this kind of knowledge is the highest kind of knowledge, Plato perhaps intends to signal that this kind of knowing of oneself, knowing oneself by being the knower, is Socratic. Wisdom is not an object of knowledge; it is self-knowledge.

Alcibiades's words from the *Symposium* hint at this look within:

I don't know whether anybody else has ever opened him up when he's been being serious, and seen the little images inside, but I saw them once, and they looked so godlike, so golden, so beautiful and so utterly amazing. (Symp 216e5-217a1)

It is now that we can appreciate Socrates's advocacy of self-knowledge as virtue and as knowledge of the good. The virtues, the adornments of wisdom, are to be discovered in the knowing self—bravery, temperance, piety, wisdom, and justice. Socrates's search for the definition of virtue, in the sense of the disposition of the virtuous person, ends in the qualities that attend the knower.

The *Charmides* takes shape as a dialogue between two tyrants and a philosopher. One of these tyrants alludes to the inscription at Delphi:

In saying this, [Apollo] speaks very darkly, as a seer would do. That “Know thyself” and “Be temperate” are the same (as the inscription claims and so do I) might be doubted by some. (165a2)

The language of obscure meaning and public inscription suggests this contrast between esoteric and exoteric formulations. What is available for public consumption and what those who claim to know the meaning of divine sayings report, according to Critias, future leader of the oligarchic junta known as the Thirty, diverge. But Socrates in this passage, demurs; he claims exactly that he does not know anything (166d1). The imagery is alluring, as the inscription “Know thyself” is set on the threshold of the temple, bidding worshippers to enter. This “Know thyself” is a doorway, then, into the meaning and location of Socratic virtue; Critias refers to it as “Apollo’s greeting,” his signature, as it were.

The themes of occult versus publically available knowledge begin from the very opening of the dialogue. As we saw in the preface, Plato inserts Socrates into a Pythagorean lineage, sprinkling initiatory motifs into the dialogue. In Histories 4.94–95, Herodotus tells the story of the god Salmoxis (alternative spelling of Zalmoxis) and the Thracian worship of this deity, connected to rites of immortality. Herodotus uses the phrase ἀθανατίζουσι δὲ τόνδε τὸν τρόπον (they immortalize in the following way), following on which is the grisly tale of the impaled messenger to the god. Plato’s text, which uses apothanatizein (to render immortal), hints at the Herodotean passage. Moreover, Herodotus goes on to discuss the spiritual lineage of Salmoxis. At 4.95.3, he writes that Salmoxis was in fact a servant of Pythagoras (δουλεῦσαι δὲ Πυθαγόρη). Socrates tells the story of how he acquired a “pharmakon” to cure Charmides’s headache while on campaign from “a Thracian healer of Zalmoxis” (156d5). With these words, Socrates inserts himself into a Pythagorean lineage and the language of charm, spell, drug, and foreign methods—all imply an esoteric lore, one that is not available among “the Greeks” at large (156e4).

This compelling juxtaposition of esoteric imagery, of what is inside versus what is outside the self and the temple, of Apollo’s greeting, with perplexity over the very meaning of self-knowledge, at a minimum allows the reader to begin to wonder, too, about the occult knowledge of Socrates. By developing the central motif of the *Apology*, the Socratic ignorance endorsed by Apollo and associated with self-knowledge, the *Charmides* expands on the initial introduction to Socratic ignorance and Socratic wisdom in the *Apology*. There we saw that Socrates identified a wisdom neither great nor small, as the highest wisdom.

Here in the *Charmides*, we learn that this wisdom is self-knowledge, but that its very conditions are aporetic and problematic. All states of the mind are objects of knowledge and there is no state of knowledge that does not correlate to such an object. But the knower, the mind itself, is not such a state; the knower is never an object. Then how can the self be known? What exactly is

self-knowledge? The paradox that Socrates demonstrates is that self-knowledge does not even constitute knowledge, as it does not yield an object.

Socrates and Charmides in fact play out the drama of this paradox, as Socrates repeatedly asks Charmides to “perform” self-knowledge on himself: *πάλιν τοίνυν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ὦ Χαρμίδη, μᾶλλον προσέχων τὸν νοῦν καὶ εἰς σεαυτὸν ἐμβλέψας* (Charm 160d4) (“Once more,” said I, “now, Charmides, play closer attention and look into yourself”).

Socrates continues: *ἐννοήσας ὁποῖόν τινά σε ποιεῖ ἡ σωφροσύνη παροῦσα* (160d8; Can you discern what effect the presence of temperance has on you?). Charmides does not prove to be adept at this investigation. Possibly here Plato alludes to the future role that Charmides will play as a member of the “Piraeus ten under the Thirty” (sc. Tyrants; Nails 2002, 90). Thus the point would be that Charmides cannot discern the effect of temperance precisely because he has none. Then again, the point might be a bit more subtle: by his very looking into himself, Charmides is performing self-knowledge.

Later in the dialogue, as Socrates develops this “*techne*,” or art of self-knowledge, he tells Critias, “first, let us investigate if the following is possible or not: *τὸ ἄ οἶδεν καὶ ἄ μὴ οἶδεν εἰδέναι ὅτι οἶδε καὶ ὅτι οὐκ οἶδεν*” (167b2; when it comes to what one knows or does not know, to know that one knows or does not know). Critias replies, “Yes, we need to investigate that question” (167b5). Surely, this is an odd reply; what could be more obvious than that one knows? How could one fail to “know that one knows”? What we have here, in my view, is perhaps the earliest literary argument for the self-evidence of self-awareness. The question, is it possible to know that one knows, gets derailed in the dialogue, as we saw, because focus shifts from the knower to the array of objects known, and becomes a thesis about the self-sufficiency of expert knowledge. Nevertheless, the initial question—Is it possible to know that one knows?—might be taken as an adumbration of a viewpoint, according to which the very fact *that one knows* at all, is developed as a line of inquiry and its implications are studied.

Now Socrates goes on to ask (172b5), What benefit do we get by knowing what one knows or does not know? The dialogue develops this ethical approach as well, probing the relationship between virtue and knowledge. What is the benefit of self-knowledge, in this inchoate stage, as the knower comes into an awareness that he knows? Here in the *Charmides*, we do not yet see the full implications of this virtue, self-knowledge. It is a greeting from the god at Delphi, and it is the Socratic imperative.

In the *Republic*, Plato speaks of a “*techne* of conversion.” This *techne*, whose goal is what Plato describes as *periagoge*, “turning around,” is quite similar to the concept of knowledge of knowledge in *Charmides*. He asks, *αὐτοῦ τέχνη ἄν*

εἴη, τῆς περιαγωγῆς, τίνα τρόπον ὡς ῥᾶστα τε καὶ ἀνυσιμώτατα μεταστραφήσεται? (518d3–7; And must there not be some art which will effect conversion in the easiest and quickest manner; not implanting the faculty of sight, for that exists already, but has been turned in the wrong direction, and is looking away from the truth?). In asking here whether or not there is such an art of reversing direction, so that one looks not at the objects known, but rather at the knower, it seems clear that Plato implies that there is such an art. In the *Republic*, Plato suggests that this capacity to see is “of a more divine quality, a thing that never loses its potency” (518e2). Readers of the *Republic* know that the cave analogy goes on to illustrate the art of turning around to see the source of sight—first in the glimpse of the fire and then finally culminating in the vision of the sun: “if also someone should compel him to look at the light itself” (515e1; *κἂν εἰ πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς ἀναγκάζοι αὐτὸν βλέπειν*). This idea of directly looking at the light by turning away from attending to what is illuminated can be related to the language we saw above in the *Charmides*: the sight that is not of any sight but of sight itself.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that an esoteric reading of the *Charmides* does several things. First, it treats the maxim at Delphi as the gateway to the temple of Apollonian wisdom, by turning that maxim into another aporia and by issuing an invitation, through this citation, to study the self qua knower. The esoteric meaning of the utterance, to which Critias alludes but which he does not grasp precisely because he does not engage in this critical reflection, addresses the self as a knower. It hints at or invites attention toward the self, which prior to this invitation was itself a closed door. A state of mind would then be opaque; a wisdom, by turning that maxim into another aporia and by issuing an invitation, through this citation, to study the self qua knower. The sage, one’s own capacity to be aware of whatever object, meets that tyrant in conversation over the question and ultimate fate of one’s own self-knowledge. To be an expert, in Critias’s sense, is to invest in oversight of the objects of knowledge, obscuring the knowing self. As Socrates says, “temperance,” that is, self-knowledge, is precisely a “science of self” (165e1).

It is a question of what one directs one’s attention to. Usually, awareness of awareness happens “in passing”; we are more concerned with the objects of awareness. Nor, in this overlooking of, or weak acknowledgement of, the awareness of awareness, are we much concerned in an everyday sense to notice that, indeed, the objects of thought, opinion, seeing, and sound are objects of awareness. In the ensuing chapters, we shall see how this knowledge of the knower develops through the dialogues, both as a practical orientation to the psychology of mind and as the initial suggestion of what is meant by the ethical tag “assimilation unto deity, as far as possible.” The *Charmides*, with its initiatory

themes and its imagery of the inscription on the outside of the temple, beckons us to enter through the gateway of “Know thyself,” not yet able to see the implications of this injunction.

## Appendix

### Self-Knowledge and Divine Knowledge: A Preliminary Excursion

Plato tells us that the entryway to Apollo’s temple is marked with the inscription “Know thyself” (164d4). The imagery of this dialogue from the *Charmides*, including the opening frame, with its incantation and its demand to “submit your soul” for examination (157c5), points us in the direction of esoteric knowledge. The esoteric knowledge in question is, in keeping with this imagery, an examination of the entire self and at the same time, perhaps, an encounter with the divine inhabitant of the shrine whose motto is “Know thyself.” The link between divine knowledge and self-knowledge is a fundamental tenet of the Platonic tradition. We see this link become most explicit in the often atheized line of the *Alcibades I*: “The best mirror for the soul is god” (133c10). But the association is also made by Aristotle, who counts in this instance as a reader of the *Charmides*. In this comparative excursion, I study the *Charmides* as a source of inspiration for Aristotle’s model of divine knowledge in *Metaphysics* book 12.

The *Charmides*’s aporetic investigation of the divine motto “Know thyself” and the self-contemplation of Aristotle’s god: Both are engaged in what might be called models of self-reflexive knowing.<sup>18</sup> But to underscore the parallels for the moment, let us turn to *Metaphysics* 12.9:

The topic of thought involves several perplexities; it seems to be the most divine of phenomena, but how it must be if that is to be so involves several difficulties. For if it thinks of nothing, what about it would be worth of reverence? It would be as though it were asleep. And if it thinks, but something else determines it [to think], then since that which constitutes its substance would be not thinking but being able to, it would not be the best substance. For it is because of thinking that worthiness belongs to it. (1074a15–24).

So it seems that it thinks itself, if indeed it is the best, and thinking is a thinking of thinking. (1074a33–35; Kosman trans. Frede and Charles [2000, 326])<sup>19</sup>

In Brunschwig's (2000) reconstruction of this passage, Aristotle here argues for the second alternative, that the divine mind thinks itself and only itself, via reference to the principle of perfection at line 1074a21. Brunschwig thus translates the argument into the following syllogism:

The intellect necessarily and exclusively intelligizes what is most excellent.

What is most excellent is nothing else than itself.

*Ergo*, the intellect necessarily and exclusively intelligizes itself. (288)

Of interest for our discussion of the topic of self-knowledge in the Socratic dialogues is Brunschwig's invocation of the *Charmides* as a way to understand the structure of the self-intellection of nous in the Aristotle passage. According to Brunschwig, Socrates contrasts the "self-reflexive knowledge" that knowledge has of itself (*aute hautes episteme*; 166e) and the "centripetal knowledge" that a person has of himself (*episteme heautou*; 165c). The way that Brunschwig reads this passage, the sophron knows himself, and from there one is entitled to infer that, his knowledge is a knowledge of itself. Thus, knowledge knows itself; but Aristotle goes on to raise criticisms about the self-reflexive knowledge under discussion (289).

Aristotle points out, as Brunschwig shows, that all human cognitive states have an object that is distinct from them; as such, cognitive or perceptual states—that is, all states of consciousness—are only aware of themselves as a *parergon*, a side effect.<sup>20</sup> Aristotle goes on to object that thinking is not, in general, of itself; it cannot be its own object. This objection is similar to the one we saw in the *Charmides*, concerning knowledge of knowledge:

But it seems clear that understanding and perception and belief and thought are always of something else; they are only of themselves in a secondary mode. (*Metaph.* 1074a35–36; Kosman trans. Frede and Charles [2000, 326])

Generalizing to all objects of consciousness, Aristotle objects here that, precisely, awareness of awareness (that is, as differentiated from the awareness of the object of awareness) is not the primary object of awareness. This almost seems to fall out from the very idea of awareness or perception, which for Aristotle, is "not of itself but of something else that is necessarily prior to the perception (*De an.* 4.5.1010b35–36).<sup>21</sup> Both Caston (2002) and Brunschwig see the *Charmides* passage on self-knowledge as the background to a problem in Aristotle's theory of consciousness. For Caston, the *Charmides* is consistent with what Aristotle says about awareness of perception. That is, when Socrates

posits a hearing of hearings or desire of desires, he means that these things are not separate faculties of perception or even duplicate activities. There is no basic or primitive form of awareness that exists, over and above the acts of awareness that are, primarily, directed to objects (Caston 2002, 772). For Brunschwig, Aristotle's point will be that, generally speaking, it would seem that in the case of human consciousness, this objection, that awareness is object oriented, will block the intelligibility of *noesis noeseos*; if divine awareness or intellection were just like human intellection, then positing this as the content of divine thought would simply be incoherent.

But then Aristotle surprises us by exactly pointing back to examples of human knowing, showing in effect that, in the case of the sciences, where the object of knowledge is immaterial, knower and known are the same, and hence that, here, knowing the object is knowing the subject. Potential knowledge (the science) is realized as actual knowledge (the philosopher's contemplation of the essence via *theoria*). Thus Aristotle will reply to his own objection actually by reference to human consciousness again. His solution is that in the case of knowledge alone, since its object is immaterial, the thinking is the same as the object of thought. There is no alterity between what is intelligized and the intellection:

But in some cases, isn't it true that understanding is the thing? In the productive [sciences] without matter, it is the substance in the sense of what it is [for something] to be what it is. In the theoretical [sciences], the formula is the thing, and so is the thinking. Since what is thought of, therefore, is not different from thought in the case of things without matter, they will be the same, and thinking and what is thought will be one. (*Metaph.* 12.9.1075a1–5; Kosman trans. Frede and Charles [2000, 326])

The upshot for the Aristotle passage is difficult to construe. For Brunschwig, we are left hanging at this point in the text. He writes:

We do not yet know whether the identity between *noesis* and *nooumenon*, which is compatible with the multiplicity of *noumena* in the human case, is still so in the divine one. This is an awkward situation; either Aristotle is right in believing that his answer to the *parergon* objection (b38–a5) justifies his notion of *noesis noeseos*, and then that notion cannot be narcissus like, contrary to the previous evidence; or his notion of *noesis noeseos* is narcissus like indeed, and he is wrong to believe that his answer to the *parergon* objection fills the bill. (297)

It is not my concern or prerogative here to go into the many ways in which, in this passage especially, god's knowledge of himself alone is seen as exclusively contrastive or not with god's knowledge of objective essences. Rather, this is my point: Generally speaking, consciousness is directed to objects and Aristotle is right to say that it is only *en parego*, in passing, that, for human beings, there is awareness of awareness. Yet god's situation is exactly the reverse of ours; Aristotle says that god enjoys always what we do occasionally. God's thinking is always of thinking (12.9.1074a10; "this intellection, which is intellection of itself for all eternity").





## CHAPTER FOUR

# *EUTHYDEMUS*

## Native and Foreign

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In this chapter, I ask about the interface between theory and practice in the elenctic conversation as it is represented in the Socratic dialogues of Plato: What is the relationship between the rules of Socratic discourse and the emergence of a Socratic philosophy? In the case of the Socratic theses—that no one errs willingly, that it is better to suffer than to commit injustice, that virtue benefits the one who possesses it, that virtue is knowledge—several explanations for the uncontested assertion of these theses in a Socratic conversation are proffered in the literature. Most scholars agree that Socrates avers the truth of these precepts at least partially on the grounds that they remain undefeated in elenctic arguments. Furthermore, Socrates thinks that all people will agree to these same precepts, given time to reflect about them and despite their initial protestations to the contrary. Why is it that these precepts alone arise from the elenchus as indefeasible truths?

Whether we emphasize the substantive contents of an alleged Socratic belief system or we emphasize the importance of dialectical principles in the conduct of the elenchus,<sup>1</sup> the status of the Socratic theses can probably never be determined with accuracy. Are they advanced as hypotheses, presented as dogmas, subject to retraction, survivors of previous elenchi? We can't actually know. Instead, we can look to their deployment within the Socratic conversations and notice the work they do in situ. Do the Socratic theses, which certainly function as the dialectical engines of the elenchus, have any pragmatic functions, and is their dialectical value related to a philosophical content?

Of course, the answer to this question is yes. Both the procedural requirements of the elenchus—that the interlocutor say what he thinks is true and the subject matter of Socrates's conversations, in which participants articulate their deepest or core values—guarantee that the resulting discussion involves a high degree of self-disclosure on the part of the interlocutor. Although it is very common to see the elenchus as a kind of covert inculcation of a moral

system, in fact the elenchus itself often results in emotional reactions of anger (Thrasymachus, Anytus, Meletus), narcissistic grandiosity (Euthyphro, Hippias), profound ambivalence (Alcibiades), sadistic rage (Callicles), or neurotic dullness (Laches).<sup>2,3</sup> Very few of Socrates's patients noticeably improve, and, even if the Socratic thesis survives the elenchus, it seems clear that its deployment has revealed deep pockets of resistance in the psyches of Socrates's conversational partners.

Indeed, it would seem that the elenchus is anything but a rational exchange, at least for the interlocutors. Instead, the speakers seem to trade in *aidos* and *doxa*, that is, in shame and rash judgment, with very little contemplative skill on show. These values form a contrastive pair, with Socrates negotiating their exchange over the span of the elenctic encounter in performance before an audience. *Aidos*, the emotional impact of the elenchus as shaming, refutation, humiliation, is what earns Socrates the ire of his fellow citizens as he describes it in the *Apology*: the public loss of face and consequent threat to the interlocutor's internal sense of security and wellbeing. Shame,<sup>4</sup> the experience that another's gaze is upon you and that your very self together with the reality of who you have become is under inspection, is a painful and uncomfortable emotion that inspires either the desire to change or anger and denial.<sup>4,5</sup> So, one aspect of the elenchus is a self-disclosure that permits the interlocutor to step outside of an ordinary subjectivity and to view this subjectivity from another perspective. This peculiarly moral emotion is one of the practical pivots of the elenchus. Asked to disown his desires, the interlocutor then encounters his own affective states very much as if they belonged to another. In the *Apology*, for example, Socrates asks his interlocutors to examine their ordinary and conventional desires for things like wealth or fame (29e1).

On the surface, the formal structure of the elenchus as the examination of an objective definition has an obvious lack of affinity with the affective symptoms that the elenctic victim develops. It is an entirely rational exercise and so is at odds with the emotional transaction entailed by its social and personal, or *ad hominem*, dimensions.

Further puzzles abound when we consider the tension between the doctrinal contents of the elenchus and the empirical evidence supplied by the emotions and aspirations of the interlocutors themselves. For example, despite Socrates's insistence, according to the prudential maxim, that everyone desires the good, at least as revealed within the work of the elenchus, most desires, not to say virtually all of his interlocutors' desires, are precisely for what is not good. People seem concerned with getting ahead in life, or just getting on with life, with advancing their place at the expense of others, and many contemplate actions

and desires that truly occasion revulsion. Even those who actually evince the occasional desire for virtue (Clitophon, Alcibiades) or instruction more generally (Laches) are actually half-hearted about this desire. In fact, we saw that one of the initial functions of the elenchus was the hard work of instilling the desire for virtue, or for the good, into the interlocutors.

Thus, much of the work that the elenchus does will be to help the interlocutor discriminate among his own desires, or, rather, among his affective states in general. During the elenchus, habits of thought, emotional reactions, and entrenched opinions all come to the surface. In the *Hippias Major*, when Socrates asks Hippias about *to kalon*, Hippias reveals his fondness for pretty women, fine horses, and lots of money (288aff.). These attachments indicate something about the structure of Hippias's personal desires as well about the locus of value in the community to which he belongs.

But once he articulates these values, the elenchus offers Hippias a forum in which to question their authenticity. Why does Hippias think horses are so wonderful? Isn't a cooking pot just as beautiful in its own humble way? This very encounter with Socrates authorizes but does not necessarily promote a certain amount of detachment from his passions, states of mind, and desires, and allows Hippias to notice their contingency, both cultural and personal. In other words, the fact that one has a desire does not in and of itself countenance the belief that one ought to fulfill it. Moreover, the fact that one has a belief does not in and of itself warrant that one hold it, and the fact that one is in any particular state of mind does not warrant that one persist in that state of mind.<sup>6</sup>

In the *Hippias*, Socrates models this interrogation of one's own mind by the fiction of a brutal roommate before whom Socrates cowers in shame, lest he be detected in making pretentious claims to know:

By the dog, Hippias, the person before whom I would be most ashamed to babble and pretend to say something, while actually saying nothing [would not accept this answer, sc.].

And who is this man?

The son of Sophroniscus, who would no more let me get away with rashly making assertions or pretend to know what I don't know. (298b6–c1)<sup>7</sup>

Often Socrates encounters his interlocutors on the verge of doing something rash, as Euthyphro's prosecution of his own father on charges of homicide appears to be, or persisting in a complacent, self-assured state of mind that is based on the need to rush into action to secure, precisely, the object of desire. It is in this sense that Socrates speaks of *sophrosune* in the *Charmides* as knowledge

of knowledge, that is, as awareness of what one represents to oneself (cf. 375d5). This Socrates is someone that Socrates can count on. Nothing escapes his detection. Yet is everyone with whom Socrates converses also living with such an obnoxious roommate? Probably not, but like that son of Sophroniscus they too have a witness whom nothing gets past.

Socratic conversation insists on equanimity, on attending to the demands of the argument, and on becoming a neutral witness as to the truth of one's subjective states. That one may happen to care for something does not offer a sufficient reason to care for it. Rather, there must be a good reason to care for it, irrespective of whose desire one happens to fulfill. In the course of the elenchus, Socrates sponsors a distance from the affective self or from affective states of the self. We could say that, as for what he thought was previously his own, this turned out to be not his own, to be foreign. This is one half of the self-disclosing work that the elenchus performs. To engage with Socrates in the elenchus is to be doing just what its question presupposes, to be looking into oneself, to be examining one's thoughts, and so on.

But not only must the privately invented self be put aside in the elenctic conversation, the socially constructed self is also chased off the set during the elenchus. Socrates uses the procedural requirements of the elenchus to create a kind of false door through which the public self is supposed or required to exit. Without resorting to community norms, be they linguistic or ethical, the interlocutor must come forth with an authentic position to be gauged by the measure of his self-consistency. In the Socratic dialogues, the interlocutor may not appeal to collective wisdom or to well-deserved reputation in a dispute with Socrates concerning the meaning of an ethical term. He is cut off from the resources that consensus leaves at his disposal to guide normative practice. For example, at *Apology* 25a, Meletus tells us that all members of the polis are capable of improving the young. Socrates finds this claim intrinsically implausible. Although he had no technical name for it, Socrates teaches the practice of self-attention, taking a backward step that illuminates the self, in the course of elenctic conversation. Here the interlocutor is required to look at his own states as if they belonged to another, to distinguish between what is *oikeion*, authentic, and what is *allogrion*. The method that Socrates employs in the elenchus is to launch an investigation as to what lies beneath the surface. In this chapter, then, we investigate the *Euthydemus*, which shows a Socrates in pursuit of the question, What is *oikeion*? What fundamentally belongs to you?

Crito begins the *Euthydemus* by asking Socrates, "With whom were you conversing yesterday in the Lyceum?" The dialogue's opening question, *tis* (Who?), does not confine itself to asking after Dionysodorus's and Euthydemus's

credentials. This word also introduces an important aspect of Socratic methodology—Socratic self-inquiry—that is meant to contrast strongly with the disputational art. Self-knowledge, or discernment of what does and does not belong to the self, is foregrounded in Plato’s representation of Socratic philosophy.

Socratic elenchus relies on the interlocutor’s willingness to engage in genuine self-reflection. Self-inquiry—a fundamentally non dogmatic practice—is the basis of the Socratic elenchus, which is not (at least in the *Euthydemus*) therefore calculated to derive, inculcate, or otherwise produce a list of so-called Socratic precepts or elenctic principles. It is in this sense that the question with which the dialogue begins—Who?—retains primacy in the *Euthydemus*’s representation of Socratic philosophy. As I hope to show in more detail, Socratic philosophy begins as a sincerely undertaken effort to ask this question about oneself.

This orientation, self-inquiry, is revealed in many of the dialogue’s most telling images and is blatantly announced by the interlocutor least likely to embrace it when Dionysodorus asks Socrates, “Tell me, do you think you know what belongs to yourself?” (301e6). Formally, the dialogue’s relentless sophisms, as we will shortly see, turn on fallacies of predication, on identities that are misplaced or falsely attributed to inappropriate subjects. To use fallacies in order to gain an unfair dialectical advantage is the primary tactic of those who practice *antilogia*. No doubt Socrates went out of his way to distinguish his own methods from the disputational *technai* practiced by some of his contemporaries, and no doubt Plato is jealous of the Socratic reputation, refusing to allow it to fall into the wrong hands. However, the sophisms in this dialogue also assist in the development of its central theme, which involves locating, defining, or predicating the self. Dionysodorus and Euthydemus are not just guilty of technical errors in the realm of logic; they also go seriously astray in their attempts at self-definition.

In the *Euthydemus*, two no doubt now flabby but erstwhile pankratists, Dionysidorus and Euthydemus, have turned, somewhat late in life, to eristic performance, and specialize in the use of fallacy to score points against their interlocutors. The *Euthydemus* is the site of painfully obvious mistakes in logic that Aristotle imported wholesale into his *Sophistici elenchi*. To my mind, in this dialogue that notoriously can be dated as early or middle, according to standard criteria (Ausland 2001, 21)<sup>8</sup>, we see Plato doing the history of philosophy, engaging in a reprise of the Socratic method. There are allusions to Eleatics, to Protagoras, to followers of Socrates, and possibly even to his successors (in the form of the dialogue’s pointed references to Antisthenes; but, above all, there is an attempt to distinguish the Socratic method itself, the elenchus, from the broader context of disputation. The dialogue purports to pit Socratic wisdom against the various alternatives for higher education in Athens, a very common

feature of Socratic dialogues (e.g., *Alcibiades I*, *Gorgias*, *Protagoras*, *Hippias Major*). In these dialogues, Socratic elenchus is counterposed against sophistic *logographia* or eristic, as the case may be. I would argue that here Plato metaphorizes Socratic philosophy and especially the elenchus, using images that involve cutting up, undressing, stripping off the flesh. At *Euthydemus* 285c3 and following, Socrates poses as a would-be late learner and offers to entrust himself to the tutelage of Dionysodorus “as if he were the famous Medea of Colchis. Let him destroy me, and if he likes let him boil me down. . . . Only he must make me good.” Ctesippus, inspired by the example of Socrates, offers himself “to be skinned by the strangers even more, if they choose, than they are doing now.” Shedding one’s skin or having it forcibly stripped is a metaphor that puts a rather more violent spin on the wrestling images often associated with *paideia* in the Socratic dialogues; to strip naked and wrestle with one’s opponent signifies the requisite honesty and vulnerability that attend any true meeting of minds:<sup>9</sup>

If they know how to destroy men in such a way as to make good and sensible men out of bad and foolish ones—whether this is a discovery of their own, or whether they have learned from some one else this new sort of death and destruction which enables them to get rid of a bad man and turn him into a good one—if they know this (and they do know this—at any rate they said just now that this was the secret of their newly-discovered art)—let them, in their phraseology, destroy the youth and make him wise, and all of us with him. But if you young men do not like to trust yourselves with them, then fiat experimentum in corpore senis; I will be the Carian on whom they shall operate. And here I offer my old person to Dionysodorus; he may put me into the pot, like Medea the Colchian, kill me, boil me, if he will only make me good. (285b9–c6; trans. Jowett)

According to Eliade, in the Tibetan Bon tradition, fundamentally a Shamanic religion, there are rituals that mirror the butchering techniques of herding peoples, but operate on the psyche of the participant. The spiritual practice of dismemberment, of chopping up the entire body, inviting the demons to drink from the disciple’s very skull, all of this is part of the process of rebirth, of initiation into the tradition of seers, and of receiving the gift of vision. The *Euthydemus* refers to the Scythian nomads who drink out of their own skulls (299e). This gilding of the skull also refers to the shining revelation of the dream, to the vision that replaces one’s own wisdom. This wisdom will never belong to someone whose self remains intact. Only after that is set aside, after, as it is described in the *Euthydemus*, “someone butchers the cook and cuts him up and

boils and roasts him” (301d4), can this initiation take place. Ctesippus offers himself for dismemberment: Chop me up, he says, if only you will make me wise.

The dialogue continues to play with the theme of discerning the real person hidden beneath clothes or skin, as the *himatia* example illustrates:

“Do the Scythians, and in fact all other human beings, perceive objects that admit of perceiving or objects that do not admit [of perceiving]?” said Euthydemus. “Those that do.” “And the same is true of you?” “Yes, of me as well.” “Now do you see our cloaks?” “Yes.” “Therefore they are capable of perceiving.” (300a1–10)

Clothes of course cannot perceive; the seat of awareness or knowledge in the person is, as Socrates attempts to interject at 295b3, the soul, that by means of which one knows anything at all:

[Euthydemus speaking to Socrates] “And tell me, do you know with that whereby you have knowledge, or with something else.” “With that whereby I have knowledge; I think you mean the soul, or is not that your meaning?”

This inner gold is exposed once the skin has been stripped off, the person flayed, his cloak removed. Dionysodorus’s question to Socrates—“Do you think you know what is your own?” (301e5)—reflects the theme of the dialogue, which is discerning the self, locating what is *oikeion* (301e2–3).

Consider one of the brothers’ sophisms, introduced at *Euthydemus* 299d1–e10. The exchange begins over a dispute over what counts as valuable. Dionysodorus sets the snare by obtaining Ctesippus’s assent to the proposition that wealth should be counted as a good:

[Dionysodorus asks Ctesippus] “So don’t you think that one should try to keep hold of it always and in all places?” “Absolutely.” “And you agree that gold is a good?” “Yes, you have my assent,” said he. “So one ought to try to possess it at all times and in all places, especially on one’s person, and the happiest person would be the one who had three talents of gold in his stomach, a talent in his skull, and a stater in each eye?”

Ctesippus’s reply to Dionysodorus is instructive:

Ctesippus replied, “they say, Euthydemus, that those happiest and best of men are Scythians, who keep a great quantity of gold in skulls that turn out to be their own . . . and what is even more remarkable is that they drink from the skulls that are their own and they see this gold inside, when they hold their own skulls in their hands.” (299e7)



Violence has progressed from skinning to decapitation, but let us proceed to study the example, undeterred by the threatening language. Here the gold migrates from hand to eye as the Scythians look at what they are holding. In fact the gold turns out to be inside “their skulls,” so that by perceiving the gold they bring it inside. Those who perceive or have a soul will be those who are able to keep gold in their heads. In our passage, the Scythian warriors, nomads who do not dwell in houses, have to keep their gold with them. They can only possess, as it were, inner wealth. This gilding of the skull also refers to the shining revelation of the wisdom, to the vision that replaces one’s own narrow thoughts. What is this Socratic initiation and what part does the elenchus play in it? In this chapter, I argue that the elenchus is intended to help its practitioners locate the “inner wealth” (*Ap.* 33d) that can make them genuinely virtuous, by helping them to strip away what is not native, what does not belong.

### Against Instrumentalism

The metaphor of inner gold suggests that Socrates, in pursuing the question of what is oikeion, is looking for what is intrinsically valuable, what confers value. This quest for what is inherently good leads back to the fundamental inquiry articulated in many of the elenctic dialogues and is often explored by scholars in the terms of eudaimonism—the idea that happiness alone confers value on other things.. In the *Euthydemus*, one text in particular has tended to receive a eudaimonist interpretation. In what follows, I will discuss how this text fits into an esoteric reading of the dialogues. Socrates is speaking:

“Do we human beings all wish to do well? Or perhaps this question is one of those that I just now feared was ridiculous? For it is foolish, no doubt, even to ask such things. What human being does not want to do well?”

“Not a single one,” said Clinias. (*Euthyd.* 278e3–279a1)

For some interpreters, Socrates holds that virtue is supreme. Virtue is happiness; it has no other necessary constituent parts. As Socrates puts it in the *Apology*, “From virtue comes every good.” For others interpreters, instrumentalists, Socrates holds that happiness is that for the sake of which we do all that we do (Irwin 1995).<sup>10</sup> Virtue is instrumental to happiness. Thus, broadly speaking, either virtue or happiness, or some relationship between them is the sphere within which Socrates often searches for the answer to the question

of what is good—that is, of what is intrinsically valuable—metaphorized in the *Euthydemus* as digging for gold.<sup>11</sup> To be sure, there is no denying that at *Euthydemus* 288d9–291d3 Socrates asks about an art or craft of happiness “that will make him who obtains it happy” (Irwin 1995, 69), where Socrates describes this art on the analogy of productive sciences, such as generalship and architecture: “When we got to the kingly art and were giving it a thorough inspection to see whether it might be the one which both provided and created happiness . . .” (291b5). Texts such as this one provide evidence that Socrates regards virtue, for which the “kingly art” stands in, as instrumental to the obtaining of the genuine good, happiness. Instrumentalist interpretations of Socratic ethics are bolstered by the endorsement of Aristotle, who no doubt has this kind of passage in mind when he criticizes Socrates in the *Eudemian Ethics*:

Socrates the elder thought that the end of life was knowledge of virtue, and he used to seek for the definition of justice, courage, and each of the parts of virtue, and this was a reasonable approach, since he thought that all virtues were sciences. (1216b2–6)<sup>12</sup>

It is not just that Aristotle thinks that Socrates gets the notion of virtue wrong because Socrates doesn’t see the place of character virtue per se;<sup>13</sup> he also thinks that Socrates’s conception of virtue is misguided. Conceived as a craft, virtue is not happiness itself; instead, happiness is its product (Irwin 1995, 72). By contrast, according to Aristotle and contra his understanding of Socrates, virtue ought not to be valued because it produces something outside of itself (*Eth. Nic.* 1140b3–7). Virtue is concerned with actions that are ends in themselves. As Aristotle puts it, “good action is itself an end.” Not so, for Socrates, as Aristotle tells the story. His conception of virtue, then, as a science of happiness, assigns virtue an instrumental value; it is a means to obtain something else, something truly valuable, namely, happiness. Aristotle’s criticisms of the craft analogy, together with his insistence on Socrates’s endorsement of the analogy, are at the root of modern readings that interpret virtue as having an instrumental value in the Socratic dialogues. *Euthydemus* 281d2–e5 is another important text for those attempting to understand Socratic ethics, and to answer the question of whether it can be interpreted in terms of instrumentalism:

In sum, I said, it looks like this, Cleinias: as for all the things which at first we said are good, our argument concerning them is not this—that they are by nature good in themselves. Rather this appears to be how things stand; that if ignorance leads them, they are greater bads than

their opposites, to the extent that they are more able to serve what leads, it being bad, while if intelligence and wisdom lead, they are greater goods, but in themselves neither of them is worth anything. What then is the consequence of what has been said? Is it anything other than that of all the other things, none is either good or bad, but as to these two things, wisdom is good, ignorance bad?—He agreed.

Here Socrates says that wisdom is the only thing good in itself; everything else is neither good nor bad. Now, some interpreters read this passage to mean that wisdom is the only thing that is always a means to happiness.<sup>14</sup> Hence, wisdom is instrumental to happiness. That interpretation is quite popular, is rooted in Aristotle's understanding of the Socratic persona, but, I would argue, is not the only way to understand the passage. Consider, if the belief that one is going to obtain "the good" by pursuing some aim implies that the agent thinks that certain external states of affairs will benefit or harm her, then clearly this belief conflicts with what Socrates says here. For he says that apart from wisdom, everything (else) is neither good nor bad. The question then becomes, What can maximal benefit consist in, once we posit that states of affairs in the world in themselves bestow neither happiness nor misery? How is an instrumental approach, one that does not recognize the intrinsic value of wisdom, going to accommodate this puzzle?<sup>15</sup> It seems that the circular nature of this Socratic teleology—the fact we constantly strive for happiness, whereas anything that we go for can only belong to the set of things that cannot bestow happiness, and hence that our actions can never actually achieve our ends—would actually deprive the Socratic thesis of any explanatory power. Indeed, how irrational, on this understanding, would all human action be!

Consider now the interpretation according to which wisdom alone is that which is good in itself and not just a means to happiness. Another way of stating this conclusion is that all genuine goods will be integral.<sup>16</sup> Such genuine goods cannot be located in the world in the sense that any state of affairs can be specified as good. But how is an action going to maximize wisdom to begin with? Can wisdom be increased or decreased through action? And if that more or less that we obtain through wisdom is just another thing that in itself is neither good nor bad, then how can the goodness of wisdom consist in its being a means to the accumulation or maximization of things that have no value in themselves?<sup>17</sup>

What we see in the *Euthydemus* puzzle is that Socrates here calls the production model, or science of happiness model, into question. Recall that, for Aristotle, any craft or art has as its end the production of something other than

itself (*Eth. Nic.* 1040b6) and that, again for Aristotle, it is Socrates who uses the craft analogy to illustrate the structure of moral knowledge. Although the *Euthydemus* may outline a value theory that appears to be straightforward, within its structure lurks a puzzle about what constitutes an end.<sup>18</sup>

When we look at certain of the Platonic dialogues, we find that it is part of wisdom to understand that, whatever state we are in, that state is limited and finite, and will inevitably come to an end. The Myth of Er makes this truth startlingly clear: Those who go to heaven on the basis of divinely apportioned rewards will be likely to choose their subsequent lives less wisely.<sup>19</sup> The good consequences and good effects of virtuous action, in short, the heavenly benefits, run out. Those who sought their good in these states were mistaken. Philosophical insight alone provides protection against this false reliance on states that we mistakenly think constitute our wellbeing. In fact, it is just this insight, that all such states are limited and that they cannot constitute her good, which makes the philosopher less vulnerable. In the *Phaedrus* the philosopher is able to oversee her welfare over a number of lifetimes, during which she eschews anything other than wisdom for its own sake. But this wisdom is not scientific knowledge about how to obtain the good. Rather, it is just this seeing through the various conditioned states, realizing that they come and go and cannot be made permanent, that they are not part of oneself, which allows the philosopher to be free of heaven and of hell, or the cycle of birth and death.<sup>20</sup>

Although this talk of the cycle of birth and death and wellbeing over lives has no place in the aporetic dialogues, commonly understood by developmentalists to be the “Socratic dialogues,” I have alluded to it to try to illustrate what I take to be a paradox that the ethics of the *Euthydemus* 281 uncovers. People want good things (*Meno* 77). But there is no such thing as a good thing, since things are not inherently good. True, the *Euthydemus* reveals that when things are used wisely, they can be called good, although, first and foremost, if people truly want the good, what they should want is wisdom. And yet, almost no one wants wisdom; in fact, in their desire to acquire good things, people tend to neglect the acquisition of wisdom. Now suppose, to solve this paradox, we say that it is a question of how we use things; happiness is the result of using things wisely, while wisdom is the knowledge that enables one to do so (*Euthyd.* 280).<sup>21</sup> So, we have to ask, What is it to make wise use of things? Will this wisdom be equivalent to making use of things to benefit oneself? Yet benefiting oneself is just making oneself happy. What then is happiness? Well, is it not the state of the person who knows how to make use of things to make himself happy. And, if it is this, how are we to escape this circle? Perhaps we will need to specify what

happiness or the ultimate good is independently from this cycle. One thing that happiness cannot mean, is the acquisition of things that are not inherently good, that have no ability to add to one's happiness, that is, of goods apart from wisdom. But, if happiness is the final good, then there simply is no candidate for this final good apart from wisdom, since wisdom and wisdom alone is good in itself.<sup>22</sup> The question is why.

According to Socrates in a great many texts,<sup>23</sup> when we do things, or go after things, we do so in the belief that they actually contribute to or have purchase for some kind of good. And this belief is exactly the problem. Although Socrates demonstrates that this belief is widespread or even ubiquitous, instrumentalism does not work out for people, since it is just the way of understanding the world that necessitates that one will always be unfulfilled. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates gets Polus to agree that we do intermediate things (i.e., things that in themselves are neither good nor bad) for the sake of good things (468a–b). And far from being the kind of knowledge that leads to virtue, this mistaken way of looking at how to find the good is actually the fundamental ignorance that Socrates talks about at *Euthydemus* 281, when he suggests that things are bad when ignorance “leads them.” This ignorance may be expressed as the belief that something is good when it is neither good nor bad, or that it is bad when it is neither good nor bad. With wisdom, one sees things as they are. What about death and poverty? In themselves, Socrates shows us, they are neither good nor bad (*Ap.* 31, 37).<sup>24</sup> In other words, wise use of things is to see them as neither good nor bad. Death and poverty form ingredients of Socrates's overall good, even though they represent the extreme absence of any external goods. In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates takes himself to have established that so-called goods, such as health, and so-called bads, such as sickness, strictly speaking are neither good nor bad.<sup>25</sup> “In all these things we said at first were good, our account is not that they are in themselves good by nature, but the position, it seems, is as follows. If ignorance controls them, they are greater bads than their opposites” (281d).

There remains the worry that the thesis that Socrates proposes, that wisdom is the only good, is left without argument on its behalf (Irwin 1995, 58). What support is there for this thesis within the terms of the dialogue? Here I would like to return to the fundamental question of the dialogue: What is oikeion? This, then, is the principal distinction that underlies Socrates's pursuit as it is depicted in the *Euthydemus*, between what is oikeion, native, and what is foreign. In the *Charmides*, Critias offers this same allotrion/oikeion (foreign/native) distinction as an ethical criterion and as an approximation to the meaning of the Delphic injunction “Know thyself” interpreted through the lens of a Hesiodic tag, that “word is no reproach” (*Op.* 309):

For we should think that he calls such [previously mentioned beneficial] things, “what is our own,” whereas he calls harmful things, “foreign.” (*Chrm.* 163c3–4)

O Critias, I said, I already understand your argument, even though you were just now starting to speak. That you called what belongs to one or are one’s own, goods, and that you called the creations of good things, “actions.” (163d1–3)<sup>26</sup>

In this entire complex of ideas, the central philosophical quest, whether pragmatic or theoretical, revolves around the search for what is *oikeion*, what belongs essentially to the subject.

Again, the search for the *oikeion* surfaces, for example, in the Socratic Antisthenes’s worries over the possibility of definition, preserved for us by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, where he reports a puzzle propounded by the “Antistheneans and similarly uneducated persons to the effect that you cannot define what a thing is ‘for a definition is a long logos’ though you can teach what it is like” (1043b23–26). At *Euthydemus*, Antisthenes’s signature phrase, *ouk estin antilegein*, is used as the foundation for another sophism, the denial of falsehood. When Socrates hears the brothers introduce this topic, he immediately associates it with Protagoras, and goes on to draw a series of inferences from the thesis that “it is not possible to contradict”: for example, that it is impossible to speak or to think what is false. While some of the associated topics in this section of the dialogue are Eleatic (e.g., it is not possible to think what is not), they also figure into (what we know of) Antisthenes’s theory of accounts, according to which there is only one possible way of referring to any object of discourse, and this is by means of the *oikeios logos*, or proprietary account.

Perhaps, as has been suggested by Burnyeat, by the *oikeios logos* or proprietary account, Antisthenes meant something like a complete discursive mapping of all distinguishing features of an object, “which would be the one and only statement that was genuinely about *o* [the object] and nothing else. It would be a statement that was simultaneously the simplest adequate identification of *o* and an exhaustive description of *o*” (Burnyeat [in Plato 1990, 170]). The problem with this notion of definition, as Aristotle saw,<sup>27</sup> is that it does not distinguish between accidental and essential features of an object, between “Socrates” and “musical Socrates.”

The virtue that Antisthenes likens to an impregnable fortress, self-knowledge, if it purports to be a discursive and exhaustive knowledge of what does and does not belong to the self, will prove elusive.<sup>28</sup> This failure to define the self, to itemize its constituents so as to capture uniquely that which belongs to the

self and that which does not, has a particular interest for those who search for the meaning of Socratic philosophy. Recall Antisthenes's puzzle over definition cited above: "to the effect that you cannot define what a thing is, 'for a definition is a long *logos*,' though you can teach what it is like." Socrates's emphasis on self-knowledge, coming to a realization of the self as a knower, but not any of the things known, resonates with the Antisthenean insistence that there is no *oikeios logos*, no itemization of the self.

Don't forget who is here, Socrates seems to say. Is there anyone here who is not a sage, who can opt out of the human vocation? In answering the question for everyone he meets in the negative, Socrates fills those same streets of Athens with aspirants to wisdom. Those who would inhabit this city of sages no longer go about in search of something to make them happy; they are not trying to maximize the amount of good they might get from doing or having certain things. It is no longer the case that for these practitioners, the most rational way of spending one's life is in search of a set of circumstances, a state of affairs in the world or even within oneself, that will "maximize the ultimate good" if this ultimate good is conceived as a transient state of soul, dependent on conditions to support it. We have seen that happiness can never be like this: something that one accrues temporarily or maximizes through the manipulation of states of affairs in the world.

Perhaps it seems melodramatic to portray self-knowledge as akin to the scary rites of Shamans or to liken ordinary elenchus to the occult frenzy of Bacchic ritual and the psychic *sparagmos* that this ritual implies. That Plato goes out of his way to create this association with something as quotidian as a conversation with Socrates, than which evidently nothing could be more ordinary, is not something that we should overlook or dismiss. Primarily, the *sparagmos*, the ritual dismemberment in question here, is self-discernment. The true person will have to separate himself from all that is not his, keeping only that which is most his own. The language of sacrifice and ritual slaughter is most prominent in the *Euthydemus*, as we saw: Cut me up, only make me wise. Socrates cannot actually perform the dismemberment; one can only apply this rite oneself. Socrates tries to point the patient in the right direction for deepening his search, as when he mentions the soul to the histrionic pair of Sophists (287) or when he extols wisdom and demotes the value of external goods. But his hints are continually set aside as the interlocutors insist that, in the words of Dionysodorus "one's own" must be detachable property, that the word *mine* indicates a proprietary relationship with other objects. Overall the dialogues succeed in showing us best what is not *oikeion*. It is evidently not the body or any of its possessions, nor is it any of the other so-called goods that appear on any Socratic list.<sup>29</sup> And yet, the

oikeion, despite the failure to identify it as anything, is vividly present during the elenchus and is, in a sense, its constant object, as it is that virtue through which one knows what is most one's own. It can never be alienated; in whatever circumstance, one brings it along. This inner wealth is the virtue of the knower; our wealth lies in knowing the knower. The elenchus then is a practice environment; it points us toward the knower, it severs our ties with what is foreign.

At this point, it is time to return once more to the plaintive voice of our critical reader, who, having endured these chapters, still feels compelled to ask: What is the self that we are supposed to know, and why is it so all important? The author is evasive, showering us with vague hints about "the good," "the daimon," the "knower." But what does this amount to? Is this "knower" a Cartesian disembodied self? Is it a privately available, introspectively accessed self? Is it the uniquely privileged object or subject of introspection? For surely we would not want to say that! If the Socratic self, the self that is accessed in the elenchus shows us anything, it is that there is nothing private about it. In the Socratic dialogues especially, introspection, asking people to look into themselves and report what they find, yields nugatory if not negative results (Woolf 2008) Socrates's interlocutors can be singularly blind to their own qualities. They can be arrogant and overweening when they pretend to have *sophrosune*, they are sometimes cowardly and fearful when they allege that they are courageous, and, of course, they are unwise and ignorant when they think that they are filled with wisdom and virtue.

In part, we have to leave this question unanswered. The ethics of wisdom that Socrates introduces is a practice. It requires from the interlocutor a reversal of direction. Rather than being fooled by one's own *doxa*, the knower here takes up residence at the guardian door of *sophrosune*; presiding over *doxa*, taking his seat behind the play of appearances, letting them come and go, but not grasping them as the truth. This self-inquiry requires a different orientation from the practitioner, but it is not necessarily accompanied by a theory of what this knower is. Socrates's name for this practice, the care of the soul, refers to this reversal, the redirection of the attention, as one attends to the knower:

I do nothing else besides go around trying to persuade the young and the old among you alike, not to be attached to your bodies nor to your possessions nor to anything except to the effort to make your soul as virtuous as possible. (*Ap.* 30a7–b1)

Socrates literally stops people in mid track, about to act, or mid-career, or at the beginning of a career—at any point along the chain of action, production, or aspiration—and asks them to reflect precisely on what it is to be the person



who occupies a given role.<sup>30</sup> Because he focuses on caring for the self, attending to it as knower, it really is the practical side of the contemplative life that Socrates represents. Before a theory of the self arises, before what is known is grasped in all of its splendor, we must at the very least, do justice to the knower, without whom none of this is possible.

This way of reading the *Euthydemus*, in terms of its discernment between what is native and what is foreign, is on a comparative scale a rather more esoteric reading than, for example, a reading that sees an anticipation of consequentialism or even a maximalist consequentialism implied in the passage already discussed. The questions of what is my own, what is native to me, what truly belongs to me, cannot be answered by pointing to anything detachable, transient, extrinsic. Therefore, neither can the person find her felicity in that which is unstable, beyond her control, subject to destruction. Far from establishing a philosophy or ethics of maximization, Socratic philosophy here points in the direction of detachment from any such factors as a means to satisfy this primary human drive, to do well, to flourish. The exoteric reading would point us to the absurd antics of the two brothers, stuffing their bellies with gold staters, scoring points off of verbal victories. The esoteric reading uses initiatory symbolism to recommend disowning one's possessions, like those Scythian nomads.

### The Roman Inheritance of Socrates

We saw above how this search for what is native ramifies into the Socratic inheritance of Antisthenes, a member of the Socratic circle. Antisthenes seems to anticipate this “interior citadel” of the Stoa: “Virtue is a weapon that no enemy can capture”; and “Wisdom is a wall that cannot be breached; no one can break it down and no one can betray it. This defense is furnished by one's own unassailable thoughts” (Diog. Laert. 6.10–13 = Giannantoni 1990, vol. 2, 186–87, VA 134).

As with other dimensions of Socratic philosophy articulated in the Socratic dialogues, we find echoes of this language in Hellenistic ethics. The allotrion/oikeion shows up as a crucial concern in Cynic ethics and reverberates even more distantly in Epictetus's *Discourses*. According to Epictetus, Socrates's disciple, Antisthenes is said to have taught that “evil is constituted by everything that is foreign”.<sup>31</sup>

Since the time that Antisthenes set me free, I have no longer been a slave.... He taught me [the distinction between] what is mine and what is not mine. Property is “not mine.” Relatives, servants, friends,

reputation, accustomed haunts, pastimes, [he taught] are foreign.  
(Diog. Laert. 6.12)<sup>32</sup>

Richard Sorabji has called attention to the distinction between what is *oikeion* and what is *allogrion* as forming the subject of a practice taught by Epictetus to his young students:

It is especially for this kind of thing that you must perform exercises. Go out at first light, examine whatever you see or hear, and answer as if you had been asked a question. What did you see? A good-looking man or woman? Apply the rule (*kanon*). Is this subject to your will or not? No: remove it. What did you see? A man grieving at the death of his child? Apply the rule. Death is not subject to your will. Move it out of the way. Did a consul meet you? Apply the rule. What sort of thing is consulship, subject to your will or not? No: remove that too: it is not approved. Throw it away; it means nothing to you. (*Discourses* 3.3.14–17; trans. Sorabji [2003, 182–83])

We know that the practice of delimiting the self was the theme of a number of Stoic meditations. Marcus Aurelius describes an exercise that consists in circumscribing the self, starting from the body, thought, and intellect. The exercise finally results in a completely self-enclosed identity, the person of supreme self-sufficiency that Aurelius compares to the *sphairos* of Empedocles (*Med.* 12.3.1).

Long focuses on the Socratic persona as funding Epictetus's signature philosophical construct, the idea of *volition*, or, in Greek, *prohairesis*. Epictetus is exactly after an answer to the Socratic question—What fundamentally belongs to you?—which, as we saw in the *Euthydemus*, was the location of a discernment symbolized in the metaphors of butchering, flaying, and stripping by means of the blade of wisdom. Epictetus says:

Everything everywhere is perishable and easy to attack. Whoever sets his heart on any such things must be disturbed, discouraged, a prey to anxiety and distress, with desires that are unfulfilled and aversions that are fully realized. Therefore, are we not willing to secure the only safety that has been granted to us, and by giving up the perishable and slavish domain work at those things that are imperishable and naturally free? (4.5.27; trans. Long [2002, 226, text 124])

Here Epictetus makes the point that a maximizing approach to happiness—trying to secure as much of it as possible—to put it in the crude terms of the brothers in our dialogue, is inherently flawed. Whoever aims at anything

perishable is immediately subject to stress and anxiety—the very reverse of happiness or well-being.

Epictetus then invokes Socrates's example: "Socrates kept this in mind, as he lived in his own house, putting up with his wife's ill temper and his insensitive son. . . . But what do I care if I judge that these things have nothing to do with me?" (4.5.36; Long 2002, 227, text 124). In other words, whatever is mine is not me, not self, not native, not *oikeion*.

In this Hellenistic reception of the Socratic legacy, wisdom or insight is able to break the cycle of desire and aversion as the conditioning agents of mind that impel the person who then becomes caught in a calculative disposition with a predetermined end, that of obtaining the objects to which desire attaches and of avoiding objects from which aversion recoils.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# ALCIBIADES I

## The Mirror of Socrates

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When Socrates's daimon finally allows him to speak to Alcibiades, the latter is no longer a teenager, but has already grown a beard and is about to embark on his life's ambitions. Alcibiades thinks that ruling the world, being master of all men, sounds like a good job description (*Alc.* 105).<sup>1</sup> But Socrates is not so sure that Alcibiades has the qualifications. Compare yourself to the kings of Persia, Socrates urges. Don't you know how they are raised from early childhood? After spending seven years with select and highly prized eunuchs, their education is overseen by four great sages, possessing the four cardinal virtues of moderation, wisdom, courage, and justice. The wisest among them teaches the young prince the wizardry that belongs to Zoroaster, son of Ohoromazda, and teaches as well the royal art, the art of ruling oneself (122a2).

But this same art, the art of ruling oneself, is just what Socrates is going to teach the young Alcibiades, to prepare him for his career goals, to be master of the universe. How does one rule oneself? First, Alcibiades needs to know himself. He should take care lest he end up knowing what is his, but not himself:

Socrates: The art by means of which we each care for our self is different from the art by which we attend to what belongs to our self?

Alcibiades: Apparently.

Socrates: Therefore, when you are attending to what belongs to yourself, are you attending to yourself?

Alcibiades: By no means. (128d4–5)

In this chapter, we follow the course of this interchange, attempting to discern this distinction between what constitutes *attending to the self* and *attending to what belongs to the self*. The discussion will lead us in the direction of searching for the nature or essence of the self, here considered as the human self, as well as searching for the best means to attend to the self.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, if the late Platonists can be said to engage the figure of Socrates in Plato's dialogues, it is almost, though not quite, entirely through their readings of *Alcibiades I*.<sup>3</sup> Much of Proclus's commentary on *Alcibiades I* is still extant (although it is not known how much is lost, since the extant commentary extends only until Stephanus [116b]; Renaud and Tarrant 2016); and it is also possible that Porphyry in editing the *Enneads* of Plotinus had an inchoate conception of a philosophical curriculum in mind, as he began with *Ennead* 1.1, "On the Animate and the Man," a treatise that forms Plotinus's own kind of commentary on the *Alcibiades I*.<sup>4</sup> It is even possible that Plotinus's familiarity with the *Alcibiades I* and what Brunschwig has called the tradition of "recherche gnoséologique"<sup>5</sup> extends the image of the mirror into Augustine's own speculations on the mind's intuition of itself.

In late antiquity, Neoplatonists read the dialogues of Plato according to a cycle that corresponded to the student's progress in the philosophical curriculum. We know that Porphyry's younger colleague, the Syrian born Iamblichus promoted this curriculum, which correlated closely with the Neoplatonic system of ranking kinds of virtue (Westerink 2011, xl; Olympiodorus 1998, 13–14; Layne, forthcoming).<sup>6</sup> *Alcibiades I*, a dialogue hardly recognized as genuine among scholars today, came first in the schedule since it promoted self-knowledge. It was followed by *Gorgias* (constitutional virtues) and *Phaedo* (purificatory virtues). The first decad of dialogues was crowned by the theological dialogue *Philebus* (study of the good) and followed by the two "perfect" dialogues, *Timaeus* (all reality via physics) and *Parmenides* (all reality via metaphysics).

Olympiodorus mentions that foundational to the whole enterprise of Platonic philosophy, is *Alcibiades I*:

Concerning the order [in the curriculum] one must say that it is necessary to assign the *Alcibiades I* first of all the Platonic dialogues. For as he [sc. Plato] says in the *Phaedrus* it would be ridiculous to attempt to know the rest [of the curriculum] while being ignorant of oneself. Secondly, it is necessary to study the teachings of Socrates by means of a Socratic method, and Socrates is said to have arrived at philosophy through the [doorway] of "know thyself!" (*In Pl. Alc.* 10.8–11.2)

The Neoplatonists presumed that self-knowledge was the *sine qua non*, the entry point for a life of philosophy, since the whole purpose not just of the philosophical life but of life itself was to effect the return of the soul to the one.<sup>7</sup> But this goal, the return of the soul, is not a journey to a distant place. Instead, it involves recovering the nature of the self through exploring what Gwenaëlle Aubry (2014) has called "an immediate reflexivity" (310).<sup>8</sup> To give the reader

some idea of what this quest is about, that search for self apart from anything that we might think of as a self-state, we can think of the self in two distinct ways. One way to think about the self is as the “immersed self,” to borrow a phrase from Zahavi (2005, 125).<sup>9</sup> Zahavi writes that

the idea is to link an experiential sense of self to the particular first-personal givenness that characterizes our experience of life; it is this first-personal givenness that constitutes the *mineness* or *ipseity* of experience. Thus, the self is not something that stands opposed to the stream of consciousness, but is, rather, immersed in conscious life. (125)

So, here the self amounts to what Socrates and Alcibiades agree is the particular self, (130d4). The self is the set of experiences that belong to the individual or the embodied soul. Yet another way to understand the self is to investigate what Socrates calls the self itself. Is this self a universal self, as Plato’s language, *auto to auto*, might suggest? Is the self itself (later, we will examine this collocation, found at 129b1–3) simply the self who is subject to self-states, is in some sense identical with those self-states? Or can the self in any way be said to be free from self-states, even, transcend these self-states? Socrates dramatizes, enacts, and brings to life this question of what or who is present here, in the midst of this immersed self, or soul.

In what follows, I do not necessarily assume that Plato<sup>10</sup> is the author of *Alcibiades I*, especially given the stylistic work presented by Tarrant and Roberts (2012).<sup>11</sup> Most difficult for my treatment here is the challenge made not merely to the authenticity of the dialogue as a whole but to what is rightly understood as a later Platonizing interpolation in the text just as it enters into the crux of its discussion on the possibilities of self-knowledge.<sup>12</sup> However, the verdict over the authenticity of text, found in all the manuscripts,<sup>13</sup> that directly equates self-knowledge with divine knowledge by evidently positing a “theomorphic self,” to use Brunschwig’s term, and the verdict over the authenticity of the dialogue as a whole, are essentially not germane to what I take to be the purpose of the *Alcibiades I*: a summary of the meaning of Socratic philosophy, whether written by Plato or, more likely, by Platonists who sought to thematize the figure of Alcibiades and the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades.<sup>14</sup>

For late antique authors such as Olympiodorus and Proclus, Socrates represents the intellect, the most divine aspect of the human being.<sup>15</sup> For example, Proclus says in his commentary on the *Alcibiades I* that Socrates “has established himself as corresponding to the intellect of the soul” (*In Alc.* 43.7–9). Ambury (2014, 110) points out that, if so, Alcibiades also occupies an allegorical role in Proclus’s reading of the dialogue, and so corresponds to the soul.<sup>16</sup> Proclus

writes, “According to the analogy of the extremes we must relate Alcibiades to the rational soul, to which are still attached the emotions and the irrational powers” (43.20). I am going to argue that this late antique reading of *Alcibiades I* can help us make sense of the dialogue.

Let us, then, stipulate that Proclus’s reading can be of use to us; Socrates does play the role of the intellect to Alcibiades’s soul. In fact, the text of *Alcibiades I* helps us in this regard, since Socrates tells Alcibiades that “Socrates is conversing with Alcibiades by means of employing speech, although he is not speaking to your face, but rather to Alcibiades, and this means, the soul” (130e1–5). Now according to this allegorical reading, Alcibiades represents the soul, that is, the parts of the soul other than the philosophical part. Alcibiades is ambitious—he can be identified in part with the honor-loving dimension of the soul and in part with the appetitive dimension of the soul. Plato makes this identification clear at the very outset of the dialogue. Socrates approaches Alcibiades precisely because his ambitions are unmatched by any other living human being. Socrates says to Alcibiades, οὐκ ἄν αὖ μοι δοκεῖς ἐθέλειν οὐδ’ ἐπὶ τούτοις μόνοις ζῆν, εἰ μὴ ἐμπλήσεις τοῦ σοῦ ὀνόματος καὶ τῆς σῆς δυνάμεως πάντας ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἀνθρώπου: (105c; I am sure that you would not even be content to live under such conditions, unless you were to, as it were, fill all human beings with your name and your power). For Proclus, Alcibiades’s ambition (*philotimia*) is the apex of the irrational soul; love of honor needs only guidance and direction to discover the nature of that which is truly valuable. Socrates then tells Alcibiades that τούτων γάρ σοι ἀπάντων τῶν διανοημάτων τέλος ἐπιτεθῆναι ἄνευ ἐμοῦ ἀδύνατον (105d3; Without me it is impossible for the end of all of your ambitions to be realized). Later in the dialogue, we learn that it is intellect that determines the beneficial outcome of all possible desires:

Dear Alcibiades, for the one who has the power to do whatever he wishes, but has no intellect, what is the likely outcome, for private citizen or community? For example, suppose one has the power to do what one wishes for a sick person, but does not have the intellect of a physician? (135)

Socrates here presents himself as the practical intellect, supplying the instrumental reasoning without which Alcibiades’s desires will not achieve fruition. Of course, Socrates also hints that the soul as he finds it, Alcibiades, is ailing and in need of a cure. Proclus interprets these two characters as the higher and lower elements of a single soul: the *noeric* (intellective) aspect of the soul, on the cusp of the intelligible world (Socrates), and the rational soul, identifying with its own self-interests. Here the soul, as Proclus describes it, in the person

of Alcibiades, is torn asunder through conflicting desires and by his ignorance about how to achieve the one thing he wants most, which is power.

Just as Alcibiades represents all possible human desires and all possible human ambition, so Socrates represents the intellect, functioning in the midst of these very desires, illuminating them, bringing them to light, and into the ambit of awareness. This mirroring function, the capacity to be aware, is represented by Socrates.

In this respect, our Socratic dialogue is not very different from other Socratic dialogues. We might say that, in the *Crito*, Crito represents the appetitive part of the soul (he is a business man). Again, in the *Republic*, Cephalus represents the appetites and Polemarchus represents *thumos*. Or, finally, in the *Laches*, Nicias stands in for the honor-loving part of the soul by virtue of his military profession. So, in the Socratic dialogues, Socrates converses with the other parts of the soul. The conversation as a whole can be said to represent a complete human soul, in which Socrates tries to bring about agreement and like mindedness, as well as to instill the motivation uniquely belonging to the philosophical element, that is, the love for wisdom.

These inner conversations, in which we look inside the conflicted soul, reveal a Socratic presence that uncovers the desires, opinions, and in the case of Alcibiades, the ambitions of the soul. Proclus explains the attraction that Alcibiades holds for Socrates, an attraction that modern day interpreters might find puzzling, given what we know of Alcibiades's betrayal of Athens. It is Alcibiades's philotimia, his aspiration to greatness, that steers him in the direction of Socrates. Proclus writes:

This is the characteristic of one who disdains what is vulgar, is convinced of its worthlessness and yearns to behold only what is great and of great value, "not realizing what has come over it" (*Phaedrus* 250), but, in accordance with its innate notions, picturing to itself some other genuine greatness and sublimity. (*In Alc.* 135: trans. O'Neill [Proclus. 1954, 89])

For Proclus, among other things, Alcibiades also represents the aspiration to wisdom, that discontentedness with anything particular, finite, or small. Already the soul in this stage is exercising a kind of ability to see through the attractions and obstructions of the individual self, and, as Proclus puts it, "is convinced of its own worthlessness." At this juncture, Alcibiades comes in pursuit of Socrates. He turns within himself in this reading or, to use the technical language of Proclus, attempts to revert to his authentic nature, and yet he cannot quite find himself. We can understand, according to Proclus, that the soul in



this state will take up the question, “What is the self itself?” At 129b1, Socrates asks Alcibiades, “Come now, in what manner can the self itself be discovered?” Later, elaborating the distinction, “Surely the human being is one of three things? Which things? The body, the mind, and the body-mind compound?” (130a6), Socrates concedes that perhaps Alcibiades and Socrates have only succeeded in apprehending the nature of the particular self: “Just now, instead of the self itself, we have been looking at the nature of the particular self” (130d6). But this particular self is, as Alcibiades affirms, the soul (130e9).

Above, we saw that Proclus’s allegorical reading did much to solve the paradox of this most infamous of love stories. The most virtuous man that Plato had ever known fell in love with a man who eventually proved to be a traitor. After every attempt to rescue Alcibiades, including saving his very life at Delium (cf. *Symp.*, 220e),<sup>17</sup> Socrates ended up taking the rap for an irremediable comrade. Yet if Socrates and Alcibiades represent that other inseparable pair, the irrational side of human nature and our better, enlightened selves, the romance seems one with which all mortals are acquainted. *Alcibiades I* is truly a mirror for the soul.

Therefore, Socrates in representing the intellect, or functioning as the knower, is the mirror for Alcibiades. This dramatic enactment of self-knowledge, wherein Socrates attends Alcibiades and Alcibiades in turn seeks Socrates (Alcibiades says, “You have only just anticipated me, for I intended to approach you”; 104c1–2) suggests communication between these different parts of the soul. At 132c10, Socrates introduces the Delphic inscription as holding a clue (the Greek word is *συμβουλευεῖν*) concerning the manner in which we are to “look into” our soul. Socrates proposes an illustration: What if an eye wanted to know itself? How would it find its nature? It could look into another eye, into the pupil of the other person’s eye, to see what its own nature is. “Therefore an eye seeing an eye and looking into the part of it that is best and by which the eye sees, in this way could see itself” (133a5–8). We have seen that for Proclus, when the self looks into the self, it is a case of the soul looking for intellect and at the very same time, intellect looking for soul. Alcibiades and Socrates approach each other. Because Socrates and Alcibiades represent different stages or perhaps hypostases of the self (Ambury 2014),<sup>18</sup> Alcibiades’s approach to Socrates represents what Proclus discusses in his commentary and elsewhere as the reversion of the soul to the intellect. The higher or prior hypostasis functions both as efficient cause and as final cause of the lower hypostasis, or effect. Therefore, intellect (*nous*) is the cause of soul (*psyche*), and the soul both proceeds from intellect and reverts to it. For example, *Elements of Theology* references Proclus’s general theory of reversion:

All that proceeds from any principle and reverts upon it has a cyclic activity. For if it reverts upon the principle from whence it proceeds, it links its end with its beginning and the movement is one and continuous, originating from the unmoved and to the unmoved again returning. (33.1–6; quoted by Chlup 2014).

Proclus understands intellect as a timeless, eternal actuality that contains all possible beings; soul's activity takes place in time, and the soul discursively unfolds the content of intellect as a kind of description or representation of what intellect both knows and is. Proclus writes in *Elements of Theology* that

Πᾶσα ψυχή πάντα ἔχει τὰ εἶδη, ἃ ὁ νοῦς πρώτως ἔχει.  
εἰ γὰρ ἀπὸ νοῦ πρόεισι καὶ νοῦς ὑποστάτης ψυχῆς, καὶ  
αὐτῷ τῷ εἶναι ἀκίνητος ὧν πάντα ὁ νοῦς παράγει, δώσει καὶ τῇ  
ψυχῇ τῇ ὑφισταμένη τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ πάντων οὐσιώδεις λόγους (194)

Every soul has all of the forms that intellect has in a primary way. For soul proceeds from intellect and intellect is the underlying reality of the soul; then it is both the case that, while remaining unmoving, intellect produces in virtue of its being and that it will bestow upon the soul that is dependent on intellect essential rational accounts of all the realities it contains.

Therefore, not only does *Alcibiades I* represent a drama, and a tragic drama at that, but it also enacts a powerful truth about the quest for self-knowledge, according to Proclus. The soul is capable of “reverting,” returning, recognizing intellect as its good, precisely because it is incorporeal. Proclus says that “all that is capable of reverting on itself is incorporeal” (ET 15). Thus, in the dialogue, Socrates leads Alcibiades to the understanding that he, Alcibiades, is the soul. But as we saw, so far they have only uncovered the particular self. In fact, the dialogue suggests through the analogy of the eye looking into an eye that the particular self is only an image of the “self itself,” the true self.

Socrates uses the analogy of an eye looking into another eye in order to illustrate what it is like for the self to seek itself. Socrates says:

Have you noticed that the face of the person who looks into an eye appears in the mirror of the opposite eye, which we call the pupil, as a kind of image of the person who is looking? (133a1–3)

If we understand that the mind, the soul, is looking into itself in order to see itself, then all it will see is an image of itself (*eidolon ti*). That is, the mind cannot look into itself as if it were gazing into another and find itself in that way;

if it looks for itself as if it were different from what it is looking for, it can only find an image. Hence, the analogy is misleading if we are looking for a method whereby the soul can see the self itself. At this point in the narrative, the soul is still confused. The eye looks into another eye but finds only an image of itself. In what follows, we will see that it now looks past the image into the space in which the image arises.

Recent work on *Alcibiades I* suggests that interpretations of this passage tend to veer in two distinct directions: one that understands the interpersonal illustration implied by the image and one that understands the empirical consciousness or individual egoic mind apprehending a theomorphic self (Renaud and Tarrant 2016, 64).<sup>19</sup> As Renaud and Tarrant write:

The theocentric interpretation emphasizes that the passage is concerned not only with the divine in us (theion) but also a god or god (theon 135c). Since the intellectual part of the soul is divine, the knowledge of the soul is directly linked to god; this part even coincides with that of god. According to some commentators, this very reference to god (or a god) proves that Plato did not write the *Alcibiades* or at least that passage, on the ground that the idea of a god illuminating the soul is Neoplatonic rather than Platonic or at any rate not Socratic. (64)

Certainly, the idea of reverting to intellect, divine intelligence, is a prominent part of Proclus's reading in his commentary on the *Alcibiades*. In the dialogue proper, Socrates goes on to ask Alcibiades, "Are we able to say that there is any more divine aspect of the soul than this, the part that is concerned with wisdom and knowing?" (133c1). In fact, as Renaud and Tarrant point out (64), all the manuscripts contain the explicit link that Socrates now makes between the intellect and god, a direct pointing to the theiomorphic self:

One who looks into this and comes to recognize the whole of the divine nature, god and wisdom, would in that way especially come to know himself. (133c5–6)

Although Tarrant emphasizes the fact that the soul is said to be akin to god (Τῷ θεῷ ἄρα τοῦτ' ἔοικεν αὐτῆς [133c4; This part of the soul is like the god]) and therefore other than god (Tarrant and Renaud 2016, 64), it also seems true that the soul's knowledge is simultaneously self-knowledge and divine knowledge.

Before Socrates introduces the illustration, he is trying to explain how "one must care for the soul and look into this" (132c1). Socrates continues to explain

how the eye can see itself by suggesting that the eye must look “into that place where the virtue of the eye actually arises. And that virtue is vision” (134b1–5). Socrates here is searching for the essence of the self and suggests that the self is essentially the knower. Self-knowledge is knowledge of the knower, but this knowledge is not of what the knower knows. Is knowing the knower something one can equate with knowledge of any states of the knower? At least, we cannot restrict knowledge of the knower to states of the knower, since none of these states is identical with the knower. The experience, the object that we might say conditions knowledge, is always something known, whereas the knower is that which knows, and not anything known. It is just this self-knowledge that Plato attempts to represent in the guise of Socratic wisdom, in the Socratic interpretation of Delphi’s *gnothi sauton*. The elaborate exercise that precedes the moment of self-knowledge, through which Socrates separates Alcibiades from what belongs to Alcibiades, must now apply equally to the soul: The soul is not any state of the soul. Thus, the self is not anything that belongs to the self; what belongs to the self cannot be the self. It makes sense to say that the person is not his body and so not any of the things belonging to the body. But if the person is the mind, is she then any of the things belonging to the mind? In this spirit, Socrates warns Alcibiades that they have so far only encountered a particular self:

Tell me how we can come to know the self-nature of any self [auto to auto]? Maybe this is the way to find out what we ourselves [autoi] are—it may be the only possible way. (129b1)

On this interpretation, then, the question about the self itself, if it does draw on the resources of essentialism implied in the *auto*-language of the forms, asks whether or not the essence of the self is to be a knower. This essence is invoked in the metaphor of the eye: *καὶ ψυχὴ εἰ μέλλει γινώσασθαι αὐτήν, εἰς ψυχὴν αὐτῆ βλεπέον* (133b7; If the soul is to know itself, it must look at a soul, and especially at that region in which what makes a soul good, wisdom, occurs). For the self to see itself, it must look to its knowledge, but not its knowledge of this or that; rather, it must see that it is the seer. How can it see that? What is it that does the knowing? Who is it that knows? If it sees itself as something, then, of course, what it finds can’t be the seer, it can only be what is seen. Let us try to get a little clearer about the implications of this question, again starting from the fact that Plato posits that in order to know the self itself, we must look to the place where knowledge occurs. In knowing himself, the knower will actually not be attending to any of the things that he knows. This interpretation of the text fits the distinction that Socrates makes between attending to oneself and attending to what belongs to oneself. What belongs to oneself is all that characterizes

the particular self: one's body but also one's representational objects, states of mind, we could say, the things of the soul; for the soul qua knower that all of these things are objects of knowledge. The art that attends to oneself does not attend to the possessions or attributes of the self. Necessarily, then, it does not attend to anything per se. But, if so, then what could it attend to? The text of the *Alcibiades I* has left us with an aporia. It is as if Socrates points Alcibiades to a space, and, indeed, he does actually suggest that Alcibiades look into the region where knowledge arises. Yet what exactly is in this space of awareness? No doubt all things are there; it is just that these are not the knower, they are rather what the knower knows.

Let us stop here and take stock of where we are in the interpretation of Socrates's philosophy. My claim has been that self-knowledge is a signature of Socratic philosophy. I also suggested that self-knowledge is the key to understanding the Socratic thesis that virtue is knowledge. That is, virtue is self-knowledge. Furthermore, virtue as self-knowledge requires identifying oneself as the knower, and it is abiding in that realization that produces virtue. How it does so is now the question. It bears notice that in this dialogue Plato comes closest to equating self-knowledge with virtue. Note the proliferation of virtue words: ἡ ὀφθαλμοῦ ἀρετὴ ἐγγιγνομένη (133b4; in which the virtue of the eye occurs); ἐν ᾧ ἐγγίγνεται ἡ ψυχῆς ἀρετὴ, σοφία (133b9); φρόνησιν (133c5); σωφροσύνην (133c19). The knower here is the inner ruler. The wisdom or guardian of the soul that we see in Platonic psychology is literally described as the *phylax*, the custodian of the city. That is, the philosophical element functions as the soul's guardian, keeping watch on desires, thoughts, and emotions. Socrates associates self-knowledge with self-mastery or self-rule in *Alcibiades I*. In bringing forth the mind that seeks wisdom and truth—that attends to desire and aversion, pleasure and pain not as its own nature, as not equating to the self—the wisdom of the knower shines through the conditions of the psyche. We have already become familiar with that passage in the *Alcibiades I* in which Socrates invokes the special education of the Persian kings in the art of self-knowledge as the gateway to perfect rule. Why does Socrates call the art of ruling oneself a royal art? One who has mastered this art will be the ruler with real authority, no matter what the regime. As we would say in modern parlance, philosophers rule! Socrates makes clear why he sees self-knowledge as the prerequisite to the art of ruling. To be master of oneself is not to identify with any of the states of mind that arise as they are conditioned by the various objects of experience. The self, that which knows the experience but cannot itself be experienced, is not dependent on any experience for its wellbeing. Rather, it is that which makes all experience, whether of good or bad, pleasure or pain, available. In this practice of self-inquiry,

the soul (Alcibiades) reverts to intellect (Socrates). But this way of capturing the moment of self-knowledge fails to represent the realization of the self itself. The two converse in this picture offered by the dialogue but do not yet converge.

To return, then, to Neoplatonic interpretations of Plato's *Alcibiades I*, we can see that this idea, this discernment between transitory experiences involving the emotions or appetites and the knowing self that is aware of them, informs the question expressed at the beginning of *Ennead* 1.1. Plotinus there signals that he is venturing an interpretation of the *Alcibiades* when he begins his treatise, Ἡδοναὶ καὶ λῦπαι φόβοι τε καὶ θάρρη ἐπιθυμίαι τε καὶ ἀποστροφαὶ καὶ τὸ ἀλγεῖν τίνος ἂν εἶεν; Ἡ γὰρ ψυχῆς, ἢ χρωμένης ψυχῆς σώματι (Pleasures and pains and fear and courage, desires and revulsions, and the capacity to suffer, to whom would these belong? Is it the soul, or the soul using a body?), with a quotation from *Alcibiades I*, χρωμένης ψυχῆς σώματι (soul using the body).

The treatise proceeds to consider the various stations of soul in a way that articulates an intellectualism that represents the soul as the impassive witness to emotions that are seated in what Plotinus calls “the couplement.” Plotinus perhaps here borrows this idea of an entity compounded from soul and body from *Alcibiades I*, which has a different Greek word for couplement (συναμώτερον; 130a9) but clearly anticipates Plotinus, who describes “a third thing,” echoing Plato's language wondering if μὴ οὐ τριῶν ἔν γέ τι εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον. Speaking of what he calls the “we” (τὸ ἡμεῖς), Plotinus echoes *Alcibiades I* (129b1), a text already discussed. He quotes Plato and seems to reify or formalize the word ἡμεῖς (we) so that it becomes a technical reference to the individual self:

SOCRATES: Tell me how we can come to know the essence of any self-nature [auto to auto]? Maybe this is the way to find out what we ourselves [autoi] are—maybe it's the only possible way. (*Alc.* 129b1)

This contrast between “we ourselves” and the self-itself is one that Plotinus picks up on when he wants to distinguish the various dimensions of the self in *Ennead* 1.1. So he writes of the we using the first person plural verb as well as the pronoun in the accusative case:

Πρὸς δὲ τὸν νοῦν πῶς; Νοῦν δὲ λέγω οὐχ ἦν ἢ ψυχὴ ἔχει ἕξιν οὖσαν τῶν παρὰ τοῦ νοῦ, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν τὸν νοῦν. Ἡ ἔχομεν καὶ τοῦτον ὑπεράνω ἡμῶν. (1.1.8.1)

What is our relationship to intellect? I mean by “intellect” not some state of the soul that belongs to intellect's productions, but intellect itself. Well, we both have it and it is above us. (Plotinus uses the pronoun ἡμῶν.) Plotinus goes on to say:

ἕκαστος αὐτὸν ὅλον ἐν ψυχῇ τῇ πρώτῃ. Ἐχομεν οὖν καὶ τὰ εἶδη  
διχῶς, ἐν μὲν ψυχῇ οἷον ἀνειλιγμένα καὶ οἷον κεχωρισμένα, ἐν δὲ  
νῶ ὁμοῦ τὰ πάντα. (*Enneads* I.1.8.5–6)

Each has its entire soul in the primary sense. Thus, we possess the forms as well in two senses: in the soul, as it were, unraveled and separate; and in intellect all together, simultaneously.

For all of these commentators, *Alcibiades I* is a drama that plays out in the field of awareness, as the conscious mind or temporally conditioned mind (the soul has its activity in time) turns to ask about its own source. Plotinus's questions—"To what do the passions belong?" and "What is our relationship to intellect?"—exactly frame the Socratic quest for self-knowledge insofar as the knower, the soul, is witness to the passions, not involved in them. This mind also has the ability to understand its source, but that source is not yet another content of the mind. Rather, as Plotinus puts the matter, that center or source is intellect itself. For Plotinus, as for Plato, nous, intellect, is divine. What Socrates calls the mirror of the soul, god, is none other than intellect. And that is the knower in the truest sense.

To say that the true self is intellect, the eye of the soul, is possibly to arrive at another station of aporia. After all, what is intellect? If we say that intellect is god, then we ask, What is god? This chasing of entities in search of a primordial or theomorphic self does not initially yield many results, apart from aporia. One could argue that the *Alcibiades I* includes a reference to another aspect of the esoteric tradition associated with Platonism—the oral teachings hypothesis—in this very metaphor of the divine mirror, the eye of the soul, into which or, rather, into whom the student gazes.

To be sure, the Neoplatonists were also aware of the tradition that Tarrant (2005) has dubbed that of the "philosopher lover," as representing the importance of the master-disciple relationship in Platonism, a tradition that goes all the way back to the Hellenistic Academy of Polemo, according to Tarrant. Certainly this relationship, with its potential for transmitting doctrines outside the domain of the text or for illuminating the conventionally transmitted text, is also an important component of any esoteric reading of the Platonic dialogues. We have only to think of the *Seventh Letter* and the famous analogy of the sudden "light, as it were ... kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another," (*Letter VII* 341c9–d1) to appreciate how important the intimacy between teacher and student proved to the very early formation of an esoteric tradition of interpreting Plato. The extent that the contemplative realization of Platonist teaching was facilitated or remediated by means of this relationship is documented in the hagiographic biographies of the Platonist scholarchs up until the very last Athenian scholarch,

Damascius, who headed the Academy in the sixth century. In particular, the intimacy between Alcibiades and Socrates is worthy of attention. One question that Proclus raises concerns why Socrates has maintained silence for so long (*In Alc.* 56.6; αἴτιον τῆς τοῦ Σωκράτους σιγῆς). Proclus adduces a reference to ineffability of the divine presence, invoking the idea of the esoteric as tacit acknowledgement of divine presence, and says that Socrates “establishes himself in the silent rank of the gods” (*In Alc.* 56.13). That Socrates accompanies Alcibiades as his companion everywhere both speaks to Socrates as embodying divine providence and also, perhaps, to the philosophy of knowledge through presence. In other words, Socrates’s silent presence or even shadowing of Alcibiades plays a crucial dramatic role in the dialogue. It is the proximity that the dialogue emphasizes that fuels the Neoplatonist interpretation of seeing the dialogue as enacting the lower soul’s reversion to its higher cause, intellect.

Therefore, in this discussion, I emphasize the tradition of self-knowledge as divine knowledge, focusing on the ever-ripe potential of the Socratic figure as encountered in Plato’s texts to awaken the wisdom, latent in every reader, that is the subject of Socratic philosophy. As such, *Alcibiades I* occupies a crucial place, as we have seen, in that it represents an initiation into the philosophical curriculum by suggesting an orientation that is truly Socratic: namely, that the student must begin with his or her self. The higher guide that the student meets is his own true self, the essence of the self or even self of the self.

### Appendix: Suhrawardi on Knowledge by Presence

For this purpose, I ask the reader to accompany me on a journey to twelfth century Syria, to meet the martyred Platonist philosopher, Shihab al-Din Yahya ibn Habash ibn Amirak Abu ‘l-Futuh al-Suhrawardi, or Suhrawardi al-Maqtul. Born in 1154 in Iran and moving to Aleppo in 1183, he was executed in 1191 by Salah al-Din, like Socrates, on charges of corrupting the religion. Despite his early death at the tender age of 38, Suhrawardi’s output and influence were prodigious, as he is known as the founder of the Ishraqi (or Illuminationist) school of Islamic philosophy, which still has living branches today in Iran. Suhrawardi’s great Arabic work, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, or *Hikmat al Ishraq*, purports to be an exposition of what he calls, the science of lights (*‘ilm al anwar*), based on the intuition of the teacher and master of philosophy (the *dhawq imam al hokma wa rais*) Plato. In the author’s introduction to the treatise we are told, “Who ever wishes to learn only discursive philosophy, let him follow the method of the Peripatetics” (trans. Walbridge and Ziai [Suhrawardi 1999, 4]). Thus



Suhrawardi's topic in the treatise is the meaning of Platonic intuitive wisdom, or *Dhawq*, which he contrasts with Peripatetic philosophy, and specifically with the Aristotelian idea of essentialist definition.

For Suhrawardi, the fundamental difference between Platonist approaches to knowledge and Aristotelian methods lies in what he calls, "knowing by presence" (*huduri*). In invoking the idea of knowledge by presence, Suhrawardi primarily refers to self-knowledge and specifically a form of self-knowledge that is nonrepresentational. Self-knowledge does not refer to knowledge that one has about the self—such as its place in the universe, or knowledge of first person states, or of subjective states. Instead, Suhrawardi is interested in the way that knowledge by presence can discover the human soul's essence as that which knows itself; as such, this essence cannot be characterized by any other attributes. Suhrawardi founds his philosophical project on the nature of self as pure awareness, and only from that point constructs an epistemology and metaphysics.

In the introduction to his exposition of this method in the *Hikmat al Ishraq*, Suhrawardi refers us to another of his works, the *Intimations*, or *al Talwihat*, which he says treats of Peripatetic philosophy. There he recounts his struggle with the meaning of knowledge. Suhrawardi tells us that he had a dream or, rather, a vision in which Aristotle appeared to him, and Suhrawardi asked Aristotle, "What is knowledge?" (*Ma s'alat al 'ilm*). Aristotle answers: "consult yourself and it will be solved for you." Suhrawardi then asks Aristotle, "How is that?" and Aristotle replies:

When you apprehend your self, is your apprehension of your essence by your essence or by something else? If the latter, then you would either have another faculty or else an essence apprehending your essence, but either would result in an absurd regression. (Walbridge 2000, 225–6)

Suhrawardi recounts this vision as a key for understanding his epistemological principle, which is grounded entirely in the possibility or, rather, the inevitability of self-knowledge, and the attendant definition of the self as self-evident light, the light of the absolute, indeed, as a modality, at root one with the first light, which is god. Suhrawardi devotes 2.1 in his major metaphysical work, the *Hikmat al Ishraq*, to the topic of self-knowledge and self-definition. Let us glance briefly at the structure of the argument employed there. He begins with a definition of the self-evident:

Anything in existence that requires no definition or explanation is evident. Since there is nothing more evident than light, there is nothing less in need of definition. (trans. Walbridge and Ziai [Suhrawardi 1999, 76])

In section 114, Suhrawardi uses this definition of light as the self-evident to make the ontological point that whatever perceives its own essence is a pure light, and every pure light is evident to itself and apprehends its own essence. This theory of knowledge by way of self-evidence is closely related to the Neoplatonist idea of the soul's reversion on itself, as we find it in Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, proposition 16: "All that is capable of reverting upon itself has an existence separable from body."

By way of argument for his definition, Suhrawardi adduces evidence that "you are never unconscious of your essence" in the terms of an argument *per absurdum*." (1999, 80) Suppose you are able to be unconscious of your essence. In that case, your nature is not self-evident. But if it is not self-evident, then what will make the self evident? If something else makes the self evident, then that other is the self. There can be no pointing to awareness without that awareness being present to be aware of the pointing. Nothing else can know my nature if I am not aware of my nature, since that nature, as the self-evident, could never be self-evident to anything else. Thus, it is only to me that my nature, the self-evident, can be self-evident; only I can know that I know, or be aware that I am aware.

At the same time, there is no way to represent this awareness in terms of any attribute that it might possess—the nature of the self is simply awareness, with nothing else added. This, perhaps, is the shocking feature of Suhrawardi's definition of the self. He says that the self is pure light and has no other nature, no other states, no other properties. Why is it that there is no content for the self, other than awareness? Any content, any representation, attribute, or state that belonged to the self, of which the self could be aware, would no longer be that which is aware, but only what it is aware of. Thus Suhrawardi contrasts the *I* with the *It*:

A thing that exists in itself and is conscious of itself does not know itself through a representation of itself appearing in itself. This is because if, in knowing one's self, one were to make a representation of oneself, since this representation of his Inness (*ana iyyah*) could never be the reality of that Inness, it would be then such that that representation is it (*huwa*) in relation to the Inness and not I. It thus follows . . . that the apprehension of the reality of Inness would be exactly the apprehension of what is not I-ness. This is an absurdity. (115)

This key pointer that the self is that which is aware also carries the negative corollary, that the self can never be represented as anything, nor can it be anything at all other than that which apprehends its own essence:

If you examine this matter closely, you will find that that by which you are you is only a thing that apprehends its own essence—your *ana'iyatuh*. (116)

Here Suhrawardi employs an argument from the distinction between essence and accident. Were there something beyond consciousness or awareness, it would be unknown and would not belong to your essence, whose awareness is not superadded to it. Hence there is no other property in addition to your essence of which being evident could be a state.

Having accompanied the author to twelfth century Syria, the reader may perhaps return to *Alcibiades I* with more curiosity about what that question—“What is the self itself?”—connotes. Suhrawardi helps us to solve the problem of endless deferral when self and the divine become interchanged in the interpretation of *Alcibiades I*. Suhrawardi emphasizes what he calls “knowledge through presence.” And this presence, the presence of Socrates to Alcibiades is dramatized in the dialogue’s very narrative. The divine as present to the mind through the light of its own awareness—this is the soul tending that Socrates represents. Linguistically, we may be at a loss to fill in the terms of this equation with a distinct set of terms (god, intellect, self) that do not bring each other into a circle of obscurity. Yet *Alcibiades I* relies on or points to knowledge by presence, asking the reader to look with the eye of the mind. It dramatizes what Suhrawardi has called the self-certifying awareness whose essence is simply to know itself. This self, whose essence is to know itself, is the final reference to Plato’s question: Tell me, how can we determine the essence of the essence (auto to auto)?

## CHAPTER SIX

### LYSIS

#### The Aporetic Identity of the First Friend

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In this book and, in particular, in the two previous chapters, I have argued that virtue is self-knowledge. Yet at the same time, Socrates most often suggests that virtue is knowledge of the good. In what follows, we trace the links between these formulations, virtue as knowledge of the good and virtue as knowledge of the self, via an encounter with the first friend. I will argue that, for Socrates, knowledge of the good and knowledge of the self belong to one and the same knowledge. I want to build on the argument developed in the previous chapters, where we have been studying self-knowledge and the question of access to the self. We left off in the last chapter by noticing that knowledge of the self only occurs by virtue of self-presence, and cannot be likened to the search for an object of experience. Nevertheless, in addition to discussing self-knowledge, it is time to ask about the nature of the self that is known. After all, it makes little sense to say that self-knowledge is a philosophical imperative if nothing whatsoever can be said about the self. Therefore, we need to examine the scope of the self in the Socratic dialogues, beginning with the *Lysis*. What is meant by self? Is the self equivalent to the modern idea of the ego? Is the self the individual embodied person? Already in the *Alcibiades I*, we saw that self-knowledge could be associated with divine knowledge, or that the self itself, with its *auto* language, could be associated with a universal, transpersonal self. Renaud and Tarrant (2016) write that

it does seem that we are supposed to envisage “the self itself” (if that is how we should translate it) as something superior to each individual self and perhaps also to the collection of individual selves. . . . Since *Alcibiades* is about to be invited to examine his own mind via the mind of another it does indeed seem that there would have to be something linking all mind together in such a fashion that knowing one mind can open up the knowledge of another. (58, with omissions)

We are investigating this possibility, then, in the *Lysis*: that there is some larger sense of self at stake in Plato's valorization of self-knowledge through the figure of Socrates.

One text that plays a central role as evidence for the alleged egoism of Socrates is *Lysis* 215–22, where Socrates argues for the teleological structure of all human desire (Penner and Rowe 2005, 243–45). At stake is the identity of the terminal point of desire, that for the sake of which, Socrates argues, one ultimately does everything that she or he does. The identity of this first friend, as Socrates calls it, is a piece of information left crucially missing in our text:

Ἄρ' οὖν οὐκ ἀνάγκη ἀπειπεῖν ἡμᾶς οὕτως ἰόντας ἢ ἀφικέσθαι ἐπὶ τινα ἀρχήν, ἢ οὐκέτ' ἐπανοίσει ἐπ' ἄλλο φίλον, ἀλλ' ἤξει ἐπ' ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἐστὶν πρῶτον φίλον, οὗ ἔνεκα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα φαμὲν πάντα φίλαεῖναι; Ἀνάγκη.

Therefore, must we refute the possibility that we will go on in this way, or will we instead arrive at a first principle, which one can no longer refer to another friend, but rather, this first principle will reach back to that which is a first friend, that for the sake of which we say that all the others are friends as well? (219e5–d2)

Socrates does not tell us what this first friend is, although he makes statements about it. For example, he tells us that it is like a beloved son, whose father esteems him before all else. In that case, the instruments a father uses to preserve his son's health only acquire value insofar as they contribute to the end of preserving his son: ἔνεκα τοῦ τὸν υἱὸν περὶ παντὸς ἡγεῖσθαι ἄρα καὶ ἄλλο τι ἂν περὶ πολλοῦ ποιοῖτο (219d9–e1; For the sake of his supreme regard for his son, would he value also something else?).

In that same passage in the *Lysis*, Socrates also says that the first friend is a terminal point “unlike all the other things we said were friends for the sake of another” (220d9–e1; Τὸ ἄρα φίλον ἡμῖν ἐκεῖνο, εἰς ὃ ἐτελευτα πάντα τὰ ἄλλα— ἔνεκα ἐτέρου φίλου φίλα ἔφαμεν εἶναι ἐκεῖνα—οὐδὲν [δὲ] τοῦτοις ἔοικεν). This primary friend, then, which is loved, valued, and desired for its own sake also makes all other things desirable; they could not be desirable absent this primary friend. But what could this primary friend be, which makes all other things desirable through its presence? Again, Plato does not tell us, but there are at least two ready to hand candidates.

It could be that we do all we do for the sake of happiness, a possibility that is certainly strongly signaled in the text, though Socrates does not identify the primary friend as happiness. But for example, in Socrates's conversation with

Lysis, he does illustrate the teleology of Lysis's parents' desires as culminating in their desire to make Lysis "as happy as possible": οὐκοῦν βούλονται ἄν σε ὡς εὐδαιμονέστατον εἶναι (207d9).<sup>1</sup>

Again, we might locate this supreme source of value in that which makes a person happy, using this same passage. In this case, we could describe the first friend as "the good," specifying that this term is just equivalent to whatever makes one "as happy as possible."<sup>2</sup> However, this interpretation does not take into account any of the specific information conveyed by Plato's use of the word *philos*. At the outset, it would seem remiss to ignore the valences of this word, a word that conveys precisely the idea of well-wishing,<sup>3</sup> love for, and affection towards, in a dialogue which is precisely about friendship. In what follows, then, I investigate the "first friend" of the *Lysis* passage insofar as the collocation is informed by the semantic associations of the word *philos* that ramify in terms of kinship and intimacy, and in terms of friendship and benefaction. It will be important to preserve the various associations of the word *philos* which are at play in this part of the dialogue.<sup>4</sup>

### A First Skirmish over the First Friend

In the *Lysis*, Socrates is searching for the definition of friendship. The context for this discussion is both erotic and familial at once. The dialogue surveys a number of causes for the condition of friendship as well as qualifications for the status of being a friend. Roughly, the dialectical interchange revolves around competing requirements for friendship that pertain to issues of utility, beneficence, and desire. Hippothales's desire for Lysis is the result of his recognizing the youth's good qualities, but this very recognition raises anxiety about Hippothales's own qualifications to win from the youth a reciprocal affection. Moreover, Lysis is the object not just of Hippothales's attentions, but of course shares a number of friendly relationships with peers as well as family members who in a sense outrank Lysis himself. All of these, that is, parents, peers, and lovers, are friends, but what secures their friendship? After surveying a number of candidates for the position of the chief cause of friendship, Socrates homes in on one candidate, namely, the good. Is it one's goodness that allows him to become friends with another?

"What about this, though? Isn't a good person, insofar as he is good, sufficient to himself?"

"Yes"

“And a self-sufficient person has no need of anything, just because of his self-sufficiency?”

“How could he?” (215a2–9; trans. Penner and Rowe [2005, 699])

A couple of brief comments about this text are in order. First, the Greek word that is translated as “sufficient” is *ικανός*. Socrates glosses the meaning of this word as “lacking in nothing, qua sufficient” (‘Ο δέ γε *ικανός* οὐδενὸς δεόμενος κατὰ τὴν *ικανότητα*). In *Lysis* 215a9, then, the nature of the good is all-inclusive; were it to lack something, it would not be self-sufficient. Were it not all-inclusive, it would not qualify as “good.” What Socrates says here about the good is consistent with several other Platonic texts, the most important of which is *Philebus* 67a6, where to be good is to be an end in itself or to be self-sufficient: “[Reason and pleasure] fell short of self-sufficiency (*autarkeias*) and the quality of being adequate (*hikanou*) and perfect (*teleiou*)?” (trans. Hackforth [Plato 1972, 141]). These ways of getting at the nature of the good all describe the good as inclusive, perfect, without need, independent. Next, we should notice that four words reverberate throughout this section of the *Lysis*: namely, *agathos* (good), *philos* (a friend), *oikeios* (native, belonging), and *homoios* (the same or similar). Each of these may be defined in terms of the others, as the following passages illustrate:

ὦ παῖδες, ἢ ἐρᾶ, οὐκ ἄν ποτε ἐπεθύμει οὐδὲ ἤρα οὐδὲ ἐφίλει,  
εἰ μὴ οικειὸς πῆ τῷ ἐρωμένῳ ἐτύγχανεν ὧν ἢ κατὰ τὴν  
ψυχὴν ἢ κατὰ τι τῆς ψυχῆς ἦθος ἢ τρόπους ἢ εἶδος

And if one person desires another, my boys, or loves him passionately, he would not desire him or love him passionately or as a friend unless he somehow belonged to his beloved either in his soul or in some characteristic, habit, or aspect of his soul. (222a1–5)

Here, the requisite for being one’s *philos* (friend) is being *oikeios*, that is, belonging intrinsically to another. At 210d2, Plato again suggests associations between being *philos*, *oikeios*, and *agathos*: πάντες σοι φίλοι καὶ πάντες σοι οικεῖοι ἔσονται—χρήσιμος γὰρ καὶ ἀγαθὸς ἔσῃ (For all will be your friends and all will be your relations, since you will prove useful and good). Here the series of associations is extended. What is *philos* is again *oikeios*, and this is so because the *philos* is good. Now we are beginning to see the relationship between the good qua inclusive, self-sufficient, excluding nothing, and the *oikeion*. If the good excludes nothing, then everything will in some way belong to it.<sup>5</sup>

In the following text, Plato emphasizes that friendship aims at and embraces that which is native to the person: Τοῦ οἰκείου δῆ, ὡς ἔοικεν, ὃ τε ἔρως καὶ ἡ φιλία καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία τυγχάνει οὔσα, ὡς φαίνεται (221e3; Then is it, as it seems, that eros and friendship and desire are actually of what is native to one?). Other texts (221e6, 222a5)<sup>6,7</sup> continue to suggest these same associations between the *philon*, the *oikeion*, and the *agathon*. At 222b4 and 222b6 the equations are extended to include a consideration of what constitutes the *oikeion*: Does it consist in being similar, in sharing similar qualities? Εἰ μὲν τι τὸ οἰκεῖον τοῦ ὁμοίου διαφέρει (222b4; Does that which is native differ in any way from that which is the same?); and εἰ δὲ ταῦτόν τυγχάνει ὄν ὁμοίον τε καὶ οἰκεῖον (222b6; If the similar and native to are actually the same thing ...).

We could construct a table listing some of these epithets to try to get a more precise sense of the series of equivalencies in the *Lysis*.

friend, dear to	<i>philos</i>
relative, one's own	<i>oikeios</i>
of like kind, akin to	<i>homoios</i>
sufficient	<i>hikanos</i>

The equations are meant to illustrate, via a kind of *figura etymologica* that extends throughout the dialogue, some of the parameters of friendship. *Kinship* and *sharing the same nature as* signal one dimension of friendship, the aspect that pertains to belonging together by nature. Then again, *goodness* and *sufficiency* signal the object of love as having not just the same nature as the lover, but having a certain kind of nature: beneficial. As the texts in the notes suggest, Socrates says that to be *philos* is to be both good and *oikeios*, native to, or intimately related to others. Hence, owing to the nature of the good, which is self-sufficient and lacking in nothing (215a9), and therefore does not desire something else as the good, Socrates and the virtuous person in general discover that their friend must be “integral,” to use an expression borrowed from Margaret Graver (2007, 47–48).<sup>8</sup> The good belongs, if it does belong, to one intrinsically; the good, the first friend, is not something outside of the self; it is not adventitious.

Now at this point in the argument, I am only suggesting a line of interpretation for *Lysis* 215a6, which will have implications for understanding *Lysis* 216–221, a passage that is often adduced to support the thesis of psychological eudaimonism. (I shall have more to say about the second passage, which



concerns the “first friend,” below.) What I say here is meant only to introduce a general approach to the topic of self-knowledge and how it figures into Socratic ethics. Hence, let me just review one additional implication from what Socrates says about the good and the *oikeion* (what is one’s own).

If everyone desires the good, a premise that one may easily supply from the frequent deployment of the eudaimonist axiom throughout the Socratic dialogues (cf. *Prt.* 358d1; *Euthyd.* 127e4; *Meno* 77e) then there is already a paradoxical structure to this desire. If there is that which one does desire, and that object is good, then it is *oikeion*, integral, not adventitious for that very person. But if it is *oikeion*, integral, native, then this good belongs to the lover, and yet the lover simultaneously somehow lacks this good, or else would not desire it. At *Symposium* 201e3–5 we learn that “anyone who has a desire desires what is not at hand and not present, what he does not have, and what he is not and that of which he is in need” (trans. Nehamas and Woodruff [Plato 1997e, 481]). Yet were it (the good) not native to me, then I could not need it in this way, could not lack the good in this way. When it comes to anything that is not native to me, not genuinely my own or *oikeion*, then this thing, whatever it is, would simply be foreign, an accretion, and nothing that I could stand in need of. In our text, the example of the body that has been deprived of its native health makes this criterion explicit. As we saw, the language of *Lysis* 222a also specifies this aspect of the good qua locus of desire, where Socrates says, by way of conclusion, “and if one person desires another, my boys, or loves him passionately, he would not desire him or love him passionately, or as a friend unless somehow he belonged to him.”

The reader will notice that I have been interpreting a passage that treats individuals and their relationships with other individuals, as in the previous sentence, where Socrates speaks of one person desiring another person. Moreover, in the larger context of the dialogue, Socrates is coaching Hippothales about how to win *Lysis*, and so at *Lysis* 215a6 Socrates is talking explicitly about a good person. Indeed, if, as seems likely, Aristotle’s own discussions of (human, personal) friendship and self-sufficiency (*Eth. Nic.*, bks. 8–9; cf. Penner and Rowe 2005, 312–21) are informed by this passage in the *Lysis*, why then am I taking the liberty of treating this text as a discussion about the good *absolutum*?<sup>9</sup> Isn’t Socrates simply talking about the important question of why the good person or indeed any person has need of friends? Not exactly, since the passage goes on to refer to the friend in abstract terms: for example, at 220b1–2, Socrates refers to the “first friend” in the neuter gender: φίλον δὲ τῷ ὄντι κινδυνεύει ἐκεῖνο αὐτὸ εἶναι, εἰς ὃ πᾶσαι αὐτὰι αἰ λεγόμεναι φιλίαι τελευτῶσιν (The real friend is most likely that in which all of these so-called friendships terminate?).

Throughout the discussion, Socrates closely equates the *philon* with the *agathon*, using the neuter adjectives. Here he is speaking generally of the good: τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐστὶν φίλον; (220b7; Then the good is dear?). Socrates, while initiating a conversation with reference to individuals and what are evidently ordinary human relationships, ranges much more widely and abstractly: What is the good that is the friend of the neither good nor bad? Is it utility? Indeed is the good considered as the final end of all human action, the purely human good, that is, happiness? Surely this answer, that the first friend is happiness, begs the question of what it is that is good about this human good? Moreover, is what is good confined to what is human? So much for a first skirmish over the first friend.

### The Aporetic Nature of the First Friend

So far, I hope to have established this much: When Socrates posits the first friend at *Lysis* 216 as the only thing that is loved in itself, its actual nature remains open, subject to interrogation at this point in the text. To insist that this text is unambiguous in its documentation of Socratic egoism is, for this reason alone, highly suspect. If it is correct to read the *Lysis* with the understanding that in this text, Plato truly means that that at which all actions aim, and the only thing that is choice worthy for itself, is the individual's happiness, to which all other ends are subordinate, then of course egoistic eudaimonism will be an ethical theory that is consistent with the axiology deployed in the *Lysis*. On the other hand, if the text presents scant evidence that what Socrates refers to by the first friend is one's own happiness, then one cannot assume this reading of the *proton philon* based on a general belief in egoistic eudaimonism as the unique philosophical discovery of Socrates.

Socrates introduces the first friend by illustrating the necessity of a final end. We are in search of the good because of some evil; being ourselves neither good nor bad, we wish to improve our condition. But what we get by pursuing this method is again something that is neither good nor bad. For example, we befriend the doctor to pursue health. Illness here is an evil and health will be the good. But health itself is in its own right neither good nor bad. Hence, as Socrates makes clear again, it cannot be that we are searching for some state of affairs that will be in itself good. There is no state of affairs like this; all states of affairs are neither good nor bad, even though we can sometimes desire them as relative goods, that is, relative to another that is itself relatively bad.<sup>10</sup>

In order to understand what the first friend means, then, we have to take into account the arguments that lead up to it. From 215b5, we learn that the

friend must be an object of love. But he who loves something desires it because he is in want of it (215b1–3). This notion of want should be construed as the condition of being deprived of what originally or inherently belongs to the person or thing that stands in want, as the example of the ailing body deprived of its native health (215d–e) makes clear. Socrates also stipulates that lack can only be identified in cases where there has been a deprivation of what originally belonged to one:

“A thing desires what it is deficient in. Right?” “Yes.” “And the deficient is a friend to that in which it is deficient.” “I think so.” “And it becomes deficient where something is taken away from it.” “How couldn’t it be?” “Then it is what belongs to oneself...” (221e1–8)

Thus the primary friend will be whatever is most truly one’s own. But, as the argument proceeds to show, this primary dear thing must be desirable on account of itself, not simply relative to a state of deprivation, for then it would not be primarily dear, but only relatively so. Hence some such epithet as the good must be awarded to it. Since all desires can be expressed in terms of desire for this good, it makes sense to say that nothing will be loved for its own sake, except this primary dear thing (219–20). But we have just seen that the primary dear thing is what is most one’s own by its very nature.

Thus, the person who desires anyone or anything will have been deprived of his native goodness through lacking that same something. Here the problem is one of separation, of *lysis*. What deprives someone of her native goodness? And what Socrates says results in a paradox: What we love, we lack. But what we lack is native to us. But what is native to us, we cannot lack. And so, we must ask this question: How does the *lysis*, the separation of what is native to me from myself, ever arise? If we view this question in Socratic terms, then we can understand this problem in the terms of Socratic intellectualism. How is it that I lack what is native to me? For if it is not native to me, then I cannot lack it. I must be unaware that it is present—it surely cannot be the case that it is not present. My ignorance then is of this primary friend. But we have just seen that this good is inherent in me—we necessarily belong together (222a1–4; If one person desires another, my boys, or loves him passionately, he would not desire him or love him passionately or as a friend unless he somehow belonged to his beloved). Hence, in being ignorant of what this good is, my native condition, I am ignorant of myself. In not knowing that it is present to me, I fail to know myself. Now it could be that someone can help me to attain knowledge of the good or remind me of who I am, of the fact that this good belongs to me and, so, that I am actually not deprived of it. This person, then, will be a friend in a

secondary sense. She will be able to remind me that I cannot find the good outside of myself. Therefore, the friend will teach me to love what is native to me, that is, myself. But this seems odd, since of course I cannot lack myself. Therefore I cannot desire myself. I can only desire another. And yet, if I desire another, that which excludes me, this kind of desire, although all desire is for the good, won't satisfy my desire. Hence this friend in the secondary sense will teach me, not to love myself, but to know myself. The *Alcibiades I* with its image of the two eyes, the eye that gazes into another eye, recalls this function of befriending another, to assist him in self-knowledge. This understanding of the friend, as someone who helps to cultivate self-knowledge in another, assisting him to do what he cannot easily do on his own, is the reading that Aristotle (or whoever the author of the *Magna Moralia* happens to be) adopts, in what seems to be an engagement with the *Lysis* as well as *Alcibiades I*:

Just as when wishing to behold our own faces we have seen them by looking upon a mirror, whenever we wish to know our own characters and personalities, we can recognize them by looking upon a friend, since the friend is, as we say, our second self. If, therefore, it be pleasant to know oneself, and this knowledge is impossible without another who is a friend, it follows that the self-sufficient man will need friendship to recognize what manner of man he is. (*Mag. mor.* 1213a7–37)

### Friends Share All Things Alike

Before proceeding further it will be helpful to recall that the *Lysis* appears to offer a unifying explanation for the nature of all friendship as rooted in utility. Rudebusch (2006) has shown that there is a strong correspondence between Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.2.52–53 and the *Lysis* in this respect; Xenophon indicates that it was actually Socrates's teaching on the nature of friendship and its basis in utility that rendered him deeply suspicious in the community:

Of friends too he said that their goodwill was worthless, unless they could combine with it some power to help one: only those deserved honor who knew what was the right thing to do, and could explain it . . .

Now I know that he did use this language about fathers, relations and friends. (*Mem.* 1.2.52–53)

At *Lysis* 210b–d, Socrates's interlocutor is a teenager named Lysis. Socrates wants to know whether or not his parents love him and whether or not they

allow him to do what he wishes. Lysis replies that it is because his parents love him that they do not allow him to do what he wishes. Socrates shows that it is only in matters in which Lysis can be expected to have sufficient experience—lyre playing, writing, and the like, but not chariot driving or weaving—that his parents entrust him with their affairs. When Lysis grows up, the Athenians will entrust their affairs to his expertise. Socrates is arguing from a general principle that Rudebusch (2006, 190) has described as the “causal role” of wisdom in creating associations between people who rely on another’s expertise. As a result of one’s knowledge about a given subject matter, everyone who lacks this wisdom on her own will become dependents and belong to the person who demonstrates this kind of wisdom.

It is worth dwelling on this conception of friendship rooted in dependency that expertise is supposed to foster. The notion of ruling expertise is familiar from dialogues with political associations; we are more likely to accede to this notion of expert governance in the case of political rulers who are qualified, either by knowledge of the good, or in ordinary democracies, by knowledge of civic practice. Yet we should pause before we agree with some commentators<sup>11</sup> that what Socrates explores aporetically at 210 he also endorses as a doctrine. In the first place, to cite Xenophon as a reliable witness to Socrates’s endorsement of the argument at 210 is to ignore the radical disagreement that Plato and Xenophon have over the goals of Socratic conversation. Xenophon says that the burden of Socrates’s moral expertise is the attempt to turn men into gentlemen, and in the process attracts a number of followers, who thus are no longer willing to grant authority to other experts, as they consider Socrates their teacher (*Mem.*1.2). But this is exactly what Socrates denies in the *Apology*: “If you have heard from anyone that I undertake to teach anyone . . . that is not true either” (19d5; trans. Grube [Plato 1997a, 23]). A utopia, a world where human needs are met by a cadre of experts who can “guarantee” happiness because they possess the necessary skills, is the underlying model for the utilitarian form of friendship that, Socrates insinuates early in the dialogue, but wrongly, as it turns out, is the basis of all friendship (210);<sup>12</sup> it is also what Aristotle describes as utility love.

But Plato’s Socrates does not have any expertise to share, nor does he offer outright practical advice, such that anyone could become his needy dependent, while Xenophon’s Socrates above all emphasizes the value of utility, *ophelēia*. It is with the utilitarian sense of virtue in mind that Xenophon’s entire apologetic task in the *Memorabilia* is concerned; Xenophon tells us that, “Socrates was helpful in every activity and in every way.”<sup>13</sup> By contrast, Plato’s Socrates insists that “if any of [my interlocutors] turns out to be good or not, I cannot justly

bear responsibility” (*Ap.* 33b3).<sup>14</sup> As Socrates puts it in the *Symposium*, “If only wisdom were like water which always flows from a full cup into an empty one when we connect them with a piece of yarn. If wisdom were that way too, I value the place beside you very much indeed; for I think I will be filled from you with wisdom of great beauty” (17d4–e2).

Rudebusch’s interpretation of the *Lysis* is commendable for its analysis of differently structured kinds of friendship: that is, of beneficent, giving love, the kind that we attribute for example to Socrates and his associations with his interlocutors; and of needy, desirous love, the kind that we attribute for example to his interlocutors’ associations with Socrates, who has what they need. The one kind of love that Rudebusch rules out is exactly the kind of love that Aristotle privileges in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: the equality love between two good persons, each of whom functions as another self for his friend. But if we look closely at the structure of the Socratic friendship explored in the *Lysis*, it will be clear that Socrates is not in a superior position vis-à-vis wisdom; he actually lacks what the others need.<sup>15</sup> He is not good and he is not self-sufficient. Hence, he is more like his interlocutors with respect to his lack of wisdom. If so, then what accounts for the friendship between them, or are they indeed friends? As Socrates puts the questions:

For if neither the beloved nor the lover nor the similar nor the dissimilar nor the good nor relatives nor any of the other examples we have gone through, if none of these is a friend, then I have nothing else to say. (222e5)

Precisely in this apparent inequality is the play of eros, or the seduction of wisdom, wherein Socrates approaches another person and attempts to entice him through an elaborate courtship ritual that involves humbling the youth and removing his arrogance. Socrates explicitly formulates this seductive technique at *Lysis* 210e2, when he instructs Hippothales on the way to capture Lysis: “This is how you should talk to your boyfriends, Hippothales, making them humble and drawing in their sails, instead of swelling them up and spoiling them, as you do” (210e2–5).

For his part in this seduction, Socrates bestows a share of his own ignorance on his beloved, and it is in this sense that the match, initially unequal, turns out to be between equals. In fact, both of them are equally ignorant, whereas Socrates is better off in recognizing this ignorance. Yet out of goodwill he shares this poverty and tries to restore the equal footing of the interlocutor. This relative lack of superiority is evidenced most clearly in the *Symposium*, when

Socrates compares his rank to that of Alcibiades, on the very night that Alcibiades attempts to seduce him, just because he thinks, mistakenly, that Socrates can give him the virtue he needs:

Alcibiades, my friend, you have indeed an elevated aim if what you say is true, and if there really is in me any power by which you may become better; truly you must see in me some rare beauty of a kind infinitely higher than any which I see in you. And therefore, if you mean to share with me and to exchange beauty for beauty, you will have greatly the advantage of me; you will gain true beauty in return for appearance—like Diomedes, gold in exchange for brass. But look again, sweet friend, and see whether you are not deceived in me. (218e1–9)

Notwithstanding the inequality that tradition ascribed to the *erastes-eromenos* couple, who are supposed to be different in age, power, resources, beauty, and, perhaps above all, eros itself, Socratic friendship, including erotic friendship, is necessarily between equals for the reason that “friends share all in common.” Socrates begins his interrogation of friendship in the *Lysis* with this supposition.<sup>16</sup> Even more than the erotic relationship, based as it is on the artifice of creating a desire for virtue in another, Plato frames Socrates’s activity of philosophizing with another, as such, in terms of a friendship in which members share genuine goods and so create an association of equality. In saying that Socratic friendship obtains between equals, I mean to suggest that Socrates aims at a restoration of equality in his interlocutor by depriving him of falsehood, arousing a desire for wisdom, and developing self-knowledge in him. Moreover, this distribution of the good of philosophy, this sharing of the desire for wisdom, is, according to Socrates in the *Apology*, among the greatest goods that one can share with another (29d–30a). Of course, as philosophy consists in the love of wisdom precisely because Socrates recognizes that he lacks wisdom, then this conversion itself, as we saw above, is a sharing of poverty. Thus Socrates restores his conversational partner to equality by depriving him of the knowledge he thought he had. With this understanding that Socratic friendship is based neither on giving or receiving knowledge or wisdom, that it holds between two equally ignorant parties, and that, in any case, whatever wisdom Socrates possesses cannot be transmitted to another, we can once more return to the puzzles over the causes and conditions of friendship explored in the so-called great passage of the *Lysis*. We shall see that the conditions that apply to the first friend, that it be native to one, that one lack this primary friend in order to desire it, and that it be good for its own sake, now allow us to make greater sense of the method

by means of which Socrates, although he cannot transmit his wisdom and is no teacher, nevertheless shares this wisdom.

So let us now briefly review what we have uncovered about friendship in the *Lysis*: He who loves something desires it because he is in want of it (215b1–3). This notion of want should be construed as the condition of being deprived of what originally or inherently belongs to the person or thing that stands in want (221e). Yet what could be more truly one's own than one's very self? Textual evidence supports this interpretation of the first friend as the self, since Socrates introduces the concept at 214d by stating that the first requisite for being a friend is the condition of a thing's being "the same as itself." Therefore only the self is the friend to the self, although, in a secondary sense, the friend will be he who helps me to know myself. Self-ignorance is what causes the *lysis*, the distance of self from self, the deprivation of one's native good, and the lack of what inherently belongs to oneself. This solution, that the friend will remind his friend to know himself, explains the nature of Socratic friendship and the context of Socratic conversation: Socrates acts a friend in the secondary sense not by providing the good for or to someone who lacks it, or by pursuing another as the object of eros, but only by pointing out a direction in which this good can be sought. Only by knowing oneself can one recover the good that one apparently lacks, but actually cannot lack. For if the good were completely other, then, of course, there would be no deprivation, since if the good is utterly outside of oneself, then it can never be one's own.

With this initial skeletal outline of the terms of Socratic conversation in place, we can ask if it is possible for friends to love each other for their own sakes, thus addressing directly the complaint against Socratic eros that it is rather narcissistic in structure and once more testing the limits of egoism. In fact, a friend can love another friend as his or her very self, since what he or she loves is dear and what is most dear is the self. The existence of genuine friendship might be taken as evidence that two selves can be or become one self. Of course, this would only be true of a self that constitutes something like a larger self for all individual selves.<sup>17</sup> This notion of a "true self," a transpersonal self or impersonal self, while it seems to be a possible explanation for the notion of the primary dear thing in the *Lysis*, has no metaphysical support in this "transitional" dialogue.<sup>18</sup> But later Hellenistic ethics affirms that the association of persons who will the good constitutes not only the cosmopolis, the community of sages and gods who alike bear within themselves the apospasmata of divine reason, but that this cosmos is actually an organic unity, an organism directed toward its own fulfillment. The Hellenistic construct, then, of an association of



parts of a larger rational self, that is, Zeus, who by virtue of their participation in this larger self constitute a community of friends, is one model that might be anticipated in the Socratic idea of friendship.<sup>19</sup> The Stoic idea of assimilation of other to self, or *oikeiosis*, viewed as a practice that involves expanding the circle of self-identity, can also be represented by the philosophical friendship sketched in Plato's *Lysis*. Here, Socrates would not so much be advocating a theory of a transcendent self, but would rather be asking the interlocutor to look at friendship, love, and passionate desire in terms that would expand his notion of self beyond the realm of egoism, and so to see that loving another, that is genuine friendship, involves loving another as oneself. The self-sameness here need not refer to an impersonal "I," but instead could indicate that in cases of genuine friendship, where someone is loved for his own sake, the relationship to self is the same as relationship to another.<sup>20</sup>

In this sense, the friend is another I.<sup>21</sup> Now, if someone else can be another I, can be such that his happiness matters to me for its own sake, then this raises the question of what it is that I love when I do love myself: that is, whether it is personal. What is it about myself that is lovable?<sup>22</sup> Since what is primarily dear is the self (and again, were it not so, then this good would not be native, one's own), and the self, insofar as it loves the other, is loving what is included within the self (otherwise, this self will, again, be deficient and hence no longer good), then self loves other as self, which it loves for its own sake. Hence, if I love you, then I love you also for your own sake. Second, it is hard to see how I could love you at all unless I loved you as my very self, since what I love is dear and what is most dear is myself. If your self and my self are one self it follows that I can only love you for your own sake.

One aside here will help focus this discussion. In the *Lysis*, Plato seems to posit that genuine friendship is founded on two distinct grounds. The first ground is goodness, as all desire is for the good (215). The second ground is that the friend is one's own, or propriety. Of course, I have been arguing that the good and the self are not separate; at the very least, the good must include the self or the good would not be complete. At the same time, the good must be native to me, or I would not lack it. However, these grounds converge in the *Lysis*, as the good is independently glossed as what is always one's own (222b8–c1; "Shall we ... lay it down that the good belongs to everyone and the bad is alien?"). In a similar way, we can see that Aristotle's discussion of friendship is profoundly informed by just this interplay between the grounds of friendship consisting, on the one side, in virtue and, on the other, in the quality of being one's own. At 222b6 in the *Lysis*, Plato raises the question that we have been

studying in this chapter: Is being “like” (homoion) the same or different from being “one’s own” (oikeion)?

εἰδὲ ταῦτόν τυγχάνει ὄν ὁμοίον τε καὶ οἰκείον, οὐ ῥάδιον ἀποβαλεῖν  
τὸν πρόσθεν λόγον, ὡς οὐ τὸ ὁμοίον τῷ ὁμοίῳ κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα  
ἄχρηστον (ADD 226b6-b8)

If in fact being like and being one’s own are really the same thing, it will not be easy to dismiss the previous argument and show that, after all, the like is not useless to like by virtue of their likeness.

It is not at all clear if Aristotle, in what seems to be a reply to *Lysis* 222b, equates similarity with belonging, since of course, virtuous friendship arises out of the similar characters between virtuous friends (*Eth. Nic.* 8.3, 8.4). For example, at *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.9.1170a, Aristotle writes that “being one’s own is one way in which things can be pleasant” (trans. Rowe [Aristotle 2002, 207]).

Yet we have seen above that the good cannot reciprocate love. The good fails to lack the other, and, hence, cannot desire the other. Indeed, the good does not desire the other, for there is nothing outside of the good; if there were something outside of the good, then the good would by definition be incomplete. This original state is all-inclusive; if anything is excluded, to that extent it is not good. Therefore, the good benefits all things, but does so, one could say, by giving them themselves. And it is in this sense that the virtuous person or virtuous activity functions to deliver people to themselves.<sup>23</sup> The good person in general and Socrates in particular, by befriending others, cannot render them better than they originally are, impart a good that they lack, or, in this sense, be responsible for whether or not they are good. Instead, the most that Socrates can do is point his friend in the direction that becomes the entryway for her actual attainment of the good. This doorway, as we have seen, is self-knowledge and the good that she gains thereby is not something to which she can attain because the good by nature is not adventitious.

### Conclusion: *Lysis* 215a9 and Unitarian Readings of the Socratic Dialogues

In a stimulating essay, Rowe (2007) attempts to demonstrate the cogency of reading the *Republic’s* excursus on the form of the good in the terms of egoistic eudaimonism. The strategy he pursues is partly based on an acceptance of Kahn’s (1996) chronological ordering of the dialogues into groups one

(*Apology, Charmides, Crito, Euthydemus, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Hippias Major, Ion, Laches, Lysis, Menexenus, Meno, Phaedo, Protagoras, Symposium*), two (*Phaedrus, Republic, Parmenides, Theaetetus*), and three (*Sophist, Statesman, Laws*), a grouping that diverges from what Rowe deems an aberrant Anglo-American tradition of separating off the “Socratic” dialogues as early from the middle Platonic dialogues. In adducing Kahn’s grouping, Rowe suggests that the Socratic understanding of the good as teleologically determined (all that we do is for the sake of happiness, and hence the good means simply this, the human good, that is, the happiness of the individual) can extend to the form of the good adumbrated in Plato’s *Republic*. Rowe’s idea is that if one refuses the developmentalist hypothesis that separates the Socratic and the non-Socratic, why then suppose that there is a Platonic impersonal good, a good that is not the good of a particular individual, in contrast with Socratic happiness, which means, precisely, (again, according to Rowe 2007) my happiness or your happiness? Penner’s (2007a; 2007b) two essays in the same volume as Rowe’s seek to establish the premise that the form of the good just means the form of benefit; for Penner, once we see this, it will be easy to perceive the incoherence of the idea of the impersonal good. We will always want to ask, when using the word *good*, “Whose good?” and this is to say that the good always benefits someone.

At *Charmides* 173d5 Socrates, having elaborated a dream according to which all of the branches of human activity are ruled by their given technai, says, “Whether acting scientifically would make us fare well and be happy, this we have yet to learn.” Aristotle of course famously responds to this puzzle with his criticism of the form of the good in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “It is hard, too, to see how a weaver or a carpenter will be benefited in regard to his own craft by knowing this ‘good itself,’ or how someone who has viewed the Form itself will be more of a doctor or more of a general” (1.6.1096b32–1097a13; trans. Ross with revisions by Barney [2007, 291]). This question whether the good is always and everywhere someone’s good and never an “impersonal good,” either in the aporetic dialogues or in the constructive dialogues,<sup>24</sup> is obviously answered by Aristotle in the affirmative. For him, the problem with the (Platonic) form of the good is that it is of no use: “For a doctor seems not even to study health in this way, but the health of this man, or perhaps rather the health of this man; for it is individuals that he is healing.” (1.6.1097a13–15) Yet, even if one could argue that the good—that is, the absolute good, as opposed to the (merely) human good (cf. Ferber 2002; Barney 2007) is distinguished in, for example, passages like *Republic* 509b9, or is implied in passages like *Philebus* 64e–65a, where the good is referenced by means of three properties—beauty, reality, and proportion—to argue for a specifically Socratic location for the impersonal conception of the

good might seem a stretch. How Socrates could be looking at or for a good that is good in itself without reference to an individual for whom it is good, seems highly problematic, at least for most interpreters. As Rowe (2007) puts it:

The “form of the good” apparently needs to be (virtually identical with) our good; the thing we always seemed to be talking about in the “Socratic” dialogues (so called)... It is this reference to what we all desire and go for, so far as we can—together with references to usefulness and benefit—that is what finally seems to tie the present *Republic* context to those many contexts in the “Socratic dialogues” in which the great man, in talking about the good and the bad, seems for all the world to be talking about what will benefit and harm us, and so make us either happy or unhappy. (145)

With these questions in place, we can now turn to consider *Lysis* 215–222. For one thing, let us once more notice the language of *Lysis* 215, which speaks only of a good person; this good person, we are told, will be utterly self-sufficient. There is no mention of a good in itself, and so, at first glance, it looks like what we are dealing with here and throughout this section of the *Lysis* is purely the human good. But, in the first place, it is clear from the later discussion that what Socrates is talking about is not just good persons, but goods in general and even the good in general; he freely substitutes “the good” for “the good person,” as in 222b8–c1: “Shall we . . . lay it down that the good belongs to everyone and the bad is alien?” In addition, it is standard for Plato to refer to what is good as what is self-sufficient, lacking nothing, complete, independent, as for example at *Philebus* 67a7, where to be good is to be an end in itself or to be self-sufficient: “[Reason and pleasure] fell short of self-sufficiency [*autarkeias*] and the quality of being sufficient [*hikanou*] and perfect [*teleiou*]”; the world-god (*Ti*. 33d2) is also “self-sufficient” qua good; and, in the spurious *Axiomata*, *autarkeia* is (defined as the) “complete possession of every good.”

I have argued that the first friend of *Lysis* 219 is the good, and that the good lacks nothing. As that which is desired in itself and is not desired on account of some further thing, it seems axiomatic that the first friend must be the good. Now, is this good “merely” the human good—Is that which is desired in itself happiness? This question is perhaps worth pausing over. Several sub questions have to be sorted out. First, if happiness here means individual happiness, that is, what makes one individual happy, we can ask, To what extent is the good referenced at *Lysis* 215–222 that which is good for one person, though not necessarily for someone else? To what extent, we are asking, is “my good” not “your good”? Is the highest human good, that is, what everyone wants, simply the good for oneself? I doubt

that there is a definitive answer to these questions, but several texts may be said to weigh in on them. One of these texts we have already looked at. We see what is very like the Aristotelian contrast between the limited aim of a particular skill and the appeal to an absolute good in *Laches* 196: “But whether the suffering or not-suffering of these things will be best for a man is a question which is no more for a soothsayer to decide than for anyone else.” Another text that we might appeal to is *Lysis* 210d1–2: “If you become wise, everyone will be your friend [philon] and belong [oikeion] to you; for you will be useful and good.” If this is sound, then, as Rudebusch (2006) points out, the good is oikeion to everything. Yet one more text is *Meno* 73c1–8, where Socrates explicitly says, “So all human beings are good in the same way, for they become good by acquiring the same qualities.... Then the virtue of all is the same” (trans. Grube [Plato 1997c, 873]).<sup>25</sup>

What then does it mean to say that the good is complete, lacking nothing, and that it belongs to all or is native to all? All of these things are said of the good in the *Lysis*. Now the good cannot be just what is loved because it is loved; happiness cannot be what we aim at because it is what we love. Rather, what we love, happiness, is what we aim at because it is good—unless, perhaps, it is good for us, and so we do all that we do for the sake of ourselves, and it is ourselves that we value above all. But, there again, we must ask, What is so good about ourselves? What is valuable about ourselves? Would we value ourselves if we lacked all goodness? Socrates says that even were all bad eliminated, there would still be good. Something is valuable in itself, then, and not just for its utility and not just because it is us.

In this discussion, I have tried to read *Lysis* 215–222 based on a number of observations. First, the first friend, the good, can also be shown to include oneself as a consequence of the all-inclusiveness of the good, that is, of its complete perfection. Second, the object of desire, that which someone lacks, is something that belongs to her originally. Apparently, she is alienated from it, but this condition is owing to ignorance. Finally, we must find this good in ourselves; if we don’t find it there, it is perhaps because we do not yet know ourselves.

We have yet to address the final problem, the problem of how one passage in the *Lysis* that suggests that the good cannot exclude anything can be taken to inform the entirety of Socratic ethics. Can it even be feasible to assert that for Socrates knowledge of the good and knowledge of the self are one and the same? There may, for example, be a lot of things about oneself that are not good; similarly, there may be things about the good that are not oneself (indeed, everything else that in fact is other than oneself, is not oneself). Moreover, it would seem that this reading of the *Lysis* offers a self-contradiction: If the good includes everything, then presumably, everything is good. But Plato does not think this at all. Lots of things

are bad, and the cause of bad things cannot be the good. Moreover, most things, or rather, all things are in themselves neither good nor bad. So we have arrived at a problem: If the good includes all things because it is perfect and lacking nothing, how is it that most things are neither good nor bad, and, so, not good? How can the good include any individuals, all of whom are neither good nor bad, or any so-called relative goods, such as health or wealth, or any states of affairs, and any states of mind, and any states of body? And so, if what is in us, if what we generally are, is neither good nor bad, then how is it at all likely that knowledge of the good and knowledge of the self are one and the same?

Here again, we must remind ourselves that for Socrates most of what ordinarily passes as “ourselves,” is alien, foreign, accrued, and ultimately not self. Body is not self. States of mind are not self. Reputation is not self. Recall that, for Socrates, the self is the knower and not any of the things known. Nevertheless, there is an important implication in the equation that self-knowledge and knowledge of the good are one and the same. If *Alcibiades I* is taken to be a later reprise of Socratic philosophy, then that dialogue’s equation of divine knowledge and self-knowledge might be seen as consistent with the finding here, that knowledge of the self and knowledge of the good are one and the same. Furthermore, the dialogue’s result, to the effect that one’s good cannot be obtained outside of oneself (it is *oikeion*), is also consistent with the search for happiness as a central element of Socratic philosophy. In the terms of an esoteric reading of the Socratic persona, the dialogue’s exterior frame, the aristocratic setting of a love affair, can be understood as a metaphor for the true genealogy of friendship, which is rooted in the self. To find one’s happiness within, to find that the self is the friend to the self—these are the discoveries that attend the *Lysis*’s principal explorations of friendship. Since it is all-inclusive, this self underlies the fulfillment of all desire for the good. Because it is the primary friend and that by which all desires are quenched, there is an aspect of the good that manifests as loveable. This beautiful, desirable face of the good is a complement to what so far has occupied this study, which has approached the self as the ground of knowledge, that is, the supreme intelligence, not the intelligible object but intellect itself. Now in the equations of the *Lysis* we understand the self as the good and the good as the self, whereas the approach to this self is not through knowledge but through love. In the *Philebus*, Socrates develops more explicitly the multiple facets or approaches to the good, as the monads of beauty, truth, and proportion:

Therefore, if we cannot by means of one idea, let us take three in our approach—beauty and symmetry and truth—and catch hold of the good. (65a1)<sup>26</sup>

## Appendix

### The Impersonal Self: A Contradiction?

We in the West understand by *self* precisely that which is unique, particular, and individual. Already in the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle describes such unique, separable, and particular beings, as the τὸδε τι, or “this discreet thing,” to refer to a discreet embodied individual that is different from all such other individuals. Even in Neoplatonism, the ἡμεῖς, “we,” marker can delineate a unique, temporally structured being, the individual soul, whose very essence, according to some Neoplatonists, is to exist in time. Plotinus, for example, refers to the individual, embodied soul in a number of his treatises, as the “we” (τὸ ἡμεῖς; *Enn.* 6.4.14.16), in a way that asks after the true nature of that self (cf. Remes 2007). Moreover, even if the truest self is, as Socrates indicates in the *Republic* and Plotinus hints in *Ennead* 4.8.8, the intellect, the eternal knower, how is this self in anyway the repository of satisfaction? Surely the self, by virtue of being the same as oneself, cannot be the object of desire?

A comparative perspective might aid us at this juncture. In approximately the eighth to sixth centuries BCE there began to develop a group of dialogical prose commentaries attached to the ancient Hindu scriptures known as the Vedas (Dussen 1919, 6–7). These commentaries, or *Upanishads*, as they are known, often feature, like the Socratic dialogues of Plato, sages in conversation with rival sages, all of whom contend for the reputation of “knowers,” that is, those who can validly lay claim to knowledge of reality, of truth, of god, or Brahman. Within the tradition of Upanishadic literature, the very word *Upanishad* is the subject of etymological and historical investigation. Primarily the word conveys the idea of the esoteric, that which can only be communicated to a student, a son, an initiate, precisely because of the very secrecy of the doctrine of Brahman. In the philosophy of the *Upanishads*, the so-called *Mahavakyas*, or great sayings, form a series of equations that illustrate the multiple avenues of approach to the ultimate reality (Brahman). These equations signal the identity of that ultimate reality and the self: *Tat tvam asi* (Thou are That), *Aham Brahman Asmi* (I am that divine reality), and *Atman Brahman asta* (The self is that divine reality). The ultimate principle of reality, the *Atman*, is often rendered as “Self.” In an important respect, the *Atman* shares a fundamental characterization with the good of Plato. The *Upanishads* describe the *Atman* as *neti, neti* (i.e., *na iti* or “not thus”).<sup>27</sup> In the words of the *Upanishads*, that true self nature is “not this, not that.” It is beyond essential nature, which might remind us of Plato’s formula for the form of the good in the *Republic* as *epekeina tes ousias* (509b). That same

formula (*neti, neti*) applies both to the inmost self, as we have seen, and to the supreme reality, according to the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad*:

Now, therefore, the description of Brahman: “Not this, not this”; for there is no other and more appropriate description than this “Not this.” (2.3.6; translated by Nikhilananda [*Principal Upanishads* 2003, 200])

This formula, put forth by the sage Yajnavalkya in an attempt to instruct his wife in the nature of Brahman (divine reality) might also remind the reader of Socrates’s declaration about the nature of the highest wisdom, to the effect that one who has this wisdom is aware he has no wisdom, great or small.

What is possibly the oldest of the *Upanishads*, the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, recounts the dialogues with the sage Yajnavalkya and a number of interlocutors, including renowned Brahmins, famed teachers and scholars, and members of his own family, among whom may be counted his wives. Traditionally, the Vedas were only to be communicated to “a son or student,” and certainly never to a woman.<sup>28</sup> But the renunciate Yajnavalkya is featured in dialogue with his own wives, in a way that might call to mind the Xenophontic Socratic dialogues, which feature Socrates conversing with a number of female interlocutors, perhaps in violation of the educational norms of the day. In our dialogue, Yajnavalkya and his wife, Maitreyi, are rehearsing some of the same topics we find in the *Lysis*: What is the ground of friendship, the love that binds families and friends? Is anyone or anything loved for its own sake, or is everyone and everything always loved for the sake of something else, that first friend, for whose sake everything is loved? The conversation resonates strikingly with what we have already seen in the *Lysis*, especially in the delineation of a hierarchy of objects of affection and even a teleology of desire. Yajnavalkya says:

Verily, not for the sake of the husband, my dear, is the husband loved, but he is loved for the sake of the self. Verily, not for the sake of the wife, my dear, is the wife loved, but she is loved for the sake of the self. Verily, not for the sake of the sons, my dear, are the sons loved, but they are loved for the sake of the self. (2.4.5; translated by Nikhilananda [*Principal Upanishads* 2003, 201])

Yajnavalkya continues the process of discernment all the way up the scale of value, arriving at that greatest possible expanse of being, the all, the universe:

Verily, not for the sake of the beings, my dear, are the beings loved, but they are loved for the sake of the self. Verily, not for the sake of



the All, my dear, is the All loved, but it is loved for the sake of the self.  
(2.4.5; translated by Nikhilananda [*Principal Upanishads* 2003, 201])

How very familiar this Upanishadic passage will sound to those who have just read of the first friend in Plato's *Lysis*:

φίλον δὲ τῷ ὄντι κινδυνεύει ἐκεῖνο αὐτὸ εἶναι, εἰς ὃ πᾶσαι αὐται αἰ  
λεγόμεναι φιλίαί τελευτῶσιν.

The true friend, I would hazard, is that very self, in which all of these eponymous friendships culminate. (220b)<sup>29</sup>

That true self, we saw, is both good and intrinsic. It is inalienable—all-inclusive yet immanent. But in saying that the self is dear, and even dear before all else, are the *Upanishads* liable to that same charge of egoism that, we saw, lingers over the interpretation of Socrates's dictum that everyone desires the good? If all things are dear for the sake of the self, doesn't that make the ego the supreme locus of value? It is important here precisely to distinguish the ego from the self. One of the problems is linguistic: there really is no word in Greek for "ego," (other than ἐγώ, which means, of course, I, who am not you or any other individual). Nor does *auto* mean, exactly, "self," except in certain collocations, as for example when used in the reflexive or intensive constructions, and perhaps as an extension of these uses, when Plato speaks of "the F itself," in which case he means the form. How then shall we distinguish the referent, the primary friend—that which is intrinsically dear—from the ego? Or can we? In Plato's text, we have already learned that the very parameters by which something is identifiable as "good" prevent that same thing from being limited, dependent, incomplete, and separate. Thus the ego, the individual self, the I, can't be the most beloved, that for the sake of which all else is a friend, since that kind of self, the individual, is entirely limited, transient, dependent, incomplete and supremely separate. In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, Yajñavalkya concludes:

For when there is duality, as it were, then one smells another, one sees another, one hears another, one speaks to another, one thinks of another, one knows another. But when everything has become the Self, then what should one smell and through what, what should one see and through what, what should one hear and through what, what should one speak and through what, what should one think and through what, what should one know and through what? Through what should one know That owing to which all this is known—through what, my dear, should one know the Knower? (2.4.14; trans. Radhakrishnana)

Here Yajnavalkya tries to explain to his wife that the self he is talking about cannot be an entity that is separate from its objects, which then complete the self, in just the way that the individual self is separate from its objects or goods, which then complete it. Only because the self, *Atman*, is identical to *Brahman*, reality, can the real be discovered “within.” The experience of the self precludes duality: Everything has become the Self. So, in coming to know this good, there is no other way: One has to be that self. “Through what should one know that owing to which all this is known—through what my dear should one know the knower?” (2.4.14; trans. Radhakrishnana)

This self, then, has priority as that which makes possible any object of experience; yet at the same time, according to the *Upanishads*, the self is not subject to any experience. It is eternal, unchangeable, called the “imperishable” at *Brihadaranyaka* 3.8. In 4.4.20, we find this doctrine of changelessness fully expounded:

As unity we must regard him,  
Imperishable, unchanging,  
Eternal, not becoming not ageing  
Exalted above space, the great self. (quoted in Deussen 1919, 154)

In the philosophy of the *Upanishads* we also encounter a kind of expansive idealism—the self that is within all is in addition the all-pervasive self. There is an identity of the inmost consciousness and the infinite reality that is Brahman:

Ushasta, the son of Chakra, said:  
“You have explained it as one might say: ‘Such is a cow,’ ‘Such is a horse.’ Tell me precisely the Brahman that is immediate and direct—the self that is within all.”  
This is your self that is within all.”  
Which is within all, Yājñavalkya?”  
You cannot see the seer of seeing; you cannot hear the hearer of hearing; you cannot think of the thinker of thinking; you cannot know the knower of knowing. This is your self that is within all; everything else but this is perishable.”  
Thereupon Ushasta, the son of Chakra, held his peace.

Upon reading these lines from the oldest of the *Upanishads* the reader might at once recall *Charmides* 167c5, where, as we saw in chapter 4, Socrates asks if there is a vision that is not a vision of anything, but that sees itself and all other visible things; a hearing that hears itself and all other sounds, but is not

the hearing of anything; a love that loves itself and all other loves, but is not the love of any good; a knowledge that knows itself and all other knowledges, but is not the knowledge of anything.

The Upanishads are emphatic on this point:

Only he who knows it not knows it,  
 Who knows it, he knows it not;  
 Unknown it is by the wise,  
 But by the ignorant known. (*Kena Upanishad* 11; trans. Dussen  
 [1919, 83])

The primary philosophical teaching of the Upanishads is the concept of Advaita, that is, nondualism (Mahadevan 1957). The great exegete and metaphysician Sankara in the ninth century created extensive commentaries and systematized the philosophy of nondualism, Advaita Vendanta, just as Plotinus in the third century and Proclus in the fifth century expounded the philosophy of Plato under the rubric of Neoplatonist metaphysics and the doctrine that the One is cause of all. What the *Upanishads* mean by *nonduality* is itself the subject of a complex interpretive tradition that spans centuries of philosophical exegesis over a number of major philosophical schools, all of which purport to explain the relationship between *Brahman*, the supreme reality, and the phenomenal world. For the purposes of comparison, it is important to see that in the *Upanishads*, there is the concept of an all-inclusive self, the one self that is immanent within the human being, and the self that is the self, as it were, of all selves. In *Brihadaranyaka* 3.4.1, quoted above, Yajnavalkya uses a collocation that exactly captures this, to us, paradoxical conception of self:

Then Ushasta Cakrayana questioned him. “Yajnavalkya,” said he,  
 “explain to me him who is the Brahman present and not  
 beyond our ken, him who is the Self in all things.”  
 “He is your self (*atman*) which is in all things.”

In the *Lysis*, we come to discover this self in all things, the primary friend, that for the sake of which all of this is loved, that which is self-sufficient and in need of nothing else because there is nothing outside of it, and which, as the self of all selves, is loved for its own sake and thus makes true friendship, when the friend is loved for the sake of the friend, possible. The example of the *Upanishads*, where the “reluctant sage” (Ganeri 2007, 13) discloses knowledge of the absolute in a way that cannot be understood through words alone, points to an esoteric conversation, a privileged form of discourse that shrouds itself just by virtue of its subtlety. In the *Lysis*, conventional forms of friendship trade in the

external markers of identity that signal desirability including parentage, wealth, ancestral lineage, chariot victories, and other marks of aristocratic breeding. A rather strange remark that Socrates makes to check the excesses of Hippothales points in another direction: “Most certainly, it is to you whom these songs refer.” Already at the very beginning of the dialogue, Plato hints in cryptic language at a self that is as yet undisclosed. Just so, in the Upanishads there is a reference to what Ganeri has called the “concealed self,” which functions as “a hidden connection between one self and all” (Ganeri 2007, 31).<sup>30</sup> Ganeri quotes the Katha Upanishad:

As the single wind, entering living beings,  
Adapts its appearance to match that of each;  
So the single self within each being,  
Adapts its appearance to match that of each,  
Yet remains quite distinct.  
As the sun, the eye of the whole world,  
Is not stained by visual faults external to it;  
So the single self within every being,  
Is not stained by the suffering of the world,  
Being quite distinct from it. (5.10–11; trans. Olivelle, as quoted  
by Ganeri [2007, 31])



## FROM VIRTUES TO FORMS IN THE *PHAEDRUS*

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One of the consequences of the severing of Platonism from the Socratic dialogues is a diminishment of the richness promised in self-knowledge. Instead, to study the Socratic persona within its Platonic frame is both to notice the centrality of self-knowledge to the entire Platonic enterprise and to notice the changing scope of what constitutes self-knowledge and its objects. In the *Phaedrus* we see the scope of self-knowledge as it progresses from the virtues to forms, all the while remaining markedly Socratic. Early on in the *Phaedrus*, we encounter Socrates's iconic testimony to the constancy of this occupation: οὐ δύναμαι πω κατὰ τὸ Δελφικὸν γράμμα γνῶναι ἑμαυτόν· γελοῖον δὴ μοι φαίνεται τοῦτο ἔτι ἀγνοοῦντα τὰ ἀλλότρια σκοπεῖν (230a; I am not yet able to know myself, in accordance with the Delphic epigram. How very ridiculous is seems to me, when I am ignorant concerning this matter, to investigate foreign matters).<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I discuss the Socratic quest for virtue as anything but the investigation of *allogria*, “foreign matters.” What I want to argue is that neither are the forms *allogria*, at least as they are encountered in the *Phaedrus*.

All too often, commentators restrict the scope of Socratic self-knowledge to mean what Nightingale (2010) refers to as an “awareness of his own intellectual limitations” that “evinces an understanding of his distance from truth and divinity” (11).<sup>2</sup> Yet in the later Platonist tradition, we saw, beginning with *Alcibiades I*, self-knowledge can be equated with divine knowledge. What I have been arguing is that the figure of Socrates most signifies the central place of self-knowledge in the philosopher's search for virtue. Wisdom, of the kind that Socrates inspires and even presides over, is never knowledge of another. This counsel is something Plato repeats from time to time precisely by renewing his commitment to the figure of Socrates throughout the oeuvre. Even so, Socratic self-knowledge has been taken in a negative sense to refer to knowledge of one's limitations, knowledge of what one does not know, and knowledge of one's human fallibility.<sup>3</sup> It would seem that many scholars attribute this kind of

self-knowledge to Socrates. One such view is represented by Nightingale, who applies a negative understanding of Socratic self-knowledge to the *Phaedrus*. Nightingale writes that Socrates becomes aware “that he has bumped up against his own epistemic limits” (11). And, she describes Socratic self-knowledge as an “awareness of [the philosopher’s] own intellectual limitations” (11). Yet, in this same essay, Nightingale goes on to talk about contemplative self-knowledge. Nightingale writes, with reference to the *Phaedrus*, that “in portraying the soul’s ‘vision’ of reality, Plato stages an ontological encounter between the human soul and the essences of the Forms” (25). Instead of severing Plato and Socrates by attributing knowledge to Plato and the limits of knowledge to Socrates, what would happen if we studied the Socratic within the Platonic? We begin to notice the centrality of self-knowledge to the entire Platonic enterprise, and also to fathom the increasing depth of what constitutes self-knowledge. For example, in the chapter on the *Lysis* I argued that self-knowledge equates with knowledge of the good. In previous chapters we have surveyed the method that depends on the distinction between *allogtrion* and *oikeion*, severing all ties to what is foreign, taking the backward step to recover one’s native, intrinsic wisdom. So far, we have identified the knower as the ground of virtue, via the path of self-knowledge. This highest wisdom, the wisdom that does not grasp or measure and so is aporetic, belongs to the knower as her intrinsic nature. Again, as we saw, to know the self is, in a very real sense, to be aware of knowing nothing (cf. *Ap.* 21b, 21d). To know the knower, the self, is to know nothing, for if the knower knows himself or herself as something, this “something,” or even “someone,” in turn will only be the object of knowledge.

The language that Socrates uses in the *Apology* to the effect that he is aware of having wisdom that is neither great nor small, together with his professions of ignorance, can lead us in the direction of assuming that Socrates simply knows nothing in the sense that he professes not to know. Socratic wisdom sometimes has been equated with skepticism. Could skepticism even border on a kind of epistemological nihilism, insofar as its working principle is that nothing can be apprehended?<sup>4</sup> In this chapter we entertain the possibility of a positive approach to Socratic wisdom, one that bears in mind the Socratic markers of self-knowledge as divine knowledge and of the ultimate ineffability, so to say, of Socratic wisdom. We might think of this more positive approach as akin to kataphatic theology.

The question this chapter attempts to answer, by way of addressing the problem of a looming emptiness that apparently shrouds Socratic wisdom, threatening to turn it into mere nihilism, is, therefore, Can Socratic wisdom underlie Platonic knowledge? In the following reading of Plato’s *Phaedrus* myth,

which after all is largely an adaptation of the late antique interpretation, I wish to show that there is a very direct way in which Socratic wisdom gives rise to Platonic knowledge.

Perhaps it would be best to explain their connection within the terms of a narrative. For the most part, this is Plato's narrative, which begins, as we know, with the Socratic search for virtue. According to Plato, there is a continuity between the Socratic search for virtues and the Platonic discovery of the forms. We might begin with the observation that originally the forms, at least insofar as the Socratic dialogues everywhere imply, are the virtues of the soul, each one refracting as a prism, so to say, of the light of wisdom: "All things are knowledge, that is, justice and temperance and courage" (*Prt.* 361b2; πάντα χρήματά ἐστιν ἐπιστήμη, καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ ἀνδρεία). As such, the virtues, the forms that Socrates initially pursues, are qualities that belong intrinsically to the inquirer, the seeker after self-knowledge, in the sense that they are the virtues that attend the self by virtue of the self's identity as a knower. The practice of identifying with this innate condition, of being the knower, is the practice of Socratic philosophy. It is not theoretical as opposed to practical. In other contexts, the forms split themselves off to become independent causal entities, the referents for incomplete predicates, quasi-lexical items, species kinds, and higher ranging metaphysical realities, as, for example, the good itself.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, the Socratic dialogues highlight the identity of the forms as the intrinsic qualities, innate disposition, of the self as a knower through their dramatization of the search for virtue exactly by means of knowledge of the self.

As Aristotle informs us, in the Socratic dialogues Socrates is searching for virtue. That search becomes in his hands a vehicle for self-knowledge because of the way that Socrates conducts this search. In the *Charmides*, Socrates tells Charmides, "Once more, ... Charmides, pay greater attention and look into yourself, and perceive what kind of a person the temperance that is present within you creates" (160d; πάλιν τοίνυν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὦ Χαρμίδη, μᾶλλον προσέχων τὸν νοῦν καὶ εἰς σεαυτὸν ἐμβλέψας, ἐννοήσας ὅποιόν τινα σε ποιεῖ ἢ σωφροσύνη παροῦσα). In fact, as we saw, it was just this "paying attention and looking into" the self that constituted its temperance. *Sophrosune*, however, is not only a state or a disposition; instead, the practice of self-inquiry points to the form, to the virtue as it is present. In other words, for Charmides, to see the virtue is to be virtuous.

We need to pause for a brief discussion of the language that Socrates uses in the "Socratic" dialogues—for example, in the *Euthyphro* as well as in the *Laches*—pointing out, first, that certain words in these Socratic dialogues—namely, *eidos* (form), *idea* (idea), *ousia* (essence), and *aition* (cause)—are all part



of the vocabulary associated with a purported “theory of forms,” a metaphysics of essence that asserts that there are real, essential natures that give particulars their characteristics and allow them to be predicated correctly with the relevant property. In fact, from a linguistic point of view, there is almost no difference between what Socrates says in the *Phaedo* about the form of the equal and the search for the “form” of piety in the *Euthyphro*. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates says that “all beautiful things are beautiful by the beautiful” and that “it is through beauty that beautiful things are made beautiful.” Again, in the so-called Socratic dialogues, Plato uses the words that he uses regularly in the *Republic* and *Phaedo*, envisioning the object of definition, piety, temperance, courage, as an *eidos*, *paradeigma*, *ousia*, *idea*.<sup>6</sup>

Zuckert (2009) and Linck (2007) have each drawn attention to the importance of the dramatic dates of Plato’s dialogues for determining a biography of Socrates. Indeed, for Zuckert, the dramatic dates follow a Socratic trajectory, in the sense that these dates inform the narrative dimension of the dialogues, what Zuckert calls “Plato’s dramaturgy” as the intellectual biography of Socrates. In a different but equally challenging vein, Linck has studied the figure of the young Socrates in Plato’s non-Socratic dialogues, where Plato shows us the inchoate ideas, as they gestate in Socrates’s early dialectical encounters. Linck’s book consists in a series of running commentaries on central passages in the *Symposium*, *Parmenides*, and *Phaedo*, all of which offer portraits of the young Socrates.<sup>7</sup> Linck astutely notices that these portraits contain important adumbrations concerning the forms and, from there, tries to argue that the person of Socrates is central to the configuration of Plato’s nascent theory. Or, rather, for Linck, these passages collectively show that the “theory” of forms must also be understood as entailing Socratic self-examination, insofar as they develop as a result of Socrates’s reflections upon his own approach to the phenomena of philosophy.

Both of these approaches are salutary insofar as they take seriously the representation of Socrates as a thinker with considerably more philosophical resources than most allow him. In his intellectual biographical sketches, Plato represents Socrates as meeting Parmenides, as familiar with the thought of Heraclitus, as thoroughly familiar with but ultimately dissatisfied with the physics of Anaxagoras, and, of course, as triumphing against such sophistic thinkers as Gorgias and Protagoras. Yet even these Sophists were known as having views about the nature of reality, evidenced in Gorgias’s treatise *On Not-Being* or Protagoras’s *Aletheia*. Does Plato pit Socrates against such fierce adversaries, arming him only with the crude, ready-made tools of a moralist, an innate decency, and excellent interviewing skills, or ought we believe that Socrates harbored what we might call metaphysical intuitions?

The upshot for the discussion is this: Insofar as we are looking for something distinctively Platonic (as opposed to Socratic) in the so-called middle dialogues, we have certainly not found it in the forms. The very identity of the linguistic markers for the forms of Socratic virtues and forms deployed in the *Phaedo* already mitigates the severance of Plato's metaphysics from Socratic ethics. Socrates is after a unique form that is "is a model" by which to determine which actions are and are not pious; he apparently presupposes this very thing, a form that accounts for the pious.<sup>8</sup>

Though his interlocutors never produce a satisfactory answer, Socrates apparently presupposes knowledge of the virtue in question—else why would he ask the expert for a definition? Recollection is no more than the discovery of what is already known. How then does Socrates stimulate recollection? Exactly where or how are the forms to be discovered? Are they properties of things, discoverable through scientific inquiry? Rather, they are virtues; recollection involves manifesting that virtue. Manifesting the virtue involves recollecting oneself. In brief, recollection involves the contemplation of the form. Recollection is training in such contemplation.

In the *Laches*, Socrates shows that Nicias's definition of courage as knowledge of what is to be feared amounts to the admission that courage is knowledge that understands "not future goods and evils, but those of the present and the past and all times" (199c1–2; trans. Sprague [Plato 1997b, 684]). Yet Socrates declares that this definition, that courage is knowledge, is wrong: "What we are saying now does not appear to hold good" (199e6). In other words, Socrates appears to deny the very thesis that Nicias attributes to Socrates.

As we see in the *Laches*, Socrates reminds the interlocutors that to receive a share of the argument one must attend to the argument, not indulging in the desire for victory. Laches and Nicias do not have *homonoia* because their *pleonexia* gets in the way, not only in the larger sense of the external situation—we are dealing with the background context of an Athenian imperialistic aggrandizement that is bent on *pleonexia*—but its leaders suffer from the psychic condition of *philonikia*, the desire to win, as well. They wish to score points, to come off well, but they do not have the virtue of seeking truth for its own sake, for the sake of the common good, or even for the sake of the company as a whole. It is exactly this self-assertive or self-serving kind of motivation that gets in the way of discovering truth. And it does so for a very good reason. In seeking to preserve their own interests, Laches and Nicias develop blind spots, areas of oversight that prevent their seeing, not so much the answer to the definition that is sought, but, rather, the hesitations, rashness, and self-protection that comprise their intellectual lack of *andreia*, the virtue that they are, after all, seeking:

Laches: I am ready not to give up, Socrates, although I am not really accustomed to arguments of this kind. But an absolute desire for victory has seized me with respect to our conversation. (194a8–b1; trans. Sprague [Plato 1997b, 679])

I have already suggested that the one thing not permitted is a view from afar. Words and deeds must match. The seeing must be the being; in bringing forth the virtue, there must be no separation between the person and the thought. In the *Laches* Nicias hides behind the Socratic answer, that virtue is wisdom, thereby displaying a lack of courage. Nicias says, in answer to Socrates's request to rescue the company and declare the meaning of the virtue courage:

I have often heard you say that everyone of us is good with respect to that in which he is wise and bad in respect to that in which he is ignorant. (194d1–2; trans. Sprague [Plato 1997b, 679])

Here, Nicias fails to be courageous—he is too cautious—while Laches also fails to be courageous, but for different reasons—he is rash and does not persevere. According to my argument, it is the Socratic conversation, the elenchus, which serves as the vehicle of self-inquiry. The goal of this conversation, the joint search for a definition of virtue, lies ultimately not in the verbal formulation or lexical item that marks the occasion of this inquiry. Rather, Socrates uses the elenchus to help his interlocutor cultivate the virtue in question. What is it like to be engaged in that inquiry? That very seeking reveals the self qua knower. Augustine writing his *De Trinitate* approximately eight centuries later seems to capture this same intuition, that the mind or self seeking to know itself in that very way manifests the knowing self, when he writes, “Next, when it seeks itself in order to know itself, it knows itself as already seeking itself” (10.3; *Deinde cum se quaerit ut nouerit, quaerentem se iam nouit*).

The virtues, the adornments of wisdom, are to be discovered in the knowing self—bravery, temperance, piety, wisdom, and justice. Socrates's search for the definition of virtue, the search for the disposition of the virtuous person, ends in the qualities that attend the knower, the person who seeks after the meaning of virtue in the first place. The virtue of self-knowledge is not, it turns out, expert knowledge that allows one to examine another's claims to expertise, nor is it expertise in the science of happiness that allows one to control more or most situations. Socratic knowledge asks its interlocutors to develop from controlling others or using expertise on them (*Charmides*) to knowing oneself; from fighting with weapons (*Laches*) to cease from hiding behind Sophistic weaponry in order to expose one's ignorance. In this chapter I have so far been suggesting

that the Socratic quest for virtue lies in a direction toward self-knowledge; this convergence of form and virtue explains how the elenchus can function as the method for discovery of the form, the virtue.

In the *Phaedrus*'s myth, the virtues that are the objects of search in the encounter with Socrates (What is courage? What is temperance? What is knowledge?) show up in the world of the forms. Insofar as the virtues for which Socrates is in search are forms (he asks for the *hen eidos* or *mia idea* of a virtue), we can expect that they are objects of contemplation. And we do meet the virtues at the summit of the soul's contemplative flight as well. Whether the forms are encountered in the *hyperouranian topos*, in a mythic setting, or on the streets of Athens, in a literally pedestrian setting, Socrates is there to remind us that one must bring oneself along on the journey; there is no view of virtue from a distance.<sup>9</sup> In the remainder of this chapter, we shall investigate one such journey.

### Self-Knowledge and Forms in the *Phaedrus*

One fruit of his study of the self in the *Phaedrus* is the myth that follows the proof of the soul's immortality, where Socrates narrates the journey of the chariot of the soul, following in its divine choir to its ultimate bourn. It is in the *hyperouranian topos* that the charioteer unyokes his pair, sating them with nectar and ambrosia, and seemingly disappears: Plato tells us that he "goes home." Before this arrival at the soul's final destination, the soul has had a glimpse of the forms. What the soul sees when she gains access to the *hyperouranian topos*, after her arduous journey and presumably prior to any subsequent descent, are precisely the virtues: justice, temperance, and knowledge. What is of interest is that there, in the *hyperouranian topos*, the souls "sees" the virtues that have been the objects of the Socratic quest; she, the soul, sees them as realities. They are not predicates, properties, or qualities. They belong in some sense to that realm, and yet they must also belong to the soul, for they are the very forms of the virtues under investigation.

We come now to the central journey of the *Phaedrus*, the charioteer's circuit, a journey that is linked to the Socratic quest for self-knowledge, not only by virtue of the dialogue's prologue, but more importantly by the very language that Plato uses to describe the charioteer's vision. Before we can determine exactly what it is that the soul sees or how she sees these long-sought virtues, we must investigate Plato's language in the myth. Bearing in mind that the entire text beginning at *Phaedrus* 247 is an "image of the soul," and hence in itself an exploration of identity, we follow the chariot along her route and join her at the

summit. Of necessity, we will need to look carefully at the Greek text. In what follows, I depart significantly from the previous chapters, which have retained standard translations, to discuss a matter of translation that, in my view, bears vitally on the meaning of the myth and on the relationship between Socratic virtue and Platonic forms. Initially, I will translate this passage as follows:

On its circular journey, the soul sees justice itself, and sees temperance, and sees knowledge, but not knowledge associated with becoming, nor yet knowledge that differs according to its object, which varies as one of the things that belong to what we now call real. (247c5–e1)<sup>10</sup>

Several points deserve notice here. First, why does Plato use the preposition ἐν (“in”) of the objects of knowledge in the collocation τὴν ἐν τῷ ὃ ἐστιν ὄν ὄντως ἐπιστήμην οὖσαν (“the knowledge which is of” [here translating ἐν as “of,” following most standard translations])? Ordinarily Plato uses the genitive, or, rather, Plato always uses the genitive of the objects of knowledge. We see this use for example in the *Phaedo*:

Ἄρ’ οὖν καὶ τόδε ὁμολογοῦμεν, ὅταν ἐπιστήμη παραγίγνηται τρόπῳ τοιούτῳ, ἀνάμνησιν εἶναι; λέγω δὲ τίνα τρόπον; τόνδε. ἐάν τις τι ἕτερον ἢ ἰδὼν ἢ ἀκούσας ἢ τίνα ἄλλην αἰσθησιν λαβὼν μὴ μόνον ἐκεῖνο γνῶ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἕτερον ἐννοήσῃ οὐ μὴ ἢ αὐτὴ ἐπιστήμη ἀλλ’ ἄλλη, ἄρα οὐχὶ τοῦτο δικαίως λέγομεν ὅτι ἀνεμνήσθη, οὐ τὴν ἔννοιαν ἔλαβεν; (73c4–d1)

Plato is here describing what happens during recollection:

Don’t we then agree that this is recollection, namely, when knowledge comes about in the following way? I mean in this way: When a person sees, hears, or has another kind of sense perception and then not only cognizes that first object, but in addition, another object comes to mind, *of* which the knowledge is not the same, but is rather a different knowledge, then are we not correct in saying that he as recalled that thing of which the thought has come to mind?

Again, in this passage Plato uses ἐπιστήμη οὖ (knowledge of); that is, he uses knowledge of an object with the genitive case.

Again, at *Statesman* 292d4 Plato uses the locution ἐπιστήμην . . . ἐν (the same Greek expression we have in the *Phaedrus*, “knowledge *in*”), referring to the city in which a certain kind of science can arise: ἐν τίνι ποτὲ τούτων ἐπιστήμη συμβαίνει γίγνεσθαι περὶ ἀνθρώπων ἀρχῆς (*In* which, if any, of these forms of government is engendered the science of ruling men?)

How then, keeping these two comparative passages in mind, ought we to translate the *Phaedrus* passage? Ought we to keep the suggestions of most translators and think that here, uniquely in the corpus, Plato uses the preposition ἐν to mean the object of knowledge, that “knowledge in” equates with “knowledge of”? Or, perhaps, we can read the passage more literally and understand by “knowledge in,” knowledge in a subject. So the whole passage would read as follows:

Soul sees knowledge, not however, the kind of knowledge associated with change, nor the kind of knowledge that varies according to the subject, and belongs to the category of the things we now call real (but are not, in fact, real). Rather, it is knowledge that is real, and it belongs to [the mind or knower] who is truly real. (247d6–e2)

Here knowledge is in the real. The real is the subject of knowledge as well as the object of knowledge. Therefore, the subject and the object of knowledge share the same reality. In other words, the only place that the soul can look for this knowledge is within herself. The text continues to heighten the sense of shared reality, the convergence of knower and known. Notice that this method of translating the passage once more brings out the affinities with a Neoplatonic reading. Porphyry writes, in reference to the *Phaedrus* and its treatment of virtues, “It is not that the soul does not discover this knowledge in itself, but rather it is that without that [reality] that is prior to soul [viz., intellect] the soul does not see what belongs to itself” (32.53; Porphyry 2005; my translation).

Thus the Phaedrean myth asks us to look at the relationship between Socratic wisdom and Platonic knowledge. The forms belong to the divine world and the virtues are discoverable in the soul. But, these sets of objects are comprised of the same members. The question becomes, What does Plato mean when he says that knowledge is “in that which is real”? The context of the passage certainly sustains the metaphor, if that is what it is, of location; Plato is talking about the *hyperouranian topos*, itself described as colorless, formless, invisible, except through intellect. Knowledge, however, is in a subject. Plato appears to be saying that the kind of knowledge the soul sees is that according to which the knowledge and the subject of knowledge are both real. Now for Plato, at least in this passage, what is real are τὰ ὄντα—the collocation that Plato uses for the forms.

Next, Plato says, “The soul sees the other real beings in the same way, that is, it assimilates them” (e2–3; τὰλλα ὡσαύτως τὰ ὄντα ὄντως θεασαμένη καὶ ἐστιαθεῖσα). Thus, for the soul to see the form is for the soul to assimilate the form. To see the form, in other words, is to be or to become the form. Yet haven’t we been aware, all along, that Socrates has insisted on this condition for knowledge

of virtue? In the elenctic dialogues, Socrates requires the interlocutor to manifest the virtue under discussion; there is no other way to discover the virtue.

What is at stake is precisely the status of the form vis-à-vis the knower. In the soul's journey, we note the shift away from the ground of knowledge to the objective demarcation of the essential nature, from self-disclosure to knowledge of being. There is a continuity between the Socratic practice of self-inquiry and the Platonic inquiry into the forms, the objective contours of being. How does the Socratic path of self-knowledge lead to this kind of discovery, or indeed can it?

Plato reminds us of the nature of the Socratic virtues and the original identity of the forms as the ornaments of wisdom by locating the seer who has just feasted on the sight of truth in her original home. "After the soul has contemplated the other real beings in just the same way," Plato tells us, "that is, by feasting on them, once more it sinks back within the heavens: It has arrived home" (247e3).

He emphasizes the sovereignty of the knower over the objects known, that is, over the transient states of mind that reveal either the grasping of an object as attractive (desire) or the rejection of an object as obstructive (*thumos*; anger, aversion). At that moment, Plato tells us, the soul is finally ready to "park" its team, appetite and emotion, the two horses that have until that point transported the charioteer. In our passage, Plato marks this quality of belonging, of going home, of staying and not departing, as the final stage of the soul's journey.

When the soul comes to identify as the knower, as intellect, it is ready to park its team: "The charioteer brings the horses to stand at the stable, feeds them with ambrosia and waters them with nectar" (247e1–6). It is now separate from appetite and *thumos*. That original state of the soul belongs only to the intellect, ψυχῆς κυβερνήτη μόνω θεατῆ νῶ (247c7; only the pilot-eye of the soul can see), since it alone has the capacity to see the forms:

The mind of the god is nourished by intellect and knowledge in their pure state, as is also every soul who practices and is receptive to what belongs to it, the soul which, over time finally sees reality, and on seeing the truth, is thereby nourished and experiences well-being, as long as its cyclical journey returns it back into sameness [sc. with reality?]. And on its cyclical path, it sees justice itself, it sees temperance, and it sees knowledge. (247d1–d7)<sup>11</sup>

We have previously seen Plato use the language of what is *oikeion*, or native to the soul. To discover the *oikeion*, what belongs to oneself, is the central quest of the elenchus. What we found is that what is native, what cannot be alienated, is the knower, that is, intellect. All the objects of knowledge that are outside the

knower come and go; they don't remain. They are guests; what is at home is the host. When the soul arrives home, it at last is completely without change, motion, decline, advance, grasping, rejecting, and indeed is not following in the train of any god but is the god that stays at home. Recall that Plato writes of Hestia, "She alone remains in the home of the gods" (247a1–2; μένει γὰρ Ἑστία ἐν θεῶν οἴκῳ μόνῃ). Plato's Greek reveals a resonance between the soul and the goddess in the verb ἔστιαθεῖσα (247e1; to banquet, to assimilate the form).

Here, the soul gains self-knowledge primarily through its identification with the epistemic self, the self qua knower. Plato says that this kind of a soul, the soul that has received what is appropriate to it, assimilates itself to reality by means of unalloyed knowledge. It sloughs off otherness and circles back into sameness with reality. In this turning toward the same, it beholds justice and temperance. Again, I would argue that the language here points to the sameness of knower and known. The soul cannot see reality outside of itself. Moreover, when the soul is ready to see reality, it must turn inward. The knowledge of truth is "in" the knower. Remember, Socrates cautioned at the beginning of this journey, "I have no time to look into what is foreign."

The echoes of this passage with the prologue to the *Phaedrus* have been noticed (cf. Ferrari 1987, 13–14). The *atopos* experience of Socrates outside the city walls, searching as he is after self-knowledge, in search of sophrosune, of the justice that can advance to face the calumny of Typhoeus, resembles the soul's advance to the hyperouranian topos (ἔξω τείχους [227a2; outside the walls]). Socrates is called explicitly *atopos* (230d1); he uses the word εἰστία (227b7; feasted); Boreas carries Orithuia away; in this sense, she follows in the train of the god. In these linguistic markers we are made aware of the *hyperouranian topos* as a fundamentally Socratic place, wherein the soul enjoys its intellectual repast and thereby assimilates itself to reality.

We also meet, at 246, with a familiar Socratic conception of justice, as care for the all: ψυχή πᾶσα παντὸς ἐπιμελεῖται τοῦ ἀψύχου (Every soul cares for all that is without soul).<sup>12</sup> As Socrates cares for the souls of all the citizens in the *Apology*, so the soul cares for the universe. Such is the disposition of the soul before it identifies with a body. If the soul is not identified with or in a specific, local body, then the principle of *aphthonia*, ungrudging generosity, can prevail. In this way, the soul imitates the divine; it also becomes more Socratic. In fact, we have seen that the *Phaedrus* features a reprise of Socratic self-knowledge, not, indeed, via the elenchus but rather enacted in multiple mythical landscapes: the first, the site of Orythuia's ascent and Socrates's possession (241e5; σαφῶς ἐνθουσιάζω, he says, "I am clearly possessed"); the second, the narration of the soul's vision of what turn out to be its own virtues. The myth, the suspension of



ordinary reality, the quality of vision—all of these mark the narrative as perhaps touching on a capacity to know, a capacity to be present in the world, in a way that seems markedly different from ordinary forms of such presence. Socrates openly reveals his altered state of consciousness when he says, “Do you not know that I am clearly divinely possessed by the Nymphs?” (241e4–5).

When introducing the palinode, the apology for love, Socrates reminds Phaedrus that “he [Socrates] is a seer, though not a very good one. But sufficient for myself” (242c4). So the soul here comes to resemble Socrates. Like Socrates, the precarnate soul has a universal charge—to care for all. And, like Socrates, the soul is a seer, one who is possessed by a god. Finally, like Socrates, the soul struggles mightily to gain the vision of reality. This journey toward self-knowledge, then, is a kind of depiction of the definition of virtue as “assimilation to the divine, together with wisdom,” a depiction that is framed by references to divinely inspired madness and to love.

The soul of the lover who follows in the train of a god embarks upon a path of self-transformation. He fashions himself and his beloved in the image of the god whose “traces he discovers within himself” (253a1; *ιχνεύοντες δὲ παρ’ ἐαυτῶν ἀνευρίσκειν τὴν τοῦ σφετέρου θεοῦ φύσιν*). It is only by looking within himself that the lover is able to “keep his gaze fixed on the deity” (253a2; *διὰ τὸ συντόνως ἠναγκάσθαι πρὸς τὸν θεὸν βλέπειν*), and so the lover actually comes to share the god’s nature “to the extent that it is possible for a human being to participate in a god” (253a6; *καθ’ ὅσον δυνατὸν θεοῦ ἀνθρώπῳ μετασχεῖν*). This kinship with the divine allows the lover to draw inspiration from Zeus in the manner of a bacchant, and to pour this out as an offering upon the beloved.

Plotinus picks up on this image of the lover who looks within himself to find the god he seeks to become like. In *Ennead* 1.6 (“On Beauty”) Plotinus elaborates this image to suggest the figure of a sculptor who creates an *agalma*, a shrine to beauty, in the center of his own being:

But how are you to see into a virtuous soul and know its loveliness? Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine. (1.6.9; trans. MacKenna [Plotinus 1956])

In drawing out these relationships, without actually specifying or identifying the nature of the known and the object known, we see that, at least here, Plato is not willing to isolate the Socratic project of self-inquiry from this exploration of the forms, the eternal essences.

In this dialogue, Plato engages with the question, What is the status of the knower vis-à-vis the known? In coming to know being or the real beings, what can be said about the nature of the knower? Is it a particular, an individual mind, or is that precluded by virtue of the nature of its object? What I have been suggesting in this chapter is that the status of the subject is fluid, transforming, owing to an expansive self-knowledge that begins by what Plato calls “going home,” that is, undertaking a journey that ultimately goes nowhere, that arrives at what Plato calls “the same place,” and also refers to as “staying at home.”

What is it, then, to stay at home? It is no longer seeking for something to know, no longer seeking for something to possess, attending to the all, no longer identifying with the body, and so it is beholding true justice, concern for the whole, true temperance, with nothing to attain, and beholding true knowledge, which is not a knowledge of an object. Plato speaks about “the god who stays at home,” in another words, he begins to reveal the nature of the *oikos*, of what is most one’s own. This home is the soul’s original home. But what is that home? In fact, the soul does not have to take a trip into the *hyperouranian topos* to recover its fundamental nature. In this larger, more expansive experience of knowledge, there is an openness, a vastness, and a beauty that preclude the appetitive mode of encountering objects—desire predicated on lack and *thumos* predicated on separation.

While this reading of the myth of the *Phaedrus* remains vague and suggestive at best, we might do better to look at the trajectory of this myth, which is in some sense a self-mover, as it circulated in the narratives of late antiquity. In this case, the myth’s very dissemination reproduces the story it tells, through its own wandering, aspiration to divine knowledge, fragmentation, and embodiment. In the history of this myth, various parts of it shatter, fall into the soil of foreign texts, respectively reified, ritualized, ruined, and repaired. We recognize its fractured body, immobilized and lying in the scrapyards of commentaries, the ruined chassis, sitting up on the racks of the imagination, an otherworldly mechanic frantically trying to overhaul the engine. The charioteer circulates, telling the story of our original station in the divine choruses, our fall into embodiment owing to what Plato variously calls the inability to see, inability to follow, forgetfulness, and simple vice, in the guise of religious and literary narratives.

### The *Phaedrus* in Late Antique Platonism and Christianity

In calling the myth of the charioteer a self-mover, I mean that this text circulates through the theological literature of Middle and late Platonisms, often in Jewish and Christian contexts. Origen claims in the *Contra Celsum* that “Plato learned the words of the *Phaedrus* from some Hebrew” (6.9.19.22–25 Ἐγὼ δὲ οὐκ ἀπογινώσκω τὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ Φαίδρου λέξεις ἀπὸ τινων Ἑβραίων μεμαθηκότα τὸν Πλάτωνα). In fact, there Origen recuperates, that is, invents, the story of the charioteer as a part of the Judeo-Christian revelation. Origen speculates that perhaps Plato learned philosophy ἐν τῇ εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἀποδημία συντυχῶν καὶ ἰτοῖς τὰ Ἰουδαίων φιλοσοφοῦσι καὶ μαθῶν τινα παρ’ αὐτῶν (4.39.57; Plato encountered, in his sojourn in Egypt, also some Jewish philosophers and learned these doctrines from them).

At any rate, the *Phaedrus* shows up both in the *Contra Celsum*, where it is quoted numerous times, as well as in Origen’s *Peri Archon* (*On First Principles*), a work that does not entirely survive in the original Greek. The *Phaedrus* is not directly quoted but referenced at several key points in Origen’s cosmology. The story of how each soul receives its appropriate body echoes the myth that Plato recounts at *Phaedrus* 248c.<sup>13</sup> In Origen’s narrative, souls neglect and feel aversion to their participation in the transcendent godhead, experience differing degrees of distance from their original station in the divine pleroma, and so become, respectively, angels, principalities, virtues, and the diverse array of rational beings, both human and nonhuman. The condition of separation is only temporary, at least in the case of the human soul, to whom it remains open to become restored to the original condition of perfection after a period of remedial learning that constitutes embodied life: “It is not an absolute separation, but it remains possible for the soul to return to its origin and to be reestablished in its original condition” (1.3.8).

Later in the Platonist tradition, the question as to how the individual mind maps onto the divine mind is a matter of great concern. One might almost say that it forms a dividing point between orthodoxy and heterodoxy for thinkers who draw on Platonic resources but affiliate with a monotheistic religious system. Where does the human mind belong? To the realm of the unchanging, eternal? Or to the moral, changing order? This question is perhaps one of the most fraught questions in the history of late antique philosophy and theology. A famous example can be found in *Ennead* 4.8, Plotinus’s own commentary on the *Phaedrus*, where he says:

If I am to be bold enough to express more clearly my own opinion against that of others, our soul does not descend in its entirety, but part of it always remains in the intelligible world. (4.8.8.5)

For the Ancient Platonists, the soul “reverts” (they used the word we find in *Phaedrus*, *epistrephehai*) to intellect, nous (the cybernetic mind of the soul at *Phaedrus* 247), which in itself contains both the objective and subjective portions of consciousness. The fusion or nonseparation of knower and known characterizes reality at the level of truth, whereas this very separation, the sense that the mind grasps something outside of itself—all of this was part of the problem, what the Neoplatonists meant by discursive thinking, by knowledge subject to doubt, fallible knowledge. For the Neoplatonists, what Plato means when he describes this vision of “arriving home,” in the interior of heaven, is the very knowledge that is “not of another,” that is “in what is real,” that “sees knowledge.” To illustrate what he means by intellectual knowledge, Plotinus often resorts to paradoxical statements like, “Truth is what it says.”

Therefore, the Neoplatonists saw the Socratic project of self-inquiry, reversion, turning to one’s cause, as the method whereby the forms were apprehended. Neoplatonists saw in the *Phaedrus*’s language of procession, remaining, and returning (*πορεύεται* [246e4]; *μόνη* [247a2]; *ἐπιστρέφεται* [247a5]) an indication of the cosmic cycle, as well as of the destiny of the soul as bona fide member of the intelligible order and as transient inhabitant of the world of becoming.

Neoplatonists were especially enamored of this stretch of the *Phaedrus* (246–248) and an extensive collection of scholia from the fifth century remains as a commentary (attributed to Hermias, but traced by some scholars to Proclus). In one such scholion, Hermias (or Proclus) writes:

The lemma describing knowledge [sc. in the passage], “not [knowledge] associated with becoming, nor with succession,” refers not only to the knowledge that consists of contemplation and exists in the soul, but also knowledge that is present in intellect, and so in form. For when knowledge is in the intellect, as we were saying, it is circumscribed, as if by another. Reason creates division even if it also unified. Further, it is sufficient that there be these three names, temperance, justice, and knowledge, as these alone are sufficient for a blessed life. Moreover, it is right that the soul who has seen is described as one who has feasted, since [Hestia] is not an obscure goddess, but rather it is she who represents the fullness of the good and she who distributes native perfection. And the expression “sinking into the inside of heaven

she arrives home” is said instead of [saying that the soul] comes from seeing the *hyperouranian topos* to the contemplation of what is inside heaven. It is then from those [divinities, i.e., the forms] that soul sees herself, as well, as soul. For this is what it means to come home. (sec. 155; Hermias 2012 162, lines 1–10)

This awareness of one’s cause is what Hermias implies in his exegesis of the *Phaedrus* passage, as we saw: “It is then from those [divinities; i.e., the forms] that soul sees herself, as well, as soul. For this is what it means to come home” (sec. 155; Hermias 2012 162, line 15). In other words, soul, the human mind, recognizes its own capacity for knowledge as “from” that reality, the intellect, which in itself contains the forms, the real beings.

In this chapter I have so far been suggesting that the Socratic quest for form lies in a direction toward self-knowledge; this convergence explains how the elenchus can function as the method for discovery of the form, the virtue. Again for later Platonists—starting with Plotinus, and continuing with Porphyry, Iamblichus, Damascius, and Olympiodorus—the virtues, the positive qualities that Socrates explores in his conversations, form the necessary prerequisites for attaining to *theoria*, contemplation. They belong to the soul, the inner person, as an expression of psychic harmony (constitutional virtues), detachment (kathartic virtues), transcendence (intellectual virtues), and divine knowledge (paradigmatic virtues). This doctrine of the virtues as degrees of perfection that ultimately become the supports for contemplation is the subject of Porphyry’s *Sententiae* 32 (2005, 338–40).

Porphyry writes that the third degree of virtue belongs to the soul that already enjoys knowledge of reality. He goes on to qualify this knowledge by saying that “It is not the case that the soul does not discover this knowledge in itself, but rather it is the case that without that [reality] that is prior to soul [viz., intellect] the soul does not see what belongs to itself” (32; 2005, 338). Here Porphyry defines wisdom or *phronesis* as “the contemplation of that which resides in intellect,” whereas justice consists in what he calls *oikeiopragia*. That is, justice is “performing one’s own function,” which for soul is “paying attention to intellect.” The fourth class of virtue, Porphyry says, belongs to intellect proper. Here, for example, courage is identification (*tautotes*; sc. with intellect), which Porphyry glosses as meaning “remaining as one is, in a state of purity through a superfluity of capacity [or power]” (32; 2005, 338, lines 65–70).

Porphyry’s treatment of the relationship between virtues and soul, though rooted in Plotinus’s treatment of these topics in the *Enneads*, can also

be understood as an interpretation of virtue in Plato's dialogues, where these same virtues show up in the world of the forms, both insofar as the virtues for which Socrates is in search are forms (he asks for the hen *eidos* or *mia* idea of a virtue) and insofar as we meet the virtues at the summit of wisdom. The form of the good, the form of beauty, and the forms of justice, temperance, and even wisdom, at last appear after the seeker has traversed and seen through every particular manifestation of the given form. Thus the Socratic search for virtue inaugurates that aspect of the Platonic tradition that includes a positive approach to the divine nature, through the many forms.

Proclus Diadochus is perhaps best known for his *Elements of Theology*, an aphoristic work that sets out the basic principles of Neoplatonic metaphysics in a systematic presentation that is modeled on Euclid's *Elements*. Proclus elaborates what by comparison is Plotinus's austere view of the unseen world (One, Intellect, Soul) into a complex and intricate series of triads that are characterized in various ways, principal among which are the intelligible triad, limit, unlimited, and mixed (with the mixed, or Being, itself the head of a triad that consists in Being, Life, and Intellect), and also the dynamic triad of procession, remaining, and reversion. The three kinds of realities that inhabit this world that devolves from the one or good are henads or gods, intelligences, and souls. In a sense, Proclus reinvests in the cultural aspect of paganism, translating the Iamblichean valorization of pagan ritual into a spiritual vortex of endless possibility.

In this late antique tradition, the virtues of the human being resonate with the virtues of the universe; the forms are summoned, even ingathered, from the pages of Plato's texts as well as from the causal functions they possess as prototypes of the mundane. In the works of Proclus the forms (Proclus calls them henads, after the one or first principle) link and even unify the human soul and the ultimate reality. Proclus writes in his commentary on the *Republic*:

In the most sacred rites of initiation they say that the initiates at first meet with various classes of god but entering further without turning back, and guarded by the rites they are engulfed by the divine illumination and, stripped of everything, as the Oracles say, they share the divine nature. In the same way also in the practice of contemplation of the [whole] the mind, looking beyond itself sees only the shadow of reality, but turning inwards it sees itself and begins to unravel its own wisdom. And at first it is as if it only sees itself but deeper knowledge reveals the intellect within the soul and the orders of reality, and with intellect the soul can contemplate the class of gods and even the henads

of reality. For all things are in us in a psychic manner, and because of this we are naturally capable of knowing all things by awakening our divine energy and the icons of the whole. (1.3.16.1)

Self-knowledge involves the understanding that the human soul is in itself an icon of the divine. Contemplating the nature of the soul, turning inward, involves simultaneously seeing past or beyond the individual, embodied soul:

The soul is composed of the intellectual words and from the divine symbola, some of which are from the intellectual ideas, while others are from the divine henads. And we are in fact icons of the intellectual realities, and we are statues of the unknowable sunthemata. (Proclus 1891, 5)

### Conclusion: Mania

I have been arguing in this chapter that the myth in the *Phaedrus* posits a kind of knowing that bridges the gap between Socratic ignorance and Platonic knowledge, between the Socratic knower, not identical with any of the objects known, and the forms, conceived both as virtues and as dimensions of the divine. In the *hyperouranian* world, the soul catches a glimpse of the “most lovely” forms of real being. Back then, when our souls followed in the train of the gods, Plato tells us, the souls

saw and were initiated into what is lawfully called the most blessed of the mysteries, which we celebrated when we ourselves were whole and untouched by the evils that awaited us in later time, and in the pure light we were witness to the visions, whole, simply, unchanging, and blessed, ourselves pure, and unmarked by that which we now call the body, and are bound in it, in the manner of a shell. (250c1–7)<sup>14</sup>

Elsewhere in the dialogues, Plato emphasizes the approximation or assimilation of knower to known, as in the *Phaedo*, where he uses the metaphor of kinship or even of intercourse between the soul and the form.

The suggestion I am making is that this kind of encounter—Plato describes it as “departure into the pure, eternal, immortal, and changeless, and coming to be together with that, because the soul has that same nature” (*Phd.* 79d3)—resonates with our passage in the *Phaedrus*. There is a broadening from the confinement of the self, which is no longer conceived as the individual, but rather as sharing the same nature as the form. To lose one’s separate self, to be

carried away or ravished, to be seized by a god and lifted into the *hyperouranian topos*—this is the madness described in the *Phaedrus*. Hermias calls it a form of *ekstasis*—of self-transcendence.

Throughout the dialogue, Plato suggests that mania is “better than” sanity; “better than” rationality. To be out of one’s mind is a gift of vision bestowed by the divine. In the previous chapters, we have been more concerned to explore the Socratic presence as the container for Platonic knowledge, in the sense that this unconditioned wisdom, the wisdom that is neither great nor small, is always prior to the determinations of any particular object. Yet in this chapter we have been studying self-knowledge as the uncovering of the virtues of the knower. These virtues are not separate from the knower—they help her recover her divine nature. And it turns out that the virtues of the knower belong—indeed, are at home in—the divine world. They are the names for the deity. In the trajectory of Neoplatonist readings, we see that the forms become part of the retinue of divine names.





## CHAPTER EIGHT

# THEAETETUS

## Socrates's Interrogation of Platonic Knowledge

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One of the dialogues that illustrates the relationship between Socratic wisdom and Platonic knowledge is the *Theaetetus*.<sup>1</sup> The Socratic question of the earlier dialogues—What is virtue?—now appears in a different guise as, What is knowledge?<sup>2</sup> Socrates tells Theaetetus at the beginning of the dialogue, “I am in a state of *aporia* with regard to this very point, and I am not able in myself to grasp it adequately, namely, What is the essence of knowledge?” (145e7). Even before this declaration, that knowledge is something that Socrates cannot grasp, Socrates poses an important question, one that I take to call attention to this distinction between Platonic knowledge and Socratic wisdom, when he asks, “Are wisdom and knowledge the same thing? Various scholars have debated the question about whether or not Socrates sincerely wants to distinguish between knowledge and wisdom, but what I would suggest is that here, Plato is asking about what knowledge looks like from within the viewpoint of Socratic wisdom.” (145e5; ταὐτὸν ἄρα ἐπιστήμη καὶ σοφία)

The opening frame of the dialogue is an overt meditation on Socratic wisdom, whereas the main body of the dialogue constitutes an inquiry into the foundations of knowledge. Socrates engages in an exchange with a variety of interlocutors, employing such illocutionary categories of speech as hortatory, admonitory, maieutic, and purgative. The various treatise-like elaborations of ontology—including the physical elements that constitute material reality, mental constructs, or ideation—constitute the world of knowledge. In fact, the entire dialogue will go on to interrogate the relationship between the object of knowledge and the knower. As Burnyeat has written, “What is at stake in the discussion of false judgment is nothing less than the mind’s relation to its objects” (Plato 1990, 69).

The *Theaetetus* analyzes knowledge no longer according to metaphysical constructs, but in terms that are primarily conceptual, analytical, and linguistic,

in other words, concerned with mental objects, as opposed to the explicitly extra mental objects that the *Parmenides* investigated (Kahn 2013, 19; M. L. Gill 2012, 137). In fact, Kahn posits that Plato references the *Parmenides* within the *Theaetetus* because Plato wants the reader to recall the demise of the metaphysics of the forms, that is to say, the extra mental absolutes of the *Republic* and *Phaedo*. The references to the *Parmenides* are a pointer to the “death” of the forms in their other-worldly sense. Here, all of these levels of knowledge—empirical, conceptual, formal, absolute—are reduced to the same status. They remain objects for the mind. They are within the purview of the knower but are not the knower. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato demonstrates just how the contemplative life, described metaphorically in the famous portrait of the philosopher who does not know the way to the agora (173δδ; ἀγορὰν οὐκ ἴσασι τὴν ὁδόν), develops internally, as an inquiry into how the mind meets with the constituents of experience, without thereby losing itself in the midst of them.

In what follows, I will offer a reading of the *Theaetetus* as Plato’s effort to outline, juxtapose, and contrast these two distinctive spheres of his complete philosophical project—that is, Socratic wisdom and Platonic knowledge—always keeping in mind that they continually interpenetrate each other. In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss some contemporary interpretations of the *Theaetetus* in terms of how they support this contrast between the Socratic and the Platonic. In the central part of this chapter, I will compare the main body of the *Theaetetus* to the division of early Buddhist philosophy known as the Abhidharma (Pali: Abhidamma).<sup>3</sup> This branch of Pali literature consists in seven fundamental treatises (Anacker 1975) and constitutes the third *Pitaka*, or “basket,” of the three primary collections of Theravadin (South and Southeast Asian) Buddhist texts. In the Abhidharma, we encounter a highly scholastic elaboration and enumeration of the ingredients, so to say, of reality. This extremely technical literature reads in strong contrast to the lively and personal exchanges of the Buddha in dialogue with his community, in which the Buddha makes use of metaphorical language as well as language borrowed from everyday life. So too, I will argue, the intensely personal attendance on individual souls, giving birth to unique spiritual creations, that characterizes Socratic midwifery in the first part of the *Theaetetus*, contrasts with the impersonal attendance on the nature of the mind as such in the second part of the *Theaetetus*. Nevertheless, Socrates is present there as well, infusing the space of awareness into the crowded array of conceptual schemes and characterizations of the contents of mind. Finally, in the conclusion to this chapter, I will survey one of the most important metaphors of the opening frame. Socrates claims that his art has the power to awaken labor pains, *odis* (149d1; ἐγείρειν τε τὰς ὠδίννας). This metaphor became

especially important in late antiquity and actually acquired a technical meaning in the vocabulary of Neoplatonism that described a specific form of intellectual effort. This chapter aims at explaining how the aporetic inquiry into the essence of knowledge that marks the beginning of the dialogue continues to resonate through the entire dialogue, with Socratic aporia operating as the ground of wisdom that permeates the field of knowledge and its objects.

I have been arguing that Socrates's highest wisdom is the larger space that contains Platonic knowledge. In the *Theaetetus*, Socratic barrenness serves as another metaphor or even model for this relationship. Socrates describes this trait, his barrenness, in just the terms of that functional definition of esotericism discussed in the preface: It is a secret. Socrates tells Theaetetus at 149a6 not to "give [him] away to the rest of the world. You see, my friend, it is a secret that I have this art."<sup>4</sup> To elaborate on this esoteric dimension of Socrates, it is important to specify the precise language that Socrates uses to describe himself and his condition, since he says not that he is among the "sterile" (στειρίφαις) but is rather among those who are δι' ἡλικίαν ἀτόκοις, "past the age of childbearing." This reference to Socrates's age again invokes the idea of an elder man initiating a younger man into divine wisdom. In our dialogue, there is perhaps a vague echo of *Parmenides* 137a.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, at 183e6 Socrates actually recalls for Theaetetus<sup>6</sup> that time he met Parmenides, "when [Socrates] was very young and he was a very old man; and he seemed to me to have a wholly noble depth." Socrates references an initiatory meeting, the transmission of an esoteric wisdom that risks being misunderstood, when he talks about the wisdom he "received" from Parmenides: "I am afraid we might not understand even what he says; still less should we attain to his real thought" (184a2).

Socrates is past the age of childbearing and therefore has come to resemble his patroness, the goddess Artemis, who grants him the privilege of this hidden art out of deference to the fact that he resembles her: τιμῶσα τὴν αὐτῆς ὁμοιότητα (149c3). That same language, likeness to god, anticipates Socrates's definition of virtue at 176b in the so-called digression on the persona of the genuine philosopher. Socrates here reveals that it is his barrenness that allows him to resemble Artemis. He is, as he says, μὲν οὐ πάνυ τι σοφός (150d; not very wise at all).

If Socrates truly is to preside over the birth of Platonism (Sedley, 2004), then in the *Theaetetus* Socratic wisdom, which as we have already seen is no wisdom, is the source of knowledge, while not itself being a kind of knowledge. By contrast, Platonic knowledge is a vast accomplishment, moving as it does from that ineffable ground of wisdom, thence to the highest kinds of all beings, to the essential natures, and finally in the later stages of the Platonic

corpus, spiraling back down to conceptual truths, linguistic formulations, and, of course, written signs that circulate in space and time. We saw that Socrates asks what knowledge is at the very beginning of his conversation with Theaetetus, and admits to failing to define its essential nature. Of course, the dialogue as a whole follows the trajectory of Socrates's aporia in failing to arrive at a definition of knowledge. Socrates begins his conversation with Theaetetus by saying, "I am unable in myself to grasp the essential nature of knowledge" (145e7).

The aporetic conclusion of the dialogue and its significance for the status of the various definitions of knowledge that Socrates has tested, is a matter of some debate. For example, M. L. Gill (2012) maintains that in fact there is a successful definition of knowledge in the offing here in the dialogue if the various attempts to define knowledge, viz. as perception, true judgment, and true judgment plus an account, are combined to create a new formulation of knowledge as expertise. Gill writes, "The *Theaetetus* explores and criticizes three definitions of knowledge—as perception (*aesthesis*), as true judgment (*alethes doxa*), and as true judgment with an account (*logos*)" (101–2). Socrates examines and rejects each definition in turn and concludes with these words: "So, Theaetetus, knowledge is neither perception, nor true judgment, nor an account added to true judgment" (210a9–b2). Knowledge cannot be identified with any one of the three, but Socrates's statement leaves open a possibility I shall pursue, that knowledge is a combination of those components.

This is an attractive way of reading the dialogue's second half. According to Gill, Plato's counter examples to the definition of knowledge as true judgment require and so invite the addition of either sense-perception (as in the case of the jury 200d5–201c6; M. L. Gill 2012, 124) or an account, so that all three together create a capacity that Gill refers to as "expertise." Again according to Gill, this expertise is a new turn in Platonic philosophy—one that veers away from Plato's prior concerns with absolute metaphysics, and moves toward a fine-grained explanation invoking empirical experiences with particular states of affairs. What I would like to add to Gill's emphasis on expertise is that this expertise itself now turns back to ask, Who is the expert here? In other words, part of the source of the aporia in the *Theaetetus* operates throughout the dialogue by virtue of the fact that the ingredients of the mind don't quite add up to the mind, the one making the judgment in the first place. There can be no knowledge without the knower, and this knower cannot be one of its own items of knowledge. Therefore, all of these ingredients of knowledge (accounts, judgments, sense perceptions) fail, in this sense, to contain the source of knowledge, which, after all, is a state of comprehension, a conscious experience of grasping,

the recognition that things are so and not otherwise; moreover this recognition belongs to a conscious subject.

In this way, Plato signals that the entire production of Platonic knowledge, while in one way it supersedes Socratic wisdom, in another way can never supplant it precisely, because Socratic wisdom is the unfathomable foundation on which any epistemic construction is built. To the extent that this wisdom is “secret,” to the extent that Socrates’s revelation of this secret art is reminiscent of his earlier encounter with Parmenides, whose “depth” (184a1; βάθος τι ἔχειν) still leaves Socrates puzzled as to his meaning, Plato preserves and provokes the reader’s engagement with an esoteric Socrates. “Don’t tell anyone about my art,” Socrates requests. “It’s a secret.”<sup>7</sup>

### Plato, Midwifery, and Natural Philosophy: The *Theaetetus* in Recent Scholarship

Sedley’s (2004) reading of the *Theaetetus* as Plato’s return to an earlier phase of the philosopher, Socrates, in an acknowledgement of Socrates as the midwife of Plato and of Platonism, is a compelling story.<sup>8</sup> According to Sedley, whose book, *The Midwife of Platonism*, we have already had occasion to study in chapter 1, the *Theaetetus* is Plato’s deliberate return to an earlier, metaphysically innocent Socrates. Plato pays tribute to Socratic philosophy and shows how many of the intractable philosophical queries in this dialogue imply Platonic solutions, and thus how Socraticism in a sense implies or invites Platonism. Yet, according to Sedley, in the *Theaetetus*, Plato also reminds us that the quasi-historical Socrates who acts as a midwife to Plato and to Plato’s philosophy, is not in his own right interested in metaphysics or physics. The irresolution concerning the question interrogated in the dialogue—What is knowledge?—actually masks or, rather, itself functions in a maieutic capacity, to allow the reader to come to an understanding of how the mature Plato would define knowledge. Therefore, the dialogue’s empirical approach to the objects of knowledge, with no mention of the forms, asks the Platonically informed reader to play catch up for that earlier Socrates.<sup>9</sup>

Other scholars have expressed appreciation for Sedley’s treatment yet offered important cross-examinations of his explanation for the earlier Socrates’s sudden recall. Kahn (2013) for example, wonders why Plato’s reversion to this earlier Socrates follows on and alludes to the *Parmenides*. For Sedley, the Socrates that we find in the *Parmenides*, at least in its first half, is a bland anticipation of that fiercely aporetic historical philosopher, whom we then meet as part of Plato’s

Socratic imaginary in the later *Theaetetus*. For Kahn, however, the criticisms of the forms in the *Parmenides* are telling: in the *Theaetetus* Plato avoids talk of the forms and leaves it to the later dialogue the *Sophist* to resuscitate these forms in terms of their inter entailments as describing a linguistic-conceptual, but no longer extra mental realm.<sup>10</sup> Both Sedley and Kahn are right to ask about Plato's reprisal of Socratic philosophy in the *Theaetetus* in terms of the central question: What is knowledge?

Yet an important crux in the interpretive tradition surrounding the *Theaetetus* is worth dwelling on. Burnyeat offers an interpretation that would have us infer the necessity of the forms after Socrates's discomfiture of Protagoras and exposé of the senses. For Burnyeat, Plato is exploring "cognitive psychology" in the second part of this dialogue. Kahn offers an interpretation that would have us infer the demise of the forms and the upholding of empirical knowledge in a "post metaphysical" phase of Platonism that represents a turn to natural philosophy. Along these same lines, Gill explores an interpretation of the second half of the *Theaetetus* according to which all three definitions of knowledge, perception, true judgment, and true judgment with an account together comprise the constituents of knowledge.<sup>11</sup> Sedley's brilliant insight, that Socrates is the midwife of Platonism, is something I build on in this chapter. I also build on the explicit links between the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus* that Kahn emphasizes. Moreover, I accept Gill's important work on the various components of knowledge as Plato enumerates them in the *Theaetetus*. Yet, I would want to claim, Plato does not move on from an earlier Socrates, nor is it the case that this earlier Socrates cannot accommodate, simultaneously, Platonic knowledge. In fact, all of these states of mind—knowledge, judgment, opinion, false opinion, ignorance—exist all at once within the larger moment of Socratic awareness, without thereby displacing that same awareness.

In the previous chapters, we studied the Delphic precept and saw that it functioned as the pivot of Socratic philosophy, swaying inwards into the very root of the interlocutor's identity, as Socrates deployed that precept in the *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Phaedrus*, and *Alcibiades I*. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates invokes Artemis, the twin sister of Apollo, presumably to remind the reader of his Apollonian affiliations but also to signal a difference with that tradition. What could the difference amount to?

Artemis, guardian of childbirth, attends to expectant mothers. She is also thus traditionally patroness of the young. Socrates strongly affiliates himself with the goddess in this dialogue, claiming allegiance with her and at times conflating his own influence and actions with those of the goddess. It is to Artemis's tutelage that Socrates attributes his "art" of attending souls in the throes of bringing

to light that beauty hidden within: “She [Artemis] assigned the task to those who have become incapable of childbearing through age—honoring their likeness to herself” (149c5).

In other words, Socratic wisdom is the midwife of Platonic knowledge, just because Socratic wisdom is in fact barren of all formulations. One might say then, that what Plato conceives in this juxtaposition of Socratic wisdom and Platonic knowledge is the very idea of the self-knowledge of knowledge. Here, knowledge circles back in the direction of wisdom to look for its own moorings in the absolute. For Plato’s project, this circling back is very important. We could say that Platonic knowledge itself circles back to its origins in the Socratic wisdom but fails to know those origins—this is what Socrates means when he says that he cannot grasp the nature of knowledge. For this reason, the central inquiry that drives the *Theaetetus*—What is knowledge?—must remain unanswered in the terms of Socratic wisdom. There may be an account of knowledge and its constituents, but left out of this account is the knower as such, since the knower never appears as a thing known.

As we saw above, for Kahn and Gill, Plato’s *Parmenides* offers a critique that signals Plato’s clear break from his earlier metaphysical considerations and his entry into natural philosophy. I would only add that by pointing to the earlier dialogue, the *Parmenides*, Plato reminds us of Socrates’s own initiation into the unconditioned reality of the one that is not (for it is in these terms that Socrates in the *Theaetetus* distinctly recalls that conversation in particular). What is important is that by reiterating the Socratic formula, to the effect that Socrates has no wisdom, in the terms of Socratic barrenness, Plato reminds us that knowledge is grounded in that original wisdom, which thus can never be supplanted. Rather, all of these levels of knowledge—empirical, conceptual, formal, absolute—may well become the objects of investigation, without thereby excluding each other or canceling each other out. Hence, Plato ranges in his works from the highest wisdom (Socratic wisdom) to the most outward (material substance), starting at the point of the highest wisdom, as revealed through the Delphic oracle and certified by Apollo. If in the dialogues that develop the themes adumbrated in the *Theaetetus*—that is, the *Statesman* and the *Sophist*—Plato is going on to the next phases of his philosophical project, into scientific or natural philosophy, these new births are assisted by Apollo’s twin sister, Artemis, who stands surety for the philosopher as such, even though her wisdom looks outwardly, into the formulations of knowledge, rather than inwardly, into the heart of the knower. Yet Artemis and Apollo remain twins: Knowledge can never entirely leave wisdom behind. Nor can Platonic knowledge ever abandon Socratic wisdom.



In fact, the imagery or motif of twins is one of central importance in the *Theaetetus*.<sup>12</sup> Apollo is the twin of Artemis. Theaetetus looks like Socrates. The *Theaetetus* repeats this theme of duality: the knower and the known, the subject and the object of knowledge which are described as twin motions, the inquiry itself and that into which it inquires. But also, in terms of the dialogue, this twinning allows us to understand that Socrates is investigating Socrates. Socrates must finally interrogate his own barrenness and ask about how functions with respect to Platonism. We might imagine Socrates being questioned as follows: “When you say that you don’t know, that the highest wisdom is no wisdom, does this amount to the Protagorean saw, *anthropos-metron*? Can there be, after all, no knowledge? If the highest wisdom is no wisdom, then how can knowledge ever certify its results? Isn’t your philosophy as bad as sophistry?” Socrates, no doubt, would do well to face this objection. Protagoras might be seen as another kind of mirror image for Socrates. Protagoras is the Socratic look-alike who apparently does what Socrates does: He denies the possibility of knowing but substitutes another kind of *aletheia*, truth (the title of Protagoras’s book) that insinuates itself in place of knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Plato then reveals how Socratic wisdom grounds Platonic knowledge. Plato insists on the Socratic presence all the way through the dialogues, though, as Sedley points out, that presence will now fade into the background.

The first half of the dialogue, then, investigates the realm of the senses. In it, the objects under investigation are the empirically available sensations, conceptions, and empirical phenomena more generally. The mind knows the world through the senses, but the mind itself stays outside of the picture. These objects skate across the field of awareness and break apart under the scrutiny of Heraclitean inspired ontology. Under the guise of Protagorean truth, Socrates investigates the thesis that knowledge is perception but discovers that this realm of experience in itself is radically unstable. In this way, when looking for knowledge, sensation can be known as unknowable. There is no direct experience of being, there. The senses are empty of stable, permanent, fixed reality. The conclusion of the first half of the *Theaetetus*, an investigation of empirical experience as the basis for knowledge, is that, in the words of Socrates: οὐδὲν ἄρα ἐπιστήμην μᾶλλον ἢ μὴ ἐπιστήμην ἀπεκρινάμεθα ἐρωτώμενοι ὅτι ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμη (182e9; When we were asked, “[W]hat is knowledge[?]” our answer turned out to be, No more knowledge than the lack thereof).

The second part of the dialogue offers several models for the mind (Trojan horse, wax tablet, aviary, jury) and so looks at the more refined realm of experience involving judgment, memory, opinion, and truth and falsehood. Here in

the later parts of the dialogue, there is a greater intimacy between knower and known. The mind and its thoughts are represented as container and contained. The knower has direct access to the contents of the mind. In fact, some of these mental contents themselves proclaim the truth or falsity of other such contents. The reality under investigation is a subtler realm; it comprises the inner world, the subjective life of experience. Insofar as this life includes mental content and recognizes the truth or falsity of that content, exhibiting directedness toward states of affairs in the world, there is a greater psychic complexity involved. There is also a question of objective truth that exists outside of the mind, whereas it is the role of certain components within the mind to ascertain how things are in the world outside of it. In the second half of the dialogue, Socrates undertakes to study what happens when this ascertainment fails to capture just how things are in the world outside of the mind; in other words, he discusses a theory according to which knowledge is true judgment. What happens in cases of false judgment?

Then in what way is false judgment still possible? There is evidently no possibility of judgment outside the cases we have mentioned since everything is either a thing we know or a thing we don't know; and within these limits there appears to be no place for false judgment to be possible. (188c5)

At this impasse, Socrates introduces a number of analogies for the mind and its objects, beginning with the analogy of a block of wax, onto which is imprinted mental content: perceptions and thoughts (191d5). Memory will be a function of the impression's durability (191e1). Again, this model of the mind is ruled out because the model accommodates an impossibility: namely, that someone thinks that one thing he knows is another thing he knows (196b8). Socrates rules out this circumstance as a source for false judgment, since, in that case, "the same man must, at one and the same time, both know and not know the same objects" (196c2).

Next, Socrates introduces the analogy of an aviary, wherein the mind is a kind of birdcage, and its objects are the birds he keeps inside the aviary: "Now let us make in each soul a sort of aviary of all kinds of birds" (197d8); "by the birds we must understand pieces of knowledge" (197e3). Ultimately, this model of the mind ends in an infinite regress. How can a person who has both states of mind, knowledge and ignorance, mistake the one for the other, given that knowledge implies being aware of an object and being correct about it, whereas ignorance implies that one does not have this awareness? Socrates suggests a regress at this point to solve the puzzle:

Or are you going to start all over again and tell me that there's another set of pieces of knowledge concerning pieces of knowledge and ignorance, which a man may possess shut up in some other ridiculous aviaries or waxen devices? (200c3)

Even though false judgment is something that Socrates's analogies cannot accommodate, Socrates turns to ask what must be added to true judgment to give us a complete definition of knowledge, and Theaetetus proceeds to formulate another definition of knowledge as "true judgment with an account" (201d1).

The philosophical picture here, of a unified consciousness that is able to scrutinize any of its contents, is an accomplishment in itself. Yet this unified consciousness, whether articulated here for the first time in Plato's thought or a continuation of the epistemological discoveries in the *Republic*, is now itself the subject of scrutiny. Here the Socratic investigation shines a light on that knowing self, in this way imitating the Socrates of the earlier dialogues. This scrutiny of the knower is both familiar and repeated, on the one hand, and disarming, on the other, because we understand the elements under scrutiny as that whereby the knower does its judging, examining, and pronouncing.

### The *Theaetetus*: Plato's Abhidharma

The interpretations so far discussed contain important insights insofar as they emphasize the psychological dimensions of the second half of the *Theaetetus*. Plato here approaches the mind or soul through a refined analysis of what we can call its objects. Judgments, concepts, perceptions, accounts—all of these are the objects of awareness. They are the elements that function within the enumerative psychology of the *Theaetetus*. So in treating, in a sense, all of these elements on a par, that is, as the objects of mind, Plato pursues a unified Socratic psychology that mentions neither the tripartite soul of *Republic* nor the forms of the *Republic*. In a flattening out of these elements, the capacity to observe the entire field of the mind, from raw feels ("the wind feels hot to me") to sophisticated models of the mind, ways of grasping the mind, remains supremely Socratic. The mirror of Socrates that reflects the contents of the mind here interrogates the mind, but finds that all of the models fall short of capturing that mind. It is this failure to grasp the mind, despite the precise delineation of its elements, which brings us back to the Socratic within the Platonic, that is, within the natural philosophy that Plato now begins to investigate.

Let me now digress as I try to compare these two aspects of Plato's texts—the Socratic primordial wisdom and the Platonic knowledge of being, non-being,

and their categories (sense perception, mental constructs, eternal forms, eternal attributes of being)—to the Buddhist philosophical constructs of the dharma and the Abhidharma. In early Buddhist philosophy, that is, in the Buddhist literature written in the Pali dialect, there are three *Pitakas*, or baskets, comprising the Pali scriptural canon: namely, *Vinaya* (monastic discipline), *Sutta* (Discourses of the Buddha), and *Abhidharma* (Nakamura 1980; see also Anacker 1975).<sup>14</sup> The Abhidharma literature contrasts with the Sutra literature, in terms of its definition, as the Sanskrit word Abhidharma means “beyond” (*abhi*) the dharma, that is, the truth expounded by the Buddha. The Sutra *Pitaka* represents the discourses of the Buddha with various disciples, and it reads much like the Platonic dialogues, with the place of Buddha occupying the role of the major interlocutor. The Abhidharma literature, however, is concerned rather with analyzing the constituents of the real, which is to say, the dharmas or realities that together comprise anything that arises, whether physical, mental, or sensory. Another important aspect of the dharmas, or constituents of reality, is that in this philosophical tradition they are studied in terms of their nature as elements of consciousness; they comprise the total possible world of all experience, whether phenomenal, sensory, mental, or, indeed, transcendent. Now, according to the philosophy of the Abhidharma and as expounded in one of the classical Pali texts, the *Abhidhamma Sangaha* (Bodhi 2003), these fundamental constituents of reality are of two types: unconditioned (equated with nirvana, the liberation from all conditioned states of consciousness) and conditioned (any phenomenal aspect of reality). Just so, I want to claim, we can compare the two aspects of Plato’s works—Socratic wisdom, or unconditioned wisdom, and Platonic knowledge, or the components of Plato’s philosophical system that derive primarily from an analysis of what can be fully known—to these categories of the Abhidharma. In the Buddhist tradition, the unconditioned reality (nirvana) that is the ground of unconditioned wisdom (enlightenment), is not an item of experience; it rather represents the cessation of all conditioned forms of experience. Nevertheless, the dharmas, the elements of conscious experience that inform every possible moment of awareness or mental content, are fully real. So, the Buddhist philosophy of the Abhidharma emphasizes both the meditative practice that leads to the highest wisdom, the unconditioned reality, or nirvana, and a detailed and even prolific accounting system, which describes a matrix-like array of categories of experience (Bodhi 2003, introd.).

In particular, when we look at the overall structure of Plato’s *Theaetetus* in terms of this comparative perspective, we find that Socratic barrenness, his *atokia*, his lack of mental productivity, corresponds to just that feature of the real isolated in Buddhist dharma theory as nirvana. That is, it is the unconditioned

mind, whose roots extend inwardly, as we have seen, to the knower, not equated with any of the things known, and transcendently, as we will see in the next chapter, to the one beyond being. On the other hand, after Socrates discloses the fact that he is incapable of production (he says, recall, that Artemis grants the power of midwifery to those who are atokos: ταῖς δὲ δι' ἡλικίαν ἀτόκοις προσέταξε τιμῶσα τὴν αὐτῆς ὁμοιότητα) he then turns precisely to the entire range of psychic or mental productions, including to a survey of just what cognition is. Interesting for the purpose of comparison to the Abhidharma theory of dharmas is *Theaetetus* 207c, where Socrates offers that an exposition (*diexhodon*) in terms of elements (*stoicheion*) is in fact a rational account of something. But what are these *stoicheia*, the elements of the last sections of the *Theaetetus*?

They are just the discreet moments of, on the one hand, any given thought process or judgment, and, on the other hand, the discreet constituents of any phenomenal thing. For example, color is in this sense an element. So is shape. But also, a sensory apprehension is an element. And so is a concept. It is anything that can be described as “this” or “that”; it is any of the discreet realities that form a part of whatever it is that comprises, altogether, the total possibilities of experience. At 201e1–202c5, Socrates recalls a dream. According to this dream, he hears people saying that “the primary elements, as it were, of which we and everything else are composed, have no account. Each of them, in itself, can only be named.” Now let’s try to understand this theory a little more closely by comparing the Abhidharma category of dharma.

Karunadasa (1996) writes:

All the different modes of analysis and classification found in the Abhidhamma stem from a single philosophical principle, which gave direction and shape to the entire project of systematization. This principle is the notion that all the phenomena of empirical existence are made up of a number of elementary constituents, the ultimate realities behind the manifest phenomena. These elementary constituents, the building blocks of experience, are called dharmas. The dhamma theory is not merely one principle among others in the body of Abhidhamma philosophy but the base upon which the entire system rests. It would thus be quite fitting to call this theory the cornerstone of the Abhidhamma. But the dhamma theory was intended from the start to be more than a mere hypothetical scheme. It arose from the need to make sense out of experiences in meditation and was designed as a guide for meditative contemplation and insight. The Buddha had taught that to see the world correctly is to see—not persons and

substances—but bare phenomena (*suddhadhamma*) arising and perishing in accordance with their conditions. The task the Abhidhamma specialists set themselves was to specify exactly what these “bare phenomena” are and to show how they relate to other “bare phenomena” to make up our “common sense” picture of the world. (introd.)

So the Abhidhamma tries to lay hold of the “bare phenomena” of experience. Let’s compare, again for the sake of studying the juxtaposition of the Socratic and Platonic that the *Theaetetus* uniquely affords, what Socrates calls at 201e1 “a dream for a dream.” Socrates explains the contents of his dream as follows:

In my dream, too, I thought I was listening to people saying that the primary elements, as it were, of which we and everything else are composed, have no account. Each of them, in itself, can only be named; it is not possible to say anything else of it, either that it is or that it is not. That would mean that we were adding being or not-being to it; whereas we must not attach anything, if we are to speak of that thing itself alone. (201e2–202a2; trans. Burnyeat [Plato 1990, 338–39])

Now, one way of understanding this dream is to see that, as with the elements of an actual dream, the elements of experience are simply present, as bare phenomena. There is no accounting for or of the discreet moment of experience, that is, the element, which is filled with content but not reducible to any other content. In Buddhist parlance, the dharma, the bare phenomenon, is experienced as a “thought moment,” a transitory state that follows in succession upon other such states. In the philosophy of the Abhidhamma, there is an elaborate and detailed methodology for the classification of all such elements, under the rubric of the five aggregates, or modes of experience: perception, conception, feeling, form, and awareness.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, although each dharma manifests itself under one or another of these distinct categories of experience (it is, e.g., either a visual datum or a mental image or the shape or form of a material entity), the dharma as such is not subject to analysis. It is primary. The flow of these dharmas in quick succession gives rise to extended experience, to the world with which we are conventionally familiar.

When it comes to comparison with Plato, we see that the fundamental elements, the basic building blocks of conventional reality, are not subject to analysis. Plato says that “it is impossible that any of the primaries should be expressed in an account; it can only be named, for a name is all that it has” (*Tht.* 202b1). Yet again, these “bare elements” comprise or are “woven into” the more complex objects of consciousness that can then become the subjects of accounts, judgments, and knowledge. Socrates continues, “But with the things

composed of [the elements] it is another matter. Here, just in the same way as the elements themselves are woven together, so their names may be woven together and become an account of something—an account being essentially a complex of names” (202b1). It is a matter of interpretive controversy as to what these elements are, as well as what the complexes that they comprise are. Are the complexes individuals or types? If the elements are a matrix of the components of experience that underlie conventional reality, then the answer to this interpretive crux might be that some of these elements come under the rubric of conceptual thought; others come under the rubric of perception or sensation. Likewise, some of the complexes will turn out to be abstractions or ideations; others will turn out to be physical or material entities.

Socrates’s dream theory of primary elements can be compared to the fundamental theory of the Abhidharma. Recall, the Abhidharma rests on the theory of primary elements, the dharmas, or constituents, which function as ultimate realities underlying empirical experience (Karunadasa 1996; see Stcherbatsky 1988, 73). Stcherbatsky writes, in a way that might remind us strikingly of the *Theaetetus*’s theory of elements:

The conception of a dharma is the central point of the Buddhist doctrine. In the light of this conception, Buddhism discloses itself as a metaphysical theory developed out of one fundamental principle, viz. the idea that existence is an interplay of a plurality of matter, mind, and forces. These elements are technically called dharmas, a meaning which this word has in this system alone. Buddhism, accordingly, can be characterized as a system of radical pluralism: the elements alone are the realities, every combination of them is a mere name covering a plurality of separate elements. (Stcherbatsky 1988, 3)

The *Theaetetus* is Plato’s attempt to, so to say, offer an ontology of experience, of realities that are not encountered outside of the mind, insofar as they are analyzed very much as contents of the mind. Although the element theory is only one hypothetical construct within the dialogue, here I am using a comparative view that might assist the reader in making sense of this theory within the context of the *Theaetetus* as a whole. Uniquely of all the Platonic works, the *Theaetetus* focuses on the psychology of cognition; a comparison to the philosophy of the Abhidharma helps us to understand that the elements to which Socrates refers in the dream are taken from a direct analysis of experience.

The dream theory is anticipated in the dialogue by a series of meditations on the possibility of false judgment, along with a number of models for the mind that Socrates tries to utilize for the purpose of explaining how false judgment can

take place. There is a kind of Socratic psychological viewpoint in this section, as judgments, perceptions, and other mental phenomena are taken as instances of the same kind of thing. At 197d3, Socrates suggests:

A little while ago we were equipping souls with I don't know what sort of a waxen device. Now let us make in each soul a sort of aviary of all kinds of birds; some in flocks separate from the others, some in small groups, and other flying about singly here and there among all the rest.

So, from the point of view of the aviary model, what we have is mind (the aviary) and its objects (the birds, whatever the nature of these objects).

For example, at 199b1–6, Socrates discusses the false judgment consisting in mistaking the number twelve for the number eleven:

It was this that happened when he thought eleven was twelve. He got hold of the knowledge of eleven that was in him, instead of the knowledge of twelve, as you might catch a ring-dove instead of a pigeon.

What has happened here, according to Sedley (2004), is that “the attempt to diagnose false judgements has ended up taking them to be internal mental processes which are themselves about further mental items, namely bits of knowledge” (148). Sedley continues, “What is missing, then, in the arithmetical example is a metaphysical separation of numbers from the cognitive states by which they are known.” Thus, even in the earlier discussion, when Socrates attempts to present various models of mind, one aspect of the dream theory is implied, namely, that all phenomena can be understood as elements of experience and that our conventional world view, which sees a mind grasping some entity—as, for example, a number—can be re envisioned as the search for an item in the mental world, that is, the catching of a soul-bird. This aviary world, a somewhat flattened world, arises when all forms of experience are seen as not outside of the mind and is in many ways a continuation of the Protagorean construct explored earlier in the dialogue, according to which knowledge is perception.<sup>16</sup>

The dharma theory as assumed in the *Abhidharma* is distinctive in that it, unlike the element-theory of the *Theaetetus*, is dogmatic; it purports to be a meticulous and exact description of the realities that underlie our conventional world. Socrates, by contrast, only offers the theory as a dream.<sup>17</sup> Another important difference is that in traditional Buddhist philosophy, although “consciousness” is a factor, or, rather, an aggregate articulated as a category of experience, this



consciousness does not imply a unified mind belonging to a single conscious substance or soul. By contrast, Socrates everywhere in the *Theaetetus* assumes the existence of a thing called soul and also, evidently, at least in the metaphors of wax tablet and aviary, implies that there is a unified conscious subject who possesses his or her own thoughts.

At 197e2, Socrates continues:

Then we must say that when we are children this receptacle is empty; and by the birds we must understand pieces of knowledge. When anyone takes possession of a piece of knowledge and shuts it up in the pen, we should say that he has learned or has found out the thing of which this is the knowledge; and knowing, we should say, is this.

For Sedley (2004), the problems with Socrates's analysis of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* are deliberately underscored by Plato. Socrates approaches the entire project of discerning the nature of knowledge in terms of cognitive psychology. According to Sedley, he fails to "investigate the ontology of the entities which the mind interrelates" (152). And Plato, in presenting a Socrates who simply has no access to metaphysics, is deliberate in showing the limits of this approach. Plato will make the fine ontological and metaphysical distinctions between mental phenomena and the ontology that underlies those mental states, a distinction not possible without recourse to metaphysics to classify those same items of experience. Yet I would suggest that Socrates's exploration of a world that arises out of the elements of experience is not, in itself, an indication of Socrates's lack of metaphysics. Rather, it represents Plato's discrimination between the project of developing metaphysical or philosophical knowledge, which I have called Platonic knowledge, and the project of exposing the prior ground of that knowledge, which may variously be called Socratic wisdom, or even Socratic ignorance.

What exactly is missing from the aviary, or, indeed, from the element theory explored at 201? One question might be this: If the aviary is the mind, consciousness, then who is it that does the catching of the birds, whether they are knowledge birds, opinion birds, or even ignorance birds? Who is the subject who searches for a state of mind to get hold of in the first place? The wax model suggests that there is no subject, but merely a passive material that is involuntarily imprinted with the results of experience. Now unless there is a category of experience that is different in kind from the objects that it searches for, and not simply another one of those objects, then, of course, knowledge cannot be accounted for. The knower and known cannot be the same thing or the same kind of thing, else knowledge could never arise. It is not only metaphysics that is missing from these theories, but also any accounting for the conscious subject.

In the sense that the *Theaetetus* does not provide in its models of the mind for the knower, the person who searches, we can say that the knower is missing. The knower goes unobserved, since it is not any of the things known. In a similar way, for Buddhist psychology, there is no knower or subject distinct from the various categories of experience. In Buddhist parlance, this lack of a subject is called *anatta*, that is, no self. This recognition of no-self, of the fact that the self or knower is not a thing or state like other things, of just this inability to grasp a stable, immutable, permanent self that underlies the various states of mind, is in itself what the Buddhist calls nirvana, extinction, that is, extinction of self. Thus the whole as well as every detail of whatever arises in the mind, including its manifest ignorance, miscalculations, false ideation—all of it is a stoicheion (a dharma, in Buddhist parlance). And yet the missing dharma, the unconditioned, is nothing like any of those same conditions.

We have seen that, in the case of Socratic psychology, Apollonian self-knowledge represents, as it were, the mind as it is in itself, unconditioned by its objects. But the mind as we find it in ordinary life is never like this, never free of objects, never empty. The mind is always pointed toward or occupied with something. We only notice the mind, as Aristotle puts it, as a *parergon*. The mind thus seems to be nothing other than a series of states of mind. And yet, to say this, surely begs the question, To what or to whom do the mind-states belong? If we specify something or someone who possesses these states, then this too will fall into one of the categories of experience, one of the elements.

If we may continue to use the Buddhist analogy, it is in the *Theaetetus* that Plato brings together Socratic discourse (which we may liken to the Buddhist sutras) with Platonic analysis (which we may liken to the Abhidharma). Together, these facets of Platonism constitute a whole truth, one that considers the phenomena of experience as lived by individual embodied persons, and, at the same time, remains ever mindful of the ground of experience. This analysis of experience then begins with the Heraclitean flux insofar as experience is ever changing, by its very nature impermanent. And yet, an astute analysis of that experience will nevertheless pick out the fixtures of any experience, its elements. These elements can be spoken of in terms of their relative stability, as discrete realities. When encountered in experience, however, they are all part of the flow of the mind, that Heraclitean river.

In turning the light of Socratic inquiry on the contents of the mind, of the birdcage, so to say, Plato opens up that same inquiry to every phenomenal moment. No longer does this Socrates stay within the pristine silence of not knowing, or barrenness. Instead, he attends, so to say, to all that the pregnant mind can bring forth. He switches out Apollo for his twin sister, Artemis. He

finds his way into the marketplace of awareness, where objects are traded, one for the other. Or, rather, perhaps it would be better to say that young Theaetetus, Socrates's lookalike, venturing into the world of perception, conveys that vantage point to his partner, past the age of childbirth. The Socratic stillness never wavers; those bulging eyes (143e) stare into or even past the proliferation of objects, into the source of their arising.

### Socratic Barrenness in the Neoplatonic Tradition

I have attempted to read the analysis of the elements of experience presented in the dream of Socrates alongside the Buddhist philosophy of the Abhidharma. But the *Theaetetus* is also an important dialogue for the late Platonist tradition. In particular, Socrates's self-disclosure of his professional ties with Artemis, goddess of childbirth, and his tending of pregnant souls takes on an afterlife among late antique Neoplatonists in connection with Socrates's remarks at 151a. There Socrates tells Theaetetus that "his associates suffer the same experience as women who are in the process of giving birth. For my associates are in travail, filled with aporia night and day, much more than expectant mothers. My art has the power to awaken this labor pain (Greek: *odis*) and then again to assuage it" (151a6–b1).

In the late Academy, the word *odis* becomes a charged term, taking on significance as an interpretation of the meaning of *aporia*. Thus Proclus and Damascius use *odis* to refer to the *via negativa*, the way of negation as a path to arriving at what they call the one or even the ineffable. Not only does this labor entail the removal of any and every idea about the one, but it also entails a living connection to that one, that is, it implies a kind of genetic relationship to the one, which is revealed as the center of the soul itself.

What follows is a very brief survey of Proclus's use of the term labor pain (*odis*) in his own commentary on Plato's *Parmenides* and Damascius's subsequent deployment of this word in the *Problems and Solutions*. As we see in the following passage, Proclus uses the idea of travail to mean the labor of emptiness that consists in the willingness to abandon the self and to remove the sense of separation or selfhood that constitutes the origins of the soul's descent into the world of becoming. In this sense, Proclus describes it as a predilection for the one, a native affinity that, paradoxically, has no object for which it experiences this affinity.

In speaking about this innate desire for the one, which, it turns out, actually amounts to an index of one's native affinity with the one, Proclus writes: "All

things are what they are through desire for the One through the agency of the One, and in virtue of this striving (κατὰ τὴν ὠδίνα ταύτην) each, being filled with its proper degree of unity, is likened to the single cause of all things (1199.22; trans. Morrow and Dillon [Proclus 1987, 546]). And again, Proclus discusses the innate affinity that each being has for the one, not owing to an intellectual grasp of the one, but, rather, owing to a kind of predilection or the innate reality of the one as it exists in all things:

The predilection for the One does not come from knowledge, since if it did, what has no share in knowledge could not seek it; but everything has a natural striving (ὠδίνα) after the One, as also has the soul. What else is the One in us except the operation and energy of this striving? It is therefore this interior understanding of unity, which is a projection and as it were an expression of the One in ourselves, that we call “the One.” (56 Kalbfleisch; Morrow and Dillon [Proclus 1987, 593]).

For Damascius, labor pain is associated with the one in the soul, and with the kind of intimacy or innate awareness of unity that both awakens the soul’s striving for the one and makes that identity possible. Labor pain is also associated with ignorance, with that experience of separation that demands restoration. The effort or striving is one factor that ultimately leads to the goal, which is, after all, the self-revealing experience of not being different from the one. Damascius writes:

If someone working through these puzzles should at last come to accept the One as first principle, and should then add as a decisive consideration the grounds that we have no conception or imagination simpler than the One, how then will we speculate concerning what is beyond our most remote speculation and conception? If someone asks this, we will have sympathy with the problem raised (for it seems unsolvable and thinking about it seems without benefit) but nevertheless on the basis of what is more familiar to us, we must stir up the ineffable labor pains in ourselves toward a hidden (for I know not how to express it) consciousness of that sublime truth.” (CW 1.6; trans. Ahbel-Rappe [Damascius 2010, 70])

The center of the self, the light of knowledge, is the *ixnos* or trace of the one; when pressing toward this goal the word that Damascius uses is *odis*, the effort to be centered, or the striving after unity. He employs this terminology because any striving implies duality or separation, and there would be no need for this striving if the identity between self and the one had already been realized.

Still, it is a qualified kind of striving because there is no real separation between the center of the self and the one, which is why Damascius and Proclus refer to it as the “one in us.”

Again, Damascius uses the term birth pang to describe the experience of intellectual purification. Birth pang refers to the knowledge of the one that is not actually a form of knowledge; it is not an object to be apprehended by the intellect. It is not a content of the mind:

If, in saying these things about it, that it is Ineffable, that it is the inner sanctuary of all things and that it cannot be conceived, we contradict ourselves in our argument, it is necessary to realize that these are names and thoughts that express our labor pains, an which dare to meddle improperly with the Ineffable, standing at the threshold of the inner sanctuary, but reporting nothing about what takes place there. (*CW* I.8.11–16; trans. Ahbel-Rappe [Damascius 2010, 71])

This excursion into the reception of Socratic *odis*, labor pain, in the texts of late Neoplatonism reveals how important the Platonic metaphor became for these philosophers. Primarily, labor pain indicates pregnancy, a correlation that we find in Plato’s text as well: “Whoever does not seem pregnant to me, I realize that they have no need of my services” (*Tht.* 151b2). Thus this form of *aporia* is not a sterile negation of knowledge; it is not the equivalent of *epoche* or academic skepticism. Instead, it is associated with the effort to bring forth what is innate; the linkage between parent and child is, for the Neoplatonists, the recognition of the one by the one in us.

## “HE WHO IS WISEST AMONG YOU”

### Socratic Ignorance between the *Parmenides* and the *Apology*

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Plato introduces us to Socrates in the *Apology* by engaging the reader with a question: “One of you might interrupt and ask, ‘Well, Socrates, just what is your enterprise?’” (20c5; Ὑπολάβοι ἂν οὖν τις ὑμῶν ἴσως· Ἄλλ’, ὦ Σώκρατες, τὸ σὸν τί ἐστὶ πρᾶγμα;). Socrates replies to this hypothetical question that he will answer with, “The entire truth” (20d5; πᾶσαν ὑμῖν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐρῶ).

The answer that Socrates discloses, nothing less than the truth entire, should be in some sense momentous, though on first hearing it reeks of dissimulation, as Plato acknowledges when he narrates Socrates as pleading with his audience not to raise an uproar. In the *Apology* Socrates explains his lifelong practice in terms of three essential ingredients. First, Socratic wisdom is endorsed by the god at Delphi, hence its association with self-knowledge. It cannot be disclosed to another, but only discovered for oneself. Thus the Socratic public disclosure is at most an open secret, since wisdom can actually be unveiled only in self-knowledge. No one can teach it to another, not even Socrates. The Socratic search for virtue must always be understood in light of Socrates’s denial that he was ever a teacher: “Nor, if you have heard that I attempt to instruct people ... is this true, either” (*Ap.*19e1). Second, Socratic wisdom is the highest wisdom, and yet it is not wisdom at all. It cannot be measured. It is neither great nor small. The second key to the Socratic enterprise, then, is the paradox, that the highest wisdom is not wisdom. Third, the Socratic art is meant to assist in the recovery of one’s true nature, one’s native virtue, as Plato describes it more remotely in the *Republic*. There, Plato describes an “art of conversion” (*techne periagoges*; 518d4), a way whereby one might most easily turn around.<sup>1</sup> Through this turning around, to look within the soul, the philosopher arrives at wisdom, but it is not adventitious; rather, the wisdom he has sought has been there all along: “It is not a matter of putting knowledge in him, rather, he already has the capacity to see, but he is not oriented correctly” (518d4–6).<sup>2</sup> Likewise, with Socrates.

He does not strive to put knowledge in someone, but rather strives to orient the seeker. Who stands before me as this very knower? Bring me the person himself! That is what Socrates demands when he asks, What is virtue? Become a philosopher; actualize your nature as a knower, a seeker; seek wisdom and then become curious. Who is it that seeks this wisdom?

The *Apology* tells the story of Socrates's fate at the hands of the jury, but it allows us as well to hear Socrates in his own words, as he discloses what he calls "the complete truth" of his "enterprise" at *Apology* 21. This enterprise is associated with Delphi. It comes to birth after Socrates has been divinely revealed to possess "the highest wisdom"; and Socrates's query into the meaning of this divine revelation functions as its catalyst. Apollo's pronouncement is the spur, goading Socrates to undertake a new assignment, not to teach but to produce aporia; to create around himself a veritable city of those who will come to share this aporia, evidently, a sharing of the highest wisdom, a wisdom that is, nevertheless, no wisdom at all.

First, Socrates discusses the nature of his wisdom but cautions that this wisdom remains both an enigma and a source for slander or misunderstanding. Socrates tells us that he has received the epithet "wise" because of a human wisdom:

Gentlemen of Athens, I have acquired this name [wise] through nothing other than a certain wisdom. Yet what sort of wisdom is this? It is, perhaps, a human wisdom, for I probably truly am wise when it comes to this wisdom (20d6–9).

So, we will want to know more about this wisdom, but Socrates warns us that it is easily misunderstood. For one thing, most people assume that they know what wisdom is, but, as a result, they misunderstand the nature of Socratic wisdom. Socrates says: "These people, perhaps, whom I just now mentioned, might be wise with a wisdom that is greater than human wisdom or I am at a loss as to what to say. Certainly I do not know it and whoever says I do lies and speaks with a view to slandering me" (20e1–2). Socrates is talking about how the many view him, "these people" (*houtoi*), pointing to what we might call an exoteric understanding of wisdom. These people generate a name that circulates among themselves, although, as Plato shows later, the name, "wise" is attached in this public sense to scientific investigation and sophistic ethics. Socrates alludes to the *Clouds* in his defence, when rehearsing the "old charges" or prejudices. He says, "Socrates is guilty of wrongdoing in that he busied himself studying things in the sky and below the earth. . . . You have seen this yourself in the comedy of Aristophanes, a Socrates swinging about there, saying he was walking on

air and talking a lot of other nonsense about things of which I know nothing at all” (19c2–5).

Socrates says that this kind of wisdom is, for him, inscrutable. He doesn’t even know what it is and certainly doesn’t have it. So, then, the question becomes, What is Socratic wisdom? To answer this question, Socrates refers us to Delphi: “I will furnish the god in Delphi to you as a witness as to what the nature of my wisdom is” (21a; τῆς γὰρ ἐμῆς, εἰ δὴ τίς ἐστὶν σοφία καὶ οἷα, μάρτυρα ὑμῖν παρέξομαι τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἐν Δελφοῖς).

We might think of this statement as tending to point toward the esoteric aspect of Socratic wisdom, at least insofar as he marks it as divinely certified. The public circulation of wisdom, represented by Socrates circumambulating in the think-o-mat of the comic poet, is strongly contrasted with the oracular pronouncement, each of these disclosures representing, respectively, the exoteric and esoteric versions of wisdom. Socrates offers himself as a contrast to the teachings of the Sophists, a group of people who rely more or less on certain brute, empirically observable “truths” about human nature and its social manifestations. Socrates delivers his riposte to any who would assimilate him to these teachers, and, rather than pronouncing some ultimate psychological truth, Socrates denies that he has any such doctrine to purvey:

The likelihood is that neither one of us knows anything fine or worthy, but this fellow thinks that he does have knowledge of this kind, whereas I, just as I really do not have any knowledge, neither do I imagine that I do. And it is precisely here that I am apparently in some small respect wiser, that is, that I don’t think that I know what I in fact do not know. (21d2–8)

Socrates continues to reveal, in a public way, the complete truth behind his enterprise, yet all he can reveal here is a puzzle. The god’s meaning cannot be made obvious, as it is obvious not even to Socrates: “Whatever does the god mean; what is he hinting at? For I am fully aware that I am wise, neither in great nor small measure” (21b4; Τί ποτε λέγει ὁ θεός, καὶ τί ποτε αἰνίττεται; ἐγὼ γὰρ δὴ οὔτε μέγα οὔτε σμικρὸν σύννοια ἐμαυτῷ σοφὸς ὢν).

The language that Socrates has used so far suggests that there are two understandings of wisdom operating. One, the wisdom that the many suppose they are wise in, is a kind of inflated wisdom that Socrates does not recognize as wisdom. The other, the wisdom that the god recognizes but only hints at, is what Socrates now attempts to disclose.

Socrates goes on to explain the difference between the two understandings of wisdom by continuing to explain in what way he is wise. He says:



But the likelihood, gentlemen, is that in reality the god is wise, and in this oracle is proclaiming that human wisdom is worth little, which is to say nothing. Yet, he appears to mention this Socrates, whereas he is using my name, turning me into an example, as if he were to say that, “He among you, human beings, is wisest, who knows that he has no worth with respect to wisdom, in very truth.” (*Apology* 23a5–b4)

Socrates affirms, “He who is wisest has no wisdom,” together with “I have no wisdom.” This, then, is first parameter of Socratic wisdom, namely, that it is at once the highest, and that it is no wisdom at all. Socrates universalizes the purport of the oracle, declaring that having the highest wisdom means realizing that one has no wisdom. We in the Western tradition are keenly aware of the extent to which this disquotational move on the part of Socrates infuses the Socratic persona with a foundational irony. The highest wisdom is no wisdom at all. The irony associated with this disavowal is at the center of modern interpretations of Socrates, which focus on how we are to understand the limits of human wisdom and the force of Socrates’s interrogation of the pretense to wisdom, on behalf of the oracle.

There is no doubt that Socratic irony enters into our interpretive traditions as a gloss on the oracle’s pronouncement. The rich philosophical legacy of and scholarship on Socratic irony (Vlastos 1991;<sup>3</sup> Nehamas 1998; Lear 2006<sup>4</sup> to name only a few examples) lead us to believe that the irony of the oracle is already familiar to us, that we have long recognized the frailty of Socratic wisdom, which is humbly dissembling, possibly skeptical, essentially critical of dogmatisms, but scathingly destructive of convention. For the ancient skeptics, the Socratic disavowal of knowledge is the discovery that knowledge is unattainable. Cicero’s report in the *Academica* presents Arcesilaus, head of the (third century BCE) skeptical Academy, as offering rejoinders to dogmatic positions, and therefore reproducing the Socratic method of using the interlocutor’s statement in an elenctic refutation. For Arcesilaus, academic philosophy flows from the “milk” (*uberitas*) provided by the source of all skeptical philosophy, Socrates (*Acad.* 1.16.).<sup>5</sup>

The idea that Socratic wisdom is critical and negative has a long pedigree in the modern understanding of Socrates. We see this emphasis on the unmasking function of Socratic wisdom, for example, even earlier, in Kierkegaard’s (1993) writings on Socrates (from which Lear [2014, 3–73] has drawn inspiration), as in this passage from his diary:

What did Socrates’s irony actually consist of? Could it be certain terms and turns of speech or such? No, these are mere trifles; maybe

virtuosity in speaking ironically. Such things do not constitute a Socrates. No, his entire life was irony and consists of this: While the whole contemporary population . . . were absolutely sure that they were human beings and knew what it meant to be a human being, Socrates probed in depth (ironically) and busied himself with the problem: what does it mean to be a human being? (128–29)<sup>6</sup>

Taken together, this Western tradition that appreciates Socratic critical irony and skepticism, humility and circumspection, does much to illuminate Socratic discourse in its interrogatory mode. And yet in Kierkegaard and also for Nehamas there is a distinct emphasis on Socrates’s activity and reality as a unique individual, inexplicable and for that reason all the more a paradigm.<sup>7</sup> Plato’s Socrates also says that god “makes him a paradigm” (*Ap.* 32b1; ἐμὲ παράδειγμα ποιούμενος), but it is possible that there is a deliberate contrast between the two distinct modes in which, Socrates says, Apollo refers to him, as appearance (*φαίνεται*; 23a9) and paradigm (*παράδειγμα*) in the very same sentence. We know that appearance and paradigm together form the spectrum between the ontological poles in Plato’s metaphysical works, that is, phenomena and form. In this case, Socrates is both the form and the appearance; both the particular and the universal. We might ask, Of what is Socrates an appearance? Of what is he a paradigm? If he who knows he has no wisdom has the highest wisdom, then why should or how can these limits, the skepticism, the ignorance, the critical caution, constitute the highest wisdom? Let us be wary of entering the puzzle through the wrong door, starting with what might amount to a kind of nullification of wisdom. Instead, we might wonder what happens if we enter through the door of the highest wisdom and ask, In what way is the highest wisdom no wisdom at all? And in what way is this wisdom Socratic?

What we need at such an impasse is actually to defamiliarize ourselves with the meaning of this oracle, with the customary interpretations of its pronouncement to the effect that the highest wisdom is no wisdom. We need to be more like Socrates and ask ourselves, Whatever could the god mean? In order to accomplish this defamiliarization with the implications of Socrates’s highest wisdom-that-is-no-wisdom, we can turn to a non-Western tradition for comparison. The Socratic dialogues often remind me of Zen dialogues; in the literature of Zen Buddhism, there are “transmission” texts, stories of the old Zen masters who carefully took advantage of an opportune moment to help a student see beyond his or her limitations. “The highest wisdom is no wisdom” recalls countless episodes in this literature, as with the example of the sage, Vasubandhu, from Zen Master Keizan’s saying, “When the mind seeks nothing, this is called the way” (Cook 2003, 121).

Again, in a cross-cultural perspective, we might take the tradition of the *Prajna Paramita* sutra literature, originally written in Sanskrit in India and datable to the first century CE (Lopez 1988; Conze 1967) as a way to gauge the meaning of the Socratic paradox, to the effect that the highest wisdom is the awareness that one has no wisdom, great or small. This literature features various redactions of a text according to a number of expansions or elaborations, one of the most compressed of which is known as the Heart Sutra (*Prajna Paramita Hrdaya Sutra*). Before we get to the contents of these sutras it will be helpful to discuss their title, *Prajna Paramita*, which means precisely, “the perfection of wisdom.” These discourses of the Buddha and his disciple, Subudhi or (in the case of the Heart Sutra) the Bodhisattva, Avalokiteshvara, feature an exposition of what constitutes the highest wisdom according to one branch of the Buddhist tradition, the Mahayana. This most terse of expositions (it is considered a summary of the *Perfection of Wisdom* in 100,000 stanzas) expounds the viewpoint of the highest wisdom in a few brief verses, translated for example by a mere 632 Chinese characters. In the development of early Buddhist doctrine, there was a great attention to detailing the elements of consciousness, the components of which are all elaborated in terms of five groupings, called “aggregates” (Sanskrit, *skandhas*): form, sensation, perception, conception, and consciousness. Wisdom consists in seeing through these aggregates or in seeing them as “empty,” having no self-nature. The Heart Sutra, then, is a meditation on emptiness, on the non-abiding nature of all of the components of experience, up to and including the attainment of wisdom itself:

Shariputra, a son of good lineage or a daughter of good lineage who wishes to practice the profound perfection of wisdom should view [things] in this way: They should correctly view those five aggregates also as empty of inherent existence. Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is not other than emptiness. In the same way, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousnesses are empty. Sariputra, in that way, all phenomena are empty, that is, without characteristic, unproduced, unceased, stainless, not stainless, undiminished, unfilled. Therefore, Sariputra, in emptiness, there is no form, no feeling, no discrimination, no compositional factors, no consciousness, no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no form, no sound, no odor, no taste, no object of touch, no phenomenon. There is no eye constituent, no mental constituent, up to and including no mental consciousness constituent. There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, up

to and including no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death. Similarly, there are no sufferings, no origins, no cessations, no paths, no exalted wisdom, no attainment, and also non-attainment. (Lopez 1988, 20–21)

Like Socrates, the person who attains to the highest wisdom, to *prajnaparamita*, has literally no wisdom: “no wisdom, no attainment, and no nonattainment.” But Mahayana Buddhism is far from a tradition of skepticism. Instead, the *Heart Sutra* points out that all conditioned phenomena, all forms of being, are from the viewpoint of this highest wisdom, empty of self-nature. Maybe we could say in Platonic parlance that they have no essential nature. As things, phenomena, the world of becoming have no reality in and of themselves (they cannot be said to be), then there is no need to escape them. Just this seeing through the conditioned nature constitutes wisdom. Therefore, wisdom is not a condition of the mind. It is an unlearning of all conditioned states of mind. And hence, there is, in this sense, no wisdom.

Now although it might allow us to extend the boundaries of the Socratic imaginary if we reach back to Tang Dynasty China or to India of the first century CE, in an effort to understand Socrates’s paradox, is it actually necessary? Is there anything closer to home, to the tradition of which Socrates formed a part, which can help us?

We are encountering an idea that suggests that the highest wisdom is not knowledge about anything—in other words, as Socrates puts it, it is not great or small. What, then, can this wisdom be about? And where in particular can we seek within Plato’s texts themselves for clues as to the nature of this highest wisdom, the wisdom that is no wisdom? Starting with this very fact, that the highest wisdom is Socratic wisdom, we might turn to the beginning of Socrates’s philosophical life, to the literary encounter that Plato invents, when Parmenides visits Athens and initiates the young Socrates into the nature of what he calls, simply, the “one,” via a mysterious exercise. What is this one and why does it occupy the first moment in Plato’s narrative about the development of Socrates’s path?

There is a working similarity between that (dramatically) earlier gymnastics Parmenides put Socrates through when he was a young man and the later Socratic elenchus, the exercise through which he puts his fellow citizens: their aporetic conclusions. It is here that the life-blood of Socratic wisdom most resides, in aporia, in irresolution and the failure to grasp the answer. The Socratic encounter, with which we are so familiar through the elenctic dialogues, starts out with a search for definition and a program of constraints on the formulation

of definition. Yet, for all that, it is not a demonstration of inductive reasoning, since Socrates, notoriously, does not even allow definitional procedure through example. The Socratic elenchus reaches to a place that reason and logic cannot attain to;<sup>8</sup> and constantly reverts to the failure of logic to define the nature of virtue or any specific virtue. In a similar way, the paradoxes generated through the *Parmenides's* survey of problems with the forms, together with the irresolution generated by the eight (or nine) hypotheses in the second half of the *Parmenides*, suggest that there is something in the nature of the reality under discussion that eludes the grasp of the logical mind.

Now we saw that in the *Apology* Socrates describes his response to the declaration that he is wisest in the following words, ἐγὼ γὰρ δὴ οὔτε μέγα οὔτε μικρὸν σύννοια ἐμαυτῷ σοφὸς ὢν (I indeed am aware that I am wise, neither in great or small measure). Crucial to this formula are the words “neither great nor small,” as they play an important role in the first half of the *Parmenides*, which is precisely a discussion of the great and small. The defining problem of the first half of the dialogue concerns participation between form and particular. How can the one form be distributed in its participants, either as a part or as a whole? M. L. Gill (2012, 25) labels this part of the argument, from 130e4–131e7, “the Whole-Part dilemma,” which she calls the “second movement of the first half” (32).

Significant, in my view, is that Plato uses the language of great and small throughout this section of the dialogue. This echo between the *Apology's* “great or small” and the “great and small” of the first half of the *Parmenides* is a deliberate link between the beginning and end points of the Socratic intellectual trajectory. In this sense, Socratic wisdom, the highest wisdom, contains the world of the dialogues:

Is it your intention, Socrates, to maintain that the one form actually distributes its parts among us, but yet remains one?

By no means, said [Socrates].

For consider, he said. If a man partitions largeness itself, and each of the many larges will be smaller, by means of a part of largeness, than largeness itself, does that not seem illogical to you?

Very illogical, he said.

But what about this? By subtracting each small part of the equal itself, will one get something that, by being less than the equal itself, will be equal to something?

Impossible.

Well, can one of us have a part of the small itself, and this will be bigger than the small itself, inasmuch as it is [only] a part of it, and in this way, the small itself will be larger? And if you add what has been subtracted [from the small] to something, this thing will be smaller rather than larger than it was before [the addition of the small.]

That couldn't be true, he said. (*Prm.* 131c9–131e2; trans. M. L. Gill [Plato 1996])

The problems here concern treating the form as a physical object existing separately from another such object. It is an absurd attempt to spatialize and quantify a kind of reality that does not have that solid, concrete, objective existence. Yet if the form is treated not as a physical object, but as a thought, a mental object, then other difficulties arise in turn. For example, the thought will constantly proliferate, giving rise to what M. L. Gill (2012, 32) calls “the largeness regress” that begins at 132a1:

I suppose you think each form is one on the following ground: whenever some number of things seems to you to be large, perhaps there seems to be some one character the same as you look at them all, and from that you conclude that the large is one thing.

That's true, he said.

What about the large itself and the other large things? If you look at them all in the same way with the mind's eye, again won't some one thing appear large, by which all these appear large?

It seems so.

So another form of largeness will make its appearance. (trans. M. L. Gill [2012, 35])

In response to the largeness regress, Socrates proposes that forms are thoughts in the mind. Yet, as Parmenides shows, thoughts should refer to extra mental objects, so that either the extra mental objects will determine the forms and, in that case, the forms won't be causes, or else the extra mental objects will turn out themselves to be thoughts, since forms are thoughts, in order to retain their explanatory powers. That is, the participants will themselves only be thoughts and the objective world will dissolve. Following on these problems, the “worst difficulty” argument (133a8–134e8) arises because of the incommensurability between the individual's intelligence conceived as a particular knower, whose intelligible “object” consists in something that is putatively absolute.

What to do in the face of these puzzles? How can the form be known? How can it be conceived? How can the individual knower grasp an object that inherently transcends all individuals? As M. L. Gill (2012) puts it, “In this final movement *Parmenides* and Socrates agree that forms are not in us (133c3–5)” (41).

In the dialogue’s second half, Socrates is forced to move beyond the physical, beyond the mental and conceptual realm, into a deeper wisdom, the wisdom that is no wisdom, in other words, the highest wisdom. The first hypothesis denies that the one is anywhere, of any size, at any time. It is completely without number. It is not an object. It is neither great nor small. It cannot be measured. It is neither here nor there; it has no determinate nature, and so it cannot be thought. Thus, in the first half of the dialogue, Socrates confronts the difficulties inherent in his own mind. What he is to study cannot be an object of thought. What ensues is an insight into a reality that is unconditioned by the particular mind. This insight is facilitated by the foregoing dialectical process concerning the nature of the real in the first half; its purpose is to take away any imagination or thought about the one.

The *Parmenides* is notorious not least because contemporary Plato scholars have a difficult time understanding how the second half of the dialogue constitutes a reply to difficulties *Parmenides* raises about the logic of participation in the first half.<sup>9</sup> Centuries ago, however, Neoplatonists thought that the second half of the dialogue referenced a transcendent principle that eschewed any kind of participation relationships. For late antique readers of the dialogue, this grounding element, the one that is not restricted to a determinate essence, is the subject of the first hypothesis that begins at 137c4 with the words of *Parmenides*: “If the one is, [surely] the one could not be many?” (137c4–5).<sup>10</sup> The first deduction goes on to show that what follows from positing that the one is (or that the one is one), is that the one is not:

Therefore, in no way does the One participate in being.

It seems not.

The One, therefore, by no means is in any way at all.

Apparently not. (141e7–10)

From this apparent absurdity, that to assume the existence of the one entails that the one does not exist, the Neoplatonists posited the one that does not participate in being as the subject of the first hypothesis. Now, if we are able to entertain at least notionally the idea of a one that is not, then it is possible that here, in the first hypothesis of the second half of the dialogue, after being led through a series of puzzles designed to show how inadequately he conceptualizes

the relationship between the transcendent form and the particular, Socrates glimpses the one for the first time. He has an insight into the one-that-is-not, thus becoming initiated into the highest wisdom, the wisdom that is no wisdom. He also sees how arduous the path is to integrate this unconditioned reality into everyday life, into ordinary experience. In fact, this is the function of the next seven (or eight) hypotheses, to demonstrate that the one is all pervading; it is everywhere and nowhere. In the elenchus, the goal is actually to arrive at aporia, to see the limits of one's own understanding, and to see for oneself that the reality of virtue cannot be defined, though we may know it.

Of course, for this reading to work, we have to acknowledge that it is not Socrates but, rather, the young Aristotle who becomes Parmenides's interlocutor in the dialogue. Socrates has been reduced to aporia and asks Parmenides, “What is the method of training?” (*Prm.* 135d7). He asks Parmenides to demonstrate the method to him, in order to understand it: ἀλλά μοι τί οὐ διήλθες αὐτὸς ὑποθέμενός τι, ἵνα μᾶλλον καταμάθω; (Why don't you go through the method by posing a thesis yourself, in order that I can better understand?). Therefore, it is as part of Socrates's training that Parmenides then undertakes the exercise of going through the hypotheses concerning the one. Then, at 137, Parmenides proposes that the youngest person present answer. In this case, the young Aristoteles volunteers to be Parmenides's interlocutor: “I am ready, Parmenides, to do that,” said Aristoteles, ‘for I am the youngest, so you mean me. Ask your questions and I will answer’” (137c). Thus, here in the *Parmenides*, the young Socrates is led to the insight, that the genuine ground of wisdom cannot be measured; it is neither great nor small. Like Plato's predecessor, Parmenides, in his *Way of Truth*, in the *Parmenides* Plato describes the initiation of a *kouros* into divine wisdom. That experience of profound aporia, of doubt about the very possibility of encountering an absolute truth, led to an insight. Here then we have the esoteric counterpart, what Parmenides warns cannot be revealed before the many, of Apollo's proclamation that the highest wisdom is no wisdom.

Now we can relate this first Parmenidean hypothesis to the initial Socratic declaration about the highest wisdom in the *Apology*, which operates as a bookend to its adumbration in the *Parmenides*. At the beginning of his life in wisdom, Socrates is initiated into the one that is not, the one that denies plurality, denies essence, denies being itself. At the end of his life, Socrates reveals that this wisdom is the highest wisdom, it consists in being aware that one has no wisdom, great or small. Yet what is this one, the encounter with which ushered Socrates into the path of aporia? Is it a mathematical abstraction? Is it an isolated essence? An example of the form? How could this one be related to the highest wisdom?



Aporia, not being able to solve the puzzle, is itself a clue to the nature of the highest wisdom. It is something we cannot grasp with the ordinary mind. It is something that apparently defies logic. In a similar way, Parmenides takes Aristoteles through the logic of the one in the eight hypotheses of the second half of the *Parmenides*, initiating Socrates, precisely, into what he overtly refers to as an esoteric doctrine. Note the language at 137, Zeno speaking:

Let us make the request from Parmenides himself: for his doctrine is far from commonplace. Or perhaps you don't see the magnitude of your request? If we were greater in number, it would not even be reasonable to ask, since it is not seemly to disclose things of this nature before the many and especially for one so young. Indeed, the many are ignorant that without this progression through all things, a kind of digression, it will be impossible for mind to encounter the truth.

This disclosure is esoteric—not for the many. It stands as the mirror image of the *Apology's* announcement, disclosed before the jury of 500, the pronouncement of Apollo: He who knows, like Socrates, that he is worth little or nothing with respect to wisdom, is wisest. We can see how Plato frames this highest wisdom, which gives the appearance of being worth nothing. But that is only how it appears in court, before the many, who are ignorant of the path that traverses all things, but begins with the one that is not being.

Parmenides begins by hypothesizing a one: if there is a one, it is not many. What follows from this assumption is that the one does not have parts. Since it has no parts, it has no end or beginning; it does not exist anywhere, either in itself or in another, it is without limit, without change. It is without contents. In fact, it does not participate in being nor does it exist, nor can it be known, or perceived, or opined.

Therefore, in no way does the one participate in being.

It seems not.

The one, therefore, by no means is in any way at all.

Apparently not.

Nor, therefore, is the one such as to be one.

For in that case it would already be and participate in being; but, as it seems, the one neither is one nor is it, if one ought to put stock in this argument.” (*Prm.* 141e8–9)

What I am suggesting is that the *Apology* and the *Parmenides* are like the inside and the outside of a message, to the effect that the highest wisdom is no wisdom. In the *Apology*, Socrates says that the god only appears to name Socrates. And in the *Parmenides*, Zeno says that this doctrine of the one is esoteric, not meant for the public. In order to understand Socratic wisdom, we are given two views, the esoteric disclosure and the outer or public appearance. The sum total of Socratic wisdom as it appears in the *Apology* emphasizes the limits of wisdom. But when Socrates was a young man, he encountered the esoteric philosophy, which promised to anyone willing to undertake this discipline of the one that at last the “mind encounters truth” (136e2; ἐντυχόντα τῷ ἀληθεῖ νοῦν).

So far, we have been talking about what Plato calls in the *Parmenides* “the one” that “does not participate in being” (*ousia*—perhaps, here, “essence”). At least it has no determinate nature. It is *apeiron*, without limit, not circumscribed. Its very nature is radically perplexing; it can only be approached via the path of aporia, of paradox, and of negation. Thus Plato tells us only what the one is not. It is not here or there; it is not now or then; it is not inside or outside; it has no nature. In fact, the one is not. Now we are coming to understand why, when the mind undergoes this training, as it struggles to encounter the truth, the only wisdom it attains is no wisdom: nothing can be said about the one. Plato says that this one can’t even be known, so that the highest wisdom is no wisdom.

But we did not arrive at this place of complete emptiness, without shape, size, content, existence, or essence, and yet utterly and entirely one, without preparation, even arduous preparation. The only reason that Parmenides could disclose the nature of the one to Socrates but not to the many, was because of the preparations that Socrates had already made to free his mind from his habitual thinking. The first half of the *Parmenides* is precisely about this work to prepare the mind.

Here I would like to consider how the Neoplatonists, especially Proclus, read the puzzles of the first half of the *Parmenides*. For Proclus, the entire series of participation dilemmas (130–135c8) consists in successive *reductio* arguments, designed to help mature Socrates’s mind. In Proclus’s words, this part of the dialogue is “hortatory in character, intended to bring out Socrates’ thoughts; hence it is not as a contestant eager for victory that Parmenides adds that things here consequently do not participate in the Forms. Rather he is stimulating Socrates, inviting his intelligence to discover the authentic way of participation: that is, by leading him round through the more spurious modes, he will leave it to his intelligence to discern that manner that is truly appropriate to the creative activity of the divine Forms” (874; trans. Morrow and Dillon [Proclus 1987, 237]).

How did Socrates prepare his mind to encounter the Forms? When Parmenides and Zeno approach the young Socrates, they set about trying to acclimatize his mind, so to say, to the breathless, scarcely traversable peaks of the one, the cold climate where nothing moves, changes, or even comes to be. The first half of the *Parmenides* starts with the most outward aspect of reality—the realm of extension, of size, of quantity, precisely, of large and small. It is the world that Plato describes in the *Timaeus* as always becoming and never being. The form, true being, Parmenides shows, cannot be extended into the external world; it cannot be partitioned into this external world; it cannot be found outside, as an item in the world. True, the cosmos as a whole is filled with immanent forms, the “forms in us,” as Plato calls them in the *Phaedo*. But these immanent forms are, in the words of Proclus, who comments on *Parmenides* 130b at 788 (Proclus 1987, 160), “derivatively” what their causes, the forms, are primarily. How can the one form be distributed in its participants, either as a part or as a whole? After Parmenides has Socrates detach his mind from the gross outwardness of physical objects, of magnitude (Proclus says that the solution lies in understanding “whole and part not in a bodily sense, but in a way appropriate to immaterial and intellectual beings” [874]), the dialectic next turns toward the realm of the mind, the inward aspect of the world, considered now as thought and its objects. Perhaps form resides in the mental world? It is a more subtle conception of reality, one that shows progress beyond the realm of the giants, those brutish people who think that reality can be grasped with the hands (cf. *Soph.* 245–249).

Socrates said, “Well, Parmenides, could it be that each of these [forms] is a thought, so that it is appropriate for it to arise nowhere other than in our minds? For if that were the case, each form would be one and yet it would not be subject [to the regress] you now mentioned” (132b3–5).

Again, as we saw, Socrates is considering the nature of the mental order. The form is a paradigm with which to compare other objects, but in this relative order appearances proliferate. No self-standing nature can be discerned because the mind gives rise to an endless series of thoughts in a chain of resemblance, and, since each is a thought, there is no original toward which the thought can be directed. Thought is succeeded by thought. Though this world is subtler than the gross, exterior world, Socrates must finally renounce thought.

At this juncture, the worst difficulty appears. Thought’s object is either commensurate with thought, and so is another thought, or else is incommensurate with the thought, transcending thought. Yet if the mind conditions its object, that object no longer transcends the mind. And if, ex hypothesi, the object transcends the mind as absolute, then it cannot be grasped by the mind.

When Socrates faces these difficulties, he has been prepared for the insight that follows. The prior training deprived him of reliance on his own conceptual resources. Whatever approach to reality Socrates makes will not be through his own particular mind. His own particular mind can only be in a transient state, at a given particular time, as all thoughts are ultimately transitory, and that state can never equate with the absolute, with absolute reality or absolute form or absolute truth.

The problem is one of subjectivity—how an individual mind grasps reality and conditions it; how truth is conditioned by one’s own perspective, and the inherent limitations of the mind precisely because thought is always of some particular. The worst difficulty suggests that, no matter how subtle or exact one’s thought, thought itself can be an obstacle to what Plato calls at *Parmenides* 137 the mind’s encounter with truth. Here the worst difficulty is not elaborated, but it is possible to employ passages from other works that detail the problems inherent in the mind’s attempts to grasp truths in themselves.

One such passage is *Symposium* 208, where Diotima elaborates the impermanence that insinuates itself into every state of thought, any particular object of knowledge:

Even in the mind (*kata ten psuchen*), manners, character, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains, fears, no one can have these states as self-same, but some arise and others disappear. And what is stranger by far than this is that even knowledge, I fear, is something that we are not the same with respect to, but each of these knowledges arises and perishes as well.

The preparation of Socrates for this encounter with the truth has consisted in this gradual stripping away of the limiting conditions associated with the individual mind, thought process, and imagination. It is important to remember that this preparation is not something unusual in Plato; he often talks about the conditions for genuine knowledge. This is the path of dialectic, as described in the *Philebus*, moving from “my mind” to “mind,” a path that Plato alludes to at 22c5. In that dialogue Socrates admits that he cannot equate his own mind with the highest good, but that he recognizes a “true” mind, and that this latter certainly is the highest good: “It [sc. the fact that it is not the highest good] may apply to my reason, Philebus, but certainly not to the true, divine reason, I should think. It is in quite a different condition” (22c5). The *Philebus* can be understood as a survey of human nature, starting from the impulse to pleasure and pain, and moving into ever higher forms of awareness. At the summit of these psychic faculties is what Plato calls “the divine mind.” It is by means of this divine mind that we contemplate the form at last.<sup>11</sup>

So then, the highest wisdom, the wisdom that is no wisdom, is not a knowledge about something or of something; it does not grasp its object; it is not a state of a particular mind. But what then can the highest wisdom be like? What could this insight into the one possibly mean? Should the project of knowledge then be abandoned, or what is the relationship between knowledge and wisdom? To see this, we revert once more to the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*, which concludes, as we saw already, that if the one is (or if the one is one) then “the one neither is one nor is.”

Recall that what preceded Parmenides’s exposition of the hypotheses in the second half of the *Parmenides* was a disquisition on the large and small, couched in terms of what has been called “the largeness regress,” and was related to the problems entailed by the idea of participation. Recall, too, the language of Plato’s *Apology*, where Socrates says that he is aware he has no wisdom, “great or small.” Now according to a report of Aristotle, Plato actually used this collocation, “the large and small” to denote an ontological principle. Twice at *Metaphysics* 987b, Aristotle mentions “the large and small” as a principle that Plato employs to explain phenomenal change or the existence of the empirical world. He equates it with the Pythagorean dyad calling it at one point “matter” in relation to the one: ὡς μὲν οὖν ἕλην τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρὸν εἶναι ἀρχάς, ὡς δ’ οὐσίαν τὸ ἕν (987b; The great and the small are principles [functioning as] matter, while the one [functions] as form). The language Aristotle uses is very close to Plato’s language in *Apology* 21 and *Parmenides* 134. If Aristotle is correct in the analysis that follows this language, it would seem that under the influence of or in conjunction with the dyad (the great and small), the one suddenly proliferates. Before this proliferation there is no multiplicity.

No one would insist that Aristotle gets this narrative about the esoteric principles at work behind Plato’s metaphysics right; as Dillon 2003 points out, Aristotle is everywhere highly tendentious when quoting predecessors.<sup>12</sup> Possibly, however, for the purposes of this narrative, where we are trying to arrive at an understanding the idea of the highest wisdom, it makes sense to say that Plato frames the highest wisdom as “not great or small,” outside of multiplicity: prior to this and that, prior to being itself. In other words, this tag, “not great or small,” might be in itself an important signifier.

We have traveled forward in time; almost one thousand years separate the death of Socrates from the closing of the Platonic Academy. Surely this is an unfathomable distance from which to look back to assess the meaning of the Socratic declaration that the highest wisdom is no wisdom. And yet, our researches have opened a vantage point that allows us to begin to see how this equation might possibly make sense.

We return to the wisdom that is no wisdom. What we have seen is the inside and the outside of the Socratic disavowal of knowledge. From the outside, Socrates speaks to the Athenians and announces something paradoxical and outrageous enough: The god calls me wisest, but I have no wisdom at all. From the inside, the god appears to use the name Socrates, but announces the nature of the highest wisdom: that the highest wisdom is no wisdom. When mind encounters the absolute, then there is no mind, no absolute. If the one is the ultimate principle of reality, then it has no nature. To know this unconditioned reality, the mind must transcend its own limits; the soul cannot grasp the form if the soul is unlike the form.

Socrates in his own quest for wisdom was guided past the limits of his own mind; he had previously understood true reality as something separate. He had a belief about what reality was like. It was in some other realm, exalted, divine, a unity. But that unity excluded him. He looked for truth outside of himself. Yet that first encounter with the one-that-is-not pointed him in a direction that he had not expected. The implications of that one revealed that there could be no distinctive essence there, and, therefore, that this reality excluded nothing. The very oneness of the one excluded anything other than the one; hence, this encounter with the one had implications, too, for Socrates’s notion of self.

In coming to the limits of his own mind, struggling with the worst difficulty, Socrates had to question what he meant by mind, what he meant by self, what he meant by knowledge. In the *Parmenides*, in the initial breakthrough into the one, Socrates had not yet refined just how this insight refracted on his ideas about himself.

Now, of course, in linking these two moments—the beginning and end of Socrates’s life in wisdom, the *Parmenides* and the *Apology*—by connecting them through a kind of parlance that signifies a wisdom neither great nor small, there is the obvious fact that “great and small” means two entirely different things in these dialogues, such that there is no apparently defensible way to link the passages by reference to this collocation. In the one dialogue, the *Apology*, “great or small” just is a way of speaking or configuring the idea that Socrates can’t know anything of either trivial or momentous consequence. In the *Parmenides*, the “great and small” are simply examples of forms that are subject to the regress test. In neither one of these dialogues is there any reference to what is after all a conception first documented in Aristotle, that is a reference to the “Platonist” conception of the “great and small,” the indefinite dyad, the total compass of multiplicity.

Nevertheless, if indeed, as Aristotle suggests at *Metaphysics* 1.6.987a26, Plato did reference, at least in the Academy, a totally encompassing principle of being through the collocation “the great and the small,” then it is still possible

that when Plato uses this collocation he alludes to this principle, at least on occasion. This suggestion depends on the line of interpretation advanced in the Tübingen school, as for example by Krämer (1964), but also discussed more recently by Dillon (2003):

As first principles Plato postulated the One and the Indefinite Dyad (given by him, it would seem, the distinctive title of “the Great-and-Small”)—in this, as in many other respects, developing the doctrine of the Pythagoreans. (18)

Dillon (2003) goes on to explain the purport of “great and small” by saying that the dyad “is regarded as a kind of duality, as being infinitely extensible or divisible, being simultaneously indefinitely large or small” (18). Whatever we make of Aristotle’s remarks in *Metaphysics* book 1, I think it is important to underscore that he employs the phrase “great and small” three times in this passage, suggesting that Plato derived the ideal world as ideal numbers from what Aristotle calls “the participation” (*methexin*) of the great and small (*to mega kai mikron*) in the one: “Accordingly the material principle is the ‘Great and Small,’ and the essence is the One, since the numbers are derived from the ‘Great and Small’ by participation in the One (987a26; trans. Ross [Aristotle 1924]; ὡς μὲν οὖν ὕλην τὸ μέγα καὶ τὸ μικρὸν εἶναι ἀρχάς, ὡς δ’ οὐσίαν τὸ ἓν: ἐξ ἐκείνων γὰρ κατὰ μέθεξιν τοῦ ἐνὸς τὰ εἶδη εἶναι τοὺς ἀριθμούς).

When Aristotle talks about the great and small as *hyle*, it is important to remember that he is still attempting to tell a story about the history of metaphysics as anticipating his own metaphysical discovery of the four *aitiai*. As he makes clear later in 1.9, when he compares the “great and small” to the “rare and dense (*to manon kai to puknon*) of which the physicists speak, he is going out of his way to fit what he takes to be Plato’s analysis of the constituent parts of reality into a scheme that includes what Aristotle calls ὡς μὲν οὖν ὕλην, or “playing the part of material cause.”

To put the point another way, I think it is fair to say that one may not infer that Plato held to a principle of being that he referred to, perhaps even explicitly referred to in Academic contexts, as “the great and small” from reading passages in the *Apology* or in the *Parmenides* that, admittedly, do not permit of anything like this kind of ontological interpretation. Still, it is perhaps not out of the question that if “great and small” does possess some kind of ontological significance within the Academy or Academic circles, that this phrase may carry more weight than a casual reader is likely to notice. Quite possibly, when Plato is attempting to summarize the “complete truth” of the Socratic “enterprise” (*pragma*), he expects the reader to pay very close attention indeed to every word.

Another important objection to the linking of the “one that is not,” or hypothesis one, of the *Parmenides* with any Socratic interest in what is beyond being (that is, an interest that arises before later Academic treatments of the first hypothesis as representing the metaphysics of the one beyond being) is that the figure of Parmenides and allusions to Parmenidean philosophy are always linked in the dialogues not to what is beyond being but precisely to being.<sup>13</sup> Illustrations proliferate, as in the *Theaetetus*, which as Gill shows, creates a contest between Heraclitean instability or impermanence and Parmenidean being.

At *Theaetetus* 180d8 Plato quotes or perhaps misquotes a fragment of Parmenides’s *Way of Truth*, associating the philosopher with an anti-Heraclitean metaphysics of stasis:

that “unchanged is a name for the all,” plus the other things a Melissus or a Parmenides asserts in opposition to all of them (the Heracliteans)—that all things are one, and that the one stands still (*hēsteken*), itself in itself (*auto en hautōi*)” (180d8; trans. M. L. Gill [2012, 79])<sup>14</sup>

In discussing these objections, essentially we are stepping into the torrent of Socratic hermeneutics, touching on controversial topics, as for example, the Neoplatonic reading of the *Parmenides*, the so-called unwritten doctrines, the historical Socrates and developmentalism, and the trustworthiness of Aristotle as a witness to Plato and to the Academy and as a reader of the dialogues. So fragile a link—the great and small—between the two bookends, as I have been calling them, the inner and outer shells that together house the Socratic dimension of wisdom that is neither great nor small, seems tenuous no doubt.

We can add to this gossamer strand of verbal echoes (great and small) other links that continue to develop the idea that Socratic wisdom, the highest wisdom, is the larger space from which Platonic knowledge is birthed. Important to this discussion are the connections to *Republic* 509e, to the form of the good that is, in Plato’s own words, “beyond ousia,” and to Socratic midwifery, the famous barrenness of Socrates’s wisdom that nevertheless delivers or brings to light the knowledge produced by other minds.

But even if the reader utterly rejects the idea that the *Apology* and the *Parmenides* frame the philosophical career of Socrates by focusing on the nature of Socratic wisdom as no wisdom, the argument of the book as a whole does not rest on this frame. As with any frame surrounding any argument or any work of art, for that matter, this framing of the Socratic persona, the initiation of the young Socrates into the one beyond being, and the declaration of the elder Socrates thirty days or so before his death that the highest wisdom is no wisdom, merely makes that persona easier to see.





## CONCLUSION

# THE SOCRATIC PARADIGM

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I hope to have shown that Plato's Socrates cannot be reduced to an historical figure that we can paradoxically only recover from the pages of Plato's representations. Instead, we are forced to admit that this Socrates, Plato's Socratic persona, is a paradigm; he functions within the dialogues as the very premise of the highest wisdom, and therefore is the larger container within which Platonic knowledge—that is, metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology—arises. Once developmentalism is suspended as an external explanation for how the Socratic relates to the Platonic, we are left with an open reading of the dialogues that fully embraces Socrates's multifaceted persona. We see him embodying the virtues that he is in search of. We see him distributing the good of truth telling to all comers equally. We see him caring for the souls of young. We see him concentrating on himself in the *Symposium*; staying awake all night in trance; walking barefoot through the sleet. We bid farewell to him as he drinks the poison. We chase after him as he pursues death. We meet him as the sage, the embodiment of divine wisdom, the person within the person who speaks to all within us that is selfish, ignorant, and violent. We meet him as the presence of the divine in the city. And, of course, we meet him as the highest wisdom within ourselves, the wisdom that is no wisdom.

Not a teacher, but still engaged in what he calls his pragma, in the course of the dialogues, Socrates is portrayed by Plato variously as a Theseus entering the labyrinth<sup>1</sup> (*Phd.* 58a10) and as Odysseus in search of his comrades (*Prt.* 315c8–d1).<sup>2</sup> Within these narrative frames of Plato's, Socrates is associated with the figure of the hero. He explains his motives for the practice of philosophy in terms of dedication to his mission and obedience to a higher authority (*Ap.* 28d–e), while his actions are all directed toward the fostering of wisdom in others.<sup>3</sup>

We have seen that, whatever doctrines Socrates may or may not have promulgated, the very facts surrounding his extraordinary life and death formed the impetus for the spate of Sokratikoi logoi that began to circulate in the 390s and continued to be published into the mid-part of the fourth century. In addition

to the more complete sets of Socratic writings (Plato's Socratic dialogues and Xenophon's *Memorabilia* in four books, as well as his *Symposium*), we also possess very incomplete remains of Socratic dialogues written by other members of the Socratic circle, including Antisthenes, Aeschines, and Phaedo (mostly available in Giannantonni 1990).<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the most we can ask of this literature is to provide us with a sense of the initial ethical intuitions that Socrates's story provokes and of how it comes to furnish the raw materials from which entire traditions of ethical philosophy have been spun, if not quite whole cloth, then certainly, in the absence of Socratic authorship, from tenuous threads. Quite possibly one of the earliest of Socratic dialogues is Aeschines's *Alcibiades* (Giannantoni 1990, frags. 43–54). As in other Socratic dialogues, here we glimpse Socrates associating with a wealthy and promising young man, later destined for ruin, betrayal, and infamy.<sup>5</sup> In Aeschines's version, Socrates attempts to intervene in Alcibiades's imminent plunge into folly, driven by the ambition that characterizes him in nearly all representations. He reprimands Alcibiades by comparing the latter unfavorably to Themistocles, raking the Greek hero over the coals for good measure for failing to outwit his domestic enemies and making clear that Alcibiades is no match even for this damaged icon. At the same time, Socrates is made to confess his love for Alcibiades, and he offers to explain his motives for attempting to befriend him:<sup>6</sup>

Because of the love that I truly feel for Alcibiades, I came to suffer an experience no different from that of the Maenads. Indeed, when the Maenads become full of the god, they are able to draw milk and honey from wells from which others cannot even draw water. So it is with me, although I have no wisdom that I can teach and so benefit the man, nevertheless I imagined that I could make him better through associating with him, on account of my love. (11c)

Here we see that Aeschines represents Socrates as explaining his motives for associating with Alcibiades as διὰ τὸ ἐρᾶν βελτίω ποιῆσαι; that is, Socrates wished to make him better on account of love for him.<sup>7</sup> The Aeschines fragment suggests that Socratic eros is primarily other-regarding; Aeschines's Socrates uses the language of "benefit" (ὠφελήσαιμ'), a word that is related to a complex of ideas in Plato's writings, as well as among the Stoics, to the effect that virtue entails benefiting or doing good to others.<sup>8</sup> Other Socratic writers home in on the beneficence of Socrates, as for example Xenophon, whose dialogues suggest that Socratic eros is an art of benevolent or even altruistic seduction, in which Socrates panders to the desires of his interlocutors for virtue:<sup>9</sup>

How therefore could [Socrates] be liable to the charge? He who, instead of failing to honor the gods, as was charged in the indictment, was most conspicuous of all in worshipping the gods? And instead of corrupting the youth, as the accuser charged against him, if any of his companions had base desires, he was conspicuous in putting a stop to these and in turning them toward desire for the finest and most noble virtue, by which cities and households flourish. (*Mem.* 1.2.64)

In Aeschines's dialogue, Socrates compels "Alcibiades to weep, laying his head on his lap in despair" (frag. 9) owing to his lack of virtue. Both the Aeschines passage and the Xenophon passage associate Socrates with a kind of eros or love by means of which Socrates attempts to benefit his companions, instilling in them the desire for virtue (and not necessarily by making them virtuous). These same ingredients—benevolence, the language of affect, familiarity, and other-directed concern more generally—feature in Plato's portrait of Socrates in the *Apology*.

In the *Apology* (31b), Socrates says that he approaches each citizen, "like a father or elder brother, exhorting you to regard virtue" and that, in doing so, he has had to neglect all of his own affairs (*emautou*; literally, everything "that belongs to myself"). In that same dialogue Socrates tells the Athenians, "Men of Athens, I welcome you and I love you" (29d3; Εγὼ ὑμᾶς, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ἀσπάζομαι μὲν καὶ φιλῶ). What does this vocabulary of friendship, affection, and care tell us about Socratic eudaimonism or about how Plato and other Socratics intended to represent the motivations of Socrates? Plato goes out of his way to call attention to the exemplary figure of Socrates as one who benefited the city. But what is remarkable is the extent to which this formulation was already a part of the Socratic persona even in what is possibly a pre-Platonic (and certainly an extra-Platonic) context. In fact, the Aeschines fragment suggests that eros itself is a *theia moira*, a dispensation from the gods that brings about the desire to benefit (frag. 11). This formula is also recognizably echoed in the early Stoic discussion of eros. One of Zeno's definitions of eros, as reported by Athenodorus—τὸν ἐρωτα θεὸν εἶναι, συνεργὸν ὑπάρχοντα πρὸς τὴν τῆς πόλεως σωτηρίαν (SVF I 263)—can be translated as "eros is a divine partner for the purpose of saving the city." This Zenonian definition resembles a later formulation, preserved as an Academic definition, of eros as "service to the gods for the care and salvation of the youth."<sup>10</sup> Both formulae have deeply Socratic overtones. In particular, the phrase "service of the gods and care of the youth" in Polemo's formula and the function of eros as partnering with god for the salvation of the city in Zeno's

formula recall the *Apology*'s association with Apollo and the altruistic motivations that Socrates claims for himself there.

The verb that Plato has Socrates use at *Apology* 29d3 when he addresses all of his fellow citizens—Ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ἀσπάζομαι μὲν καὶ φιλῶ (Men of Athens, I welcome you)—is etymologically related to a Stoic technical term, the noun *aspasmos*. It is one of the species of *eupatheiai*, states of mind associated with the sage, which the Stoics delineate in contrast to the irrational and erroneously generated emotions of ordinary people (fools). Under the genus of joy (*chara* as opposed to the emotion *hedone*, or delight) come a number of species terms including *eunoia*, *eumeneia*, and *aspasmos* (Graver 2007, 59n48), all of which involve the primary meaning of goodwill or wishing well attended by the desire to benefit the object of one's *boulesis*. The last term, *aspasmos*, is defined as “constantly renewed good will.”<sup>11</sup> It would not be too much to connect this nexus of ideas with Socrates's activity in the *Apology*, with his constant good will or wishing persons well for their own sakes, and so with Socrates's comportment toward the Athenians as a whole.

The *Apology* contains a number of statements that appear to be primarily other-regarding. For example, the Athenians require that Socrates suggest a counterproposal in exchange for his capital sentence, whereupon Socrates insists that what he ought to have from the state is a reward, since he has spent his life “conferring upon each citizen individually what [he] regard[s] as the greatest benefit” (36c3–4). Again, in the same dialogue, Socrates describes his philosophical activity in the following way: “The Olympian victor makes you think yourself happy; I make you be happy” (36e9).

As Plato has Socrates tell the story at 20e6–23c1, Socrates undertakes his lifetime of elenctic examination as a form of *latreia*, of service to Apollo (23c1). In this same passage, Socrates tells us that, as a result of his service, he is unable to undertake any action on his own behalf (πρᾶξαι μοι σχολή γέγονεν ἄξιον λόγου οὔτε τῶν οικείων). Yet why did Socrates initially enter into this service? Socrates, again as Plato tells the story, is puzzled about the meaning of an oracle. He recognizes that Apollo cannot be lying when he claims that “no one” is wiser than Socrates; he uses the phrase, “it is not lawful.” The Greek phrase here—οὐ γὰρ θέμις (21b6)—refers to matters of religious propriety. The suggestion is that Socrates embarks on his activity to fulfill a duty, or in recognition of an obligation for which there is divine sanction. Later in the speech, Socrates seems to recognize the service he renders to Apollo as a kind of order, station, or post: “Wherever one takes up his post in the belief that it is better or is assigned a post by a superior . . .” (28d7; οὐ ἂν τις ἑαυτὸν τάξῃ ἡγησάμενος βέλτιστον εἶναι ἢ ὑπ' ἄρχοντος ταχθῆ).

Primarily, Socrates's exhortations to virtue in the *Apology* amount to advice to his fellow citizens to care for their souls, in order to make them as virtuous as possible (29e–30b2; cf. also 38a):

For this is what the god commands me to do, and I am aware of no greater good to have befallen you in this city than my service to the god. For I do nothing other than to go around and persuade you, both young and old, to attend neither to your bodies nor to your wealth, prior to, or with the same attention that you give to making sure that your soul may be the best possible. (29e–30b2)

In the *Apology*, Socrates makes the case that he cares for souls of his fellow citizens on two grounds. First, his work is a service to the divine. Second, he feels affection for his fellow citizens (ἀσπάζομαι; 29d3) and acts toward them in the capacity of a father or older brother (31b4). He also makes it clear that he attends to the souls of his fellow citizens precisely to do them good: “I am aware of no greater good to befall you in this city than my service to the god” (30a6). According to the narrative that Plato constructs in the *Apology*, Socrates offers his philosophical activity on behalf of his fellow citizens when he assures his audience and explicitly denies that his motivation involves any self-interest:

I am far from offering a defense for my own sake, as one might assume, but rather, I am defending myself for your sakes, lest you go astray in the god's gift by condemning me. (30d6)

### Assimilation to God: Socrates and the Divine

So far we have seen that Plato adumbrates his version of the Socratic paradigm in the *Apology*, where Socrates intervenes in the spiritual and moral crisis of the late fifth century. But the figure of Socrates as an exemplar, as someone whose motivations are literally idealized by Plato and contrasted with the motivations of the many is multivalent and operates throughout the dialogues. At *Meno* 100a7, we are told about the man who possesses genuine virtue: “Here on earth such a man would be the real thing in comparison with shadows as far as virtue is concerned.” In the reading program of the dialogues, we are meant to notice the inversion of the Socratic desire, to benefit all, in the interlocutor's desire, which is solely for his own good. The difference between them has to do with the difference between being the cause of good, as the form is the cause of the good and benefits, and being the recipient or participant in that cause,

as the particular participates and receives its good from the form, with which it is not identical.

We need to see what this Socratic paradigm shares with the metaphysical dialogues. Moreover, the decidedly metaphysical language used of Socrates in the *Apology*, the phenomenal (this particular) and the real (the form) invites us to take up the question of the Socratic paradigm in search of its metaphysical ramifications, in other words, to search not so much for the real, or historical, Socrates, as for the form of Socrates. In particular, the desire to benefit, attending to the common good, and assimilating one's fellow citizens to the good—in all of this we see how Socrates behaves like the Demiurge. Socrates's influence in the dialogues signals the presence of the divine and channels the influence of the divine. In this respect, we begin to see inside Plato's Socrates when we acknowledge the likeness to god that forms the basis of Socratic ethics. Assimilating others to the good, being a cause of the good, not exhibiting envy, generously bestowing benefit—all of these descriptions hold true for Socrates and signal his kinship with the divine.

The Socratic intervention or we might say the descent of Socrates is an occasion within which the divine makes its presence felt through the assimilative activity of this particular human being, who then operates as a paradigm for others. As it happens, we can only fully uncover the meaning of the Socratic quest for virtue and the beneficent placement or stationing of Socrates in Athens through reference to the *Timaeus* and to the *Theaetetus*. And yet this outward activity is in its own way another mask for Socrates. His true virtue lies not in action but in contemplation; from the very beginning, as we saw, Socratic training in virtue is training in *theoria*.

If Socrates operates as a paradigm, then presumably his virtue is paradigmatic. And paradigmatic virtue is of central importance to the Neoplatonic discussion of contemplative virtue. According to the Neoplatonist “scale of virtues,” the highest possible virtue is what Porphyry (and Iamblichus in the tradition that follows) calls “paradigmatic”:

The fourth class of virtues are the paradigmatic, which are those stationed in the intellect, since they are superior to the psychic virtues and are in fact the paradigms of the latter, paradigms of which the virtues in the soul constitute the [mere] names. Now intellect is that in which the as it were paradigms exist simultaneously, whereas intellect is knowledge and intellect, that which knows, is wisdom, intellect's proximity to itself is its temperance, and its minding its own business is its accomplishing its native act, its courage is its sameness and its remaining pure, in itself, through its superabundance of power. (Porphyry 2005, 338, Sentence 32)

Here Porphyry suggests that paradigmatic virtue is simply the intrinsic nature of the mind. The intellect, the true knower, is intrinsically adorned with the virtues. Porphyry says that the intellect, in knowing itself, accomplishing its function, attending to its own reality, or contemplating itself, takes on these adornments of courage, wisdom, and temperance. Hence, the reality of these virtues is that they are born directly in the heart of wisdom; they are contemplative in nature. They are not species of action; they are not prudential thinking aimed at the improvement of the individual's condition. Virtue is knowledge in this most intimate of senses, for Porphyry. Later Platonists developed this method of reading the Socratic dialogues in order to highlight the contemplative meaning of virtue and to show that Socrates, even though he is a "street philosopher," stands in for the divine intellect itself, coming into view as the true nature of the self.

I have suggested that Socratic ethics instances a kind of metaphysical realism insofar as it relies on the paradigmatic aspect of the Socratic persona. In the final section of this chapter, I will argue that there is no reason to assume that the good to be sought, the good to which Socrates exhorts his interlocutor, pertains most, exclusively, or primarily to the agent herself. I wish to illustrate the error of equating Socratic virtue ethics with egoistic eudaimonism, or with egoism of any kind.

### *Sama Dukha Sukhaa Sarveheh*: The Equality of All Beings with Respect to Well-Being and Suffering in Plato and in Shantideva

There is a widespread understanding among historians of philosophy that classical Greek ethics are largely or even entirely eudaimonist in structure. In particular, for the past twenty or more years classicists and historians of Greek philosophy have given an account of Socratic ethics as reflected in the Socratic dialogues of Plato that emphasizes the agent's pursuit of his or her own well-being. In what follows, I would like to interrogate this standard view of Socratic ethics by studying the eudaimonist implications of the so-called *prudential principle* (the principle that everyone desires the good) in light of Shantideva's *Bodhicaryavatara*. I first discuss the work that the prudential principle is commonly made to do in rational eudaimonist accounts of Socratic ethics. I then contrast the altruism inherent in Shantideva's treatment of what he calls the *sama dukha sukhaa sarveheh* ("the equality of all beings with respect to well-being and suffering") with the purportedly egoistic implications of Plato's doctrine that all desire is for the good. My purpose is to show that rational eudaimonist interpretations are by no means adequate for understanding the importance of



the prudential principle in the Socratic dialogues. Third, I compare the function of arguments from transmigration in Shantideva's text and in Plato's text in terms of how such arguments are used to undermine strictly egoistic accounts of rational motivation.<sup>12</sup> The section concludes with a discussion of the virtue of equanimity in both authors. I argue that the Socratic dialogue has the intended, though not necessarily realized, goal of creating an association between persons who will the good based on the shared awareness that everyone desires the good. This awareness, that everyone desires the good, has its own motivating force that can be expressed as the desire to benefit others. Fundamental to Socratic ethics is this orientation of extending the good. Thus I want to underscore the importance of the prudential principle for an interpretation of Socratic eudaimonism in which the equality of self and other form a part of Socratic teaching. In this respect, Socratic ethics more closely resemble the later ethics of the Stoa, where pursuing one's own well-being and pursuing another's well-being are, at a certain peak of moral development, indistinguishable. I hope that by studying this principle of equality as it appears in the eighth-century Madhyamaka text alongside Plato's Socratic dialogues, we can test the meaning of classical Greek eudaimonism. We can also, most importantly, clarify the Socratic persona and Socratic ethics, rejecting the shallow egoism that characterizes modern interpretations of Socratic philosophy as a whole.

There are several obstacles in the way of understanding the scope and meaning of Socratic eudaimonism.<sup>13</sup> First, the concept of happiness that Socrates invokes is notoriously thin, as Annas has demonstrated. He does specify that virtue is happiness, but he does not really say how virtue equates with happiness. Even so, there are disputes about whether virtue for Socrates is constitutive or instrumental to happiness.<sup>14</sup> Second, though, various interpreters allow or refuse to allow the eudaimonism of Socrates to include aims that are non self-referential and not inherently agent centered. For example, both Terry Irwin and Gregory Vlastos construe Socratic eudaimonism in a particularly constricted way, since each insists that it must be entirely self-regarding. Here is Irwin's (1995) discussion of the structure of Socratic eudaimonism:

- (1) In all our rational actions we pursue our own happiness. (2) We pursue happiness only for its own sake, never for the sake of anything else. (3) Whatever else we rationally pursue, we pursue it for the sake of happiness....

The remarks in the *Euthydemus* about happiness, taken by themselves, imply only that if we do not pursue our own happiness, we are not acting rationally....

Psychological eudaemonism, in contrast to rational eudaemonism, requires the rejection of ... possibilities that common sense recognizes: ... Common sense believes that it is possible for us to benefit someone else for the other person's own sake, not for our own happiness....

A psychological eudaemonist must claim that such actions cannot happen, and that common sense is misled in believing that they happen. Rational eudaemonism claims not that these actions are impossible, but that they are irrational. (53)

And Vlastos's (1991) equally restrictive assessment may be found in his discussion of *Gorgias* 468c2–6

Here desire for happiness is strictly self-referential: it is the agent's desire for his own happiness and that of no one else. This is so deep-seated an assumption that it is simply taken for granted: no argument is ever given for it in the Platonic corpus. (203n14).

Obviously we need not accept these strictures on eudaimonism. We could say, with White (2002), that while the importance of one's own happiness arises with great frequency in Greek ethics as a starting point, nevertheless, there may be other motives for rational action that are not agent-centered. Our starting point may, for example, be the cosmos as a whole, or even the well-being of some smaller community. Our starting point for ethics may indeed be some notion of the good that is not particularly referenced to any agent, as with Plato's form of the good. These alternative reference points for talking about rational activity may still coexist with a very strong eudaimonist orientation (330–38).

We know, too, from Annas's (1993) work on eudaimonism, that if a eudaimonist asks "How is my life going?" then she can say it is going well if she is developing the virtues and not well otherwise. But now, since the virtues are by their nature not self-regarding but in fact demand the curtailment of her own desires (as in temperance) or abandonment of her self-interest (as in justice), there need be no egoistic implications of Socrates's claim that we do everything for the sake of happiness. Thus happiness does not need to be linked to well-being in the narrow sense of one's own personal interest, or even welfare (see especially 127).

But it is, after all, troubling that two very prominent Socrates scholars take a narrow, constrictive view of Socratic eudaimonism. Irwin suggests that caring for another's welfare for his own sake is irrational or impossible and Vlastos suggests that the agent is primarily concerned with only his own happiness. On

what do they base their claims? Obviously their work arises as a response to the prominence of the prudential principle in a number of Socratic elenchi. As we have seen, Socrates often begins the elenctic progression from the undisputed premise that everyone desires the good. In the case of the *Gorgias*, he uses the premise to undermine Polus's point that the tyrants have the greatest power in the city; in *Meno*, Socrates uses the paradox to refute Meno's definition of virtue—everyone wants good things, so wanting good things cannot be a distinguishing feature of the virtuous person. On the surface, the prudential principle appears to coincide more closely with the structure of strategic or self-interested action: “‘Who in the world does not wish to do well?’ ‘Not a single one,’ said Clinias” (*Euthyd.* 278e4). As it is expressed in the *Protagoras*, the principle apparently guarantees that first and foremost, we would choose our own good, that, all things being equal, we would never sacrifice our benefits and accept a diminished good in place of a greater one:

No one willingly goes to meet evil or what he thinks to be evil. To make for what one believes to be evil, instead of making for the good, is not, it seems, in human nature, and when faced with the choice of two evils no one will choose the greater when he might choose the less. (358d1)<sup>15</sup>

On first glance, it might seem that an egoistic interpretation of text follows rather straightforwardly from the frequency with which Socrates argues that “no one wants to be unhappy” and that there is no one in the world “who does not wish to do well.” Interpreted in this light, Socrates is making a point about the structure of motivations; people are motivated to act with a view to enhancing their own well-being. Yet the matter cannot be settled so easily. For we should consider the possibility that in pointing out that people generally wish to fare well, Socrates might be calling attention to this fact because of the ethical consequences that follow or should follow from recognizing this fact about all people. While it may be a general truth about persons that they wish to do well, it does not follow that the only implication of this principle for one's life is that one should advance his or her own happiness. Rather, one can observe this feature about other persons and, as a result, refrain from harming them. Moreover, one can observe that, in this respect, one person is much like another; all wish to be free from suffering and to enjoy well-being. Finally, far from having to conclude that a given person ought to advance her own happiness, on understanding that everyone wishes to be happy, a person might respond by noticing that, in this regard, she is like every other person. There is nothing special, unique, or privileged about her own regard for her welfare. In sum, the act of pointing out

that people wish to be happy, or the implicit realization that people wish to be happy, does not in and of itself guarantee that the ethical position that does so is structurally eudaimonist. In order to see the implications of this belief, that all people wish to be happy, we need to examine the dialectical contexts in which this belief is introduced.<sup>16</sup>

To cast a different light on the implications of the eudaimonist principle in the Socratic dialogues, I wish to take the reader on an excursion to India, to the eighth century, to be more exact, at a time when the Buddhist poet and monk Shantideva wrote his famous treatise, the *Bodhicaryavatara*, or *Entering the Path of Enlightenment*.<sup>17</sup> Shantideva wrote this compendium of Mahayana philosophy at the very zenith of the Madhyamaka school, whose obsession with the absolute is perhaps matched only by the Greek philosophical tradition inaugurated by Parmenides. Chapter 8 of the treatise, on the perfection of meditation, contains Shantideva's arguments for a radically altruistic position that is grounded in what he terms the *sama dukha sukha sarveheh* (the equality of all beings with respect to well-being and suffering). For Shantideva, this sameness of all beings in their desires for well-being is construed as the foundation for the Bodhisattava's vow to save all sentient beings.

Now, we saw already that this same principle is enunciated in the terms of a similar formation in the Socratic dialogues, that is, it is expressed as a universal desire to be free from suffering or to be free from harm:

Socrates: Well, does anybody want to be unhappy and unfortunate?

Meno: I suppose not.

Socrates: Then if no, nobody desires what is evil. (*Meno* 77e1)

Let's compare verse 90 of the *Bodhicaryavatara* here:

One should first earnestly meditate on the equality of oneself and others in this way: "All equally experience suffering and happiness."

In verse 91, we find another premise:

Likewise, different beings, with their joys and sorrows, are all equal, like myself, in their yearning for happiness.

Here we see something very like the Socratic claim, the claim that all beings desire to be free from suffering, deployed in order to support a doctrine of radical altruism. We might say that just keeping this fact in mind about other beings, that they all wish to be happy, will help me to see that each makes a claim upon all. By regarding them as beings who wish to be happy, who have

independent subjectivities, lives, projects, I begin to see them with greater equanimity. I begin to meditate on the equality of myself with others.

For the Buddhist philosopher, the idea that everyone wishes to be happy does not lead one to consider his own happiness, how to promote his own happiness, or how to promote his own happiness primarily. Much less does it lead to the conclusion that it is irrational for me to promote another's happiness "for his own sake."

It might be worth pausing here to consider in more detail the structure of the claim that all beings are alike with respect to their desires for weal and their aversion to woe. For Shantideva, the argument begins with a recognition about all beings, that suffering and well-being are common to all. But, in this case, Shantideva suggests that this fact, one that is presumably empirically obvious and requires no special argument, leads to a conclusion: There is an equality of self and other with respect to this condition. Presumably the thought is something like this: All beings suffer and enjoy well-being. I am a being. Hence, in this respect I am the same as all beings: I suffer and enjoy well-being. The next step introduces a second premise, this time connected to the desires of all beings. Although all beings experience both weal and woe, in fact, they all want to enjoy well-being. Here we encounter yet another feature about beings—their desires are structured in a certain way. Moreover, since I am a being, then my desires are structured in this very same way.

Returning to the texts of Plato, it might seem that the question I have raised about the implications of the eudaimonist principle in the Socratic dialogues are purely academic. After all, Shantideva explicitly argues for the altruistic implications of his first premise, the *samadukhasukha sarve*, the sameness of all beings with respect to well-being and ill-being. Contrast Socrates. Where do we find any hint of altruism, or, indeed, where does Socrates explore the altruistic implications of the prudential principle? A partial answer lies in pointing out the extent to which Socratic ethics is inherently other-regarding insofar as it is an ethics of self-restraint (see Weiss 2006).<sup>18</sup> That other persons wish to enjoy well-being presents a constraint on our behavior, a constraint that Socrates invokes in the *Crito* and in the *Gorgias*, when he states his principle of non-harming. It is always wrong to do injustice, to harm another:

Do we say that one must never willingly do wrong or does it depend on circumstances? (*Cri.* 49a)

Notice that in this articulation of the principle of non-harm Socrates offers no support for this thesis; it is not tied to a theory of eudaimonia. Socrates simply states that it is always wrong to harm another. In fact, by stipulating that one

must never harm, irrespective of the surrounding circumstances, Socrates makes clear that this principle of non-harm cannot be tied to a theory of eudaimonism, of how such non-harm benefits the agent, for its justification; it must be prior to all such considerations.

In short, we may find that what is behind the elenctic deployment of the prudential principle, that persons wish to do well, is the import that this claim—namely, your claim to well-being—will have on the way that I live my life. If I respect you, then I won't violate this claim. If I am stepping on your toes and you say to me, "Ouch! That hurts!" then I have a good reason to stop stepping on your toes. Your claim provides me with a constraint on my actions. In this sense, Socratic ethics often functions in the dialogues as an ethics of self-restraint, of leaving undone what otherwise might have promoted one's own advantage. Could it be that the Socratic stricture that it is always wrong to harm another follows directly from considering the altruistic implications of the eudaimonist principle that everyone wishes to be happy?

In this reconstruction of Socratic principles, Socrates begins to argue from something that he and virtually all of his interlocutors consider self-evident, not worth disputing: that is, the universal desire to be happy. Next, Socratic elenchus, as we have seen, often involves a pointing out of this feature about others—they wish to be happy. It follows that it is wrong to harm them, to commit injustice. In this sense, there are ethical implications of the prudential principle that extend beyond eudaimonism and provide ethical guideposts for my actions that are not motivated by my concern for my own well-being. Thus there is an implicit contrast between the subjective recognition of the eudaimonist principle that all people wish to be happy, in the sense that it might be immediately obvious that people attempt to advance their own happiness, to a more objective application, that the desire that all people have to be free from suffering gives me a reason not to harm them. The move is from a form or kind of egoism to a greater awareness of the needs and desires of those who are outside of my egoistic ambit.

### The Transmigration of Happiness

In verses 90–117 of chapter 8, Shantideva develops a number of arguments that might remind us of Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* or Nagel's *The Possibility of Altruism*. Shantideva here argues for the altruistic implications of his first premise, the *samadukhasukha sarve*, the sameness of all beings with respect to well-being and ill-being. What kinds of strategies does he employ? First, Shantideva suggests that suffering should be eliminated no matter who suffers. If it makes sense to

eliminate my own suffering, I have those same reasons to alleviate the suffering of another. In other words, I have reason to eliminate suffering not because it is I who experience it but just because it is suffering and, hence, the object of rational avoidance. Verse 97 employs an argument from future states of self to show that the suffering of other selves should matter to me:

If I do not protect them because I am not afflicted by their suffering,  
why do I protect my body from the suffering of a future body from  
that which is not my pain?

We know that Plato discusses similar constructions as a part of his hedonistic calculus in the *Protagoras*, where the agent must decide to measure the pleasure that will become available to his or her future self, and the futurity of the pleasure in question has a distorting effect on one's capacity to measure accurately the total amount of pleasure available. One will tend to weight present pleasure more heavily than future pleasure (*Prt.* 351–56).

But still, the opponent can argue, as Shantideva's antagonist goes on to do in verse 98, "The assumption is that it is the same me even then." I care about my future pain in a way that I do not care about another's pain just because it will be I who suffer the future pain in a way that I will not have to suffer another's pain. Several strategies are available at this point to the Buddhist and to the Greek dialectician. Let us briefly explore these in terms of the idea of self-continuity over time in relationship to well-being.

As we have seen, Shantideva's strategy works in two competing directions. In one way, Shantideva emphasizes the discontinuity of self-identity. Given the fragmentation of self or the doctrine of *anatta*, of no self, the question of ownership over states of well-being or ill-being, of pain or of welfare, becomes moot. Generally there is no one to whom such states belong—and the fragmentation of self-identity over time within one life span demonstrates the poor logic of arguing for the priority of states that happen to belong to oneself. The other strategy he adopts is based rather on the idea of the non-continuity of self-identity over a succession of lives. Here we find an argument based on the transmigration of the soul. Suppose I have a reason to care about the suffering undergone by the person who, it turns out, is realized as a future incarnation of what could be described in some sense as one's own soul. According to the logic of this argument, we assume that there is something called a self or owner of states of well-being or ill-being. Yet, given the doctrine of transmigration, it is possible to talk about this self or owner coming to be the referent of future states of well-being that are realized in other lives. If so, then, Shantideva argues, I have just as much reason to care about (contemporary) other selves. I have

reason to care about other contemporary selves for the same reason that I care about future selves whose lives are nevertheless not my life: I am able to identify their welfare or suffering as objects of concern for me. Plato it seems does something similar to defeat the strictures of the narrow eudaimonism that are presented at the outset of the *Republic*.

In book 10 of the *Republic*, Er's report of the future tyrant, the reincarnation of someone who pursued a virtuous life out of habit, but not out of philosophy, is meant to elicit compassion and fear; the implication is that we do care for the happiness of what would presumably be an indefinite number of other selves, of people not in any way oneself, namely, those whose incarnations will turn on the choices now made in a present incarnation:

He was one of those who had come down from heaven, a man who had lived in a well ordered polity in his former existence participating in virtue by habit and not by philosophy and we may perhaps say that a majority of those who were thus caught were of the company that had come from heaven, inasmuch as they were unexercised in suffering. (619c)

This person, a successful person in a successful community, is brought before us as object of both pity and fear, and perhaps ridicule, in the tragic-comic pageant that closes the *Republic*. Recall that in this passage Plato is presenting us with concluding arguments that relate to the question of whether or not the life of justice is more conducive to happiness than the life of injustice. At this juncture, Plato discusses the posthumous curriculum of the soul. Why does Plato leave us with the consideration that we must look to future births in order to see whether or not our lives have gone well? Presumably, if we do undergo a future birth, we will have no recognizable affinity with this other birth. We will have a full measure of Lethe, as Plato tells us, and we will be completely different people. Our future self will not be in any meaningful way "us." True, Plato says that it will be the same soul who undergoes each successive birth, but this notion of soul is highly underdetermined at this point in the story.

So how do we construe the eudaimonism of Plato and, prior to him, of Socrates? Here we are looking at an eschatology that posits a continuity not exactly of self but at least of causal relationship between the life choice in one person's life and the life choice to be realized in a distinct and separate person's, or indeed living being's, life. What reason do I have to be concerned with the life of another person when my life, as indeed the lives of those around me, has gone so incredibly well that I am fortunate enough to be naive and



inexperienced in suffering? What relationship is there between the present lack of suffering that I currently enjoy and the future suffering of this as yet unborn tyrant who seems to be a separate self? How does eudaimonism accommodate this example?

Even if we admit that eudaimonism is not limited to narrow self-interest and that it is not inherently egoistic, this example from the *Republic*, with its implication that an indefinite number of other selves can function as a test for how my life as a whole is going, seems strangely out of place in a eudaimonist world. After all, if a eudaimonist asks, “How is my life going?” presumably he will not also normally ask, “How will the lives of all and every subsequent incarnation go?” In fact, for Aristotle’s version of eudaimonism, this example from the *Republic* fits rather poorly. For Aristotle, the conception of one’s life as a whole informs the value of happiness: Happiness is stable and self-sufficient. *Autarkeia* is the word that Aristotle uses:

We stipulate that the happy life will be self-sufficient. But not in the sense that the individual is cut off or only attending to his own happiness: Rather, it relates to parents, wife, and children. (*Eth. Nic.* 1.7.1097b)

But, Aristotle says, we must put a limit to this; if we extend it to parents and descendants and friends’ friends it will go on ad infinitum: “We posit as self-sufficient that which when isolated by itself makes life choice worthy and lacking nothing” (1.7.1097b).

It seems that Plato’s argument in the *Republic* is precisely structured to skew the consequentialism of the preceding books and indeed to skew the very inquiry that the interlocutors undertake in the first place. The interlocutors demand to know why they are better off choosing a life of justice, that is, why justice is intrinsically better than injustice for the agent. Now, of course, we know that the person in our example, the nonphilosopher who comes down from heaven, is someone who is just owing to habit. It is because he lacks discernment about what is actually valuable that he cannot see through the apparent benefits of tyranny to the concomitant evils such a state brings in its train. The person who comes down from heaven chooses tyranny, and yet it is another person who must suffer the consequences of his choice. Which other person? The person whose rebirth will take place in what will be a distinctly different life. In a similar way, Shantideva’s opponent in the *Bodhicaryavatara* attempts to distinguish between one’s eudaimonist commitments to future births and one’s possible obligations to alleviate the sufferings of contemporary other selves. As we have seen, Shantideva blocks this objection:

The notion, “it is the same me even then” is a false construction, since it is one person who dies, quite another who is born. (8.98; trans. Crosby and Skilton)

My suggestion, then, is that Plato presents the Myth of Er as a way to throw a monkeywrench into the workings of eudaimonism; in some sense, he has to show that justice is worth choosing without respect to its consequences for the agent who practices it.

Shantideva’s text begins with the inculcation of equanimity that arises upon seeing the equality of self and other. For Shantideva, this is preliminary work that becomes the foundation for the radical altruism of the *Bodhicaryavatara*. Part of the foundation of this equality is the Buddhist doctrine of anatta, of no self. The topic of self and other, of who ultimately is the owner of pain and joy, of weal and woe, is one that no Platonist who hopes to investigate the parameters of ancient eudaimonism, can afford to ignore.

Unfortunately, there is no space to explore in greater detail the possibility of comparing the Buddhist doctrine of anatta with Plato’s metaphysics, which, at least on some accounts, denies that particulars possess any essence, any real being (Silverman 2002). What I have tried to do instead is to show that the Socratic paradigm, insofar as it models altruism, concern with the welfare of others, together with neglect of anything belonging to the self and assimilating others to the good, far from recommending egoism, does everything it can to promote altruism. Only by turning away from the narrow compass of one’s own desires, thoughts, opinions, and viewpoints, that is, only by interrogating the self, can one understand the Socratic exhortation to lead an examined life. The fruit of this life, a mind that enjoys equanimity by understanding that any of the objects of thought or of desire are not capable of bringing about felicity, will also manifest itself in an ethics that recognizes the equality of self and other.



## NOTES

### Preface

1. Compare Nehamas (1998, 41), who talks about the ironic approach of Plato to his audience. He says there that “Socrates’ irony is directed at Euthyphro only as a means; its real goal is the reader.” In what follows, I am not assenting to the idea that Plato takes what Nehamas calls “an insultingly ironical approach to the reader.” Rather, the approach is not insulting at all. Instead, as I hope to show, Plato must rely on and, in a sense, entrust his Socrates to the sincere efforts of the reader to solve this aporia: Who is Socrates, and why is Socratic wisdom the highest wisdom?

2. “He appears to mention this Socrates . . .” (*Ap.* 23a9–b1; φαίνεται τοῦτον λέγειν τὸν Σωκράτη . . .). All translations from the Greek are my own, unless otherwise specified.

3. ἐμὲ παράδειγμα ποιούμενος (*Ap.* 23b1).

4. Aristotle focuses on this aspect of Socrates in his account of Socratic philosophy in the *Metaphysics*: “But when Socrates was occupying himself with the excellences of character, and in connection with them became the first to raise the problem of universal definition . . .” (1078b22–33).

5. “What then does the god mean when he declares that I am the wisest?” (*Ap.* 21b5; τί οὖν ποτε λέγει φάσκων ἐμὲ σοφώτατον εἶναι;).

6. For a discussion of what esotericism has meant historically in the critical literature on Plato, see Krämer (1990). For the Tübingen school, the idea of the esoteric suggests doctrines that circulated orally within the Academy. For the Tübingen school’s use of the term *esoteric* to refer to the so-called unwritten doctrines of Plato, see Nikulin (2012). Nikulin’s book presents a balanced and intelligent discussion of the evidence used by the Tübingen school for the hypothesis that Plato orally transmitted a foundational system of metaphysical principles within the Academy. Nikulin’s very useful book also translates seminal articles from the German of members of the Tübingen circle. The evidence for this hypothesis consists in a large number of testimonia found in the writings of the Aristotelian commentators, purporting to be traceable to the early Platonic successors Speusippus and Xenocrates. Dillon’s (2003) book is largely

a review of the evidence of these testimonia as it relates to the reconstruction of developments in the earliest post-Platonic Academy.

7. For Strauss's Socrates, see Strauss (1964). For an excellent discussion of Strauss's ironic interpretation of Plato's *Republic* in terms of an apolitical Socrates who valorized the contemplative life above political constructions, see Zuckert (1996, 127–98). See also the defense of Strauss by Ferrari (1997).

8. See Dillon (2003) on the reception of Plato's philosophy in the early academy and references to a Pythagorean-Platonic metaphysical system involving the monad and the dyad and the derivation of being from these initial principles. See also Tarrant (2000).

9. This idea of a Platonic metaphysical system is well presented in Gerson (2013). Gerson writes, "What I want to show is that the substance of Plato's thought can be seen to be built up from UP" (10). By his abbreviation UP, or Ur-Platonism, Gerson explains, he means the following: "The elements of UP according to my hypothesis are antimaterialism, antimechanism, antinomialism, antirelativism, and antiskepticism" (10). I certainly would agree that Platonic philosophy assumes knowledge of an immaterial reality (that is, antiskepticism and antimaterialism). What I am saying here is not meant in any way to impugn the idea of Platonic metaphysics or a positive account of Platonic knowledge. I am simply saying that Socratic wisdom falls outside of the scope of any systematic doctrine that embraces what Gerson refers to as Ur-Platonism.

10. By *developmentalism*, I mean the thesis that Plato wrote his dialogues in a chronological order that started with the *Apology* and the aporetic dialogues, writing under the influence of the historical Socrates, whom these dialogues purportedly represent. See Vlastos (1991, especially 45–80).

11. By Eudaimonism, I mean the thesis that the moral philosophy of Socrates (and indeed of the entire Classical tradition) can best be described as a search for the individual's well-being, as a search aimed at enhancing the agent's well-being rather than, say, as an investigation of the agent's obligations (deontology). See Annas (1993). On Socratic Eudaimonism especially see Irwin (1995, 52, sec. 36).

12. The phrase "the Socratic movement" comes from the title of Vander Waerdt's (1994) book.

13. I will have much more to say about these interpreters later. See Johnson and Tarrant (2012), Layne and Tarrant (2014), Porphyry (2005), Hermias (2012), Proclus (1963), Olympiodorus (1990), and Damascius (1977).

14. For the history and etymology of the word *symbol*, together with a discussion of how in particular Neoplatonists developed the literary applications of the idea of the symbol, see Struck (2004, 227–53).

15. Fragment 1 of the *Oracles* begins as follows:

Ἔστιν γάρ τι νοητόν, ὃ χρή σε νοεῖν νόου ἄνθει·  
 ἦν γὰρ ἐπεγκλίνης σὸν νοῦν κακεῖνο νοήσης  
 ὧς τι νοῶν, οὐ κείνο νοήσεις· (Julianus 1996, 66, lines 1–2)

Two indispensable books on the *Chaldean Oracles* are Lewy (1956) and Addey (2014). On the idea of the *Chaldean Oracles* as a theology and on the figure of Julian the Theurgist, see Athanassiadi (1999).

16. See Weiss (2006), whose book involves a close reading of the Socratic dialogues that attempts to show that such ethical constructs as egoistic eudaimonism are part of the arsenal of Sophistic theorizing, while, for the most part, Socrates remains free from any doctrinal commitments. On this idea of a Socrates who mirrors his interlocutor’s ethical views but does not hold any moral theses or deploy them constructively, see also Peterson (2012).

17. “... et ibi vita sapientia est, per quam fiunt omnia ista, et quae fuerunt et quae futura sunt, et ipsa non fit, sed sic est ut fuit, et sic erit semper” (August., *Conf.* 9.10.24).

18. See below extract:

Σωκράτης μὲν γάρ, ἅτε ἔνθεος ὢν ἐραστής καὶ πρὸς  
 αὐτὸ τὸ νοητὸν κάλλος ἀναγόμενος, τῷ νῶ τῆς ψυχῆς  
 ἀνάλογον ἴδρυσεν  
 ἐαυτὸν· τί γὰρ ἄλλο ἐστὶ τὸ τῷ νοητῷ συναπτόμενον ἢ νοῦς .  
 (Procl., *In Alc.* 43.7–10)

19. Compare *Euthyphro* 15c9: “We must go back again and start from the beginning to find out what the holy is”; *Lysis* 223b5: “Well Lysis and Menexenus, we have made ourselves rather ridiculous today, I, an old man, and you children. For our hearers here will carry away the report that though we conceive ourselves to be friends with each other—you see I class myself with you—we have not as yet been able to discover what we mean by a friend” (Wright trans. [Plato 1961]).

20. Arthur Versluis (2004) writes persuasively that the literary form has an important role to play in the process of initiation in the Western esoteric traditions. His thesis no doubt applies in the case of Socrates, where we see Plato’s literary performance of the struggles over the transmission of the true purport of Socratic wisdom at *Phaedo* 59. In the introduction to his volume that elaborates this thesis, Versluis writes:

What makes Western esotericism different above all, I believe, is the pervasive lack of initiatory lineages and thus of the immediate reproof

or approval of a living teacher. In the absence of a well-recognized line of historical masters, the weight of initiatory transmission is transposed to literary and artistic works, and thus also to the individual. This is not to say that the West had or, for that matter, has no one capable of discerning a right understanding from a wrong one, nor to say that there are no examples of initiatory lineages at all like those of Zen Buddhism. Rather, I am arguing that in the West, esoteric literature and art can function rather like the koan in Zen Buddhism, as means of initiation, and that this is in fact the primary means of initiatory transmission in the West—through word and image. (12)

21. Versluis (2003) is concerned to extend the boundaries of the esoteric to include what he calls “the mystical.”

22. The Greek root, *μύειν*, is associated with silence and nondisclosure to noninitiates, but Versluis is particularly concerned with the traditions of contemplation and union with the divine, or divine knowledge. Taking this functional approach to the idea of the esoteric, we can also trace a textual path through late antiquity, perhaps going back to Pythagorean and Socratic constructs.

23. Zeno, Parmenides, and the young Socrates are about to go through the Parmenidean method and Zeno warns Socrates as follows:

εἰ μὲν οὖν πλείους ἤμεν, οὐκ ἂν ἄξιον ἦν δεῖσθαι. ἀπρεπὴ γὰρ τὰ τοιαῦτα πολλῶν ἐναντίον λέγειν ἄλλως τε καὶ τηλικούτῳ. ἀγνοοῦσιν γὰρ οἱ πολλοὶ ὅτι ἄνευ ταύτης τῆς διὰ πάντων διεξόδου τε καὶ πλάνης ἀδύνατον ἐντυχόντα τῷ ἀληθεῖ νοῦν σχεῖν.

If there were more of us, it would not be right to make the request [sc. of Parmenides to instruct us]. In general it is not fitting to speak of such matters in front of the many and especially not by one so advanced in years. The many are ignorant of the fact that without this method and wandering through all things it is impossible for the mind to encounter the truth. (136d–e)

24. On Socratic silence, see Nehamas (1999, 83–107; 1998, 10).

25. Xenophon (*Mem.* 4) tells the story of Euthydemus’s recruitment. See Morrison (1994, 189).

26. Most (1993). See *Phaedo* 59e:

Ἐχεκράτης

ἐτυχον δέ, ὦ Φαίδων, τίνες παραγενόμενοι; Φαίδων

οὗτός τε δὴ ὁ Ἀπολλόδωρος τῶν ἐπιχωρίων παρῆν καὶ Κριτόβουλος καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔτι Ἑρμογένης καὶ Ἐπιγένης καὶ Αἰσχίνης καὶ Ἀντισθένης: ἦν δὲ καὶ Κτήσιππος ὁ Παιανιεὺς καὶ Μενέξενος καὶ ἄλλοι τινὲς τῶν ἐπιχωρίων. Πλάτων δὲ οἶμαι ἠσθένει.

Echecrates: Who were these, Phaedo?

Phaedo: Of native Athenians there was this Apollodorus, and Critobulus and his father, and Hermogenes and Epiganes and Aeschines and Antisthenes; and Ctesippus the Paeonian was there too, and Menexenus and some other Athenians. But Plato, I think, was ill. (trans. Fowler [Plato 1966, n.p.]

## Introduction

1. “If anyone claims to have heard something from me in private that he has not heard in public, then neither is this true” (*Ap.* 33a).

2. See Kahn (1996, 1–29), who surveys six authors who belonged to the literary movement that imitated the conversations and life of Socrates, including Antisthenes, Phaedo, Euclides, Aristippus, Aeschines, and the younger writer, Xenophon. See also Clay (1994, 23–47).

3. Some of the important essays on Socratic irony are those by Vlastos (1991, 21–44), Nehamas (1998, 46–100), and Lear (2006).

4. Rather than make an argument about what that rubric should or should not include, I defer to experts in the history of religion or in theology who have forged a generous definition of the esoteric under the auspices of what some refer to as the *philosophia perennis*. For example, Schuon states:

A religion is a form, and so also a limit, which “contains” the Limitless, to speak in paradox; every form is fragmentary because of its necessary exclusion of other formal possibilities; the fact that these forms—when they are complete, that is to say when they are perfectly “themselves”—each in their own way represent totality does not prevent them from being fragmentary in respect of their particularization and their reciprocal exclusion. (Schuon 1969, 144)

5. This term, *Western esoteric tradition*, has long been the subject of theoretical and historical discussion. One of the most useful interrogations of the concept is by Versluis (2004). The term *esoteric* presents a difficulty in that



many understand it as a New Age concept, or, at least historically, as referring to a group of societies that operate on the margins of traditional discourses and rituals. But, in discussing Socrates as belonging to this tradition, I do not mean that he operated in secret in this sense, or that he was given to ritual practice, or even that there is a historical connection between the esotericism of Socrates and of other, more frequently noticed members of the Western esoteric tradition. As support for my attempt here to link the Platonic portrayal of Socrates to a version of esotericism, I cite Versluis (2004), who discusses the idea that esotericism may in fact be transmitted through mainstream texts. Versluis writes:

Here, I use the word *esoteric* in a religious context to refer to individuals or groups whose works are self-understood as bearing hidden inner religious, cosmological, or metaphysical truths for a select audience. Such a definition can include alchemical, magical, Masonic, or gnostic groups or individuals, but in any case there is a separation between esoteric (from the Greek *eso-*, meaning “within” or “inner”) knowledge for a select audience and exoteric knowledge for the general populace. This definition includes the social-anthropologic sense of initiation as admission into a secret society, but extends it to include the full range of cultural works like those of literature and art, which may very well convey secrets hidden from the casual observer. (Versluis 2004, 8)

The word esoteric is of ancient usage, as it was in circulation among philosophers in the Platonist tradition. The Greek word, *esoterikoi*, was used in relationship to Classical philosophy by the late antique Platonists, as for example by Iamblichus, who distinguished a group of Pythagorean *esoterikoi* and those who were *ektos*. Compare Horky (2013, 115, citing Iambl., *VP* 41.14; 52.14–18; 50.6–17).

6. Yet, for all that Parmenides figures as the young Socrates’s preceptor in Plato’s dialogue, this apophaticism, where the one is approached only in terms of negations, is in obvious and glaring counterpoint to the historical Parmenides’s way of affirmation: “It is and cannot not be.”

For more on this problem, see chapter 9 of this book.

7. For more comparisons to the Vedanta, see chapter 7 of this book.

8. This is excepting of course the *Laws*, the one dialogue that escapes past the borders of Socratic wisdom, containing no appearance of Socrates. It is also the dialogue wherein the person who disagrees with the state mandated religion, or has his “own” religion or altars, will be put to death by a board of bureaucrats who, by their selection criteria, are admittedly not philosophers.

9. On “Know thyself” and Delphi and the literary representations of the purported Delphic inscription, see Moore (2015). The so-called Delphic maxim “Know thyself” is eponymously named from an inscription in the pronaos (forecourt) of the temple of Apollo at Delphi, as reported by classical authors, including Plato, and as documented by Pausanias in his *Description of Greece*:

In the fore-temple at Delphi are written maxims useful for the life of men, inscribed by those whom the Greeks say were sages. These were: from Ionia, Thales of Miletus and Bias of Priene; of the Aeolians in Lesbos, Pittacus of Mitylene; of the Dorians in Asia, Cleobulus of Lindus; Solon of Athens and Chilon of Sparta; the seventh sage, according to the list of Plato, the son of Ariston, is not Periander, the son of Cypselus, but Myson of Chenae, a village on Mount Oeta. These sages, then, came to Delphi and dedicated to Apollo the celebrated maxims, “Know thyself,” and “Nothing in excess. (Paus. 10.24.1; trans. Jones [Pausanias 1961, vol. 4, 506.]

10. Socrates describes his interrogation of those with great reputations for wisdom in the *Apology* as ἐπὶ ἅπαντας τοὺς τι δοκοῦντας εἰδέναι (22a; approaching all of those with the reputation of knowing something). In the *Protagoras*, Plato recounts the self-celebratory style of Hippias as follows:

After him the wise Hippias spoke up. Gentlemen, he said, I count you all my kinsmen and family and fellow citizens—by nature, not convention. By nature like is kind to like, but custom, the tyrant of mankind, does much violence to nature. For us then who understand the nature of things, who are the intellectual leaders of Greece... (337c5–d5; trans. Guthrie [Plato 1956, 71])

Hippias uses the word, *nature* (*physis*) four times in this short speech. Clearly then, the Sophists in this dialogue have definite views about human nature: about the nature of the *psyche* as it is in itself and as it is shaped by convention, and about social order as a whole. Hippias suggests that the entire company hold definite views about these matters and are justified in doing so (τὴν μὲν φύσιν τῶν πραγμάτων εἰδέναι). They have actual knowledge, and it is this knowledge that gives them the license to dispense ethical teaching above all. Thus I would contrast the esoteric wisdom of Socrates with this public disclosure of privileged knowledge, circulating with the socially and intellectually elite circle of Athenian higher education.

11. Compare Rivzi’s (2004, 225–26) brief remarks.

12. The work is translated as Twinch (2011).
13. See Versluis (2003). On the limits of Socratic rationality, see Bussanich (2006, 2013).
14. See Szlezák's (1999) section titled "The Difference between Esotericism and Secrecy" (85–86).
15. See pages x and 189n6 for the unwritten-doctrines hypothesis. Let me say here that I find the idea of explaining Socratic wisdom in terms of "unwritten doctrines" largely incoherent. In fact, Socratic wisdom is not a doctrine at all, written or unwritten.
16. On Socratic receptions see Ahbel-Rappe and Kamtekar (2006) and Trapp (2007).
17. "Socrates autem primus philosophiam devocavit e caelo et in uribus conlocavit et in domus etiam introduxit et coegit de vita et moribus rebusque bonis et malis quaerere" (Cic., *Tusc.* 5.4.10).
18. Indeed, when we do compare Xenophon's *Apology* with that of Plato, it is precisely in this matter of the esoteric pronouncement and the endorsement of Apollo (Pl., *Ap.* 20d–23b), aligning Socratic wisdom with "Know thyself," that the two authors part company.
19. Socrates gives his suggested headache cure greater authority by citing a Thracian doctor trained by Zalmoxis, described as a divine and immortal king. Zalmoxis is also mentioned in Herodotus (Hdt. 4.94–96), where he is a Thracian deity whose worshippers believe they will enjoy immortality in the afterlife.
20. The Derveni papyrus is "the oldest European manuscript to survive" (Janko 2002, 1) and was discovered near Thessaloniki in 1962. It was written around 350 BCE, but possibly its contents date back to the fifth century. Although the text interprets what is evidently some version of an Orphic cosmology allegorically, its very existence demonstrates the circulation of such literature in the fifth century and thus helps us to understand how this material would have been accessible to Plato himself.
21. Before the discovery of the Derveni papyrus, three versions of the Orphic myth were distinguished: first, the Rhapsodic Theogony, preserved by Damascius and Christian apologists, in which Chronos produces a cosmic egg, which then hatches into Phanes, the bisexual being who creates the world that is eventually swallowed and regurgitated by Zeus; second, the Eudemian and the most ancient version, mainly attested in Aristophanes's *Birds* (693–703), but also supposedly known by the Peripatetic Eudemus, in which Night creates the cosmic egg; and third, a version, that of Hieronymus, possibly Hieronymus of Rhodes, attested to solely in the writings of the sixth-century Platonist Damascius. The quotation that Damascius makes from the version of Eudemus gives us information about

the Orphic poems circulating during the Classical period, which can be used together with Aristophanes's *Birds*, Plato's *Symposium*, and the Derveni papyrus to comprehend which episodes belonged in early versions of the Orphic poem.

22. Of course, Socrates himself is the initiator.

23. For this and other Platonic narratives or terminology as specifically initiatory, see de Vries (1973).

24. On Socrates's religious experiences, including trance states, mystical practices, and meditation, see Bussanich (2006, 2013). Bussanich develops this theme in much greater depth.

25. Compare also Bussanich (2006) on Socrates's trance states and their contrast with rational argument in the place of Plato's narrative concerning the philosophy of Socrates.

## Chapter One

1. For instrumentalist interpretations of Socratic ethics, compare Irwin (1995, 73–75). For another strong defense of the instrumentalist interpretation, see Reshotko (2006, 118–55). On this interpretation of Socratic philosophy, happiness is the only unconditional good and it is the only self-generated good. According to Reshotko, virtue is an unconditional good, but it is other generated (it is only valuable because it leads to happiness).

Reshotko makes the bold claim that “Socrates was not a moral philosopher” (2). Instead, she says, Socrates was a theorist who discovered one fundamental fact about the structure of human motivation. All human beings seek their own happiness, whether or not they are aware of it. All desire is for the good, but what Socrates means by this must be disambiguated; Socrates's understanding of desire is not desire for the apparent good, but for the actual good. Thus there is a link between a person's desire and good objects or states of affairs in the world toward which desire ubiquitously drives. Again, for Reshotko, to understand this theory of motivation, we need to see that by good Socrates means whatever situation or action most benefits the agent. Therefore, Reshotko is a proponent of Penner's, Vlastos's, and Irwin's thesis concerning Socratic ethics, that Socrates is a psychological eudaimonist. For Socrates, according to this thesis, it is impossible for an individual to be motivated to do anything other than what is in the agent's interest.

2. According to Reshotko (2006), there is a nomological relationship between knowledge and happiness. People try to become knowledgeable (and this is the same as to say that they become virtuous) to become as happy as

possible. There is no difference between scientific knowledge and virtue; so, there is no difference between science and morality. In fact, there is one supreme science, and this is the science of happiness.

3. See Nightingale (2009) on the history of this word and its radically original deployment by Plato.

4. εἰ μὲν δὴ καλὸς ἔστιν ὃδε ὁ κόσμος ὃ τε δημιουργὸς ἀγαθὸς πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ (*Ti.* 29a3–e3).

5. In other dialogues, Plato emphasizes that by nature all individuals partake of these two poles. They are fundamentally lacking and, at the same time, they reflect, imitate, and strive to be like the form that bestows reality. They have an aspiration toward their own good, necessarily, but they also fall short of that aspiration. In the *Phaedo* at 67 Plato tells us that all individuals are striving to be the form that they fall short of being.

6. Compare Zuckert (2009, 8–9) on the *Parmenides* as the first time we meet Socrates according to the dramatic dating of the dialogue, which she places in 450 BCE).

7. Compare C. Gill (2006, 92–93). For example, insofar as Socrates is thought to represent an ideal of invulnerability that is also embraced by the Stoa, then the adventitious picture of happiness, in which one tries to secure the greatest good available in a given action based on a calculation of its effects, which is one possible way of construing Socratic eudaimonism according to views we have examined, seems incompatible.

8. Socrates says that the witness to his virtue is his “dire poverty,” *muria pena* (*Ap.* 23c1, 31c3).

9. For a detailed discussion of the dialectical status of many of Socrates’s purported ethical “precepts” and of any alleged Socratic eudaimonism see, above all, Weiss (2006). See also Ahbel-Rappe (2012).

10. On the ascetic legacy of Socrates in the Cynic school, see Goulet-Cazé and Goulet (1993).

11. See Ganeri (2007, 110–12). Ganeri discusses the Buddha’s discourse as nondefinitive, as an application of skillful means designed to liberate the target audience from false views and operating as a protreptic.

## Chapter Two

1. For surveys of recent work on Socratic originals versus Socratic reception, see Morrison (2007), Trapp (2007), and Ahbel-Rappe and Kamtekar (2006).

2. For a modern scholar who emphasizes “assimilation to God” as the core of the Socratic ethical legacy, see Sedley (2004, 75).

3. For a modern scholar who understands god as nous in Plato’s philosophy see Menn (1995).

4. Ahbel-Rappe and Kamtekar (2006, xv) show that, according to the sources, “Socrates affirms and denies that the good is pleasure (*Grg.* 495a–99b; but cf. *Prt.* 351b–e, 354d–e); Socrates does and doesn’t investigate questions of natural science (*Ar.*, *Clouds* 217–33; *Arist.*, *Metaph.* 1.6.987b1–3; *Xen.*, *Mem.* 1.1.11–16, 4.7.2–10; *Pl.*, *Phd.* 96d–99e; but cf. *Ap.* 26d–e); Socrates disavows and avows having knowledge (*Ap.* 21b–23b; *Tht.* 150c–d; but cf. *Ap.* 29b). So why suppose that the Socrates of Plato’s early dialogues was the historical Socrates, rather than the Socrates of Xenophon’s Socratic writings, or the Socrates of Aeschines, or Aristippus, or, indeed, of the hostile witness Aristophanes?”

5. Compare Nehamas (1998), who emphasizes the extent to which “the most voluble figure in the history of philosophy is someone we do not hear at all” (70) and suggests that, out of the irony of Plato and Socrates, the character Plato created and to whom he gave a stronger foothold on reality than he gave himself, a whole tradition according to which life can be lived eventually came to grow.

Compare also Long (2006, 8–10), who discusses the figure of Socrates as presenting a new understanding of self-control. *Enkratēia*, self-mastery, is the essential characteristic of the Socratic paradigm, according to Long, as we discover Socrates in both Xenophon’s and Plato’s dialogues. Moreover, it is the appeal of Socrates as possessing inner power and strength that accounts for the popular impact of Hellenistic ethics.

6. See Ausland (2006) and Ahbel-Rappe and Kamtekar (2006) for accounts of how Gregory Vlastos’s version of the historical Socrates as identifiable with the Socrates of Plato’s early dialogues also brought about a doctrinal content to Socratic philosophy.

7. Ausland (2006, 495) cites Schleiermacher’s 1815 lecture “The Value of Socrates as a Philosopher.” Ausland writes:

The problem of Socrates is at least twofold. The question of the relative merits of Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes as contemporary sources is but ancillary to a more fundamental problem of the worth of the Socratic teaching. Both arose together almost two centuries ago out of a third issue—the paradox of Socrates—which at the time was felt to consist in the strangeness of a figure who had apparently produced no philosophically interesting doctrines, but had been generally accorded a pivotal a role in the history of philosophy. (493)

8. See *Metaphysics* (987a29–b9, 1087b9–32). Compare Vlastos (1989, 1–28).
9. On the sense in which character and doctrine are to be understood in Plato’s dialogues in general, see Nails (2000).
10. See Kahn (1996, 2–3) on the “optical illusion of the dialogues.”
11. Ausland (2006, 504), commenting especially on what he calls there “the Socrates of Vlastos’ middle period.”
12. Socrates, however, was occupying himself with the moral virtues, having been the first to search for universal definitions of them (*Metaph.* 1078b1).
13. Annas (1993) argues, as well, that Aristotle’s formulation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*—“there is some end of the things we can do, an end which we wish for because of itself” (I.7.1094a18)—is related to the question that Socrates poses in the *Republic* (352d) of how ought one to live.
14. For Aristotelian texts on Socrates, see Vlastos (1991, 81–106). Vlastos cites the *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle summarizes Socrates’s contributions to the history of Greek philosophy as “occupying himself with the moral virtues having been the first to search for universal definitions of them” (1078b16–17; Vlastos 1991, 91). On virtue as knowledge, see Aristotle in *Magna Moralia*: “Coming afterwards, Socrates spoke better and more fully about [virtue]. But neither did he speak correctly. For he made the virtues forms of knowledge and this is impossible” (1182a15–18).
15. For Socrates as a paradigm in Hellenistic philosophy see Long’s (1996, 1–34) chapter “Socrates in Hellenistic Philosophy.” See also Annas (1993).
16. Compare Brown (2006):

A second way in which the Stoics pledge allegiance to Socrates is by invoking him as an example to imitate. Seneca, Musonius Rufus, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius—all prominent Stoics in the time of the Roman Empire—do this. The record is less clear for earlier Greek Stoics, whose writing is almost all lost. The evidence of interest in Socrates is perfectly clear: the second head of the school, Cleanthes (331–232 BCE) cites Socrates for the view that advantage is not severed from what is just (Clement, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 1.558); the obscure third-century BCE Stoics Zeno of Sidon and Theon of Antiochia each wrote an *Apology of Socrates* (Suda s.v. = SSR I C 505); another third-century BCE Stoic named Sphaerus wrote a work titled *On Lycurgus* and Socrates in three books (D.L. VII 178); Antipater of Tarsus, a second-century BCE head of the school, invoked Socrates in his book *On Anger* (Athenaeus, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 3.65: Antipater) and collected Socrates’ remarkable divinations (Cicero, *On*

*Divination* I 123); and Panaetius (185–109 BCE) defended Socrates from the charges of bigamy frequently made by Peripatetics (Plutarch, *Aristides* 335c–d = fr. 152 van Straaten). (275–76)

17. Long (2002, 69) quotes this line and discusses the place of Socrates in the thought and methods of Epictetus. Compare also Long (2006, 8–10). Here Long discusses the figure of Socrates as presenting a new understanding of self-control. *Enkratēia*, self-mastery, is the essential characteristic of the Socratic paradigm, according to Long, as we discover Socrates in both Xenophon’s and Plato’s dialogues. Moreover, it is the appeal of Socrates as possessing inner power and strength that accounts for the popular impact of Hellenistic ethics.

18. There are Cynic and Stoic technical vocabularies that attempt to capture some of the features that Socrates exhibits in his life: one example is the Cynic word, *karteria*, which denotes endurance, fortitude, and an attitude of and capacity for toughness. The Cynics and Stoics identified this virtue with what they read or heard about Socrates’s exemplary toughness, as when he is reported to have walked through the Thracian winter snows in bared feet (Pl., *Symp.* 220b).

19. “The aims of moral philosophy, and any hopes it may have of being worth serious attention, are bound up with the fate of Socrates’ first question, even if it is not true that philosophy, itself, can reasonably hope to answer it” (B. Williams 1985, 1).

20. Compare Aristotle, *Metaphysics*: Σωκράτους δὲ περὶ μὲν τὰ ἠθικὰ πραγματευομένου περὶ δὲ τῆς ὅλης φύσεως οὐθέν (987a35; Socrates worked on ethical problems and not at all on reality as a whole).

21. Compare Kraut (1989): “[Aristotle’s] formula, as I understand it, is that the more one contemplates, the better one’s life. On the contrary, there is no formula for the Socratic life, which is contemplative twenty-four hours a day, precisely because there is no alternative: an unexamined life is not worth living” (27).

22. Again, Bussanich (2006).

23. On the date and authenticity of *Alcibiades I*, see Baynham and Tarrant (2012). A good student Greek edition is that of Denyer (Plato 2001).

24. Much of the material in Porphyry is a paraphrase of Plotinus’s work in his treatise “On Virtue” (Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.2). The most recent edition is Porphyry (2005).

25. Ἄλλαι αἱ ἀρεταὶ τοῦ πολιτικοῦ, καὶ ἄλλαι αἱ τοῦ πρὸς θεωρίαν ἀνιόντος καὶ διὰ τοῦτο λεγομένου θεωρητικοῦ,



καὶ ἄλλαι αἰ τοῦ ἤδη τελείου θεωρητικοῦ καὶ ἤδη θεα-  
τοῦ, καὶ ἄλλαι αἰ τοῦ νοῦ, καθ' ὃ νοῦς καὶ ἀπὸ ψυχῆς  
καθαρός. (5)

26. See Porphyry, *Sententiae*: “They pertain to a constitution that is blameless with respect to one’s neighbor” (32.9–10; Porphyry 2005, 334).

27. See Annas (1999, ch. 4 and p. 81n22), where she quotes this line.

28. Surely for Plato, when the gods and souls assimilate the forms of virtue in the *Phaedrus’s hyperouranian topos*, Plato signifies that virtue belongs to the realm of the gods. Plato himself seems to attribute virtue to nous, that is, the divine, and one scholar has even suggested that nous is virtue, in at least many genuine Platonic texts, including *Phaedo*, *Philebus*, and *Laws*. See Menn (1995b, 17).

29. According to Taki (2012), Proclus understands the interlocutor as under examination by his own inner deity (intellect) insofar as the soul’s activity of thinking through philosophical puzzles posed in the elenchus constitutes an opportunity for the projection (*probole*) of the logos previously latent in the soul. Therefore, the soul recollects its prenatal knowledge during the elenchus, and, in this sense, Proclus’s commentary on *Alcibiades I* is a kind of metacommentary on the whole of Socratic method. Socratic method then equates with self-knowledge.

30. Ἐπειδὴ τοῖνυν φαμέν εἶναι καὶ ἐν ἀνθρώποις τὸ εὐδαιμονεῖν τοῦτο, σκεπτέον πῶς ἐστὶ τοῦτο. Λέγω δὲ ὧδε· ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἔχει τελείαν ζωὴν ἄνθρωπος οὐ τὴν αἰσθητικὴν μόνον ἔχων, ἀλλὰ καὶ λογισμὸν καὶ νοῦν ἀληθινόν, δηλον καὶ ἐξ ἄλλων. Ἄλλ’ ἀρά γε ὡς ἄλλος ὢν ἄλλο τοῦτο ἔχει; Ἡ οὐδ’ ἔστιν ὄλως ἄνθρωπος μὴ οὐ καὶ τοῦτο ἢ δυνάμει ἢ ἐνεργείᾳ ἔχων, ὃν δὴ καὶ φαμεν εὐδαίμονα εἶναι. Ἄλλ’ ὡς μέρος αὐτοῦ τοῦτο φήσομεν ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ εἶδος τῆς ζωῆς τὸ τέλειον εἶναι; Ἡ τὸν μὲν ἄλλον ἄνθρωπον μέρος τι τοῦτο ἔχειν δυνάμει ἔχοντα, τὸν δὲ εὐδαίμονα ἤδη, ὃς δὴ καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ ἐστὶ τοῦτο καὶ μεταβέβηκε πρὸς τὸ αὐτό, εἶναι τοῦτο· περικεῖσθαι δ’ αὐτῷ τὰ ἄλλα ἤδη, ἃ δὴ οὐδὲ μέρη αὐτοῦ ἄν τις θεῖτο οὐκ ἐθέλοντ (Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.4.4–11)

31. O’Meara (2003, 28–63) also emphasizes the Neoplatonic focus on divinization—that is, on what Plato refers to at *Theaetetus* 176b as “likeness unto God”—as the goal of ethics. He points out, with Sedley (2004), that many passages in Plato lend support to the Neoplatonist understanding of an ethics of wisdom. What is important for O’Meara, as it is for Sedley, is the suggestion that the human ethical enterprise is not just to imitate the divine, but in some sense to realize the divine within human nature.

## Chapter Three

1. On the authors of the *Sokratikoi logoi* in general see Kahn (1996, 1–35), and for Phaedo in particular see Kahn (1996, 9–11); see Rossetti (1980) for the fragments of Phaedo’s Socratic dialogues, missing from Giannantoni (1990), as Kahn notes. Cicero actually mentions Phaedo’s dialogue, the *Zopyrus*, twice (*Fat.* 10–11; *Tusc.* 4.80). Kahn rightly emphasizes other important Socratic themes present in the fragments of the *Zopyrus*, in addition to the obvious theme of self-knowledge: the notions of practice, of moral self-improvement, and of the care of the soul.

2. One might choose to argue for this as follows: By asking his interlocutor to produce a definition, Socrates engages him in the activity of introspection vis-à-vis his beliefs. What is of value for Socrates’s purposes is not the definition, but the effort that the interlocutor makes both to articulate and to examine his own beliefs. This explanation seems consistent with the elenctic procedure but it lacks a textual basis. For, any reader of the dialogues will know that the contents of the definitions that Socrates disputes do matter, so much that, as we have seen, Socrates is often taken to be espousing a doctrinal moral system.

3. See Nehamas (1999, 294n38), where he extensively documents that Socrates’s “What is X?” question refers to virtue.

4. See Adkins (1969, 30–60).

5. “The verb *elegxein* means primarily ‘to impugn the honor of’ a person or of his actions or words. In early poetic diction, an *elegchos* (neuter) ... is accordingly a moral reproach—usually within the terms of a characteristically martial ethic. The more technical later use of the masculine noun *elegchos* is to be understood accordingly in forensic contexts, where it refers more narrowly to refuting the claims of an antagonist by testing them or putting them to the proof” (Ausland 2002, 37).

6. At least the young Lysis and Theaetetus seem eager to pursue the answer to Socrates’s questions. See, however, Nehamas (1992, 281), who shows that many of Socrates’s clients appear to be either unmoved by their encounters with Socrates or moral derelicts in their own right.

7. For this approach, see Reeve (1989, 179) and Vlastos (1991, 269).

8. Compare: “Inasmuch as I do not possess knowledge, neither do I imagine that I possess it. So I am probably to some small degree wiser than this man, because I do not imagine that I know what I do not know” (*Ap.* 21d5–6). Moreover Socrates explains his philosophical activity as a divine behest in

which he sets out to deliver his fellow citizens from this pretense to knowledge, and so to instill within them this cognitive self-knowledge: “Even now, I continue to investigate this very matter on behalf of the deity, if I imagine that someone, either citizen or foreigner, is wise. And whenever it strikes me that he is not, I come to the assistance of the deity and demonstrate that he is not wise” (23b4–7).

9. The story of the oracle is in this respect similar to the story of Socrates’s encounter with Zopyrus: A soothsayer reports something negative about Socrates, and Socrates confirms the truth of the statement, relying on his self-knowledge for confirmation of the soothsayer’s expertise.

10. For the ironic interpretation, see Vlastos (1991, 21–44). For an excellent discussion of the difficulties with the ironic interpretation of Socrates’s disavowal of knowledge, see Nehamas (1992, 187ff.).

11. At *Charmides* 166, Plato signposts this kind of self-knowledge as distinctively Socratic; attention is drawn to *sophrosune*, which differs from every other kind of knowledge (166c1) because it alone brings knowledge of knowledge in its train. This language exactly parallels the formulation used at *Apology* 21b, cited previously, to describe the distinguishing feature of wisdom. At 166c5, Critias implies that Socrates is already familiar with his definition of *sophrosune*. So far from denying this, Socrates agrees that by examining the definition, he is in effect examining one of his own beliefs. I have already stated that Plato associates the character of Socrates with the theme of self-knowledge, even in the post-elenctic dialogues.

12. On the procedural requirement that Socrates is only interested in statements that the interlocutor holds to be true, and its relationship to the elenchus as a genuine quest for truth, see Vlastos (1991): “Since Socrates’ real purpose is not merely to search out and destroy his interlocutor’s conceit of knowledge, but also to advance the search for truth, if he is to find it by this method, while professing to know nothing, he must worm it out of *them*” (113). See also Benson (2000).

13. Benson (2000, 3–14) and Nehamas (1992) do.

14. Compare *Lysis* 210, *Charmides* 174b, and *Laches* 199b.

15. On Critias’s self-certainty and concern with rule over others as a misguided and malformed understanding of temperance, see Schmid (1998, 102–6). Indeed, Schmid’s book in itself, in terms of its clear articulation of Critias’s art of living model of expert knowledge that delivers certain “benefit” (*Chrm.* 171d1) and, therefore, happiness (172a3) might be viewed as the poor but noble relative of the more prominent endorsements of just this science of happiness model, free of moral values, as being precisely

what Socrates means by the examined life. See especially Schmid (129–37) on this section of the *Charmides*, in which Socrates demolishes the science of benefit model of virtue as knowledge. I say “poor but noble relative” because Schmid, rather than capitalizing on this purportedly Socratic science, in fact shows that nothing could be more at odds with genuine Socratic self-knowledge.

This last point, disparity between the role of an interlocutor qua expert and the role of the interlocutor qua participant in the elenchus, brings us to another point of comparison with Hellenistic ethics in terms of the four personae theory of Poseidonius within the Stoa. And even in the early Stoa, the rational cosmos or the community of sages also implied that the philosopher had an allegiance or commitment to the welfare of all rational beings that extended far beyond personal loyalties.

16. See Strange (2004, 43) and Graver (2007, 30–31). Graver discusses the early Stoic theory of emotion in the terms of a basic awareness that *hegemonikon* has of its own states.

17. Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, criticizes Socrates for identifying virtue with knowledge (1144b17–21). Compare Irwin (2006, 242). On Socrates’s denial of *akrasia* in the *Protagoras* and its association with rational control, see Cooper (1999, 63n54).

18. I say “might be” because the idea of god’s self-reflexive knowing is highly disputed in connection with the self-thinking of god in *Metaphysics* book 12, chapters 7 and 9. See further and especially Gerson (2004), Brunschwig (2000), Kosman (2000), and, earlier, De Koninck (1994).

19. διὰ γὰρ τοῦ νοεῖν τὸ τίμιον αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει. ἔτι δὲ εἴτε νοῦς ἢ οὐσία αὐτοῦ εἴτε νόησις ἐστὶ, τί νοεῖ; ἢ γὰρ αὐτὸς αὐτὸν ἢ ἕτερόν τι· καὶ εἰ ἕτερόν τι, ἢ τὸ αὐτὸ αἰεὶ ἢ ἄλλο. πότερον οὖν διαφέρει τι ἢ οὐδὲν τὸ νοεῖν τὸ καλὸν ἢ τὸ τυχόν; ἢ καὶ ἄτοπον τὸ διανοεῖσθαι περὶ ἐνίων; δῆλον τοίνυν ὅτι τὸ θεióτατον καὶ τιμιώτατον νοεῖ, καὶ οὐ μεταβάλλει· εἰς χεῖρον γὰρ ἢ μεταβολή, καὶ κίνησις τις ἤδη τὸ τοιοῦτον. πρῶτον μὲν οὖν εἰ μὴ νόησις ἐστὶν ἀλλὰ δύναμις, εὐλογον ἐπίπονον εἶναι τὸ συνεχὲς αὐτῷ τῆς νοήσεως· ἔπειτα δὴλον ὅτι ἄλλο τι ἂν εἴη τὸ τιμιώτερον ἢ ὁ νοῦς, τὸ νοούμενον. καὶ γὰρ τὸ νοεῖν καὶ ἡ νόησις ὑπάρξει καὶ τὸ χεῖριστον νοοῦντι, ὥστ’ εἰ φευκτὸν τοῦτο (καὶ γὰρ μὴ ὁρᾶν ἔνια κρεῖττον ἢ ὁρᾶν), οὐκ ἂν εἴη τὸ ἄριστον ἢ νόησις. αὐτὸν ἄρα νοεῖ, εἴπερ ἐστὶ τὸ κράτιστον, καὶ ἔστιν ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις. (Met. 12 1074b21–b34)

20. For a similar way of reading the *Charmides* in reference to Aristotle's understanding of self-reflexive knowledge, see Caston (2002).

21. Caston (2002) cites this passage.

## Chapter 4

1. Scholars have tried to explain the compliance of Socrates's interlocutors in several ways. Irwin has suggested that, in the end, Socrates must rely on the self-evidence of the proposition that virtue always benefits the person who possesses it. Brickhouse and Smith (1994), following Vlastos, suggest that for success in the elenchus Socrates relies upon a latent but universally held belief system that equates with his own views. Other writers emphasize the derivation of the elenchus from logical foundations. The self-evidence, for example, of the principle of noncontradiction is the logical structure from which the pragmatic goals of the elenchus—that is, clarifying the belief structure of the interlocutor and removing contradictory beliefs—are derived.

2. *Republic* 336a9, "While we were speaking, Thrasymachus had tried many times to take over the discussion but was restrained by those sitting near him, who wanted to hear our argument to the end. When we paused after what I'd just said however, he couldn't keep quiet any longer. He coiled himself up like a wild beast about to spring, and he hurled himself at us as I to tear us to pieces."

*Apology* 23e4: "Meletus being vexed on behalf of the poets, Anytus on behalf of the craftsmen and politicians."

*Meno* 95a2: "I think, Meno, that Anytus is angry, and I am not at all surprised. He thinks, to begin with, that I am slandering those men, and then he believes himself to be one of them. If he ever realizes what slander is, he will cease from anger, but he does not know it now."

3. *Euthyphro* 6c5: "I will, if you wish, relate many other things about the gods which I know will amaze you."

*Hippias Major* 304b1: "Here is what is fine and worth a lot; to be able to present a speech well and finely, in court or council or any other authority to whom you give the speech, to convince them and go home carrying not the smallest but the greatest of prizes, the successful defense of yourself, your property, and friends."

4. For the invocation of shame as a way to manipulate the interlocutor see *Apology* 29e1: "You are an Athenian. Are you not ashamed." For other instances of Socrates's attempting to induce shame in the interlocutor see *Gorgias* (474bff.)

and *Alcibiades I* (124). On shame as a teaching device in Epictetus, see Kamtekar (1998). My discussion owes much to her discussion there.

5. On shame as the peculiarly moral emotion see Wollheim (1999), who gives the example of a man who makes a vulgar gesture: “He uses a rasher of bacon to mark his place in the book he is reading” (158). At first he believes it has gone unnoticed, but then he realizes that someone has observed him. This is when profound shame arises.

6. It is also true that in the *Hippias Major* and in the *Alcibiades I*, Socrates is also interested in asking about the identity of the person. Compare Annas (1985), who also shows that in the *Alcibiades I* self-knowledge is construed as objective knowledge, as a viewpoint that is made available by stepping outside the immediacy, let us say, of one’s own vantage point (129–31).

7. μὰ τὸν κύνα, ὦ Ἴππία, οὐχ ὄν γ’ ἂν ἐγὼ μάλιστα αἰσχυνοίμην ληρῶν  
καὶ προσποιοῦμένός τι λέγειν μηδὲν λέγων.

Ἴππίας

τίνα τοῦτον;

Σωκράτης

τὸν Σωφρονίσκου, ὃς ἐμοὶ οὐδὲν ἂν μᾶλλον ταῦτα ἐπιτρέποι

ἀνερεύνητα ὄντα ῥαδίως λέγειν ἢ ὡς εἰδότα ἃ μὴ οἶδα. (*Hp.*

*mai.* 298b6–c1)

8. Ausland (2001, 21). Ausland writes, “Critics have long had to avoid [the Euthydemus] or explain it away,” if they wish to maintain a strict developmentalist approach to the Socratic dialogues.

9. Compare *Charmides* on stripping for examination: “If you are willing, in accordance with the stranger’s instructions, to submit your soul” (154d3, 157c5).

10. For Vlastos (1991), virtue is sufficient for happiness, but external goods can still contribute to it. Compare Irwin (1995 57–58, sec. 40) on the relationship of external goods to happiness. On the Hellenistic use of Socrates as a model for indifference to external goods, self-reliance, or *karteria*, see Christopher Gill (2006, 89): One of the most prominent aspects of the presentation of the figure of Socrates in fourth-century Socratic literature is his self-control as regards emotions and desires and his imperviousness to physical hardship and dangers. Xenophon’s comment is typical: “Socrates was the most self-controlled of all men over sex and bodily appetite, the most resilient in relations to winter and summer and all exertions, and so trained for needing moderate amounts that he was satisfied when he had only little.” (Xenophon 1923) Different Socratic writers, as it seems from our surviving sources, conceive this feature in rather different ways. In Phaedo’s *Zopyrus*, this trait is presented as the result of deliberate

self-control exercised on an inborn nature prone to sensuality. In Antisthenes, the ideal character state, exemplified by Socrates is that of toughness and self-mastery as regards emotions and desires. Although Stoic writers draw on a variety of sources in their picture of Socrates's character, particularly Xenophon, Plato's depictions have a special importance for Stoicism.

11. This metaphor of digging for gold to find the self might be an amalgam of Heraclitean images, as for example: ἐδιζήσάμην ἐμειωτόν (I searched out myself). (Diels & Kranz 1903, B23, 70) Compare: ἀνθρώποισι πᾶσι μέτεστι γινώσκειν ἔωυτοὺς καὶ σωφρονεῖν and χρυσὸν γὰρ οἱ διζήμενοι γῆν πολλήν ὀρύσσοι καὶ εὐρίσκουσι ὀλίγον (Searching for gold they dig much earth, yet find little). (Diels & Kranz 1903, B101, 80; B116, 82)

12. Σωκράτης μὲν οὖν ὁ πρεσβύτης ᾤετ' εἶναι τέλος τὸ γινώσκειν τὴν ἀρετὴν, καὶ ἐπεζήτει τί ἐστὶν ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ τί ἡ ἀνδρεία καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν μορίων αὐτῆς. ἐποίηε γὰρ ταῦτ' εὐλόγως. ἐπιστήμας γὰρ ᾤετ' εἶναι πάσας τὰς ἀρετάς, ὥσθ' ἅμα συμβαίνειν εἰδέναι τε τὴν δικαιοσύνην καὶ εἶναι δίκαιον. ἅμα μὲν γὰρ μεμαθήκαμεν τὴν γεωμετρίαν καὶ οἰκοδομίαν καὶ ἐσμὲν οἰκοδόμοι καὶ γεωμέτραι. διόπερ ἐζήτηε τί ἐστὶν ἀρετὴ, ἀλλ' οὐ πῶς γίνεται καὶ ἐκ τίνων. τοῦτο δὲ ἐπὶ μὲν τῶν ἐπιστημῶν συμβαίνει τῶν θεωρητικῶν (οὐθὲν γὰρ ἕτερόν ἐστι τῆς ἀστρολογίας οὐδὲ τῆς περὶ φύσεως ἐπιστήμης οὐδὲ γεωμετρίας πλὴν τὸ γινώσκειν καὶ θεωρῆσαι τὴν φύσιν τῶν πραγμάτων τῶν ὑποκειμένων ταῖς ἐπιστήμας. (Aristotle 1884, 1261b2–25)

13. Aristotle's point will be that virtue is a state of character, not a productive knowledge, and so, unlike productive knowledge, it cannot be abused; it is controlled by constraints on desire.

14. Compare Penner and Rowe (2005, 266–67). To clarify their view, it seems that for Penner and Rowe, things other than wisdom have “restricted” evaluations: that is, they are not inherently good or bad but only at a given moment, or for some people, or in some way. By contrast, wisdom is the object of an “uncompromising evaluation,” in the sense that it is intrinsically good, for all people, something that everyone will be better off having more of.

15. For Reshotko (2006), people strive to act in such a way as to be able to further pursue states that are in themselves neither good nor bad.

16. I borrow this terminology from Graver (2007, 46–47).

17. In a sense, it may be that Aristotle would find that Socrates's endorsement

of wisdom as good in itself and as the only thing good in itself would then be strikingly close to his own formulation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

<Wisdom> is not craft-knowledge, because action and production belong to different kinds. The remaining possibility, then, is that wisdom is a state grasping the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about what is good or bad or a human being. For production has its end beyond it; but action does not, since its end is doing well itself. (1140b3–7; trans. Irwin [1995, 71])

18. “The final puzzle in the protreptic interlude of the *Euthydemus* offers Socrates a further opportunity to deny that wisdom is a craft producing some product distinct from itself. If he denied this assumption, he would be able to disarm the puzzle, but we have to reason to believe that he chooses this solution” (Irwin 1995, 71).

19. “Most of those who were caught in this way were souls who had come down from heaven and who were untrained in suffering as a result” (Resp. 619d1–3).

20. Compare this from the *Phaedrus*: “The mind of any soul that is concerned to take in what is appropriate to it, and so it is delighted at last to be seeing what is real” (247d2–3; ἰδοῦσα διὰ χρόνου τὸ ὄν ἀγαπᾷ τε καὶ θεωροῦσα τάληθῆ τρέφεται καὶ εὐπαθεῖ).

21. This line of explanation is presented by Penner and Rowe (2005), and, it must be admitted, it certainly is the natural way to take *Euthydemus* 281b6–9:

Then in heaven’s name, I said, is there any advantage in other possessions without good sense and wisdom? Would a man with no sense profit more if he possessed and did much or if he possessed and did little?

22. I realize that this interpretation of Socratic ethics is controversial. But not only is it the upshot of the *Euthydemus* argument; Socrates also directly states that his mission involves pointing out to his fellow Athenians that one integral good, that is, the best possible state of soul, or wisdom, should be sought before all else (*Ap.* 29e1–3). Certainly the Stoics understood the Socrates of Plato’s dialogues as endorsing the maxim that virtue alone is good

23. In the following texts, we see Socrates obtaining his interlocutor’s assent to the thesis that desires are always for the good. These texts represent the majority of such interchanges, wherein Socrates elicits assent to the fundamental idea, that desire is for the good.

*Gorgias* 468c2–c6, Socrates speaking:



Therefore we do not want simply to slaughter or banish from cities or appropriate wealth, but rather if they prove beneficial, then we do want to commit these acts, whereas if they prove harmful, we do not want to commit them. For as you say, we want things that are good; we do not want what is neither good nor bad, nor do we want what is bad.

*Gorgias* 468d1–d6:

Socrates: If we make these agreements, then when someone, whether a despot or a politician, kills a man or banishes him from his city or appropriates his wealth, imagining it to be more advantageous for him, whereas in fact, it turns out to be more harmful for him, still this person is doing what seems best to him, does he not?

Polus: Yes

Socrates: Therefore is he also doing what he wants, since these acts are in fact harmful?

*Protagoras* 358c6–d4, Socrates speaking:

“Therefore, is it not the case,” I said, “that no one advances toward bad things voluntarily, or toward what he imagines as bad? To go after what one believes to be bad, instead of the good, is not, it seems, in human nature and when one is compelled to choose between two evils, no one will choose the greater when he might choose the less.”

*Meno* 77d7–78a8:

Socrates: Isn't it clear that these people, that is, those who don't recognize evils for what they are, don't desire evil but what they thought was good, whereas in actuality it is evil; hence, those who do not recognize evil yet imagine it go be good clearly desire the good?

Meno: Yes, they at least probably do desire the good.

Socrates: Now as for those whom you describe as desiring evils in the belief that they do harm to their possessor, surely they know that they will be harmed by evils?

Meno: They must.

Socrates: And don't they believe that whoever is harmed, to the extent that he is harmed, is miserable?

Meno: They must believe this as well.

Socrates: And that the miserable are unhappy?

Meno: I certainly think so.

Socrates: Well, is there anyone who wants to be wretched and unhappy?

Meno: Not in my view, Socrates.

Socrates: Therefore, no one wants what is bad, since no one wants to be in this condition. Since what is it to be wretched other than desiring bad things and obtaining them?

*Euthydemus* 278e3–279a1:

Socrates: Do we human beings all wish to do well? Or perhaps this question is one of those that I just now feared was ridiculous? For it is foolish, no doubt, even to ask such things. What human being does not want to do well?

Clinias: Not a single one.

24. Reshotko's (2006, 95–117) discussion of the neither good nor bad is salutary.

25. In sum, then, when Socrates discusses the eudaimonist principle and calls the interlocutor's attention to the desire for the good, he has in mind a state of the soul, virtue. One scholar has particularly investigated the Socratic-Stoic continuity by comparing the renegade Stoic Aristo and his demotion of the moral value of the Stoic category known as *preferred indifferents* to what we find here (Long 1996, 27). As Cicero tells us, Aristo became embroiled with the orthodox Stoic Chrysippus over the question of whether the Stoic indifferents (things in between virtue and vice) could be ranked as valuable in any way. According to the orthodox Stoic position, virtue alone can be classified as a good. So-called goods, such as birth, wealth, and natural assets, are all morally indifferent but naturally preferable. Aristo, in denying that something can be naturally preferable if it is inherently without moral value, is accused of reverting to the Cynic camp. Long claims that this radical denial of value to anything but virtue as a component of human happiness is the upshot of *Euthydemus* 281d6–e5. Vlastos (1991, 220n74) disagrees with the "Cynic" interpretation of the *Euthydemus*.

26. Here I give the Greek text of passages from the *Charmides* that employ that identical language to Socrates's language in the *Euthydemus*, that is, the *allotrion* (foreign) and *oikeion* (native) distinction. The following is a conversation between Critias, who explicates a saying of Hesiod, and Socrates, who

listens to the interpretation. Note that the passage is not continuous and the text is marked in the parentheses:

φάναι δέ γε χρή και οικεία μόνα τὰ τοιαῦτα ἡγεῖσθαι αὐτόν, τὰ δὲ  
βλαβερὰ πάντα ἀλλότρια. (163c3–4)  
Ὡ Κριτία, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, και εὐθύς ἀρχομένου σου σχεδὸν  
ἐμάνθανον τὸν λόγον, ὅτι τὰ οικεία τε και τὰ αὐτοῦ ἀγαθὰ  
καλοῖς, και τὰς τῶν ἀγαθῶν ποιήσεις πράξεις. (163d1–2)

27. Again, see Aristototle *Metaphysics* (1024b26–34); also Alexander's commentary on the *Metaphysics* (434.25–435.20). As Burnyeat (in Plato 1990) puts it: "These parts and those qualities make o what it is and are essential to its identity; the rest just happen to belong to 0" (170).

28. But does not the *Euthydemus* precisely engage the reader in this fantasy of a kind of universal knowledge, both in Socrates's speculations about a knowledge that can impart happiness and in the brothers' fantastic claims—"Then you know everything, since you know something" (294a1)—about the knower who knows all things before he is even born? In the Socratic meditation on the knowledge that makes all human beings happy and in the eristic parody of this knowledge, we see traces of Antisthenes's theory of language. The *oikeios logos*, whether we construe it as a complete discursive mapping of the network of meanings, or as an exhaustive description of an extralinguistic reality, translates, in Hellenistic philosophy, into the unattainable rationality of the Stoic sage, while the autonomy that such a map would provide the sage approaches the Cynic idea of absolute self-reliance or independence.

29. One is reminded of the negative terms deployed by the Cynics to express their moral philosophy: "*adiaphoria, atuphia, apatheia* . . ."

30. On the contrast between an objective participant and subjective-individualist conception of the self, and an endorsement of the self-accessed in Socratic elenchus as the former, see Christopher Gill (2006, 338–45, 354–49, on *Alc. I*).

31. Perhaps the most Antisthenean passage in the *Euthydemus* is the signature phrase *ouk estin antilegein* (285e2; loosely translatable as, "It is not possible to contradict/gainsay another's logos"). Aristotle (*Metaph.* 1024b32–34; *Top.* 104b21), Alexander (*In Arist. Top.*; *In Arist. Metaph.*), Proclus (*In Pl. Crat.*), and Diogenes all clearly attest to the Antisthenean origins of this saying:

Wherefore Antisthenes mistakenly thought that there is no reference, except by means of the proprietary account, one [word] referring to one [nonlinguistic referendum]. From this it results that it is impossible to gainsay another's logos. (*Metaph.* 1024b32)

32. The *Euthydemus* has in fact many allusions to Socrates's associate, Antisthenes: for example, the *oikeion/allotrion* distinction, but also the phrase: "It is not possible to gainsay another's logos" (285e2). Dionysodorus introduces the doctrine as part of an elaborate defense against accusations of lying; Socrates then draws a comparison between Dionysodorus's denial that falsehood is possible (resorting to the Antisthenean paradox) and to Protagoras's (man-the-measure) doctrine. That Socrates in this particular dramatic setting would misidentify an Antisthenean motto and wrongly attribute it to Protagoras is a result of the historical relationships expressed in the dialogue. Socrates could not very well, without violating the dialogue's verisimilitude, attribute the saying to Antisthenes, since Antisthenes at the time of the dramatic date had not yet formulated this doctrine. Nevertheless we, as readers who stand outside the dramatic date and are familiar with the origin of *ouk estin antilegein*, have reason to identify the author of the doctrine as Antisthenes.

## Chapter 5

1. For this chapter I use the following editions: Plato (2001); Olympiodorus (1954); Olympiodorus (2015); Olympiodorus (2016); and Proclus (1954).

2. For Renaud and Tarrant (2016), "Only when one gets as far as the second mention of the Delphic inscription 'Know yourself' at 129a does a pair of subjects clearly emerge that holds the reader virtually until the end of the dialogue. One may sum up the pair of questions in this way: 'What is the human self, and how may one know oneself?'" (14).

3. The Neoplatonic engagement with the figure of Plato's Socrates is explored in two volumes coedited by Harold Tarrant: Layne and Tarrant (2014), *The Neoplatonic Socrates*, and the earlier Johnson and Tarrant (2012), *Alcibiades and the Socratic Lover-Educator*.

4. Brunschwig (1996, 62) makes the larger point that in his view this theme, and what he calls the "gnoséologique" interpretation of the Delphic precept, is all but absent in the dialogue *Alcibiades I* itself.

5. Stróżyński (2013) points to *De Trinitate* 10.3.5, where Augustine uses the combined image of the mirror and the eye, as Plato does at *Alcibiades I* 132, to illustrate the structure of self-knowledge. For Augustine, the difficulty of Plato's conceit, wherein the soul knows itself by looking into another soul, lies in the fact that the mind must see itself before it knows another mind. Augustine writes:

For the mind does not know other minds and not know itself, as the eye of the body sees other eyes and does not see itself; for we see bodies through the eyes of the body... As the mind, then, itself gathers the knowledge of corporeal things through the senses of the body, so of incorporeal things through itself. Therefore it knows itself also through itself, since it is incorporeal; for if it does not know itself, it does not love itself. (10.5.3. [5–10])

6. Περὶ δὲ τῆς τάξεως ῥητέον ὅτι πρῶτον αὐτὸν δεῖ τάττειν τῶν Πλατωνικῶν ἀπάντων. ὡς γὰρ ἐν Φαίδρῳ φησί, γελοῖόν ἐστι τὸν ἐπειγόμενον τὰ ἄλλα γινώσκειν ἑαυτὸν ἀγνοεῖν. δεύτερον ὅτι δεῖ Σωκρατικῶς τὰ Σωκράτους μαθάνειν, λέγεται δὲ ὁ Σωκράτης ἐκ τοῦ γνῶθι σαυτὸν ἐπὶ φιλοσοφίαν ἔλθειν (Olymp., *In Alc.* 10.8–11.2).
7. On reflexivity and self-consciousness as a construct in the dialogue see Jeremiah (2012).
8. Ganeri (2015) uses this term *immersed self* in order to present what he calls a “philosophical understanding of the mental” and what he thinks of as “a first-person perspective on it” (152).
9. Indeed, it is possible to see in Plato’s own works an overt meditation on the philosophy of Socrates, a recognition that it is a theme to which he returns repeatedly, and that, all along, Plato has been conveying to us the figure of Socrates as an icon of the historical Socrates. Here my insistence is only limited to the statement that *Alcibiades I* reiterates the investment that Plato’s Socrates makes in the Delphic injunction “Know thyself!” It would be remiss not to offer an interpretation in line with the central theme of the dialogue, which is self-knowledge. Socrates mentions Delphi in this dialogue and the injunction at 124a7–b4.
10. Tarrant and Roberts (2012) show that the *Alcibiades I* is not likely, on stylistic, that is to say, vocabulary grounds, to belong to early Plato, while by thinking of the dialogues as “late” Plato, one would have to explain its affinities with, for example, the *Phaedo*, as well as its divergences from the style of late Plato. Its more obvious stylistic affinities are with dialogues also found in Tetralogy VII and more often thought to be spurious, *Alcibiades II* and *Hipparchus*.
11. There are, then, different ways of restricting the scope, value, and relevance of Plato’s discussion of self-knowledge in the *Alcibiades I* as in some sense equivalent to divine knowledge. There is the effort of confining the text to a “conservative reading” that merely introduces the thought that one is not strictly identical with the body but is rather the soul, a less wholesale athetizing of lines 133c4–6, which mention the idea of god as the divine mirror of the soul (cf. Brunschwig 1996 and Denyer’s commentary [Plato 2001, 236–7]); or

there is the dismissal of the dialogue's authenticity in its entirety on the grounds that it violates the standard chronology of early, middle, and late by revealing traits of all three.

12. According to Renaud and Tarrant (2016, 64), the words *πᾶν τὸ θεῖον γνούς, θεὸν τε καὶ φρόνησιν, οὕτω καὶ ἑαυτὸν ἄν γνοίῃ μάλιστα* are found in all of the manuscripts. In these lines, Plato states that one who knows himself knows “the divine in its entirety, namely god and intelligence.”

13. Again, on the dating of *Alcibiades I* and also on the lines 133c4–6, see Renaud and Tarrant (2016, 103–4).

14. Griffin (2014) writes that:

the ten basic dialogues of Iamblichus are concerned with the ascent of the *psyche* on the ladder of virtues; the lower conditions of *psyche* are symbolized by an ascending ladder of characters in the dialogues, always aided by ‘Socrates,’ the noeric, knowing function of the *psyche*. A way of putting this intuitively is that Socrates symbolizes the soul in its best condition, realizing its potential to grasp and understand the truth, much as Plotinus (*Enn.* 3.4) contends the soul can put into practice better or worse potentials; Socrates signifies the *psyche* when it has insight into the truth.” (Griffin 2014, 103)

15. Renaud and Tarrant (2016, 44). Socrates encourages Alcibiades’s “ambitions to be worthy of the *real* Alcibiades.”

16. In this paragraph, I have been arguing that, whether the *Alcibiades I* is spurious or genuine, or to whatever degree it is spurious or genuine, its structure does not represent any kind of departure from other Socratic dialogues.

17. This phrase, *auto to auto*, is variously translated and interpreted. Gill (2007, 102), for example, suggests that we can translate as “the itself itself,” thus avoiding any discussion of reflexive self-knowledge and instead focusing on the conceit of Platonic essentialism. Inwood (2005) writes a strongly worded criticism of Foucault’s treatment of this passage. Foucault suggests an interpretation of the inquiry into the *auto to auto* as an inquiry into the soul as subject, as an activity of knowing rather than as a substance. Rejecting Foucault’s interest in this text as an investigation into the possibility of self-reflection, Inwood writes:

It is reasonably clear, then, despite the difficulties inherent in the *Alcibiades*, that Foucault’s urge to reify reflexivity here, and so to produce a subject-self, goes far beyond what the text (or a conservative reading of it) requires. His own interpretation of the text is not quite impossible, but it must, I think be recognized as extravagant and

unmotivated. On the more conservative interpretation (that is, the interpretation less dependent on presuppositions about the nature of the self to be found in it), Socrates is asking what *auto to auto* (the intensifier “itself” taken in isolation) and not what *auto to heauton* is (the reflexive pronoun used of humans taken by itself). (338)

Thus, contrary to the traditional way of interpreting the *Alcibiades I*, which associates the themes of Socrates, self-knowledge, and Delphi as pertaining to the inquiry into what I have been calling “the epistemological self” and have put forth as the primary sense of self in connection with Socratic philosophy, Inwood invokes Denyer, who takes Socrates to be making a point about how, in all instances, the self, or we could say essential nature of anything (the itself itself), can be discovered. Other commentators want to insist that, initially, at least the Delphic precept “Know thyself” is introduced early in the dialogue (120b–c) precisely in its political, possibly even material sense: “C’est regarder les autres, et notamment des autres par excellence que sont les ennemis, et se regard soi-meme dans un miroir pour se compare à eux” (Brunschwig 1996, 63). Still other commentators have emphasized the tradition of the theomorphic self, pointing to the text as confirming the idea that the true self, or ground of the self, is god.

18. In addition to Tarrant (2005), see also Marcus (2016) on the master-disciple relationship in Platonism as a form of devotional spiritual practice.

19. For discussions of this structure, see Razavi (2003). See also Ziai (1990).

## Chapter 6

1. In chapter 4, we looked at reasons to reject the instrumentalist interpretation of a similarly structured passage in the *Euthydemus* (278e3–281a5), in which wisdom is identified as the sole good. Penner and Rowe (2005, 275–78) interpret the *Euthydemus* passage to mean that wisdom in the *Euthydemus* is the knowledge of the good, the knowledge that enables one to use things that are in themselves neither good nor bad, to benefit himself (265). They then use this passage to suggest that wherever Socrates is referring to that which is intrinsically desirable, Socrates is actually referring to happiness, or, put differently, self-interest. They summarize this view as follows: “We will suggest that Socrates holds that anyone who has this desire for good has, as her or his ultimate desire, generative of all his or her so-called ‘voluntary’ actions—actions being thought of as means to the ends desired in those actions—desires for *his or her own* good (that is, his or her own maximum possible good given his or her circumstances)” (212). Crucially, Penner and Rowe use their interpretation

of the *Euthydemus* passage to extrapolate to an interpretation of the *Lysis*'s "first friend." They say that "while this teleological, hierarchical conception of *desire for good* is hardly explicit in the *Lysis*, there is nevertheless excellent evidence for the presence of such a teleological, hierarchical conception of *philia* (and indeed of *erōs*) in the dialogue" (212).

2. Insofar as Socrates does not refer to this first friend as a form, I take it that there is no reason to assimilate the *Lysis*'s first friend to the form of the good in the sense that would entail an explicitly Platonic metaphysics. In the Socratic dialogues, Socrates uses the word *good* and refers to desire for the good in an unspecified way. Often the interlocutor will stipulate what he means by the good; often Socrates alludes to a conception of the good that differs from a conception explored in other dialogues. For example, Socrates substitutes the word *pleasant* for *good* at *Protagoras* 355 to arrive at the paradox or even logical impossibility that a person willingly performs an act, knowing it to be bad, because he is overcome by goodness; whereas at *Gorgias* 475c Socrates precisely distinguishes *badness* from *pain* in order to win the argument with Polus that committing injustice is worse than suffering it.

3. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle famously defines friends, *philo*, as "those who wish each other well, that is, wish each other's good" (1156a4; δεῖ ἄρα εὐνοεῖν ἀλλήλοις καὶ βούλεσθαι τὰγαθὰ). Vlastos (1973) denied that Socrates in fact had this conception of friendship, of well wishing to the friend for his or her own sake. Since that article, many have responded to Vlastos, whose article is primarily about the *Symposium*, but has an appendix on the *Lysis*. See, for example, Sheffield (2012 1).

4. Τί δέ; οὐχ ὁ ἀγαθός, καθ' ὅσον ἀγαθός, κατὰ τοσοῦτον ἰκανὸς ἂν εἴη αὐτῷ; Ναί. Ὁ δέ γε ἰκανὸς οὐδενὸς δεόμενος κατὰ τὴν ἰκανότητα. Πῶς γὰρ οὐ; Ὁ δὲ μὴ του δεόμενος οὐδέ τι ἀγαπῶν ἂν. (215a9–b1)

5. On the ramifications of the word *agathos*, good, in the *Lysis*, see Gonzalez (1995).

6. Ὑμεῖς ἄρα εἰ φίλοι ἐστὸν ἀλλήλοις, φύσει πη οἰκεῖοι ἐσθ' ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς (221e6; If you two are *friends* with each other, then by *nature* you are native to each other). Here again *philo*i are said to be *oikeio*i.

7. τὸ μὲν δὴ φύσει οἰκεῖον ἀναγκαῖον ἡμῖν πέφανται φιλεῖν (222a5; Then by nature it is necessary that what is *native* to us be a *philos* to us).

8. Graver (2007, 47) explains "integral objects" as "goods or evils of the psyche."

9. Compare *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.1.1069b4–8: "There is a dispute concerning the happy person, as to whether he will need friends or not. For they say that divinely happy and self-sufficient people have no need of friends, since



‘good things are theirs.’ Since they are self-sufficient, then, they stand in need of nothing else.”

10. Again, for the description of states of affairs as neither good nor bad in themselves, see Reshotko (2006, 95–117).

11. Rudebusch (2006) and Vlastos (1981). See next note, and for the opposite view, the position that the *Lysis* is not doctrinal, compare Price (1989). For him the *Lysis* is strictly aporetic: “As Vlastos bizarrely overlooks, the attempt [at a doctrine of utility based love] fails” (11).

In other words, Socrates ends the elenchus by admitting that his attempt to define the *philos* as the good does not work (222e1–9). Recall, moreover, that in the *Charmides*, Critias interprets the Delphic injunction “Know thyself” in terms of the objective measurement of one’s expertise; he suggest that those who have sufficient expertise will be able to rule over men’s affairs for them. Socrates does not seem to think this aspiration to perfect utility will make people happy: “What we were saying just now, about temperance being regarded as of great benefit (if it were like this) in the governing of households and cities does not seem to me, Critias, to have been well said” (*Charmides* 172d3–6).

12. I am inclined to think that this scientific model of happiness and utility is another Sophistic construct that Socrates targets both here and in the *Charmides*. Compare again Price (1989, 11), quoting *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.8.1159b12–14: “Friendship because of utility seems especially to arise from contraries, e.g. between poor and rich, ignorant and learned.”

13. Compare Dorion (2006, 99–100), who lists the following passages where Xenophon emphasizes *ophelēia*, the usefulness of Socrates: *Memorabilia* 1.1.4, 1.2.2, 1.2.60–61, 1.7.5, 2.4.1, 2.5.1, 2.6.1, 2.7.1, 3.1.1, 3.6.1, 3.8.1, 3.10.1, 4.1.1, 4.4.1, 4.7.1; Xenophon, *Apology* 26, 34.

14. Again, Xenophon has Socrates distinguishing between grades of companions. A few companions are members of his inner circle: “Crito was Socrates’s companion and so were . . . others, who associated with him, not because they wanted to become politicians or barristers, but because they wanted to become truly good men” (*Mem.* 1.2.48). But there is no guarantee that Socrates has transmitted wisdom to any members of this circle, even those who have survived the character testing that Xenophon makes so much of in *Memorabilia* 4, nor is there any evidence that Socrates “approved of the message,” to borrow a phrase from American elections, of any of his companions, and there may be strong evidence to the contrary.

15. Indeed, antique commentators on the *Lysis* sometimes interpret the dialogue as an exercise in *utramque partem* disputation and thus a model of Socratic aporia.

16. “And friends have everything in common, as the saying goes ...” (*Lysis* 207c6).

17. Already the discussion of *Alcibiades I* has pointed in the direction of a distinction between a particular self, the individual person, and an essential self (the self itself). This chapter, then, construes the idea of true self in terms of that which is intrinsically valuable or perhaps even a universal self. On the notion of the distinction between persons (possibly socially or psychologically constructed) and self (referring to something universal, paradoxically not belonging to a particular individual, in the Indian tradition), see Smith (2012, 18–19).

18. In calling the *Lysis* “an aporetic dialogue,” I am aware that Vlastos treated it as “transitional,” in the sense that it was possibly a “vehicle of Platonic doctrine.” It is also true that Penner and Rowe (2005) read the *Lysis* not as aporetic, but as an articulation of the full blown egoistic, psychological eudaimonism that, for them, not only characterizes the central discovery of Socratic ethics but is actually a true account of human action in its own right. One of the chief divergences I have with their presentation is their identification of the first friend with happiness.

19. On this Hellenistic construct of friendship between rational selves and the constitution of the cosmopolis as an organic whole, see Vogt (2008): “All sages are friends, even though they may not be friends” (152). This paradoxical structure of friendship, playing between conventional notions and aspirational notions, as well as deep identities, shares perhaps something similar to the Socratic interrogations of friendship in the *Lysis*. On the relationship between Socrates and the Stoa, see Alesse (2000).

20. We can compare *Alcibiades I* to the *Lysis* in terms of the way they might be seen as asking parallel questions. Just as *Alcibiades I* takes all of the contents of what is in the ambit of the self qua body, qua mind, and qua body-mind compound (the *sunamphoteron*) and asks what is the self here in the midst of all that belongs to the self, so in the same way we can understand that the *Lysis* takes all that is in the ambit of the affective self, all that it loves, and asks what is it that is truly lovable.

21. Aristotle exactly calls the friend *allos autos*, “another I” (*Eth. Nic.* 1157a30–32). On this idea, see Stern-Gillet (1995, 37–58).

22. For Aristotle, it is my goodness that I love in myself, and thus I love myself qua good, not qua “me”; indeed, if I am vicious then I actually cannot love myself, although I can flatter myself. On this topic of what is lovable about me when I do love myself, see Whiting (1991):

So if character-friends love one another as persons of a certain sort, and love themselves in the same way that they love one another, they

will love themselves as persons of a certain sort. In this sense, the virtuous person will have disinterested affection for herself as a certain sort of person and will be disposed to have such affection for any and every one of that sort. (21)

23. In alluding to this metaphor of delivering, I am deliberately invoking the midwifery of *Theaetetus* as well as underscoring Sedley's (2004, 8–12) emphasis on this metaphor as a retrospective way of characterizing the activity of Socrates.

24. As Nails pointed out in unpublished comments about this manuscript, the terms *constructive* and *aporetic* avoid the developmentalist language of early and middle, and they avoid the question begging distinction of Socratic versus Platonic.

25. To cite a nonaporetic text, we can turn to the *Republic*. If the form of the good is the source of the intelligibility of all that is knowable and the source of the existence and essence of all that is, then here too (509b9) “good” is not coextensive with the highest human good, happiness; happiness does not bring about the existence or essence or even the intelligibility of anything. In this sense, the good is not just “my good” but, in a very real way, it “belongs to” everything; and not merely in the sense that it is “useful.”

26. οὐκοῦν εἰ μὴ μιᾷ δυνάμεθα ἰδέα τὸ ἀγαθὸν θηρεῦσαι, σὺν τρισὶ λαβόντες, κάλλει καὶ συμμετρίᾳ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ (*Phlb.* 65a1).

27. This formula *neti, neti* (not thus; not thus), as a formula to express the nature of the truest self, or *Atman* (sometimes rendered as “soul”), appears in four passages in *Brihadarankaya Upanishad* (4.2.4, 4.4.22, 4.5.15, 3.9.26). See Deussen (1919, 149).

28. Deussen (1919, ch. 2.3).

29. Notice in this translation I am taking extreme liberties with the pronoun *auto*, rendering it as “self,” and translating it together with the demonstrative adjective as the antecedent of the relative pronoun “which.” If we don't translate “auto” in this way, we have to ask, How should we translate it? Perhaps in the following way? “The true friend, I would hazard, is that itself in which all of these eponymous friendships culminate.” By avoiding the translation “self” we keep the idea of an impersonal “thing” that somehow has ultimate value. But, as we have already had occasion to remark, such a thing could not be valuable, not infinite, if it excludes the self; if it remains outside oneself.

30. Ganeri's chapter, “The Upanishadic Self,” is a summary of the kinds of doctrines under discussion here. Ganeri emphasizes that this Upanishadic self is, as he puts it, “not an object of consciousness” (27), saying, “If the self is not within the purview of the senses and the mind, that is not because it has nothing to do with sensing and thinking; in fact, just the opposite—being what makes

sensing and thinking possible, it is ‘too close’ to be seen.” Ganeri does not bring in the Socratic dialogues, but he does cite Proclus’s *Commentary on Euclid’s Elements* from Sorabji (2004, 150).

## Chapter 7

1. On the *Phaedrus* and self-knowledge, see Griswold (1986) and Nightingale (2010). Nightingale argues that the vision of the forms is somehow distinct from the philosopher’s self-knowledge, and that the philosopher varies her vision from the cosmic perspective to the individual self-awareness that constitutes her experience of herself.

2. Nightingale cites Nehamas (1999, 73–80), among others.

3. Moore (2015, 8–31), discusses the tradition of *gnothi seauton* in pre-Socratic contexts, in particular, with reference to a purported Delphic inscription (not attested in the archaeology, but for which there is literary evidence), as for example a report from Didorus Siculus: “When Chilon came to Delphi, he thought to dedicate to the god the first-fruit, as it were, of his own wisdom and engraved upon a column these three maxims: ‘Know yourself’; ‘Nothing in excess’; and the third, ‘Pledge, and ruin is near’” (9.10.1; trans. Oldfather, with modifications by Moore [25]). Again, Moore cites earlier scholarship that associates this Delphic precept with a purely human form of knowing one’s limitations.

4. On the affinities between Socratic philosophy and the New Academy and the possibility that the New Academy correctly interprets Socratic philosophy as zetetic, the literature is vast. One important book that advocates a skeptical Socrates is by Vogt (2012). See also Brittain (2001, 191–219). Brittain discusses Cicero’s account of Arcesilaus’s interpretation of Socrates in *Academica* and says that Cicero records a relationship between Arcesilaus and the philosophy of Socrates in six passages (197).

5. Obviously the bibliography on this topic is too vast to enter into here in other than a cursory way, but some of the books I have consulted concerning the origins, functions, and development of Plato’s so-called theory of forms include Silverman (2002), Fine (2003), and Nehamas (1999).

6. For example, we see in the *Euthyphro* that Socrates demands from Euthyphro that he state the form itself that makes all pious actions pious: “Remember that I did not ask you to teach me one or two of the many holy things, but this form itself by which all the holy things are holy” (6d9–11).

7. Not only is the Socratic invention of the forms in Plato’s *Phaedo* as the “simple” explanation for predication of interest, but also worthy of exploration

is what Plato means by suggesting that the soul is “most like” the forms, as is the question as to why he enters into a discussion of the forms only after he has summarized the Socratic account of virtue and only after he has sketched the Socratic autobiography.

What is the relationship between the *katharsis* from the various objects of pleasure and pain, of weal and woe, and the subsequent discussion of the forms? Why do these forms get introduced as a part of Plato’s account of Socratic historiography? This text is not the only one in which Plato explicitly links Socrates to the incipient theory of forms. Another passage in the corpus is the *Parmenides*, where the young Socrates is portrayed as already thinking about the forms, long before he has undertaken his mission on behalf of Apollo and long before he has undertaken the search for objective essences in the dialogues. If the regress and sailcloth challenges offered by Parmenides to the theory in the first half of the dialogues are there to illustrate the participation-predication relationship and to motivate an exploration of the nexus of forms, the worst difficulty argument seems to point rather to the relationship between the forms and the knowing self. On all of these points see the monograph of Linck (2007).

8. Commonly the *Phaedo* is understood as the “first” adumbration of Plato’s mature theory of forms. One very persuasive proponent of this understanding can be found in Silverman (2002, as well as 2014). According to Silverman, objective essences, forms, account for, or indeed are, the explanatory causes of certain kinds of properties. Forms are or have essences, self-consistent natures, that become instantiated in particulars, individuals, who, by dint of their metaphysical inferiority, lack such essences. Another influential account of how Plato handles the structure of explanation in the *Phaedo* is Nehamas (1999), who focuses on the fact that the qualities Socrates homes in on in the *Phaedo* as the explananda in his theory are for the most part (numbers excepted) expressed as “incomplete predicates” (138–58). The predicates *beautiful* and *large* are not, in Aristotelian parlance, substances. For Aristotle, they must be “said of” a subject, that is, a substance, but fall, again in Aristotelian parlance, into the categories of quality or quantity. Why Plato thought that these entities could be understood as substances at all is a vexed question. Silverman (2002) works more with the idea of essential property, and sees the theory of forms as articulated in the *Phaedo* as adumbrating a general discussion of essences, so that “each Form, F, is its essence, Y,” and that “for all particulars, P, and for all properties Y, if Y is predicated (able) of P, then P Has Y.” Moreover, the *Phaedo* especially is the locus of this theory as a theory of predication: “The *Phaedo* asserts that particulars are what they are in virtue of the Form’s being what it Is” (sec. 8).

9. Contrast Ferrari (1987) on the location of the forms as in a place that is fundamentally “elsewhere,” a place that the gods must “travel to reach” (131).

10. ἐν δὲ τῇ περιόδῳ καθορᾷ

μὲν αὐτὴν δικαιοσύνην, καθορᾷ δὲ σωφροσύνην, καθορᾷ δὲ ἐπιστήμην, οὐχ ἢ γένεσις πρόσεστιν, οὐδ' ἢ ἐστὶν που ἕτερα ἐν ἑτέρῳ οὐσα ἧμεῖς νῦν ὄντων καλοῦμεν, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐν τῷ ὃ ἐστὶν ὄν ὄντως ἐπιστήμην οὐσαν. (*Phdr.* 247c5–e1)

11. ἄτ' οὖν θεοῦ διάνοια νῶ τε καὶ ἐπιστήμη ἀκη-

ράτῳ τρεφομένη, καὶ ἀπάσης ψυχῆς ὄση ἂν μέλη τὸ προσήκον δέξασθαι, ἰδοῦσα διὰ χρόνου τὸ ὄν αγαπᾷ τε καὶ θεωροῦσα τὴν ληθῆ τρέφεται καὶ εὐπαθεῖ, ἕως ἂν κύκλῳ ἢ περιφορᾷ εἰς ταῦτόν περιενέγκῃ. ἐν δὲ τῇ περιόδῳ καθορᾷ μὲν αὐτὴν δικαιοσύνην, καθορᾷ δὲ σωφροσύνην, καθορᾷ δὲ ἐπιστήμην. (*Phdr.* 247d1–7)

12. On the theme of care for the all in the myth, see Ferrari (1987, 128). The philosopher, according to Ferrari, is concerned with reality as a whole, “with whatever else there is.”

13. On the relationship between Origen’s story of creation and the *Phaedrus* see Martens (2015).

14. εἶδόν τε καὶ ἐτελοῦντο τῶν τελετῶν ἦν θέμις λέγειν

μακαριωτάτην, ἦν ὠργιάζομεν ὀλόκληροι μὲν αὐτοὶ ὄντες καὶ ἀπαθείς κακῶν ὅσα ἡμᾶς ἐν ὑστέρω χρόνῳ ὑπέμενεν, ὀλόκληρα δὲ καὶ ἀπλᾶ καὶ ἀτρεμῆ καὶ εὐδαίμονα φάσματα μουόμενοι τε καὶ ἐποπτεύοντες ἐν ἀύγῃ καθαρᾷ, καθαρὸν ὄντες καὶ ἀσήμαντοι τούτου ὃ νῦν δὴ σώμα περιφέροντες ὀνομάζομεν, ὅστρεῦ τῶν τρόπων δεδεσμευμένοι. (*Phdr.* 250c1–7)

## Chapter 8

1. In this chapter, I rely principally on Burnyeat (Plato 1990), Sedley (2004), Kahn (2013), M. L. Gill (2012), and Blondell (2002).

2. τοῦτ' αὐτὸ τοῖνυν ἐστὶν ὃ ἀπορῶ καὶ οὐ δύναμαι λαβεῖν ἰκανῶς παρ' ἐμαυτῶ, ἐπιστήμη ὅτι ποτὲ τυγχάνει ὄν (*Tht.* 145e7).

3. Here I am borrowing a Sanskrit term (the Pali equivalent term is *Abhidamma*) that expresses the systematic philosophical analysis that arose in the first centuries of Buddhism after the demise of the Buddha. See Ronkin (2005, 50–74) for a general overview of Abhidamma thought in its philosophical and religious context.

4. μὴ μέντοι μου κατείπης πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους. λέληθα γάρ, ὦ ἑταῖρε, ταύτην ἔχων τὴν τέχνην (*Tht.* 149a6).
5. κάγω μοι δοκῶ μεμνημένος μάλα φοβεῖσθαι πῶς χρή τηλικόνδε ὄντα (*Prm.* 137a; I too, remembering [how difficult the method is] fear what I must do, at this old age).
6. I am indebted to M. L. Gill (2014, 80), for pointing out this reference and for developing a reading of the *Theaetetus* that establishes its links to the *Parmenides*.
7. μὴ μέντοι μου κατείπης πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους. λέληθα γάρ, ὦ ἑταῖρε, ταύτην ἔχων τὴν τέχνην (149a7).
8. Sedley (2004) finds developmentalism largely convincing as a reading of the Platonic oeuvre as a whole: “In this I am largely agreeing with Vlastos” (3n).
9. Sedley (2004, 35) deliniates what is not a part of Socrates’s original philosophy, according to Plato, which he summarizes under five headings (a to e): transcendence, psychic complexity, immortality, recollection, and physics.
10. Kahn (2013) writes as follows: “Fundamentally, then, the *Parmenides* can be seen as transitional, a transition symbolized by the replacement of Socrates by Parmenides. The *Parmenides* looks back critically at the metaphysical doctrine of the earlier dialogues but it also looks forward at a reconstruction of the theory designed for the world of nature” (19).
11. M. L. Gill (2012) writes, “I have argued that knowledge is a complex capacity to be defined on the model of clay: Knowledge is analyzed into its conceptual parts—preception, true judgment, and an account” (137).
12. For an important discussion of the motif of “twinning” in Plato’s dialogues, see Stang (2016, 23–50).
13. Compare *Theaetetus* 152c7, where Socrates discusses Protagoras’s discourse entitled *Truth*, which he suggests has an esoteric dimension: καὶ τοῦτο ἡμῖν μὲν ἠνίξατο τῷ πολλῷ συρφετῷ, τοῖς δὲ μαθηταῖς ἐν ἀπορρήτῳ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἔλεγεν (Is this indeed what Protagoras was telling the unwashed masses in a disguised form, while he spoke to his disciples about “The Truth” in secret?).
14. Ronkin (2014) writes that the Abhidharma offers a “metaphysics of experience.” See also Ronkin (2005), for a developed study of the contrast between the discourses of the Buddha (Sutras) and the Abhidharma or analysis of the constituents of conscious experience.
15. On the philosophy of the Abhidharma as an ontology of experience, see Waldron (2003, 53; also quoted in Ganeri 2015, 127n1): “[The Abhidharma] (1) depends upon a phenomenological analysis of experience in descriptive terms; (2) is metapsychological in the sense of being a self-conscious, systematic analysis of experience.”

16. On the aggregates or *skandhas* (literally, heaps), see Buddhagosa (1976).  
 17. See Sedley (2004, 169) for the way that the dream theory draws on the first part of the *Theaetetus*.

## Chapter 9

1. ἐγὼ γάρ, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, δι' οὐδὲν ἄλλ' ἢ διὰ σοφίαν τινὰ τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα ἔσχηκα. ποίαν δὴ σοφίαν ταύτην; ἥπερ ἐστὶν ἴσως ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία· τῷ ὄντι γὰρ κινδυνεύω ταύτην εἶναι σοφός (20d6–9).
2. ἐγὼ γάρ δὴ οὔτε μέγα οὔτε μικρὸν σύνοιδα ἑμαυτῷ σοφός ὢν. τὸ δὲ κινδυνεύει, ὦ ἄνδρες, τῷ ὄντι ὁ θεὸς σοφός εἶναι, καὶ ἐν τῷ χρησμῷ τούτῳ τοῦτο λέγειν, ὅτι ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία ὀλίγου τινὸς ἀξία ἐστὶν καὶ οὐδενός. καὶ φαίνεται τοῦτον λέγειν τὸν Σωκράτη, προσκεχρήσθαι δὲ τῷ ἑμῷ ὀνόματι, ἐμὲ παράδειγμα ποιούμενος, ὡσπερ ἂν <εἰ> εἶποι ὅτι Οὗτος ὑμῶν, ὦ ἄνθρωποι, σοφώτατός ἐστιν, ὅστις ὡσπερ Σωκράτης ἔγνωκεν ὅτι οὐδενός ἀξίός ἐστι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πρὸς σοφίαν (*Ap.* 23a5–b4).
3. For Vlastos (1991, 21–44), Socratic irony is potent but benign, bereft as it must be of any hint of deceit. Socrates speaks the truth by saying the opposite of what he means. Clothed in the familiar arsenal of questions, assent to which Socrates inevitably secures (the premises from which Socrates is able to elicit a contradiction of the interlocutor's thesis), is a compromise wisdom, human wisdom, as Socrates call it in the *Apology*. Socrates does not have scientific knowledge or expert political knowledge adequate for the giving of advice on policy to one's fellow citizens, but, nevertheless, he has a kind of knowledge derived empirically from years of sifting the souls of his fellow human beings.
4. Lear's interpretation (2006, 442–62) understands irony as the critical dissonance Socrates creates through interrogation of the conceit to wisdom.
5. Cicero writes, "Arcesilaus said that nothing can be known, not even that residuum of knowledge that Socrates had left himself—the truth of this very dictum (*Acad.* 1.45). Compare also, "We do not even know that nothing can be known" (2.73). The view that Socrates asserts that nothing can be known is widely held even among modern readers. Compare, however, Fine (2008), who argues that one cannot read the *Apology* in this way. I would argue that the two phrases cited above in connection with the oracle—namely, σύνοιδα ἑμαυτῷ σοφός ὢν (21b4; I am fully aware to myself of being wise in neither great nor small measure) and ὅστις ὡσπερ Σωκράτης ἔγνωκεν ὅτι οὐδενός ἀξίός ἐστι τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πρὸς σοφίαν (23a5–b4; Whoever, like Socrates, realizes that he is



worth nothing in truth with respect to wisdom)—need not be read as asserting that Socrates knows he knows nothing. In both phrases, Socrates says, on the one hand, that he is aware or knows: *σύννοιδα, ἔγνωκεν*. He says, on the other hand, that, in this awareness, he understands that he has no worth with respect to wisdom, that he is aware of *σοφὸς ὢν*, being wise, but that the way in which he is wise cannot be measured as great or small. One might object that this translation is a distortion of the obvious meaning of the text. Clearly each text affirms that Socrates knows, that he has awareness, that he is cognizant, but not cognizant of something that can be measured, something that can be understood as wisdom. These phrases beg the question, What is wisdom? At this point in the *Apology's* narrative we do not yet know what wisdom is.

6. Lear (2006, 449) quotes this same passage from Kierkegaard. Another example is Kierkegaard's (1989) master's thesis, *Concept of Irony with Constant Reference to Socrates*, where Kierkegaard emphasizes the equivalence between irony and negativity:

Irony [is] the infinite absolute negativity. It is negativity, because it only negates; it is infinite, because it does not negate this or that phenomenon; it is absolute, because that by virtue of which it negates is a higher something that still is not. The irony established nothing, because that which is to be established lies behind it. (26)

7. Compare Nehamas (1998, 105). For Nehamas, Socrates has no system of virtue. That is what he exactly lacks. Instead, he is precisely a unique individual who happens to be good. Plato has no explanation for this goodness, but perhaps is owed praise for somehow curating this figure.

8. On Socrates and the transrational, see Bussanich (2006).

9. M. L. Gill (2012) has an interpretation that successfully relates the two halves. Gill's brilliant rendering of the connection between the two halves of the dialogues suggests that the first half presents difficulties with the theory of forms that cannot be solved "without proper exercise," supplied by the second half of the dialogue (45). Gill suggests that the second half demonstrates that without the one, there would be no world at all, and hence, that the world itself cannot exist without forms. The second half presents solutions to the first half, again, according to Gill, by denying the premise, assumed in the first half, that forms do not participate in their opposites. Gill gives a concise survey of what other scholars have taken to be the relationship between the first and second parts of the dialogue (50).

10. M. L. Gill (2012) translates as follows: "If it (the one) is one, the one would not be many, would it?" (62; *εἰ ἓν ἐστίν, ἄλλο τι οὐκ ἂν εἴη πᾶσι τὸ ἓν*).

11. In the *Phaedo* Socrates talks about how to practice this kinship with the forms, which he styles a death before death. It consists in separating the mind from the body, rising above the senses, dropping off the body entirely. In other dialogues, Plato is capable of metaphorizing this process of stripping off what is extraneous. Says Ctesippus in the *Euthydemus*, “Flay me alive, only make me wise.”

12. Other scholars hold that the ontological/metaphysical interpretation of the latter half of the *Parmenides* began as early as the Neopythagorean Moderatus. Tarrant quotes the following fragment from Porphyry’s *On Matter* that purports to give a testimony on the theory of Moderatus: “Following the Pythagoreans, this man [Moderatus] declares the first One to be above Being and all substance, while the second One is true Being and the intelligible (he says it is the Forms) while the third, which is that of Soul . . . participates in the One and the Forms” (Simplicius 1892, 36–40; trans. Tarrant [2000, 157]).

13. See M. L. Gill (2012, 76–100). The “contest” between Parmenides and Heraclitus involves a conversation about whether being as an object of awareness or knowledge is stable or impermanent. In the *Sophist*, Plato’s critique of Parmenides involves a discussion about the location of nonbeing as an item of the Sophist’s intellectual repertoire, a reply to Diels and Kranz (1903, B7:1–2, 120) and Diels and Kranz (1903, B2, 120).

14. Original Greek text is disputed and the extent to which Plato quotes or misquotes Diels and Kranz (1903, 28B8.38) is also disputed.

## Conclusion

1. The *Phaedo* begins with an explanation of why the execution of Socrates was stayed (58a5). The commemorative voyage to Delos in honor of Apollo, who saved the Minotaur’s victims had to return before blood could be shed in the city: “This is the ship, as the Athenians tell the tale, on which Theseus embarked to Crete, leading home the twice seven, having saved them and himself as well” (*Phd.* 58c) The position of this tale at the beginning of the *Phaedo*, with Socrates functioning as the savior of the young (Plato names thirteen friends of Socrates as present at the execution, including Phaedo himself), entering into the labyrinth to meet the Minotaur (death itself and, in particular, the fear of death) is meant to resonate with the heroic image of Socrates.

2. At *Protagoras* 315c8–d1, Socrates quotes *Odyssey* 11.584—“Then I spied Tantalus” (Καὶ μὲν δὴ καὶ Τάνταλόν γε εἰσεῖδον), the underworld scene—himself taking the part of Odysseus in search of knowledge,

while Prodicus the Sophist plays the part of Tantalus undergoing his punishment in Hades.

3. It would seem unquestionably odd if, although his own happiness is absent from Socrates's motivations for doing philosophy, that philosophy itself recommends the truth of egoistic eudaimonism, or at least apparently recognizes the truth of egoistic eudaimonism. Not that I wish to forestall the objection that this discussion of Socrates's own motivations cannot answer decisively the question of whether or not Socrates subscribes to an ethical position, is the discoverer of a psychological truth, or at any rate relies on an ethical theory that approximates egoism, but we must also consider the doctrinal implications of statements that Socrates makes. Nevertheless, in my view, it is unlikely in the extreme that the *Sokratikoi logoi* have it wrong at the outset, that they set out to portray the extraordinary life of Socrates, a life spent in service to the divine and to his community, but that in reality this same philosopher actually teaches us the gospel of "me first."

4. See Giannantoni (1990, 2: 609–10) and Denyer (Plato 2001, 1–29). Kahn (1990) explores the idea that Plato's treatment of Alcibiades and the eros theme is a response to Aeschines's earlier portrayal. If Aeschines's dialogue was published before Plato's *Symposium* (and certainly before the *Alcibiades I*, whether or not that dialogue is Platonic), then Plato does not even inaugurate this primal scene but is already under the influence of a narrative tradition that informs his own shaping of the material.

5. Young men destined for ruin were Charmides, Polemarchus, Alcibiades; older men destined for ruin were Nicias, Cephalus.

6. Giannantoni (1990 2: 609–10)

7. Kahn (1996, 21) translates διὰ τὸ ἐρᾶν βελτίω ποιῆσαι as "through the power of love," that is, in contrast to the knowledge that Socrates lacks.

8. For example, for Chrysippus it is a truism that "virtue benefits" (ἡ ἀρετὴ ὠφελεῖ). Moreover, the good as such benefits and insofar as it is good, benefits impartially:

The beneficial is entirely superior to what is not beneficial. But nothing is better than the good. Therefore the good benefits. It is agreed that god is good. Therefore god benefits. But the good, insofar as it is good, does nothing other than benefit. Therefore god benefits all things. (von Arnim 1964, frag. 1116, line 3)

9. On this point, I am indebted to the work of Rynearson (especially 2008).

10. Tarrant (2012, 158) discusses this definition of eros as belonging to the philosopher Polemo, who headed Plato's Academy in 314. The saying is found in Plutarch's *Life of Alcibiades*: "And he came to think that the work of

Socrates was really a kind of provision of the gods for the care and salvation of youth” (4.3; Plutarch 1916, 13). In fairness, I should also point out that because Tarrant (2012, 158) treats *Alcibiades I* as the product of Polemo’s Academy, when Socrates speaks of a certain “divine opposition” to his association with Alcibiades (*Alc.* b1) it is in keeping with the theology of Polemo.

11. Graver (2007, 58–59) cites Diogenes Laertius (1950, VII.116) for the list of *eupathe*. For definitions, we must turn to a much later source, Psuedo-Andronicus, *On Emotions*:

Εὐνοια· εὐμένεια· ἀσπασμός· <ἀγάπησις>  
 α' Εὐνοια μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ βούλησις ἀγαθῶν <ἐτέρῳ> αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν  
 ἐκείνου. β' Εὐμένεια δὲ εὐνοια ἐπίμονος γ' Ἀσπασμός δὲ ἀδιάστατος

Goodwill, good intention, welcoming, love

Good will is the desire for good things for another person on account  
 of that person himself.

Good intention is abiding good will.

Welcoming is steadfast goodwill. (von Arnun 1964, 3.432)

12. See Todd (2013, especially 142–76) for a discussion of the ethics of Shantideva and in particular the question of how a non egoistic eudaimonism can function.

13. On the thinness of eudaimonia as an ethical norm, see Annas (1993), where she says that eudaimonia “is a thin rather than a substantial concept” (227). On the problem of the relationship between virtue and happiness see Vlastos (1991). See also Irwin (1995, 52–64).

14. In responding to eudaimonist interpretations of Socratic ethics, I also have in mind, among others, the following works: Annas (1993); Irwin (1995, 52–64); Vlastos (1991, 203, especially n14); and Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 103). For a general assessment of eudaimonism as it applies to Platonic ethics, see White (2002).

15. On interpretations of the particular problems that the *Protagoras* raises for a consistent theory of Socratic eudaimonism, see Rudebusch (1999).

16. For support of the position that I explore here, see Weiss (2006): “The only sense in which Socrates might be said to be a eudaimonist is insofar as he believes that all men wish to be happy and not wretched” (5).

17. For text and translation, see Sāntideva (1960, 1997, respectively). For a discussion of Shantideva’s dialectical strategies in defense of altruism, see P. Williams (1998).

18. Again, see Weiss (2006).



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## PHILOSOPHY

In this highly original and provocative book, Sara Ahbel-Rappe argues that the Platonic dialogues contain an esoteric Socrates who signifies a profound commitment to self-knowledge and whose appearances in the dialogues are meant to foster the practice of self-inquiry. According to Ahbel-Rappe, the elenchus, or inner examination, and the thesis that virtue is knowledge, are tools for a contemplative practice that teaches us how to investigate the mind and its objects directly. In other words, the Socratic persona of the dialogues represents wisdom, which is distinct from and serves as the larger space in which Platonic knowledge—ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics—is constructed. Ahbel-Rappe offers complete readings of the *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Alcibiades I*, *Euthyphro*, *Lysis*, *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus*, and *Parmenides*, as well as parts of the *Republic*. Her interpretation challenges two common approaches to the figure of Socrates: the thesis that the dialogues represent an “early” Plato who later disavows his reliance on Socratic wisdom, and the thesis that Socratic ethics can best be expressed by the construct of eudaimonism or egoism.

**Sara Ahbel-Rappe** is Professor of Greek and Latin at the University of Michigan. She is the author of *Socrates: A Guide for the Perplexed* and *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius*; translator of Damascius's *Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles*; and coeditor (with Rachana Kamtekar) of *A Companion to Socrates*.

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