UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

# Democratic Education in the Works of Plato

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by

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# DEDICATION

To those who have shared conversations about our world with me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Democratic Education in the Works of Plato

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Understanding Plato's contribution to democratic education means more than understanding the substance of the conversations he depicts: appreciating how his characters shape each other with speech and recognizing how Plato similarly employs his writing to shape readers.

Such reshaping is crucial for political education because, as revealed in the *Protagoras*, the key to the political art is guiding others to harmonize their preferences as individuals with those they hold as citizens. This means uniting their goods as individuals and the goods of the polity with people's collective understanding of what is admirable or beautiful (*kalos*).

A fuller understanding of the polity, and a deeper form of self rule, requires a

more complete understanding of how the world comes to be the way it is. Plato offers this possibility to his readers by showing the relationship between understanding knowledge (epistemology) and existence (ontology). People's social interaction influences the way they make sense of the world, playing a crucial role in what they take to be—and what is—real. The conversations Plato depicts with Socrates as well as those he initiates in readers' minds shape reality; Plato himself is a "philosophical poet."

Examining these conversations more closely makes it possible to see how the political art is practiced. Socrates begins by understanding how others see the world, questions their assumptions to open them to a new outlook, and engages them in verbal give and take to help develop a new, or reformed, understanding of the world. His interlocutors must argue their own opinions and decide issues in common with him, harmonizing their beliefs.

Plato's support for logical reasoning and truth over traditional rhetoric paves the way for a more stable polity. Favoring internal consistency in a polity works against the tyranny of public opinion and makes individuality possible. However, since Descartes, historical changes have transformed truth, threatening a new form of tyranny: preventing people from contributing to the polity's being. Plato supplies a solution *within* his dialogues, demonstrating how to reshape the world and opening a new space where people may join as fellow citizens, forming a polity in speech (*logos*).

## Introduction: Plato and the Problem of Democratic Education

*γνῶθι σαυτόν.*

*Know Thyself.*

*μηδὲν ἄγαν.*

*Nothing in excess.*

— Inscriptions on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi

In this dissertation, I examine what Plato's texts have to tell us about democratic education. I strive to develop a deeper understanding of how contemporary democracy can be made better—more likely to endure as well as better for its citizens—by making sense of how Plato saw education and polities generally.

Plato's manner of writing, in dialogues in which Socrates is often, but not always, a main speaker, complicates this task. One must first consider how to go about understanding Plato—what it means to understand him and what it means to understand more generally.

Typically when scholars explore Plato and education, they focus on the content of education; but at least as important is the manner in which people are educated. This means considering how people's experiences—education broadly conceived—guide the formation of their preferences that in turn affect individuals' happiness and the strength of their polity at the same time. Such an examination must focus on the *process* of education rather than simply on its subject matter. *How* people are taught

has at least as much to do with the people they become as *what* they are taught; or more precisely, *how* they are taught forms a crucial part of *what* they are taught. Those taught to listen to long speeches are likely to become very different people than those who engage in detailed conversations—even if the general content of both are the same.

With Plato, these two issues blur together. How he writes is integrally connected to his thoughts on education and how people should learn. Moreover, it also relates, I argue, to what makes Plato fundamentally democratic—in the end far more democratic in the essentials than most writers who argue for democracy explicitly. He is democratic because of the way he encourages readers to interact in the dialogues he writes, disagreeing at any step, adding their own thoughts, as well as by never himself stating a final word on any matter.

Democratic education is education that is about more than the human being as an individual. It is about the group of people that interact with each other; the people who form an ongoing association with one another: the *polis* or polity. Understanding political education entails making sense of the connection between individual human beings and the polities of which they are a part. To make sense of what political education is or how it works, one must know something about how education goes from affecting individual human beings to changing a polity as a whole.

I contend that Plato saw the preferences of individuals, especially the preferences which they tend to give priority to, their goods, to be key to the development of the individual and the polity as a whole. In addressing this Plato

tackles a problem that rational choice theory has a particularly difficult time addressing fully: the majority of people fail to appreciate the importance of shaping their own preferences. Rather than simply working to satisfy their current preferences, people's long-term well being is advanced by considering the preferences they currently have and working to shape them to those that will put them and their polity in the best position to flourish. Successful political leadership means guiding a polity with a view to the preferences people need in the future, not just the ones they are predisposed to act on today. This in turn entails that the art of political rule must include guiding people to judge better which preferences serve them well and engaging them in activity that will help them to develop those as opposed to others.

Democracies—ancient or modern—typically have citizens who place freedom and equality among the highest goods. To remain strong and healthy, they require citizens who place among their highest goods other goods as well: revealing themselves to others and moderation—goods that respond to the Delphic Oracle's commands. These goods can coexist harmoniously with other democratic goods and together lead to a strong and healthy democracy. However, it is only over the course of the next five chapters that I reach that conclusion.

In Chapter One, I consider what Socratic writing is. While my focus remains on Plato, in order to gain additional traction on how Socratic writing is unique as well as to better understand the primary speaker in Plato's dialogues, I compare Plato and Xenophon's writing, their accounts of Socrates's defense before the city of Athens. These works tell us about what wisdom means to Socrates and what knowledge he had

to pass on to future generations. A further examination of what Plato and Xenophon write on the topic of writing provides insight into the reason for writing dialogues: to be useful. But using, I argue, means engaging readers in an activity that changes them for the better. For Plato in particular this entails creating a world that transports readers to alternate realities in which they become the participants in arguments.

In Chapter Two, I pull my readers into a detailed analysis of Plato's *Protagoras*. I demonstrate that by participating in the dialogue as a careful observer of the conversation might, one finds key information in details of the drama that frequently go unnoticed. These details help show that to have a good polity (regardless of type), citizens must have preferences that can be satisfied and that also tend to strengthen their government. A notion of the common good is embedded in the language we use, in words like beautiful or admirable, (*kalos*) and our institutions. Yet individuals' understanding of what is most admirable is often in conflict with their personal preferences; this leads conflict *between* members of the society and *within* individuals themselves. It is very difficult for people to recognize that one set of preferences is better for them than another and to adjust their preferences over time so that they can flourish within and for their polity. A key task of leaders and political thinkers is to make people more aware of these differences and guide them to reshape their preferences in order to bring about greater harmony for people as individuals and citizens at the same time.

Chapter Three encompasses political action and ontology. While it has recently been argued that Plato employs images both to explain the realm of thought

and to change people's behavior, I contend that these are only the beginning of how Plato sought to use writing to effect political change. Within the account of epistemology Plato provides, especially in the *Theaetetus*, lies an ontology; understanding what it means to know something, helps us see how things come to exist and change. Plato uses this understanding of being to change reality for his readers. A considerable part of the potency of Plato's writing derives from his appreciation of the way in which people's social interaction influences the things they believe in and treat as real. I conclude that in bringing conversations to life, Plato changes reality for his readers.

In the conversations to which Plato transports his readers, which I examine in Chapter Four, he shows Socrates engaging in the political art, shaping himself and his interlocutors into what amounts to a small polity through their conversations. Early in conversations Socrates endeavors to understand other people and how they see the world, typically beginning with the assumptions they bring to bear on the world and questioning those assumptions until, through refutation of their understanding of the world, his interlocutors are reduced to a state of perplexity. He works hard to engage people in a question and answer format with frequent back and forth because it is essential to developing a shared understanding of the world. And to ensure that he shares the same world with his interlocutors, he insists that others make arguments based on their own opinions and that disputes, including those about how the conversation itself is handled, are decided in common. His careful approach to conversation makes it possible to guide his companions from pursuing one good to

another one that will minimize their internal conflicts at the same time it maintains harmony with others in the polity. In describing Socrates's conversations, Plato portrays his own understanding of a good political education for readers.

In Chapter Five, I consider what Plato endorses as goals of political education and analyze their relationship to democracy. I argue that Plato's support of logical reasoning over tradition rhetoric encourages a new means of political engagement. Favoring internal consistency in a polity provides rule of law which works against tyranny that would otherwise threaten to close off uniquely political goods. Moreover the consistency within an individual provides a basis for rational truth which allows individuals to stand their ground against popular opinion, sustaining their unique understanding of the world in the face of a majority opinion to the contrary: individualism.

However since Plato's time, I explain how Arendt understands historical forces to have caused rational truth to evolve into a new danger, threatening to prevent people from contributing to the polity's reality at all. While the threat is not inconsequential, I claim that it will ultimately prove to be more illusion than reality. And in her preoccupation with this concern she may have overlooked the political space Plato creates in his dialogues. He uses them to transport readers to a polity in speech where they are encouraged to join others in an alternative type of political space, one that prepares readers to overcome the problem Arendt confronts.

# Chapter 1

## Reading Plato: Plato and Xenophon as Teachers and Poets

> *When Xerxes had resolved to make a campaign against Hellas, Demaratos, being in Susa and having been informed of this, had a desire to report it to the Lacedemonians. Now in no other way was he able to signify it, for there was danger that he should be discovered, but he contrived thus, that is to say, he took a folding tablet and scraped off the wax which was upon it, and then he wrote the design of the king upon the wood of the tablet, and having done so he melted the wax and poured it over the writing, so that the tablet (being carried without writing upon it) might not cause any trouble to be given by the keepers of the road. Then when it had arrived at Lacedemon, the Lacedemonians were not able to make conjecture of the matter; until at last, as I am informed, Gorgo, the daughter of Cleomenes and wife of Leonidas, suggested a plan of which she had herself thought, bidding them scrape the wax and they would find writing upon the wood; and doing as she said they found the writing and read it, and after that they sent notice to the other Hellenes.*
>
> —Herodotus, *Histories* 7.239

### 1.1 Introduction

Plato and Xenophon write in a way that seems to defy many of the principles students are typically taught in today's schools. They are told to state the point at the beginning, be clear, avoid any unnecessary words, make the structure obvious to readers, and other principles that help convey their thoughts to readers as quickly and clearly as possible. Other political philosophers write more directly about their ideas, with Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and others adopting the treatise form instead of dialogues or histories containing dialogues.[1] While Xenophon provides readers a little

[1]I omit the stark comparison with Aristotle because it remains unclear precisely what sort of text we

insight into his thought, writing in his own name, readers of Plato are in much the same position as they are with Shakespeare; and simply assuming that Plato thinks whatever Socrates says, may well be like taking Shakespeare to think whatever Hamlet, Richard III, or Lear's fool says.[2]

In this chapter, I offer insight into how to read Plato based on the connection between poetry, rhetoric, and philosophy that Plato elaborates over several texts, and examining the texts in which Plato discusses writing directly. I also compare Plato and Xenophon, attempting to understand Plato better by juxtaposing him with the only other Socratic writing (out of seven we know of) from whom we have extant texts. I compare their accounts of Socrates' defense to his jury and consider what Xenophon wrote in his own voice about writing. While informing how one can gain more from reading Plato, this inquiry also shows how these authors understood their writing to carry on the work of their non-writing predecessor.[3]

## 1.2 Comparison of Apologies

A reasonable starting point to try to understand something about how to read Plato is by comparing him to his the sole remaining Socrates writer, Xenophon. Both

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have of Aristotle's, though its present form strikes us more like a treatise. See Carnes Lord, "The Character and Composition of Aristotle's Politics," *Political Theory*, (1981), 459-78.

[2]In recent decades, reasons not to read Plato in this manner have covered extensively. See *Who Speaks for Plato?*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefiled Publishers, Inc., 2000), *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles L. Griswold Jr. (New York: Routledge, 1988), and James Arieti, *Interpreting Plato: The Dialogues as Drama*, (Savage, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1991).

[3]In this book, my writing does not follow the example of Plato. In part this is a shortcoming of it, but as I hope becomes clear in Chapter 4, it is also because I write under changed conditions, to people who are affected by a change in the understanding of truth since the time of Plato. See Chapter 4, my section on the Tyranny of Truth.

men wrote multiple works with Socrates as a main character, though Xenophon wrote substantially more in which Socrates does not appear except perhaps through his influence, writing histories as well as what appear to be treatises, such as his texts *On Hunting* and *On Horsemanship*.

The clearest place to make a direct comparison between Plato's and Xenophon's writing is their accounts (*logoi*) of the defense speech Socrates made before Athens executed him for carrying out his philosophical work.[4] The different content of the apologies distinguish them immediately. The parts of Socrates' defense they cover varies substantially, but neither of them present themselves as complete accounts: Xenophon's account explicitly states that it excludes things,[5] and Plato's account presents itself as a dialogue only, with no commentary about thoughts or motivations Socrates left unspoken at his trial.

The account of Socrates' encounter with the Oracle of Delphi varies. Plato's account states that the Pythia said "no one was wiser" than Socrates (21a).[6] Socrates questions both (a) what the Pythia might mean by *wisdom* (*sophos*) and, at first, (b) whether he was actually the wisest. The word translated as *wise* could also be rendered *clever*, and generally means someone clever or skilled at some particular art

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[4]There are numerous shortcomings to making such a comparison, not the least of which is that Xenophon places portions of what he has to say on the matter in another text, his *Memorabilia*. But the comparison remains useful.

[5]Xenophon, *Apology of Socrates to the Jury* (below: Xenophon's *Apology*), (translated by Robert Bartlett) (Cornell University: 1996), paragraph 22. Unless otherwise indicated, throughout this book, I base my quotations on translation cited when a text is first referred to, occasionally amending the translation based on my reading of the Greek and to make the meaning clearer for the context in which I am discussing the text.

[6]West and West, *Four Text on Socrates* (Cornell: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984).

(*technē*), but the Pythia does not indicate a particular art in which Socrates is skilled. Precisely what readers of the text, as well as Socrates's jury should understand by *sophos* is a crucial point because the teachers or clever men Socrates is at pains to distinguish himself from for the jury (and who comprise some of his key interlocutors in many of Plato's dialogues) are known as *sophistes*, which had a broad range of meaning, from "master of one's craft" and "prudent man" to "wise" or "clever" man.[7]

Socrates questions the meaning of wisdom just before he brings up the Pythia's comment, saying that he was slandered because of a "*certain* wisdom," and he questions ""Just *what sort* of wisdom is this?" His response is that it might be "human wisdom," (20b-e emphasis mine). However, he explicitly states that he does not have knowledge of the excellence of the "human being and citizen," and that anyone who has such knowledge "might perhaps be wise in some wisdom greater than human." Socrates goes on a Herculean quest to disprove the oracle, questioning politicians, poets, and craftsmen (21c-22d).[8]

Plato's Socrates seems most upset by his confrontation with the poets, in fact he acts as if the encounter caused him so much shame he almost does not recount it. Yet when he does, he notes that almost all those present would have spoken better than the poets about their own poetry (22b-d).[9] He complains that "they say many noble (beautiful) things, but know nothing of what they speak." By contrast, he recognizes that the craftsmen, each of whom practices some art (*technē*), have

[7]Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon.
[8]Also, see below, fn.49.
[9]See also fn. 35 below.

knowledge he does not have—yet even they made the mistake of believing they had knowledge of something like human excellence. And Socrates finally concludes that the oracle was saying that "human wisdom is worth little or nothing," and that he is superior only in that he knows what he does not know: others know nothing, but are deluded into thinking their knowledge is substantial, he knows nothing and recognizes it for what it is (23a, 21d). Though perhaps in a late nod to the poets, he himself decides to write music (*Phaedo* 60e).[10]

Xenophon's account, instead of focusing solely on wisdom, indicates that Apollo stated "no human being was more free, more just, or more moderate [*sōphōn*]" than Socrates (14).[11] Here, the word *moderate* could also be translated as *prudent* or *of sound mind*. Yet, far from denying his wisdom in this account, Socrates defends the god's pronouncement saying "how could someone plausibly deny that I am a wise [*sophon*] man—I, who from the very time that I began to understand what is said never yet ceased seeking and learning whatever good thing I could," (16).[12] While Socrates defends the god's pronouncement about him, the way in which he does so makes one question whether he had the same understanding of the terms other Athenians used.

Xenophon's Socrates also differs dramatically in the way he defends himself

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[10]Nietzsche points this out and notes his final words, telling Crito that he owes a cock to Aesculapius, *Phaedo* 118a, *Birth of Tragedy*. Though perhaps it is more fitting to recognize that Socrates died before composing music other than philosophy, and only his doctrine of reincarnation, perhaps in a well-trained student, would allow for him to actually have become a poet himself.
[11]Citations to Xenophon's *Apology* are to paragraph numbers.
[12]This time using Xenophon uses the same word used in Plato's account.

against the charge of corrupting the youth. In Plato's work, Socrates (a) demonstrates that his accusers, while saying he makes the youth worse, cannot say who makes the youth better and (b) presents the fact that neither anyone he supposedly corrupted nor their families has come forward, while many who spent time with him were present at the trial (24c-25c; 33d-34a).[13]

By contrast, in Xenophon's text Socrates admits that, in regards to education, the young follow him instead of their parents, but defends himself from guilt on account of his expertise in education: it makes sense that they would follow him instead (20-21). By contrast, Plato's Socrates, while expressing esteem for anyone who can teach something about human excellence, disclaims doing so himself (19e-20c, 33a).

Finally, Xenophon's Socrates has no special relationship, good or bad, with either the poets or craftsmen. Xenophon barely mentions the poets in either the *Apology* or *Memorabilia*. At the same time, he also fails to make any special remarks about the craftsmen or art (*technē*) in general.

To reconcile these two accounts requires finding a way to understand Socrates as both wise and knowing nothing. It is also necessary to understand how a man who knows only that he knows nothing and lacked knowledge of the excellence of human beings and citizens could have been an expert in education that the young would follow in preference to their parents and who ultimately made them better. To make

[13]Throughout Plato's account focuses on negative evidence, while Xenophon's account presents positive evidence; the trend continues in their description of Socrates' *diamonion* which Plato describes as only tell Socrates what not to do, whereas Xenophon describes it as giving positive directions.

these facially contradictory claims coherent, one must consider what makes Socrates' work different from the poets', and that, in turn, requires that one read well the authors who wrote about him.

## 1.3 Plato on the Relationship of Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Poetry to Education

### 1.3.1 The Art (*technē*) of the Poet and Rhapsode

By casting shadows, Plato's *Ion* illuminates the connection Plato's Socrates sees between poetry and rhetoric, on the one hand, and rhetoric and philosophy on the other.

Socrates questions Ion at length about exactly what it is that he, as a rhapsode, does and what it is that he understands better than others: what sort of knowledge, if any, he has. For example, Socrates asks Ion who would know better if Homer speaks well about diviners, Ion or a diviner (531b)?[14] Likewise, he asks if Ion or a charioteer would be a better judge of the sections of Homer about chariot racing (538b).

Socrates' questions to Ion seem designed to provoke readers to ask at least two questions: What precisely is the art (*technē*) of the rhapsode (and by extension the poet)? And since it seems impossible that even Homer could be an expert on so many different arts at once—divination, charioteering carpentry, medicine, and others—then what, if anything, does Homer teach?

The *Ion* provides a partial answer to the first question: poets and rhapsodes recreate reality for their audience. Plato reveals this to readers by having the

[14]Plato, *Ion*, trans. Allan Bloom, in *Giants and Dwarfs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990).

conversation draw attention to the fact that when a rhapsode is really good, people in his audience react to events in the story just as they would to events in real life. Ion recognizes that when he performs, he transports himself and his audience. Plato first has Ion describe transporting himself: "When I speak of something pitiful, my eyes fill with tears, and when of something frightening or terrible, my hair stands on end from fear and my heart leaps," (535c). Next he has Ion describe himself transporting the audience: "....I look down on them each time from the platform above as they are crying, casting terrible looks and following with astonishment the things said," (535e). By having Ion dwell on the fact that if he does this well, he is financially rewarded, and if poorly, he is not, Plato indicates that it is this transporting of the audience that is Ion's art; that is what he is paid for.

Plato is ultimately more interested in an attack on poets as a whole than on rhapsodes, who are merely middlemen. Thus, he has Socrates use the image of a magnet and iron rings to connect the art of the two and also to emphasize the magic-like effect that their arts have on people. Socrates describes the Muse as a magnetic stone which attracts iron rings (first poets) to it, and in turn through them attracts other iron rings (rhapsodes and then the members of the audience). Thus, the art of transporting people to consider a fictional world as if it were real is ultimately the art of the poets (inspired by the Muse). This art acts in a way which is almost magical or irrational, which Plato underscores by having Socrates describe poets repeatedly using words like possessed (*entheoi*) and inspired (*katechomenoi*), as well as noting that they (along with rhapsodes and ultimately even members of the audience) are not in their

right minds (*emphrones*) (533e-534b, 535d-536b).

Plato has Socrates draw into question both Ion and Homer's knowledge of various arts as a well of setting in relief just what they actually do. Socrates asks Ion who would be a better judge of various passages in Homer: of a passage that describes chariot racing, would Ion or a charioteer just better (537a-b)? Of a passage describing a drink to help heal a wound, would Ion or a doctor judge better (538c)? On divination—would Ion or a diviner judge better (538e-539d)? By going into the detail in which Homer describes scenes involving each art, Socrates forces Ion to admit he is not knowledgeable about that art; he lacks the technical expertise of the particular art to know if the passage has been written accurately. This demonstration shows many things that are not the art of Ion or Homer, setting in relief (especially by the description of what Ion makes money for), what their art is. Of what are they a good judge?

Despite Socrates' assertion that rhapsodes are good, not by art, but by divine dispensation, Plato has Ion provide a description of his work that refutes Socrates, exposing precisely what Ion can judge. He judges well how entranced in his (and Homer's) spell the audience is, and how to adjust his own actions (words, intonation, expressions, etc.) to maximize the effect. He notes in particular that he "must pay the very closest attention to [the spectators]," (535e). Were he actually doing this because of divine dispensation or because he is "possessed" by the god and not in his right mind, then he would not need to pay such close attention—indeed, based on the degree to which Socrates describes how "the god takes away [the performers']

intelligence" and merely uses them as servants, speaking through them, he could not use his mind to pay attention even if he wanted to (534d). But he does, and considering Ion just won first prize, he appears to judge quite well the level of enchantment of his audience, along with how to adjust his actions. Homer, in turn, appears to judge well just which words to use when to conjure a believable world for his audience.

With their art, rhapsodes and poets transport people to alternative realities; in doing this they lead people's souls. Plato has Socrates draw Ion's (and readers') attention to this by asking "...are you in your right mind? Or do you become beside yourself, and *does your soul think it is at the scene* of the deeds of which you speak in your inspiration, either at Ithaca, or Troy, or wherever the epic takes place?" (535c emphasis mine).[15] They lead souls to alternative realities; and part of the way they do that is by transporting their own souls.

This image of leading souls is crucial because it is one that Plato employs again in the *Phaedrus* where he has Socrates call "the rhetorical art taken as a whole" to be "a certain leading of the soul through speeches," (261a).[16] The art of poets and rhapsodes creates an alternative reality for members of the audience and thereby leads their souls to a new place. It is no accident that Plato has Socrates use similar language to describe both rhetoricians and poets

The alternative reality created by the poet may change the way listeners or

[15]Ironically, Plato has Ion follow up with words that reveal that Socrates himself is presently engaged in a similar sort of transporting: "How vivid is this proof of yours to me, Socrates!"
[16]Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. James Nichols Jr., (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1998).

readers understand the world, and thereby change who they are and how they behave. Any reality, even a fictional one, contains knowledge about the world (or about another world), and through it the poet could have a more than transitory effect on the souls of audience members. This provokes the questions: Where does a poem lead them and what does it teach?

The poet's creation of an alternative reality, more than it teaches anything about carpentry or charioteering, teaches people about the good way of life and human excellence by providing them with examples they can follow. These examples are not presented to the young in an objective fashion, but are conveyed with much excitement and emotion which cause people to become attached to them, and encourage others to imitate them.

Plato calls readers' attention to this power of poetry by the critique he has Socrates make of poetry in the *Republic*. At first it is possible to see his criticism as being directed at the truthfulness of Homer because he complains that Homer "gives a bad image of what the gods and heroes are like, the way a painter does whose picture is not at all like the things he's trying to paint," (377d-e).[17] But just before this Socrates and Adeimantus agreed that, first, children should be educated with false stories, and just after they agree that even if the stories that give a bad image of the gods are true they should "be passed over in silence, not told to foolish young people" or if told, then told to "only a very few people—pledged to secrecy," (377a, 378a).

[17]Plato, *Republic*, Grube trans., revised C.D.C. Reeve, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992).

Homer educates people about the right way to live one's life—when it is proper to hate others, when or if it is appropriate to grieve, etc.—and these opinions tend to stick with the young, permanently forming part of their character (387a, 378c).[18]

Therefore, the poet's art is that of creating an illusion that is so real people change from being exposed to it—especially the young—and it teaches them ideas about what the good life is and what human virtues are.

### 1.3.2 The art that is not really an art – Poetry and Rhetoric as a Knack[19]

Poetry, described in this way, is powerful; and the problem is not its great power, but that it is used so... artlessly. The artlessness of poetry amounts to two distinct things: (1) poetry is composed by inspiration (according to the Socrates of the *Ion*) rather than through a methodical process (with techniques passed down from one practitioner to another), so it is merely a knack rather than an art (*technē*); and (2) not enough foresight goes into the end product of poetry.

The failings of poetry become clearer after considering in more detail how it is related to rhetoric. In the *Gorgias,* Socrates indicates that poetry amounts to nothing more than a species of rhetoric: rhetoric with melody, rhythm, and meter adorning it

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[18]At 388d-e the text continues "it's hardly likely that they'll consider the things described in [poems] to be unworthy of mere human beings like themselves" when gods do them; and at 378d-e "the opinions they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable. For these reasons, then, we should probably take the utmost care to insure that the first stories they hear about virtue are the best ones for them to hear."

[19]Parts of this and the next section were informed by Griswold, whose article helped solidify my thoughts on the connection between poetry and rhetoric in Plato's writings. Griswold, Charles, "Plato on Rhetoric and Poetry", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2009/entries/plato-rhetoric/>.

(502c).[20] Poetry creates an illusion that people experience as if it were true (transporting the soul), whereas the rhetorician is said to make beliefs in the souls of the listeners (455a). Poetry mixes examples people can model with emotions that encourage them to emulate. Rhetoric mixes logical and seemingly-logical arguments with emotional appeal. In the end, poetry and rhetoric are both ways of "leading the soul by means of speech," (*Phaedrus* 261a). And in leading the soul, both of them have the effect of shaping the soul. Rhetoric, at least as it is generally practiced, has the same failing as poetry in that it is merely a knack (*empeiria kai tribē*), rather than an art (*technē*) (*Gorgias* 463b).

The well-recognized arts all aim at some good. The doctor aims at health, the cobbler makes shoes, and the farmer grows crops (*Republic* 341e, *Charmidies* 174c; *Republic* 370c-d, 374b-c). Poetry seems to have two possibilities for its aim: either it merely tries to entertain, which is one of Ion's goals, or it aims to educate. Plato's Socrates explicitly recognizes this as the effective end of Homer's poems, calling him "the educator of Greece," (*Ion* 535e; *Republic* 606e). The problem is that while it ends up educating, it fails to do that methodically, with some specific goal in mind; it does not try to make the most excellent human being (though Socrates tries to reform it to do so in the *Republic*) but if anything it seems merely to try to please the crowd, as Ion does (*Republic* 377-379; *Ion* 535e).[21]

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[20]Plato, *Gorgias*, James H. Nichols Jr. trans. (Cornell: Cornell Univ. Press, 1998).
[21]This element of the critique is carried forward by Rousseau, who argues that the educative possibilities of public entertainment are corrupted by the need of the author to please the audience. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to d'Alembert on Spectacles* (1758) (Pléiade ed., vol. 5): 264-65.

Rhetoric is also directed at gratification or pleasure rather than making people better (*Gorgias* 453a, 464d). Socrates drives this point home by comparing rhetoric to cooking tasty food: cooking for taste fails to really aim at the good of the body (as a doctor would) and rhetoric fails to aim at the good of the soul (as a philosopher would). It is no coincidence that in the *Republic* Socrates frequently compares the philosopher to a doctor.[22] Just as the cook aims at profit more than the health of the customer, rhetoricians typically aim at using their power of persuasion to achieve their own personal good, narrowly conceived: getting a "greater share," (*Gorgias* 483c-d). Rhetoric fails to be an art (and poetry along with it), in large part because does not fully consider its consequences. It does not aim at producing the good life for people in common because rhetoricians are more shortsightedly focused on using their ability to shape people's souls to further their own personal good (either power, fame, or money). Thus, instead of directing their ability to human excellence, they direct it at satisfaction of the audience, which is why the Socrates of the *Gorgias* accuses rhetoricians of pandering to or flattering the audience (*Gorgias* 470b and *Republic* 602b).

### 1.3.3 Philosophy as the True Art of Rhetoric

Yet Plato's Socrates holds out hope that rhetoric (and thus poetry with it) can be saved, that there can be a good form of rhetoric that amounts to an art. Toward the end of the *Gorgias* Socrates suggests that there could be a species of rhetoric that

[22]See also *Phaedrus* 270b.

would turn "its efforts to the way the souls of the citizens would be the best they can possibly be, and struggling to say the best things, whether they're more pleasing or more unpleasant to those who hear them," (*Gorgias* 503a-b). This would change the end toward which rhetoric is aimed from the desires of the many to the good of the audience. The *Gorgias* leaves readers with only the hope that this can happen, as Socrates points out: "But you've never seen this sort of rhetoric," (503b).

The way in which rhetoric can be fully made into an art is brought out in the *Phaedrus*. Socrates contends that someone who engages in rhetoric with the proper ends in view and understanding the techniques he employs (which entails understanding a good deal about speech writing) will be engaging in an art (*technē*) (260d-e). To do so requires that one understand the human soul (including the various types of human souls) the way a doctor understands the human body—if one fails to do this, then one merely has a knack (*empeiria*) (270b). But this, in turn, requires a thorough understanding of the world as a whole (270c). As is made clear in the *Republic*, only the philosopher has "synoptic vision," so the true rhetorician is the philosopher (Book 6 531d, 537c).

For Plato's Socrates, philosophy (as the true rhetoric) constitutes an art because it guides people's souls with a view to the effect it has on them, rather than haphazardly or with some other end in mind, like typical poets or rhetoricians. According to the *Gorgia*'s analogy of medicine and cooking compared to politics (as the right way of practicing philosophy) and rhetoric, philosophy aims to make people better (even if it temporarily seems unpleasant to them) whereas typical rhetoric

pleases people temporarily.

To fully qualify as an art, philosophy also must have regular procedures that can be taught and handed down to others who practice that art. To elucidate this aspect of philosophy as true rhetoric, Plato has Socrates go into detail on the art of *dialectic*. Dialetic is the manner of creating a reality for people used by philosophers (as a species of rhetorician). It is more predictable than the knack practiced by others in that it bases itself on first principles or axioms which lead to more predictable outcomes.[23]

### 1.4 True Rhetoric Immortalized: Plato and Xenophon's Writing on Writing

The works of Plato and Xenophon, whether one calls them history, dialogue, or philosophy, that remain with us today are all a subtype of rhetoric because, in one manner or another, they lead souls. But what does it mean to lead souls in writing? Plato and Xenophon share an understanding of how that aim changes the nature of the author's task: the author, if he wishes to teach a reader something useful cannot simply provide information, he must provide an experience that changes the reader's understanding.[24]

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[23]For more detail on *dialectic* see chapter 3 below.

[24]Matthew Linck states this point well in an article on Plato's *Phaedrus*. Describing a way in which Plato's writing differs from the work of the sophists, he explains that a distinction "we find in Plato's dialogues is between teaching that attempts *to impart information* and a teaching that struggles *to turn around* a soul," (emphasis mine). "Unmastering Speech: Irony in Plato's *Phaedrus*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2003: 271.

### 1.4.1 Xenophon: Writing that Changes the Reader

#### 1.4.1.1 On Hunting

Xenophon states his intention to write things that have a good effect on the reader (as opposed to simply conveying information) in his *On Hunting*. Near the end of the text, he writes that "I do not wish my words to *seem* useful rather than to *be* so," (emphasis mine, 13.6).[25] What does Xenophon mean by this? What makes one set of words seem useful and another to actually be useful? One answer comes from the manual on hunting which precedes this comment, where Xenophon *shows* what he means. Rather than talking about excellence, he encourages people to engage in an activity that will help shape them into excellent people.[26] Xenophon is keenly aware of the difference between *telling* and *doing* or *effecting*. Were he to tell people how to be excellent, he would be forced to say something like "stay healthy," "work hard," "endure pain without complaint," "be a good soldier." Instead, Xenophon encourages people to hunt, knowing that from hunting they will become better, often in ways not particularly related to hunting. From carrying weapons over terrain for many hours, they develop endurance (12.2). From overnight hunting trips, they will become used to sleeping on the ground without comforts, even hunting in the snow (12.2, 8.1). From each morning's extensive preparation and from learning how to raise and train good hunting dogs, they learn value of foresight and develop the habit of applying it

[25]Xenophon, *On Hunting*, chapter 13, section 6 (13.6). E.C. Marchant, G. W. Bowersock, tr. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1925).
[26]While Xenophon often talks of hunting with men, he is careful to note that hunting trains women well also, 13:18.

methodically. Moreover, Xenophon's form of hunting requires extensive teamwork, with some people working in concert with dogs in pursuit of hares and other people stationed farther away with nets (2). From hunting as a team, they will learn to work with others and stick to their role in that team (12.3). All these activities and others associated with hunting will prepare them to be good soldiers, ready to pass along commands quickly, follow orders, cover various types of terrain quickly without slipping, which allows them to press the advantage in victory or retreat with minimal loss during a defeat (12.4-5).

Xenophon sees hunting as an activity that naturally turns people into more excellent human beings—not because a good hunter is necessarily a good human being—but because it develops the qualities that are necessary for becoming excellent. While other forms of entertainment might make teens worse, hunting "is the only one among the pleasures of the younger men that produces a rich crop of blessings." While being in good physical shape or being able to sleep on the ground does not itself constitute human excellence, they put people in a position where they are more able to be moderate, because they are used to few comforts, or just, denying themselves what they might take from others. Thus, unlike many other pleasures, it can be good in itself and also lead to other goods which are more rewarding. The pleasure from the hunt leads—through repeated association—to pleasure from exercise, from working as a team, from exercising foresight, and even from a certain amount of self-denial. This sets it apart from "most pleasures" which are "evil, and by yielding to these [people] are encouraged either to say or to do what is wrong." Most pleasures shape people in

a way that makes them less able to obtain excellence (e.g. drinking which Xenophon's Socrates sees as impeding Anytus's son from developing his potential).[27] And beyond developing a human being that is prepared to work successfully in an army, these qualities create a person who is ready to work together with others in any social unit, making the common good an integral part of his own good. Thus, Xenophon's writing on hunting, by encouraging people to hunt well with an eye to the positive consequences that will flow from doing so, constitutes words that are useful, rather than (as in the case of the sophists) words that simply seem useful because they contain information.

#### 1.4.1.2 Hiero

But the difference between telling someone information and helping them actually become better does not mean Xenophon always suggests an activity that will create habits. Indeed, most of his texts are dialogues or dialogues combined with historical narrative. Doing something useful, with writing, means placing readers in a situation that encourages them to ponder certain ideas. Allowing readers to reason their own way to a conclusion tends to be much more effective in changing people's actions than simply telling them a particular choice is better for them and trying to explain why.

Xenophon's *Hiero* provides a good example of this sort of writing. Xenophon describes a fictional encounter between the poet Simonides and the tyrant of Syracuse,

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[27]Xenophon, *Apology of Socrates to the Jury*, (Bartlett translation) (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), sections 30-31.

Hiero. The conversation starts out with Simonides asking Hiero about the relative pleasure and pain between a private life and the life of a tyrant. As the conversation unfolds, Hiero complains about the shortcomings of the tyrant's life—how the satisfaction he receives from physical pleasures is transitory and he cannot obtain other, less tangible, goods like security (with peace of mind), honor, and friendship—yet Simonides continues suggesting the tyrant's life must be the better of the two.

Simonides eventually gives Hiero advice on how to reform the rule of his city so that it will provide him with the goods he is missing. He precedes his advice by remarking that "a real man differs from the other animals in... striving for honor" and "some cares seem... to lead to much hatred, whereas others seem to be mutually very gratifying," (7.2).[28] Simonides' reforms include offering prizes for better farming and encouraging more importing (and having tax revenues increase from the increased wealth these bring his citizens rather than directly raising their tax burden), transforming his body guard into "a bodyguard of all the citizens" (or a police force to protect the people generally), and spending his private wealth on public works projects (9-11). He concludes his advice by saying "Consider the fatherland to be your estate, the citizens your comrades," (11.4)

The text ends without a clear resolution: readers do not know if Hiero takes Simonides' advice or not. Hiero, and readers, must be suspicious of Simonides because Simonides' advice would effectively transform the tyranny into what looks

[28]Xenophon, *Hiero* trans. Marvin Kendrick in Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991) 7:2.

like a benevolent monarchy.[29]

In the *Hiero*, Xenophon presents a situation that provokes readers to reexamine their opinions about different types of rule and the true human goods. He does not tell them what to think, but gives their mind something to think about. In just Simonides' opening question, he arouses readers with an unexpected dichotomy: the private life and the life of the tyrant. Xenophon leaves open the question of whether these are properly considered the same or different, placing the question in readers' minds to decide for themselves. He plants suggestions which allow readers to conclude that the happiest tyrant is the one who makes his rule bear out the dichotomy and enlarges himself to become a public man rather than attempting to bring the city into himself; instead of focusing on physical pleasures and remaining in antagonism with those around himself, he has the option to enjoy uniquely human goods, living what he can choose to consider a higher life, and living in harmony with those around him.[30] However, he does not make these connections for them, which allows the conclusion, if reached, to be their own, and to be embraced as their own. In this way, Xenophon himself resists the tyrannical impulse to which many writers succumb, leaving his readers in freedom.

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[29]The Greek word for tyrant (*turannos*) was less clearly pejorative than the English word, thus allowing the reform to seem legitimate. But it is still the case that Simonides' advice would transform Hiero's city in a way that defies readers' and Hiero's expectations about what was originally desired by Hiero (and anyone thinking the tyrant's life must be the best life). See Anthony Andrews, *The Greek Tyrants* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

[30]There are, of course, other important themes in the text not explored here, such as the tyrannical impulse hidden within the poet.

### 1.4.2 Plato on Writing

The passage of Plato which comes the closest to the end of Xenophon's *On Hunting*, in discussing what counts as good writing, is toward the end of the *Phaedrus*. Socrates begins the discussion of writing with a myth in which an Egyptian god offers writing to the King of Egypt (a god himself, typically taken to be like Zeus),[31] who rejects writing claiming it will make them forget, and gives students apparent, rather than true wisdom (275a-b). The point of the myth is that people who trust in writing stop thinking for themselves. Writing presents them with answers, which they take to be wisdom. Yet wisdom does not consist of bare answers, but the reasoning that leads from well-considered definitions to those answers: what one might call 'understanding.'[32] This leads the god-king to declare that "those who put trust in writing recollect from the *outside* with foreign signs, rather than themselves recollecting from *within* by themselves," (275a). Recollecting from *within* is starting from some accepted piece of knowledge and working, step-by-step, from it to one's conclusion about the matter in question. Writing, on the other hand, simply hands the conclusion to someone. Even if it provides some reasoning to back up that conclusion, one is not forced to rethink the connections between some accepted starting point (or even acknowledging there is some starting point that is *simply* accepted) and thus have them all in mind. In this way, even if the answers provided

[31] *Phaedrus* translated by Stephen Scully (Focus Publishing: 2003), p.64 fn.144; subsequent quotes of the *Phaedrus* are not from this translation..
[32] A similar point appears at the end of the *Meno* where Socrates speaks of needing to tie down the statues of Daedelus so they do not run away.

by the text are, so to speak, true, the reader still fails to possess knowledge without the intervening connections to some consciously accepted starting point.[33] They merely "appear rich in knowledge when for the most part there's an absence of knowledge," (275b).[34]

The message of this myth explains why we have no treatises by Plato. A text cannot take the place of reasoning for oneself, but only delude people into believing they understand something when they really do not. Instead, it can only point people in the directions that it might be useful for them to think for themselves. A treatise can be useful in provoking thought in a particular direction, but it is more likely than a well-written dialogue to trick readers into thinking they have understood more than they really have thought about for themselves. It appears to tell the answers, when in truth, answers must be considered, pondered, and reached—each person for herself. At best, a text can only provide clues that entice or provoke one to think certain thoughts for herself. At the same time, treatises have other deficiencies, which are brought to light in the remainder of the discussion Socrates has with Phaedrus.

Socrates goes on to point out more difficulties of written speeches. They always say the same thing and do not adjust their message depending on who is reading them.[35] This is a point that means much to Phaedrus, who is a lover of

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[33]This interpretation is confirmed by the exchange Socrates and Phaedrus have after the myth, where Phaedrus considers himself rightly admonished for being concerned with the authority (or origin) of the myth instead of judging its content for himself, 275c.

[34]A similar point is made at the end of the *Meno* about true opinion being different from knowledge.

[35]*Phaedrus* 275d-e: "For you would think that they speak with some understanding, but if you ask something about the things said, wishing to learn, it indicates some one thing only, and always the

rhetoric. Who the audience is can change dramatically the argument one wants to make in order to be convincing. But in addition, the inability to change their message also opens written documents to abuse, they can be read by people who the author would not want to speak to either (a) because that audience would not fully appreciate what is being said, and thus might, in ignorance, react in a way that would be detrimental or (b) because that audience would attack the author of the speech for what is being said, and the author would not be present to defend herself. Therefore, a written speech is a liability for both potential readers and the author himself.[36]

Were this the end of the dialogue, readers would be rightly puzzled as to how Plato justifies all the writing he does himself; he would be contributing to the problem of encouraging people to think they understand something when they really just accept an opinion without having reasoning behind it. But Plato's Socrates holds out the possibility of a different kind of writing that solves many of the difficulties presented. He suggests he and Phaedrus consider how this other sort of speech could be written and how it is better (276a). Yet, for reasons that I hope become clear, the dialogue does not make the details explicit, but instead gestures toward two metaphors.

First, Plato's Socrates calls this different kind of speech the "brother" of the other one. The person using it to learn can achieve knowledge (as opposed to mere

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same... For by itself it cannot defend or assist itself."

[36]One would probably not (a) describe in detail to a young child how to load and fire a gun, and (b) while someone might tell a trusted friend (or one's lawyer) why he happened to be present at the scene of a crime, even though he had nothing to do without, one would not want to tell the police that he happened to be present unless he was sure he would have the opportunity to explain why that did not imply his guilt.

opinion). It has the ability to defend itself. It can choose which readers to speak to and which not to. Thus, this type of argument is animated: living, breathing (ensouled). Normally it is only possible to have a speech like this between two or more live human beings, but the written version of this speech is somehow more than most writing, being an image of the living speech.

Next, Plato's Socrates describes this speech with the analogy of a farmer planting seeds (276b). A farmer who plants seeds and expects them to grow quickly (in eight days) is only doing so in play, such as if one were seeking to produce a few blossoms to be used as part of a festival. But when he really cares for his seeds and wants them to grow into healthy, lasting plants that will continue to be fruitful, he sows them in proper soil and is content when they take eight months to grow.

These metaphors distinguish a type of writing—call it prudent writing[37]—which overcomes many of the limitations common in written works. It can help a reader reach understanding as opposed to just true opinion; it does this by accepting some of the limitations of writing, only attempting to give reminders of knowledge the reader has once known or providing pointers to knowledge the reader must reach herself. It speaks to some readers, but not others; or alternatively it speaks to some in play, and to others it speaks seriously. This ability is crucial for two reasons. First, what one can understand depends on what one already knows; to explain something to one person, it is necessary to say one thing, to explain that same idea to another

[37]From Plato's use of *phronountas* at 275d.

person, it is necessary to say something else. In a conversation it is possible to learn something about the people one speaks with and tailor the message to them, but a text needs some other way of distinguishing among readers. Moreover, it is often only after understanding some first idea that one is in a position to understand another idea; so the text needs to be able to explain one idea to one person and another idea only to the person who already understand the first idea. Second, it makes sense to provide different people with different information. As Socrates explains in the *Republic*, some people (e.g. children) are apt to take even allegorical messages literally, and there are things they should not be told at all.[38]

The plant metaphor also suggests that, to one audience a text will not speak or will speak only playfully and here it will bear fruit (true opinion) quickly, but insubstantially; in another audience, the text speaks more seriously, and while it will take much more time to bear fruit (knowledge), the result will be much more valuable. In addition, the prudent speech is able to defend itself, but how it does this is unclear: perhaps through a combination of not speaking to the wrong people and by providing pointers that allow the reader to furnish the defense the speech needs for itself. Finally, prudent speeches are capable of propagating indefinitely, in that they bear fruit that will itself, in turn, bear more fruit, ultimately making them, in a sense, immortal (*Phaedrus* 277a).

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[38]*Republic* 378d, 378a.

#### 1.4.2.1 Ensouled Speech

But just what would it mean for a speech to have a soul? It seems that we could only answer this question if we knew precisely what a soul is, and Plato's Socrates warns us that this is impossible without understanding the nature of the whole (270c). Nonetheless, we can speculate that it would mean the speech, comes to life, interacts with us. This is the sort of description Machiavelli gives of the books he reads in his famous letter to Vettori:

> When evening comes, I return home, and I enter into my study; and at the door I take off my everyday dress, full of mud and of dirt, and I put on royal and courtly clothes; and decently dressed I enter into the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received lovingly by them, I eat the only food which is mine, and for which I was born. There I am not ashamed to speak with them, and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they, in their humanity, answer me. And for four hours at a time I feel no boredom. I forget all trouble, I do not fear poverty, death does not frighten me. I put myself completely at their disposal.[39]

While it may be impossible to say exactly what makes a speech alive, there are nevertheless ways in which it departs from a dead speech, the type criticized by Socrates in the *Phaedrus*. If readers keep in mind some of these differences, it is more likely they will be in a position to interact with the speech seriously, as Machiavelli did, instead of just having it play with them (276b). Many of these features that bring Plato's texts alive are shown by Jacob Klein.[40]

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[39]Niccolo Machiavelli,in *The Prince* trans. William Connell, (Bedford: St. Martin's, 2005), Appendix, *Letter to Francesco Vettori, December 10, 1513*. While we do not know for certain that Plato was one of the ancient men Machiavelli had in mind, we do know he was thinking of Xenophon, *Prince* chapters 14, 16.

[40]In the following section, I draw on Klein's *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965), Introduction, relying substantially on Schleiermacher).

Probably the most crucial point is to note that the reader, to get much from the text, must become an active participant in the dialogue. Plato writes in the dialogue format to encourage readers to engage in the text the way they would engage in a conversation. That means, not just following the discussion, but judging the various points made for themselves, considering when a point made is good or bad, noting when they would respond differently than those speaking even if they are not in a position to interrupt. If they could interrupt, what would they say? If they walked away from the conversation with one of the participants afterwards, what would they say they thought was a good point or a mistake in the conversation? Many of the dialogues have more characters than readers remember after they finish reading the text. For example, the *Republic* has 11 characters, though it is rare for people to remember more than six of them.[41] They, like the reader, are still present, and are likely to be thinking about the argument. Five of them never speak, and at least one reason Plato placed them as observers in the dialogue was to encourage other observers (i.e. the readers) to share in the conversation as if they were actually present.[42]

Even a non-speaking observer of a conversation may affect its content. The people speaking in a conversation are often well aware of who is listening to them,

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[41]The *Protagoras* specifically lists 21 people present, most of whom never speak.

[42]One could argue that the non-speaking participants are present merely for the sake of historical accuracy, that is, because Plato wanted to write the dialogue as it actually occurred. But there is ample reason to doubt the historical accuracy of even the dialogue most widely believed to be a report of events that actually occurred: the *Apology*. See William Prior, "The historicity of Plato's Apology," *Polis*, Vol. 18, Nos. 1 & 2, 2001, 41-57.

and it is not uncommon for them to alter what they say, to choose to make or not make certain arguments because of who is present.[43] Many characters appear in more than one of Plato's texts, for example the Lysias of the *Republic* plays a substantial role, even while in absentia, in the *Phaedrus* and was also widely-known as one of the best speakers in Greece. Others, like Charmantides of the *Republic* appear nowhere else in Plato, though it is often possible to learn more of them and how their presence might have altered the dialogue.[44]

That characters may make certain arguments because of others who are present highlights that the discussion, while often a philosophical debate that turns on fine points of logic, is not meant to be simply a straightforward argument for a particular position. Many of the characters, even Socrates, make what a logician might consider to be bad arguments. Sometimes they recognize this and retract their remarks, at other times they do not and the discussion proceeds as if they were valid. That Plato and his character of Socrates were well-aware of many of these fallacies becomes clear when one reads Plato's *Euthydemus*, in which two sophists make arguments 'proving' first one side of an argument and then the other.[45] Socrates even goes so far as to make many crucial points which, at least ostensibly, rely on myths. But he makes clear that

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[43]Stanley Rosen notes the tension caused in the *Republic* by having characters associated with each side of the conflict with the Thirty Tyrants, taking place not long after the conversation in the *Republic*. While some characters were associated with the Tyrants, others, like Lysias and Polemarchus died fighting for the democrats. *Plato's* Republic*: A Study* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), 13.

[44]See Debra Nails, The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2002).

[45]See Roseamond Sprague, *Plato's Use of Fallacy: A Study of the* Euthydemus *and Some Other Dialogues*, (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1962).

he expects people to accept or reject the content of those myths based on their own evaluation of the content (*Phaedrus* 274c-275c), and there is no reason they should do less with the arguments made by the characters in his plays. The number of contradictions in an argument sometimes accumulate to such an extent that there appears to be no solution, and even the character of Socrates may give up resolving the argument, while Plato may have woven the contradictions together in such a way that there is a single possible solution, ensuring that the reader who is not exhausted by fatigue will have the thought Plato intended, while others simply give up.

In addition to making both good *and* bad arguments, characters in Plato's dialogues sometimes remain silent on key issues. Poignant silences are one way of conveying information to one set of readers and not another because some people, based on their backgrounds and the thoughts already in their heads, are more likely to notice a character's silence on an issue than another. Plato's Socrates specifically points to the need for silence on important issues in the *Republic*, when discussing the sorts of stories not to expose children to, like bad things about the gods, even when they are true (378a).

Arguments come in the form of, not merely words, but in the form of actions too. An argument (e.g. one on a point identified by a poignant silence) may be addressed by characters' actions instead of their words. There are a number of ways in which characters' actions can, so to speak, argue; Klein identifies at least three different ways in which characters actions can be said to argue—or mime: ethological

miming, doxological miming, and mythological miming.[46] Ethological miming consists of actions which reveal someone's character or his thoughts; for example, Thrasymachus blushing in Book I of the *Republic* reveals something about who he is as a person (not everyone blushes at the same things) as well as revealing the thought that just passed through his mind.[47]

Doxological miming is when characters act out an opinion, rather than simply arguing for it.[48] For example, at the beginning of the *Republic*, Polemarchus suggests that if Socrates does not want to go back to the port with them, there are more of them in the group that want him to go back, and thus they could force him to go. Socrates attempts to parry this threat, suggesting that they discuss the matter, turning to persuasion over force; to this Polemarchus responds that they may not listen. The matter is partially resolved only after Socrates notes some interest in seeing a relay race that is going to be held in the port, a race dedicated to a novel god from outside of Athens. Yet, regardless of the plans the group may have had, Socrates dominates the conversation which lasts so long that the group misses the race. The action shows, in case the dialogue does not, that persuasion has triumphed force in what counts for justice; while at the same time, those in the party, while missing the race, may still have, in a sense, been introduced to new idols.

Mythological miming provides another layer to a text. Readers are presented

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[46]Klein 17-18.
[47]See Paul Gooch, "Red Faces in Plato," *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 83, No. 2, 1987, Plato. 124-127.
[48]See also Jacob Klein's Speakers' Club Lecture from May 7, 1963, "On the Platonic Men in Particular and Platonic Dialogues in General," *The New Yearbook for Phenomenology and Phenomenolgoical Philosophy I*, 2001, 1-5.

with a character whose actions or words parallel those of a different character from a well-known story, like Achilles, Odysseus, or Hercules.[49] The readers' knowledge of the mythological character's story inform their understanding of the text before them, even though it may well not explicitly mention that character's name at all.

Finally, I should not close without at least mentioning Socrates' (or Plato's) famous irony. Irony is the use of speech that means more than its meaning that is initially apparent; it does not mean speech that means the opposite of what is said, but speech that means more than what is said. Readers' awareness of the slipperiness of an ironic text's meaning provokes them to think about it longer and more deeply than they otherwise might, and yet it generally prevents them from pinning down an exact, non-ironic translation. As Matthew Linck explains "Platonic writing exploits our desires for absolute mastery and yet simultaneously denies it in word and deed."[50]

The details already described show many of the ways in which a text may become alive, speak differently to different people, and yet somehow defend itself, but to make an exhaustive list of these techniques might not only be impossible, it goes well beyond the scope of this chapter. Nonetheless, the brief list already presented suffices to show that there are many details in an ensouled speech which a reader could not possibly see until the second, third, or fourth time reading it.

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[49]See Klein 18; see also Plato's *Apology* p.70 fn.34.

[50]Matthew Linck, "Unmastering Speech: Irony in Plato's *Phaedrus*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Vol. 36, no. 3, 2003, 274. Linck's article provides an excellent discussion of Plato's use of irony as well as stimulating a more fruitful exploration of the *Phaedrus*. See also Klein, p. 5.

## 1.5 Conclusion

If readers take Plato's Socrates at his word, he was wise only insofar as he knew that he did not know, and he believed knowledge of something like human excellence was for the gods, not humans.[51] While this might explain why Socrates left behind no writings of his own, if there is no wisdom to transmit, then what accounts for the many writings by Plato and Xenophon? Perhaps an answer lies somewhere in a key message of Socrates about wisdom in Plato's *Phaedrus* and the overriding image in the *Ion*. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates specifically avoids calling the one who can write true rhetoric *wise*, instead opting to name him a lover of wisdom: *philosopher*. It is, perhaps, a confusing remark from one who claims that human wisdom amounts to little or nothing. But this particular remark was written by the same man who provided the image of a magnet (the Muse), from which is suspended an iron ring (the poet), and in turn other rings (the rhapsodes, dancers, teachers, and finally spectators) which are all hanging, suspended in empty air with the power transmitted by the Muse and written by the poet. To fully appreciate this point for the first time, one would probably have to reread this chapter, but perhaps the following will propel someone forward.

Poets know how to transport the souls of their spectators to alternate realities. While Socrates did not write, Plato did, and it was no accident that he chose to do so in the dialogue format—the very sort of imitative speech his character of Socrates criticizes in the *Republic*. But he does so in a way that differs from Homer and other

[51]Plato's *Apology* 19e20c, 21d.

poets in at least one crucial respect: the reality he transports readers into is one in which they engage in logical argument. They are not handed answers, but are placed in a story where, to have his dialogues do more than play with them, they must reason for themselves. And if he attempted to engage in true rhetoric, readers should expect that he sought to place them in discussions that would improve their souls.

Therefore, one must consider whether Plato was not more of a philosopher than Socrates himself and whether one must be a poet in order to truly love wisdom.

# Chapter 2

## Pluralism, Politics, and Beauty: Harmonizing Conflict through Orientation toward *To Kalon* in Plato's *Protagoras*

*"Tell me, Xenophon," Socrates said, "didn't you hold Critobulus to be one of the moderate rather than the rash human beings, and one of those with forethought rather than senseless and reckless?"*

*"Certainly," said Xenophon.*

*"Well, hold now that he is hotheaded and heedless in the extreme. He would even make somersaults into daggers and leap into fire."*

*"And what did you see him doing," said Xenophon, "that you have formed such judgments about him?"*

*"Did he not dare to kiss the son of Alcibiades, who is most fair and in his bloom?" he said.*

—Xenophon, *Memorabilla* 1.3

### 2.1 Introduction

Contemporary political theory spends much effort on the difficulties of how to deal with value pluralism. Indeed, Rawls's reinvirgoration of political theory was based in large part on his attempt to resolve, or at least circumscribe, problems caused for liberalism by reason's inability to deal with value pluralism: "How is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?"[52] These concerns were addressed by Plato, though in ways often not recognized by contemporary political theorists nor Plato scholars. While I would avoid claiming that Plato *solved* the problems presented by value pluralism, he supplied a response to value pluralism that is of particular interest to contemporary liberal democracies, as

[52]John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996), xxv.

well as those who promote global justice.

Plato's *Protagoras* is, on one level, a text about whether human excellence (virtue) can be taught, but this understanding of the text as well as many others in the literature, typically ignores the *Protagoras*'s political dimension; and nearly all accounts of the *Protagoras* neglect the central link it makes between politics and beauty.

I contend that the key insight of Plato's *Protagoras* is that what the community as a whole through its use of language indicates to be good or admirable—is better than the pleasurable. In ancient Greek, *the kalon* is a concept that could be translated widely as the beautiful, the admirable, or the noble. The *kalon* conveys the notion of physical beauty, fitness for a purpose, and moral attractiveness. Thus one could say that a piece of furniture fits into a room beautifully, without making an exclusively aesthetic judgment. One might also refer to a soldier who saved his fellow soldiers by diving on top of a hand grenade by saying, "That was a beautiful (*kalon*) thing he did." It blurs the line between what we might call admirable, beautiful, and noble. To preserve this broad meaning, I retain the Greek term *kalon* (or *kalos* for the adjective), occasionally reminding readers that it should be taken as admirable, beautiful, or noble. Similarly, I use the Greek term for its opposite, *aischron*: the ugly or the shameful.

I argue that in the *Protagoras*, Plato attempts to show readers of the dialogue that what one deems beautiful is better in the long run than what will satisfy one most immediately. The *kalon* is the unique good or end that all people, by virtue of their

use of common language (or language readily translated), share; and orienting people toward the beautiful can help them harmonize, tending to unite them instead of allowing them to simply pursue their own individual ends, which frequently leads to conflict. This knowledge guides the person with political excellence (*aretē*) to lead the polity[53] in such a way that human beings who do not fully appreciate the difference between pleasure and *to kalon* will nevertheless be inclined to choose the *kalon*.

A community's concept of *to kalon* is a tuning fork and its reverberations allow citizens to become engaged in the pursuit of goods they hold in common. Its sound makes it possible for leaders to unite the polity and gives individuals a tone by which they can harmonize their individual preferences with the good of the whole, minimizing conflicts between people while also helping them resolve conflicts within themselves. *To kalon* is the best guide for political education.

Thus the *Protagoras* reveals a way to greatly mitigate the problems of pluralism, showing that people, even those with diverse values, can better thrive together when leaders take citizens' various beliefs about what the community ought to strive for and bring them to reality by slowly transforming individual preferences to harmonize with the community's common understanding of good embodied in its concept of the *kalon*. Such leaders have excellence, or political *aretē*.

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[53]There is no ideal translation of *polis*, which properly understood means not the *city* (as in the buildings), but the group of people beyond blood relationship who regularly interact with each other. Rather than retaining *polis*, I use polity to minimize either inaccuracy (by simply using *country*) or confusion for readers without Greek. I do not mean to assume that country and *polis* are identical since something that may be true for a smaller community like the *polis* may not also hold true on a larger scale, such as many contemporary countries.

While some might think that orienting citizens toward the "community's concept of the *kalon*" entails choosing one value over another, the matter is not this simple. A polity's use of language, which is always inexact and changing, allows multiple understandings of the *kalon* to coexist while also pulling them with a certain inexorably gravity to slowly fuse into one.

This understanding of Plato's text also makes sense of *Protagoras* as a whole. Pleasure cannot be the true good because each person is a composite of human being and citizen—a combination of bodily individuality and ever-present connections with others, with whom one shares identity to a greater or lesser degree.[54] Pleasure is mainly an individual good and causes conflict even within the individual because pursuing one pleasure generally leads to the sacrifice of another. Yet even the various virtues can lead to conflict, as the religious good (piety) can conflict with justice in the polity (as Antigone and Creon poignantly demonstrate). Thus while the different human excellences are not one as we find them, if their conflicts can be assuaged with beauty as a guide so that, while they are distinct, they harmonize with each other as the distinct parts of a face can work together to make a beautiful face. It is thus by looking to the polity's shared sense of what is beautiful that the human excellences can be made consonant.

This analysis of the *Protagoras* is organized to show the importance of beauty to contemporary politics at the same time it shows the centrality of beauty to a full

[54]Identity is typically shared most with parents, children, and siblings, then friends, neighbors, co-workers, and fellow citizens.

understanding of the text itself. A primary difficulty for value pluralists is determining how to have different standards of good coexist, Plato provides away to mitigate this problem by appealing to the community's sense of the *kalon* (or what is admirable).

## 2.2 The Relationship between the Good and the *Kalon*

Anyone who doubts the centrality of the *kalon* in understanding the *Protagoras* must confront the fact that Plato uses some version of *kalon* at least 58 times in the text, with substantial clusters at the beginning and end. The text begins with the comrade asking about Socrates's pursuit of "the beautiful (*kalos*) Alcibiades": the comrade presumes Socrates is interested in physical beauty, the type of beauty commonly associated with sensual pleasure. The *Protagoras* ends with Socrates explaining that he only stayed to honor the admirable (*kalō*) beautiful Callias. Given the similarity of sound between *kalos* and *Callias* in ancient Greek, this could be heard as Socrates saying he stayed (or more literally, he stood his ground, as a soldier does) to favor the admirable (or noble) *kalon*—the truly good form of the beautiful (362a).[55] He stayed to defend the *kalon* that transcends the physical, which meant supporting the *aretēs* (especially justice) in their contest with bodily pleasure before the many, including Socrates's companion Hippocrates.[56]

[55]The Greek is "alla Kallia tō kalō charizdomnos paremeina."

[56]Readers have reason to believe that early in the dialogue Hippocrates is on the fence in deciding between physical pleasure and the beautiful: he is so eager to learn Protagoras's wisdom that he wakes up Socrates before dawn and suggests that he would give anything (including the possessions of his family and friends) to get it; but at the same time, he was detained for a day because of the need to

The need to reorient a polity, anchoring it to the community's concept of the *kalon* comes in the center of the text, in what appears to be Socrates interpreting a poem by Simonides. This section of the *Protagoras* is the most neglected by commentators and the one with the greatest need for a detailed explication because the message is embedded in Plato's complex literary presentation. The story reaches this scene after Socrates and Protagoras's dispute about the relationship of different human excellences, such as justice, moderation, and piety, broke out into a contentious quarrel that threatened to cut off the conversation altogether (333d-35c). The compromised reached by the group was to have Protagoras ask questions of Socrates, followed by Socrates being allowed to question him. Protagoras decided to question Socrates about his interpretation of a Simonides poem.

### 2.2.1 Socrates Rebuking Protagoras from Beneath a Cloak

Rather than simply engaging in literary interpretation, Socrates subtly hijacks the inquiry into the meaning of the poem in order to continue his earlier attempt to refute Protagoras.[57] Protagoras's earlier position amounted to condoning doing injustice to fellow citizens in order to further one's personal interest. His argument led there because he saw that for an individual's to achieve something to his advantage sometimes requires committing injustice. But a lot rests on his concept of *advantage*:

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chase his run away slave Satyrus, a possible metaphor for Hippocrates's pursuit of physical pleasure (310c).

[57]Socrates later eschews the practice of literary interpretation altogether, claiming that it is for ordinary uneducated people who need to be guided by poems, whereas superior people will reason about the world for themselves, 347b-48a. He has already modeled this opinion by having his own reasoning take precedence over the message of Simonides's poem.

how one measures someone's good. Socrates argues that human excellence should not be evaluated based on someone's material success, judged by outcomes, but by people's choice to act in *kalos* ways. In the process, Socrates uses Simonides's words to make his own point. Taken as a whole, Socrates argues for a different understanding the good of human beings. From this perspective, engaging in injustice to obtain more for oneself results in a net loss because the material gained is inferior to the missed opportunity to act according to the *kalon* and instead behaving in a way that is *aischros* (shameful or ugly).

Readers can reach this understanding of the text only if they can plumb the multiple layers of Plato's dialogue. The meaning is obscured intentionally, in part because when Socrates was about to expose Protagoras for condoning injustice, Protagoras became angry and began to argue for the relativity of human goods. Socrates now decides to correct him without exposing him. To draw Protagoras and Hippocrates's attention the deeper meaning of his Simonides interpretation (as well as to alert readers to this subterfuge), Socrates provides an elaborate story about how the Lacedaemonians (Spartans) are closet philosophers and sophists, an absurd notion, (342b); but in doing so, he indicates that he is about to argue from beneath a cloak.

Plato calls attention to the idea that poetry can be used to disguise one's true meaning earlier when he had Protagoras speak of the first "sophists" who used poetry as a disguise or "cloak" (316d).[58] Facilitated by this disguise, the analysis of the poem

[58]Readers are also told that cloaks fail to work against those "with power to act in the cities," 317a.

functions on at least two levels of meaning at once: (1) the meaning of the poem along with Socrates's interpretation of it and (2) as a continuation of the contest between Socrates and Protagoras.[59]

As for the meaning of the poem, Socrates claims that Simonides is arguing for a change in the standard by which people are considered good. Pittacus typifies the old system when he states (in Simonides's quote) that "it is difficult to be good (*esthlon*)" (339c).[60] Someone who is *esthlon* has success, prosperity, a good measured *in results*.[61] But this means having a standard of goodness that is dependent on factors outside of human control such as chance and the favor the gods. This is a capricious standard, one that no one can satisfy for a long period of time (344c). Simonides disagrees with Pittacus and claims the focus should not be on results (being *esthlon*), but on a different understanding of being good (*agathos*).[62] He contends that one's goodness should not be judged based on outcomes, but on the actions one takes—the

[59]A copy of the poem is provided in the Appendix at the end of this document.
[60]Plato has Socrates draw attention to the way in which apparent synonyms can have crucially different meanings when Socrates avails himself of Prodicus's assistance in distinguishing bases a first attempt to explicate the poem based on the difference between two other possible synonyms: become (*genesthai*) and be (*emmenai*), 339b, 339c. In the process, Socrates has also pointed to the contrast between the other, more prominent, apparent synonyms in the same two lines: good (*agathon*) and having the success that makes one considered a noble (*esthlon*).
[61]See A.W. H. Adkins, *From the many to the one* (Cornell: Cornell Univ. Press: 1970), 76-77. *Esthlos* could also mean good birth or bravery, but the context here points strongly to the focus on success or prosperity, especially since Socrates later states that it is possible for someone *esthlon* to become bad, like a harsh season falls upon a farmer, 344d-e. I use the Greek to keep the ambiguity of the word in my readers' minds.
[62]Simonides here seeks to overturn a manner of judging the goodness of a life that was widespread in his time, a good that amounts to "fortunate." Herodotus portrays Solon judging the worth of Croesus's life in just this way (1.30-33): despite using all foresight humanly possible, he cannot prevent his son from being killed (by the very man he trusted to guard him) and he cannot prevent losing his kingdom (foretold by the very prophecy he used all his ingenuity to acquire). Herodotus later reveals that only the gods can succeed by such a way of measuring success (1.207) so that even the great conqueror, Cyrus, aided by the best possible counsel fails by this standard (1.208-216).

*results of which* cannot be fully controlled. While humans cannot assure good outcomes, they can avoid *choosing* anything that they know is to the detriment of their own polity—these things that are *aischros* (ugly or shameful).[63] The main thrust of the poem is to replace good as measured by actual results with avoiding actions one knows will hurt one's polity.[64] Understood in this way, the opening line means that it is difficult (yet possible) to become a man in harmony with his polity.

As his analysis of the poem draws to a close, Socrates emphasizes that the standard for judging a man is what needs to change. Having success without any flaw cannot be the standard; instead it should be choosing the *kalon* and avoiding the *aischron* (shameful or ugly): "All things, you see, are *kalon*, with which *aischros* things have not been mixed" (346c).

On the level of the unfolding drama, Socrates draws attention to his

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[63]This new good focuses on avoiding being bad for one's polity: "nor overly lawless (*apalamnos*); one who knows justice as benefactor of the city," *Protagoras* 346c.

[64]Cf. Coby 100-01, 104. Coby's commentary agrees with my analysis of the *Protagoras* on many points, but we disagree rather starkly in our understanding of Socrates's poem exegesis. Coby brushes aside the distinction between *agathos* and *esthlon*, stating that "Socrates makes nothing of it," *Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment*, 99 fn 3. While Socrates may not *explicitly* deal with it at length, Plato draws attention to in such a way as to compel careful readers to confront the issue. As Coby elsewhere recognizes (100-101, 104), Socrates draws Prodicus into the conversation to distinguish between words that are apparent synonyms. More important is what Coby leaves out: that *Plato* himself brings Prodicus into the action for more than what Coby refers to as Socrates's "delaying tactic," (101); Plato uses Prodicus to attune readers to the fine distinctions Plato himself is making between similar words. And shortly thereafter Plato has Socrates repeatedly quote the poem's use of *esthlon*, though he ostensibly does this for other reasons such as to note the difference between *emmenai* and *genesthai*. The result is to push in readers' faces the other pair of apparent synonyms which can account for Protagoras's mistaken assertion that Simonides blatantly contradicts himself just seven lines apart. When Simonides uses the term *agathos*, he means something *different* from what Prodicus means by *esthlon*. As a consequence of what I see as the crucial difference between these two words, Coby and I reach different conclusions about what the competing notions of the good are in the poem (101-103, 113), who represents Protagoras and who represents Socrates (i.e. Coby see Socrates as Pitticus and Protagoras as Simonides, 110), and whether Protagoras has gone from being Socrates's enemy to his friend (111).

understanding that it is Simonides's intention to overthrow Pittacus. In emphasizing this, Socrates sets up a parallel to his present contest with Protagoras. This provides Socrates with a cloak he can wear: in the guise of Simonides trying to take down (*kathaireō*) Pittacus, he (the young Socrates) takes down Protagoras. Lest there be any doubt on Protagoras's part that Socrates is intentionally drawing this parallel, Socrates precedes his interpretation of the poem by drawing attention to his preference for those who hide their wisdom. He digresses at considerable length detailing how the Lacedaemonians (known for their fighting ability) are actually made superior to the rest of the Greeks by their wisdom (as opposed to courage). This digression has extra meaning for Protagoras and Hippocrates because they were the only people present when Protagoras told Socrates about the difference between the sophists of old, who wore poetry, music, etc. as a cloak, and himself, who acknowledges that he is a sophist (316d-317c). This enables Socrates to alert Protagoras and Hippocrates to a meaning that will be lost on the rest of the audience. Thus his claim that the Lacedaemonians who appear to be good at fighting, but are really outstanding for their wisdom sets up the parallel that Socrates who appears good merely at arguing prefers to keep his wisdom hidden.

From this point on, the words Socrates utters (as if he is Simonides speaking against Pittacus) can be heard a second time as Socrates himself speaking against Protagoras.[65] Socrates provides confirmation of this way of understanding the

[65]Zuckert notes as one of the implications of her ordering of the dialogues that, at the time of the *Protagoras*, it is Socrates who is relatively unknown and in need of a reputation and thus he "used the

passage, at the end of the poem analysis, by suggesting that they "leave be what pertains to lyrics and poems" and instead speak as gentlemen "with the sound of just their own voices" (347b, 347d).[66] At that point he is ready to drop the cloak of Simonides and speak for himself again.

In his cloak, Socrates blames Protagoras for providing a teaching that condones injustice and is worse for all human beings.[67] If the standard for goodness is success or material results, then injustice would indeed sometimes be the right choice because it would gain advantage, since it would bring material success. By arguing implicitly for the wrong standard of goodness, Protagoras threatens to make life worse for all human beings. The irony brought about by Socrates's disguise becomes crucial as he reaches the climax of Simonides's rebuke of Pittacus:

> ...even if you had said what is suitable and truthful in only a middling way, Pittacus [understood to also mean "Protagoras"], I never would have blamed you. But as it is, opinion has it that you speak truthfully, but you are stating utter falsehoods about the greatest things, and for these reasons I do blame you (346e-347a).

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opportunity to make a reputation for himself." Catherine Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009), 218. Cf. Coby who also recognizes a dual level of meaning, but mixes up the roles. This confusion may be caused by inattention to the dramatic chronology of the dialogues, *Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment*, 110.

[66]Socrates comments that instead of being like "paltry human beings in the marketplace" (*tois phaulōn kai agoraiōn anthrōpōn*) who are incapable of speaking "with their own voices and their own speeches," they ought to drop poetry analysis and imitate "real" men (*andres*) who set aside poets and fashion speeches with one another by themselves (347b-348a, especially 347c and 348a).

[67]Cf. Bartlett *Protagoras and Meno*: Interpretive Essay, 76-77, 79; while Bartlett recognizes at two points that there is "sophistic concealment" in the poetry analysis, he claims (a) it is started by Protagoras and (b) Socrates uses it only at the end of his speech in order to point out that Protagoras is being inconsistent in pursuing wisdom for the sake of honor but then seeking victory over a wise man. Bartlett does not recognize a lengthier use of the Simonides cloak by Socrates.

Socrates blames Protagoras for stating falsehoods about the greatest things.[68] Protagoras's great wrong was indicating in his myth, and in the conversation about the relationship among virtues, that it is acceptable to be unjust. This is directly connected to the content of Simonides's poem because it is in the old system of good and bad (the one based on outcomes) that it sometimes makes sense to be unjust. In that system, the various human excellences are not necessarily tied together, so a person could use some subset of them, such as wisdom and courage while neglecting justice, to garner success and thus become good. Indeed, injustice itself could start to seem to be an excellent trade insofar as it could be used to accomplish more of the success which allows one to be considered *esthlos*.

By contrast, Socrates and Simonides argue for a standard of goodness focused on the actions people take. Being good means continuing to eschew actions that are shameful or ugly *(aischros*) and acting in ways that are *kalos*. Unlike results, these actions are within human control. And since understandings of the *kalos* and it's opposite, the *aischros*, arise from the political community, they provide a system in which the good of individual and citizen can be mutually reinforcing. To be good, one needs to act in a *kalos* manner (admirably) and that makes it impossible to decouple the excellences. One cannot choose courage and injustice and still be good; injustice itself is bad because it is *aischros* and so by definition shameful or ugly. There is no way to choose injustice as a means to something else that is higher because the final

[68]Coby notes that Socrates repeatedly insists that every line of the poem is a protest of Pittacus, but Coby nonetheless takes Socrates to be playing the role of Pittacus himself, *Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment* 120.

standard of good and bad—the *kalon* and the *aischron*—rules out injustice.

### 2.3 Political Education and the *Kalon*

It is not immediately clear how different standards of what make a person "good" help us think about political rule, and perhaps even less clear just how it might mitigate the difficulties value pluralism causes for democracies. Afterall, value pluralism starts from the position that people have different concepts of the *kalon*, so introducing this element into politics might make things even more contentious; this seems to be part of the reason liberals focus on negative liberty.

The useful insight comes when considering the implications of the *kalon* for political rule. Socrates's conversation begun by him asking Protagoras what he would teach Hippocrates (other than simply teaching him to be better each day). It becomes clear that he teaches people how manage the household well and how to use the polity for their own personal ends—that is how they maximize their success for a results based standard of good. In the final section of the dialogue, Socrates shows how a different understanding of good leads to a different education, one that harmonizes the good of the individual with the good of the polity.

Protagoras has been shaken by Socrates's rebuke of him, and he is temporarily paralyzed, uncertain whether to ask Socrates more questions or to allow Socrates to question him (348b).[69] But the details of how the *kalon* is related to ruling a polity

[69]Protagoras's temporary paralysis is not altogether different from that of Socrates at the end of Protagoras's long speech at 328d. As I argue below, they *both* learn something from each other; and

remains unclear to him. To work out these implications, Socrates begins a long discussion—not directly with Protagoras—but with "the many," having Protagoras as his ally. Socrates demonstrates how Protagoras's previous understanding of political art (as ruling simply) and political *aretē* (ruling others with a view to one's individual advantage) amounts to the pursuit of pleasure instead of the pursuit of other goods such as wisdom and, ultimately, *to kalon*.

The implication is that for people who recognize goods other than pleasure, one can reason with them about the superiority of other goods to pleasure; Protagoras is a case in point. For people who see pleasure as the only good, the best one can do is guide them to developing different preferences that will serve them better; and this means helping them prefer the *kalon* over mere pleasure. Therefore, the political art, properly used, means guiding "the many" human beings in the polity to pursue the *kalon* because doing so will ultimately bring them more enjoyment. It will bring into alignment their goods as individual human beings with the good of the polity, making it possible to be at once an excellent human being and an excellent citizen.

To elucidate these points, Socrates starts with Protagoras's *kalos* position that wisdom and knowledge are superior to other goods; and he contrasts it to the position of the many (352d). Many human beings find themselves doing one thing for pleasure that causes some corresponding bad that they do not like. In some cases this amounts to choosing a small pleasure (especially one that is immediate) in exchange for what is

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they are not immediately certain how their new knowledge affects the rest of their thoughts.

a much greater pain (albeit often one that comes later). Socrates addresses such people directly with his argument about those who claim to be trying to do some good thing when they are overcome by pleasure and do something else instead (352d-357b). He concludes they simply appear to measure badly.

Socrates himself does not seem to hold their view; and when Protagoras is made to "uncover his thought" for Socrates, readers find that he stands with Socrates and not the multitude—this is where Socrates and Protagoras are allies because they both gain more pleasure, so to speak, from knowledge than from anything else.[70] For them, pleasure is not the good;[71] and they both give much evidence of this throughout the dialogue. Even aside from knowledge, there are things (other than pleasure and pain) that direct their behavior: *to kalon* and the *aischron*. Socrates repeatedly tests Protagoras on this point, and Protagoras responds making it clear that (a) he considers *aretē* something beautiful (349e), (b) he would choose the *kalon* over pleasure (351c), and (c) he considers knowledge and wisdom the greatest of all human things (352c-d).[72] After these tests, Socrates knows he can make an argument *with* Protagoras

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[70]Cf. Larry Goldberg , *A Commentary on Plato's* Protagoras (New York: Peter Lang, 1983), 318, stating that Socrates and Protagoras share the one assumption that it is a fault to contradict oneself.

[71]Cf. Catherine Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2009), 228, stating that Protagoras shares the opinion of the many in considering pleasure as the supreme good. While Protagoras behaves in ways that reveal a certain unconscious agreement with the many, such as choosing his own advantage over justice; he nevertheless explicitly recognizes the good as the beautiful rather than pleasure, *Protagoras* 352b-d. Plato also reveals the two of them to be like minded in this respect when he sets them up as allies, having Socrates quote at 348d a section of the *Iliad* to indicate that they are allies like Diomedes and Odysseus, 10:224 and following; my explanation of this allusion is Diomedes on page 74.

[72]Protagoras also acknowledges near the end that he and Socrates previously agreed that all beautiful actions are good, and he says that "*I* am always of that opinion," Protagoras 359e (emphasis from the Greek *ge*).

against the many; and Protagoras is in a position to appreciate the implications for the political art. That he follows Socrates and learns something is clear from his responses after the argument is over.[73] At that point, he anticipates Socrates's view, states it, and Socrates repeatedly says that what Protagoras says is true (359c-e).

### 2.3.1 Preferring the *Kalon*

Contrary to what some argue, Socrates's discussion with the multitude is neither an argument for hedonism[74] nor is it primarily an argument against the notion that people sometimes recognize one thing as being better and yet nonetheless choose something else (*akrasia*). Instead, Socrates uses the hedonism argument—which concludes by showing that what Protagoras needs to teach the many is how to measure properly—in order to reverse the line of thinking Protagoras enters the dialogue with. Protagoras starts with the belief that the good is something that varies for each person, that "man is the measure of all things," which means that because people are all different and what is good for one is not good for another because the make up of each person is different.[75] From this he concludes that there is no excellence for all people—no virtues that override individual goods—and each individual should pursue

[73]My argument that Protagoras is reformed by the end of the dialgue is detailed on page 72 Protagoras Persuaded "Protagoras Persuaded."
[74]Cf. Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 117. Nussbaum does not recognize a conflict within each individual between that individual's desire for immediate pleasure and the same individual being pulled toward the notion of good set by the community, e.g., courage. Instead Nussbaum's theory of the *Protagoras* insists that Socrates wishes to take hedonism as his own position in order to offer the audience a better way to control outcomes in an uncertain world by adopting a one-dimensional way to measure happiness and eliminating tragedy from the world.
[75]See also *Theaetetus* 166d-167b.

his own good, narrowly defined. Justice may be good for the polity as a whole, but it is not to the advantage of each person to act justly (333d-334b).

While Protagoras does not fully appreciate it at first, this places him very close to the popular position of hedonism. In essence, he teaches not to worry about overarching goods, but to pursue individual ones, even if that means using the polity (against what is good for it) in order to procure goods for oneself.

In Socrates's discussion of hedonism, he uses Protagoras's own initial position to reach a very different conclusion. People each respond to different things as good because their internal makeup varies dramatically; however he adds the insight that they also all recognize community-wide goods such as justice, moderation, and courage. More broadly construed, they all recognize certain things as beautiful or admirable (as *kalos*). This addition leads to *akrasia*: people are torn between multiple things they recognize as goods—the pleasure of eating more and the good of moderation; the pleasure of getting more and the good of justice, etc. Many people have a one-dimensional understanding of the world that leads them to recognize only one thing as good, namely pleasure, so they make sense of the contradiction among different types of goods as knowing one good, but being overcome by an appetite for something else. Their social interaction and their use of shared language to communicate and even to think, prevents them from ignoring many community-wide goods. Indeed, these shared notions contribute to each person's makeup and form a crucial part of each person's individual world view, even if they only fully make sense when one is part of a community. The true difficulty for each person is beholding two

sometimes conflicting goods and recognizing either that (1) on one level, that one is not a good; for example, Protagoras actually teaches that justice is something one should simply appear to have, rather than actually practice or (2) that both are good, but they are not able to choose the one that constitutes human excellence.

Since many people are unable to develop a more nuanced that distinguishes between pleasure and beauty, Socrates's solution to the fact that they all perceive the world differently (and thus, from one viewpoint, have different goods) is to show them how to measure better. Measuring better means learning to consider some goods as being worth more than others: in particular learning to value excellences (virtues) more highly than pleasures. It is an inferior solution to having people consciously recognize the superiority of the *kalon* and choosing that instead, but that solution does not appear to be possible for all people. For people who only understand the world in terms of pleasures, this translates into becoming better at distinguishing a superior pleasure (e.g. justice, moderation, courage) over an inferior pleasure. This translation by Socrates accepts in a general way Protagoras's understanding of the world—that what is good is different for each person—but forces it to be reconciled with the community-wide goods that each person also recognizes. Man is the measure of all things, but if one is going to believe that, then he must deal with the limits imposed on his understanding of the good caused by the fact that he is a social creature. That limit changes what is actually good. Teaching people to measure better amounts to altering their preferences so that what they judge to be good for themselves, as individuals, is consonant with what is good for the community as a whole. Socrates thus reforms

Protagoras to teaching what he claimed to teach earlier, though only after Socrates put the words in Protagoras's mouth: that he makes people "good citizens" (319a).

In the process, Socrates shows why it is wise to change your preferences. Even human beings who recognize only the good of pleasure agree that at times something that causes short term pain (e.g. the medicine given by a doctor) can provide longer term pleasure, which makes the pain worth suffering.[76] In the case of medicine, only pleasure and pain is at stake, but the principle behind the choice to suffer in the short term for long term enjoyment reaches much further. People can develop new preferences for things that are better for them; that is, to some degree they can change what gives them pleasure or pain. They can pay the short-term cost of the displeasure of working to alter their preferences—their "goods" or what brings them pleasure—for the long-term gain of having more enjoyment. This is not terribly different from what happens to nearly all people growing up, when they are taught to be just. Those who already accept that the *to kalon* is the good are already accept that some preferences are better to have (and pursue) than others—they already choose the *kalon* (the admirable) over pleasure in some instances.

The many, who think pleasure is the good, will often be at odds with themselves and with others unless they develop different preferences. First, this is true because many bodily pleasures result in pain when they are removed; thus such pleasures are limited in how much *net* pleasure they can bring both (a) by the pain

[76]W.K.C. Guthrie, *Protagoras and Meno* (London: Penguin Books Ltd. 1956), 23, argues simply that the text shows that knowledge is necessary to obtain the good, even accepting the common view that pleasure is the good, but goes no further.

which ensues when they are gone and also (b) by the way satisfying an appetite causes one's appetite to grow larger in the future.[77] The same does not hold true for many pleasures of the mind, like the joy of learning and contemplation. Second, many bodily pleasures are a zero sum game with others—only one person can enjoy a particular meal or house; so bodily pleasures often pit some human beings against others in a competition for pleasures.[78] Third, one can argue that the enjoyment of *kalos* things is greater than the enjoyment of bodily pleasures. Friendship and philosophizing may well provide deeper satisfaction in addition to their other benefits; thus the enjoyment of the *kalon* may be said to provide what amounts to three-dimensional enjoyment compared to the two-dimensional enjoyment of bodily pleasure.[79]

Most importantly, individuals cannot help but have some component of their own good included the community's idea of the *kalon* (the beautiful or admirable). Human ideas and values are not formed in isolation, but through interaction with others. The group of human beings one interacts with influences what one considers to be good, and thus plays a significant role in what brings the individual human being pleasure. This is inescapable because the ideas people use to make sense of the world

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[77]For a more detailed discussion of this, see *Republic* Book 9, especially 573-74 and 582-588. Increased appetite brings about additional pain. See also Socrates's discussion on appetite with Callicles in the *Gorgias*.

[78]Xenophon's *Hiero* provides a nice, concise account of both these points.

[79]*Republic* Book 9 appears to support this. Consider in particular the comparison of the pleasure of the philosopher and the pleasure of the tyrant; on the two versus three dimensionality of pleasure, see G.M.A. Grube's translation as revised by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1992), 587e, fn. 12. Socrates puts the philosopher's pleasure as 729 times greater, whereas Grube suggests 125 is a more reasonable figure.

are formed in a community and language itself is not formed or created by any individual or single group of individuals. Therefore, anyone who attempts to ignore her polity's idea of the *kalon* and instead pursue her narrow idea of pleasure will fail to fully satisfy herself; and she will remain in partial conflict with herself. She will always find that what her community considers *kalon* (beautiful or admirable) contains that community's idea of the good, and she cannot escape including that notion of the good, to some degree, within her individual idea of the good. Consequently, people should work to harmonize their own idea of the good with that of their polity.[80]

People who recognize the *kalon* as part of the good (as opposed to pleasure alone as the good), have another possibility is open to them: they can choose the *kalon* over the pleasant. Socrates needs to show Protagoras that this is exactly what is at stake in their different systems of good and bad (what was fought out while Socrates took on the role of Simonides). Someone who knows only pleasure, can measure pleasure only against pleasure and choose the greater of the two. Someone who knows the *kalon* can choose it over pleasure. This is a consequence of Simonides's alternative to Pittacus. Instead of focusing on always choosing to gain the most for oneself (success as defined by ends), he counsels people to avoid the *aischron* (the ugly or shameful, a good determined by the whole community and not simply the individual's good). So long as something is not *aischron*, then it is acceptable; whatever is gained from it does not harm another. Yet this alone does not quite reach

[80]Globalization thus introduces many difficulties for individuals and countries because it leads to the mixing and mutual influence of different understandings of the good and the beautiful.

the question I have been asking throughout this paper—what is Socrates's understanding of the political art and political *aretēs*—to answer that, one must see what Socrates does with this idea from the poem.

Socrates takes Simonides's system and improves upon it: rather than simply *avoiding* the ugly, people should *choose* the beautiful. This is difficult for human beings who believe that the only good is pleasure. They are similar to human beings in the state of nature because, in a crucial sense, they are like beasts or savages who know only the pleasures of the body. The goods peculiar to life in a polity, many of which are incorporeal, open up new possibilities for human beings. The goods of civilization (or the polity) permit enjoyment from things other than the satisfaction of hunger, thirst, and sex. But human beings who have not cultivated a taste for goods of the polity, in some respects, might as well be living outside of society. They do not currently have a preference for the goods particular to life *in common with others*; goods that are wrapped up in the notion of beauty. In certain respects, liberal states encourage the development of preferences for necessary goods rather than those of the polity.

Socrates describes human beings who recognize only pleasure as the good as "measuring poorly" in order to explain what their behavior would look like to them if only they could see themselves a little better (356a-e). While they only *think* of the world in terms of the good of pleasure, they nevertheless feel the effects of polity-wide goods because they live in a community that has given them some appreciate for these other goods. Socrates translates the reality they deal with—one of mixed goods—into

the reality they think about, that with only pleasure as the good. To do this translation, Socrates must compress a two-dimensional understanding of the good to one dimension. From this vantage, they can only be described as measuring poorly.

One implication is that they measure poorly because, by considering only pleasure, they are taking into account their preferences only *as they are at present*. They cannot take into account the benefit of *changing* one of their current preferences. It is very difficult to act on a preference *for a better preference*. In the moment when one is making a decision, that new preference would not bring pleasure: after all, it is not yet one's preference. This is why Socrates tells the many that when they say they sometimes do not do good because they were "overcome by pleasure," what they are saying really amounts to them being overcome by ignorance (358c). They sense another set of goods or another way of ordering their preferences *and* they have some awareness that the other way may in fact be superior, but they are unable to act on it. Were they to reeducate their preferences—something that may well be painful in the short term—the new preferences would bring enough enjoyment to more than make up for the short term pain. The path to a better life involves developing a second nature. Yet to do this well requires something many human beings lack: a proper appreciation for the beautiful over the pleasurable.

The *kalon* acts as a bridge between the pleasure-as-the-good system of the many and Socrates's and Protagoras's preference for the goods made possible by the polity, such as wisdom and courage. It works as a *bridge*, in part, because some beautiful (*kalos*) things bring pleasure directly, such as the physical appearance of the

object of sexual desire; others bring them indirectly. The pleasure connected directly to the bodily pleasures is natural but double edged. The pleasure from wisdom and other sources has to be inculcated.

Plato invokes this bridge between goods at the beginning of the *Protagoras* when he shows readers the contrast between the comrade, who focuses on Alcibiades's physical beauty because of its connection to sexual pleasure, and Socrates's preference for the beauty of wisdom. The human *aretēs* are *kalos* and can be chosen over pleasure, bringing more enjoyment if the right preferences have been developed. Helping citizens choose to develop these preferences is the work of a statesman: it is the true political art.[81]

The various human *aretēs* are goods that are not pleasurable to human beings by birth, but communities give meaning to them, as they do to language, making them *kalos* (admirable or beautiful). For human beings in which they are developed into a second nature, the *aretēs* can overpower the natural desire for pleasure, and even end up bringing more enjoyment, or in a crude manner of speaking, more pleasure. But this preference for the *aretēs* (and the beauty they represent) is incomplete in the multitude. Thus many human beings find themselves knowing one thing is best to do (sharing the community's belief), but not doing it because they are overcome by desire for pleasure or fear of pain. This is particularly bad because it is the *aretēs* such a

[81]Socrates recognized this from the myth told by Protagoras and finds the insight so remarkable that he is "bewitched," and he anticipates that Protagoras is going to elaborate on this point, which is why Socrates notes that he "thought [Protagoras] was going to say something else, which [Socrates] wanted to hear," 328d.

justice, piety, and moderation that allow human beings to flourish together. Someone with true wisdom can see and appreciate this all at once and choose the *aretēs*. She can even develop the preference for them so that they bring more enjoyment than simple pleasures—even an enjoyment with an added dimension.[82] Therefore, rather than it being *sōphrosunē* (sensible or self-controlled) to commit injustice in order to gain more of some particular pleasure (as Protagoras contends, 323b), on the contrary, *sōphrosunē* would counsel people to educate their preferences so that they gain more enjoyment from taking the *kalos* actions that also allow one to bring enjoyment to other people. In short, each individual is best off by gaining enjoyment through goods that harmonize with the goods of others.[83]

This also explains why, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates argues that it is better to be punished for injustice than to avoid punishment. Being punished for injustice causes people to associate pain with unjust actions, helping to reform their preferences and put them in a position to prefer other means of enjoyment in the future, means which will not have the side-effect of causing harm to others.[84]

One example of this sort of reeducated preference is exercise. For most human beings, exercise is unpleasant, it causes a certain amount of pain. However, if one

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[82]One additional dimension that can be specified precisely is the consciousness or awareness of having developed oneself into a person who appreciates *aretēs* over bodily pleasures. In addition to the enjoyment caused by doing what is beautiful, there is also the enjoyment of *knowing* one chose it for that reason, that one played a role in developing one's own preferences.

[83]The opposite case illustrates the point well also. Consider someone who gains pleasure by causing pain to others—the extreme case being a serial killer. In the long run, his preferences do not serve him well.

[84]Socrates notably stops short of claiming that one is benefited by punishment when it leads to death, 473c-e.

engages in exercise habitually, especially from a young age, something else happens: one begins to associate the exercise with its consequences like being in good shape, winning in sports, and even the physical pleasure of the body's release of adrenaline. At a certain point, many people associate these *consequences* of exercise so closely to exercise itself that exercise on its own becomes pleasant (even if they still also experience something like pain at the same time).[85]

This amounts to a refutation of Protagoras's position early in the dialogue where he argued that the good is relative (334a-c). If people's preferences can be changed (as a doctor can make someone healthy by giving him bad tasting medicine), the good is not relative because some preferences will turn out to be better for a human being than others. With certain conditions taken for granted, for example that human beings will need to live in harmony with other human beings, one set of preferences may be strictly superior to another. Altering preferences may have a short term cost, but the long term gain may be much greater.[86]

In the end, Protagoras's moral relativism is wrong because it is short-sighted; it lacks forethought. Plato symbolizes this by having Protagoras play Epimetheus to Socrates's Prometheus: he takes preferences as given rather than exercising forethought to change them. Just as the excellence (*aretē*) of a hammer depends, in part, on the context in which it exists and might be used, the excellence or virtue of

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[85]Another example is provided by Adam Smith who explains that the pleasure in having the chairs organized in a room begins with the utility of being able to move around them, but becomes tied to simply seeing the orderliness itself. *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 4.1.1-4.

[86]This takes for granted that preferences can be altered, something that may be true only in a limited sense. Doing so is also not always a simple matter. This issues are taken up in the next chapter.

human beings depends on their context, which is usually among other human beings with whom it is useful to get along. If a human being living in a polity with others could gain equal or better enjoyment from behavior that benefits others as much as from behavior that harms others, only a bad human being would harm others: he would be a savage.[87] The true political art would not teach people how to gain power in order to use the polity to satisfy their own, narrow ends—pitting people against each other to satisfy those ends; instead, the political art would lead all people to prefer those things that make it possible for them to all flourish at once. It would make them good citizens.

Fully appreciating this point leads the conversation to what is technically an illogical conclusion but is nonetheless correct: the *kalon* and good—which "the many" were not choosing because they were overcome by pleasure or pain—is also the pleasant. This returns Socrates and Protagoras to the position of the many that they clearly stated they disagreed with. They fail to do what is most pleasant because they are overcome by pleasure. Socrates and Protagoras both agree and disagree with the many, thus finding themselves in a paradox. Protagoras agrees to this after

[87]While accurate, this glosses over an important complexity and could mislead readers into thinking that I am arguing for what amounts to encouraging individuals to follow their "enlightened self-interest." While this is not strictly wrong, there is another question bound up in it—the question of being and identity. Each individual in a society has an identity that goes beyond herself and, to varying degrees, encompasses other people and ideas. A simple example is the way in which a mother typically considers the good of her child more important than her individual good (if "individual" is understood as merely what encompasses her physical body). This blurring of one's identity occurs at many different levels (in addition to relatives and friends, people often have a sense of themselves that extends to their polity and even to ideas, such as honor, love, or even "being a man"). Therefore reducing the matter to "enlightened self-interest" is an oversimplification and fails to take into account complexities of identity and being.

Socrates has shown him how it must be true, although he immediately recognizes that by doing so "we'll destroy the previous agreements," leading them to have contradicted what they stated previously (360a). It may be paradoxical, but it is also true. One might say that human beings who believe pleasure is the good are right *and* wrong. They are right from the perspective of human beings whose preferences (or notion of *the good*) cannot be changed and who do not fully contain within their understanding of *the good* what their society understands as *the beautiful*. But since use of a common language and life shared with other human beings is ineluctable, they are wrong.

Prodicus plays a useful role in underlining this paradox. Plato employs Prodicus in his dialogue in order to attune readers to fine distinctions Plato himself is making between *similar* words that readers might take as being *the same*. In this case Plato has Socrates explain that the distinction Prodicus initially made between the pleasant and the delightful ultimately breaks down, as I argue, in the face of the paradox that there are goods other than pleasure, while from another vantage, pleasure is the only good. Plato has Prodicus define the terms for readers by having him explain, in an apparent digression, that *to enjoy* (*euphrainō*) something is different from *taking pleasure* (*hēdomai*) in something (337c). He explains that *enjoying* is related to the mental realm and *taking pleasure* is related to the body. Later, just after his conversation with the many, Socrates alludes to Prodicus's earlier distinction and indicates that in some contexts the distinction breaks down:

"You agree, then," I said, "that the pleasant is good, the distressing bad.

> And I beg forgiveness from Prodicus here concerning the distinction between the names. For whether you say 'pleasant' or 'pleasing' or 'enjoyable,' or on whatever basis and however you enjoy in naming things of this sort, best Prodicus, answer me with a view to what I mean (358a-b).

The distinction breaks down because the *kalon*, which brings enjoyment, could also be said to cause pleasure—especially from the standpoint of the many who only recognize pleasure as the good.

This is what leads Socrates to conclude that *the outcome* of their arguments, if it had voice, would accuse them of being strange or paradoxical for switching positions.[88] It is crucial to note that neither Socrates, in his own voice, nor Protagoras makes this point. Only the outcome of the argument does so because it cannot accept contradiction. Human beings, on the other hand, must ultimately accept the tragic aspect of knowledge.[89]

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[88]Commentators sometimes mistake this as Socrates claiming they switched positions, but the text makes it clear he does not.

[89]Christopher Meckstroth's otherwise insightful article on Socratic Method falls short by not recognizing this point. "Socratic Method and Political Science," American Political Science Review 106, no. 03 (August 1, 2012): 644–660. Socrates often reaches a conclusion that contradicts something previously argued, and he recognizes the contradiction but does not take that as a reason to believe the conclusion is wrong, consider also, e.g., the end of *Republic* I. While many of Meckstroth's points elucidate precisely key aspects of Socrates's method, his understanding of Socratic Method remains incomplete because it does not proceed, as he argues, simply by refuting all competing views (649). It commonly refutes the very view it has reached as a conclusion, leaving the interlocutors and readers with everything said having been refuted at some point. It reveals that any knowledge must ultimately rest on some assumption; and that assumption too can be drawn into question. Mechstroth claims that Socrates "does not present some counterargument of his own that begins from a competing first principle" and thus "this method of argument allows us to arrive at determinate conclusions without presuming the truth of any positive foundational premises whatsoever" (646). However, even Socrates's questions contain implications, and those implications are based on assumptions (or hypotheses). His method, rather than bringing readers to arrive at determinate conclusions, often bring them to an awareness of what might be called the tragedy of knowledge: that it is necessarily incomplete and will ultimately contradict itself. This does not make inquiry futile because it makes possible a deeper awareness of the world and an appreciation of the assumptions upon which we

From the paradoxical relationship of the pleasurable and the *kalon* (the admirable or beautiful), Socrates draws something positive and useful. He demonstrates that any society's *particular* notion of the *kalon* is useful in making that community better; the *relative* notion of beauty is, for Socrates, universally beautiful.

### 2.3.2 Leading Others to Prefer the Kalon

In addition to changing the choices Protagoras and his students would want to make for themselves, Socrates's insight also changes what it means to exercise the political art: it means making people good citizens. If most people simply prize pleasure over justice, piety, and moderation, they will fight among themselves, each striving for a little more pleasure. Yet, these human beings who recognize only pleasure are not in a position to change their own preferences. They have no way of judging one thing as better than another other than by the quantity of pleasure it produces. They have no reason to decide to change their preferences other than by being told they can have more pleasure doing something else. In the short term, they would be *less* satisfied from choosing *kalos* actions over bodily pleasure because they do not get pleasure from the *kalon*. So there is a sense in which the many human beings are correct, at least given their present preferences.[90] But in the long run they

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regularly act. See Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* and Jacob Klein *A Commentary on Plato's* Meno, chapter 5.

[90]As Socrates explains at one point, only the courageous advance toward "terrible" things, *Protagoras* 359c. Here, "terrible" is the Greek *deinos* (terrible, awesome, at once fear inspiring and great—or more as Heidegger once put it when discussing *Antigone*'s ode to man: *strange*). Those with courage can strive for things that are currently bad (and may cause pain) but could become good—such things are *deinos*.

gain more pleasure (or something more, say *enjoyment*) from changing their current preferences; so they are also, in another since incorrect—which is why Socrates tries to explain to them that they are in need of the art of measuring (356d-357b). They cannot provide this for themselves, they need others who are wise to guide them; they need others to act as doctors who will give them medicine that is a short term pain (changing their preferences) in order to gain greater long term enjoyment. Socrates hopes to have reeducated the sophists (or at least Protagoras) in his discussion, so that the many can now count on them to be good doctors of the human soul.[91]

Ideally, this role could be played by political leaders. The political art, properly understood, is the ability to take what is truly good for the many—virtues (*aretēs*)—and make it pleasurable or enjoyable.[92] One does this by helping people develop a second nature with which they see the *aretēs* as being so beautiful that choosing *aretēs* brings them more pleasure than the strictly bodily pleasures. In the short term, this often means exposing people to pain, as Protagoras's myth suggested, when it recounted how people learn justice (325d). In the long run, this leads them to choose (in the pursuit of pleasure) actions which bring others more pleasure as well. If the things their education causes them to see as *kalos* (beautiful) are selected wisely, the multitude will enjoy doing things that will promote others' enjoyment, and hence

[91]By the end of the dialogue, Socrates suggests Protagoras is prepared to teach the art of measuring: he is a physician who can cure "the greatest ignorance," 357e.

[92]As I hope has become clear by this point in the paper, choosing the right term is difficult because the use of "pleasure" is at once true and not true. My solution has generally been to use the term "enjoyment." See my discussion of Plato's use of Prodicus at 337c and 358a-b, **Error! Reference source not found.** on page Error: Reference source not found.

enable them all to flourish mutually. Instead of choosing pleasures that cause someone else pain (most of which society considers injustices), they will choose pleasures that bring pleasure to others (or at least leaves others alone).

Developed sufficiently, people discover goods such as friendship and intellectual contemplation, which are greater than bodily pleasures to such an extent that they seem three dimensional compared to simple pleasures, which are two dimensional.[93] In the extreme case, an individual can gain so much enjoyment from the mere contemplation of an extremely beautiful act that he would be willing to die just for the idea that his actions would bring about that beauty.[94] This is the extreme case of courage, where someone gives up her life to do something benefiting others.[95]

Therefore the political art is a way of reeducating the many (or directing the polity) such that the many come to see the *aretēs* as so beautiful that they will bring more pleasure than bodily pleasures. It is a way of changing *the good* for people so that their good serves them better. This in turn would make the polity as a whole better and stronger. A minor example would be to encourage people to engage in exercise at a young age, developing a preference such that something that is fun (pleasurable) is also good for their health.[96]

When considering theories like this, some people see the idea of encouraging a

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[93]See footnote 37 , page 59.
[94]E.g. a soldier sacrificing himself for his comrades.
[95]This is not too from the political theorist who enjoys trying to understand how to organize human relations so as to improve the polity, a point made by Adam Smith who concluded "Nothing tends so much to promote public spirit as the study of politics," *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 4.1.11.
[96]Xenophon indicates similar reasoning motivated him to write his text *On Hunting*, where he explains that young men who learn the pleasure of hunting, while they learn how to become good hunters also gain many qualities that make them better citizens, see sections 12 (especially sentences 6-17) and 13.

change in people's preferences as a way of "tricking" the multitude into doing what is good for the rulers (e.g. Thrasymachus in the *Republic*). But this is an incomplete understanding of the matter, much as Protagoras's understanding at the beginning of the dialogue was incomplete. The rulers themselves are much better off if the things that bring them enjoyment are things that *also* bring others, including the multitude, enjoyment at the same time. Such rulers are not just better for the polity, they are simultaneously better for themselves.[97]

#### 2.3.2.1 Protagoras Persuaded

During Socrates's discussion with "the many human beings" about the good as pleasure, it becomes clear that Protagoras's position has changed. This discussion begins after Protagoras has voluntarily ceded the lead of the discussion for the first time in the dialogue.[98] Socrates offers to let Protagoras once again take the lead in their inquiry about the political art, but this time Protagoras declines saying "It's just for you to lead it" (351e). He recognizes that the line of argument Socrates is about to pursue is connected to the rebuke he made while cloaked as Simonides—to recognizing the good, not as *esthlon* (consequence based), but as the *kalon*. Protagoras does not yet appreciate the full implications of choosing the *kalon* for the polity, but his responses that follow suggest that he comes to understand them as

[97]Xenophon's *Hiero* illustrates this point nicely and very concisely.
[98]While Protagoras allowed Socrates to give a long interpretation of the Simonides poem, this was not by choice, but as part of the agreement he made with the audience to take his turn asking Socrates questions. Even the poem, as subject matter of the discussion was Protagoras's choice. Socrates was submitting to Protagoras's question under the bargain struck by the audience. After that, it was to be Socrates's turn to ask questions again.

Socrates points them out one-by-one.

As Socrates walks through the argument with the many, Protagoras's responses demonstrate his increasing understanding. For the two of them to argue as a team, they must accept the same basic assumption, so Socrates starts by making sure they are united on that front. It is ground on which Socrates knows he can count on Protagoras to stand with him. That knowledge is superior to other goods, Protagoras cannot deny, after all he has dedicated his life to learning and teaching. So when Socrates explains that *most people* believe passion controls human actions but it would be possible to consider knowledge as being the dominant force, Protagoras agrees stating that it is "just as you say, Socrates, in my opinion. And at the same time, it's shameful for me of all people to deny that wisdom and knowledge are most superior (*kratiston*) of all human things" (352c-d). This is noteworthy because it is the first time in the dialogue that Socrates and Protagoras truly start agreeing with each other about the substance of their own positions. Socrates even responds by saying "What you say is *kalon*, at any rate... and true." This is a rare and full acknowledgment by Socrates that he and Protagoras are in agreement. Protagoras's subsequent responses are equally positive; it is clear that they are now side-by-side as allies in the argument. Later responses include: "But what you say is correct," "I think. . . that the many would say this in response," "That's my opinion too," and "What you say is true." Indeed, Protagoras does nothing but agree from 352c through 358a, when his agreement has become so thorough that Socrates brings the other sophists into the agreement as well.

The only remaining question is that of just what *aretē* is, a question that must be deferred not because Protagoras would disagree, but because it goes to a very different question: the nature of *aretē* in the abstract and how it changes over time based on the choices a polity makes.[99]

*Plato's* use of Homer and Prodicus also alert careful readers that Protagoras's position has changed. The discussion with the many human beings is preceded by Socrates quoting Homer: "Two going together, and the one observed before the other." Before, Protagoras was symbolized as the Greek hero Achilles attacking the river god Scamander (Socrates's role), who fought for the Trojans (340a). At that point, Plato uses the allusion to Homer, in part, to show that Protagoras and Socrates are enemies. But in this allusion, Protagoras is portrayed as Odysseus and Socrates is his ally Diomedes. The quote is from the *Iliad* when Diomedes chooses Odysseus to help him in a dangerous reconnaissance mission. At first it is strange that Plato would place Protagoras in the role of Odysseus, especially since Plato cast Socrates as Odysseus earlier in the dialogue, when Socrates and Hippocrates first enter Callias's house (315b-e). But the context of the interaction between Diomedes and Odysseus in the *Iliad* illuminates why, this time, Plato has Protagoras plays Odysseus.

The quote reveals the new alliance between Socrates and Protagoras. Earlier in the *Iliad*, Diomedes criticized Odysseus on the battlefield for his cowardice as Odysseus continued to selfishly focused on his own safety, retreating instead of

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[99]This is a question taken up fully in the *Meno*, and in my Chapter 4, "Dialectic, Democracy, and Education."

helping Diomedes rescue Nestor (8.90-107). But at this point, Diomedes has just volunteered to go out at night and gain information on the enemy (10.224). He is asked to choose one man from the greatest of heroes to help him on this dangerous mission. Letting Odysseus's earlier shameful selfishness be forgotten, Diomedes chooses Odysseus and makes amends for his earlier criticism, now remarking on Odysseus's courage and his exceptional wisdom. In having Socrates utter this quote before beginning his discussion with the many, Plato portrays Socrates as Diomedes who chooses Protagoras (as Odysseus) from among all the sophists (heroes) as the wisest and the best able of all the sophists present to help him in his argument with the many. Thus Plato reveals that Socrates and Protagoras are now allies (348d).[100]

In contrast, Plato had shown that they were enemies by Socrates's characterization of Simonides (Socrates's role during the poem interpretation) as "quarreling" (*erizdein*) with Pittacus (Protagoras's role, 343d). To be sure readers appreciate his word choice, Plato had Prodicus make the precise meaning of this term clear earlier when he distinguished *amphisbētein* (disputing)—something friends do—from *erizdein* (quarreling)—something that enemies do (337b).[101] Plato marked them as enemies while they discussed the poem; and now he uses the *Iliad* allusion to show careful readers that Protagoras and Socrates's position has changed.

Any remaining doubts about their new relationship should vanish after

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[100]See *Iliad* Book 8, lines 90-107 and Book 10, lines 224 and following.

[101]Plato makes similar use of Prodicus to show the difference between pleasure and enjoyment, and then later to show that, in some respects, that difference evaporates based on the discussion he had with the many human beings.

considering the beginning and end of the whole text of the *Protagoras*, which provide evidence that Protagoras has changed his position during his encounter with Socrates. Both the beginning and end of the text take place chronologically *after* Socrates's encounter with Protagoras is over. At the beginning, Socrates indicates to his comrade that Protagoras is the wisest of men, which suggests both that (a) Socrates may have learned something from Protagoras during the discussion and (b) Protagoras ultimately understood and agreed with the view Socrates takes to be correct. Moreover, at the end, Protagoras says of Socrates "I admire you by far the most of those I've happened across, especially those of your age. I say too that I wouldn't wonder if you should take your place among the men held in high regard for wisdom" (361e). This is another strong sign that Protagoras has learned from Socrates and changed his view.

From a dramatic standpoint, Protagoras's change is also suggested by Socrates choosing to leave Hippocrates in Protagoras's company at the end of the dialogue. Toward the beginning of the dialogue (314a-b), Socrates warns Hippocrates against trusting his soul to someone like Protagoras, and ultimately joins him in order to protect him after seeing that Hippocrates is unlikely to be dissuaded from going on his own. That Socrates is willing to part without Hippocrates is a strong sign that Protagoras has changed his position so the danger has now passed.[102]

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[102]Zuckert's understanding of this ending would disagree with my point. She specifically rejects Martha Nussbaum's understanding that Socrates leaves without Hippocrates and notes that Socrates uses the first-person plural *apē(i)men* implying that Socrates leaves *with* Hippocrates. *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: The Univ. Chicago Press, 2009), 228 fn 22. However, considering this point further, I have concluded it is most likely that Socrates uses the first-person plural to refer to he and Protagoras parting ways rather than he and Hippocrates parting together (cf. Plato's

#### 2.3.2.2 Political Aretē as Unteachable

It may appear that I believe changing preferences is much easier than it really is. I actually believe it is so difficult that at times it may approach the impossible. First, there are serious questions about the goodness or beauty of changing others' preferences, especially since, as the issue is detailed above, from where they are (with their current preferences), many human beings will not want them to be changed, which means they will have to be compelled to change, perhaps ultimately as Protagoras indicates "with threats and blows" (325d).[103] Even if one were not concerned about that, just how one could guide their preferences to change is a complicated matter.[104]

There is also an aspect of political *aretē* (excellence) which cannot be taught by political leaders alone: the details of what counts as the *kalon*. While one may say that citizens need to have a preference for an *aretē* like justice, this is only to speak of justice in the abstract, as a sort of harmony among citizens. The details of how people live in such a way as to bring about that harmony must be decided by the citizens as a whole. In this respect, political *aretē* is not teachable, but must be chosen by the citizens and it changes over time—indeed, it is embedded in the very language people use. This makes the details of *aretē* a moving target and explains why Socrates says

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similar usage of the first-person plural of *apeimi* in *Gorgias* 506a and *Euthydemus* 304b). While I acknowledge the first-person plural leaves room for argument, this conclusion seems most reasonable given the verb is preceded by the first-person plural participles for "having said" and "having heard" which are more appropriately understood to mean Socrates and Protagoras. Moreover, chronologically Socrates next appears to the comrade by himself—without Hippocrates (described at the beginning of the dialogue, 309a).

[103]Or alternatively as Rousseau would have it, they will be "forced to be free" (*Social Contract* 1.7).

[104]This matter will be taken up in the next chapter.

that the Athenians are wise in believing that management of the polity cannot be taught (319b, 319d; also *Meno* 93b-94e). Socrates can teach that an excellent leader would guide human beings to prefer beauty over pleasure; and in part, one can learn the details of how to do that. But one cannot choose what constitutes the details of the *kalon* for those people. Likewise, this is the reason that the great political men cannot teach their *aretē* to their sons.

How does one acquire leaders who themselves have preferences which cause them to guide others to prefer the *aretēs*? Properly understood, the many political *aretēs* mean behaving in ways that lead people to live in harmony with one another. While they are not identical to the *love* of fellow citizens, when people pursue the *kalon*, they end up taking the same actions that the love of fellow citizens would lead to. Thus, one could say that the paramount political excellence is love of one's polity. Were this combined with love of wisdom, one would have the ideal ruler.

The Socrates of the *Republic* conceives of the ideal leader coming about in one of two ways: either the lover of wisdom becomes the ruler or the ruler becomes a lover of wisdom (a philosopher). The lover of wisdom is in a special position. He already has something he prizes over pleasure (or, put crudely, he gains pleasure from something other than the body). And his love of knowledge leads him to understand more and more; if he learns enough about human souls and the political art, this would eventually give him the ability to rule in a way that could increase the enjoyment of himself and others, aligning the good of the individual to the good of the polity. What is not clear is how he would gain the political office of the ruler. There remains the

danger that he prizes wisdom above the polity such that he pursues wisdom selfishly without regard for the polity or the common good.

The other case has equal if not greater difficulties. If a ruler did not already have a love of the *kalon*, especially a love of wisdom or a love of his polity, it is unclear that even a philosopher could bring him around to the position where he could use the political art so well as to possess complete political *aretē*.[105] Simply explaining the ideas of how he would be better off would not change his preferences.[106] Indeed, explaining the political art to such a human being may simply repeat the mistake of Protagoras by helping those who rule, rule to their own detriment as well as the detriment of others.

Finally, being in a position to understand these ideas is not simply about having them communicated clearly, it is also about having had certain experiences that put one in a position to understand them. Chance play a large role in this. Therefore, there may be some truth to Socrates's conclusion in the *Meno* that those with political *aretē* are, above all, "both divine and inspired, being breathed upon and possessed by the god" (*Meno* 99d).

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[105]If authentic, Plato's *Seventh Letter* suggests that he tried and failed at such a task.

[106]The painful irony of this fact is not lost on me as I write this paper, though I do hope I write to wise people who prize the beautiful over pleasure. This may also explain why the Socrates of the *Meno* changes directions after Meno refuses to continue pursuing the question of what *aretē* is and instead insists (as a tyrant) to revert to his original question, *Meno* 86d. Meno's love of self is so great he cannot be reformed. At that point, Socrates seems to decide that he must simply be redirected (probably fruitlessly) to piety, but he cannot be taught. This also makes inherently dubious any attempt to present such ideas directly. See also, Xenophon's *On Hunting*, sections 12-13, or the last quarter of Plato's *Phaedrus*.

## 2.4 Conclusion

A person with complete political aretē (virtue or excellence) could guide people to reshape their preferences so that their individual goods align with the good of the polity. The kalon provides a bridge that makes it possible to use human beings' natural sense of pleasure and pain to reeducate in them a second nature, which causes them to prize beautiful (kalos) things that simultaneously bring them enjoyment and give enjoyment to others around them. A ruler who could guide people in this way would be both good for his polity and good for himself. Yet it is unclear how such a person comes to be.

The key insight Socrates gains from Protagoras's myth and argument at the beginning of the Protagoras is that human beings' natural preferences for pleasure can be reeducated to a sense of beauty (to kalon) that allows for maximal harmony in the polity. Realizing this, Socrates recognizes the incomplete knowledge held by Protagoras, rebukes him for an incomplete teaching, and shows him the reason why his previous knowledge was incomplete and harmful. Readers know that Protagoras learns this lesson because Protagoras and Socrates are allies instead of enemies by the end of the text, and after the encounter, Socrates is willing to suggest to his comrade that Protagoras is the wisest of men. He has understood Socrates's insight that a society's particular notion of the kalon is beautiful generally: it is truly good—everywhere.

# Chapter 3

## Plato as "Poetical Philosopher": *Being*, Conversation, and the Political Art

*The water of rivers high in the mountains is translucent so that even in the middle of the day you cannot see the river, but only the riverbed. Yet if you find just the right angel, if you move so that the sun—or better the moon—shines on it just right, the light reflects off of its contours, and you see the river itself. Such is the angle the philosopher seeks so that he can stand in wonder.*

*It keeps eternal whisperings around*
*Desolate shores, and with its mighty swell*
*Gluts twice ten thousand Caverns, till the spell*
*Of Hecate leaves them their old shadowy sound.*
*Often 'tis in such gentle temper found,*
*That scarcely will the very smallest shell*
*Be moved for days from where it sometime fell.*
*When last the winds of Heaven were unbound.*
*Oh, ye! who have your eyeballs vexed and tired,*
*Feast them upon the wideness of the Sea;*
*Oh ye! whose ears are dinned with uproar rude,*
*Or fed too much with cloying melody---*
*Sit ye near some old Cavern's Mouth and brood,*
*Until ye start, as if the sea nymphs quired!*

—John Keats, "On the Sea"

### 3.1 Introduction

A key part of understanding Plato is appreciating his view of reality: what constitutes our world and how it changes. This understanding becomes a powerful force that can shape the world for better or worse. It forms an essential tool in improving or preserving democracy and democratic education, as well as helping us

more fully understand democracy itself.

To better pave the way for Plato's insights into political education and democracy, here I engage in a preliminary examination of his understanding of being. In doing this, I explain why I agree with Danielle Allen that Plato sought to influence politics through his writing.

Plato wrote about political matters, but his precise relationship to politics is a disputed matter. Some argue that in the wake of Socrates's execution by Athens and Plato's own engagement with practical politics in Syracuse, Plato became disillusioned with the possibility of politics bearing fruit, and he withdrew from politics to engage in a purely intellectual life.[107] He left the active life of the polis and lived one devoted exclusively to contemplation. Others contend that Plato remained very much interested in having philosophy play a greater role in politics, with some believing he promoted an elitist, tyrannical, or even a totalitarian form of rule. In *Why Plato Wrote*, Danielle Allen promotes an understanding of Plato as someone actively engaged in politics—through the use he makes of writing. In her account, he uses images in two ways: as models to help understand reality and as images to help change the behavior of those who cannot understand philosophy so that they nevertheless behave in accordance with truth.

In the final analysis, I agree with much of Allen's view including Plato's use of

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[107]George Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006), 186-87.

images and his concern with contemporary politics. Yet I see him engaging in politics in a way that also entails some substantial additions to her view: I argue that Plato used his understanding of being, that is of how the reality of our world is shaped, in order to help govern the world better.

### 3.2 Allen's Plato as "Poetical Philosopher"

The first part of my chapter title comes from Allen's description of Plato in *Why Plato Wrote*.[108] She describes Plato as using his knowledge of metaphysics to make practical changes in the political world he inhabits; for Allen, this means Plato uses his knowledge of the truth to change Athenian culture.

In an elegant and crucial move, Allen distinguishes between two different sorts of images—or what we might think of as images—and explains why Plato, the philosopher notorious for banishing poets from the city precisely for their images, deems one type of image as the essence of his work and the other essential for the practical effects his wishes to have on his world. The images Socrates denigrates are *eidōla* or "shadow-images"; they work on us with the force of reality, but mislead us. Just as a rower's oar appears to bend as it enters the water, but does not really bend, so the images most poets provide mislead people about the reality of our world (46). As a consequence, these shadow-images (*eidōla*) lead people to experience "cognitive conflict."

The other kind of image is the one used by philosophers in pursuing the truth.

[108]Danielle Allen, *Why Plato Wrote*, (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

They use images that are "models of the realm of thought (the *paradeigmata*)" in order to help visualize truth, the world of ideas, which is itself not something that can be seen and is thus hard to access. The famous Socratic images are not shadow-images (*eidōla*), but models or symbols that aid in our understanding of reality.

> Model-making, like poetry, works with images or symbols, but its symbols are different in kind. Most importantly, they are non-mimetic and therefore metaphysically sound. Nor do they trigger cognitive conflict: in them image and reality match. Models, in contrast to the shadows of the pots, convey abstract concepts in order to help those who assimilate them access the truth (47).

Philosophers pivot back and forth between the realm that can only be perceived with the mind, the ideas (the upper levels of the divided line), and the realm of perception in order to understand the ideas better and help them make sense to others. In this way, Socrates uses the symbol or model of the cave (his well-known allegory) to provide access to the reality that our perception does not allow us to access directly.

However, philosophers are not restricted merely to contemplating the ideas and helping other potential philosophers access those ideas, they also use their knowledge of the ideas to take pragmatic actions to improve the polity. To do this they must reach more than the small group of people who are potential philosophers, which requires recourse to the other type of images: shadow-images (*eidōla*). These images have powerful effects on people and can change their behavior (thus the danger posed by poets). By employing these shadow-images philosophers can instill true beliefs about the world in people who cannot engage in the philosopher's dialectic. For example, Socrates uses his famous noble falsehood about there being bronze, silver, or

gold metal in each person's soul to teach a correct belief about justice, even though the image itself is false.

> The point of the noble lie is to tell citizens a story that will cause them to act as they would if they were in fact able to cognize the truth of justice. The noble lie does not give citizens access to the metaphysical claim that justice lies in ensuring that each part of the soul does its job and is properly related to the other parts of the soul. But it provides a basis for the social hierarchy, harmonization of social classes, and social stability that would result from universal acceptance of Socrates' metaphysical truth. The noble lie, drawing on the resources of imitation, will be pragmatically efficacious for the whole citizenry, implanting principles and rules for action that could just as well have flowed from the metaphysical beliefs that Socrates propounds but which he is unable to bring a whole citizenry to see through dialectic (66).

Thus Allen explains that philosophers use models to learn and teach about the ideas or the truth of reality and they use shadow-images to bring those who cannot be taught to act in accord with truth nonetheless. Models lead us to truth, but shadow-images are the most effective way to change behavior.

In this way, Allen sees Plato's Socrates as joining "pragmatism to metaphysics," though it is perhaps Plato himself who is the first "poetical philosopher." Plato used his knowledge of reality to create falsehoods that lead people to behave in accordance with truth. Plato did not choose the contemplative life over the active one, but was engaged in both simultaneously.

### 3.3 Images, Truth, and Platonic Understanding of *Being*

I agree with Allen's understanding of Plato as a poetical philosopher, but rather

than being shocked, as one review of Allen's book anticipates,[109] I do not think Allen's activist understanding of Plato goes as far as it could. While she argues that the poetical philosopher will use false images only when they promote action that is in accord with metaphysical truth, I contend that a careful reading of Plato's texts reveals a more complicated understanding of truth (or reality and being) than Allen illuminates—an understanding of truth or reality that goes against the common understanding of Plato.

Allen does not tell us what truth is, nor does she explain precisely how the philosopher's presentation of the world differs from that of the poet other than to say that the philosopher's image does not cause cognitive conflict, whereas the poet's does.[110] What makes one true and the other not true? Or to state the same question in another way, what makes the philosopher's understanding of the world that of true beings and the poet's understanding of falsehoods? The answers to those questions are crucial to understanding the role philosophy can play in politics and democratic eduction.

In arguing that Plato is a pragmatist, Allen relies in part on Plato's *Theaetetus* (166d-167b, quoted below), on a passage where Socrates presents the position of Protagoras. As Allen explains, "Plato's fullest presentation and analysis of pragmatism appear in the dialogue, the *Theaetetus*, where Socrates tries to put forward the strongest possible case of Protagoras' version of pragmatism, so that he and his

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[109]Arlene Saxonhouse, *Classical Philology*, Vol. 107, No.1 (2012), 90-94.
[110]Danielle Allen, *Why Plato Wrote*, (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 46-47.

interlocutors might debate its merits" (66). She quotes Burnyeat's summary of the passage "that the true or truer state of mind *is* the one which has the most satisfactory consequences, the one which selects itself as the most serviceable to live with." Shortly thereafter Allen concludes that in using shadow-images (*eidōla*) such as the noble lie, Socrates "adopts a pragmatist approach to truth that conforms with his presentation of that view in the *Theaetetus*: as long as the shadows produced by the poets lead to good outcomes in the world, he can accept them."

Allen does not explain what she makes of the fact that Socrates (or Plato) supports "a pragmatist approach to truth" that conforms to a position that is, at least ostensibly, rejected by Socrates in the dialogue itself when he states that "the Truth of Protagoras will be true for no one, not for anyone else and not even for himself" (171c). I believe that Allen is right to suggest that Plato himself would affirm this purported Protagorean view, but we must examine it more closely to see why he might agree with it and what doing so means.

At first glance, the passage appears to be the contrary of a position one would expect Plato to hold. The position seems to argue for the relativity of truth. Socrates, arguing on behalf of Protagoras, says the following:

> I declare that... each of us is a measure of the things that are and are not, and yet we differ one from another in thousands of ways for this very reason, that to one person some things are and appear, to another person others do. ...I say that very person is wise who, for anyone of us to whom bad things appear and are, makes them change over into appearing and being good things. . . .that was in what was said before, that to the one who's sick, what he eats appears and is bitter, while to the one who's healthy the opposite is and appears. Now there's no need to make either of them wiser, and one doesn't even have the power to,

> nor should one accuse the sick person of being lacking in understanding because he has such an opinion, while the healthy one is wise because he has a different sort, but one should produce a change from one to the other, since that other is a better condition.... In this way in education too, one should produce a change from one condition that holds to a better one, but while a doctor produces a change with drugs, a sophist does so with speeches. One does not, however, make someone who's been having some false opinion afterward have some true opinion, for there is no power to have as opinions either things that are not, or other things besides those one experiences, and the latter are always true. But I suppose that when someone with a burdensome condition holding in his soul has opinions akin to his own condition, a serviceable condition would make him have different opinions, of that sort, which latter appearances some people, from inexperience, call true, but I call the one sort better than the other, but not at all truer (166d-167b, emphasis added).

This pragmatist position claims that there is no true and false opinion, but only the opinion one person has, which is true for him, and the opinion another person has, which, even if conflicting the first person's, is true for him too. It is not possible to compare the two people's opinions and call one true and one false. If someone's sense of taste is deformed by sickness so that good food tastes bitter, he is not wrong (i.e. his opinion is not false), but he would merely be better off if the food tasted better to him.

To make sense of why Plato or Socrates might support something close to this position, we need to examine more closely the understanding of *being* presented in the dialogues: what makes a thing real. Elucidating what counts as true will also make it possible to see the more extensive implications of Plato's poetical philosophy for education and politics.[111]

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[111]There is substantial support from within Plato's *Theaetetus* for the position that Plato agreed with this pragmatist view. In particular note that the argument that Socrates and Theaetetus use to undermine the Protagorean position is that there are things such as false opinions, which their couldn't be if being is

### 3.3.1 Knowledge, Truth, and Being in the *Republic* and *Meno*

An unexpected Platonic ontology is suggested by comparing Socrates's[112] account of ideas in book six of the *Republic* with his distinction between opinion, correct opinion, and knowledge toward the end of the *Meno* and his discussion of natural science in the *Phaedo*. This ontology is crucial for making political education fruitful in a democracy.

#### 3.3.1.1 What does it mean to learn?

One of the ostensible lessons of Plato's *Meno* is that learning is really just recollection (81d). To fully appreciate just what that means requires us to reexamine what we understand teaching and learning to be. To facilitate this, Plato provides us with an example by having Socrates ask questions of Meno's slave who "learns" without being "taught." The slave ends up being able to give correct answers about a geometry problem that he initially got wrong, though no one told him the answer in the meantime. Socrates insists at two different points that he does not teach the slave anything, but merely asks him questions (82e, 84c). He claims the slave's ability to give the right answer is proof that he must have had the answers all along, he just needed to recollect his knowledge.

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always changing (157e-158a). Late in the same dialogue, the existence of false opinion appears doubtful (199c-201a). When Socrates tries to cure this flaw, he does so by assuming an argument that he and Theaetetus had earlier rejected: that knowledge is perception (201b-c).

[112]As in previous chapters, I follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed. rules for handling apostrophes of names like Socrates and Protagoras: always adding an *apostrophe* and an *s*, (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 2010), sections 7.18; URL = <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/about16_rules.html>.

This example clarifies the operative meaning of *teach* (*didaskō*) that Socrates and Meno are using. While many of us might consider Socrates to be teaching, and perhaps even teaching in a particularly effective manner, they do not consider it to be teaching because Socrates refrains from telling the slave either (a) the answer itself or (b) precisely how to find the answer. Teaching here means *instruct*.[113] Instead he does what we might call asking leading questions. In this context, provoking someone to think for herself does not amount to teaching.[114]

What Socrates does instead is to encourage the slave to consider the relationship between what he does know and what he would like to know; in this sense, he undergoes something very similar to recollecting. When someone has forgotten something and wants to recollect it, she takes what she knows or remembers and thinks about what might fill in the missing gaps. If someone is trying to recollect the words to a song, she may start with a vague image of the paper where she saw them written, she may start with the few words she does remember, or she may simply start with a fragment of the song's melody, and then she thinks about what would fit in the places her memory cannot fill.

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[113]Plato's use is similar in the *Protagoras* where *didaskō* is used similarly to describe someone who is told what is just or pious, and has these virtues inculcated in him the way one would straighten a bent piece of wood, 325d.

[114]This is the traditional Greek understanding of education (*paideia*). Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, tr. Gilbert Highet (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1943), 295, 300, 309-12. While Jaeger notes that Plato initially appears to depart from this understanding of education in the *Republic*, he later explains that this traditional understanding ultimately "emerges triumphant." I disagree with Jaeger's understanding of Plato—especially his neglect of the education Plato has Socrates demonstrate in his conversations. However, Jaeger's focus is on *paideia*, which was the education of young men by older men, while mine is considered much broader, including the education of adults, such as that of Callicles in the *Gorgias*.

The claim that learning is recollection has important implications, not about reincarnation, but about knowledge. It is easy to become distracted by what Socrates's claim about learning being recollection means about birth, death, life, and afterlife. While there are interesting points to consider, Socrates frequently makes use of myths not because they are literally true, but because they encourage people to accept better understanding of the world. Plato's Socrates is explicit about this being his reason for providing myths in multiple places. He indicates this is his reason for the "noble lie" of the *Republic*: it is not that people really have bronze, silver, or gold in their souls, but that people vary in ways that makes them better and worse suited for different activities (414e-15c). Socrates follows up the myth of the metals by emphasizing how difficult it would be to persuade people to accept it but, if they did, it would "make them care more for the city and each other," (415d).[115] The point of the myth is to suggest an assumption that would have positive consequences.

In the *Meno*, Socrates goes even further to discount the truth of his story that learning is really recollection and the implication that the soul is immortal and had all this knowledge from some previous life. His immediate point for Meno is merely that it is worth the trouble to learn because learning is possible. The rest of the story he all but rejects himself:

> As for the other point [that the soul is immortal and has true opinions in it from some previous life], at least, I wouldn't insist very much on

[115]Danielle Allen describes this as the pragmatic justification for Socrates using shadow-images, which he otherwise denigrates and banishes from the city in the *Republic*, 65-66. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates similarly makes clear that his story of Egyptian gods creating and disputing about the usefulness of writing is presented only for the truth of its message and not for its veracity as a story (275b-c).

> behalf of the argument; but that by supposing one ought to inquire into things he doesn't know, we would be better and more manly and less lazy than if we should suppose either that it's impossible to discover those things that we don't know or that we ought not inquire into them—about *this* I certainly would do battle, if I could, both in speech and in deed (86b-c).[116]

Socrates insists, not on the immortality of the soul nor on recollection actually being identical to learning, but on the consequences for our behavior of making such an assumption: that learning is possible and we should always try to learn.[117] Indeed, in the passage that follow he seems unconcerned what specific name is used to describe what is going on, indifferently referring to it as "either recollecting or learning," (82b).

Nonetheless, Socrates does mean to say that there is a great similarity in what goes on in our mind when we recollect and when we learn. The claim that learning *is* recollection is best thought of as a metaphor "searching and learning as whole are recollection" (81d). Since the point he is trying to make is about their connection to knowledge, one can treat them, in this context, as the same. By having Socrates make this metaphor, Plato encourages readers to consider what the comparison means for what recollecting and learning produce as well. A completed recollection brings into mind the reality that existed as some point in the past. Similarly, the completed process of learning brings into mind the reality that exists in the present: it produces knowledge.

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[116]Compare this passage with 81c-d.
[117]Christina Ionescu, *Plato's Meno: An Interpretation*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 47-54.

#### 3.3.1.2 Knowledge

If learning is really just recollecting, what does that say about the object of learning: knowledge; what sort of thing must knowledge be? By calling what the slave does *learning*, Socrates implies that there can be learning without teaching: that people can teach themselves. To learn is to transform the true opinions one has into knowledge (86a). We do this by working out the connections among those true opinions. Plato's Socrates illustrates this by comparing true opinions to the legendary statues made by Daedalus, which are said to be so lifelike that they even had the ability to move about on their own. Socrates suggests that true opinions are like these statues before they are tied down: they can walk away and we lose them. He draws an analogy in which tying down a statue of Daedalus likened to transforming true opinion into knowledge. Thus, while teaching is often to be taken to mean *instructing* or even *inculcating*, learning is not about gaining what we might call *facts* but about coming to see how various things we take for granted are related to each other.

This understanding of knowledge becomes clearer toward the end of *Meno*, when Socrates distinguishes among opinion (*doxa*), correct or true opinion, and knowledge (*epistemē*).[118] He explains to Meno that true opinions become knowledge only after they have been tied down with a reasoned account of their cause (*aitias logismō*, 98a). Considering these remarks, we can deduce that true or correct opinions are separated from knowledge primarily by the fact that for knowledge we are able to

[118]For the second of these categories, Socrates alternates between using "correct" (*orthos*) and "true" (*alēthes*).

explain the connections between the different opinions, giving a reasoned account of why a piece of knowledge is true. The slave's learning was like recollection because, just as recollecting involves filling in that which is missing between the imprints or images in our memories, learning is the process of understanding the connections among various facts we already accept. Knowledge is the web of reasoning that connects various facts, perceptions, or concepts. It is the way in which we are able to make sense of those various perceptions and concepts together as a whole. Put slightly differently, it is what draws together our facts and ideas so that they constitute a whole world.[119]

An example might help clarify how I understand this relationship. A person who believes the Earth is round simply because he has heard it many times and trusts the people who say it has never really learned that it is round. He does not have knowledge, but merely holds the opinion (albeit a true opinion) that it is round. On the other hand, a person could take various facts (which are ultimately opinions or true opinions) and draw connections among those facts in a way that provides a reasoned account that the Earth is round. She might have noticed how the stars visible in the night sky change as she travels to another city far to the north or south. She might also remark on how the top of a ship disappears last as it goes over the horizon. Finally, she might connect these facts to the way that, during a lunar eclipse, the shadow the Earth casts on the moon is curved. Considering these disparate facts together, she

[119]This accords with Socrates's account in the *Theaetetus* where he states that "the very being of an articulation (*logos*) is an intertwining of names," (202b).

might come up with a reasoned account of their cause (*aitias logismō*), of what is responsible for all of them at once: the Earth is round. She has learned this; it is no longer simply true opinion, but knowledge.

What about someone who had not made those connections but then reads the previous paragraph, does that person now have knowledge? Not exactly; yet this is a crucial point for anyone involved in democratic education. Plato has Socrates explain his understanding at the end of the *Phaedrus* (274c-275c). Writing, even when it includes not just facts, but also an explanation of the connections among facts, cannot really provide knowledge. There is a way in which what for one person was the connecting of various pieces of information together, forming a sort of web of nodes and connections among nodes, for another person becomes simply a piece of information itself: simply a single node. The connections or reasoned account about what makes one thing responsible for another becomes compressed.

Socrates explains that this amounts to "supplying the opinion of wisdom to the students, not truth," (275a). Instead of gaining knowledge or themselves becoming wise, they become "opinion wise" (*doxasophoi*). Having the material with which to make connections among various opinions is not the same as making those connections for oneself. Writing can only provide the nodes we need to reconstruct the web that unites them, but cannot supply the whole web to us, that is something we have to create for ourselves. This is one reason why the *Socratic method* of teaching is considered superior by many people: instead of trying to hand knowledge to students, which can never really happen anymore than we can inject knowledge into

someone with a syringe, the Socratic method attempts to help students create the connections among various facts for themselves by provoking them to reason about the matter in question.

If knowledge is the connections among perceptions, facts, and concepts, then where do those pieces that are woven together—themselves a sort of knowledge—come from? And perhaps of even greater importance, what is Plato *doing* with knowledge? While I agree with Allen's basic understanding of Plato—that he uses model-images to guide some people to see the truth and others to act in accord with truth—I argue that he does much more: he uses his understanding of being to change reality itself. Fully appreciating what that means and how it is done requires us to question look deeper at what knowledge is and what truth is. This deeper examination is a necessity for understanding the way that political theory can contribute to education.

#### 3.3.1.3 Being

Reality is neither completely fixed, handed to us from nature (as many contemporary scientists would have it), nor is it completely arbitrary, entirely up to human meddling. Concepts that appear central to use—such as freedom—can change and may cease to exist. Objects, such as a cow, an mean completely different things in different cultures, such as the West or India.

In the *Republic*, Socrates establishes that knowledge is intimately connected with *the good*. Leading up to his image of the divided line, Socrates makes an analogy

between the sun and the good (508b-509d) that reveals something about his understanding of being. The sun is in the visible realm what the good is in the intelligible realm (*noētō topō*). As eyes see by means of light coming from the sun, the soul sees with truth coming from the good (508d-e). What the eyes see, we call sight; what the soul sees; we call knowledge. This analogy also means that the good emits truth; and when truth reflects off of something's being, it makes it possible for us to 'see' it with our minds. Just restating the same details drawn from Socrates's analogy, we can say that seeing something with our minds--understanding it-- means seeing its being in the truth cast on it by the good. From Socrates's analogy, it is not immediately clear precisely what he means. How does the good affect truth? Isn't one of the fundamental characteristics of truth that it does not depend on good or bad, but simply *is*? Isn't truth independent of the goodness or badness of things?

To answer these questions, we must consider Socrates's analogy further. He does not rest with comparing the good to the sun and truth to light, but extends the analogy: just as the sun also makes existence, growth, and nourishment possible, so the good makes *being* possible for the objects of knowledge (509b).

Appreciating just what Plato's Socrates is attempting to convey was difficult even in Plato's time—indeed Socrates suggests it is the difficulty of explaining it that pushes him to use an analogy.[120] Modern readers have an added difficulty because in

[120]The case is somewhat more complicated. Socrates claims that he cannot adequately discuss the good, so he will discuss its offspring instead. However, that offspring is the sun and so by describing the sun and making an analogy to the good, he ends up provided details about the good itself, 506d-509d. In doing this, he implies that it is only possible to discuss the good is indirectly. In this sense it is like

the years since Plato wrote, the way that people understand truth and good has changed radically. In ancient Greek thought there was no *good* simply, but only *good for*.[121] A good shoe protects the foot from the elements, weather and rough ground, without causing problems itself, such as chafing one's skin. A good horse is good because it helps accomplish some end or some collection of ends well, such as pulling goods to market or carrying a soldier around a battlefield. A good doctor is one who increases health in his patients. People often lose sight of how important the good that is—implicitly—in mind affects how we understand the thing we are considering. Bearing this in mind provides additional purchase in understanding what Socrates means in saying that the good is responsible for (*aitia*) everything (508e).

In comparing the good to the sun, I contend that Socrates indicates two crucial effects of the good. First it is what makes it possible for us to come to know something's *being*. Just as the sun emits light that allows us to see objects, the good emits truth that allows us to see beings with our mind. He also suggests that the good is what provides depth to being. As the sun is for the nourishment and growth of plants and animals, so the good is for being. What does that mean?

In pursuing any end, a person makes use of things to help obtain her goal (her particular good), each of which are understood in terms of how they relate to that good. They are good for accomplishing some aim, such as a long stick that is good for knocking fruit out of a tree. As part of this pursuit, she distinguishes among objects—

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looking at the sun: to see it without being blinded, one must look near it, but not at it.

[121]Hannah Arendt also calls attention to this change, *The Human Condition*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), (section.page) 31.226.

separating one from the many—breaking down what might otherwise be seen as an undifferentiated whole. For example, she might distinguish a stick from a tree branch, a long stick from a short one, a strong one from a fragile one, a heavy one from a light one. Each distinction is made to aid her pursuit of the good. With each contrast she learns details about the particulars of thee thing being examined (e.g. a stick) while also developing concepts that are more general: length, strength or firmness, weight, and (in each case) sameness and difference. She bothers to distinguish various details for some utility, but they become part of the being of different objects and notions that in the world generally.

Each attempt to analyze a thing or concept requires other concepts, without which the analysis cannot take place. Thus, as we interact with the world around us, we take for granted concepts that we have never really thought about in themselves. Someone who analyzes a stick that she is going to use to get fruit just wants to find the best stick, but to compare two sticks and determine which is better requires some basis for judging between them. That basis must be assumed for the moment. If she is trying to knock down fruit that is out of reach, the longer stick is going to be better. If the person making the judgment has not thought about *length* before (either because she is a person in the state of nature who has not learned concepts others hold in society or because she is still a young child), she will nevertheless implicitly realize the concept of length while considering the difference between the two sticks. She needs it or is forced to conceive of it in order to make a judgment that will help her toward her goal. Her ability to think (*dianoia*) allows her to distinguish, but in doing

so it must have some basis of comparison. In noticing that one stick is longer than another, she also implies the concept of equality. She has not seen two equal sticks, but simply by distinguishing between them she has implicitly considered the idea of two things being equal. Thus, in reaching for fruit, her good emits truth about the concepts of *length* and *equality*.

At some level, all knowledge rests on assumptions. In order to move toward her goal, she analyzes. To analyze, she uses concepts that she has not previously analyzed; she must assume their existence. In this sense, she takes them as suppositions (in Greek, *hypotheseis*) and she makes deductions based on them. I believe this is what Socrates means when he states "the soul. . . is forced to investigate from hypotheses, proceeding not to a first principle but to a conclusion" (510b). Because all of her analyses depend upon these assumptions, or stand upon them (*hypo thesis* in Greek can mean simply "something put beneath"), there is a way in which the assumptions are necessarily prior to the things analyzed. One need not understand Plato's forms as ideas that are behind the world, existing in some transcendental realm. They are the concepts that the rest of our analyses depend upon—we cannot do our analysis without them.[122] It is their priority, the need for these concepts to exist in order for the ordinary physical objects we interact with to make sense, that gives them a higher place on Socrates's divided line and makes them share in the truth to a greater extent (511e). Our understanding of everything else depends upon the ideas.

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[122]A more detailed treatment of this matter is beyond the scope of this chapter. Jacob Klein presents one in chapter five of *A Commentary of Plato's* Meno, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965), 108-72. It is that discussion that I, in large part, follow here.

To know more about one thing, we suppose (or act as if) we know others. In practice, that means that knowledge is a by-product of our analysis (*dianoia*). In trying to understand one thing, we *suppose* others. Our perceptions, or what we make of them, depend upon our ideas—the concepts we already have or the ones we assume along the way. From this standpoint, someone might consider ideas *more real* than physical objects because if our suppositions are not real, the deductions we make about physical object based on these ideas cannot be real either. Plato's theory of the forms need not be understood as the transcendental existence of objects behind the world, but merely the recognition that since we assume certain things, in order to make sense of our perceptions, the things we assume are logically prior to those physical things.[123] And the physical world depends upon them.

The connection between knowledge and the good cannot be overemphasized. A person's good is what drives him to ask questions or engage in analysis that forces him to make distinctions that depend upon ideas. This is not to presume that someone is a philosopher whose good is wisdom. The most banal end requires people to make distinctions and exercise thought (*dianoia*); and making those distinctions forces people to suppose other concepts. Consider a man who was attacked by a hungry lion, a couple of hills away; he barely got away and he is looking for a tool to use against the lion if they should meet again. He wants the best tool possible, so he is trying to compare two sticks to determine which one to bother carrying. It is the good of

[123]Other scholars have also suggested that readers are wrong to attribute the theory of the forms to either Plato or Socrates. See, e.g. Sandra Peterson, *Socrates and Philosophy in the Dialogues of Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 217.

protecting himself from the lion that drives him to make comparisons. Thus, the good—incidentally—drives him to suppose concepts, so that he can do better. His analysis combined with his good prompts him to take the stronger and longer stick.

Of course, any concept that is supposed or hypothesized can itself become the object of a person's thought (*dianoia*). We can ask what length is or what weight is; our exploration of those concepts would force us to suppose the concept of greater or lessor.[124] To understand any one thing forces us to presuppose something else. Knowledge can never be founded on a completely firm, certain base. Even the decision to analyze something presupposes that there is something to analyze, that we can inquire into it, and that there is an "I" who does so.

Each concept can also change the way we see other things. Someone who supposes that *sameness* and *difference* make sense begins to take these ideas for granted. He brings them to bear, consciously and unconsciously, on many other things he sees or conceives. At some point, the idea of stick crept into his head. At another point, he gained the concept of arm (perhaps by noticing that two segments of himself were quite similar). His arm is too short to reach the fruit in the tree. He notices that his arm and the stick, while not the same, are not altogether different. When he holds the stick, it is like he has an arm on his arm (albeit without another hand). He has applied his idea of arm (an image of arm) to the stick. We call this a metaphor, for him it is a sameness they share. The image of arm imposed on stick helps him see (or

[124]In part, these were implied previously in the supposing of length when comparing two sticks, but they will develop greater detail when length itself is examined.

more precisely, helps him understand or know) that he can get the fruit if he uses the stick as an arm without a hand. The stick cannot grab, but it can hit. He knocks down the fruit, picks it up, and eats it. This stick is good.

But what is *good*? Aside from how it helps shape the being of other things, what is it and how does it change?

#### 3.3.1.4 The Good

In addition to increasing the details in the world and enriching individual items with more characteristics—adding depth to human *being*—the activity of seeking a goal and the thinking that accompanies that search has another important side effect. I contend that this process of one being enriching the world with others is one of the reasons Plato has Socrates keep punning with the word *tokos*, which can mean both *child* or the *interest* earned on money (e.g. *Republic* 507a). Through the pun, he shows how being enriches being just as money can earn interest or people can proliferate.

The various things that are *good for* accomplishing some goal become associated with that good. In some cases, the *good for* becomes so closely associated with the goal that it becomes thought of as *good* simply. Means to a particular good frequently become ends in themselves. If for some tasks the long stick is better, but the short stick is better for others, length may remain neutral; but if a strong stick seems preferable for almost every task, strength will come to be regarded as *good*. Socrates points out that this does not make sense, the thing is not really good, its

goodness depends on circumstances; for example, wealth, if used unintelligently can be harmful (*Meno* 87e-89a). Nonetheless, that a thing can become considered as good simply instead of good-for is remarkable because it allows something that was initially a *means only* to become an *end* in itself.

An example of this is the notion of *order* or organization. The chairs in a room could be left haphazard wherever they were last used, but they would often be impediments to walking through the room, so it is sometimes better to arrange them in a particular way so that one can walk across the room more quickly and so that they are also likely to be in a useful configuration the next time they are used. For these ends, they are arranged or ordered. After repeated association with the use for which they are ordered, organization itself becomes thought of as something good. We begin to be more pleased by seeing the chairs arranged in an orderly fashion and start to enjoy the order itself. This can lead to spending considerable effort ordering chairs even in situations where we know they will be displaced in just a few hours because the order itself brings satisfaction, having itself become an end, indeed becoming a part of what we think of as beautiful.[125] Thus, while goods drive our understanding of the world and help form knowledge, they, in turn, are affected by our understanding of the world.

Things start out as being *good for* something else, but then come to be seen as good in themselves—regardless of whether or not they lead to something further; they

[125]Adam Smith uses this example in *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 4.1.1-4.

become thought of as admirable or beautiful (*kalos*). I contend this illuminates a scene in Plato's *Symposium* where, after Diotima asks Socrates what he will get by possessing the beautiful, Socrates pauses (204d). He cannot answer her question because it seems to have no answer. For what do people want things that are admirable or beautiful (*kalos*)? When the question is modified to asking what Socrates will get by possessing good things, it seems to have an easy answer: to be happy. Indeed, the logical followup question, "Why does he want to be happy?" seems unnecessary because, as Diotima puts it, "the answer is opined to be complete," or translated differently, "the answer seems to possess completeness."[126] The question, "Why be happy?" is not asked because it is not called for: the notion of happiness puts an end to our thinking what we are doing.

This places the young Socrates on the precipice of a key realization.[127] Socrates was first unable to answer why people want to possess the beautiful (*to kalon*). He is not stumped about why people wish to possess the good because language provides an answer: happiness (*eudaimonia*). However, from one vantage, this answer is no more an answer than the one Socrates had for the question of why people want to possess the beautiful. Saying that people want happiness fails to explain any more than simply not answering the question, with the exception that it is a widely accepted way of not answering the question—one that people take to be an answer. Seeking happiness is what they are doing by definition, just from knowing

[126]The Greek is τέλος δοκεῖ ἔχειν ἡ ἀπόκρισις.
[127]This story Socrates tells within the *Symposium* presents readers with a story about a Socrates who is relatively young, one of the earliest stories known of him.

they are seeking some good, but it does not add anything to why they are seeking it. This small change—without a real difference—sheds just enough light on *eros* (according to Diotima, a *daimon*)[128] and *the good* that it enables Socrates to start to see the beautiful (*to kalon*) and the good (*to agathon*) for what they are. *Eros* comes to light as the seeking of the beautiful or the good without any further *good for*. Therefore, people are frequently inclined to think of *eros* as being directed at the beautiful (*to kalon*) (200a-202a).

To shed more light on *the good* for Socrates, Diotima needs only nudge him to generalize what people are doing when they seek the good. She asks Socrates whether wanting the good (in order to be happy) is common to everyone and (since it is common to everyone) why don't we describe everyone as being under the influence of eros? This question helps Socrates see that the notion that people are seeking what is good explains nothing—no more than why they want to possess the beautiful or to be happy. Whatever anyone is seeking—whether it is erotic love of another, material goods, honor, or even wisdom—they do it because they consider the thing they seek to be good. Seeking the good is what they are doing by definition: that they seek it implies that they consider it good (or define it as good). This brings the being of *the good* into the light for Socrates, and he responds simply, "I am wondering (*thaumazdō*)," or alternatively "I am amazed," (205b).

I contend the choice of the word "wonder" or "amaze" (*thaumazdō*) is neither

[128]The close relationship between Eros, a *daimon*, and happiness, *eudaimonia*, is no mere accident. A daimon could be a god, the power controlling the destiny of an individual (one's lot or fortune), or a demi-god, Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon.

chance nor simply Plato's attempt to portray a realistic sounding conversation, but rather a signal (Plato's signal) that Socrates has reached a point where he is beginning to contemplate *the good*'s being.[129] Socrates begins to be able to view the idea of the good from a new vantage point, in substantial part, because he was brought to ask the question about whether everyone is under the influence of eros.[130] One could almost say that instead of people striving to get good things, good things are good because we are striving for them; and happiness is tautology.

Socrates wonders at the *being* of the beautiful (*to kalon*), the good, and eros which are coming into sight for him: they are becoming unhidden (*alēthes*). Diotima goes on to explain how, ideally, eros that begins by being directed at one object (initially a single person) can lead to eros for something slightly different, and then yet something else different, again and again, ultimately culminating in the ability to enjoy, not possession, but merely gazing at (*theasthai*) the beautiful (211d). This is a more dramatic version of the example I gave above about someone who starts wanting the chairs in a room arranged neatly for one purpose, such as to efficiently walk through the room, and ends up liking order for its own sake. In this case, eros begins as desire for sexual pleasure (206c)[131] and eventually leads to love of wisdom or knowledge of the being of things—first knowledge of transient being and eventually being that does not change (210b-11a).

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[129]Hannah Arendt describes the key role *thaumazdein* plays in Platonic and Aristotlean philosophy in *The Human Condition*, highlighting "the famous contention of Plato, quoted by Aristotle, that *thaumazein*, the shocked wonder at the miracle of Being, is the beginning of all philosophy," 42.302.
[130]One could say that Diotima induces a *periagōgē* or turning about in Socrates.
[131]Note that the original Greek makes Plato's use of sexual imagery more obvious, 206d-e.

While eros by nature may be desire for sexual pleasure, eros works its magic before that desire is consummated. When people are anticipating the pleasure their erotic desire directs them to, they are especially malleable or open to form associations of that pleasure with the things that *appear to be* means to that pleasure: in the first case the person from whom they anticipate the sexual pleasure, in the latter case the knowledge that would help them complete their intellectual inquiry (hence why Socrates considers himself an expert of erotics, 177e). These things begin to bring pleasure themselves, especially if the association occurs repeatedly. They start by being *good for* the attainment of sexual pleasure, but then bring pleasure themselves, even without consummation. This pleasure, no longer directed at the physical without another end but directed at knowledge simply, is beautiful. The thing that started as good for attaining pleasure now brings a sort of pleasure—call it enjoyment—itself, with no further end being necessary.[132]

As Diotima describes it, with the right associations, eros moves from desire for sexual pleasure, to non-physical desires for beautiful speeches, to knowledge, and eventually to understanding being itself. The person who has been striving for knowledge, who has eros for knowledge, has repeatedly associated the notion of *good for* with the ideas that will help him reach his knowledge. This repeated association, like the strong stick or the order of chairs, moves the seeing of the idea for what it is (seeing being) from *good for* to *good* simply: it becomes beautiful. Thus, for the

[132]Socrates's interaction with Phaedrus in Plato's *Phaedrus* can be read as just such a redirection of what Phaedrus considers good—from sexual pleasure to wisdom.

philosopher, the truth—seeing a being for what it is, unhidden (*alēthes*)—becomes an end in itself. Truth (*alētheia*) is beautiful (*kalos*).[133]

The development of new goods in the *polis* makes possible a life that is about more than utility. Through our interaction with others in the *polis* things that are not just good, but beautiful (*kalon*) arise. This makes a new, a higher life possible; a life directed at *civilized* goods. Thus, while the *polis* may come to be for the sake of mere life, "it exists for the sake of the good life," (Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b).

#### 3.3.1.5 The Social Formation of Being

##### 3.3.1.5.1 Constant Change and Perceiving With Others

Reality forms in a way that is substantially more complex than my sketch above. Perhaps the most significant omission from my person-in-the-state-of-nature example is the influence of other people on our understanding of the world. Beings, as parts of our reality, can and in one restricted sense must always be formed individually; but a primary factor influencing our understanding of almost everything is the opinion of others. One might even go so far as to describe the effect of other people's opinions as another sense that provides us with perception: we use others' understanding of the world as we use our eyes, ears, and sense of touch. Stated differently, the influence of others could be described as a way in which we use the mind's eye of other people in order to supplement what we see with our own mind's

[133]Plato confirms this understanding with Alcibiades's description of Socrates in the *Symposium* as being like silenuses dolls, 215b, which when broken open have images of the gods inside. Plato is having Alcibiades treat Socrates as Eros, making a speech in praise of him where the others praised the god. At the end of the dialogue, Socrates symbolizes eros.

eye—even to the extent that we sometimes privilege the opinions of others over the information provided by our own senses. This behavior is well studied in sociology and psychology. The classic experiment showed that when people were asked to give their opinion about which of a number of lines matched the length of other lines (after a number of other people gave made an obviously incorrect, yet identical, answer), one-third of people gave the same erroneous response.[134]

Plato did not write an individual speech for Socrates that specifies precisely the way in which people's understanding of the world is affected by the beliefs of others, so we do not have a received tradition of this theory the way we have the received understanding of the doctrine of the forms. However, various conversations he has Socrates engage in with others indirectly reveal Plato's appreciation of the way that being is influenced by peoples' opinions. While those from the *Republic* are more frequently discussed, at least as important are the conversations in the *Meno* and *Theaetetus*.

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato has the characters discuss different theories to explain knowledge that each fail because they lack a proper appreciation of the social aspect of knowledge. So while it is not discussed directly, it is present all the while because Plato is *showing* readers the very thing that is missing in the conversations he presents between Socrates and Theaetetus. He portrays them creating and modifying different

[134]The classic experiment was S.E. Asch. "Studies of independence and conformity: I. A minority of one against a unanimous majority," *Psychological Monographs*, 70 (1956), 1-70. For more on this topic, see Jens Rydgren, "Beliefs," in *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*, ed. Peter Hedstrom and Peter Bearman (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 4.4. Subsequent studies have suggested that others' opinions may effect not just the judgment people make, but the perception itself.

theories or accounts (*logoi*) of knowledge in their conversation with each other. They are shaping the world in which they live through conversation the same way an individual can shape the world in her internal conversation (thinking).

One way Plato provokes readers to consider the social aspect of being is by having Socrates present a version of Protagoras's understanding of knowledge that conspicuously lacks the social part of the theory—the component that is presented explicitly in Plato's *Protagoras*. There Protagoras describes the content of virtues being taught by parents to their children:

> Beginning from their earliest youth and continuing for so long as they are alive, [parents] both teach and admonish them. As soon as he understands the spoken word, nurse and mother and attendant and the father himself earnestly strive to see to it that the boy will be the best possible, teaching and demonstrating, with regard to every deed and speech, that one thing is just, another unjust; and that this is noble, that shameful; and that this is pious, that impious: "Do these things!" "Don't do those!" And if he willingly obeys, [fine], but if not, then they straighten him out with threats and blow just as if he were warped and bent wood, (*Protagoras* 325c-d).

In the *Protagoras*, the crucial role that other people's opinions play in forming one's understanding of reality is central to Protagoras's understanding of the world. If parents' assertion of an opinion is not enough to bring their children to treat that opinion as true, they reinforce their assertion with physical force, shaping their children's understanding of the world in they same way they might straighten a piece of wood.[135] In this way, knowledge is not simply perception but has substantial social

[135]This analogy warrants further thought. In the end, wood typically cannot be simply forced to be straight, but must be treated with water and slowly bent over time—a process Plato's Athenians were

contributions as well.

In the *Theaetetus*, the importance of the social component of *being* is stated explicitly, but because it is buried within the longest speech of the text, one in which Socrates is speaking as if he is Protagoras, it is easy to miss. Plato writes that "even though [perceptions] do come [to individuals], what appears would nonetheless not come about for each person alone—or if it has to be called "being," that it would not "be" for just the one to whom it appears," (166c). This means that even if perception is individual, the beings that we perceive have an existence that goes beyond the individual. Perception is individual, but being is social.

The passage I quoted earlier from Plato's *Theaetetus* bears repeating at this point because it warrants rereading by even careful readers and follows on the heels of Protagoras distinguishing between perception and being. The passage presents both an understanding of reality or *being* and also indicates something about how one's understanding of reality can be influenced by others. Socrates, purporting to make an argument the absent Protagoras would make, says the following:

> I declare that... each of us is a measure of the things that are and are not, and yet we differ one from another in thousands of ways for this very reason, that to one person some things are and appear, to another person others do. ...I say that very person is wise who, for anyone of us to whom bad things appear and are, makes them change over into appearing and being good things. . . .that was in what was said before, that to the one who's sick, what he eats appears and is bitter, while to the one who's healthy the opposite is and appears. Now there's no need to make either of them wiser, and one doesn't even have the power to, nor should one accuse the sick person of being lacking in understanding

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very familiar with from making triremes.

> because he has such an opinion, while the healthy one is wise because he has a different sort, but one should produce a change from one to the other, since that other is a better condition.... In this way in education too, one should produce a change from one condition that holds to a better one, but while a doctor produces a change with drugs, a sophist does so with speeches. One does not, however, make someone who's been having some false opinion afterward have some true opinion, for there is no power to have as opinions either things that are not, or other things besides those one experiences, and the latter are always true. But I suppose that when someone with a burdensome condition holding in his soul has opinions akin to his own condition, a serviceable condition would make him have different opinions, of that sort, which latter appearances some people, from inexperience, call true, but I call the one sort better than the other, but not at all truer (166d-167b, emphasis added).

Earlier I contended that, while this argument is subsequently rejected by Socrates and Theaetetus, I believe that Danielle Allen is right to imply that Plato supports this passage. I argue that the evidence for this view is, in a manner of speaking, in the *Theaetetus* itself. Socrates and Theaetetus try to understand what knowledge is, but the dialogue ostensibly ends without reaching an account of what knowledge is. While it is true that the character of Theaetetus does not reach an understanding of knowledge and his various accounts are rejected by Socrates as empty, this does not mean that Plato fails to present an account of knowledge to his readers. Considering the text as a whole, a modified form of Protagoras's argument can make sense of the many partial truths put forward by Socrates and Theaetetus throughout the dialogue.[136]

The first key to understanding the dialogue as a whole is taking the passage

[136]Given the vigor with which Socrates made this argument—a vigor remarked on by Theodorus—it is not shocking that they key to the argument lies within. For an incorrect argument made with equal fervor one would need to point to Glaucon and Adeimantus's argument against justice (in order to urge the defense of justice) made at the beginning of book 2 of the *Republic*.

quoted above seriously, while also recognizing that it need not be a relativist position. To appreciate the text, readers cannot accept the Protagorean position without dealing with the criticism leveled at it by Socrates. He criticizes Protagoras's position, not because there is nothing to it but because, as stated, it appears to go too far. Socrates says, "the other things he has said are very pleasing to me, that what seems to each person also *is* that, but [why didn't he] say 'a pig is the measure of all things,' or a dog-faced baboon. . .?" (161c). Socrates tries to provoke Theaetetus to distinguish the position stated from complete relativism. He argues that if all there is to the theory is that reality is simply what it appears to be to each person, then no one—not even Protagoras himself—can claim to understand the world better than anyone else. The world simply is (to each person) whatever she thinks it is. But Protagoras believes he has a superior understanding of the world; so either he is wrong or there is something more to the position. What readers need to search for is a deeper, more complete understanding of the matter.

For there to be something true outside of what seems true to an individual, there must be something that is not simply relativistic. This is possible because of the substantial inertia of our understanding of the world caused by the presence of other human beings (and their opinions, traditions, customs, etc.). Human beings are never individuals simply—no matter how much they might wish to be—they are always in some respect part of the others around them. In particular, people think and believe together. This does not rule out what we recognize as acts of independence or individualism, where a person stands on what she believes in defiance of what others

believe, such as Weber's famous incantation of Luther, "Here I stand, I can do no other," but it does entail that even such acts have their roots in discourse with others.[137] In short, it is our political or social nature that ultimately undermines a simply relativist position. Readers can see that Plato has woven this position through the *Theaetetus* by considering the other theories that do not quite work and noticing how an understanding of the social component of being resolves those problems.[138]

Consider the Heraclitean root of the Protagorean position. Theaetetus's contention that knowledge is perception draws on Heraclitus's understanding of the world that everything is in flux: beings undergo constant change. Plato elsewhere conveys this with the image that "No man ever steps in the same river twice."[139] Plato also has Socrates use this idea to interpret a poem by Simonides in the *Protagoras*, where he suggests that there is no such thing as *being* good, but only *becoming* good.[140] Theaetetus explores the theory that, because everything is always changing, there are no stable, persistent things or *beings* in the world and all people have is their perceptions of each thing. And people's perceptions—even of the same thing at the same time—often differ, therefore, knowledge is simply perception. Theaetetus and Socrates end up rejecting this view because they note that people recognize things such a thing as misperception and false opinions, for example the

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[137]Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures*, "Politics as a Vocation," (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2004), 92.

[138]Plato has Socrates call readers attention to the need for someone to defend the very argument Socrates and Theaetetus are attacking "if [Protagoras] were alive. . . he would be fighting off the danger [to the argument]; but here we are, flinging mud on the orphan (argument) itself. . . . We're in danger of having to come to its aid ourselves, for the sake of what is just," (164e).

[139]Cratylus 402a.

[140]See chapter 2, section 1, above.

perceptions of people who are dreaming or the opinions of those who are insane (158a-b).[141]

From the hypotheses of constant change and Protagorean position on truth, Theaetetus makes the too-narrow conclusion that knowledge is simply perception. I remark that people do not have their own perceptions only, but the perceptions of others shared as others' opinions as well. We use other people's opinions as a supplement to our own perceptions. It is not unusual to hear someone say, "Is it hot in here or is it just me?" Such a phrase reveals a desire to add others' opinions to one's perception of the world, as well as a readiness to reject one's own perceptions in favor of others'.

Along similar lines, Socrates and Theaetetus recognize experts are often right and should be trusted over an individual's perception; for example, a musician should be trusted over a non-musician in determining whether a sound is dissonant or consonant (178d). If knowledge were simply perception, then there could not be any mistaken perceptions because each person simply has his own perceptions and they are true for him. Therefore, Theaetetus and Socrates reject the theory of constant change and that knowledge is merely perception because it cannot seem to make sense of false perceptions.[142] Yet, once we consider that people use others' perceptions to

[141]Socrates describes himself with the image of a midwife who will judge the theory that Theaetetus puts forward as true or false, the way a midwife might announce that a child is healthy or stillborn (150a-51e). However, it is not clear that the theory of constant change has a chance of passing this test; since a primary criteria Socrates uses is the principle of non-contradiction (e.g. *Gorgias* 481c-82-c), and when the thing perceived and the person perceiving are both changing, Socrates's test may ensure failure.

[142] I'm presenting a simplified version of their conversation. The details are more complex; for example, the also reject

supplement their own—or become part of their own perceptions—we can imagine that they would give priority to perceptions or opinions of others, especially of those who appear to have more experience perceiving certain things or who have a sense that is more sensitive in some respect, such as a friend who often seems to hear very well sounds that we barely hear or who regularly smells certain smells before we notice them.

#### 3.3.1.5.2 Thinking with Others

With this in mind, recall above where I argued that in the *Republic* Socrates explains how reality forms as a consequence of our analysis of things. When we examine one thing, we suppose others, acting as if they are true for the purposes of our analysis. If it is through thinking that we form and give greater detail to our world, then it is crucial for us to recognize that a substantial portion of this thinking occurs in our interaction with others. Our conversations with others are a way in which we think *with* them. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates describes thinking as follows:

> Speech that the soul itself goes through with itself . . . when it's thinking the soul is doing nothing other than conversing, asking itself questions and answering them itself, and affirming and denying. But whenever it has made a determination, whether more slowly or with a quicker leap, and it asserts the same thing from that point on and is not divided, we set that down as its opinion. So I at least call forming opinion talking, and opinion a statement that's been made, though not to anyone else or with sound, but in silence to oneself (189e-190a).

This section in the *Theaetetus* is just one of many places where Plato has Socrates

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Protagoras's argument based on a fallacious argument about sight and knowledge (163e-164d).

describe thinking as a conversation with oneself or make a comparison between discussing something with others and thinking. Another prominent instance is *Gorgias* 481c-82c where Socrates emphasized the need for the different voices within himself to reach agreement.[143] Here, Socrates is keen to draw attention to the way thinking is similar to a conversation, so he stresses that it is a conversation that takes place in one's head and in silence. But his way of distinguishing conversation and thought does nothing to detract from his main point that there are great similarities between thinking done alone and conversations with others—indeed, it is because of these similarities that Socrates makes the comparison.

Dwelling on that similarity can help us see that both thinking and conversations help form the reality of the world in which we live. Our conversations with other people are a way in which we *think with* others. Just as our individual thinking relies on suppositions that become treated as real—and in a sense are more real than other things we examine because everything else we determine relies on them being true—our *thinking with others* also relies on suppositions about the world that presume certain things to be true. What holds for my person-in-the-state-of-nature, the conversation in her head, is equally true for people in groups, the conversations people share with each other. When we think in conversation with others, we (as a group) suppose some things in order to discuss others. Plato draws readers' attention to this aspect of conversation in an exchange between Socrates and

[143]Below, I discuss this passage, drawn on multiple times by Hannah Arendt. It would be easy to make a long list of other places where Socrates treats conversation as thought; I consider these at length in the next chapter and provide additional citations there.

Theaetetus:

> . . .doesn't it seem shameless for people who don't know knowledge to declare what sort of thing knowing is? But really Theaetetus, we've been infected for a long time with impure talk. For tens of thousands of times we've said "we recognize" and "we don't recognize," and "we know" and "we don't know," as though we understand one another in some way while still being ignorant of knowledge; and, if you please, even now at present we've again used "being ignorant" and understand," as though it's appropriate to use them if we're doing without knowledge. [Theaetetus responds:] But in what way will you have a conversation Socrates, if you abstain from these words? (196e-97a).

As people analyze one thing in conversation with each other, they suppose other things that populate their world with different ideas. Indeed, as Theaetetus points out, there would be no other way to talk (or think) without assuming something first. Thus, our conversations contribute to the beings that make up our reality, adding detail and enriching the world. Moreover, just as the *good* influences an individual's formation of beings,[144] the group good—in this case reaching an understanding of knowledge—plays a role in determining just what things are assumed.

This in turn illuminates a repeated Socratic triad—opinion, true or correct opinion, and knowledge—the analysis of which takes center stage at the end of the *Meno* (96d-100c) and the end of the *Theaetetus* (200e-210d). I resist the inclination to engage in a detailed reading to fully explicate both texts on this matter, first because attempting to do so would unduly lengthen this section, and second because a complete treatment of it would not be possible (something which I hope my sketch

[144]See Section 4 above.

will adumbrate). The highlights of both texts on this point are nevertheless revealing.

In addition to teaching readers about thinking, conversation shows us something about the relationship of opinion and knowledge—and ultimately being. Socrates describes thinking with the image of a conversation between multiple people, however in the case of thinking it is the soul conversing with itself "asking itself questions and answering them itself, and affirming and denying." According to this account, an opinion is that which is reached when the soul "asserts the same thing from that point on and is not divided." When we move from the level of the individual soul to a conversation among two or more people, an assertion reached by one person is still simply called an opinion. But what do we call the thing that held the role of opinion within the soul: what do we call that which two or more people state and from that point on are in agreement about?

It is clear that the answer cannot be knowledge because knowledge, according to the conversations in the *Meno* and the *Theaetetus*, requires more than assent. Knowledge, the most stable or lasting of the three (*Meno* 98a), is described in both texts as true opinion accompanied with a rational account—a *logos*.[145] Thus knowledge is constituted by an opinion that is explained. Yet this explanation of knowledge is satisfying only if it is not pressed further. It is always possible to question the details of the account itself. When the account of knowledge is tested, as it is in the *Theaetetus*, it becomes clear that any attempt to completely nail down what

[145]*Meno* 98a "calculation of cause" (*aitias logismō*); *Theaetetus* 202c (*meta logou*). Depending on the part of the conversation one privileges, there are variations, but they share the connection of true opinion with an account (*logon*).

knowledge is leads to an absurd conclusion. This is not simply because Socrates and Theaetetus make some bad arguments, which they do, but because our understanding of any one thing is necessarily connected to our understanding of many other things.[146] Thus, as detailed above in my section on being, Plato shows readers that knowledge is incomplete and that we can only ever have more or less knowledge of a thing, but never *know* it in any final sense.

What remains to be explained is the nexus between opinion and knowledge—what connects opinion and knowledge and how does it connect them? The best answer to this is the one paraded before readers by Plato in both texts: the conversations between Socrates and Meno on the one hand, and the conversation between Socrates and Theaetetus on the other.[147] In each text, the characters assert or suggest various opinions, some of which are accepted as true, while others are questioned and ultimately accepted or rejected. The opinions that no one present wishes to question further are deemed correct, indeed in the *Theaetetus* at times they are called "most true" or "most correct," suggesting degrees of truth or correctness.[148] Those opinions most thoroughly investigated, the correctness of which comes to be accounted for with a fully explanation or *logos* become recognized as knowledge—at

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[146]Wittgenstein recognized an important relationship between his understanding of language games and the account of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, which he references three times, even quoting it at length, *Philosophical Investigations:* The German Text, with a Revised English Translation 50th Anniversary Commemorative Edition (New York: Wiley, 2001), P1.46, 48, 518. Wittgenstein's references are all the more remarkable in light of his sparing references to others philosophers, only four of whom he he cites more than a single time (Frege, William James, Russell, and Augustine—the only other one he quotes at length).

[147]Other Platonic dialogues also provide further illustrations.

[148]E.g. Theaetetus 188c (alēthestata), 189c (orthotata).

least until someone, typically Socrates, later finds a way to question what appeared solid and unquestionable.

Thus correct opinion is an opinion that has been agreed upon by those present—implicitly or explicitly. Implicitly accepted opinions become suppositions or hypotheses upon which other knowledge is based (as described in my account above on "Being"). As an opinion is analyzed more fully, the account or *logos* for it becomes more developed until at some point it passes a threshold where those present are willing to say that they *know* it, and it crosses from the realm of opinion to that of knowledge.[149] Nothing prevents those present, or someone new who joins the conversation, from questioning something that was established as knowledge and drawing it back into the realm of opinion.

This understanding of correct opinion is confirmed by the example Plato has Socrates provide in the *Meno.* Socrates provokes us to consider what the difference is between knowing the way to a particular place, in this case Larissa, and merely having a correct opinion about the way there (97a). Someone who has the correct opinion about the way to Larissa can get there just as well as someone who knows the way.[150] However, when probed a bit further, we recognize that there are also degrees of

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[149]This is similar to Marcel Detienne's understanding of a time when truth was no longer determined by the sacred mouth but "the citizens as a whole 'create reality' (*krainei*). . . . Speech was no longer enmeshed in a symbolicoreligious network; it now became autonomous. It engered its own world in the interplay of a dialogue that created a particular kind of space; that is, an enclosure where one discourse confronted another. Through its political function, *logos* became an autonomous reality and obey its own laws. *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Zone Press, 1999) 105.

[150]The Greek for *way* is *hodos*, which can mean way, path, or road. While taking Socrates to mean *road* would make the exercise more trivial, Plato may well have chosen an ambiguous word to provoke readers to consider the matter further.

correctness about the way there: there are better and worse ways to get to any particular place. What is considered correct is the way that the people under consideration agree upon. Alternatively, they may agree upon some good, such as the shortest way there, though even for this they must determine if they mean shortest in distance or shortest in time (which might then mean the easiest way there, but not the shortest distance). From this standpoint, we can see that in lieu of simply agreeing upon which way is the correct way to Larissa, people could agree upon a standard of goodness (shortness, easiness, etc.) that is used to measure correctness. Therefore Socrates's example draws our attention to the manner in which true opinion (and ultimately knowledge) depend in substantial part on agreement. Moreover, the path to Larissa may depend on how many people follow it; as more people follow the same path, the brush and weeds crushed underfoot, making the path the official road or path whether it is actually the shortest or easiest path or not. And just as someone individuals' exercise greater influence over which opinion becomes accepted, heavier or broader individuals will tend to exert a greater force in making the path they take to becomes *the* path.

For that matter, the incompleteness of knowledge even appears alluded to because the example Plato chose, Larissa, was the name for a number of cities in ancient Greece, as well as simply meaning citadel or fortress.[151] The key point here is that the opinions of others play a key role in determining what counts as correct

[151]Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon.

opinion or knowledge.

Toward the end of the *Theaetetus*, Socrates contends that true opinion cannot be knowledge because rhetoricians and lawyers persuade people to have an opinion about something, such as a robbery, that they did not see and the only way to know about these things is to *see* them (201c). This is very close to the argument he earlier rejected: that perception is knowledge. With the more complete version of Protagoras's each "human being is the measure of all things" argument, we can now suggest a different answer to Socrates. Truth and knowledge are, in substantial part, formed socially. To some degree, whatever the jurors are persuaded of *becomes* the true opinion. To have knowledge of that event, we must have that opinion along with an account of how that opinion is true—the way in which it is connected to the other things we accept as true.

Typically reality is formed by a combination of our perceptions combined with our thinking about our perceptions. Those perceptions extend to what we see through others' minds' eyes. In the case of a trial, the jurors had no perception themselves, so the contributions to their reality are only what they are shown and they are told about an event combined with the thinking they do about it.

The being of anything is engendered by the interactions between people. This idea is true of simple objects, like a watch, and of more abstract notions, such as justice. Socrates seems more aware of this than his interlocutors in the *Republic* when he makes a remark that it is now clear is poignant with meaning: "If we could watch a city coming to be in theory, wouldn't' we also see its justice coming to be, and its

injustice as well?" (369a). It is not simply that thinking about constructing a city from nothing helps one peer into the meaning of justice, it is also that in the very *coming to be* of a city is it possible for justice to come to be. The being of things develops through the interactions of people.

Contrary to what many people may believe, this way of understanding the world is neither a modern nor a post-modern understanding (though the much greater number of people who understand the world in this way may be unique to our times). In the *Theaetetus*, we can see that Plato entertained this way of seeing the world and he has Socrates provoke others to see it as well. In the end, being and reality are things which we engage in a struggle over, something that is contested. As Socrates puts it, "isn't it possible for us others to become judges of your judgment. . . do thousands of people on each occasion who hold opposite opinions do battle with you regarding you as judging and believing false things?" (170d-e). These struggles take place not only in the courtroom, but in our daily lives as well. The existence of so-called *culture wars* is not new. Plato attempted to influence the polity in which he lived through his writing both with the images Danielle Allen describes, but even more so by shaping the beings that form the reality in which people live.[152]

#### 3.3.1.5.3 The One and the Many: Multitudes within Every Individual

Above, I mentioned that people are not simply individuals because traditions,

[152]Plato provides readers a sense of the importance he attaches to rhetoric and swaying people's opinion in this fight over truth at the beginning of the *Gorgias* which he begins with the words "war and battle." Yet we also immediately see Socrates's immediate (successful) attempt to change what Callicles's fighting metaphor to one for a festival or feasting 447a.

customs, as well as other people's opinions and behavior affect us; and I have started to elaborate on how other people change the *beings* in our world. Understanding thinking as conversation, on the one hand, and conversation as thinking on the other, opens us to seeing another way in which we are not simply individuals. The conversations that go on within our heads—our thinking—grow out of our conversations with others (not within out heads). Indeed as Plato depicts, someone dead can become part of our conversation in our head or with others, just as Protagoras took part in the conversation between Socrates and Theaetetus.

As part of our own thinking, we introduce the thoughts and opinions we image others would have. It is never that person himself, but our understanding or impression of that person and how he would think or speak if he were here. Our understanding of what that person might say could be exactly what he would really say or it could be completely wrong (as Socrates notes at 166b). Of course, there is a sense in which this other voice, even if we are attempting to predict what someone else would say, is now one of our own voices.

We can think in our heads from multiple positions, each our own for the moment, and we can think with the voices of multiple people (or at least our impressions of them). The notion that inside every individual is, in a sense, a multitude of people rises to the surface in the middle of the *Theaetetus*. While speaking in the voice of Protagoras, Socrates asks about the opinion of a hypothetical antagonist, “do you think he'll grant that his person is a 'him' and not a 'them', with

these becoming infinite. . . ?" (166c).[153] Since people are always changing, the person we identify as one individual is, in a sense, many. This is not true simply because being is always changing, but also because we have the capacity to think, which entails the capacity to have conversations within our minds (or souls) that contain multiple voices. There is a sense in which every character in a Platonic dialogue was *in* Plato himself. He makes them all speak to us. As a result, all these voices in Plato become voices in us as readers. Our memories of people and their opinions can play substantial roles in our thoughts or discussions. These multiple voices plays a substantial role in forming the beings that make up our reality.

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[153]Socrates and Nietzsche are not so far apart as they are typically believed to be, nor is Nietzsche as far from Plato as he would portray himself to be—though a large part of this is because Nietzsche sought to differentiate himself, not from Plato, but from the reception of Plato. Plato and Nietzsche share the understanding that the individual contains multitudes. Nietzsche's perspective is not far from Plato here. See Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration*, (U. of Illinois Press: 1975), 308: "Perspective, then, does not consist in asserting, with becoming pluralism, that I 'should' have or support a number of different points of view. It asserts, rather, that 'I' am a number of different ways of knowing and that there is no such entity as a permanent or privileged self. An order of rank is found in a 'grandiose alliance' such as Nietzsche, for instance, claim for himself in *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Ecce Homo*." A slightly different account recognizes the multiple voices within Nietzsche himself: ". . . the search for the authentic Nietzsche is misdirected. His indentity can be discovered only through an examination of his masks and their recurring features. His books do not speak with the same voice. This is not to abandon the attempt to characterize Nietzsche's thought, but merely to emphasize that any such characterization must be receptive to his various personae and their interaction. His writing must be approached as one would a musical composition of many voices in counterpoint. One observes dissonance and its resolution, with much oblique and contrary motion between the melodic parts. Such works do not preclude interpretation, they invite it. But the discovery of a harmonic them, or themes, is predicated on an appreciation of polyphony. To remain fiathful to Nietzsche's self-understanding, one must come to terms with his multiple souls. . ." Leslie Thiele, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of the Soul: A Study of Heroic Individualism*, (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), 62. Both Strong and Theile relate Nietzsche to Walt Witman's *Song of Myself*: "I contain multitudes. And Roger Bellin notes that the connection is one with a common root in Ralph Waldo Emerson, Roger Bellin, "Superman/Everyman," *The New Inquiry*, (2012), http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/supermaneveryman/. Emerson himself wrote that "Out of Plato come all things that are still written and debated among men of thought." *Representative Men*, "Plato; or, the Philosopher," (1850). The separation between Plato and Nietzsche comes more from the role that logic plays for them and the transformation of *truth* in Western history; see section 6 below and Chapter 4 on the Tyranny of Truth.

That our impression of a person and what he might say plays a role in constituting who we are helps explain why the American understanding of someone like Thomas Jefferson has been so important at various points in United States history. Leading up to the Civil War, there were fights over which side Jefferson would take in the debates over the restrictions or extension of slavery in the territories, as well as debates about his position on state's rights. For example, it was debated what he (and other framers) believed when they affirmed that "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal. . . ." Some argued that when they said "all men" they meant "all white men," while others contended that they acknowledged all men as political equals in certain respects.[154]

Jefferson's hypothetical opinion mattered in part because of the content of what he would say, but it also mattered because his opinion held considerable authority as well. What he thought (his opinion) affected what other people thought: his opinion had gained the weight of authority which gave it substantial effect over the being that people of the country believed in. Since that time, there have also been controversies over Jefferson's value as a person, over his morality. Those conflicts were not merely over the historical accuracy of who he was, they were also fought as a way of supporting or undermining the weight of his opinion: to determine how much authority he should have over the being in which the country believed.

Our conversations—those in our minds as well as those with each other—form

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[154]See, e.g., the Third Lincoln-Douglas Debate, September 15, 1858, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1953), vol. III, 445.

our reality; they shape the world in which we live. There is a sense in which no individual can have an existence completely independent of others. Even someone stranded on a deserted island would always carry with her the understanding of the world she developed before she was on her own as well as the voices of many of the different people she has known.

This brings into view the crucial importance of the central image of Plato's *Republic*. In order to learn about the soul of an individual, Socrates suggests that they examine the city as a whole and consider how the city is like a larger image of an individual soul (368d). While the city and the soul are not the same, the one cannot be understood without the other.[155] This reveals the true meaning of a polity. When the Greeks spoke of a city (*polis*), they did not mean the collection of buildings in the physical space that held the city, they meant the people of the city who interacted with each other regularly.[156] These were the people whose being was inextricably tied to theirs. Because of the way that reality arises from our interactions with others, there is a very real sense in which there cannot be an individual without the polity.

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato brings out the way that an individual can only exist as part of a polity. When Socrates and Theaetetus discuss the possibility that knowledge is true opinion with an articulation or account (*logon*) of that opinion,[157] he has them consider elements and composites that make up a whole (202b). He states that he has

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[155]See also *Phaedrus* 270c, where Socrates indicates that one cannot "thoroughly understand the nature of the soul, in a manner worthy of speech, without the nature of the whole."
[156]The collection of buildings were called a *polisma*; Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon.
[157]A definition put forward in the *Meno* as well, 98a.

heard it is impossible to know something about an element by itself:

> it's out of one's power to apply any other description, not even that it *is* or isn't, since that would already be connecting being or not-being with it, while one must not attach anything to it if one is going to speak about that thing itself alone. . . . it's impossible for any whatever of the primary things to be stated in an articulation. There's nothing for it other than to be named only, since it has only a name, but the things made of these are already composite, and just as they are intertwined, so too when their names are intertwined in the same way there has come to be an articulation, since the very being of an articulation is an intertwining of names. So in that way the elements are inarticulable and unknowable, though they're perceptible, but the compounds are knowable and speakable and capable of being held in a true opinion (202a-b).

This applies also to individual people. They have no meaningful existence completely by themselves, but only gain meaning and being by the way in which they intertwine with others Parts only make sense in the context of some whole

Socrates of the *Republic* suggests his companions consider why justice is important to a good polity, not simply because they will learn something about why it might also be good for the individual (as a miniature version of the city) to choose justice for himself also. He also suggests they consider justice in the city because in doing so they will start to see the many ways in which people share life and reality with each other to such a great degree that choosing to be unjust to another, in certain respects, results in harm to oneself.

In this understanding we also reach a deeper understanding of Socrates's decision not to flee Athens after he is sentenced to death. To leave the city he has lived in his whole life—the one in which he has spent his life having conversations—would, in a sense, amount to death anyway. It is not only that he has made an

agreement he did not want to break.[158]

While we as individuals can never really have existence outside of the polity that helps form us, it is also the case that the polity itself—the collection of people—exists as a being of sorts. Thus it is not nonsensical for someone to ask, "What will the country say?" or "What do the American people think?" The voices of a people may often be divided, but so are the voices within an individual's head. Plato connects this notion of a being composed of other beings in the *Theaetetus* as well, having Socrates connect this idea to the theory of constant change: ". . .we declare that all things are in motion and that whatever seems so also is that way, both for each private person *and for each city*" (168b emphasis mine). In addition to each person having an understanding of reality, each polity too has a collective understanding of the world.

Therefore one could say that there is a truth for each person as well as a truth for each group. The truth is simply the opinion *accepted by* (or no longer contested by) a particular person or group. Recall Socrates's remark, in describing thinking, that "whenever [the soul] has made a determination, whether more slowly or with a quicker leap, and it asserts the same thing from that point on and is not divided, we set that down as its opinion," (*Theaetetus* 190a). Knowledge of that truth consists in the accepted opinion plus an account (*logos*) or explanation of that opinion—a story that connects it to the other things that people know and accept. Thus there are truths for particular groups of people. In the *Apology*, Socrates recognizes that Aristophanes's

[158]The two are not entirely separate issue. Breaking an agreement, in addition to ending the contract also changes the person who made the agreement and then broke it.

portrayal of him in the *Clouds* has become the truth for the Athenians: "This [slander] is the truth *for you*, men of Athens," (23e); the opinion of Socrates as one who corrupts the youth, along with Aristophanes's *logos* explaining how Socrates corrupts them has become accepted opinion in Athens. There remains the difficulty (which will be explored in the next section) that it is very difficult to ensure that the various opinions we accept along with our accounts of them mesh well—that they do not end up being inconsistent with each other.

This understanding of truth and being entails, among other things, that not everything need be physical to be real. In particular, there is a sense in which the city in speech of Plato's *Republic* comes into being in their discussion and continues to exist to this day. While it has changed much over time, from the city in speech to the republic of letters to the ambiguous state in which it exists today, it still has its citizens and its guardians.[159]

It is worthwhile to pause for a moment and acknowledge that Plato's texts produce the fruit from which an energetic reader can harvest an understanding of being that incorporates (1) the different perspectives of different individuals, (2) an understanding of being and the world as a whole as undergoing constant change, and (3) a substantial social component to the understanding and shaping of being. Combined together, this understanding of the world recommends against both tyranny and cruelty. Any act of cruelty has a negative effect on both the victim and the

[159]Thus in Plato's *Republic* we find ensouled together the idea of constant change and the idea of immortality (a sort of changelessness, something that can be envisioned as a river).

perpetrator. Because each individual is always changing and is effected by the actions of others as well as his own actions, any harm inflicted on others becomes part of the future being of that individual.[160]

During the course of this section, I have at several points commented that there is a sense in which *being* is always formed individually and reality is, in a certain restricted sense, true only for an individual. While there is a substantial component of social influence shaping any individual's reality, reality remains, to some degree, individual. Despite the enormous influence each of us has on how others understand the world, each person's world is formed by somewhat different influences from the outside (social) and different internal perceptions and conversations (individual thinking). Therefore, in the final analysis one could say that different people live in different realities.

#### 3.3.1.6 The Sun Too Makes Shadows: Truth, Logic, and Philosophy

Those scholars who accept a more traditional understanding of Plato might object that my portrayal of Plato's views are not merely wrong, but antithetical to his views; Plato is known for his view that truth and knowledge are not subject to the influence of people's opinions no matter how prestigious or widespread those views might be—indeed Plato's understanding of being is that it is permanent and unchanging: this is the very essence of his theory of forms which Socrates states in

[160]This is demonstrated in Socrates's argument against Polus's love of tyranny in the *Gorgias* and Socrates description of constant change in the polity and reasons to abhor tyranny in the *Republic*, which I discuss at length in the next chapter.

Book 6 of the *Republic*. While many who hold such a view arrive at it due to an unsophisticated reading of Plato,[161] there is nevertheless something to this argument. Plato's character of Socrates makes numerous arguments for one truth versus another. One of the most prominent is when he argues in his own defense, explaining that he is telling the truth and those who have argued against him have told lies and slander (*Apology* 17a, 18d, 34b). If he is arguing against the way others represent him, then he must believe that what they say is false and what he says is true, mustn't he? At the very least, it appears clear that he is no relativist.

Moreover, in multiple dialogues, Plato has Socrates argue that people who understand a specific subject better—the polity, the soul—may deserve a privileged position. The details of this argument vary depending on the dialogue, the most widely discussed is in Book Six of the *Republic* where the person who understands *being* and *the good* better than others and is said to be the proper person to pilot of the ship of state: the philosopher-king. Plato wrote similar accounts of a person who understands the soul better and thus should be trusted as a doctor of the soul (e.g. *Theaetetus*) or is capable of engaging in the true art of rhetoric (*Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*).[162] And there are accounts, such as that in the *Protagoras*, that suggest

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[161]This is not the place argue for a more sophisticated reading of Plato than the inherited set of 'Platonic Doctrines' typically relies on. I discuss a portion of how to read Plato in Chapter 1, but the issue itself is worthy of a fuller examination, some of which have now been published. Two nice examinations of how to read Plato are *Who Speaks for Plato?*, ed. Gerald A. Press (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefiled Publishers, Inc., 2000) and *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles L. Griswold Jr. (New York: Routledge, 1988).

[162]In the *Gorgias*, Socrates departs from his typical unassuming air and claims that he is one of "a few Athenians—so as not to say myself alone—[who puts] my hand to the true political art and I alone of the men of today practice politics," (521d).

someone with special knowledge of the soul is in the best position to educate people (314a) whereas no one can have knowledge of political matters except for the people as a whole (319b). Taken together, these accounts make a compelling (or at minimum a highly suggestive) case that Plato understands there being more to truth than simply agreement of people's various opinions.

In short, the question can be presented as follows. If one person understood human souls, the polity, or being better than others and became an expert in it, wouldn't it be beneficial to defer to that person's judgment? And yet at the same time, how could there be such a person if it is always the collection of people who form reality and truth and that truth is always changing?

Above I have argued that not only did Plato appreciate the way that being is, in part, formed through social interaction, it was one of the ways that he tried to influence it. Now I move to the other primary means of changing being: logic.

I contend that Plato presents an understanding of the world where *being*—despite it always depending ultimately on the opinions of others—it is nevertheless possible to limit the degree to which others can influence and change *being*. The world of being can be anchored with the concept of consistency. Consistency is an *addition* to the understanding of knowledge as an agreed upon opinion along with an account of that opinion prevalent in Platonic texts. Sometimes consistency is the focus of an account itself, as it is in the *Theaetetus* when Socrates explains thinking as conversation: "whenever [a soul] has made a determination, whether more slowly or with a quicker leap, and it asserts the same thing from that point on and is not divided,

we set that down as its opinion. So I at least call forming opinion talking, and opinion a statement that's been made, though not to anyone else or with sound, but in silence to oneself," (189e-190a emphasis mine). At other times, Plato merely works *consistency* into Socrates's manner of speaking: "what the most we can say [about knowledge] that would put us least in opposition to our own selves?" (200e).

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates explains his desire to maintain a position that is consistent. Some people provide one account (*logos*) about one opinion at one time and at a other times provide accounts (perhaps about other things) that—if the all the various threads of these accounts were combined—ultimately conflict with each other, either directly or when the various assumptions contained in each account along with their implications are fully worked out. On the other hand, philosophy sets itself apart by requiring that each account (*logos*) it provides always be consonant with all of its other accounts (482a). At the heart of this account is the principle of non-contradiction. While it may not initially seem like much of a restriction on the various accounts one can give to say that they must each be consistent the others, such a restriction places substantial (perhaps impossible)[163] restrictions on how *beings* can form because it adds the necessity that our reality never contain beings with accounts that are in conflict with each other in any direct way.

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[163]Consider e.g. Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorems. For Plato's influence on Gödel, see Rebecca Goldstein, *Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Gödel* (New York: Norton, 2006), 53-120. That Socrates rejected a "mathematicized philosophy, a philosophy that is strictly deductive in nature, a philosophy that promises certainty in all respect" or provides "comprehensive doctrines"see Paul Stein, *Socratic Rationalism and Political Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato's Phaedo* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 181.

Conspicuous in this account (*logos*) of philosophy and truth is that Socrates does not present the principle of non-contradiction as a necessity, but as a preference. It sets philosophy apart from other subjects as the one subject that always abides by the principle. The love of wisdom (philo-sophia) is the love of knowledge. In the view of Plato's Socrates, that means preferring a world in which different accounts of true opinions can coexist in harmony. The various accounts (*logoi*) must not conflict.

Perhaps the best passage of Plato portraying this position is in the *Gorgias*. Socrates, himself a lover of wisdom, suggests it is better to remain consistent with oneself. He states "I think. . . it is superior that my lyre be out of tune and dissonant. . . and that most human beings disagree with me and say contradictory things, rather than that I, being one man, should be discordant with myself and say contradictory things," (482b-c). Socrates does not go so far as to suggest that it is wrong or a false position to maintain positions that are in conflict with each other; he asserts the superiority of harmony to dissonance.

Armed with the principle of non-contradiction and a mind sufficiently adroit in deduction, a philosopher can play a greater role than others in forming the truth of beings that people in a polity accept; and thus in shaping reality. This works only insofar as people accept the principle of non-contradiction, but that is relatively easy to establish because rejecting it outright leads to what many see as chaos, and people generally do not consider a partial or limited acceptance of the principle.

To shape the world, philosophers use their understanding of being in reverse. Recall from above in section on "Being," where I described how in the process of

analyzing the world we inevitably (though often unconsciously) make suppositions that become hypotheses (in Greek, things set down) upon which the rest of our understanding depends.[164] Recognizing this, philosophers can develop a better understanding of being by noticing the suppositions our understanding of the world makes and considering which other suppositions we must make before we can make even those suppositions—that is, those which come logically prior to the first suppositions noticed—in order to eventually reach a first supposition or first principle. Socrates describes this process at the end of *Republic* book six, when he describes the intelligible section of the divided line:

> Then also understand that, by the other subsection of the intelligible, I mean that which reason [*logos*] itself grasps by the power of dialectic. It does not consider these hypotheses as first principles but truly as hypotheses—stepping stones to take off from, enabling it to reach the unhypothetical first principle of everything (511b).[165]

To make this more concrete, consider the example I used earlier where a person-in-the-state-of-nature sought to get fruit from a tree and considered which of two sticks to use as a tool. In comparing them, she notices that one is longer and one is firmer, and she supposes concepts of length and strength. The concepts of length and strength themselves suppose other things: the concept of equality and that there are before her two sticks and not simply one object connected by the dirt (between the two sticks). So those first suppositions can lead one to see further suppositions, in this case concepts of same and difference as well as one and many (part and whole).

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[164]See p.96 Being.
[165]Plato has Socrates give a similar account in *Phaedo* 99d-101a.

Philosophers consider these suppositions and attempt to recognize which suppositions must logically come prior to the others, as well as which must come first and be the *first principle*. Here my use of the word "must" is perhaps too strong because the relative priority of the various suppositions we make is not always clear and, as indicated above in my section "The Social Formation of Being," the relative priority may be in part determined by social forces, which could vary from one polity to another. Plato provides readers with a singular instance of Socrates choosing a first principle in the *Meno*. Having just abandoned his suggesting that learning is really just recollection (and by consequence his suggestion that the soul is immortal and learned everything before birth), Socrates makes a grand assertion:

> that by supposing one ought to inquire into things he doesn't know, we would be better and more manly and less lazy than if we should suppose either that it's impossible to discover those things that we don't know or that we ought not to inquire into them—about *this* I certainly would do battle, if I could, both in speech and in deed (86b).

Here Socrates stands ready to do battle for what he believes is the preferred first principle: that learning is possible—that fruitful inquiry is possible. To appreciate how one might choose a first principle, we must turn back to the divided line of the *Republic*.

In addition to working to see which principles must be logically prior to others, philosophers must also consider the effect various suppositions have on our understanding of the world. It makes no small difference whether one supposition or

another is taken as a polity's first principle.[166] Socrates describes this as follows (in the section immediately following my quote above the first principle above):

> Having grasped this principle, it (*logos*) reverses itself and, keeping hold of what follows from it, comes down to a conclusion without making use of anything visible at all, but only of forms themselves, moving on from forms to forms, and ending in forms (511b).[167]

Philosophers consider the logical implications of the various hypotheses people make in reaching an understanding of the world. Once they find a hypothesis that comes logically prior to others, they reverse the direction of their thought and consider what implications can be deduced from that first principle. In the *Meno*, Socrates appears to have considered that people could conceive of the world in two starkly different ways: one in which we believe that we can inquire about the world we live in and learn about it by investigating it, another where such learning is not possible. He does not state that either of the two is necessarily true; it is not a question of saying which of the two possibilities accurately describes the world. Instead he focuses on the *results* of believing in a world where learning is possible: people will be more courageous and less lazy (86b).

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[166]It is on this point that Leo Strauss distinguishes between the Ancients and the Moderns: the Ancients, in understanding the world, take their bearings from the high, which means the beautiful (*to kalon*) whereas the Moderns (starting with Machiavelli) take their bearings from the low, conceiving of the world negatively in terms of what people want to avoid. *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958), 250; *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953), 161-63. See also Catherine Zuckert and Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2008), 184.

[167]A similar account is provided in Plato's *Phaedo* where Socrates suggests that one should consider all the things that spring forth from a particular hypothesis "that is, whether in your view those things are consonant or dissonant with one antoher. And should you have to give an account of that hypothesis itself, you'd give it in just the same way, by hypothesizing in turn another hypothesis, whichever of the higher ones appeared best, until you came to something sufficient," (101d-e).

Before moving on, I should remark that I have only scratched the surface of the way that a deep understanding of logic combined with the formation of being would make it possible for someone to reconceive the world. The *Republic* itself only touches on the matter and recognizes the enormity of a full appreciation of it. Responding to Socrates's comment (quote just above), Glaucon exclaims "you're speaking of an enormous task," (511c). The full scope of what is required to attempt such a task is adumbrated by the outline of education that would be necessary to prepare someone to do it, which follows in the next section of the *Republic* (514-540). Even the philosopher-king, who is culled out from successive collections of the best students, is not fully prepared to lead until his or her[168] education is completed at age 50.

In other texts, Plato provides more details into how speech can shape being with logic. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates provides a sketch of how dialectic is used to first comprehend "things dispersed in many places to lead them into one *idea*," (265d). Socrates indicates that the technique does not of necessity produce the best possible answer, but only an answer; it can speak "well or badly," but either way articulates something "distinct" and "in agreement with itself." Then the process reverses direction and considers the best way to divide things "to cut apart by forms, according to where the joints have naturally grown, and not to endeavor to shatter any part, in the manner of a bad butcher," (265e). Dialectic alters the way we understand the world by

[168]Socrates is careful to include women as potential philosopher-kings, 540c.

changing the lines that divide one concept from another. Plato provides substantially more details of how logic can be used to separate and combine concepts in the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, where he demonstrates the matter for readers by having the Stranger engage in elaborate examples. A full account of the matter is beyond the scope of this book. The Socrates of the *Phaedrus* indicates that someone who has mastered this dialectical ability is like a god, "I. . . am a lover of these dividings apart and bringings together, so that I may be capable of speaking and thinking. And if I consider someone else to have the power to see the things that have naturally grown into one and toward many, I pursue this man [as if he were a god]," (266b) and he likewise compares the stranger of the *Sophist* and *Statesman* to a god (216b).

To completely reform an entire polity in short order would be impossible or would require more extreme steps than practically desirable. It would necessitate the expulsion from the polity of everyone over 10 and the education of everyone else, as indicated in the *Republic* (541a). Plato indicates that Socrates and his companions are not serious about actually pursuing such a scheme. He has Socrates preface many of his remarks about this polity in speech by noting how ridiculous it will sounds and Glaucon concludes their discussion by noting that "you've described well how it *would* come into being, *if it ever did*," (541b). Socrates engages in this discussion in order to bring to light something about the nature of the human soul—indeed the polity itself is explored primarily as a means of understanding the soul better—and I have explained above that it is crucial to understand the way in which any person is necessarily more

than an individual simply.[169]

Despite the impracticability of wholesale reform, Plato himself provides us with a much more reasonable option, the one that is the focal point of most of the dialogues: having conversations with people. This alternative is the one chosen explicitly by Socrates himself at the very beginning of the *Republic*, something too many readers neglect. When confronted with the threat of force, Socrates eschews physical forces and suggests that he be given a chance to persuade those who oppose him; and in his political discussion of justice, he continues to engage in persuasion rather than force for the remainder of the text—his party neglecting to attend the festival in favor of continuing their conversation well into the night.

Plato improves on the conversations of the historical Socrates. First he expands their reach by preserving and spreading them through writing. This difference in means also provides an additional measure of security compared to Socrates who was ultimately executed for his conversations. Never speaking in his own name, Plato instead writes the conversations of other people in arguably historical settings.

More importantly, Plato presents not conversations merely, but exchanges carefully crafted with an understanding of dialectic and the social component of being

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[169]Nevertheless, the context in which these matters are discussed has not prevented people from suggesting that Plato himself meant these hypothetical remarks by Socrates to be implemented in practice. For a detailed account of the *Republic* as parody, see Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, (New York: Basic Books, 1968), Interpretive Essay 307-436. For the most notorious account of taking Socrates literally, see Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, (Milton Park: Routledge, 1966) 101, 198.

to change the way that people think. In discussing rhetoric in the *Phaedrus* , Socrates explains that someone properly called a philosopher will craft speeches with an thorough understanding of the human soul (270e, 271d, 278d). And in the *Gorgias,* Socrates states that there is a good form of rhetoric and a "true political art" which he alone currently practices (503b; 521d). Ancient tradition claims Plato started as a playwright and then burnt all his plays after encountering Socrates;[170] and a plausible explanation is that, having encountered a type of speech that was different in kind, he determined to engaged in nothing else. Thus, instead of plays, we have his dialogues. But even if we accept this, there remains this question. Given that true and being substantially influenced by the opinion of others in society, what makes Socrates's rhetoric and political art amount to *true* rhetoric the true political art?

#### 3.3.1.7 Good Rhetoric and the True Political Art

The logical implications of the rule of non-contradiction are merely part of the way we understand the world, one the is incomplete. One must also appreciate the social aspect of being. Ultimately, in attempting to understand being, one is also trying to understand the human soul. To understand an particular human being, we must gather together the collected understandings of being stored in that person's mind (or soul).[171] The various ways in which impressions and understandings have been formed or stored in any particular individual over even just the early part of his life is

[170]Diogenes Laertius, Lives of Eminent Philosophers, 3.4.
[171]Often the better word to translate the Greek *psychē* is mind; consider for example Socrates discussion of memories being like imprints on wax of our souls, *Theaetetus* 191c, where contemporary speakers of English would use the word mind.

open to many elements of chance. These collected understandings could have been formed in many other ways (driven by different initial goods), and they in turn would have led to different hypotheses about the world, which would again lead to the development of other goods. The main factor providing widely-shared understandings of the world is the social component of being itself—that people use others' opinion much like they use their own sense of perception.

As I explained above, in "above," an individual's good can change—indeed it is common for one good to transform into another the way someone's preference for the arrangement of chairs in a room to allow one to quickly walk through it to can lead to a preference for organization more generally or the way Diotima of the *Symposium* describes someone who initially focuses on sexual pleasure ultimately preferring wisdom. And in Chapter 2, I suggested that Socrates's discussion of pleasure reveals his belief that not all preferences are equal. In particular it is possible that a person's greatest good—what drives that person forward and holds out the promise of satisfaction—might lead to a painful existence. While many members of an enlightened liberal polity would shrink from judging a person's preferences, there some cases that the vast majority of people would still agree about. Consider the case of a heroin addict who pursues the immediate good (for him) of obtaining more heroin at the cost of all other goods—not only family, morality, and other arguably higher goods but—even at the expense of being in a position to obtain more heroin in the future. Such a person is in conflict with himself; the good to which he gives priory subverts the attainment of his other goods, even more of the same good in the

relatively near future.

This raises the possibility that there are better and worse ways to understand the world or that there are better or worse combinations of understandings and goods for a person to have. This does not mean there is a best way to live or a true *summum bonum*, only that there are some goods or combinations of goods that lead to problems. That is, there can be clearly bad ways of life even if there are not best ways of life. This does not mean that way of living would appear bad to the person with a particular good—indeed one anticipates that the heroin addict's way of life frequently does not appear bad to him, which is precisely part of the problem. Nevertheless, in many cases it may be possible to see a system of ideas (understandings of beings) and goods that contain strong internal conflicts that would lead to a painful existence. If this is the case, then it may be possible to avoid some bad educations as well as to cure some people who have already developed a system with many internal contradictions.

So far, this position is similar to that elaborated as the position of Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*: "to the one who's sick, what he eats appears and is bitter, while to the one who's healthy the opposite is and appears," and "when someone with a burdensome condition holding in his soul has opinions akin to his own condition, a serviceable condition would make him have different opinions," (166e-167b). But while Protagoras is willing to call one condition worse and another better, he disputes the notion that one person's understanding can be called *true* and that that person is *wise*: "Now there's no need to make either of them wiser, and one doesn't even have the power to, nor should one accuse the sick person of being lacking in understanding

because he has such an opinion, while the healthy one is wise." Instead he claims that "some people, from inexperience, call [one opinion] true, but I call the one sort better than the other, but not at all truer," (166e-167b).

In contrast, Plato's Socrates is willing to call one opinion *true* and others false; and while he repeatedly refrains from calling individuals (other than gods) *wise*, he is willing to call one a lover of wisdom (*Phaedrus* 278d, *Theaetetus* 175e). The only individual human wisdom he seems to recognize is knowledge of ignorance "I am likely to be a little wiser than [another] in this very thing: that whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know," (*Apology* 21c). It is not possible to be wise in the final analysis because one can never form a system of understanding all beings that is complete because it will always make suppositions that cannot be supported. Nevertheless, it is possible to seek to keep understanding better the beings we accept in our interaction with others—those we call true.

This position that Plato reveals to readers through Socrates and the other characters of his dialogues is notably not a relativist position. Plato holds before readers a way to amend Protagoras's view by adding to it the social component of being. No individual lives in isolation; the opinions of others affect one's own opinions and ultimately the being that people believe in. Since this is, in the final analysis, inescapable, there are truths for groups of people; and what those truths, or accepted opinions, are changes whether or not seeking a particular human good necessarily leads to conflict or not. People's goods affect each other and change what is ultimately best for any individual. Protagoras's view looks at people myopically, in

isolation, whereas Socrates's considers them as a polity.[172] Consequently, while Socrates avoids calling individual human beings *wise*, he is willing to call a city wise, as well as its citizens as a group (*Republic* 428b; *Protagoras* 319b).

The widely accepted beliefs of people in a polity when tied to accounts (*logoi*) explaining the beliefs endows those beliefs with an inertia that makes them, while not permanent, stable. This stability makes claims for truth possible despite the ever changing nature of being. Other people's views—the opinions they accept—help to fix facts, at least from the individual's point of view. At the same time, inconsistencies in the various accounts of beings leads to instability. Consequently, the philosopher in his love of wisdom longs for the consistency that allows accounts to remain stable together: to be coherent.

Individuals' understanding of the world will recurrently come into contact with their (1) other understandings of different beings in the world as well as (2) the opinions of others in that society. While they do not need to agree with those opinions, individuals need an understanding of the world that can, to some degree, harmonize with those opinions. For an individual to be healthy means for her to have a certain minimum coherence among her various beliefs, as well as a certain amount of harmony with the views of others in her polity. Take something as simple as a wrist watch. Different people can understand differently what it means to have a good watch—for one it might be large with Arabic numerals for another it might be ornate

[172]Recall that in the *Protagoras*, Socrates is compared to Prometheus, who exercises forethought, whereas Protagoras is compared to Epimetheus: afterthought.

with Roman numeral—but if it fails to keep the time, it is no longer a good watch (it might be a good piece of jewelry, but not a watch). In this way, people can minimize internal contradictions of their beliefs and conflicts with others. This amendment to Protagoras's account of being cures the flaw in Protagoras's relativist position.

The various remarks Plato's Socrates makes to distinguish good from bad rhetoric, especially in the *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias*, reveal that good rhetoric is systematic, requires a deep understanding of human beings, is tailored to specific human beings, and is directed to further the greatest good of those it is directed at. Of most interest for the present discussion is that good rhetoric is distinguished by considering not just the current good of any individual, but all the possible goods that person could have; and this necessitates considering the cost to that person of developing a new good.[173]

Where Socrates employs the analogy of a doctor most prominently—the one used by Protagoras in the *Theaetetus*—is precisely where he differentiates typical rhetoric from good rhetoric and claims that he alone practices the true political art.[174] In the *Gorgias,* Socrates distinguishes between various practices that flatter people as opposed to those arts that are directed at their true good (462d-463c; 464d-e, 467c). Giving people whatever tastes best to them, as a pastry chef might, is like flattery, whereas a doctor gives people what really is good for their health, even if that might only come about by causing the patient some pain. Rhetoric, as it is typically used, is

[173]See Chapter 2, sections 2a. and 2b.
[174]Socrates all but calls himself such a doctor when he tells Polus "submit yourself in a nobly born manner to the argument as to a doctor, and answer. Say either yes or no to what I'm asking," 475d.

"the counterpart of cookery in the soul," whereas good rhetoric would be like medicine (465d). Plato portrays Socrates as just such a doctor of the soul, administering bitter medicine to Polus, having Socrates order him to: "submit yourself in a nobly born manner to the argument as to a doctor, and answer. Say either yes or no to what I'm asking," (475d). It is not that Socrates wants Polus to be in pain, but that he sees that Polus's current beliefs, especially that ones that amount to believing that more power is better and so the life of the tyrant is best, are misguided and will ultimately bring Polus more misery than happiness. Thus, by the time Socrates engages the most tyrannical of his interlocutors, he proclaims, "I put my hand to the true political art and I alone of the men of today practice politics, inasmuch as it is not with a view to gratification that I speak the speeches that I speak on each occasion, but with a view to the best, not the most pleasant," (521e).

Good rhetoric forms part of the true political art because it attends to the true goods of individuals, rather than simply satisfying their present goods—their present desires. In practice this sometimes means administering bitter medicine in order to change the goods or preferences of the patients. Sometimes this means helping people see the way their various beliefs conflict with each other in ways that trap them in a sort of dissonance with themselves: in order to satisfy one end, they are forced to undermine their pursuit of others. At other times, this means guiding people to see the ways in which their own goods put them into inevitable conflict with those around them in ways that limit their ability to achieve their own collection of goods.

If we extend the analogy of the doctor, true rhetoric might also mean providing

people with speeches (*logoi*) that help them move from a dissonant set of understandings of the world and goods to one that has more internal and external harmony.

Being able to become such a doctor of the soul (or mind) would require such a great understanding of human beings, and the polity in which they live, that we can doubt whether it is truly possible. It would require a thorough understanding of the human soul, as well as the various types of human souls one is likely to encounter. Socrates explains the need for this in order to practice good rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*:

> Since the power of speech happens to be a leading of the soul, it is necessary that one who is going to be rhetorical know how many forms the soul has. Therefore there are so-and-so many [different types of souls], and of such and such a sort, from which such and such people come to be. And when these have been thus distinguished, then in turn there are so-and-so many forms of speeches, each of such a sort. Now then, people of such a sort are easily persuadable to such things by such speeches on account of this cause; people of another sort are difficult to persuade on account of these things. And the, having thought these things through competently and after that beholding them existing and being practiced in actions, one must be able to follow up on the perception quickly; otherwise he's as yet got nothing further than when formerly he attended to hear speeches. When not only can he say competently that such a person is persuaded by such speeches but also he's able to perceive distinctly that such a one is present and point out to himself that this is the person and this is the nature that the speeches formerly dealt with, a nature that in deed is now in his presence, to which he must apply these speeches in this way for the sake of persuasion about these matters; and when, already having all these things, he grasps in addition the critical times when one must speak and when one must refrain, and when, having learned what are the forms of all the speeches. . . he recognizes the opportune time and the unfit time for these; for him, then the art has been beautifully and perfectly accomplished, but before then, not (271d-272b).

It is no accident that this scene resembles the one from the *Republic* where Socrates

details how much knowledge of the beings one must have to appreciate first principles and see how different first principles affect how we conceive of the world (see page 141 above). There, Socrates's interlocutor responded "you're speaking of an enormous task," (511c). Here, Phaedrus responds "the work appears as no small matter," (272b). While the task appears nearly impossible, it is much the type of work that some contemporary psychiatrists or psychologists attempt.

Again, this doctoring does not have to mean forcing people to all have the same good, to pursue exclusively the good of the polity, or any particular *summum bonum*. That people with different understandings of the world and very different goods can nevertheless live together in harmony is not simply countenanced by Plato, but appears to be a necessity. The Socrates of the *Republic* recognizes a polyphony of primary goods in the different groups of citizens: pleasure for the merchants, honor for the auxiliaries and novice guardians, and wisdom for the potential leaders.[175] The argument Plato has Socrates make need not be an anti-pluralist position, so much as the position of a pluralist who is willing to moderate the most extreme form of pluralism to achieve greater harmony in the polity. The goal is not to determine people's goods for them so much as it is to guide them to goods that are good for them in the long view rather than myopically so, and to have the various goods of citizens harmonize with each other.

Each person's individual good is in some manner, at least indirectly, connected

[175]Contrary to what one might anticipate, the leaders themselves have the polity as their greatest good; it is a primary basis on which they are selected, 413c-414b.

to the good of the polity as a whole. First this is true because our individual understandings of the beings that populate our world are heavily influenced by each other. Second, no matter how independently we might try to live, the behavior of one person inevitably affects others, so the goods we pursue affect other people and their ability to pursue their goods. Consider the, perhaps overly simplified, example of a serial killer. For some reason, perhaps due in part to genetics but perhaps also in part due to the various parts of his education, he finds himself with a good that involves killing others. Such a good is likely to cause substantial internal tension with many of his other goods—this much is likely because he is surrounded by people who think very differently and they all influence his sense of what is good in many ways. However, even if such a good does not cause internal tension, it quickly will run into severe conflicts with other people's pursuit of their goods.

Socrates makes clear that such a person must be either cured or prevented from spreading their disease. In the *Republic*, Plato has him note that those whose "souls are incurably evil" should be put to death (410a). While in the *Gorgias* he considers the case of someone whose soul is knotted in such internal strife that he would not want to be saved if he were dying:

> if someone possessed by great and incurable sicknesses of the body has not drowned, this man is wretched not to have died and has received no benefit [from the boat pilot who has saved him from shipwreck]; it therefore cannot be that, if someone has many incurable sicknesses in what is held in higher honor than the body, the soul, this man should live and he the pilot will help him by saving him either from the sea or from a law court or from any other place whatsoever. Rather, he knows that it is not better for the degenerate human being to live, for he must necessarily live badly (512a-b).

Despite the way *being* is understood varies from person to person, the social component of being causes much of our understanding to be shared. Our goods need not always be shared, but they nevertheless must be able to coexist with the community of other goods pursued in the polity.

### 3.4 Conclusion

I began this chapter with an account of how Danielle Allen understands Plato to have participated in politics through his writing: her answer to the question *Why Plato Wrote?* She describes Plato using image as models or paradigms to help people visualize the world of ideas and shadow-images (*eidōla*) to teach correct beliefs to those who cannot understand the world of ideas. Philosophers who understand the world of ideas can leverage their knowledge by influencing others with well-informed shadow-images.

In this chapter I have added to that understanding of Plato by looking within the ideas which Plato has Socrates describe and explaining what it reveals about learning, knowledge, and being. Learning follows a process very similar to recollection[176] because both processes involve starting with an incomplete understanding of the world and filling in some of the details with assumptions and creating a reality in the process. The account or explanation of a correct opinion transforms true opinions into knowledge.

The key addition to Allen's account of Plato's means of influencing politics is

[176]Learning as recollection is thus what one might call another *eidōla* Plato uses to help us visualize metaphysics.

the way he employs his knowledge of *being* to change reality for his readers and the people they in turn influence. He compels people to question some of the suppositions they already hold about the word and thus clears the way for a new understanding, one that he often plants by encouraging people to make other assumptions, in part by the way he divides up the world and the beings in it. One of the most potent ways to change the world readers inhabit is by altering what they conceive of as good, for example transforming a love of justice into a love of wisdom *and* justice (as with Glaucon and Adeimantus in the *Republic*). Altering one's good not only changes what someone strives for, but also how she processes her perceptions of other things she experiences.

Plato's texts derive a considerable part of their potency from Plato's appreciation of the social component of being and logic. Plato has characters engage in conversations that (1) encourage certain suppositions, (2) divide the different beings of the world in ways that tend to change our understanding of it, and (3) guide our understanding of what is good to new ends that may serve us better. His conversations carefully consider the ways in which leading readers down one path of reasoning will tend to lead them to make certain assumptions, recognizing in advance just what the various assumptions one makes will tend to add up to when put together into a whole. At the same time, Plato takes advantage of the social influence that the voices of different characters will have on our understanding of the world: their opinions will supplement our perceptions—we think with others and even the characters in the dialogues become new voices in our heads that encourage us to think down particular

paths, as wells as for and against specific understandings of the world.

The particular paths Plato sends readers on, or the ones his character of Socrates sends interlocutors on, are not chosen at random or by whim, but give Plato a claim to practicing the true political art because they are designed to reduce the internal conflicts in our understandings of the world and various goods we can pursue, as well as harmonizing the various goods of different citizens to harmonize them with each other at the same time they harmonize the human being and citizen within each person.

In what most makes Plato a poetical philosopher, I perhaps differ with Allen a little. I believe it is not his images so much as his conversations. He takes conversations in his head and gives them life in his readers' heads, just as the rhapsode does in the *Ion*—or more accurately, what Homer does with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In doing this, he changes *being* in at least two ways. It is only by bringing his conversations to life that they can have the full social influence that a real conversation would make possible. Just as the stories in Homer took on a life in the minds of ancient Greeks that influenced the way they lived their lives—what they conceived of as good, what was worth striving for, what was true and what was false—Plato himself creates conversations that have continued to have a life in the minds of his readers, that changed their interactions with others, that influenced their political views of what was worth fighting for and what was not.

Now it is possible to see in a different light what I described in Chapter 2 as

"Harmonizing Conflict Through orientation toward *to kalon* in Plato's *Protagoras*." Above, I spoke of they way that there are many voices inside each individual (see section The One and the Many). Two of these voices are that of the individual human being and that of the citizen, a member of the polity. The individual's good is heavily influenced by the polity's understanding of what is admirable, noble, or beautiful: what is *to kalon*. At the same time, each person contains within herself an identity as a citizen; and that citizen's notion of the good is based on an understanding of the group's good, that is the polity's good as a whole. While it might seem that pursuing some particular pleasure is the best plan in the short-term, the need to harmonize the various competing understandings of good within oneself and with others in the polity play no small role in the results of pursuing one goal versus another. Consequently, someone who calculates well, will often recognize that it is in her best interest to alter her preferences so that her goods as human being and citizen harmonize with each other and so that neither of them conflict too violently with the goods of others in the polity. Focusing on the polity's understanding of *to kalon* has a tendency to bring about this harmony.

In the next chapter, I look at the key aspects of the conversations Plato transports readers into, explaining how Plato uses them to depict effective political education.

# Chapter 4

## Political Education: The Shaping of Polities in Conversation

> *"If we should watch a city coming into being in speech," I said, "would we also see its justice coming into being, and its injustice?"*
>
> —Plato, *Republic* 369a

### 4.1 Introduction

In the *Republic*, Plato shows Socrates engaging his companions in a conversation. He thinks with them and in sharing their thoughts they shape each other, becoming something different than they were when the dialogue began. The group of them, by their interaction with each other, constitute what might be called a polity in miniature.

Within this play, Plato depicts a group of friends, for even Thrasymachus is called a friend (498c), creating a polity. They intervene in the polity's natural development in an attempt to make it better.

These are the concerns of this chapter: how people through their interaction create a polity and what sort of intervention can make it better. These two concerns are inextricably intertwined.

### 4.2 The Being of People and the Being of Polities

In Book 8 of the *Republic*, Plato has the interlocutors discuss the principles that explain how the *being* of a polity is shaped. While typically unremarked on by

political theorists, Plato depicts a polity whose being develops very much in the manner of the individual I describe in the last chapter: along the lines Plato explores in the *Theaetetus* and *Republic* Book 6. The activity of a polity is driven by what it considers the highest good—honor in war for a timocracy, wealth for an oligarchy, freedom for a democracy, and pleasure for a tyranny. Just as with an individual, the polity's pursuit of a particular good shapes the way it changes, leading it to develop new goods, which, in turn, further alter its course of development.

This calls readers' attention to Socrates's consistent recognition of the Heraclitean position of constant change. Even here in the text most well-known for the theory of the forms, the most stable of beings, followed by a description of the ideal state, Plato's Socrates concedes that even this most stable of polities will change over time: "everything that comes into being must decay. Not even a constitution such as this will last for ever. It, too must face dissolution," (546a). Therefore Plato—even at his most ideal—recognizes that polities in particular are in constant flux.

While the received understanding of Plato tells us to believe that at least the various types or forms of polities are in some sense *unchanging*, even this understanding belies Socrates's actual description, which is much less definite or rigorous. Socrates first (at the end of Book 4) couches his discussion as being in terms of five types of soul "worth mentioning" (445c); thus he implies there are other types and that these five are chosen because of his immediate purpose. Shortly thereafter he claims what he will say is true both of the bad types of soul and of the polity, but he

makes his claim conditional on whether the ideal polity they have already described really is the correct kind: "And if indeed this is the correct kind, all the others—whether as city governments or as organizations of the individual soul—are bad and mistaken," (449a).

Scholars debate whether the ideal polity described in the *Republic* is really meant to be taken as an ideal or if it is instead useful as an example to draw other conclusions from.[177] While one might argue that the conditional part of the statement is not meant too strongly (that it is implied that they have managed to construct the best polity), Plato has Glaucon repeat the condition three books later when they resume the discussion of the types of polities at the beginning of Book 8: "you [Socrates] said that, *if this city was the right one*, the others were faulty," (emphasis mine 544a). Moreover, this comes on the heels of Glaucon pointing out that when Socrates made that statement at the beginning of Book 5, he had not yet provided all the details of the intervening books that made the ideal city fully the best: "even though, as it seems, you had a still finer city and man to tell us about," (543d). This questions from the start whether or not the conditional is satisfied.

The four types of polities Socrates discusses seem to be chosen merely for being the "ones for which we have names," (544c) but even this soon turns out not to

[177]Perhaps the most prominent account of the *Republic* as a parody is Allan Bloom's: *The Republic of Plato*, (New York: Basic Books, 1968), Interpretive Essay 307-436. See also, H.D. Rankin, "Laughter, Humor and Related Topics in Plato," *Classical et Medievalia* 28 (1967), 211, Victorino Tejera, *Plato's Dialogues One by One* (New York: Irvinton, 1984), 97. Diskin Clay argues along alternative, persuasive lines that Plato does not intend for readers to agree with the train of conversation in the *Republic*, "Reading the *Republic*" in *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles Griswold Jr. (University Park: Penn State Press, 2010) 23.

be true because Socrates can't think of a name for the Spartan type of polity, so he forced to coin the name *timocracy* for it (545b). Finally, Socrates also explicitly recognizes other types of polities, but claims they are somewhere between the ones he will discuss (544c-d). Therefore, not only are actual instances of polities always changing, but even their forms seem to be less precise or permanent than our received tradition of the Platonic forms would lead us to believe (one might ask whether the Spartan form of polity existed before Lycurgus). Both actual polities and the forms of polities possible appear to be in flux along with other beings.

Yet constant change also opens up the possibility of shaping a polity. The notion that we can intervene to guide the development of a polity is opened up after we learn about the principles that shape them. Early in Book 8, Socrates recognizes that the character of a polity is determined by the character of its people. He explains that a polity's constitution grows out of "the characters of the people who live in the cities governed by them," (544d). The dominant good of the citizens will become the dominant good of the polity. If the people are directed by love for honor and the primary way they can distinguish themselves is in war, then they will naturally form a timocracy and be a polity eager to go to war with others. If the people grow up with a love of freedom (*eleutheria*) and license (*eksousia*), they will tend to form a democracy and pursue different ends at different times according to their passing appetites (557b; 561c-d).

### 4.2.1 Regime Change

One immediate consequence of this understanding of polities is that "regime change" as it is typically understood today is not possible. To impose a *form* of government on a people is a futile effort. The form of the polity is ultimately determined by the character of the people and not the legal code or a set of constitutional principles, so even if one were to impose a legal code on a people, we would expect a different form of government will continue to rise out of the character of the people nonetheless. As Socrates indicates, it is the character of the people that will always "tip the scales, so to speak, and drag the rest along with them," (544d). This is not a principle added in Book 8, but one that underlay Socrates's discussion of how to bring about the ideal polity of Book 7: it is why the education of the guardians is so important and why establishing the ideal polity was said to necessitate expelling everyone over the age of 10 (540e-541a). Again, contrary to an overly-simplistic, traditional understanding of Plato, polities are not forms, but are composed of, or one might say constituted with, people.

As I have shown in chapters 2 and 3, the character of the people can be shaped, not only by historical forces, but by political forces. In Chapter 2, I endeavored to explain, through a close reading of the *Protagoras*, that Plato's text shows it is possible for individuals' preferences to be guided so that they can become better for them. While these preferences are difficult for any particular individual to alter herself—because she is driven by her current preferences rather than by what might be her ideal preferences—change is possible, especially once one has the awareness of the

alternative preferences and how they would improve one's life, though many people may need some outside assistance from a leader with this knowledge. In Chapter 3, I sought to look at the details of Plato's take on *being* and knowledge (understandings of the world) to appreciate how they are shaped or constituted. Here I connect and enlarge the discussion from the previous chapters to indicate how Plato saw these ideas applying to the polity at large.

### 4.2.2 Guiding Political Change

The polity changes because the people who constitute it themselves change. In the *Republic*, Socrates and his companions view this change through the lens of decay. A primary concern for any polity is how to persist in time, just as survival is a key concern for an individual. Socrates contends that not only do polities change, they tend to devolve over time. Within Book 8, Socrates's description of how polities devolve seems to accept the process as inevitable, but a more comprehensive understanding of Plato's thoughts on being, like that considered in my previous chapter, opens the possibility that such a process can be controlled. Even if not all change can be arrested, we might be able to direct or shape the flow of that change so as to guide it away from decay and toward growth. That our situation in the contemporary world is markedly different than the situation of *Republic* Book 8, which deals more with ideal types of polities, provides additional reason to suspect that a different outcome is possible. First, we might be working with mixed forms of polities instead of pure forms which might provide a force to counter the tendency to

decay.[178] Additionally, contemporary democracy differs substantially from the type of democracy Plato writes about.

The character of the government comes from the character of the people; the polity decays because the people who constitute it, especially those of greatest influence, no longer support that type of polity. The change in the people occurs when their pursuit of one good leads to an alteration in their being. For example, Socrates describes a timocracy transforming into an oligarchy because someone who is driven to gain honor is cheated of his military office, has his property confiscated, and his son, having no chance to satisfy his love of honor and humbled by poverty, seeks to accumulate wealth instead (553a-54b). To prevent the decay of a polity, one must harness the tools of political education to ensure that the goods of the people support the good of the polity.

While I touched on this issue in Chapter 2, now it is time to look at the art of political education presented by Plato in more detail. What Plato makes clear repeatedly in his numerous dialogues—and this is the closest we get to Plato speaking in his own name[179]—is that the *manner* in which education occurs is at least as important as the content. While investigations of education in Plato typically

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[178]Polybius, though he provides a very different account of the natural tendency of polities to decay, *Histories* 6.3-9, argues that it is by mixing different forms of government that Rome was successful in preventing the devolution Plato writes about, *Histories* 6.10-18.

[179]The possible exception are the letters attributed to Plato, but the genuineness of all of these are doubted, and while the Seventh Letter is more widely accepted as genuine, even it is consider spurious by many scholars. Malcolm Schofield, "Plato & Practical Politics," in *Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. Schofield & C. Rowe (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), 299-302; Julia Annas, "Classical Greek Philosophy," in *The Oxford History of Greece and the Hellenistic World*, ed. Boardman, Griffin, and Murry (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 285.

concentrate on the education of the guardians in the *Republic*, I examine the education that Plato depicts occurring in his dialogues.

## 4.3 Plato Demonstrating the Political Art

### 4.3.1 The Manner of Education

To appreciate Plato's insight to education, we must look to the examples he provides in his many dialogues: the conversations themselves. This means looking at the way in which Socrates interacts with other characters in Plato's dialogues, the content of their conversations and how they were conducted.

It is in our conversations that being comes into existence and is shaped. For the individual, these are foremost the conversations within one's head, which use input from the senses combined with the opinions of others, which are treated as equally good, sometimes more important, inputs.

In the polity, being comes into existence in our conversations with others. As I adumbrated from within the discussion of the social component of being in the last chapter, what makes a polity a polity (or a *polis* for the Greeks) is the collective understanding of the world. This is the understanding of being that starts out (and to some degree always remains) unique in each individual's mind and becomes shared, grows, and transforms through our interactions with each other. But at some point it becomes meaningful to talk about what *the country* thinks or pondering over what it should do. In some artificially technical sense, a country cannot *do* anything, it relies on people to do things in its name. Yet at a certain point it seems truer to say that the United States dropped the bomb than that Harry Truman did—or for that matter that

Paul Tibbets because it was from his plane, the *Enola Gay* that it fell—but we recognize that we speak more truly about reality when we say that the United States dropped it.

//vi It is no accident that Plato's Socrates, who asserts that he practices the true political art, is constantly engaging others in conversation. It is not simply his personality that drives him to it nor a penchant to meddle, it is his patriotism. That is why he announces at his trial that he makes his defense speech not "on my own behalf," but "on your [Athens's] behalf," cexplaining that "I have been careless of all my own things," and "for so many years now I have endured that the things of my family be uncared for" in order to "do your [Athens's] business, going to each of you privately," (*Apology* 30d-31b).

### 4.3.2 The Shared Quest for Understanding: Creating Being with Others

In his conversations with others, Socrates seeks to do, as part of a polity, what he does when thinking alone, form being through examining it and providing accounts of it. In the last chapter, I detailed my understanding of Plato's presentation of how thought and being develop for the individual by examining Socrates's account of thinking in the *Republic* and *Theaetetus* and comparing it with his discussion of rhetoric and the political art in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*. In this chapter, my focus shifts to how his conversations with others have a political effect. By altering people's understanding of the world in conversations, Socrates alters their character; and since the character of the polity is determined by the character of its people, he changes the

polity itself. But just how does Plato believe Socrates changed the polity in conversations? While (according to the last chapter) any conversation can affect someone's understanding of the world, what must one do if one has an idea of how the world could be better? What must take place in conversations to maximize the changes of changing the polity?

#### 4.3.2.1 Seeing Others' World with the Mind's Eye

Early in nearly every substantial conversation in a Platonic dialogue, Socrates attempts to understand how the world appears to his interlocutors. In the *Meno*, despite its abrupt start with the very first line being Meno asking Socrates if excellence is teachable, Socrates delays, denying he can provide a response, and then, on the second page, asks what Meno thinks virtue is (71d). Before he can begin a reasonable discussion about excellence, he needs to have a better sense of who Meno is and how he sees the world. Before asking Meno to detail his own thoughts on excellence, he seeds the conversation with stereotypes of the Athenians compared to the Thessalians (Meno's home), and specifically mentions Gorgias whom he suspects has influenced Meno since the two come from the same place (70d). This draws out of Meno the fact that he largely shares Gorgias's views and provokes him to elaborate on them.

Similarly we see Plato's Socrates gathering information on his interlocutors early in the *Lysis*. He first asks who they are, what they are doing, and who teaches them. After he sees Hippothales blush and recognizes that he is deep in love for one

of the others, he recognizes that he cannot understand Hippothales without also knowing how he sees the one he is in love with. The other boys tell Socrates that Hippothales is always writing poems about his love, but when Socrates inquires further he hones in on the details of Hippothales's mind: "I'm not asking to hear any of your verses. . . But I want the thought," (205a-b).

The pattern continues, for example in the *Phaedrus* (where Socrates asks about his visitor Lysias and then about the content of the speech he wrote), the *Republic* (where he asks Cephalus about old age), and the *Menexenus* (where he asks where Menexenus was, whether he intends to become involved in politics, and what the Council was doing), and other dialogues. The main exception is for in dialogues where Plato begins with Socrates already well involved in a conversation (e.g. *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, and *Sophist*).

Perhaps the telling example of Socrates's efforts to see through the mind of Protagoras. While Plato portrays him gathering information in his usual way from Hippocrates near the beginning of the dialogue, he encounters Protagoras in the middle of a lecture and does not have the same opportunity to query the man directly. While this might not be as much as a difficulty as it would with other people, Socrates has already met Protagoras since he arrived in Athens, and many of the teacher's view were widely known. Nonetheless, later in the dialogue it becomes crucial for Socrates to understand Protagoras better. But at this point Protagoras, wary of being trapped by Socrates at this point in the dialogue, avoids committing himself to a position on whether pleasure is good: "'Just as you always say, Socrates,'" he said, 'let's examine

it, and if the inquiry seems to be reasonable and the same thing appears to be both pleasant and good, we'll agree to it. But if not, then at that point we'll dispute it,'" (351e). For Socrates, this is an especially bad time to have Protagoras keep him at arm's length; they have spent most of the dialogue in contentious interaction and Socrates has just finished making an overture to have the two of them join in common inquiry.[180] Socrates explains himself and presses further so that he can understand enough about how Protagoras views the world (from behind the persona he has been holding up) that they can join in developing an understanding in common: "Having observed that you stand in regard to the good and the pleasant as you contend, I must say something like this: 'Come, now, Protagoras, uncover for me this aspect of your thought as well: how do you stand in regard to knowledge? Is your opinion about this too like that of the many human beings, or different?'" (352a-b).

#### 4.3.2.2 Beginning with Others' Assumptions

With the understanding of another person he gathers, Socrates typically begins his inquiries from the opinions or assumptions others bring with them: he starts from where they are. Perhaps the most conspicuous example is in the *Apology* where Socrates begins by noting that he has two sets of accusers, the ones who brought the case against him and the ones who have spread rumors about him for years. The rumors that have been spread about him is the opinion many people have accepted as

[180]See Chapter 2 where I discuss this exchange in more detail. The brief explantion is that Socrates just compared the two of them to Odysseus and Diomedes in the *Iliad* where the two men overcome a past dispute and join as partners in a reconnaissance mission, 348d; *Iliad* 10.224.

true, so he calls them his “dangerous accusers” and begins by addressing the rumors (18a-b).

While starting with others' assumptions may strike many of us as common sense, it is often not how people proceed in matters of politics. At least as common is starting with conclusions that 'ought' to be reached or with the speaker's own assumptions about politics, for example what it means to be a democracy. It is also a typical starting point for his interlocutors (e.g. Crito in *Crito* 44d-45c, Hippocrates in *Protagoras* 310d-311c, and Meno in *Meno* 71e-72a). Not everyone has the mental flexibility to see the world from so many different perspectives, but Socrates reaches out to see how others understand the world and then begins his conversations with them with their assumptions (see also, e.g., *Lysis* 207a-209e, *Theaetetus* 146c-48b, *Republic* 329d-331d, 368e-73e).

There is a nice example of this where Plato appears to go out of his way to show this to readers of the *Gorgias*. While Socrates speaks with Gorgias and Polus, some of the ways Socrates looks at the world appears so contrary to the assumptions Callicles makes that it provokes him to interrupt and ask if Socrates is serious or joking (481b). In response, Socrates acknowledges that things often look very different to different people and that it would be difficult for them to communicate if they could not begin by first finding something in common: “Callicles, if human beings did not have some feeling that was the same—some having one and others another—but if some one of us suffered some private feeling different from what the others feel, it would not be too easy to point out one's own affection to the other.”

Immediately after explaining this difficulty Plato shows us Socrates surmounted it by making an analogy between Callicles and himself: "I say this bearing in mind that you and I now happen to have suffered something that is the same: we are two lovers, each in love with two things—I with Alcibiades. . . and with philosophy, and you with. . . the Athenian people and the son of Pyrilampes," (481c-81e). From this common ground he explains his need to follow the principle of non-contradiction.

#### 4.3.2.3 Refutation: Elenchus and Aporia

While Socrates is well known for his elenchus or method of refutation, it is common for scholars to focus on it unduly.[181] Because many dialogues end ostensibly without reaching any conclusions or by reaching the conclusion that Socrates and his interlocutors do not know what they would need to know to understand something, it is common for people to claim that Plato simply wanted to prod people to think, to become more conscious of their views and the problems with their positions. I agree that is *part* of the reason Plato's Socrates refutes others' positions and many dialogues end with an little more progress than an appreciation of our ignorance. However, I believe they the *elenchus* and the *aporia* often brought about by Socrates's refutation of interlocutors is merely part of how Plato shows him engaging in the political art.[182]

By refuting others' positions Socrates is frequently able to open people's minds to new ways of understanding the world or new goals. Refutation is crucial to paving

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[181]Consider Gregory Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol.1, ed. Julia Annas (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984).
[182]See Hugh Benson's response to Vlastos, "A Note on Eristic and the Socratic Elenchus," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (1989), 591-99.

the way for a new or deeper understanding. Socrates refutes the positions of interlocutors for several reasons. First he must expose the reasons a person must reconsider their position; he points out contradictions in their system of beliefs to indicate how they are in disharmony with themselves.

Second, Socrates induces *aporia* in his interlocutors. *Aporia* can simply be an impasse, but can also refer to the state of perplexity in which people find themselves when they reach a seemingly irrecoverable problem. Socrates uses the first to induce the second. But these impasses are only temporary, they are provocative, used to make it possible to chart a new course across a sea of uncertainty.[183] It is only when people cannot use their current understanding of the world to resolve an impasse that they are forced to admit that their understanding of the world is incomplete and it must be amended. *Aproia* opens the way for the creation of new beings and a new reality to comprehend them.

Plato has Socrates explain the point of *aporia* in what amounts to an example within an example in the *Meno*. When Socrates refuted Meno's different accounts of human excellence, it reduced Meno to *aporia* and Meno accused him of being like a stingray that paralyzes what it strikes, and he claims that Socrates has left him speechless. Later Socrates begins asking a nearby, uneducated boy questions about geometry. It is not long before he gives some wrong answers, though he believes he is right. Socrates asks him more questions to help him see that he is wrong, and he

[183]Sarah Kofman, "Beyond Aporia?" in *Post-Structuralist Classics*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (New York: Routledge, 1988), especially 11-13, 30-40.

swears and exclaims that he does not know how to proceed. At this point, Socrates turns aside to Meno and explains:

> To begin with he didn't know. . . just as he still doesn't know—but [before] he *supposed* that he did know it and confidently answered as though he did and didn't believe that he was perplexed (*aporein*). But now he does believe that he is perplexed, and just as he doesn't know in fact, so he doesn't even suppose that he knows (84a-b).

Socrates goes on to point out that while this feels like a setback, the feeling of *aporia* is actually an improvement because now he is eager to inquire and learn about what he does not know, whereas before he would not have had a longing to know (84b-c).

Therefore the *elenchus* forces people to look outside their current understanding of the world by confronting them with a problem in their current understanding; in this sense it is the moment that causes the people in Socrates's cave to turn their heads away from the shadows on the wall and look to see what might be causing the shadows.[184]

At the same time refutation brings people to question the suppositions their previous understanding of the world rested upon; it dissolves hypotheses and leaves clear ground on which they can build something new. In the wake of their old conceptions being refuted, the new building is likely to constitute a deeper understanding of the world.

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[184]Charles Kahn, Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 99.

#### 4.3.2.3.1 Aporetic Dialogues?

Some scholars call a set of Plato's 'early' dialogues, *aporetic*, distinguishing them by the way that they end without a conclusion or reaching a fuller understanding of the questions that drove the dialogue. They typically place in this category dialogues like *Meno*, *Euthyphro*, *Protagoras*, *Laches*, and sometimes others such as the *Lysis* and *Theaetetus*.[185] The first book of the *Republic* is also sometimes included in the group, seen as a standalone aporetic dialogue to which Plato later added a work of a very different sort in the remainder of the *Republic*. However, which texts count as aporetic varies from scholar to scholar. This forces the question how useful the classification of some dialogues as aporetic is because many of the supposedly non-aporetic dialogues raise important questions for which they provide either no answer or only clearly incomplete answers;[186] and even dialogues which appear to reach resolutions often have stark moments aporia within them.

Many of those classifying a set of the dialogues as aporetic take the position that Plato had no certain views to share, but wished to encourage people to question and think more. This *skeptical* approach—the first wave of which goes back to antiquity—sees the aporia and subsequent curiosity induced by the dialogues as *the*

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[185]Charles Kahn considers the aporetic dialogues to come later, after the *Gorgias*. *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 179.

[186]On this point, Charles Griswold writes "Not only the aporetic dialogues are aporetic; superficially non-aporetic dialogues such as the *Statesman* and the Republic are also aporetic in that they raise important questions to which they provide no answers or at least no satisfactory answers," "Response to Kenneth Sayre," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* IX (1993), ed. John J. Cleary and William Wians (Lanham, MD: Univ. Press of American, 1995) 200.

end of them.[187] Plato, like Socrates, wished to sting people out of their life of sleepwalking and cause them to think more, but his own thinking had not led him to specific insights he wished to share with readers.

I argue that even the aporetic texts contain insights on the very issues they appear not to answer. Along with the waves of refutation that reveal to interlocutors and readers alike their ignorance, Plato typically has sandwiched in deep insights. Sometimes these insights are disguised as digressions, such as Socrates interpretation of the Simonides poem in the *Protagoras* or his teaching geometry to the slave-boy in the *Meno*.[188] These apparent digressions often continue the conversation begun earlier though in a less obvious way.[189] In this way the conversation is continued on another layer, one on which the reader is required to supply more of the conversation. In this way, I agree with Sarah Kofman who I take to illustrate that only after clearing the ground can Plato offer a new path to readers.[190]

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[187]The first recorded instance is the New Academy of Arcesilaos, beginning in 316 B.C.; for a list of skeptics running through Cicero and being revived in the renaissance, see Gerald A. Press, "The State of the Question in the Study of Plato," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* (1996), Vol. 34, 508. Cf. Kahn (1998) for a view that sees even the aporetic dialogues as part of a larger project, gradually developing Plato's work in the *Republic*.

[188]My Chapter 2 provides a detailed example of how the ostensible aporetic ending to the *Protagoras* merely forces readers to reread the dialogue and ponder its parts more deeply before they can begin to see what Plato has placed in the middle of the text.

[189]Without specifically mentioning the usefulness of the ostensible digressions, Charles Griswold notes that the difference between the aporetic dialogues and Plato's later texts is that the places for disagreement that open an outer dialogue with the reader are made explicit. "" in *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles Griswold Jr., (), 22.

[190]Sarah Kofman, "Beyond Aporia?" in *Post-Structuralist Classics*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (New York: Routledge, 1988), especially 30-40.

#### 4.3.2.4 Interaction

Socrates also typically insists on frequency changes of speaker and speeches of relatively short length; he strives for a back and forth between speakers in which they are most involved in an *exchange*. When the interaction takes on a different pattern, he does whatever is necessary to change it.

First, consider the interaction between Socrates and Protagoras in Plato's *Protagoras*, where the type of interaction they will have gives the dialogue a large part of its structure. When Socrates arrives, the first thing he sees is Protagoras walking up and down the portico with a crowd of followers on each side and behind him. Despite the presence of two other famous teachers, the most prominent members of the audience—including the wealthy host and a son of the famous Athenian statesman Pericles—are at either side of Protagoras, hanging on his every word with the rest of the audience, and turning without bumping into each other in a way that has been compared to a Virginia Reel.[191] Plato describes the elaborate way in which the crowd follows Protagoras "they were taking noble precautions never to be in Protagoras's way by getting in front of him. Instead, when he himself and those around him turned around, the listeners nicely managed to split apart on both sides while maintaining their order, and, going around in a circle, they always went most beautifully to their places in the back," (315b). Despite the harmony brought about by Protagoras's performance, one that Plato uses the adverb for *kalos* to describe, there is a problem with the way he interacts with others.

[191]Tracy B. Strong, Lecture for Poli.Sci. 110A, Fall 2011.

After a short back and forth in which Socrates asks Protagoras about whether the political art can be taught, Protagoras launches into a lengthy monologue. Protagoras is so suited to this approach that, while he asked Socrates whether he should respond with a myth or an argument and the audience tells him to proceed however he likes (320b), he proceeds to give both: the myth and the argument, continuing uninterrupted for eight Stephanus pages (320c-328d). After Socrates gathers himself, they begin to argue some points about the details of virtue, but before four pages of discussion can complete, Protagoras is so upset that he is described as being "riled up for a fight and contentious, and he stood prepared, as for battle," (333e) and he begins to launch into another long speech that prevents Socrates from questioning the details of his account.

When Socrates suggests they change to briefer exchanges that will give both of them a chance to respond to the things the other says, Protagoras refuses and the conversation is nearly broken off there (335a-c). Socrates is prepared to leave, claiming that However, the key members of the gathering—the host, the other famous teachers, and the charming youth Alcibiades—negotiate a new format in which first Protagoras will ask questions and then Socrates can do the same. Things continue under these conditions and the conversation ultimately ends with Socrates and Protagoras as allies, and Protagoras even praising Socrates for "the course of the arguments," (361d). Thus what begin more like a fight wherein both parties must try

to dominate the other ends with cooperation and mutual respect.[192]

Socrates insists on an exchange because he wishes to develop the common understanding of the world *with* Protagoras and the others' present. This is only possible if they can both contribute to the conversation. While mutual contribution of a sort might be possible with an exchange of lengthy speeches, the product of such a contest of speeches would not be territory they share so much as it would be territory they fought over. Instead of them working out the details of their world together, it would amount to alternative, complete proposals.

The *Symposium* provides an opportunity to see Socrates take a different way out of engaging in long-speeches, but it proves to be one that is also used to increase his interaction with others. The gathering is just the sort of gathering recommended by Socrates in the *Protagoras,* where he recommended that at drinking parties the guests were better off using their "own voices and their own speeches" for entertainment instead of conversing about poetry or listening to aulos girls playing music (347c-d). This is precisely the suggestion of Eryximachus who proposes to dismiss the aulos girl and have the guests instead exchange speeches in praise of Eros.[193] Moreover, since it is a friendly gathering, there is nothing to complain of in the approach of each person to the topic.

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[192]Plato highlights the difference by having Prodicus distinguish between *quarreling* and *disputing* stating that friends *dispute* whereas enemies *quarrel* (337b). He also adumbrates them changing from enemies to friends by switching from a frame that symbolically presents them as enemies to one that reveals them to be friends; for a more detailed discussion of this point, see Chapter 2 above, "Protagoras Persuaded."

[193]In the *Gorgias*, Socrates uses aulos playing as a typical example of pursuing pleasure without considering what is good, satisfying the crowd without considering what is best for them, 501e. This does not mean he thought it was bad, merely that it did not give thought to other goods.

Nevertheless, Socrates's response demonstrates his commitment to interaction in nearly any situation. First he begins a short discussion with Agathon, before and after Agathan gives his own speech (193e-194e; 198a-201c). Then, in stark contrast to the others at the gathering, he makes his speech a retelling of a previous conversation he had years ago with Diotima (201d-212b). If readers remain conscious that they are reading a dialogue written by Plato, then they see that Plato shows them what Socrates does when confronted with a situation in which he is expected to give a length speech: he turns it into a dialogue—Plato's own solution to writing. By choosing to give a speech that is a dialogue, Socrates places his listeners in the virtual role of his younger self conversing with Diotima, just as Plato places readers in the virtual position of Socrates's interlocutors.

There is also something almost dictatorial, perhaps even tyrannical, about long speeches, as demonstrated in my next example. Gorgias begins his eponymous dialogue prepared to show off his ability with monologues as well, but (years after his meeting with Protagoras) Socrates anticipates this from the renown master of rhetoric (and his pupil Polus) and seeks to head monologues off at the pass, cautioning Polus twice to avoid giving speeches in place of conversation (448d; 461d) and asking in advance that Gorgias engage with him by "asking and answering" and putting off for another time "this lengthiness of speech" that his student Polus started (449b).[194]

Here the manner of speaking is integrally connected to two of the main

[194]In addition to Gorgias's reputation for speeches, Socrates is forewarned by hearing that Gorgias has just finished a lengthy speech and is ready to "make a display" for him (447a-48a).

questions of the dialogue: (1) is the life of the tyrant the good life and (2) does the rhetorician who can control others through his ability to speak persuasively get what he wants when he uses that ability to commit injustice. Thus the attempts of Polus and Callicles to dominate the conversation with long speeches creates a shadow play that overlays the discussion they are having with Socrates about tyrants. Long speeches are a way of exercising power over the audience, whereas short speeches encourage contributions from the audience.

While the relationship between length of speech and domination is not monolithic, the way in which monologues are often used to maintain exclusive control when an exception occurs in the *Gorgias*. The first lengthy address (464b-66a, just under two Stephanus pages) ends up being given by Socrates himself; and he is so concerned that it will be taken as him breaking the very rules of conversation he set for Polus and Gorgias that he concludes his speech by explaining precisely what he spoke at such length:

> Perhaps, then, I have done a strange thing in that, not permitting you to make lengthy speeches, I have myself extended a long speech. It is then appropriate to pardon me; for when I spoke briefly, you did not understand, and you were able to make no use of the answer that I gave you, but needed a full description. So then, when you are answering, if I too do not know what use to make of it, you too extend your speech; but if I do, let me make use of it; for that is just. And now, if you can make some use of this answer, do so (465e-66a).

Socrates's exception to the rule of short speeches is made precisely for the same reason that short speeches are generally preferred: because they increase the engagement or interaction between the people speaking. His makes a longer speech because Polus

was having difficulty understanding him since he has an unorthodox view of rhetoric. Only by speaking at greater length could Socrates flesh out his view more fully and make it possible for Polus to understand him well enough to respond in a way that allowed them to continue to interact. In the terms I use in Chapter 3, Socrates must explain a certain minimum of his understanding of the world—especially the way that he perceives rhetoric and its alternative—so that Polus is in a position to agree, suggest modifications, or fully refute that view. Socrates's long speech was not made to dominate, but to include Polus.[195]

#### 4.3.2.5 Arguing for Oneself

It is only possible to fully interact with other people if they argue for themselves; thus anytime people begin to argue the position of someone else or for a hypothetical position, Socrates typically demurs. Instead he urges them to answer for themselves or says that he does not care what that person thinks and asks what they themselves think.[196]

A good example is early in the *Meno* when Meno asks whether Socrates agrees with Gorgias's understanding of human excellence (*aretē*) is (71c-d). Socrates claims he does not remember what Gorgias said about it, and asks Meno if he recollects Gorgias's position and quickly adds "doubtless you share his opinions." After Meno

[195]The most prominent exception to frequent interaction in Plato's dialogues is the *Timaeus*, in which the eponymous character gives a speech that fills over 80 percent of the whole. But in this exception Socrates is the listener and not the person speaking.
[196]Vlastos calls this the 'say what you believe' constraint, "The Socratic Elenchus," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol.1, ed. Julia Annas (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984).

affirms this, Socrates enjoins him, “Then let's let him be, since he is in fact absent. But you yourself, Meno, in the name of the gods, what do you assert excellence to be?” Socrates does not want to have a virtual conversation with the absent Gorgias. If he were to do this, Meno would take on the role of judge or arbiter between Gorgias and Socrates. He would have no personal stake in the matter and his own understanding of the world would only be engaged at arm's length—to the degree to which he later decides he agrees with Gorgias or Socrates, reserving the possibility that he thinks neither of them is wrong. At this point, Socrates would not be engaging in the political art because he would not be developing a new understanding of the world with Meno, but with a virtual reality Meno is toying with. For Socrates, the point of the conversation is to take the distinct understandings of reality he and Meno have developed to this point in their lives—understandings influenced by different perceptions, reflections, and influences from others' opinions—and give them the opportunity to merge into a mutual understanding of the world. While it is true that Socrates also will be looking to see how a particular position he and Meno might accept happens to harmonize with other beliefs they have, considering whether the particular opinions they might accept would cause more or less dissonance in their lives, his focus is nonetheless on shaping a shared reality which he cannot do with a hypothetical, or virtual, Gorgias.

After Meno sums up the position he shares with Gorgias, it is clear that he becomes fully invested in the conversation himself. The words Plato gives to Meno makes it clear that Socrates is talking with Meno alone and not merely an

understanding of Gorgias's position. Meno's following seven responses each emphasize that he is speaking his own opinion and not someone else's.[197] Plato's point is that Socrates is only interested in conversations where the beings that populate the minds of the speakers have the possibility of being reshaped.

Another scholar has indicated the usefulness of this 'method' in assisting Socrates from having his interlocutors blame themselves for the sense of perplexity they reach when refuted.[198] However, I contend that having people argue their own opinions is crucial to maintain a shared world or reality among the people in the conversation in order for them to reshape or add to that shared reality together.

Were one of the interlocutors instead to argue a position merely hypothetically, the effort would likely be wasted. Hypothetical positions tend to be positions a person assumes is not true, but agrees to consider because others involved in the conversation are interested in them. This is especially true of hypothetical taken up common, informal conversations. At this point, the person considering the point as a *hypothetical only* is not engaged in developing a new understanding of the world, but merely a *false* understanding that they were predisposed to dismiss because they considered it only for the sake of the conversation and not because they really believed

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[197]Many translations fail to reveal this, though Bartlett captures nearly all of it. The Greek is "egōge," "egōge," "dokō ge moi," "moi dokei," "egōge," "egōge pōs dokei," and "egōge," 72b-73a. One might wonder if Plato did not over stress the point.

[198]Hugh Benson, "A Note on Eristic and the Socratic Elenchus," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (1989), 591-99. The idea is that, unlike eristic which verbally wins an argument but leaves the loser feeling like he has been tricked by technicalities, this approach establishes *doxastic inconsistency*, an internal conflict between the opinions one holds, and forces people to accept that the flaw lay within them and they are to blame. It is doubtful that this conclusion is the reached by either Callicles in the *Gorgias* or the people of Athens.

it.

An especially interesting example of Socrates insisting someone argue his own position occurs in the *Protagoras*—interesting because there is at least a partial exception to the rule. Toward the beginning of the argument between Socrates and Protagoras, Socrates states "Come then. . . let's examine in common what sort of thing each of them [justice, piety, moderation, and knowledge] is," (330c). After stating his own opinion, Socrates prompts Protagoras for his, stating "For in my opinion it is; what's your opinion?" They go back and worth with Socrates asking questions and Protagoras responding. But as Protagoras begins to see that Socrates might point out a problem with his position, Protagoras becomes somewhat more reluctant to simply agree or disagree, and instead he states "It would be necessary, Socrates. . . to agree," (331a).

Then Socrates pushes Protagoras one step further and Protagoras responds,

> Its really not my opinion, Socrates. . . that it is so simple as for me to concede that justice is pious and piety just. In my opinion there is a distinction there,. But what difference does it make? . . . If you like, let justice be for us pious and piety just (331c).

Protagoras is attempting to continue the argument, but flag the fact that he no longer agrees with their conclusion because one of the step to that conclusion is something he does not really accept. This is an attempt to continue the arguement from a hypothetical position. But that would also mean that any conclusion is one that Protagoras might well dismiss and not incorporate into his understanding of the world. Socrates responds,

> That won't do for me. . . For I have no need to put to the test this "if you like" and "if that's your opinion," but rather me and you. And I say this "me and you" because I think the argument would be best put to the test if one rids it of these "if's."[199]

Socrates insists that Protagoras and he both stay in the conversation in their own voices, that they argue for themselves and accept the outcome of the argument as something that may entail a change in how they understand the world. Protagoras assents and continues the conversation in his own voice.

But before long Socrates's questions become especially pointed. He asks, "Is it your opinion that some unjust person is moderate, *because* he commits injustice?" (emphasis mine 333c). This is precisely the implication of Protagoras's previous statements, but he knows better than to admit it, so he responds "For my part, Socrates. . . I would be ashamed to agree to this, although many of the human beings do assert it." Socrates's normal response would be to object, but here he responds "Shall I fashion my arguments with a view to them. . . or to you?" and Protagoras chooses them. I believe the different lies in that Protagoras has already accepted the consequences of the argument for himself. It is really his position and he has acknowledged that it is a shameful (*aischros*) position to hold. Since he has largely accepted the results of their conversation on his previous position, it is possible for Socrates to encourage him to move to a new, non-*aischros* understanding of the world, one that is *kalon*. Socrates responds,

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[199]The phrase "put to the test" is Bartlett's translation of *elenchesthai*, which he notes could also be rendered "refute."

> Well, it makes no difference to me, provided you do answer, whether or not you give your own opinion. For it's the argument that I for my part am examining above all, although it turns out that I am equally examining both myself as questioner and the one answering.

The crucial point of making people own the opinions they argue is maintaining the person interaction that will allow the results to change the world they believe in. This much Protagoras has accepted so Socrates can, almost, let it go. Yet the continuation shows the importance of the point because soon after this exchange, Socrates asks "Is it your opinion. . ." reverting implicitly to making Protagoras own the opinions he will express.[200]

#### 4.3.2.6 Agreement

Closely related to arguing for oneself is another common feature of the conversations Plato presents: the need to reach agreement in order to move forward. If Socrates is going to change the character of his interlocutors in a lasting way, he generally does not want to slip a point by them or even have them simply acknowledge a crucial point, he prefers that they agree with the way the argument is proceeding and that they will remember what that agreement amounts to. There is a sense in which this agreement is more important than the logical force of the argument. As I explained in greater detail in Chapter 3, "The Social Formation of *Being*," reality itself is constituted in substantial part by which opinions people agree on. The truth for the polity depends upon which opinions garner widespread

[200]Cf. *Gorgias* 501c, which I examine at greater length in section B.2.f, "Agreement," below.

agreement.[201] True opinions joined to a *logos* (argument or account) explaining them constitute knowledge.

All arguments rest, at some level, on opinions that can be questioned, attacked, and ultimately doubted.[202] Even if an argument rests on a premise that nearly all contemporary readers would consider false—for example, that Zeus casts down lightning bolts on those he disfavors—if Socrates and the others present are willing to accept the point, move forward, and consider how those now established true opinions change their understanding of the world, then they can change the character of individuals who make up the polity, thus changing the polity itself. The key is whether or not they accept what has been discussed enough to base future thoughts and actions about the world on the conclusions of their conversation with Socrates.

Platonic dialogues are filled with characters asking for or giving their assent to various statements that have been made; this alone reveals the importance of agreement in the Plato's work. Plato also demonstrates that mere agreement in word is not enough; he has Socrates verify that people understand what they are agreeing to. After the argument has continued for a while, Socrates has a habit of summarizing what has come before and asking his interlocutors again, "Do you agree with all

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[201]As I remarked briefly in the last chapter, this also means that (1) there are degrees of truth and (2) truth varies from one group to another (especially one polity to another).

[202]In Chapter 3, I suggest that any understanding of the world is inherently incomplete and rests on unjustified suppositions at some point. See e.g. Gödel's incompleteness theorems, "Über Vollständigkeit und Widerspruchsfreiheit," *Ergebnisse eines mathematischen Kolloquiums* (1932), Vol. 3, 12–13. English translation "On Completeness and Consistency" in *Collected Works I. Publications 1929–1936*, ed. Solomon Feferman, John Dawson, Stephen Kleene, Gregory Moore, Robert Solovay, Jean Van Heijenoort (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 235–7. See also Craig Smorynski, "The incompleteness theorems," in *Handbook of Mathematical Logic*, ed. Jon Barwise (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1977), 821–66.

this?"[203] To change the polity, Socrates must be sure that he and others in the conversation have the same understanding of the world in their minds and are not merely assenting to empty statements. Beyond this, there are some particularly interesting instances of agreement worth discussing.

When Socrates has multiple interlocutors, he is typically in a situation where those not speaking are either agreeing implicitly, they interrupt, or they continue a divergent conversation in their head—a partial withdrawal from the conversation and the polity it seeks to constitute. However, when an interlocutor takes over a conversation partway through, Socrates is concerned that they agree with the argument they are taking over or have an opportunity to modify what has been said. About a third of the way through the story of the *Gorgias,* Polus takes Gorgias's place and Socrates encourages Polus, "if something in the argument that has been stated bothers you and you wish to set it upright. . . take back what seems good to you, and, in your turn asking and being asked, just as Gorgias and I, refute and be refuted," (462a). And the importance of their joint agreement is emphasized a while later when Socrates asks Callicles, "For if you remember, it seemed to us—to Polus and me—that. . . . Do you too vote with us, making a third?" (499e-500a). While logical truth or falsehood is frequently employed to persuade someone of a particular position, what ultimately changes the being of individuals, and therefore the polity, is which opinions the individual accept as true—regardless of their relationship to logic.

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[203]The *Gorgias* has good examples of this at 495c, 498e, 500a-b; but most dialogues have several examples.

#### 4.3.2.6.1 Agreement, Logic, and Being: The Case of Callicles

The relationship between logical truth and agreed upon truth comes out more starkly in the latter half of the *Gorgias* in Socrates's interaction with Callicles. Callicles had been arguing that rhetoric is good because it allows one to have the power of a tyrant in a city. (The underlying thought is that if one can convince all the people that one is right, then one has power that is tantamount to being a tyrant, who can force people to do whatever she wants.) Power is good because it allows one to satisfy one's desires, and the good in life is to have great desires and to be able to satisfy them (491e).

At the heart of the argument is a belief that pleasure is *the* good and all pleasures are equally good. When Socrates shows Callicles that this logically entails that the life of the catamite, Callicles objects that Socrates should be ashamed for saying this (494e). But Socrates's point is that Callicles is living in contradiction with himself: he maintains that all pleasure is equally good, yet he recognizes some pleasures as shameful (*aischros*). Therefore Socrates follows up by asking Callicles again if he considers pleasure to be the same as the good or if there is some pleasurable things that are not good.

What Socrates seeks is Callicles's *agreement* that pleasure and the good are not the same; he wants to live in a polity with others who recognize this difference. This understanding makes possible greater harmony within the individual and also among

people in the polity.[204] From this standpoint, Callicles's agreement is more important to Socrates than even that of Gorgias or Polus, both of whom are foreigners passing through Athens rather than fellow citizens and aspiring Athenian leaders like Callicles.

However, Callicles is torn, as his response to Socrates reveals: "In order that the speech (*logos*) should not contradict me, if I assert that they are different, I assert that they are the same," (495a). He now feels that they are different, but he still wants to be logically right in his argument with Socrates. Moreover, while he feels that pleasure and the good must be different—at least in the case of catamites—he still appears to feel that his original position that rhetoric is good so one can be a virtual tyrant and satisfy one's desires is also right, so he is not willing to give up on the argument either.

Socrates responds by pointing out that (a) Callicles is implicitly already contradicting himself by calling the life of a catamite shameful and (b) that he is failing to learn about the world by arguing a position that is against his own opinion: "You are corrupting the first speeches, Callicles, and you would no longer by sufficiently examining with me the things that are [(*being*)], if you're going to speak contrary to how things seem in your own opinion." Socrates is more concerned with Callicles agreeing with his understanding of the world—that pleasure and the good are different—than with Callicles being logical, but he seeks to use Callicles's belief in logic to bring about his agreement, and ultimately his belief, in the difference between

[204]See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of this matter. In particular I discuss how Socrates's apparent argument there that pleasure *is* the good is really an argument from the multitude's perspective and is trying to point out the superiority of the *kalon* over pleasure as the good.

pleasure and the good. Later, rather than conceeding the point, Callicles pretends he had always supported it, "as if you thought that I or any other human being did not consider some pleasures better and others worse," (499b). Socrates notes that Callicles has abandoned his original position, but then quickly moves forward with the argument because he is more concerned about garnering Callicles's agreement than the logic behind it.

The continuation of their interaction demonstrates the centrality of agreement to Socrates's political art. For the rest of the dialogue, Callicles resists responding to Socrates because of the conflict between his understanding of the logic of the arguments and his own feeling that the logical responses conflict with his firmly held beliefs. Socrates must continue the argument because Callicles is not the only person at stake. Gorgias and Polus are both more willing to accept the dictates of logic even if it means their position was wrong, especially if they can allow Callicles to screen them from direct refutation. Therefore when Callicles seeks to avoid both logical refutation and changing his belief, by exiting the argument because of Socrates's "sophisms" and "silly talk" (497a), Gorgias urges him to continue on their behalf: " answer for our sake too, so that the arguments may be brought to an end," also noting that "It is not at all your honor involved here, Callicles."[205] Callicles's agreement also functions as a proxy for Gorgias and Polus.

Eventually Callicles can no longer bear being proved wrong, even for the sake

[205]Here I accept Bartlett's translation over Dodds's of this ambiguous passage, but either is coherent with my argument.

of Gorgias and Polus; but even in the face of his refusal to participate Socrates exhorts him to interrupt on any point he disagrees with: "since you. . . are not willing to join in carrying through the argument ot a conclusion, then listen to me and interrupt, if something I say does not seem fine (*kalos*) to you. And if you thoroughly refute me, I shall not be annoyed," (506c). Socrates cannot gain what he seeks most, their group's endorsement of a better, common understanding of the world that will make that world more true, unless he has the agreement of the others in the conversation, which function within the dialogue as a mini-polity. Even in the face of Callicles's outright refusal to continue, Socrates creates a passive role in which Callicles is still technically engaged in the conversation.

#### 4.3.2.6.2 Deciding Being *In Common*

Agreement is important because it is the only way to develop being *in common* thus bringing different people's views into harmony and aiding individuals to bring their internal voice (to which outside voices contribute) into accord as well. Plato frequently has Socrates draw readers' attention to this by having him suggest an investigation "in common (*koinē*)," though translations of the Greek often obscure this.[206]

In the *Protagoras*, Plato presents one of his most poignant examples of the need to resolve matters in common. Protagoras has just finished dodging Socrates's attempt to reveal to the crowd the implications that Protagoras's understanding of

[206]As will become clear shortly, Bartlett's *Protagoras* brings out Plato's use of *koinē* nicely.

moderation implies that someone would sometimes choose to be unjust. He evaded the point by launching into a speech about the relative worth of different objects, finally settling on a point about olive oil being good for the outside of the body but not the inside (334c). Socrates is wary that Protagoras will continue to repeatedly evade being proved wrong by making long speeches in the future, and he complains, "For my part, I supposed that getting together to converse with one another (*dialegomenous*) was different from making a public harangue (*dēmēgorein*)," (336b). Socrates is directly contrasting dialectic and the speeches to crowds made by rhetoricians. The conversation appears to be at an end unless they can reach an agreement.

At this point, Plato presents readers with a polity writ small by having the luminaries present discuss how they will resolve the dispute. Plato has each of the distinguished listeners speak in turn: Callias, Alcibiades, Critias, Prodicus, and Hippias, who suggests they elect a judge to ensure they keep a middle course in length. Socrates rejects the idea of choosing judge, saying there is no need to have one person oversee it, instead they will all oversee it in common (338b-e). The wording of the passage in Greek is even more political than my short summary shows;[207] it is clear that Socrates rejects allowing the conversation to be controlled by a dictator, aristocracy, or democracy, instead saying they must take care of it in

[207]Plato shows two different attempts to assert unilateral control over proceedings (by Callias and Alcibiades), followed by two attempts at moderating the way it is handled, Hippias's suggestion that the group of luminaries decide, and then his suggestion that one be elected, where he even uses the term for an Athenian official: *prytanis*.

common, as a group. Thus Plato demonstrates that in addition to the need for *being* to be reached in cooperation with others, even the conversation that affects being is best managed by the group as a whole.

There is another especially nice example of deciding being in common in Plato's *Republic*, but I reserve it for my discussion on "A Better Good" below because it illustrates the point of that section as well.

#### 4.3.2.7 Prizing Knowledge Over Victory

Many people engage in discussions in order to win a debate to prove their intelligence or to gain honor; but Socrates consistently seeks to gain a deeper mutual understanding of the world, often at the expense of winning and argument or appearing more intelligent.

He goes out of his way to distinguish his own manner of speaking from what could be considered contentious or simply seeking victory. It is easy to mistake one for the other, especially when it seems like other speakers always make mistakes and Socrates is typically the person correcting them. But Socrates maintains this distinction assiduously early in the *Gorgias*, explaining to Gorgias that often people,

> . . . cannot easily define for each other the things that they endeavor to talk about, and learn and teach each other, and in this manner break off the conversations; but when they disagree about something and one says the other is not speaking correctly or not clearly, they become sorely angry and think the other is speaking from envy of themselves, loving victory but not seeking the subject proposed in the argument. And some in the end give over most shamefully [from *aischros*]. . . . So I'm afraid to refute you, lest you suppose that I speak from love of victory, not in regard to the subject's becoming manifest, but in regard

to you (457c-58a).

Having explicitly disavowed a desire to defeat Gorgias in an argument, Socrates goes on to indicate exactly what he seeks instead, explaining that he enjoys being refuted in arguments if he says something that isn't true because it is even better to be corrected because it releases one from holding a false opinion. Later in the same dialogue Socrates again indicates not merely an interest in being corrected, but a great desire to be corrected: "if you thoroughly refute me, I shall not be annoyed with you as you were with me, but you will be inscribed with me as the greatest benefactor," (506c).

While it is possible to take these remarks as irony or false protestations from a man who knows he is about to show up the man renown in Greece for his speaking ability, Socrates's typical behavior bears out the sincerity of his statements. In the first book of the *Republic* after proving Thrasymachus wrong, Thrasymachus acknowledges Socrates's success by saying, "Let that be your banquet, Socrates," (354a), but instead of claiming the victory, Socrates points out his own failure reach a satisfactory understanding of justice, "Yet I haven't had a fine banquet. But that's my fault not yours. I seem to have behaved like a glutton, snatching at every dish that passes and tasting it before properly savoring its predecessor. Before finding the answer to our first inquiry about what justice is, I let that go and turned to investigate whether it is a kind of vice and ignorance or a kind of wisdom and virtue."

The *Protagoras* initially appears to be an exception to this rule. Socrates seems intent on making a name for himself by defeating the renown Protagoras in

public debate in front of a prestigious audience.[208] However, one must consider why he seeks reputation. Early in the text, his companion, Hippocrates, woke him up, filled with enthusiasm to go gain wisdom from the famous Protagoras. At the time of the dialogue, Socrates is much younger than the one we know from most of the dialogues (probably in his mid-thirties) and has not yet established his reputation for verbal dexterity. Part of his task in speaking with Protagoras is to attenuate Protagoras's reputation in the eyes of others—especially Hippocrates—so that they will stop to question what he teaches and whether it is beneficial before simply digesting indiscriminately what he has to say. Thus a reputation for victory is a means to a selfless end.

Moreover, at the end of the dialogue, the famous Protagoras recognizes Socrates as the victor, but Socrates declines to claim victory, instead explaining that "I'm not asking all theses things. . . for the sake of anything other than my wish to investigate how in the world things stand in regard to virtue and what in the world virtue itself is." Not merely in words, but also in his actions, he prizes values a better understanding over victory.

Someone simply interested in victory would not be so keen to point out his own errors after he makes an argument, something Socrates does repeatedly (e.g. *Theaetetus* 199c-d, 200a-c, 202d, 208e, and 209e). Nor would he pointing out weaknesses or his inability to make particular arguments before he proceeds to make

[208]In Chapter 2, I argue that this is indeed one of Socrates's aims.

an attempt (e.g. *Republic* 368b, 450c-51b, 457b-58b, 472a-73c, *Meno* 70b-71b). And least of all would he, instead of taking the opportunity to show off giving a length speech, recount a story in which he is proved wrong and enlightened by a woman (*Symposium* 201d-212b).

#### 4.3.2.8 Being Before Money

Socrates also places the development of being before the making of money. This is part of the reason why he distances himself from the sophists: he does not charge money and he could not charge money and still accomplish something the sort of thing he does in his conversations with others. Accepting money would change the very nature of the interaction he has with others; instead of being a fellow human experiencing the world with others on a common journey to find knowledge, he would become something more like a merchant.[209]

Plato went to considerable effort to distinguish Socrates from those who charge money for knowledge: sophists (see e.g., *Apology* 19d-e, 33a-b). The most crucial reason for this is that the interaction with a sophist is no longer about seeking a mutual understanding of the world, but rather adding the sophist's knowledge to oneself—much like one would buy a tool or a horse to aid one with some task one wishes to accomplish. As Marcel Hénaff explains, "it changes the philosophical approach to

[209]Marcel Hénaff explores at greater length than I do below, many of the difficulties that would result if Socrates accepted money. While some of the details of our accounts differ, my understanding is owes much to my understanding of his work. *The Price of Truth* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2010), 1-71; see especially 6-10, 18-12, 38-58..

knowledge itself by giving discourse a status that breaks off the relation between speech, being, and truth."[210] Socrates engages in conversation for the love of truth, which is to say an understanding of being.

It is not that Socrates sees something necessarily wrong with charging for knowledge, but what he has to offer cannot be simply transferred like a product. He refrains from condemning charging for knowledge in general (*Apology* 19d-e, 20b-c; *Meno* 91d-e). He doesn't object to the idea that people make money for knowledge that they have; he just doesn't think that is how the knowledge he is interested in works. He never objects to the notion that a shoemaker might charge money to someone to teach him shoemaking; and he indicates that he sends some students to Prodicus, which must imply that some types of knowledge can be bought and sold in this way (*Theaetetus* 151b). Prodicus teaches how to make find distinctions between similar words; teaching or learning this kind of knowledge does not appear to be corrupted by a merchant-style relationship.[211] It cannot work that way for Socrates because he is not interested in the type of knowledge that functions as tools—and he thinks those who are frequently mistakenly believe that knowledge does more for them than it really does (*Apology* 22d; *Meno* 87e-88a). Too many of the sophists believe that all knowledge functions in this way because they fail to the inextricable connection between how someone understand the world and what that person

[210]Hénaff 9.
[211]We may also infer that Prodicus would have a dialogue named after him if he were not an exception.

becomes, and making that mistake can be dangerous.[212] They are content to provide others with tools and not ask about what they will be used for, what goal the purchaser seeks.

Socrates's conversations are about understandings of the relationships between people—political life—and this type of interaction necessarily affects people's being in ways that money would distort.[213]

#### 4.3.2.9 A Better Good

Nothing is more important, in the shaping of being, than what an individual or polity consider as *the good*. To be sure, people may have multiple goods, but the order of priority matters and whatever takes the role as the highest good plays a central role in defining a person and, through its people, a polity. While Plato has Socrates deny he is wise (*Apology* 21a-23a), Socrates claims to know erotics (*Symposium* 177e).

While the *Symposium* and, to a lesser degree, the *Phaedrus* and *Lysis* are the Platonic dialogues known for eros, Plato displays Socrates's knowledge of erotics in nearly every dialogue by what he portrays Socrates doing in conversation.

##### 4.3.2.9.1 The Good in the First Alcibiades

In the *First Alcibiades*, Socrates encounters the handsome, wealthy, extremely

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[212]I discuss this at greater length in chapters 2 and 3.
[213]Hénaff 18. See also Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (London: Routledge, 1990), 59.

well-connected, and very confident, young Alcibiades. Alcibiades's good is glory, and to a lesser extent power (principally as a means to glory). He wants to lead Athens to in the conquest of empire that will bring him more renown than his guardian Pericles; he aims for the reputation of a Cyrus or Xerxes (105c). Just why he wants this, he has not asked himself, and if he did, he would probably have no answer other than that it would make him happy (which as I point out in Chapter 3, "The Good," is really no answer at all).

Socrates begins asking Alcibiades questions and quickly confronts him with knowledge of his ignorance (106b-10d). Socrates demonstrates to him that he does not know what the good is for the polity (108d-09a) or what justice is (109b-10e). He reduces Alcibiades to a state of perplexity (*aporia*). How does this show Socrates's knowledge of erotics? Socrates has shown Alcibiades that he does not have the means to his end; he does not have the knowledge necessary to lead the polity well. Consequently Alcibiades now sees a need to pursue knowledge of the political good and knowledge of justice as a means to his end (glory). Through repeated association the means to an end can itself become a good or even the good.[214] Socrates has started Alcibiades on a path where his main goods could become wisdom and justice. Instead of power (tyranny), Alcibiades seeks human excellence (*aretē*) (135b).

However goods, especially ones strongly held, do not change overnight, so in the interim Socrates convinces Alcibiades that Socrates himself—the person who

[214]See my Chapter 3, "The Good," above.

showed Alcibiades his ignorance—is the most promising person to help him achieve the knowledge he seeks. By the end of the dialogue, Alcibiades insists that "from this day nothing can keep me from attending on you, and you from being attended upon by me," (135d).[215] Socrates responds indicating that he has hatched a "winged eros" in Alcibiades. Socrates has taken the first giant step in transforming Alcibiades's good from glory and power to wisdom, justice, and excellence. It appears that Socrates has hopes of one day guiding Alcibiades to learn the true political art. Socrates is committed to helping Alcibiades complete that transformation, but whether he will be successful is an open question, one history gives us reason to doubt, and about which Plato has Socrates express his own misgivings: "I would wish you to continue doings so. Yet I stand in dread, not because I do not have trust in your nature, but rather because, seeing the strength of the polity, I fear that it will overcome both me and you," (135e).

#### 4.3.2.9.2 The Good in the *Meno*

When another young, ambitious, handsome youth approaches Socrates, his response is more circumspect. In the *Meno*, Meno approaches Socrates to learn about human excellence. As Socrates seeks to understand Meno better, he learns that substantial reasons why Meno is interested in excellence is so that he can exercise political power and and amass wealth (71e, 78c-d). In response, Socrates asks Meno

[215]Plato, *First Alcibiades*, trans. Carnes Lord in *The Roots of Political Philosophy*: *Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Cornell: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987).

what excellence is in order to get him to reconsider what he really wants and why. In the process Socrates tries to guide Meno to see problems with his conception of excellence, especially that it must not involve ruling simply, but ruling justly (73b, 73d, 78d-79b); and he brings him to see that even wealth is not good in an unqualified sense, but sometimes harmful and sometimes good (88d).

By refuting Meno's various understandings of the world, Socrates reduces Meno to such a state of perplexity that Meno compares Socrates to a stingray who has numbed him (80a) and doubts whether it is possible to learn anything at all through inquiry (80d). Socrates attempts to show Meno that learning through inquiry *is* possible, and learning makes us better: "that by supposing one ought to inquire into things he doesn't know, we would be better and more manly and less lazy than if we should suppose either that it's impossible to discover those things that we don't know ro that we ought not to inquire into them," (86b). Meno began by asking if human excellence is teachable and, after reducing Meno to perplexity and opening him up to a new good, Socrates has given him one way to become more excellent: to inquire and try to learn and understand the world better. He is trying to guide Meno from the good of tyrants, power and wealth, to the good of knowledge and wisdom; he seeks to engender in Meno a least a little of the philosopher.

Meno's immediate response looks promising: he says "This too is well said, in my opinion, Socrates." But very soon it becomes clear that Socrates has failed to redirect his good in a meaningful way. Socrates next asks "Do you want, then, since we are of one mind that it is necessary to inquire into what one doesn't know—are we

to attempt to inquire in common into what in the world excellence is?" (86c). Meno's reply shows that Socrates has failed: "Certainly. And yet, Socrates, for my part I'd most gladly examine and hear about that which I first raised as a question, namely whether one ought to take it to be something teachable," (86c). Despite agreeing, Meno seems to have completely missed Socrates's point; Socrates spent the first half of the dialogue encouraging Meno to try to understand excellence itself—to make Meno's *means* to power his *end* instead, but Meno remains dogged in his determination to see it as a means. Subsequently, Socrates calls Meno's attention—and Plato alerts readers—to the fact that leaders admired for their excellence have failed to manage to pass on that excellence to their sons (93c-94c).[216] Socrates, despite his best intentions, may well not be able to help Meno learn excellence; his attempt to change his good so far appear to be bearing little fruit. Socrates then pushes the conversation toward the conclusion that excellence cannot be taught but is acquired from the gods (100a). The result is that, if Meno would like to be excellent, he should focus on being pious.

#### 4.3.2.9.3 The Good in the *Republic*

Developing a new good normally takes time. A longer dialogue like the

[216]The situation contains more irony than my condensed summary can show. Socrates actually speaks to one of his future accusers, Anytus, and confronts him with the knowledge that many excellent men are unable to pass on their excellence others. Thus Plato has Socrates present evidence that (1) he may not be responsible for failing to make Alcibiades an excellent man (he specifically notes that Pericles was unable to pass on his excellences to his two sons, which calls to one's mind the cousin he became guardian of: Alcibiades, 94b) and (2) Socrates is now refraining from helping any further someone who does not appear to be ready to be a just leader. Thus Plato portrays Socrates as the opposite of a corrupter of the youth—one of the accusations of Anytus.

*Republic* provides an opportunity to see a more realistic example. It might also be an example drawn from Plato's personal observation for he choose to depict it occurring in the interaction his two brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus, had with Socrates.

In the middle of Book 1 of the *Republic*, Thrasymachus has argued why he thinks the life of the unjust person is better than that of the just person. Socrates turns to Glaucon and asks, "Which life would you choose, Glaucon?" He claims he would choose the just life and that he was not persuaded by Thrasymachus, but he still wants Socrates to prove Thrasymachus wrong (347e-48a). Socrates suggests two alternative ways to proceed (a) they can oppose Thrasymachus with a parallel speech (*logos*) about the benefits of the just life, count and measure the good things each speech contains, and have find people to judge the case (like a jury) or (b) they can investigate the matter and come to agreement (*anomologoumenoi*) with one another, in which case they can be both advocates and jury themselves. Much like in my *Protagoras* example above, they choose the second course which allows them to decide the question in common.

The remainder of Book 1 fails to decide the question so Book 2 begins with Glaucon and his brother Adeimantus each detailing all the difficulties that must be overcome to convince them that the just life is better than the unjust life. In the process, they reveal something crucial about themselves: they have a deep attachment to believing in the just life, but they also have serious doubts that, when analyzed, it proves to be better. Justice is one of their most closely held goods, and so far they still hold it close, but, after the remarks by Thrasymachus, they adhere to justice as the

good increasingly *despite* their intellectual understanding of it: "Thrasymachus or anyone else might say what we've said, Socrates, or maybe even more, in discussing justice and injustice—crudely inverting their powers,in my opinion. And, frankly, it's because I want to hear the opposite from you that I speak with all the force I can muster," (367a-b).

Socrates cannot provide the explanation the brothers desire, yet he is also not content to risk them becoming more like Thrasymachus. He is unable to provide the analysis they would like, "I don't see how I can be of help. Indeed, I believe I'm incapable of it," (368b). At the same time, he recognizes their love for justice, "While I'd always admired the natures of Glaucon and Adeimantus, I was especially pleased on this occasion," and he tells them,

> you must indeed be affected by the divine if you're not convinced that injustice is better than justice and yet can speak on its behalf as you have done. And I believe you really are unconvinced by your own words. I infer this from the way you life, for if I had only your words to go on, I wouldn't trust you. The more I trust you, however, the more I'm at a loss as to what to do (368a-b).

They are in much the position Socrates once described himself when his study of cause (*aitia*) from nature fails to prove satisfactory and he was forced to engage in a "second sailing," (*Phaedo* 99d) one that uses the manufactured force of people rowing oars in place of the natural force of wind. The transition from an understanding based on natural cause to one based on human cause is precarious because in the process it is common for people to lose justice as a good (e.g. Thrasymachus).

The remainder of the conversation in the *Republic* functions to gradually move

them from one good to another. Socrates first takes their love of justice and intellectual curiosity and directs them to another project—creating a polity in speech: "if you're willing, let's first find out what sort of thing justice is in a city and afterwards look for it in the individual, observing the ways in which the smaller is similar to the larger," (368e-69a). While the ostensible goal is to learn about why the just life is the better life, the project contains another aim. It channels their love of justice, combined with their youthful excitement at the idea of creating, and in a sense ruling, a polity into love of the polity as a whole and intellectual inquiry.

Socrates engages the brothers in the task of building the ideal city and in the process he strengthens their love of learning and their desire to understand the world in an ever deeper way. Creation of a city, leads to trying to understand how people are educated and shaped by various influences, including Homer's epics. Building a just society forces them to consider how the identity of one individual can grow to encompass the identity of others (Book 5). Eventually trying to understand a polity they are brought to attempt to understand knowledge and being itself (Books 6-7). In a way not unlike the chairs that are first organized for efficiency and later the organization itself is valued as good, the brothers begin a quest to understand justice and gradually begin to prize learning for its own sake and the polity as a whole. Their means to supporting their adherence to justice as the good becomes their good. In the process, they develop a different understanding of justice—one that would have been unlikely to satisfy them if it had been handed to them directly at the beginning of Book 2—and they extend their understanding of themselves to include their whole

polity. In trying to form a good city, they become increasingly like the best of the guardians who "always do what they believe to be best for the city," (413c). The good of the city becomes their good. They have a new reason to choose the just life as the good life.

When Socrates eventually reaches an explicit discussion of the choice of the good life returns, in Book 9 (580d-83b), the decision for Glaucon and Adeimantus has already been made by the intervening action of the dialogue. They discuss the reasons one might prefer the life lived for profit, the life lived for honor, or the life lived for wisdom; and what becomes clear is that Socrates had been guiding them to this choice all along. Socrates has provided them with the experience of the pleasure of seeking wisdom that was necessary in order for them to choose it. As Socrates states, "since there's a dispute between the different forms of pleasure and between the lives themselves. . . about which is more pleasant and less painful, how are we to know which one of them is speaking most truly?"

Both of their ways of judging among the pleasures depends on the conversations that preceded this moment: a "philosopher has of necessity tasted the other pleasures since childhood, but it isn't necessary for a profit-lover to taste or experience the pleasure of learning the nature of the things that are and how sweet it is. Indeed, even if he were eager to taste it, he couldn't easily do so," and likewise the honor-lover may not have engaged in philosophy but the philosopher has experienced all three. At the same time, philosophy has equipped them with the best tools for making the decision because the philosopher alone has gained experience in reason

and argument—tools much superior to either wealth (for the profit-lover) or victory and courage (for the honor-lover) (582e-583b). On the whole, it appears that the person who prefers each type of life prefers it primarily because it is the good he has experienced. Yet it is also the generally the case that the good of the philosopher—knowledge—predisposes him least against others in the polity in order to obtain his end. One need not fight others for knowledge the way one might need to for profit or honor. The philosopher's life is harmonious with the just life.

The key variable determining Glaucon and Adeimantus's decision is the time they have spent pursuing wisdom leading up to this choice. This transition from one good supporting justice to another is one of Plato's a crucial work (*ergon*) of the Republic (*Politeia*). In working to constitute the polity, Socrates guided the constitution of Plato's brothers; and in guiding the constitution of the brothers he has helped form the character of the polity. Through his work to better the constitutions of Glaucon, Adeimantus, and others, Socrates improves Athens as a polity.

Before Plato describes Socrates discussing the way that the character of individuals determines the character of the polity (Book 8), he is already well on the way to showing his readers how Socrates guided the development of people's character in order to improve the polity.

## 4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described a crucial component of political change is often overlooked. While discussions of political education tend to focus on the

content of education, they often overlook the manner in which that education is conducted. Similarly, in analyzing Plato's texts, many scholars tend to concentrate on the content of the discussions while missing Socrates's demonstration of the political art that Plato presents. With a fuller understanding of political education in Plato—how conversation shapes people, and through them polities—it is now possible to turn to what we can learn from Plato about Democratic Education.

# Chapter 5

## Plato, Democracy, and Education: Human Being and Citizen

*For just as a human being in a state of completeness is the best of the animals, so too, one who is separated from law and a judicial process is the worst of them all. For injustice is the most severe when it has weapons, and a human being is born having weapons for good judgment and virtue which are capable of being used to their utmost for their opposites. This is why he is the most impious and savage animal, and worst where sex and food are concerned. And justice belongs in a city, for a judicial process is the source of order for a political association, and justice is a judging of what is just.*

— Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a

*The two great points of difference between a democracy and a republic are: first, the delegation of the government, in the latter, to a small number of citizens elected by the rest; secondly, the greater number of citizens, and greater sphere of country, over which the latter may be extended.*
*The effect of the first difference is, on the one hand, to refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country, and whose patriotism and love of justice will be least likely to sacrifice it to temporary or partial considerations. Under such a regulation, it may well happen that the public voice, pronounced by the representatives of the people, will be more consonant to the public good than if pronounced by the people themselves, convened for the purpose. <u>On the other hand, the effect may be inverted.</u> Men of factious tempers, of local prejudices, or of sinister designs, may, by intrigue, by corruption, or by other means, first obtain the suffrages, and then betray the interests, of the people.*

— Publius, *Federalist Papers* 10

### 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 3, I focused on the way that being and reality are shaped by conversations—internal and external—and how those conversations are guided by some sense of what is good, what is worth pursuing over other possible ends. In Chapter 4, I moved from looking primarily at the individual soul to concentrating on

how the polity is shaped in conversations and what Plato shows us about how those conversations need to be conducted to be effective in shaping the polity. The individual human being and the individual as citizen are inextricably connected and cannot truly be separated; but the type of connection between the two and the way one influences the other can vary dramatically.

In this chapter, I begin by exploring Plato's relationship to democracy, a complex issue that I contend is often approached from the wrong perspective. Then I turn to a consideration of the goods possible in political life and the threats to those goods. Finally, I consider a unique threat to democracy created, in part by Plato. I discuss the seriousness of this threat and how the understanding of being and polities from my preceding chapters offers a course of action to respond to it while helping to maintain strong democracies at the same time: conversations that consider how one good for democratic citizens leads to others.

## 5.2 Plato and Democracy

### 5.2.1 Scholarship on Plato's Relationship with Democracy

There is a large and controversial body of literature about Plato and democracy. Even over just the last 70 years, literature on Plato's view of democracy runs the gamut: from one extreme—Plato as totalitarian mastermind—to moderate views, contending that that Plato's relationship to democracy is much more

ambiguous, to more recent arguments for Plato's affection for democracy.[217] Among Plato scholars, Karl Popper is now famous, or infamous, for his contention that Plato is not only against democracy but a thinker who represents a nascent form of totalitarianism. While Popper's criticism was substantially rebutted, it remains safe to say that the traditional view of Plato is of someone who is antagonistic to democracy and one of its greatest critique.[218]

However, one need not really be against democracy in order to critique it. Indeed, one can even fight or struggle against it, or against some forms of it, and be simultaneously antagonistic and for some more refined variant of it. The last two decades of Plato scholarship have brought crucial support for such a more nuanced understanding of Plato's stance to democracy.[219] One thing this scholarship clarifies is our need to continue asking the question just what we mean by democracy, what is its heart, what can be conceded and what must be defended if it is to go by the name at all.

Here the word itself causes us trouble because it has come to mean something

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[217]For Plato as totalitarian, see Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, (Milton Park: Routledge, 1966). For a more moderate Plato, see Sara Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000). For a Plato (or Socrates) with affection for democracy, see Christina H. Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato's* Gorgias *and the Politics of Shame* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2010); Arlene W. Saxonhouse, "The Socratic Narrative: A Democratic Reading of Plato's Dialogues," *Political Theory* (2009), Vol. 37, No. 6, 728-53; Joel Alden Schlosser, *What Would Socrates Do?* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014).

[218]The most thorough defense of Plato from Popper is Ronald B. Levinson, *In Defense of Plato* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1953). Even George Kateb who calls Plato a benefactor of individualism and democracy's "greatest observer," considers Plato to be among democracy's harshest critics, "Individualism and its Critics," *Annual Review of Political Science* (2003), Vol. 6, 276, 280.

[219]In addition to the works cited above, consider Gerald M. Mara, *Socrates' Discursive Democracy:* Logos *and* Ergon *in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1997); .

substantially different than either a strictly literal definition of the Greek word or an examination of Greek practice would entail. Thus we see at the outset that our English word means something that contrasts markedly with the word Plato dealt with, allowing for the possibility that Plato could even be against democracy in the Greek sense and for the notion of it we have today. This is far too seldom the starting point of conversations about Plato and democracy.

What precisely is meant by *democracy* today is substantially different from the type of polity with which Plato was familiar. Initially James Madison and other founders promoted the United States Constitution in part because it would *not* constitute a democracy, but a republic. They claimed that features which set republics apart would increase the stability of government as well as the protection of individual liberties.[220] While the form of government has endured, though not without substantial change, the term has, by and large, not; and what we now typically we refer to as democracies were conceived of as being opposed to democracy.[221] But what exactly constitutes proper terminology has been an unresolved matter of dispute from early in United States history.[222]

Before moving on, I remark on just a few of the major differences. The

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[220]Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *Federalist Papers*, e.g. No. 10, quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

[221]Bernard Manin, *The Principles of Representative Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 1-3.

[222]One need only recall that the party of Madison and Jefferson, now typically referred to by historians as the Democratic-Republican party, was initially called the Republicans, but only lasted about 30 years before splitting into the Democratic Party and the National Republican Party. Robert Dahl contends that Madison himself initiated the confusion by attempting to claim a distinction between *republican* and *democratic* where there was no meaningful difference other than the words' origins in Greece and Rome. *On Democracy* (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 2000), 16-17.

polities which are today generally called democracies would have been considered "mixed government" by the ancients. For example, the office of the president in the United States would have partaken of monarchy, the United States Senate would partially resemble an aristocracy, especially before senators were elected by popular vote, and the U.S. House would be close to democratic, though the device of representation makes matters even more problematic. The vast details of these changes and their implications are not the focus of this chapter and have been documented at greater length by other scholars.[223]

Too often work on Plato and democracy becomes mired in confusion by an attempt to discuss how Socrates's remarks, critical of ancient democracy, do or do not show him to be a critic of democracy when it is not at all clear just what democracy is being considered. This is especially problematic in light of the fact that contemporary democratic theory continues to engage in debate over what precisely democracy is or should be.

Discussions about what kind of polity we would like or prefer—or yet again about what would constitute justice—often masquerade as discussions about what democracy is. In part this is because democracy has become something we can no longer question. In this sense, it is *the good* of contemporary Western culture. Consequently, instead of discussing what would be better, many conversations revolve around what democracy is or what would make a particular country more or less

[223]Recent scholarship has transformed our understanding of democracy as actually practiced in ancient Greece. For thorough account, see Kurt A. Raaflaub, Josiah Ober, and Robert W. Wallace, *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2007); for an overview, see 1-22.

democratic.

In this chapter, I attempt to avoid such entanglements by setting aside two major topics—at least in the form in which they are typically framed in the literature: (a) questions of Plato's relationship to democracy and (b) what democracy really is or should be. While questions about these issues may linger in the margins, I hope that by approaching them from a different perspective, it may become possible to see them illuminated in new light. Therefore, while I remain very interested in what Plato or his character of Socrates might reveal to us about what we generally call democracy, I approach this question by asking what Plato shows readers about good political interaction and save for later the question of how what we learn from Plato comports with contemporary notions of democracy.

### 5.2.2 Plato's *Republic* as a Misleading Source of Plato on Democracy

As part of setting aside the question of Plato's relationship with democracy, I would like to encourage readers to set aside their prior understandings of Plato and democracy—especially any that originate from Plato's *Republic*. In *Republic* Book 8, Plato has Socrates describe how one type of polity transforms into another. The details, while much discussed, are overemphasized. The text itself defends this position: Socrates remarks that "we're only sketching the shape of the constitution in theory, not giving an exact account of it. . . besides, it would be an intolerably long task to describe every constitution and every character," (548c-d).

There are good reasons to question many of the specifics, such as the relative

ranking of various types of polities, the critiques leveled against specific types of polities, and the even the details of what cause a particular type of polity, such as a timocracy, to lead to another, such as oligarchy. Socrates acknowledges the inexactness of the account and is mainly interested in developing a theory that brings out the principles of constitutional change. Beyond this, there are the concerns voiced by commentators that Plato is engaging in irony or parody, in part to show the results of rationalism taken to the extreme: a philosophic tyranny.[224] This section of the *Republic* is more properly analyzed only for what it indicates about the abstract principles driving the transformation from one form of polity to another.

But even if one is not inclined to take Socrates as ironically as some commentators, the context of his account in the *Republic* calls into question the scope of its application. The attention given to the various forms of government is directed to the goal of demonstrating the importance of justice to the individual. While we may learn something important about the polity through the analogy, it is doubtful how far it is proper to press this side of it. While I maintain the understanding of being conveyed in the *Republic* is consistent with other Platonic texts, the surface-

[224]While the polity begins with the ideal state ruled by a philosopher-*king*, it ends with a tyrant and is said to be in a cycle. Thus Plato leaves enough ambiguity that what appears to be a beginning and an end could be taken as revealing that the ostensible beginning in enlightened monarchy is tantamount to a tyranny of reason, with the guardians amounting to the bodyguards of the tyrant described at the end of the cycle. Perhaps the most prominent account of the *Republic* understood ironically is Allan Bloom's: *The Republic of Plato*, (New York: Basic Books, 1968), Interpretive Essay 307-436. See also, H.D. Rankin, "Laughter, Humor and Related Topics in Plato," *Classical et Medievalia* 28 (1967), 211, Victorino Tejera, *Plato's Dialogues One by One* (New York: Irvinton, 1984), 97. Diskin Clay argues along different, persuasive lines that Plato does not intend for readers to agree with the train of conversation in the *Republic*, "Reading the *Republic*" in *Platonic Writings/Platonic Readings*, ed. Charles Griswold Jr. (University Park: Penn State Press, 2010) 23.

level account of democracy is less consistent.[225] As I argued in Chapter 4, Socrates's primary task is to engage Glaucon and Adeimantus in a conversation that will reinforce their love for justice, but on new grounds. While they begin with a need to know why an individual should choose justice over injustice, even when injustice would confer some benefit, Socrates gradually moves them to a concern for the good of the polity as a whole. First they want it to be good because then they will be successful in creating the ideal in speech. As they begin to identify with their creation, they discuss the identity of citizens with each other (Book 5). They move to a concern for the polity's longevity (Book 8). And finally are concerned with the good of rulers (Book 10), which is what they have become, in speech. Context matters and the primary aim—one might say the *good* of the conversation—is to establish justice in the interlocutors' (and readers') souls as they work through an elaborate understanding of the role of justice in the individual's soul. What Socrates could not do in a short *logos*, he is able to do in a long conversation (*dialectic*).

Moreover, in part because of the context, and in part because the account focuses on ideal types instead of the more complex forms of polities one finds in practice, the comparison of polities is tendentious. The accounts are of ideals in two different ways. First, they are ideals in the sense that they are paradigms of only ideal

[225]As noted above, recently the number of scholars challenging the view that Plato has a negative account of democracy has been growing: John R. Wallach, *Platonic Political Art: A Study of Critical Reason and Democracy* (University Park: Penn State Press, 2010), Arlene w. Saxonhouse, "The Socratic Narrative: A Democratic Reading of Plato's Dialogues," *Political Theory* 37 (6):728-53, Sara Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000), Arlene w. Saxonhouse, *Athenian Democracy: Modern Mythmakers and Ancient Theorists* (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 1996), Peter Euben, *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture, and Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997).

types of government. Socrates barely considers what Aristotle and Polybius later refer to as "mixed" forms of government that have elements of monarchy and democracy or aristocracy and democracy at the same time.[226] This should strike us as strange in a text that repeatedly returns to the importance of moderation as a virtue. The only mention of something close to mixed forms of government is, perhaps, a brief note that "dynasties and purchased kingships and other constitutions of that sort, which one finds no less among the barbarians than among the Greeks, are somewhere intermediate between" the other forms discussed (544c-d). Plato writes in greater detail about various mixed forms of polities in the *Laws* (e.g. 756e); therefore it is clear that readers are not provided a complete account in *Republic*, Book 8.

Second, and more striking for undermining any criticism of the various types of polities, Socrates compares an ideal polity with an elaborate educational system that is presumed to be functioning well to a typical, non-ideal, version of democracy in practice. This brings to mind two of Winston Churchill's observations of democracy: (a) that the best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter and (b) that democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others that have been tried. Comparing a non-ideal monarchy to a democracy is a fairer comparison.[227]

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[226]Aristotle, *Politics* 3.7, 4.2, 4.11; Polybius, *Histories* 6.3..
[227]Scott F. Aikin and Robert B. Talisse, "A Belated Reply to Plato," *3 Quarks Daily*, (2014), http://www.3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2014/01/a-belated-reply-to-plato.html.

## 5.3 Plato's Account of the Goods Brought Forth by Polities

Rather than starting by asking whether Plato, or Socrates, is for or against democracy, I suggest setting democracy aside temporarily and focusing on what seemed to be the greatest political goods that Plato presents to readers. Later it will be possible to return and consider how these goods are harmonious or dissonant with the goods of a contemporary democracy.

Many of the goods that polities provide appear in the understanding of Plato I detailed in the previous four chapters. The polity is a place where the individual, through combining his perceptions and reflections, develops an understanding of the world by analyzing it. It is through this thinking that beings and reality become constituted. This process is inextricably social because a major component of our internal conversations are the opinions of the people outside of us. Plato presents conversation after conversation where individuals develop and combine their individual understanding of beings and reality with others' understandings, developing an understanding of the world they share *in common*. These common opinions, tied to accounts (*logoi*) that explain them, give stability to people's understanding of the world in which they live. The reality that evolves in these conversations leads human beings from some initial good or primary goal, like satisfying bodily desires to other, new goods that arise from their association with each other in polities, such as pursuit of the *kalon* (the beautiful or admirable) (*Meno* 98, *Theaetetus* 202). In this way, people rise from struggling for mere life to striving for the good life.

An arguably higher form of existence is possible through becoming conscious

of this process and playing a role in shaping it. People can be awakened from sleepwalking or stung into a deeper awareness of the beings that constitute their world and the different goods that shape their lives (*Apology* 30e). With this awareness, they can rise above their current goods to a place where they can choose their own future goods with an understanding of how that will shape their lives for better or worse. Those who are not awakened may still be guided by someone else to develop new goods that are more in harmony with their other goods, especially their need to remain in harmony with those around them (Chapter 2, above). For, while judging goods is very tricky because of the difficulty of determining what standard to judge them by, it is possible to appeal to the desire for harmony or an aversion of conflict or dissonance.[228]

In certain respects this is similar to what Isaiah Berlin terms "positive liberty" or what Benjamin Constant calls the "liberty of the ancients," but my stress is very different.[229] Constant describes the liberty of the ancients by stressing citizens' ability to exercise governmental office "in forming alliances with foreign governments; in

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[228]For the sake of making it possible to describe the situation more clearly I sometimes oversimplify this matter. Harmony need not be simple consistency—and indeed in music it typically is not—but it may be a polyphony that carries many melodies without creating dissonance. See C. N. Dugan and T. B. Strong, "Music, Politics, and Representation in Rousseau," in Patrick Riley (eg.), *Cambridge Companion to Rousseau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 329-64; C. N. Dugan, "Reason's Wake: Political Education in Plato's *Laws*," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 1999), 152-318.

[229]At times I doubt that Berlin and Constant's terms can be extended to the beings that arise from people's interactions along with the unique goods that arise in polities because after closely reading their texts, I find their stress is so different. But in the end I think we are referring to something that is either the same or very similar, but that I am concerned with a more abstract level on influence on the world. Isiah Berlin, "Two Conepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on of Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), 5, 27; Benjamin Constant, "The liberty of the ancients compared with that of the moderns," in Robert Leroux (ed.) *French Liberalism in the 19th Century: An Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 68-82.

voting laws, in pronouncing judgments; in examining the accounts. . . ." And Berlin emphasizes the individuals' ability to "be his own master," or make his "life and decisions to depend on [himself], not on external forces of whatever kind," (8). Yet what I would describe as positive liberty is each individual's ability to participate in the shaping of the polity's understanding of the world, to contribute to the formation of being and to have her understanding of the *kalon* (admirable or beautiful) shared with the polity's common understanding of the *kalon*. Above all, positive liberty means (if I am to accept the use of the term for what I am describing) some contribution of the individual in shaping the polity's good as a whole.

Plato depicts Socrates for his readers in these conversations with others that are designed to reveal to them (a) how being is shaped, (b) how goods can be developed or guided, and (c) how the good of each individual is intertwined with his polity—his good as citizen. The conversations which make possible the enrichment of human beings and their shared existence in the polity possible are the political ends of both Socrates and Plato. Socrates would rather not live than live without these conversations (*Apology* 34e, 37c-38a). Plato chose to immortalize them and make them available for any who chose to read.

This good life is dependent on the polity because only the collection of human beings that make up the polity can provide the conditions necessary for the creation of distinctly human goods. One can look back on this account, or my account in Chapter 3, and see that there is a sense in which all of being or reality that people prize arises from a combination of perception and opinion. The polity, itself the strongest and

most powerful source of opinion, can come to threaten the very goods it made possible; it can threaten to devour the quintessentially human goods it made possible—the *kalon* it helped create. The polity creates the condition for being, and it is also the most powerful force in the destruction of being.

### 5.3.1 The Examined Life as a Means of Revealing Oneself

In the *Apology*, Plato presents readers with a Socrates who defends his life on the grounds that he made his polity better. Central to his defense is Socrates's willingness to know himself, following the inscription on Apollo's temple at Delphi. He holds forth his willingness to question his own being, his suppositions, his way of understanding the world, and expose it to examination. This shows his willingness to change his understanding of the world and his very being in light of what he learns from others.

Less well appreciated is Socrates's equal openness to learn about others. In his speech, he states that it is a "very great good for a human being—to make speeches every day about excellence and the other things about which you hear me conversing and examining both myself *and others*—and that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being," (38a). While people sometimes think of Socrates as a pest (a gadfly), his aim is not simply to be a pest. In addition to questioning his own being and getting others to question theirs, he presents others with an opportunity to contribute their being to the polity. Put slightly differently, he encourages other people to reveal themselves in conversation with him in all their uniqueness.

Those familiar with Hannah Arendt will recognize the similarity of this benefit Socrates claims to provide with Arendt understanding of people's manner of realizing their full humanity in the political realm. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt writes,

> No other human performance requires speech to the same extent as action. . . . In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world. . . . This disclosure of "who" in contradistinction to 'what' somebody is—his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide—is implicit in everything somebody says and does (24.180).[230]

Recall Plato's Socrates from the *Protagoras* who, after switching from arguing against Protagoras to being his ally, says to him the following:

> Just as if someone should say, when inquiring on the basis of one's outward appearance either with a view to health or one of the body's tasks, and when looking at the face and hands: "Come, now, uncover your chest and back and show them to me, so that I may make a more thorough examination," so I too desire something like this for the inquiry. Having observed that you stand in regard to the good and pleasant as you contend, I must say something like this: "Come, now, Protagoras, uncover for me this aspect of your thought as well. . ." (352a).

Arendt describes this act of bringing oneself into the polity as the "revelatory quality of speech and action [that] comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them," (24.180). While Socrates's questioning can appear more aggressive than what one imagines Arendt describing, he endeavors to bring people to reveal themselves, engaging in a quintessentially human action.

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[230]*The Human Condition*, Second Edition, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958, 1998). Cites are indicated by <section>.<page>.

Further examination shows that Arendt's disclosure is not a safe or easy one either. She continues, "Although nobody knows whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed or word, he must be willing to risk the disclosure." Every disclosure risks the very being of the person revealing herself. And one must not forget that when coaxing people to reveal themselves, Socrates is very gentle at times, such as in the *Republic* with Glaucon and Adeimantus, and in the *Phaedrus*, *Phaedo*, *Lysis*, and *Theaetetus*.[231]

It is in one's conversation with others in the polity that one can examine and reveal oneself, allowing one to most fully *be* who and what one is becoming.

### 5.3.2 *E Pluribus Unum*: the *Kalon* and the Political Good of Harmony

People's conversations can also aid in reaching what Plato shows readers to be other great goods possible from life with others in a polity: the *kalon* and, ultimately, harmony.

In Chapter 2, I explored at length how harmony comes into play in the *Protagoras*. Since it is possible for people to change their preferences, they are generally better served by developing preferences that the polity considers *kalos* (admirable or beautiful). Polities evolve notions of the *kalon* that become embedded in their language and culture: things that are admirable or good in themselves (as opposed to being good as a means to some other end).

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[231]At times Socrates seems to encourage some interlocutors, like Callicles in the *Gorgias*, to *expose* as much as *reveal* themselves. While this can seem harsh, Socrates indicates that punishment for injustice is what provides the opportunity for one to become better.

Goods that polities (as opposed to individuals) consider *kalon* tend to have certain features. They are typically things that would not have satisfied a savage human being; in Plato's terms, they are not appetites of the body, but those of the soul. Instead of engaging the traits that humans share with other animals, they tend to be goods that draw on human beings' distinctly human capacities.

Plato presents arguments in the *Republic*, Book 9, that show why it is better for an individual to get pleasure from some of these *higher goods* of the polity than other things. Some pleasures are always accompanied by pain (584b). For example, hunger is a pain that precedes the satisfaction of eating; and after being satiated, it returns. In this sense, many bodily pleasures seem to have no net gain since the removal of what brings pleasure can cause pain.

At the same time, the desire for many of these pleasures grows more intense the more they are satisfied, so satisfying them increases one's future dissatisfaction. They become harder and harder to satisfy, and the pain they cause becomes more frequent or more intense the more one pursues that pleasure (585b-c; *Gorgias* 493b-494a).

Such goods also frequently set individuals at odds with others. Typically people gain bodily pleasures through means that are scarce: at least in the short term, there is only so much good food or good houses. Yet scarcity is not the only problem with goods that are not *kalon*. The extreme case that that of a serial killer—some whose good necessarily sets them at odds with others. In these cases, the individual tends to have both internal and external conflicts with others: internal from the

struggle between her sense of pleasure from killing which remains at odds with the opinion of the community which continues to influence her; external from the direct conflict that pursuit places her in with others.

Related, but not precisely the same, *kalon* goods make it possible for individuals to be simultaneously a good human being and a good citizen. Above in Chapter 3, section "The One and the Many," I explained how inside each individual there are, in a sense, a multitude of people. Two of the more important groups of people within a person are those people identify as themselves as an individual human being and themselves as a citizen. The good for the individual is frequently different than the good for the citizen. The individual may want a large comfortable home, the citizen may want the city as a whole to remain secure from invaders, and satisfying these two disparate goods simultaneously can lead to internal conflict that causes a person pain even if one of the goods is achieved (perhaps even if both are ultimately achieved). However, if individuals can adopt a good that aligns with the community's standard of the *kalon*, they can avoid this internal conflict. For example, honor is a good for many polities. When individuals pursuit honor, they satisfy their individual desire to become better and also typically make their polity better in the process.

Therefore goods that the polity considers *kalon* (admirable or beautiful) tend to be superior pleasures and also more conducive of harmony (within and between people). One can certainly ask, "Why is harmony good?" but then it is possible to ask why any particular thing is good. As my discussion in Chapter 3 indicates, people tend to start with certain goods from nature, hunger or sexual pleasure, and develop

other goods while pursuing goods they already have. Their experience of *eros*, in which they intensely desire some good for its own sake—or because it is beautiful—can lead them to develop other goods by association. There sense of what is good is also significantly influenced by the opinions of those around them, especially those they are in frequent contact with. Harmony is often a better good to have than others because it—by definition—does not have substantial conflicts with other goods. Moreover, we seem to have developed a sense that harmony is beautiful—good for its own sake—and so typically people do not even feel the need to ask why it is good.

One could describe Plato's *Gorgias* as a contest over what is more *kalon* (beautiful or admirable)--the art practiced by Gorgias or the practiced by Socrates. In the beginning, Callicles asserts that Gorgias made a display of many *kalos* things (447a). When Polus initially attempts to speak in place of Gorgias, Chaerephon asks him if he will give more *kalos* answers than Gorgias (448a). Polus claims that Gorgias practices the most *kalos* of all the arts (*technai*)(448c). Socrates argues that rhetoricians do not do something *kalos* because they seek to give people pleasure without considering what is actually good for them (462c-65e). A good rhetorician, or a doctor of the soul, would not simply feed the desires that currently give someone pleasure, but guide someone from their current goods to new ones that (a) are better in the ways described earlier in this section and (b) that help them remain in harmony with themselves and others in their polity.

Harmony does not mean that people must be the same; being in harmony with others does not mean that one has the same goods as them, but that one's good does

not come into direct conflict with theirs. Likewise, being in harmony with oneself does not mean that one does not have disparate desires, but that those different voices within oneself manage to coexist without leading to the kinds of conflict that result in substantial pain. Plato's Socrates argues that the way to achieve this is by having the voice of reason dominant over the other voices (spiritual and appetite). In part this is because the voice of reason is the one that might be able to shape the others and bring them into harmony.

At the level of the polity, harmony is justice, though it is seen from a different angle than we normally look at justice. Socrates indicates that harmony in the polity does not entail making all citizens the same or encouraging them all to develop the exact same good, but recognizes the differences among different groups in the polity. In the *Republic*, the polity in speech has three main groups with three different goods: the workers who seek money or pleasure, the auxiliary guardians who seek honor, and the leader guardians who seek wisdom and knowledge (442a-44b); and they indicate that further differentiation is natural (370a). They achieve harmony by having their identities encompass each other, calling the same things "mine" and "not mine," (462a-c). Thus while each of them gains individual pleasure from different goods, they all also seek a common good that aligns their pleasures and pains. Therefore, even with great diversity, it is possible to have justice by having the different voices of people ordered into a sort of polyphonic harmony.[232] Finding a common good that can

[232]See C. N. Dugan and T. B. Strong, "Music, Politics, and Representation in Rousseau," in Patrick Riley (eg.), *Cambridge Companion to Rousseau* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge Univ. Press,

unite people is more likely when they each pursue goods the polity considers *kalos*.

Bringing fellow citizens into the right kinds of conversations with each other tends to generate this harmony: in sharing their understandings of the world, they develop (a) in some cases similar and in other cases (b) complementary understandings of the world. The conversations allow their different understandings to influence each other and help shape each other. This makes possible the development of a unity from a diversity; from many diverse people with different goods, there can arise a being that comprises all of them with a common good.

However, following the polity's sense of what is *kalon* does not assure that people are pursuing better goods—better either for them as individuals or for the polity as a whole. Indeed, Socrates and Plato may have been responding to just such a problem. Under the influence of Homer, the Greeks often sought glory in battle as their most dominant good, more than anything else, glory was *kalos*. While the rise of the *polis* appeared to allow this good to shift from being an individual to a polity-wide good—one could seek glory for one's *polis*—even this seemed to become a good the pursuit of which led to destructive consequences in the Peloponnesian War. In response, Socrates and Plato appear to have attempted to redirect Greek good of glory in war to glory in winning arguments and ultimately arguments for understanding the truth about the world we live in. While these new goods may have served human beings well for much of the next couple millennia, there is good reason to believe that

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2001), 329-64; C. N. Dugan, "Reason's Wake: Political Education in Plato's *Laws*," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 1999), 152-318.

something in our world has changed and led this good—the pursuit of truth—to become in certain respects bad.

, and we may now confront such a problem with the pursuit of truth, something I will discuss at greater length below. After finishing my discussion of what Plato shows to be the good of polities, I return to address this more recent problem below, in my section on "The Tyranny of Truth."

## 5.4 Tyranny, Harmony, and Being

In addition to these goods made possible only through people's political life together, Plato shows us something he considers crucial about a good polity through his treatment of tyranny. In the *Apology*, Plato has Socrates highlight, for Athenians and readers alike, the deeds (*erga*) that defend him, deeds that define him. For these defining deeds, he chooses two times in his life when he stood alone against his own polity to defend what he believed was right in the face of the political force of (1) the democracy, as in the case of the trial of the generals of the battle of Arginusae,[233] as well as (2) an oligarchy installed by Sparta at the end of the Peloponnesian War (32a-d). These two examples reveal what most threatens the space of the polity where things come to be: tyranny. But what is tyranny?

### 5.4.1 Tyranny and Law

For Plato, tyranny is not a form of government so much as a characteristic any

[233]I consider this event in more detail below.

government can take on. He depicts tyranny to show the negative effect of having power without the restraint of law: people tend to pursue goods that ultimately lead them to be worse than if they were constrained to following the law of their polity. Plato shows Socrates dealing with at least two would-be tyrants: Callicles in the *Gorgias* and Thrasymachus in the *Republic*. Callicles, like his fellow student of Gorgias, Polus, is interested in learning rhetoric so that he can be like a tyrant in the city, "putting to death anyone they please, and depriving anyone of his property and expelling him from their cities as they may think fit," (466c). In other words, a skilled orator can use his ability to circumvent (or become) the law and satisfy his desires. Thrasymachus places rulers in a similar tyrannical position by having them define justice as being the interest of the stronger (338c-e).

Socrates questions whether such power would actually be a good thing—whether being able to do such injustices (or having such "advantages") would actually be better than not being able to do them. Gorgias, Polus, and Thrasymachus all eventually become ashamed under Socrates' questions, suggesting that doing wrong to another is bad or ugly (*aischros*), and start agreeing with him. Callicles however, does not.

Callicles argues that by nature the stronger should have advantage over the weaker (483d). He claims that convention teaches people otherwise as a way of the weak trying to trick the strong into thinking they should not simply use their superiority to satisfy their desires (even at the expense of others).

Socrates attempts to show Callicles that being stronger, better, or superior is

not as simple as it appears. One person has to be stronger or superior in some particular way. Based on the discussion above, in Chapter 3, I would add that any of the ways of being stronger or superior must also be ways of being more admirable (*kalos*); and the *kalon* is a standard set by people's interaction within the polity. The goal that Callicles sets appears to require a polity to make sense, yet in seeking it, he acts as if the polity does not matter, but only the individual.

Socrates asks Callicles questions intended to help him realize that his belief that more is better may not explain as much as he thinks. He suggests that shoemakers, since they are the wisest about shoes, might deserve the biggest shoes or get to wear the most shoes; or that the weaver, being wisest about clothes, deserves the largest coat or should have the finest clothes (490d-e).

More is not necessarily better. In some things, only a certain quantity makes sense. And the suggestion is that if one has an advantage at a particular thing, then what one deserves is to be able to do that thing. The implicit argument Socrates makes is that those who know most about ruling—that is, those who know most about how to help fellow citizens lead a better life, are the ones who should rule, rather than those who can speak the most persuasively.

Yet, Callicles claims to know something about the best life himself: it is where one uses all his abilities to allow his desires—whatever they are—to be as strong as possible and to satisfy them at their height (492a). According to Callicles, being a tyrant is good because the tyrant has the power to have great desires and satisfy them.

Socrates counters that this would not be the best life, but possibly the worst. It

would put the tyrant in a position where he could immediately have whatever he thought best at any moment. Freedom from constrain is also freedom to injure oneself. What one thinks is best and what one wishes (presumably what is actually best for one) are not always the same thing. In fact, obtaining what is actually best often requires self-restraint (491e). To get what is best, people need time for reflection—time to reason; the ability to immediately satisfy their appetites makes it hard for them to be moderate.

Refusing to yield, Callicles claims that moderation is merely being a slave to oneself; the tyrant, being completely free, allows his desires to be unrestrained. Why would anyone want to be mastered by anyone, even himself? To convince Callicles otherwise, Socrates has to show him where this chain or reasoning leads. To satisfy strong desires, one must first have strong desires. If satisfying them is the height of life, then life is just about wanting a great deal and then getting it. While that may seem to make sense, for example, in the case of wanting a great meal and getting it, other cases that still apply the same logic give reason to doubt the conclusion. Having an itch is a desire. Itching a lot is a great desire. Being able to satisfy that itch, according to Callicles' logic, would make one happy. Therefore, just sitting around itching and scratching all the time would be a good life (494c).

Socrates' argument, at bottom, is *not* that scratching an itch is *not pleasant* (despite disliking the image, Callicles contends that this would be a good life). What he shows Callicles is that, pleasant or not, it is the life, not of a human being, but of a beast. While he might enjoy himself, he would do so in a shallow and inhuman (or

bestial) way; and even that would be unlikely to last very long. Freedom to pursue and satisfy all desires without any restraints closes people off to other goods that might be more rewarding. Limiting the freedom to satisfy some desires, opens the way to a better life for human beings from something other than the parts of themselves they share with beasts.

Therefore one sees that the person who is tyrannical is not good for himself because he dwells beyond the law, and this frees all of his desires which typically robs him of the chance to strive for goods unique to human beings. It is possible, but unlikely that he resists even when he does not need to, but to do so he would need a thorough understanding of the consequences and conviction that they are true. Much more likely is that instead of pursuing goods developed in the polity, he tends to pursue the desires he was born with.

### 5.4.2 Tyranny's Negative Effects

Put in other terms Callicles would be pursuing a good that differs from the polity's sense of what is *kalon*; and the social effect of the community's opinion that things he pursues are shameful (*aischros*) would trap Callicles into a painful conflict of goods. While he might pursue scratching all the time, he would tend to dislike himself for it because the community's sense of the good embodied in the *kalon* would tend to affect him whether he wanted it to or not. Indeed, as is born out in his conversation with Socrates, he finds himself in just such an internal conflict: while on the one hand he shocked when Socrates shows him that his position that pleasure is *the*

*good* would entail that he endorse the life of a catamite, "Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to lead the arguments into such things?" he nevertheless is willing to continue to claim that the pleasant is the good, even recognizing this consequence (494e).

Moreover, even were it not for this internal conflict, Callicles's life is directed at the pursuit of a good that is arguably inferior for other reasons discussed earlier in this section. His pleasure would be accompanied by pain, satisfying it in the present would make it harder to satisfy in the future, and it would tend to lead him into conflict with others in his polity. Thus the tyrant is destructive of his own pleasure and of the polity itself.

Perhaps the best way to see how the tyrant is anti-political is through a consideration of tyranny and friendship. In pursuing pleasure without restraint, a tyrant seeks to remove any obstacles to his pleasure. Since other human beings also pursue goods of their own, there is always the chance that they will come into conflict with the tyrant's own pursuit, either directly by seeking the same goods or indirectly by limiting his power for the good of the polity. Thus, the tyrant must do away with his friends, even those who might have helped him establish a tyranny (567b). The most immediate and significant consequence is that the tyrant loses anyone with whom he *inter*act. He cannot share his understanding of the world with anyone, he can only impose it on others, making them into something like his slaves, or live isolated and by himself, which is not that different from a life with slaves anyway. He loses the possibility of a distinctly human life, one in which human beings shape a

world that they share together. Since he does not form a world with others, he can never explore anything beyond himself. He is reduced to the state of a mere animal, perhaps in some ways worse than social animals.

Yet it is not only dictators and other individual tyrants that need to be concerned about these dangers because any type of government—an oligarchy, democracy, and even a mixed government—can become a tyranny. Tyranny is having license to pursue one's desires without restraint. Plato has Socrates specify that it is not the *name* of office of the tyrant itself, or the form of rule—rule by one—that makes tyranny bad, but the indiscriminate use of freedom to satisfy his desires: "the majority of these examples, indeed, have come from tyrants, kings, potentates, and those who engage in the affairs of the cities; for these through having a free hand (*exousia*) make the greatest and most impious errors," (*Gorgias* 525d). It is one's ability to circumvent law that puts one in danger precisely because it is difficult to choose not to satisfy a desire when one has the power to. Those who manage to resist even when they have freedom are singled out for special praise (526a). The office of tyrant does not assure one is tyrannical; and it is being tyrannical that is condemned, not merely holding the title. And even unrestrained pursuit of basic desires is not singled out as bad in itself, but because such a pursuit prevents people from obtaining the goods unique to political life, and those are the goods that make possible internal harmony as well as harmony with others.

### 5.4.3 Logic and Rule of Law to Oppose Opinion (*Doxa*) and Tyranny

Plato's dialogues support logic, rooted in the principle of non-contradiction, as a way of preventing tyranny and preserving the being that a polity makes possible.[234] That experts possess a body of knowledge in some art or craft (*technē*) allows them to influence outcomes in ways that are predictable and teachable (*Gorgias* 464b-65e). While the correct understanding of the world and the beings in it was something previously considered a matter open to contest (*agōn*) among citizens, typically by means of rhetoric, Plato's Socrates contends that the polity would be better guided by someone with expertise in political matters, as a ship should be guided by a pilot or captain (*Republic* 488b).

Applying the principle of non-contradiction and an ability to bring out internal contradictions in the views of others in political conflicts made possible claims to truth that were are not completely vulnerable to the persuasion of rhetoricians. Someone skilled in logic could refute another's opinion—even one agreed upon by the mass of the people—by showing how it contradicts one of his other opinions or their implications.

A key part of the *technē* that helps someone guide the polity is this ability to use logic rather than rhetoric (or logic as part of rhetoric) to ensure greater harmony and less dissonance in the polity. This is a way to make consistency and individual opinion stronger than mere group opinion. Plato illustrates this in the *Gorgias* by having Socrates explain,

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[234]See chapter 3, section 6, The Sun Too Makes Shadows: Truth, Logic, and Philosophy.

> I am not one of the political men, and when last year I was by lot a member of the council and my tribe was presiding and I had to put a question to the vote, I gave people a laugh and didn't know how to put it to the vote. So then, now too do not bid me to put the vote to those present, but if you do not have a better refutation than these things, as I was just now saying, give the refutation over to me in my turn, and make a trial of the sort of refutation that I think ought to be. For I know how to provide one witness for what I say, the man himself to whom my speech is directed, while I bid the many farewell; and I know how to put the vote to one man, while I don't converse with the many either (473e-74b).[235]

Here, in the very text where Socrates will later claim to be the only Athenian of his day who practices politics (521d), he claims that he is "not one of the political men" (*ouk eimi tōn politikōn*). He later asserts he does practice politics because his goal is the good of Athens rather than simply flattering or giving pleasure to the people. If we consider his words carefully, we see that he is not political precisely because he does not "know how to put [political questions] to a vote." This does not mean Socrates thinks the opinion of the majority does not matter. Rather he contends that polity's opinion should be reached through a process of reasoning that considers more than people's current opinion, in particular the polity should consider the other things it has accepted and how its current determination will accord or disagree with its other decisions.

Just as Socrates—as an individual—prefers "that most human beings disagree with me and say contradictory things, rather than that I, being one man, should be discordant with myself and say contradictory things," we see that—as a polity—he

[235]See also (472b-c). Polus first tried to determined the outcome of his conversation with Socrates by appeal to popular opinion, emotion, and even shaming Socrates by laughing at him for the position he holds.

prefers that Athens be denied the pleasure it might get by punishing someone for the failure to recover survivors and bodies in order that it stay harmony with itself by remaining consistent with its other laws and customs. He seeks to preserve a higher life for the polity by insisting that the people do not allow their immediate and temporary desires to override their past decisions.

The particular situation to which Socrates refers is the trial of the Athenian generals at the Battle of Arginusae, in which Socrates exemplified this adherence to reaching current decisions in a way that agrees with other decisions: *Rule of Law*. Toward the end of the Peloponnesian War the Athenians fought the Spartans in the eastern Aegean near the Arginusea islands.[236] Despite being clear underdogs in the battle, the Athenians managed to defeat the Spartans, but a storm that arose at the end of the battle hampered efforts to rescue survivors of sunken Athenian ships and the bodies of those who died. The generals called off these efforts, in substantial part to preserve the fleet from further damage in the storm.

At first the Athenians were grateful for their unexpected victory, but later they were angry that the survivors and bodies had not be successfully retrieved, and they decided to put the eight generals of the battle on trial with the death penalty as punishment. Among the 50 prytanies who were chosen at random for that period to handle such cases was Socrates. During the day on which he was chosen at random to serve as president (*epistates*) of the assembly, there was a motion to put to a vote the

[236]Battle details are from Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.6; trial details are from 1.7.

guilt of all eight generals as a group. Holding a single vote on the guilt of a group of people was against Athenian custom under which each person received a separate vote, and Socrates refused to allow the vote.[237] Socrates's principle, which we would now term *Rule of Law*, is the manifestation—at the level of the polity—of the desire to remain in harmony with oneself. The analogy of the individual soul to the polity as a whole that Plato depicts in the *Republic* appears to be a central part of the way the historical Socrates lived. Harmony as rule of law is one of the most potent forces to combat the possiblity of a polity becoming consumed by tyranny (whether that be the tyranny of an oligarchy, a democracy, or a monarchy).

For Socrates, consistency is not mere pedantry but an integral part of what makes for a good polity. Harmony is a basic part of the *kalon* (the beautiful or admirable). Only in harmony can one seek to obtain multiple goods and ensure that the goods with greater priority are more likely to be obtained than those of lesser interest. On the level of the individual this means, in my simple example from the last chapter, someone who craves herion not choosing it over his family's rent money. On the level of the polity, it might mean thwarting the majority's will to remain true to a constitutional principle or not sacrificing central liberties in order to prevent relatively minor infringements of national security. Harmony among goods increases the number of goods that can be achieved and also encourages intelligent trade-offs when goods come into conflict with each other. Consistency is a key part of harmony that

[237]Xenophon shows that Socrates does so only at considerable risk to his own life. When another person had opposed the motion to try all the generals at once, others had argued that he should suffer the death penalty for making the motion, *Hellenica* 1.7.

makes a good polity possible.

The appeal to the principle of non-contradiction gives, in certain respects, a privileged position to those who can find contradictions between different opinions and point them out to refute others. While there may be no necessary choice as to which suppositions to take as first principles, more than anyone else, it is those who can comprehend beings up to the level of first principles and then deduce back down to detailed implications who have the best chance for success in making political arguments.

Whereas some saw democratic politics as a process of bringing the majority to agreement upon some opinion, which then constituted true opinion, it becomes possible in political matters to use the philosopher's insight into avoiding dissonance for one human being to claim to be right (having correct or true opinion) in the face of the opinions of many who oppose him. At the same time this makes resistance to a tyrant more possible through the *Rule of Law*, this understanding of politics gives a privileged position to the philosopher (or anyone good with logic) in political matters. It is what Hannah Arendt later terms Plato's "substitution of making for acting."[238]

With the spread of this understanding, under Plato's influence, it becomes increasingly possible for one individual to persuade others in politics, not simply by rhetorical appeals to popular opinion, emotions, interest, or shaming someone into a position,[239] but by contending that a certain position must be correct because it did not

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[238]*The Human Condition*, Second Edition, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958, 1998), section 31.
[239]In the *Gorgias*, the top student of rhetoric, Polus, attempts to win an argument with Socrates in all

conflict with other things agreed upon whereas some other position would. In short, instead of there being only popular truth, it became possible to argue for *rational* truth: the *logos* that could harmonize with the other *logoi*, the other accounts that had already been accepted. It was possible to shape the polity through thinking.

Rule of Law—applying the principle of consistency to a polity—entails that not just the current opinion of the rulers (whether monarchy, oligarchy, or democracy) determines what can be done, but any present decision must be harmonious with past decisions. Thus the principle of non-contradiction applied to polities brings about a form of self-restraint for the polity. This form of self-restraint can impose limitations on rulers that prevent them from becoming tyrants, and consequently free them to pursue the ends unique to political life instead of the more basic desires they would be likely to pursue if unrestrained.

Thus we find another political good in the works of Plato: rule of law as a way to oppose tyranny.

#### 5.4.3.1 Individualism

A consequence of the development of the spread of this understanding of truth is the flowering of individualism. As truth becomes—not simply what most people accept but—what can be shown to avoid contradicting other truths, it becomes possible for the individual to stand firm in the face of a hostile community. With *rational* truth, the being of the individual suddenly has a place from which to defend

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these ways while Socrates persists in pursuing the logical outcome of the argument (466b-73e).

himself against the community. A single human being can point to how her understanding of one thing permits her understanding of other things to remain consistent, whereas the group's understanding would not.[240]

As a consequence, each individual's own idiosyncratic understanding of the world (reality) can make a claim to be *the* understanding. The final judge of validity is not—in the first instance—the community, but non-contradiction.[241] This makes it possible for Augustine of Hippo to take the conversations in his head as trumping the opinion of the Roman people that Christianity is to blame for barbarian invasions or for Martin Luther to take his own understanding of the Bible over that of the collected experts of the Catholic Church. When Luther says, "Here I stand," he stands on rational truth: on his interpretation of a text being more in harmony with his understanding of being than other interpretations—no matter how many.

Individualism is one of the goods widely agreed on by those supporting contemporary democracy. Yet it can only develop once rational truth allows individuals to stand firm in the face of collective opinion, something which grows under the influence of Plato and Socrates. Therefore, while it is not directly one of the political goods Plato emphasizes in his dialogues, it constitutes one of the political goods we typically prize in democracies that is at least in part a consequence of the

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[240]George Kateb seems to unconsciously acknowledge that Plato represents a threshold for individualism when he writes "I must admit that although democratic individualism existed in ancient Athens, I suspect that the surviving Greek literature contains no formal articulation of the modern concept of individual uniqueness: the idea that every person is, in important respects, a distinct world." He goes on to cite Plato's myth of Er as a possible exception. "Individualism and Its Critics" *Annual Review of Political Science* (2003), Vol. 6, 275-305, 278.

[241]Kateb reaches different conclusions in part because he sees freedom from fixed roles as the core of individualism instead of the uniqueness of each being, which requires restraint to continue existing.

development of rational truth by Socrates and Plato.

### 5.5 The Goods of Polities and Democracy

Having considered in greater detail the goods that Plato sees as coming from a polity, it is now possible to say something more interesting, from a different vantage point than normal, about what Plato thinks of democracy. For Plato, the primary goods of the polity are the further enrichment of being that occurs when people interact. When people reveal themselves to each other in conversation, the being shared by all in the polity is enriched by the unique understanding of the world manifested in each person. This greater detail added to the world within the polity is of particular importance to the philosopher. Her good is wisdom; and each time a person reveals himself to the polity the wisdom the philosopher gains enjoyment from exploring in enriched, there is more of being to wonder at.

Democracies are composed of people who seek many different goods, but among the highest are freedom and equality. Both of these goods encourage interaction in the polity that encourages people to reveal themselves to others in the political community, which in turn leads to an increase in knowledge and a greater depth in being.

However, freedom—especially freedom spread equally to all people, regardless of their ability to restrain themselves and regardless of which goods they prefer can lead to tyranny. If all have the choice to satisfy their natural desires without restraint, many people will exercise that freedom and close off a deeper pursuit of the

goods unique to polities. It is some form of restraint, typically from an outside source, that makes the transition from one good to another possible. Without such a restraint, it is less likely that people will transition from a basic good such as sexual satisfaction to a political good such as the love of wisdom that will enable them to remain at once in harmony with themselves and with others.

Bearing this in mind, I contend that Plato would consider a democracy to be good only if the goods unique to political life are enjoyed by more than a small number of people who happen to be able to restrain themselves from their basic desires on their own. If they are not, then those goods would gradually be effaced for all, as people pursue basic desires, participate in political life less and less, and eventually allow it to disintegrate. One way for to increase the number of people who restrain themselves would be for widespread use of the political art. If there are many people who understand how to guide people from one good to another with the political art of conversation, then the number of people who restrain themselves may grow large enough that political goods remain widely enjoyed and can thrive.

The other possibility is for people to hold consistency and harmony as a good, in addition to freedom and equality. In this manner, the polity, while free, prefers a consistency that establish the rule of law over and prevent the polity from simply satisfying every momentary desire. Since the character of the polity comes from the character of the people, the people would need to hold rational truth as a good at least as high as freedom. This would allow a love for consistency and law to substitute for the philosopher's love of wisdom.

I believe that what we find in Plato's dialogues is evidence of support for what can be classified as three main goods of polities. First, support for people interacting in ways that enrich their lives together by shaping their world together and learning to point themselves, as much as possible, toward superior goods, judged to be superior on the basis of them lessening internal and external conflicts. Second, an imperative for people choosing higher goods. If these two aims conflict, if Plato's Socrates is forced to choose between having everyone participate in political interaction that mixes the being of all and that which involves fewer people, but helps more people direct their lives to specifically political goods, Socrates would choose the latter. The argument lying beneath the dialogues appears to be that contributing to being while having one's life dominated by the pursuit of physical pleasure or money will be destructive of political goods as a whole: destructive of the polity insofar as it is meaningful and good. Whereas once people pursue the higher goods of the polity, they can help it flourish and become better.

It is the third political good—awakening people to consciousness of the goods they seek and their ability to play a role in shaping those goods—that may make all the difference. In urging people toward this good, Plato's Socrates appears to work to resolve the conflict between the other two goods: contributing to the being of the polity and aiming at the higher human goods. Therefore, the Platonic judgment of a democracy, just as with another form of government, appears to depend upon the type of people who compose it. But a good democracy would allow for the greatest contribution of people to the development of being; therefore, if composed of the right

sorts of people, a democracy would be better than other types of polities.

Yet there remains a further difficulty in understanding the goodness or badness of democracies: historical changes have altered the conditions under which polities and political goods are shaped. In particular, the development of truth as a force to restrain freedom in the polity left open the possibility that truth itself might be unrestrained and become a tyrant. As I argue in the next section, the consistency that was part of the philosopher's good, rational truth or the wonder at seeing beings as they must be to be harmonious with other beings, changed from being a primarily good (or end in itself) to being a means to an end. Now my focus shifts to the process that led to this change in the being of truth itself.

## 5.6 The Tyranny of Truth

### 5.6.1 The Pre-Modern Conception of Truth

Before explaining how the being of truth itself has changed and what that means for democracy, I briefly recapitulate the understanding of truth I established in my section on "The Good," in Chapter 3. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates describes the good by making a comparison to the sun: as it is responsible for us being able to see all the objects we see, so the good is responsible for being. The good directs our analysis of the world; and it is in our analyzing that we are forced to suppose one thing in order to think about another. The beings we suppose are logically prior to the ones we are analyzing; and in that sense the other objects of our thought, including the objects we see, depend upon the ideas we suppose. Based on this I remarked that the

Platonic forms need not be taken as the transcendental beings existing *outside of* or *beyond* our world that Neoplatonists and Christianity made them into.

However, the good itself can change. What begins to be good for one thing (such as a long stick), can through repeated association become considered good in itself. Things that are good in themselves are considered *kalos* (beautiful or admirable) by the person who has them as a good. As more and more people interact, they create more and more beings that they have accounts of and consider to be real. Through repeated interaction, they enrich their understanding of these beings (though to be sure they sometimes question them, find problems with their understandings, and even abandon their belief in the existence of them).

While the term, the *kalon*, ultimately is strongly influenced by the opinions of people in society as well, all individuals have things that are *kalos* to them. The philosopher, whose main good is knowledge or wisdom, finds the beings themselves—and understanding them as much as possible—to be *kalos*. That is, when she can see the beings that make up reality for what they are, when she can understand how they came to be and how they change, she stands in wonder gazing at them (*thaumazdein*, the verb Plato uses to describe the philosopher pondering being) admiring the beauty of their being.

### 5.6.2 The Shift to Modern Truth

Understanding truth—which came to also mean consistency with other beings even to the point of supplanting the authority of agreed upon opinion—carried with it

another potential consequence that remained largely latent for almost two millennia until it was stirred to life by Galileo and Descartes. For Plato and other philosophers who could see how beings constituted reality, even the principle of non-contradiction was incomplete. For Plato, truth had always remained—at its core—just as it was before him: a widely agreed upon opinion. Harmony was preferred over dissonance, but that was because it was beautiful (*kalos*) instead of ugly (*aischros*), a standard that rose out of, and in turn informed the polity itself. The philosopher loved knowledge, he loved seeing the beings in the world further enriched without the understanding of one conflicting with another. But being still shined forth most brightly at precisely those points where it escaped the philosopher's ability to give a rational account of it: in tragedy or paradox.[242]

To see something that at once clearly was and was not, that must be and couldn't be, was in one sense the pinnacle of one's ability to see the beings in the world unveiled or unhidden—a very literal translation of the Greek word for truth (*alētheia*). As lover of knowledge, the philosopher is also a theorist, derived from the ancient Greek *theōros*, to see with the eyes or with the mind. The philosopher seeks to see the world as clearly as possible. As he sees, he attempts to harmonize one understanding with others. But seeing the world unhidden is itself one of his joys, a central part of the philosopher's *good*. To see paradox is proof that one has plumbed the depths of being and seen the limit of what can be understood. The philosopher harmonizes what

[242]While such paradoxes are, by their very nature, difficult to illustrate well, I provide an example of in Chapter 2, culminating in the recognition that the only good is pleasure, but the *kalon* is a higher pleasure to be preferred over pleasure.

can be gathered into coherence and wonders, mesmerized, at what cannot be.

Under the influence of Galileo and Descartes this outlook changes. As Hannah Arendt describes it, “Scientific and philosophic truth have parted company,” (41.290). This leads to a perversion of Plato's influence on politics, creating a barrier that stifles individuals' attempt to contribute to the polity. This change represents an additional threat which can prevent polity's being good for their citizens. To appreciate further Plato's relationship to democratic polities, I must explain how I understand Arendt's claim that something crucial has changed since Plato's time and how that change can make truth into a tyrant.

### 5.6.3 The Altered Meaning of Truth and Consequent Alienation

Arendt shows how the tradition of political thought uses concepts that become twisted by Descartes's reaction to Galileo's telescope. In the final chapter of *The Human Condition*, Arendt depicts how an event (as opposed to thinking) led to a change in the human condition with profound consequences for the tradition of political thought as well as modern science, capitalism, and the nation state. Galileo's invention of the telescope changed the way Descartes examined the nature of *being*—what makes a thing exist and determines the content of that existence. The telescope provides proof that people can trust neither their minds nor their unaided senses to give them a reliable understanding of the world: “If Being and Appearance part company forever. . . then there is nothing left to be taken upon faith; everything must be doubted” (38.275).

The key consequence is a loss of beauty, of the *kalon*: only a portion of which is captured by the English *beautiful*.[243] As Arendt writes, the "decisive" point is the "un-Platonic subjection of geometry to algebraic treatment" (36.265). "Yet even more significant" is the ability to "reckon with entities which could not be 'seen' by the eye of the mind" and the development of a "novel mode of meeting and approaching nature in the experiment" (36.265). The consequence is "removing the eyes of the mind, no less than the eyes of the body, from phenomena" (36.267). This new world lacks the beauty of the old one because the "assemblage of things. . . transformed into a mere multitude" is not "a demonstration of an inherent and inherently beautiful order of nature" (36.276). Instead of a magical whole, reality starts to seem as a mire of uncertainty.

This uncertainty led Descartes to doubt and to question nearly everything—even his own existence; and everything he previously thought of as real seemed to dissolve under his questioning so that the only thing he could be sure of was his doubt itself.[244] As he questioned all accepted knowledge, Descartes found almost nothing from which he could take his bearings. He saw the *being* of the things he previously

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[243]As described in chapters 2 and 3, the *kalon* or *kalos* is a Greek word that conveys the notion of physical beauty, fitness for a purpose, and moral attractiveness. Thus, one could say that a piece of furniture fits into a room beautifully (without making an exclusively aesthetic judgment). One might also refer to a soldier who saved his fellow soldiers by diving on top of a hand grenade by saying, "That was a beautiful thing he did." The opposite of the *kalon* is the *aischron*: *the ugly or the shameful.*

[244]Arendt emphasizes this by noting that at the core of Descartes's famous "I think, therefore I am," Cartesian thinking "always means *cogito me cogitare*," that is, *I think that I think*: doubt, *Human Condition* 39.280. But since all that is at stake is what the mind itself has produced, this doubt itself is certain and man only confronts himself. The one thing that is solid is people's doubt which then becomes the basis for everything that can be considered true. Arendt also quotes Descartes to show that thought is merely derivative in character, being ultimately based in doubt, 38.279 fn39.

believed in as real—or perhaps more accurately, he was not able to see any being because of the point on which he stood to examine the world—and this lack of reality made him recoil: this world without solidity, without certainty, struck him as ugly (as *aischron*).[245] He compared ancient moral writings to "proud and magnificent palaces built only on sand and mud" and described virtues as "nothing but a case of callousness, or vanity, or desperation, or parricide."[246]

By contrast, previous philosophers examined being more from the standpoint of Socrates in the *Meno*. He knows beyond doubt that virtue (*aretē*) exists, but he wants to understand what this concept means or what makes it what it is. He wants to see its being—but does not question its existence.[247] His initial success at seeing what constitutes a thing evokes in him a sense of wonder: he sees what led to something's coming into being and regards it as beautiful to behold.

Revolted by the ugliness of being, or lack of being, that came to sight from the vantage point of his analysis, Descartes sought to push back doubt, to find or to create solid ground, that is, certainty or certain truths. While truth is what Descartes needs, truth is no longer good for its own sake; now, truth is valued because it pushes back

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[245]A likely contributing factor was Descartes experience with Scholastic Thought and Christianity. These provided the point from which he took his bearings (of which Descartes was probably unaware) from which seeing being would look ugly. They set an ideal of perfect order and divine perfection, and beside these the nature of being looked paltry. Mathematics itself also biased Descartes in favor of order and certainty: "Above all I delighted in mathematics, because of the certainty and self-evidence of its reasonings," Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, 1:10. Quotes are from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985).

[246]Discourse 1:10.

[247]By contrast, Arendt notes that one of the new implications of the Cartesian world view is "that neither *truth nor reality is given*. . .and that only interference with appearance, doing away with appearances, can hold out a hope for true knowledge," emphasis mine 38.274.

the doubt, the ugliness (*aischros*) of an uncertain world. This brought about a fundamental shift in Western thought.

The role of truth changed, and that change caused a reversal from the *vita contemplativa* to the *vita activa*, and led from a world searching for beauty to one without a meaningful end or an end that amounted to only an interminable escape from the black-hole singularity of doubt (in an attempt to reach the illusory point of absolute certainty). To continue to push back the doubt, people must make new tools and perform new experiments, making tools that make it possible to demonstrate that something must be true since it can be shown; the uncertainty being pushed back by the repetition of doing.[248]

Lest anyone think that I overemphasize the role of Cartesian doubt in Arendt's understanding of this change, note that she writes that in "modern philosophy and thoughts, doubt, occupies much the same central position as that occupied for all the centuries before by the Greek *thaumazein*, the wonder at everything that is as it is" (38.273). From Descartes forward, doubt must be pushed back, and since the senses and mind can no longer do that, people must rely on demonstration: on the results of experiments.[249] Only results, and repeated results at that, can push back doubt. Results are what matter and become *the standard of goodness*.

I contend that the Cartesian change amounts to, and results in, a world in which the standard of something's goodness switches from whether something is *kalon*

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[248]Arendt notes the shift "from reality to reliability," 38.279.
[249]The irreducible is the *cogito*.

(beautiful) to whether it is *aischros* (ugly). While this change may appear inconsequential, the transformation it brings about in the meaning of truth leads to a reversal of contemplation and action, catapulting the West to produce more and more with no ultimate end other than, perhaps, to push back the ugliness of being.

This change is crucial for us to appreciate how Plato's understanding of polities might need to be modified in order to still lead to a healthy polity. We must try to understand how the *kalon* does or does not remain a possible end for individuals or the polity as a whole.

This reversal was possible only because of what political thought became in the hands of Plato, but it was not caused by him. As Arendt details in section 31 of *The Human Condition*, it was Plato who "substituted" making for acting. Instead of reaching truth based on which opinions were widely agreed upon, truth became increasingly determined by the principle of non-contradiction. Even in this section of *The Human Condition*, which seems as anti-Plato as any, Arendt does not express as much difference with Plato as it might at first appear. While Plato may have "substituted" making for acting, he did not remove action from the political realm, something that has largely happened under the influence of Descartes and has led to alienation. Instead, Plato *took action* in the form of constructing or making; he acted through his building, the suppositions and logical implications of the conversations in his dialogues. Arendt's choice of words shows that she does not think this change in the mode of action brought about its detrimental consequences immediately, but only through its later evolution:

> In *the tradition of Platonic thought*, this original, linguistically predetermined identity of ruling and beginning *had the consequence* that all beginning was understood as the legitimation for rulership, until, *finally*, the element of beginning disappeared altogether from the concept of rulership. With it the most elementary and authentic understanding of human freedom disappeared from political philosophy (emphasis mine 31.224-25).

By speaking of "the tradition" rather than Plato and of the "consequence" rather than the cause, Arendt separates the change Plato initiated from the eventual results of that change: alienation. Plato's approach to politics was still politics, though it substituted making for acting (*poiēsis* for *prattein*). It still amounted to people influencing the human condition through their words and actions.

Moreover, she digresses in order to defend Plato, stating that the substitution of making for acting was not motivated by a "contempt for men" but arose from a "suspicion of action," (31.222); and she is at pains to emphasize Plato's innovation did not arise "from any irresponsible or tyrannical will to power." Rather than removing action from politics, under Plato's influence actions began to take the form of the construction of philosophical systems rather than direct arguing in the assembly or marketplace for new beliefs with others by engaging in conversation in the polity. Arendt is careful to define her terms in such a way that Plato's 'making' still constitutes a type of action.[250] Drawing on *Politics and Truth*, I would state the change slightly

[250]Consider her claim that action is never possible in isolation, 26.188, side-by-side with her description of the philosopher's inner dialogue where he is never truly alone, 41.291, and the way she distinguishes between the philosopher's "solitude" and the "loneliness" of a Christian engaged in good works, 10.76. Cf. 26.189 (strongman is a myth).

differently: rational truth began to replace political speech acts or rhetoric.[251]

We arrive at the world alienation Arendt depicts in her final chapter of *The Human Condition* by means of the Cartesian transformation of *truth*: from an end in itself, and something considered *kalon* (beautiful), to a means to avoiding doubt, which is *aischros* (ugly). Doubt—skepticism—has become the central problem of the human condition.[252] Truth changes from being an end in itself to being a *means only*—and at that, only a means to an end that cannot be reached: escaping the grip of the black hole of doubt (or reaching absolute certainty). Put in terms I discussed in the previous chapter, truth transforms from being a *good* to being a means (a) to avoid a bad (uncertainty) or (b) to work toward a good that is necessarily unattainable because of the manner in which its being is understood.

The result is that it is no longer clear that individuals or a polity can still pursue the *kalon* in the same way that was possible before Descartes. We find ourselves with a results based standard of goodness focused on utility. Now, truth is good because it is useful in pushing back doubt, whereas it had previously been good for its own sake, for contemplation. Gaining truth requires demonstration via experiment, which in turn requires producing the means of new experiments since we can no longer see with our eyes—even the eye of the mind—but only with the doing of experiments: "man's thirst for knowledge could be assuaged only after he had put his trust into the

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[251]Put more Platonically, the true rhetoric of philosophy, *Gorgias* 503a-b, *Phaedrus* 276e, 277b-6, replaced popular and false rhetoric: an art or science (*technē*) replaced a knack, *Gorgias* 461b, 464b-d.
[252]Here one could explore the impact of the changes in Christianity and the rise of the scientific revolution, where we would find the reason for the gulf which separates Plato, who saw being as beautiful, and Descartes whose reaction was revulsion.

ingenuity of his hands.

The point is not that truth and knowledge are no longer important, but that they can be achieved only by 'action' and not by contemplation" (41.290). Or as Arendt writes several lines later "In order to be certain one had to *make sure*, and in order to know one had to do." Yet since truth is a means to only to an ephemeral removal of doubt, all the doing leads only to an increased need for more doing.

The shift in meaning of truth is accompanied by a concomitant change in the standard of goodness: from the *kalon* (beauty) to results. Before Descartes's *science* was natural philosophy: the love of the contemplation of natural being; seeing the being of things was beautiful and was done for its own sake. The goodness of things in the world was measured by their beauty. Modern science, on the other hand, seeks to push back doubt and leads to a focus on the *results* of doing. Indeed, modernity leads to such a loss of belief in there being such a thing as certain *truth*, that it begins to need *truthfulness* instead (28.276-78). The new cardinal virtues are those that push back doubt, according to Arendt those virtues are "success, industry, and truthfulness," (38.278). The standard of goodness becomes success or results: "Where formerly truth had resided in the kind of 'theory' that since the Greeks had meant the contemplative glance of the beholder who was concerned with, and received, the reality opening up before him, the question of success took over and the test of theory became a 'practice' one—whether or not it will work" (38.278). But results cannot be controlled, and indeed, the ultimate results of any individual's actions are not really known until they are dead. The consequence is sense of helplessness and materialism:

alienation.

Arendt does not blame Plato, and even goes out of her way to reject his culpability for this predicament since, but for Descartes (via Galileo), the Cartesian reversal might not have occurred.[253] Indeed, excessive focus on utility and materialism is not unique to the modern world, as Arendt notes (25.183). Socrates and Plato played a key role in the shift from ancient materialism to an orientation on the *kalon* (detailed above in Chapter 2).

### 5.6.4 Taking Back the Polity as a Place to Reveal Oneself

Arendt's dispute with Plato is not about modern alienation (at least not directly) because Plato, even bearing in mind Arendt's understanding of his differences with Socrates, looked at truth very differently than Descartes: in a way that still allowed for contemplation, especially contemplation of the good, to be the highest end. Instead Arendt dislikes the effects of Plato's innovation of truth for the limits it places on human participation in the bringing of things into being: this led to what she calls ancient world alienation (43.310). Before Plato, the term *truth* is much less solid, something that comes out in Nietzsche's understanding of truth out from his lecture notes on rhetoric:

> the feeling for what is *True* in itself is much more developed [in modernity]: rhetoric arises among a people who still live in mythic images and who have not yet experience the unqualified need of

[253]Arendt writes "had history taken a different turn, the whole modern scientific development from Galileo to Einstein might not have come to pass," *Truth and Politics* 1.548 (cited by section.page, where pages are from *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

historical accuracy: they would rather be persuaded than instructed.[254]

Before Plato there is less of a sense of truth as something absolute. Truth is rather something that is up for grabs and things are not simply true or false, but more or less true. Truth has much to do with which traditions or myths a group of people accept. Even Greek mythology was not an exact matter; there were many different versions of almost every Greek myth—indeed there were even different versions of each Greek god. Plato used his character of Socrates to change this, developing a way of understanding truth that makes it less changeable—or at least less subject to majority opinion—and leads to what Arendt distinguishes as rational truth and factual truth.

Arendt wants the bringing of things into being opened back up to more people again, rather than allowing it to remain the primarily province of the philosopher—or, as it has actually become, the scientist (a new creature, probably never really anticipated by Plato). She seeks to bring politics—the coming into being of the things of the polity *polis*—from the republic of letters, back to the polity where all can participate. She seems to have in mind a public space much like what Marcel Detienne describes in ancient Greece with the development of the *polis*:

> the citizens as a whole 'create reality' (*krainei*). . . . Speech was no longer enmeshed in a symbolicoreligious network; it now became autonomous. It engered its own world in the interplay of a dialogue that created a particular kind of space; that is, an enclosure where one discourse confronted another. Through its political function, logos

[254]Friedrich Nietzsche and Carole Blair, "Nietzsche's 'Lecture Notes on Rhetoric': A Translation, *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, vol. 16, no. 2 (1983), 96.

became an autonomous reality and obey its own laws.[255]

To open the bringing of things into being to more people, Arendt too needs to alter truth, to make it something less certain and something more like what it was before Plato. This is in part why in her *Truth and Politics*, which some people take to be a text in which she bemoans the way in which facts have become manipulated by governments, is actually a text designed to show the fuzziness of facts and even rational truth.

In this sense Arendt's *Truth and Politics* is not that different from Plato's *Republic* Book 6 or his *Theaetetus* because both are an attempt to get people to think about Being. There are two main ways that something comes into being. These correspond to the ways Socrates discusses that something can rise beyond mere opinion (*doxa*) (*Meno* 97a-99c): correct (*orthos*) opinion and knowledge (*epistimē*). Correct opinion is the political way in which something comes into being. This path to being engages people in a political struggle. The main tool in this struggle is rhetoric. Knowledge, in Plato, is something for which one gives a reasoned account. For knowledge, one starts with agreed upon premises and deduces from them—using thought (*dianoia*)—to work the way to knowledge.

Arendt draws readers' attention to the way in which the political and philosophical realms bring things into being differently. She shows how the political and philosophical are both involved, albeit in different manners, in establishing the

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[255]*The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Zone Press, 1999) 105.

basis on which our lives are lived. She alternatively distinguishes and blurs the line between opinion and truth, and even between two types of truth. After first distinguishing *fact* and *opinion* and suggesting that fact is beyond question, her further examination of fact erodes the different between them. She first sets fact apart from opinion, even seeming to fight those who might do otherwise, noting that even various possibly historical interpretations are "no argument against the existence of factual matter, nor can they serve as a justification for blurring the dividing lines between fact, opinion, and interpretation," (2:544).[256]

Yet even Arendt's ostensibly most solid example is used to do the very blurring that she appeared to intimate is impossible. The seemingly unquestionable fact that in 1914 Germany invaded Belgium must be stated in the negative if it is to remain unquestionable: that Belgium did not invade Germany.[257] It is not the fact that is not open to debate, but the opposite of the fact. Readers begin to see the implications of what Arendt explained earlier, that "factual truth. . . is always related to other people. . . . it exists only to the extent that it is spoken about," (2:553). Even factual truth is ultimately political.[258]

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[256]Cites to *Truth and Politics* are from *The Portable Hannah Arendt* , ed.Peter Baehr (New York, Penguin Books, 2000), section:page.

[257]I grant that she borrows the quote, but she did choose to borrow it.

[258]For both the invasion of Poland and Belgium the Germans had manufactured in advance the means of establishing the opposite facts and claimed that they were responding to attacks on themselves. The case of Poland was the more remarkable because of the lengths the government went to in order to make believable claims. German prisoners were dressed in Polish uniforms, killed, and their bodies lain around a German radio station they purportedly attacked. The story was carried by the New York Times. Perhaps even more telling, in the German Foreign Office archives was found a letter from Mussolini to Hitler in which he typed "If Germany attacks. . ." ("Se la Germania attacca la Polonia. . . "). The word "Germany" was crossed out and "Poland" was written in its place. The book detailing

The blurring only increases as Arendt continues. While it momentarily appears that facts are solid because "for those who accept them, they are not changed by the number or lack of numbers who entertain the same proposition," (3:555), the conditional "for those who accept them" makes all the difference, for it makes all the difference whether or not they are accepted, and (as I detail in Chapter 3, "The Social Component of Being") numbers play a considerable role in whether some people accept them. Thus it comes as little surprise when, just two pages later, Arendt states that "factual truth is no more self-evident than opinion," and she immediately begins to show all the difficulties involved in supporting factual truths with "notoriously unreliable" testimony and possibly forged records (3:557). Readers can recall for themselves that the Donation of Constantine was a fact for almost 600 years until Lorenzo Valla disproved it in 1440 and has been a fraud for the nearly 600 years since then.

We eventually find that "not only do factual statements contain no principles upon which men might act and which thus could become manifest in the world; their very content defies this kind of verification" (3:562). Factual truth is ultimately related to opinion, and truth varies depending on whose opinion is counted. Rational truth has, in one respect, more solidity than factual truth because it can be acted on and thus vindicated through performance—both by those aware of what they are doing and by many who are not. Factual truths require, if not a majority opinion, than at least a

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these planned "facts" was in Hannah Arendt's personal library: William L. Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A history of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), 568, 595, also see 555, 564, 572, 578, 593, 601.

majority of those whose opinion is taken as authoritative.[259]

Rational and factual truth ultimately merge into one. Even rational truth depends on certain principles of logic or on the starting assumptions that logic is applied to. Therefore even in the realm of pure logic, rational truth depends upon the principle of non-contradiction, something that must be reached by agreement. Arendt recognizes this origin of rational truth in opinion; it is what is at the heart of Socrates not wishing to contradict himself:

> for man, *being one*, it is better to be at odds with the whole world than to be at odds with the whole world than to be at odds with and contradicted by himself—an argument that is compelling indeed for the philosopher, whose thinking is characterized by Plato as a silent dialogue with himself, and whose existence therefore depends upon a constantly articulated intercourse with himself, a splitting-into-two of the one he nevertheless *is*; for a basic contradiction between he two partners who carry on the thinking dialogue would destroy the very conditions of philosophizing (3.559).

For the philosopher, unlike for the citizens of a polity generally, the principle of non-contradiction is essential to his existence and gives a precedence to rational truth over factual truth. However, there is a change in the philosopher's condition: because of the Cartesian change, building being out of rational truths combined with thought (as opposed to speeches between citizens in the polity) leads to alienation.

Arendt believes Plato's influence led to the bringing of things into being by rational thought to trump bringing things into being in the polity. The philosopher can win arguments about reality by appealing to some more basic principle about which

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[259]Arendt also brings the reliability of rational truth into question as well.

there is agreement and showing the necessary implications that principle leads to. By paying careful attention to the first principles upon which other agreements are based—by looking to the beginning—the philosopher rules (*archein*).

By blurring the distinctions among types of truth, Arendt calls attention to the nature of being, and ultimately she hopes to overturn Plato's dominance in the field of truth.

### 5.6.5 Plato's Dialogues as Political Space

Despite my substantial agreement with Arendt on many of these points, I contend she misses—or is ultimately unsatisfied with—the complete work (*ergon*) Plato accomplishes in his texts. First, Plato uses his texts as a way to guide people to see being for themselves. Plato exerts his fullest abilities as an author to bring people to confront the building blocks that constitute our reality, and part of that includes the way in which rational truth never provides, and never can provide, a complete picture of the world we live in. No understanding of the world can provide a harmonious account of all beings. Any account, in order to explain anything, will be forced to suppose some things. As Socrates states in the *Theaetetus*,

> For tens of thousands of times we've said "we recognize" and "we don't recognize," and "we know" and "we don't know," as though we understand one another in some way while still being ignorant of knowledge; and, if you please, even now at present we've again used "being ignorant" and "understand," as thought it's appropriate to use them if we're doing without knowledge (196e).

There will always be political space that people can use to reveal themselves and

further contribute to or shape the beings we share in our polities. While the modern understanding of truth obscures our view, such space to influence being cannot be eliminated.

Second, Plato's texts depict Socrates entering political space and revealing himself in it. Socrates goes on to encourage others to do the same. He demonstrates in dialogue after dialogue just how someone can engage in the true art of politics by having thoughtful conversations.

As I argue above in my section on "The Goods of Polities and Democracy," Plato places a priority on achieving harmony in the polity, he places it above having each individual contribute to our understanding of reality, because each person joining in the creation of being. His justification for doing so is that people should be aware (as Protagoras and Gorgias at first are not) of how they are changing our world for better or worse before they start to influence it in ways that might be bad (e.g. Protagoras in the *Protagoras*). Nonetheless, it remains the cause that Plato shows us Socrates repeatedly engaging in the kind of behavior designed to (a) wake people up to seeing how their actions influence being and reality and (b) encourage them to contribute their understanding of the world to a shared understanding—but he works to stop contributions that will cause dissonance.

Finally, on another level, Plato himself attempts to create a new political space where people can interact and, to some degree, reveal themselves. Plato, just as he

depicts Homer in the *Ion*, tries to create a new reality for people in his writing.[260] In the space left between the arguments of Socrates and his interlocutors, Plato encourages his readers to participate, confronting Socrates's arguments with their own objections and counterarguments. Through writing, he does what he can to give readers a place in his dialogues where they can be part of the conversation. From this perspective one can claim that, in his *Republic*, while Plato shows Socrates and his interlocutors using conversation to create a polity, Plato himself has created a more lasting polity in *logos* that readers have ever since used as a place to have conversations about being, the good life, and the good polity. The dialogue itself constitutes an alternative type of being, which we could call the Republic of Letters, which has had citizens who disclose themselves to others in the polity ever since.

## 5.7 Conclusion

For Plato, the goods that life in a polity makes possible do not align with one type of polity or another. It does not make sense to describe Plato as a democrat, an aristocrat, or a monarchist. For him, polities offer human beings the change to step outside the realm of the beasts into a world they help shape with their unique understandings of the world by sharing those worlds with others and being willing to listen to others' understandings as well. In such conversations, all people can contribute to our shared understanding of being.

Plato encourages people to shape themselves by changing their preferences,

[260]See my Chapter 1, above.

especially the primary good that drives them in life—to change what motivates them with eros to something that is *kalos*. He also promotes people maintaining consistency or harmony of being themselves as a way of arbitrating what beings and accounts of beings are accepted. In the first instance, this works against tyranny within the polity because Rule of Law prevents the people who make up a polity from pursuing every basic, non-political good in an unrestrained fashion.

Second, accepting the need for harmony in one's accounts of the world also increases human freedom and is egalitarian because it supports a principle under which each individual can defend her own conception of the world against others who disagree, no matter how many.

However, as Arendt details in the final part of *The Human Condition*, historical influences have changed the meaning of truth—altering it from the good philosophers seek for its own sake to a means to push back doubt. The consequence has been to discourage and limit to an extreme people's belief that they can still affect being (and reality) by revealing themselves before the polity and sharing their own unique being to shape it.

I contend that while this may appear true, it is more illusion than reality. And Arendt's call to participate is contributing to erode that false belief. Yet Arendt underestimates the Plato's accomplishment in his dialogues, where he plays the role of the poet he has Socrates describe in the *Ion*, transporting others to a world where they can engage in politics, and reveal themselves, in the *Republic of Letters* at any time. Plato, through Socrates, puts a priority on people shaping the world in a way that

makes it better, but he wants as many people as possible to learn how to do that and to enrich the world through their interaction. Those who engage in this activity with Plato through his dialogues affect the being of the illusion that our reality is unaffected by our individual opinions and only affected by rational truth; they join Arendt in speeding its demise.

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