Psychological Dimensions of Socratic Protreptic

By

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Abstract

My goal in the present work is to add to our understanding of Socratic protreptic. I do so by focussing on psychological traits and qualities of character in Socrates’ young associates. There are a number of candidates throughout the dialogues whose colourful depiction and careful psychological rendering offer us ample material for study. In this study, I focus on two characters in particular. First, I look at the presentation of Alcibiades in the final scene of *Symposium*. Here I explore how Plato uses *hubris* and *shame* to explain the failure of protreptic in this gifted Socratic associate. Next, I look at Theaetetus as presented in the eponymously named dialogue. His characterization as an able, intelligent and model candidate for philosophy gives us a penetrating insight into the Socratic ideal. Finally, I offer a reading of *Eros* in *Phaedrus* that examines the psychological dynamic between the lover and his beloved. While a number of types of lovers are envisioned in this dialogue, I argue that if a beloved is to succeed in turning toward philosophy his lover must be a *philosophical lover* motivated by other-regarding care for his beloved’s soul.
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For Arawn, Dylan and Sofia
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Chapter One: Protreptic and the Philosophical Psyche

Overview

This dissertation deals with Socratic protreptic, but not in the usual sense. It is not a work devoted to analyzing protreptic arguments themselves, but instead is concerned with understanding how an interlocutor’s character traits contribute to the success or failure of protreptic. After all, if philosophical protreptic were capable of achieving its aim solely through the force of rational persuasion, we should rightly suppose that any well-conceived and logically sound exhortation ought to handily accomplish its task.

Take for instance, an argument attributed to Aristotle from Protrepticus: “If you should philosophize, you should philosophize, and if you shouldn’t philosophize, then you should philosophize. Therefore in all cases you should philosophize” (Westerink 1962, xx). Success in coming-to-philosophy certainly depends on the persuasiveness of such protreptic arguments, but from a Socratic perspective it requires something more: it demands (as I shall argue), a sympathetic philosophical psyche endowed with the intellect, ability and nature necessary for protreptic to take firm root.

Rather than survey a large number of dialogues in an attempt to divine a set of psychological qualities that either draw one toward or away from philosophy, I have chosen to focus closely on three dialogues: Theaetetus, Symposium and Phaedrus. Indeed, in each case my treatment centres on specific sections of text. In looking at Symposium, I have limited the larger part of my analysis to the Alcibiades’ Symposium speech. Though it has been the subject of much commentary, the viewpoint argued-for here is that shame and hubris are at the root of Alcibiades’ spectacular failure in turning toward philosophy. My analysis of Theaetetus deals
with aspects of the dialogue that illuminate the psyche of the young man at the centre of the drama. In the Platonic corpus there is no more complete example of a young interlocutor who, by his character and qualities of mind, is held out as an ideal candidate for the philosophical life.

Finally, I look at *Phaedrus*. Here I examine how a beloved’s success in turning toward philosophy is dependent on his lover’s conception of eros. Like *Republic* VI (which we will look at more closely in the present chapter), *Phaedrus* is an impersonal (yet individual) characterization of the potential philosopher. However, *Republic* does not sufficiently discuss the influence of the lover on his beloved’s psyche. And so, my rationale for offering a reading of *Phaedrus*. Based on my assessment of *Phaedrus*, we might say that Socratic protreptic requires a philosophically erotic psyche in both lover and beloved.

In addressing this subject matter, I have drawn (especially in Chapters 2 and 3) on research from a variety of fields that will, I hope, bring new light to Plato’s work. Where I have relied on the findings of other scholars, my aim has been to add to our understanding of Plato on his own terms; whether or not I have succeeded by the adoption of this historicist method, I leave to the reader to determine.

While the topic of psyche in Plato has been ably discussed in many admirable volumes, the treatment of psyche in this work is not focussed on the structure of the soul, but on aspects of individual psychology, as noted above. I do not give an explicit justification for this approach (fraught as it is with hermeneutical problems), but anticipate that in an expanded treatment of this subject I will defend my methodology more vigorously. At present, I am content to bring forth my findings with the hope that the reader will view this study not as a subversion of work that has gone before, but as a complement to the metaphysical account of psyche in Plato.
In the balance of this introductory chapter then, my aim is to discuss Plato’s use of psychological characterization. In part one I begin modestly by citing selective passages from a number of dialogues, illustrating how the attitude or disposition of Socrates’ interlocutor drives the action. From here, I proceed to a brief examination of two protreptic dialogues—*Clitophon* and *Euthydemus*—highlighting in greater detail how the disposition of Socrates’ interlocutors influences the likelihood that protreptic will take hold. Part two is given over to a consideration of the first part of *Republic* VI. Importantly, we find here that Plato is committed to the idea that some individuals possess a *philosophical nature*—a nature that prefigures protreptic or dialectic. Book VI also offers us an insight into how the moral corruption of these natures is a necessary consequence of poorly constituted states and a badly educated populace. My hope is that this chapter will serve to illustrate the need for a study of the psychological factors that affect protreptic, the topic to which the remainder of this work is devoted.
I. Dialogue and Psyche

A. Introduction

Much of the work devoted to philosophical protreptic in Plato has focussed quite narrowly on dialogues whose purpose is explicitly protreptic.\(^1\) In recent years, *Euthydemus* has been subject of study by both Polansky (1992) and Chance (1992). Other protreptic dialogues have garnered attention as well: *Alcibiades* has found a new readership through Denyer’s text and commentary (2001) while *Clitophon* has been comprehensively examined by Slings (1999).\(^2\) In a recent volume, we find the suggestion that *Republic* as well can be viewed as a work largely devoted to protreptic themes.

Plato’s overarching purpose in writing the *Republic* was to effect change in his readers….This purpose can be summed up in the word protreptic, from *protrepein*, to “turn (someone) forward,” hence “propel,” “urge on,” “exhort.” Plato uses literary art, which in his case includes but is not limited to philosophical argument, to move his reader towards a greater readiness to adopt a just way of life. Protreptic discourse is not educational discourse in general and does not bring about philosophical education as a whole. Rather, it addresses the initial or preparatory stages of education, aiming to get education in virtue underway. (Yunis 2007, 4)

While these dialogues treat protreptic arguments explicitly, it is equally true that the thread of philosophical protreptic is woven into the fabric of much of Plato’s writing. “All of the dialogues, especially the shorter, aporetic ones, possess protreptic qualities, inasmuch as they contest conventional values, inculcate philosophical method, and offer Socrates as a model.” (Yunis 2007, 15). To illustrate this point, we turn to consider dialogues not often taken as conveying protreptic themes.

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\(^1\) On the distinction between implicit and explicit protreptic, see Slings (1999), 62 *passim.*

\(^2\) My approach to *Alcibiades, Clitophon* and all such *dubia* or *spuria* is to treat these texts as *Socratica*. That is, without committing myself to a position regarding the authorship of these works, I take each as illustrative of a particular perspective on Socrates as a *literary figure*. Thus, while no part of my argument rests solely on data from any of these works alone, I hope that my use of these texts will be seen as complementary to the overall project of bringing light to Plato’s work.
Though we might profitably survey Plato’s corpus and offer an analysis of the types of protreptic found there, I wish to turn my attention instead to understanding the psyche of Plato’s characters through his description of those who either succeed or fail at being turned toward philosophy. More often than not, the dramatic action in the dialogues depends not only on what an interlocutor says in response to Socrates’ questioning, but why he might be saying it. Plato’s detailed characterization of his dramatis personae gives us a vivid depiction of the motives that drive Socrates’ interlocutors in their discussions. But I wish to argue that the very possibility of Socratic protreptic succeeding depends on his interlocutor possessing a psyche suited to being turned toward philosophy.

To begin however, I put forth a variety of brief observations that illustrate Plato’s extensive use of psychological characterization as a central conceit in advancing his dramatic and philosophical aims. At this stage, we are free to interpret these passages as bearing on either philosophical or protreptic themes. The section that follows is intended as an introduction to the variety of ways in which Plato presents a character’s psyche as relevant to Socrates’ dialectical objectives.

B. The Relevance of Character

We begin then, by looking at the aporetic Euthyphro. What makes this dialogue aporetic is, of course, that Euthyphro hastily retires from the dialogue, leaving the discussion without a satisfactory conclusion or resolution. It is perhaps not difficult to divine why he does so. Euthyphro proves unequal to the task set before him by Socrates not for obvious want of
intellectual ability, but because of his dialectical resolve. What gives Euthyphro pause are the anxiety-inducing implications of Socrates’ (flattering) speech:

If you had no knowledge of piety and impiety, you would never have ventured to prosecute your old father for murder on behalf of a servant. For fear of the gods you would have been afraid to take the risk lest you should not be acting rightly, and would have been ashamed before men, but now I know well that you believe you have clear knowledge of piety and impiety. (*Euthphr.* 15d3-8. emphasis added)

Socrates’ provocative challenge to Euthyphro’s irrational dogma evokes a portrait of a man ill at ease with the idea of inquiring too closely into his own beliefs. It is apparent from Socrates’ sardonic praise that Euthyphro fears he might uncover some uncomfortable truth about the extent of his own theological knowledge.

*Gorgias* too, offers examples of characters whose dialectical progress is stalled because of psychological distress. Gorgias and Polus are not bested by Socrates in as much as they cannot proceed because shame prevents them from doing so. Similarly, Callicles’ ultimate undoing is the shame he feels in having to tacitly concede that ‘pleasure and happiness are different’.

If we look at *Laches* we find that what sets the tenor for the dialogue is the anxiety of two underachieving fathers, each uncertain as to what sort of education would most profit his son. Lysimachus insists that he and Melesias are driven to look for advice for a simple reason:

“Neither of us has a word to say about his own accomplishments. This is what shames us in front of them [i.e., their sons]….” (*Lch.* 179c6-7 emphasis added). What drives the drama is the fathers’ fears that their sons will be “nobodies” (*Lch.* 179d6), as they are. *Theages*

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3 [Note: Text is not fully visible in the image, but it appears to be a continuation of the previous sentence.]

4 But the fact that he feels shame tells us something important about Callicles: that like both Gorgias and Polus, he is subject to feeling shame which is itself a product of social convention. Thus, he is not above the nomos or conventional standards that he denounces as “crowd pleasing vulgarities” *Grg.* 482e4
echoes this theme of paternal concern as Demodocus, a conventional Athenian father, despondently appeals to Socrates for educational direction since he cannot come to grips with his son’s foolish desire to become wise. Protagoras opens with a young Socratic acolyte’s naively enthusiastic plea for sophistic wisdom and is countered by Socrates’ sobering dialectic.

Adeimantus’ desire to inquire further into why one ought to prefer justice to injustice is not undertaken as a conversational diversion or as a cold intellectual exercise, but for the sake of knowing why he should prefer justice to injustice. Alcibiades (in Alcibiades) boldly defends his political ambitions but is soon humbled (if not positively humiliated) by Socrates and as a result promises to turn to philosophy. Even Apology ends with an exhortation to philosophy that is intended to change the minds of his accusers and jurors. Socrates begs them: “when my sons grow up, avenge yourselves by causing them the same kind of grief that I caused you…” (Apology 41e2-3 emphasis added). Of course, in order to do so they would have to practise dialectic; thus, they would be turning both themselves and Socrates’ sons to philosophy.

Often we learn about a character’s sentiments and sensibilities from Socrates’ own narration. Charmides gives us a fine example of this technique for conveying psychological details. At a point where Charmides cannot adequately answer Socrates, he lets slip (with a note of annoyance) the suggestion that he has been parroting the views of his companion, Critias. Charmides tells Socrates: “I’m at a total loss…but perhaps the one who said it didn’t know what he meant either.” (Chrm. 162b10-11) In his narrative commentary, Socrates makes astute psychological observations of both young men:

5 “[H]is current passion really scares me—not that it’s beneath him, but it is dangerous. Here we have him Socrates, saying that he wants to become wise.” Thg. 121c5-7
6 “Tell me Hippocrates”, I said. “You’re trying to get access to Protagoras, prepared to pay him a cash fee for his services to you. But what is he, and what do you expect to become?” Prot. 311b3-5 (emphasis added).
7 He challenges Socrates: “You surely don’t think that the position has been adequately stated? R. 362d2-3. And again: “for we should fully explore the arguments that are opposed to the ones that Glaucon gave, the ones that praise justice and find fault with injustice…” R. 362d10-e1
It was clear that Critias had been agitated for some time and also that he was eager to impress Charmides and the rest who were there. He had held himself in with difficulty earlier, but now he could do so no longer. In my opinion, what I suspected earlier was certainly true, that Charmides had picked up this saying about temperance from Critias. And then Charmides, who wanted the author of the definition to take over the argument rather than himself, tried to provoke him to it by going on pointing out that the cause was lost. Critias couldn’t put up with this but seemed to me to be angry with Charmides just the way a poet is when his verse is mangled by the actors. (Chrm.162b10-d4)

Of course, we can suppose that the dialogue, action and drama in Plato’s works serve the purpose of confirming the conclusions that he is determined to establish. Likewise, we can paint Socrates as ‘prevailing’ in some discussions while in others his philosophical persuasion ‘falls short’. We do so however, at the risk of diminishing the Plato’s purpose in crafting passages such as in Charmides above. For, to know the mind of Socrates’ interlocutor—to know why he responds as he does—is to understand something of his personal investment in the discussion. Further into Charmides for instance, after Critias and Socrates appear to have reached a dialectical impasse, we get a deeper insight into Critias’ psyche through another of Socrates’ narrative asides:

When Critias heard this and saw that I was in difficulties, then, just as in the case of people who start yawning when they see other people doing it, he seemed to be affected by my troubles and to be seized by difficulties himself. But since his consistently high reputation made him feel ashamed in the eyes of the company and he did not wish to admit to me that he was incapable of dealing with the question I had asked him, he said nothing clear but concealed his predicament. (Chrm. 169c4-d2)

Unlike Charmides who by his own admission is simply a mouthpiece for Critias, Critias himself is both ‘affected’ and ‘seized’ by Socrates’ difficulties; he is, in other words, a capable interlocutor. What he is incapable of doing however, is admitting that in this particular instance he cannot answer Socrates’ question. Again, the stumbling block in this case is shame. Afraid of appearing ignorant publicly, he retreats to obfuscation for fear of revealing his true

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8 I am grateful to Prof. Paul Woodruff for this insightful observation based on his unpublished “Eros at the Core of Philosophy”, delivered at Queen’s University, October 2011.
epistemological condition. As we shall see in greater detail in Chapter 2, the desire to pursue philosophy must include a readiness to admit one’s ignorance. For, even a gifted interlocutor will not make progress toward philosophy with Socrates unless he possesses a psychological disposition sympathetically inclined toward Socrates’ brand of dialectic.

We see this very point illustrated late in Gorgias. Callicles’ increasingly glib responses arouse a curious reaction in Socrates: the demand that the discussion be taken seriously. For, when Callicles agrees to defend his earlier view that ‘pleasure and happiness are the same’ he does so stipulating that it is only for the sake of argument. Socrates objects:

Callicles, please don’t think that you should jest with me either, or answer anything that comes to mind, contrary to what you really think, and please don’t accept what you get from me as though I’m jesting! For you see, don’t you, that our discussion’s about this (and what would even a man of little intelligence take more seriously than this?), about the way we’re supposed to live. (Gr 500b7-c3. Italics added)

Socrates’ condition for engaging in dialectic with Callicles is rather modest: it is not sufficient to defend one’s argument simply for the sake of consistency; one must believe what one is saying. It is an epistemic condition to be sure; but the demand that the discussion be undertaken in earnest is a psychological condition. Plainly, bringing characters to life in this way animates a dialogue that might otherwise be viewed only as so many thematically connected arguments. It is a vital and contributory component in making the elenchus relevant to the reader.

9 “Well, to keep my argument from being inconsistent if I say they’re different, I say they’re the same” Gr 495a5-6
10 Klosko sets out Socrates’ conditions for moral persuasion in this way: “The interlocutor must be willing to respond to Socrates’ questions, to respect the elementary rules of reasoning, and to say what he actually believes”. Klosko (1993), 40
C. Clitophon’s Weakness: Dialectical Determination

So far we have surveyed a number of representative passages that illustrate Plato’s dramatic use of psychological motives in themes related to protreptic. Here, beginning with Clitophon, we will look more carefully for the presence of these motives in dialogues which focus directly on protreptic.

If philosophical protreptic demands that an interlocutor be earnest, surely there is something to be said for the sincerity in Clitophon’s manner with Socrates. Despite his objection to Socrates’ ability or willingness to complete a student’s tuition in philosophical matters, Clitophon nevertheless praises the worth of Socrates’ protreptic speeches and exhortations to virtue.

I dare say, I never objected nor, I believe, ever will object to these arguments, nor to many other eloquent ones like them, to the effect that virtue is teachable and that more care should be devoted to one’s self than to anything else. I consider them to be extremely beneficial and extremely effective in turning (protreptikwta;touv) us in the right direction; they can really rouse us as if we’d been sleeping. (Clt. 408c1-6)

But Clitophon is no fawning acolyte; he is a young man whose contact with Socrates has left him convinced of the value of protreptic but disillusioned with the constructive potential of the Socratic method. Clitophon represents a voice of dissent, a dissatisfied customer at the Socratic emporium of ideas. He readily concedes to Socrates that there is no one better at advancing the cause of philosophy, but all the same, Socrates seems forever to be out-of-stock of the most important wares—those things that follow after successful protreptic.11

11 “I was therefore very interested in what would come next after such arguments.” Clt. 408c7-8. If we look to Republic, we find a similar sentiment expressed by Adeimantus: “Well, Socrates, it doesn’t seem right to me for you to be willing to state other people’s convictions but not your own, especially when you’ve spent so much time occupied with these matters.” To this Socrates answers Adeimantus in a way that would serve equally as a reply to Clitophon: “What? Do you think it’s right to talk about things one doesn’t know as if one does know them?” R. 506b6-c3.
Judging from the model Socratic speeches delivered by Clitophon (407b1-e3; 408d3-409a6) he clearly admires Socrates’ devotion to virtue. But Clitophon desires more than an exhortation to virtue: he wants Socrates to deliver, on demand, the knowledge of the products of justice. What we come to see in this dialogue is a portrait of a young man who has been turned to philosophy but who evidently takes philosophy to be a body of knowledge rather than a love of wisdom. His own rather dim view of the usefulness what follows protreptic—Socrates’ dialectic—is apparent in his appraisal of Socrates’ knowledge of justice: “either you don’t know it, or you don’t wish to share it with me.” (Clt. 410c6-7)

In his present state of mind, Clitophon is an obstacle to his own success; he does not see that improvement of his own moral condition depends on harvesting the fruits of his own intellectual labours. It appears that he wants knowledge of justice without the burden of having to undertake a dialectical investigation. Ironically, the model protreptic speeches he gives in the Socratic style suggest a command and commitment to Socratic protreptic; his examination of Socrates’ associates (Clt. 409a7ff) further demonstrates a working knowledge of the Socratic method. For all this insight though, he does not see that the persistent and methodical application of Socrates’ dialectic (which he derides as rudderless and circular) would bring him nearer to the knowledge he seeks.

As we ultimately discover, what complicates Clitophon’s predicament is not just that he’s frustrated by the results of the Socratic method, but that he cannot endure refutation. After complaining that his inquiry undertaken along with Socrates’ young companions12 was fruitless,

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12 Clt. 409a7
and that his follow-up with Socrates proved just as frustrating. Clitophon confesses: “When I had endured this disappointment, not once or twice but a long time, I finally got tired of begging for an answer.” With this admission, we catch a glimpse into the cause of Clitophon’s complaint: he lacks dialectical determination. For all of his praise for Socrates’ protreptic, Clitophon does not see that he has not adequately understood the difference between dialectic and dogma. Blind to his own condition, he tells Socrates: “And this is why I go to Thrasydamus and to anyone else I can: I’m at a loss (아পωρία) (Clt. 410d1-2). Yet, this feeling of 아πωρία—‘being at a loss’—is precisely the condition that describes the genuine Socratic interlocutor. It is also the reason that courage is such a basic requirement of Socratic dialectic.

Clitophon is more than a solitary, disaffected quasi-Socratic: he is presented here as a type. He can grasp the importance of the Socratic project; he even engages in self-styled Socratic investigation. There is an earnestness in Clitophon that makes him a sympathetic figure; he is adversarial, but he is not malicious in his critique. In many ways, he expresses just what we are inclined to think from time to time. Perhaps this is what makes the dialogue resonate with us. But his passion for knowledge of virtue fosters an impatience that blinds him to the value of Socrates’ method. In the end, this leads him to dismiss Socrates as an impediment to philosophical success. His only rationale for doing so is that he is tired of persisting or

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13 “So, Socrates, finally I asked you yourself these questions and you told me that the aim of justice is to hurt one’s enemies and help one’s friends. But later it turned out that the just man never harms anyone, since everything he does is for the benefit of all.” Clt. 410b1-40
14 Slings translates this sentence as: “This I had to endure not just once or twice but over quite a long period; I have now given up persisting.” Clt. 410b5-6
15 We shall see in Chapter 3 that courage in this sense is a dialectical virtue and a necessary part of the philosophical psyche.
begging for an answer. His complaint, in short, amounts to this: it's taking too long to understand the nature of virtue; therefore, Socrates is at fault.¹⁶

D. Euthydemus

Aside from the question of what a protreptic argument should substantively look like or how it should convey its exhortation to philosophy, there is the question of what effect protreptic should have on the psyche of an individual. Euthydemus offers us the example of Clinias, a youthful Athenian prominently positioned for a life of politics. While another (and perhaps more able) young interlocutor, Ctesipus, figures centrally in the action of the conversation, it is the somewhat more youthful Clinias who Socrates nominates as the ‘test subject’ of his protreptic and that of the brothers, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.

On hearing that these two brothers are practised in the art of teaching virtue and persuading men to it,¹⁷ Socrates urges them to defer the exhibition of teaching virtue and instead demonstrate their mastery of protreptic: “Then put off the rest of your display to another time and give us a demonstration of this one thing: persuade this young man here [i.e., Clinias] that he ought to love wisdom and have care for virtue ([χρὴν ἀγαθοῦν καὶ’ ἀγαθολογεῖσθαι])…” (Euthyd. 275a5-7). Of course, Socrates is rightly preoccupied with this young man’s moral welfare.¹⁸ He expresses his concern to the brothers:

¹⁶ Clt. 410b5-c8
¹⁷ “Then, Dionysodorus, I said, you and your brother are the men of the present day best able to exhort a man to philosophy ([χρὴν ἀγαθοῦν καὶ’ ἀγαθολογεῖσθαι]) and the practise of virtue ([χρὴν ἀγαθοὴν καὶ’ ἀγαθολογεῖσθαι])? This is exactly what we think Socrates.” Euthyd. 275a1-5
¹⁸ The Clinias depicted here is referred to as Clinias III (s.v.) in Nails’ People of Plato. He was the son of Axiochus, a man convicted along with Alcibiades for the profanation of the Hermæ. According to Nails, Clinias III was the beloved of Charmides who was himself a member of the Thirty Tyrants. Clearly then, by both birth and association, Clinias appears to be a young man surrounded by notorious characters.
He is young, and we are anxious (fobou;meya) about him, as one naturally is about a boy of his age, for fear that somebody might get in ahead of us and turn his mind (tre;qav autou# th'n dia;noian) to some other interest and ruin (diafyei;rhj) him. (Euthyd. 275b2-4).

Whatever we wish to speculate regarding Clinias’ intellectual power, however we imagine that he might be ‘ruined’, it is not his intellect that will be blunted by ‘adverse influences’; instead, Socrates’ fear is surely that he will become morally ruined if, by being drawn away from philosophy he should fail to find compelling those arguments that exhort him to have care for virtue and his soul above all else. The urgency we sense in Socrates’ plea arises from the sure knowledge that like any young man, Clinias is certain to turn his mind (tre;qav) (or indeed, to have it turned) toward some pursuit or other. The fear, then, is that if protreptic comes too late, he will be so absorbed by his activities outside of philosophy that protreptic speeches might never have an effect on him. In this way, he is likely to be ruined if protreptic fails at this point in his life. “Quite simply”, notes Thomas Chance, “Kleinias represents that ideal student who is ready either to gel beautifully if the protreptic phase of his education is properly handled, or to be corrupted by adverse influences if he is dissuaded from the pursuit of philosophy and virtue.” (Chance 1992, 24). As we shall see in Chapter 2, this is precisely the circumstance that befalls Alcibiades who reveals that although he knows he ought to philosophize, he cannot bring himself do so because of a greater compulsion to please his flatterers.19

The example of Alcibiades makes clear that the enticements of wealth and power are not simply desires that compete alongside a desire for philosophy: wealth and power create a

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19 Notice for instance, how Alcibiades resists Socrates’ protreptic recommendations: “He always traps me and makes me admit my political career is a waste of time, while all that matters is just what I most neglect: my personal shortcomings, which cry out for the closest attention. So I refuse to listen to him; I stop up my ears and tear myself away from him, for, like the Sirens, he could make me stay until I die.” Symp. 216a4-9. Alcibiades explains his behaviour in this way: “I know perfectly well that I can’t prove him wrong when he tells me what I should do; yet, the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: I cave in to my desire to please the crowd.” Symp. 216b5-7. This is the phenomenon that Burnyeat calls “weakness of belief” rather than a ‘weakness of will’. We shall have more to say in this regard in Chapter 2.
psychological lens that distorts one’s view of the superior advantages of philosophy. On this reading, there is a finite window of protreptic opportunity for privileged and socially mobile young men such as Alcibiades or indeed, Clinias.

E. Embracing ‘Ruin’

Finally, we can gauge the extent to which Socrates hopes that Clinias will be transformed by philosophical protreptic if we look at the effect that he wishes the brother’s persuasive speech will have on the young man. Intervening in a heated exchange between Ctesipus and Dionysodorus, Socrates argues that the influence of protreptic on one’s soul ought to be thoroughgoing; the point of being saved from the ruin of outside influences is not so that one can remain forever unchanged. Rather, protreptic itself ought to ‘destroy’ or ‘ruin’ (in a manner of speaking) one’s soul. Socrates explains:

If they [i.e., the brothers] really know how to destroy (ἐκλυοναι) men so as to make good and sensible people out of bad and stupid ones, and the two of them have either found out for themselves or learned from someone else a kind of ruin or destruction (ἐλέον) by which they do away (ἀπολέον) with a bad man and render him good, if, as I say, they know how to do this—well, they clearly do, since they specifically claimed that the art they had recently discovered was that of making good men out of bad ones—then let us concede them the point and permit them to destroy (ἀπολεόν) the boy for us and make him wise—and do the same to the rest of us as well. (285a6-b7)

There is a palpable irony in Socrates willingness to concede that the brothers have the knowledge they claim. Socrates’ invitation for the brothers to ‘destroy’ Clinias in this manner is really a solicitation for them to effect lasting philosophical change. For, the wish that by such a ‘destruction’ one might be made “good and sensible” is the highest aim of successful protreptic. Such a conversion would not simply deaden the appeal of wealth and power, but truly turn the
young man to philosophy with reasons why he ought to prefer self-cultivation and the life of virtue.

II. Republic Considered

A. Philosophical Nature and Corruption of Character

The examples that we have seen to this point have outlined actual or potential psychological impediments to success in philosophical protreptic. Of course, this is largely because the path to philosophy is fraught with a broader range of obstacles than it is provided with the elements necessary for success. In upcoming chapters we shall have occasion to reflect on particular individuals, but for the balance of this chapter our attention turns to Republic. For, it is here that we note (especially in Book VI) a move from surveying the attitudes of individual characters to a general appraisal of psychological dispositions that convey one away from or toward philosophy.

In many ways, Republic VI serves as a template for the dissertation presented here. In this book Plato catalogues qualities of mind and character that contribute to success in philosophy (viz. Chapter 2); he demonstrates how the best characters are most susceptible to the greatest corruption (viz. Chapter 3); and finally, he envisions eros as divinely ennobling the philosopher’s psyche (viz. Chapter 4). Throughout, it is his description of the philosophical nature and the vicissitudes to which it is susceptible that bears on the question of protreptic and the philosopher’s psyche.

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“Nonetheless, we were compelled by the truth to say that no city, constitution, or individual man will ever become perfect until either some chance event compels those few philosophers who aren’t vicious (the ones who are now called useless) to take charge of the city, whether they want to or not, and compels the city to obey them, or until a god inspires the present rulers and kings or their offspring with a true erotic love for true philosophy (philosophical nature)”. R. 499a9-b6.
While Plato distinguishes between non-philosophers and those with a philosophical nature (R. 484a), his protreptic is not aimed at converting those deemed to be non-philosophers: they are, by dint of nature, precluded from becoming adequately philosophical.\textsuperscript{21} Instead, his concern is with the trajectory of those exhibiting philosophic natures. But, as Book VI makes clear, simply possessing a philosophic nature does not guarantee success; some who are adequately endowed with this nature will fail to realize the philosophical life. However, a philosophic nature that fails to embrace a philosophical life does not thereby suffer the fate of non-philosophic souls. Rather, such a nature (to borrow a phrase from Euthydemus) is ruined. In what follows, we may in fact take Socrates’ remarks equally as an explication of his fears for Clinias’ future which we noted above:

Do you see, then, that we weren’t wrong to say that, when someone with a philosophic nature is badly brought up, the very components of his nature—together with the other so-called goods, such as wealth and other similar advantages—are themselves in a way the cause of his falling away from the philosophic way of life? (R. 495a4-8)

Bodily and external goods, for example, are indubitably good, and yet “all the things that are said to be good also corrupt it [i.e., the philosophical nature] and drag it away—beauty, wealth, physical strength, relatives who are powerful in the city, and all that goes with these.” (R. 491c1-3). The philosopher is able to discern the relative value of these goods and has reasons for ranking of beauty, wealth, physical strength as subordinate goods. But in the absence of a proper upbringing, even (or rather, especially) a richly endowed philosophical nature cannot escape the

\textsuperscript{21} There are a number of ways in which Socrates distinguishes non-philosophical from philosophical natures. There is for instance, a difference based on the capacity to intuit Forms: “those who are able to grasp what is always the same in all respects are philosophers.… [T]hose who are not able to do so and who wander among the many things that vary in every sort of way are not philosophers…” R. 484b3-5. More generally though, we find that “philosophic natures always love the sort of learning that makes clear to them some feature of the being that always is…”, while “honor-lovers and erotically inclined men [sc. those who love bodies]…love all such learning and are not willing to give up any part of it.…” R. 485a8-b4. So, philosophic minds that are inclined to love ‘what-is’ love learning associated with Being. Honor-lovers and the rest love the sort of learning that pertains to the object of their desires.
influence of conventional thinking that values these goods above those of the intellect. The persuasive force of this brand of popular education is, according to Socrates, ineluctable. He sounds a definitive note in this regard:

[F]or there isn’t now, hasn’t been in the past, nor ever will be in the future anyone with a character (\(\text{\textit{hyov}}\)) so unusual that he has been educated (\(\text{\textit{paideia}}\)) to virtue (\(\text{\textit{pro\'v a\'reyh\'n}}\) in spite of the contrary education he received from the mob…. (R. 492e2-5)

The very qualities of mind which allow protreptic to resonate with a suitably constituted nature are themselves implicated when such a nature falls short of realizing its philosophical goal.

The key to understanding how a good nature can come to such a bad end is, simply put, education. Protreptic fails in able candidates with good natures not because they lack developed philosophical virtues (after all, they have yet to come to philosophy); the failure results because of the environment in which paideia occurs. Popular education and conventional morality need not pass the standards of soundness and cogency for their effect to be felt. This influence on the psyche (which we above termed a distortion) results when orthodox cultural education inculcates dispositions into one’s character that embrace conventional morality and moral valuation against the challenges posed by rational inquiry.

To illustrate this process we need only to reflect on Socrates’ depiction of the various circumstances in which this ethos is imparted to the young. Here, he comments on the commonplace behaviour of citizens in a variety of social settings:

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22 So in Alcibiades, we see for instance, that Socrates has not only to contend with Alcibiades erroneous beliefs regarding the sufficiency of his own education and preparation for public life, but he also has to contend with Alcibiades’ caustic attitude toward philosophy. To wit: “What do you hope to achieve by bothering me, always making so sure you’re there wherever I am?” Alc. 104d2-4; “Really Socrates, now that you’ve started talking you seem much more bizarre to me than when you followed me in silence” Alc. 106a3-4. These are but indications of the enmity that has been bred into him and examples of the self-aggrandizing personality he exhibits through the better part of the dialogue. Notice that at the conclusion of the dialogue, after submitting to Socrates’ elenchus, Alcibiades’ querulous attitude has been tempered and his rapport with Socrates is deferential, even respectful. Cf. Alc. 135aff
When many of them are sitting together in assemblies, courts, theaters, army camps, or in some other public gathering of the crowd, they object very loudly and excessively to some of the things that are said or done and approve others in the same way, shouting and clapping, so that the very rocks and surroundings echo the din of their praise or blame and double it. In circumstances like that, what is the effect, as they say, on a young person’s heart? What private training can hold out and not be swept away by that kind of praise or blame and be carried by the flood wherever it goes, so that he’ll says the same things are beautiful or ugly as the crowd does, follow the same way of life as they do, and be the same sort of person they are? (R. 492b4-c7)

Tellingly, the effect of this ‘education’ on a young person is to instil in him beliefs that promote his embrace of the prejudices of his fellow citizens. Plato deftly invokes corporeal symbolism to capture this by emphasizing the impression such an upbringing leaves on young person’s heart. Of course, for the Greeks, the heart was the seat of emotion. 

*Kardia* is excitable and mobile; it knocks, shakes, jumps, or “leaps from the breast” in panic. “Knocked” by emotion, it receives grief and courage. It suffers, endures, is “eager.” One can become “full of heart,” “love from the heart.” It beats and swells with rage. (Padel 1992, 18).

The point here is conveyed with a literary flourish, but the lesson is ultimately philosophical: the far-reaching influence of one’s social environment on one’s psyche cannot be assessed by reductively analyzing the state of one’s knowledge or by assessing whether or how one’s intellect or understanding have been affected.

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23 In an archaic sense, *kardia* is a metaphor for courage: “Homer knows the heart as the physical organ which is the seat of courage etc…” Snell (1959), 314 fn.19. Understood as a symbol of courage, *kardia* is (as we shall see in the person of Theaetetus) critical to the flourishing of dialectic in the philosophical soul.

24 As *Theaetetus* attests, the epistemological *is* sometimes best understood through images: “In some men, the wax in the soul is deep and abundant, smooth and worked to the proper consistency; and when the things that come through the senses are imprinted upon this ‘heart’ of the soul—as Homer calls it, hinting at the likeness to the wax—the signs that are made are everlasting…” *Tht.* 194c4-d1. On two occasions, Alcibiades employs this evocative image to convey the completely absorbing nature of Socrates’ dialectic: “Still, I swear to you, the moment he starts to speak, I am beside myself: my heart starts leaping in my chest, the tears come streaming down my face…” *Symp.* 215e2-4. Shortly afterward, when his speech turns from encomium to denunciation, he again hits upon this image: “something much more painful than a snake has bitten me in my most sensitive part—I mean my heart or my soul, or whatever you want to call it…” *Symp.* 218a2-4.
B. Adeimantus and Callicles Compared

Though it is impossible to gauge with any certainty the extent to which an interlocutor’s education and upbringing might play into his character,25 I propose here a short digression to offer a comparison of two prominent figures: Adeimantus and Callicles. In making this comparison I aim to suggest that, by his own art, Plato reveals how similarly placed interlocutors with similarly endowed philosophical natures nevertheless depart on divergent trajectories.

We begin with Adeimantus and his critique of the philosophical life. Notice how (like Clitophon) he frames his challenge to Socrates, not as an attack on Socrates himself, but as a report of the disaffection felt by some of Socrates’ interlocutors:

No one would be able to contradict the things you’ve said, Socrates, but on each occasion that you say them, your hearers are affected in some way as this. They think that, because they’re inexperienced in asking and answering questions, they’re led astray a little bit by the argument at every question and that, when these little bits are added together at the end of the discussion, great is their fall, as the opposite of what they said at the outset comes to light…. I say this with a view to the present case, for someone might well say now that he’s unable to oppose you as you ask each of your questions, yet he sees that all of those who take up philosophy—not those who merely dabble in it while still young in order to complete their upbringing and then drop it, but those who continue in it for a longer time—the greater number of the become cranks, not to say completely vicious, while those who seem completely decent are rendered useless to the city because of the studies you recommend. (R. 487a9-d3)

The tone of Adeimantus’ speech is not combative but rather, incisive; his aim is two-fold: to explain why some interlocutors feel that they’re being duped by Socrates’ questioning and to give his honest estimation of what many see as the fate of those who persist in philosophizing.

In the second part of his complaint, he adopts an impersonal stance (“someone might well say…”); this puts the focus of the discussion on the problem at hand rather than on his or Socrates’ character. As the dialogue attests, Adeimantus’ tenor throughout this section is one of

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25 One is obliged to mention in this regard Nails’ indispensable prosopographical work The People of Plato (2002) which offers innumerable and valuable details pertaining to Plato’s characters as both literary figures and historical persons.

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collaborative discovery with Socrates. Thus, when Socrates moves to respond to the criticism, the young man exhibits calm in his considered reply: “I’d be glad to hear what you think.” (R. 487c13)

Comparatively, Callicles appears no less capable of engaging philosophically with Socrates. In fact, his critique of the philosophical life is remarkably similar in detail to the one proffered by Adeimantus. But there the similarity ends. Notwithstanding Callicles’ claim to have a “rather warm regard” (Grg. 485e3) for Socrates, his critique is in many ways, less a criticism of the philosophical life than it is an *ad hominem*: he denounces Socrates for willfully employing deceptive techniques in his elenchus:

This is in fact the clever trick you’ve thought of, with which you work mischief in discussions: if a person makes a statement in terms of law, you slyly question him in terms of nature; if a person makes a statement in terms of nature, you question him in terms of law. (Grg. 483a3-6)

This makes substantially the same point that Adeimantus makes in the first few lines of the passage above. But Callicles’ remark revels something of his own attitude toward Socrates and philosophy, not least his allegation of wilful deceit as Socrates’ *modus operandi*.

Famously, Callicles stands four-square against the ethics of *nomos* or, convention appealing instead to *phūsis* or, nature to support his moral valuation. Yet, Callicles betrays a partiality for the conventions of his own upbringing and education when he parrots the ‘din of praise and blame’ common to the masses. In this passage, he advances his a critique of philosophy, one that differs noticeably in tone from the counterpart offered by Adeimantus.

When I see philosophy in a young boy, I approve of it; I think it’s appropriate and consider such a person well-bred, whereas I consider one who doesn’t engage in philosophy ill-bred, one who’ll never count himself deserving of any admirable or noble thing. But when I see an older man still engaging in philosophy and not giving it up, I think such a man deserves a flogging. For, as I was just now saying, it’s typical that such
a man, even if he’s naturally very well-favored (a man eu·favored) becomes unmanly (a man unmanly) and avoids the centres of his city and the marketplaces—in which, according to the poet, men attain ‘preeminence’—and, instead, lives the rest of his life hiding, whispering in a corner with three or four boys, never uttering anything well-bred, important, or apt (e·eled and me·ga kai mhdeno a·xiwn). Grg. 485c3-e2

Leaving aside the way in which Callicles’ conventional view of education confirms his attachment to the social mores which he so desperately rails against, we see through the persons of Adeimantus and Callicles how two similarly endowed intellectual young men making similar arguments using similar claims can yet comport themselves in dramatically different ways. Adeimantus strikes a sympathetic note with the reader, perhaps because his goodwill is as apparent as his dialectical challenges are perceptive. As for Callicles, Dodds best sums up the reader’s impression of his character:

[H]is championship of “Nature” against “Law” marks him as anti-democratic in principle. And his contempt for the people is in fact even greater than Socrates’: they are in his eyes the “weaklings” (483b), no better than a rabble of slaves and all manner of unworthy men] (489c). These are the sentiments, not of a democrat, but of Plato’s “tyrannical man,” who is at once a product of democracy and its deadliest enemy (R. 565d). (Dodds 1959, 13)

Compared side-by-side, the speeches of Adeimantus and Callicles both produce arguments that disparage the Socratic method, philosophy and the philosophical life. Of course, this is not an unusual theme in Plato’s dialogues: many interlocutors take the same stance. But Plato has crafted each character here as an embodiment of a particular personality, a particular moral and political perspective, a particular psyche. The superficial resemblance in the content of their speeches belies the fact that as individuals, there is little question which of the two is more favourably constituted as a candidate for Socratic protreptic.
C. Philosophical Nature and the Psyche

Whatever the role of formal or informal education in the development of characters such as Callicles or Adeimantus, in Republic VI Plato insists that ultimately the constitution of the polity itself impresses its mark on the souls of all citizens. As we have seen, it is—for better or worse—the philosophical nature that receives the deepest, most indelible imprint. Given the political reality of Plato’s own age, it is not at all surprising that persons such as Callicles should arise; what is more astonishing, as Socrates attests, is that any philosophical natures should find their way to philosophy:

Then, there remains, Adeimantus, only a very small group who consort with philosophy in a way that’s worthy of her: A noble (φιλόσοφος) and well brought-up character (εὐτευριόμενον), for example, kept down by exile, who remains with philosophy according to his nature because there is no one there to corrupt him, or a great soul living in a small city, who disdains the cities affairs and looks beyond them. (R. 496a11-b3)

Under these circumstances, it is plain to see why suitably-constituted natures that succeed in coming to philosophy are seen as having been divinely-guided.26 Those that fail to realize their philosophical potential however, fail because of an education that does not merely mark, but blemishes the soul. From the vantage point of Republic, the fullest realization of the philosophical life depends on a philosophical nature emerging in an adequately constituted state. Socrates spells out his point:

That’s exactly my complaint: None of our present constitutions (κατάστασις) is worthy of the philosophic nature, and, as a result, this nature is perverted and altered (διαστρέφεσθαι καὶ αλλαθείσθαι), for, just as a foreign seed (ξένη καὶ σπέρμα), sown in alien ground, is likely to be overcome by the native species and to fade away among them, so the philosophic nature fails to develop its full power and declines into a different

26 So, we read that “the philosopher, by consorting with what is ordered (κατ'όρθον καὶ δικαίον) and divine (εὐλογικόν) and despite all the slanders around that say otherwise, himself becomes as divine and ordered as a human being can…And that if he should come to be compelled to put what he sees there into people’s characters, whether into a single person or into a populace, instead of shaping his own, do you think he will be a poor craftsman of moderation (μετριότητος), justice (δικαιοσύνη), and the whole of popular virtue?” R. 500c6-d6
character (ἐκπειτείν). But if it were to find the best constitution, as it is itself the best, it would be clear that it is really divine and that other natures and ways of life are merely human. (R. 497b1-c3)

The philosophic nature, though frail in its humanity, extends its grasp toward the divine; it springs forth in the city but is always foreign; it bears with it the promise of exceptional achievement, but is subject to debasement and decline.

D. Conclusion

At this point we can draw some conclusions about what we have examined thus far and set out the plan for the upcoming chapters.

Though philosophical protreptic depends on good and persuasive arguments, it is clear that it can only proceed on certain presumptions. First among these is the presumption that there are philosophical natures suitably disposed toward protreptic arguments. As our initial appraisal of Socrates’ interlocutors has demonstrated, a person’s conduct can reveal much about his attitude toward dialectic and philosophy in general. Second, the mere fact that one possesses a philosophic nature is not a guarantee of success. Third, interlocutors—even young interlocutors—do not approach protreptic arguments tabula rasa: their natures and characters are influenced, often profoundly, by the ethos in which they have been raised. Finally, Socratic protreptic aims not at instilling a simple appreciation for philosophy or an awareness of problems and arguments, but rather at turning a philosophical prospect toward a life of philosophy. I have argued that due care and attention to psychological facets of a character’s presentation yield

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27 Although Plato speaks here of a character that is subject to “decline (ἐκπειτείν)”, arguably, he is making the same point when (as we saw above) he speaks of a character as coming to “ruin (διαφειρεῖν)”.

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insight into Plato’s intention and especially (as we shall see) into his view of the characteristics of failed as well as ideal candidates for philosophy.

Over the next two chapters we will see this drama played-out through the characters of Theaetetus and Alcibiades. Though the youthful philosophical promise of Theaetetus stands in sharp contrast to Alcibiades’ sybaritic hurtle toward infamy, it is important to bear in mind that the latter, for all of his failures, possesses as philosophic a nature as the former. In juxtaposing these two characters we will be looking primarily for the virtues or vices written into their respective psyches. As for Theaetetus, aside from Theodorus’ encomium, much of what we discover about his suitability for philosophy comes to light as a direct result of his discussion with Socrates. Through dialectical examination Socrates elicits relevant philosophical qualities in Theaetetus that, often, the young man himself does not recognize as fundamental to the philosopher’s temperament.

Our approach to understanding Alcibiades’ character differs from the examination of Theaetetus in some important respects. To begin, our primary evidence arises not out of a direct dialogue with Socrates, but rather from Alcibiades’ own report fashioned as an encomium of Socrates. Second, aside from Socrates’ occasional interjections, we are assessing Alcibiades’ character through a retrospective evaluation of his past words and deeds conveyed to us in his own terms. Finally, the study of Alcibiades’ character is a forensic consideration of a philosophical character in moral decline. There are, as we have said, many interlocutors throughout the dialogues that are hostile to philosophy; many though, prove to be unphilosophical. What sets Alcibiades apart is that he has a philosophical nature and he knows

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28 For example: Anytus (Meno. 90cff); The Isocratean Stranger (Euthyd. 303d4ff); Euthyphro (Euthphr.); Ion (Ion). I include Ion not because he exhibits an overt hostility (Cf. Callicles; Thrasymachus), but because he his brand of ignorance arises from an irrational belief in the power of the rhapsode over knowledge of technē.
what pleasures there are to be had from the philosophical life. And yet, he rejects philosophy
though somehow preserving a (grudging) affection for Socrates himself.

Lastly, we should understand the place of Chapter 4 in this work. My own long-standing
interest in a particular phrase from Republic that we encountered above—“a true erotic love for
true philosophy (ἁγνήν ερωτικὴ φιλοσοφία)” (R. 499b5-6)—has lead me to examine
Phaedrus in a chapter devoted to eros, protreptic and the dynamic between lover and beloved.
While Republic VI is a rich in its exploration of the relationship between the philosopher and the
state, Phaedrus scrutinizes the philosophical life by highlighting the personal and intimate
relationship between lover and beloved in way that strikes me as a fitting compliment to the very
personal portraits in Chapters 2 and 3. What we shall find in looking at Phaedrus is that eros
functions in the lover-beloved relationship in both noble and ignoble ways. My objective is to
ascertain the conditions in which the eros-inspired lover facilitates or frustrates his beloved’s
path to philosophy.
Chapter Two: Hybris and Shame as Impediments to Protreptic

I. The Nature of Hybris

A. Legal, Social and Cultural Perspectives

As a broad-ranging moral and legal concept, Hybris is normally understood as ‘insolence’, ‘arrogance’ or even ‘outrage’.29 While it describes a great variety of offences ranging from physical and sexual violence to impiety and even unrefined wit, we shall limit our investigation of the phenomenon to those categories of behaviour that will aid in our understanding of the psychological play presented in Alcibiades’ Symposium speech.

There is perhaps no better analytical description of hybris to be found in fourth century philosophical literature than that proposed by Aristotle. Hybris, he tells us, denotes a psychological disposition which consists in doing and saying things that cause shame to the victim, not in order that anything happen to yourself, or because anything has happened to yourself, but simply for the pleasure involved. (Retaliation is not insolence 

\[\text{\textit{ubrizin}}\] but vengeance.) The cause of the pleasure thus enjoyed by the insolent man (\[\text{\textit{ubrizontev}}\] (Rhet. 1378b24-29)

Using Aristotle as a starting point for his discussion, N.R.E. Fisher, in his comprehensive analysis of hybris in ancient Greek thought, identifies a variety of behaviours arising from the proclivity toward hybristic comportment so aptly identified by Aristotle. Hybris, Fisher argues,

29 C.f. LSJ s.v. \[\text{\textit{ubriv.}}\] Based largely on the evidence of Demosthenes’ speeches, MacDowell gives the following general characterization of hybris: “Characteristically, its driving force is the energy of a young man who has had plenty to eat and drink and behaves like a frisky horse, and it is often found in men who have wealth and political power; but it is not necessarily confined to the young and the wealthy. Its characteristic manifestations are further eating, drinking, sexual activity, larking about, hitting and killing, taking other people’s property and privileges, jeering at people and disobeying authority both human and divine.” (MacDowell 1986, 129)
is expressed in numerous ways, most evidently through acts of violence, verbal insults and
sexual offences (Fisher 1992, 86). These of course, lie at the heart of Alcibiades’ accusations
toward Socrates. In the first part of this chapter, we shall consider the plausibility of Alcibiades’
charges of *hybris* against Socrates. However, what we shall ultimately find is that far from being
the wronged party, Alcibiades himself emerges as a striking exemplar of each of the deplorable
behaviours which he unfairly and maliciously ascribes to Socrates.

i) *Acts of Violence*

Though physical violence has many causes, taken from the perspective of a classical
Athenian, physical violence arising from *hybris* “is intended to humiliate the victim and bring a
sense of superiority to the assailant...which in effect breaches the boundary which separates free
men, and especially citizens from slaves.” (Fisher 1992, 86) While a slave might commit an act
of *hybris* against a free man, the insolence or arrogance envisioned by the charge lies in the fact
that the act is committed by one citizen against another; it is an affront among civic (though not
necessarily social) equals. In a cultural and political environment where citizenship was at the
core of civic life, it would have been outrageous to countenance one citizen committing an
outrage, in the words of Aristotle, ‘simply for the pleasure involved’. Importantly, the charge (or
*graphe*) of *hybris* was distinguished in Greek jurisprudence from other causes leading to assault.
In his assessment of *hybris* among the Greeks, MacDowell makes the case for this distinction:

Clearly there is a considerable overlap between the scope of a *graphe* for *hybris* and the
scope of a *dike* for battery, violence, slander, and so on. But the Athenians, with their
concern for personal honour and their resentment towards anyone who diminished it, may
well have felt that the difference between them was more important. The difference lay
in the motive and the state of mind of the offender. If, for example, a man hit someone
because he lost his temper, or even just by accident, that was just battery (*aikeia*). But if
he hit him because he considered himself and his own wishes more important than the
rights and esteem of his victim, that was *hybris*, a much more serious offence.
(MacDowell 1986, 130)
Clearly then, *hybris qua hybris* has less to do with the actual physical harm caused to the wronged party than it does with the *shame* and *dishonour* consequent upon the act.

**ii) Sexual Offences**

While *hybris* often finds expression through physical harm, in an important sense, even physical harm might be considered as secondary in gravity to *hybris* expressed through sexual transgression. Since, as we have seen, shame and humiliation figure largely as the driving motives in acts of *hybris*, we should perhaps not be surprised at the contention that sexual offence is the primary expression of *hybris*. In making just this this case, Cohen observes that

> the noun *hubris* and the verb *hubrisein* have a strong sexual connotation. This is only natural in a society which [was] closely linked to honor and sexuality in such a way that sexually compromising a woman or child endangered the reputation of the family as a whole, and particularly its men. (Cohen 1991, 177-8)

Because *hybristic* behaviour aims at shaming the victim and is, as Cohen points out, intimately connected to dishonouring the victim in the context of a social group, it is clear that committing such an outrage might be accomplished more thoroughly through sexual interference rather than simply through physical harm.

**iii) Graphe Hybreos**

Our cursory consideration of the two most egregious manifestations of *hybris* leads us then to consider the lawful redress afforded the wronged party in these circumstances: the *graphe hybreos*, or accusation of *hybris*. Clarifying the place of the *graphe hybreos* in Athenian jurisprudence, MacDowell is careful to distinguish between simple acts of violence and those committed through *hybris*. He notes that “a *graphe for hybris* is not to be regarded as duplicating the other legal procedures for assault and abuse...it existed alongside them in the fourth century; being a *graphe*, it was a more serious kind of prosecution....” (MacDowell 1986,
While the *graphe hybreos* brought a heightened sense of seriousness to legal proceedings, there are also instances in which the gravity of a *graphe hybreos* was used in a rhetorical fashion, as a way of intensifying the lesser infractions which may well not have amounted to *hybris* properly understood. In considering the use of just such a *graphe*, Dover observes that the charge of *hybris* “normally arose from physical maltreatment, but there was nothing to prevent a speaker from using *hybris* and its verb *hybrizein* for emotional effect...” (Dover 1974, 54) Thus, while the charge of *hybris* was, as we have noted, a serious one, it was often invoked in an effort to make lesser infractions such as verbal insults or fraud appear significant. Dover explains further: “It was much easier for [a complainant] to evoke an abnormally strong reaction against fraud by utilizing an established pattern of response and calling fraud ‘*hybris*’ than by attempting to go against established patterns and to argue ‘fraud is worse than *hybris*’” (Dover 1974, 54). So, while we might fairly conclude that a *graphe hybreos* is among the most serious of accusations, the charge itself was often used as a legal flourish, open to abuse and thus potentially baseless. Since the perpetrator’s intention figured largely as the basis for laying the charge, it is not surprising that for all of the circumstance attendant on the charge, “actual prosecutions for *hybris* appear to have been rare.” (MacDowell 1986, 131)

iv) *Alcibiades’ Graphe Hybreos*

Though Alcibiades’ speech is ostensibly an encomium delivered by a drunken gate-crasher, it is apparent even to a casual reader that the speech itself conforms in its formal construction to the principles of rhetorical oratory.30 And while it bears the earmarks of a satyr-

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30 Rosen usefully divides the speech into five sections (adapted from Rosen 1968, 293-4):
   1) method of his speech (215a4-5)
   2) Socrates as Silenus and Marsyas (215a5-216c3)
   3) Alcibiades’ attempted seduction of Socrates (216c4-219e5)
   4) Socrates’ virtues in war (219e5-221c1)
   5) Socrates’ uniqueness (221c2-222b7)
play\textsuperscript{31} or even a farce, we are always acutely aware of the serious undertones to Alcibiades’ assorted indictments. In due course, we shall take up each of the four charges of \textit{hybris} which Alcibiades levels at Socrates. But before doing so, it is important to take special note of the fact that however comedic we find Plato’s depiction of Alcibiades, his allegations of \textit{hybris} carry important implications for unravelling the psychology of shame and honour, not least because Alcibiades casts himself as prime witness and the assembled symposiasts as jurors in his case against Socrates. As we read in the course of his second accusation of \textit{hybris} (which we shall consider shortly), Alcibiades refers to those present as “members of the jury (\textit{dikastai};)”, adding: “for this is really what you are: you’re here to sit in judgement (\textit{dikastai};) of Socrates’ amazing arrogance (\textit{upofani;av})” (219c5-7). As we have seen, if success is to be hoped for in a \textit{graphe hybreos}, it’s the \textit{intention to shame} by outrageous conduct that must be established. Now, as friends and intimates of Socrates, the juror-symposiasts appear to Alcibiades as a sympathetic assembly, likely to ‘convict’ the accused since—at least in his own mind—he and the jurors share a common experience.

[Y]ou know what people say about snakebite—that you’ll only talk about it with your fellow victims: only they will understand your pain and forgive you for all the things it made you do. Well, something much more painful (\textit{kardian}) than a snake has bitten me in my most sensitive part—I mean my heart, or my soul, or whatever you want to call it,\textsuperscript{32} which has been struck and bitten by philosophy, whose grip on young and eager souls\textsuperscript{33} is much more vicious than a viper’s and makes them do the most amazing things. Now, all you people here, Phaedrus, Agathon, Eryximachus, Pausanias, Aristodemus, Aristophanes—I need not mention Socrates himself—and all the rest have shared in the madness, the Bacchic frenzy of philosophy (\textit{th#v filos)} (217e7-218b3)

\textit{Hellen North follows Aristotle in identifying the “oratory of praise and blame” (North 1994, 89) in the \textit{Symposium} as characteristic of Plato’s use of ‘epideictic’ rhetoric.}

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{C.f.} Socrates’ closing remarks to Alcibiades: “we’ve seen through your little satyr-play” \textit{Symp.} 222d4.

\textsuperscript{32} Whether the ‘bite’ of philosophy is felt in the heart (\textit{kardian}) or soul (\textit{quch;n}) seems a point of indifference to Alcibiades; he seems to dismissively conflate the seat of emotion (\textit{kardian}) with the basis of cognitive function, \textit{quch;n}. But this very confusion seems aptly descriptive in the case of Alcibiades.

\textsuperscript{33} ‘young and eager souls’ translates \textit{ne;ou quch#v mh}. However, \textit{quch#v mh} might more felicitously be rendered as ‘not without natural talent’, a somewhat more grandiose self-description by Alcibiades.
While his clear objective in this short declamation is to co-opt the jurors and garner their sympathy, Alcibiades’ skewed depreciation of philosophy speaks less to the nature of philosophy than it does to the state of his psyche. By his own testimony, philosophy has caused him more pain than a venomous adder’s bite; it has stricken his soul and even driven him to madness known only to Bacchants. Condemnations of philosophy are familiar enough to us in dialogues. But as a Socratic associate, Alcibiades stands alone in the Platonic corpus for his depiction of philosophy as painful, agony-inducing madness.

Yet, it is precisely because of his unflattering depiction of philosophy that we are afforded a glimpse into Alcibiades’ character. It is revealing that throughout his testimony he seems to confuse philosophy itself with the effect philosophy has had on him. Consequently, he takes a dim view of philosophy, something which serves to further embolden him in his graphe hybreos against Socrates. For all his philosophical potential, he is not lulled by the soothing charms of philosophy, but feels its intellectual appeal as an agonizing sting. Having suffered the effects of philosophy’s poison, it is Socrates, he reasons, who has intentionally administered the bite. Naturally, the claim is as dubious as the inference is unsound; but in it we observe the mind of a man incapable of accepting culpability for his own philosophical failure.

However, simple ignorance of his own failures would make Alcibiades conventional, almost uninteresting. His presentation is complicated with what appears as selective insight into the condition of his philosophical soul. As the encomium unfolds and his tone becomes confessional, one senses that his failure early in life at becoming a Socratic acolyte has had a

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34 As we read for instance when Callicles disparages Socrates’ inclination toward philosophical conversations (Grg. 485b1ff) or when Crito reports the condemnation of philosophy by the so-called ‘Stranger’ at Euthyd. 304d4ff.

35 Recall that he does manage to catch a fleeting glimpse of the divine philosophical beauty in Socrates: “But I once caught him when he was open like Silenus’ statues, and I had a glimpse of the figures he keeps hidden within: they were so godlike—so bright and beautiful, so utterly amazing...” Symp. 216e5-7. As we shall see below, Alcibiades’ capacity to see the philosophical beauty in Socrates while at the same time resisting the life enjoined by Socrates’ philosophy is what makes Alcibiades’ case compelling.
crippling resonance on his subsequent attempts both at becoming philosophical and at leading a life quit apart from philosophy. Indeed, his ordering of goods seems driven by a vicious circularity:

He [i.e., Socrates] always traps me, you see, and he makes me admit that my political career is a waste of time, while all that matters is just what I most neglect: my personal shortcomings, which cry out for my closest attention. So I refuse to listen to him; I stop up my ears and tear myself away from him, for, like the Sirens, he could make me stay by his side till I die. (Symp. 216a5-8)

Alcibiades recognizes that Socrates’ arguments make him admit what he ought to do, but the young man rebels against reason, ‘refusing to listen’, that is, refusing by force. Thus, forcing himself to deny what reason compels him to accept, Alcibiades feels bitten, though it is more properly by his conscience than by Socrates or his philosophy.

Given what we have already learned of Alcibiades, his attempt at exculpating himself by deflecting blame is a predictable psychological ploy made all the more gripping for what it reveals about his deeply conflicted desires. As he proceeds with his disquisition, he speaks as though ignorant to numerous contradictory desires in his soul. Shamelessly, he declares:

I know perfectly well that I can’t prove he’s wrong when he tells me what I should do; yet the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: I cave in to my desire to please the crowd. My whole life has become one constant effort to escape from him and keep away, but when I see him, I feel deeply ashamed, because I’m doing nothing about my life, though I have already agreed with him that I should. (216b5-8)

Both in this passage and the previous one, there is the claim that merely by his presence Socrates is a catalyst for philosophical conversion. While Alcibiades gives his free assent to the

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36 Alcibiades expresses his conflicted sentiment in dramatic fashion: “Sometimes, believe me, I think I would be happier if he were dead. And yet I know that if he dies I’ll be even more miserable. I can’t live with him, I can’t live without him!” Symp. 216c2-5

37 Symp. 216a6-7

38 It is not, strictly speaking the ‘desire to please the crowd’ that draws Alcibiades away from what he knows he should do, but rather ‘the honour of the crowd’. The difference is important since we are assessing his motivation for wishing to escape Socrates’ persuasion.
conclusions of Socrates’ arguments, by his own admission, this drunken komast is tormented by competing desires for conventional goods. The compulsion he feels for these goods is so overwhelming that, by an apparently extraordinary act of will, he suspends his assent to the dictates of reason and forces himself back into a pre-philosophical state. This, he concedes, can only be sustained so long as he is successful in his ‘constant effort to keep away’ from Socrates.

Since the impossibility of akrasia is a cornerstone of Socratic ethics, we should be wary of diagnosing Alcibiades as suffering from ‘weakness of the will’. For this reason, Burnyeat has given his predicament an epistemic reading. It is, he suggests, a ‘weakness of belief’. Whether or not we can persuasively argue that his weakness is epistemic, the psychological fact is that philosophy flourishes in Alcibiades’ soul only when he is in Socrates’ company; otherwise, without the constant attention of his philosophical companion, it withers, only to blossom during a subsequent unhoped-for encounter.41

39 I take the phrase from Burnyeat’s (as yet) unpublished lecture of the same name delivered at Queen’s University, Kingston in 2008.

40 While Alcibiades is in many ways unique among interlocutors—especially for the residual psychological effect brought on by his association with Socrates—he is not the only character mysteriously affected by proximity to Socrates. Crito attests to the same phenomenon: “Now whenever I am in your company your presence (σοίσυχνάμα) has the effect of leading me to think it madness to have taken such pains about my children in various other ways... Euthyd. 306d5-7. The pseudo-Platonic Theages offers tantalizing evidence as well. There, Socrates himself gives evidence of his effect on his associates: “And of these, again, who make progress, some are helped in a secure and permanent way, whereas many make wonderful progress as long as they’re with me (οὐκομένοιμενοι) but when they go away from me (μουαποφτικαί) they’re no different from anyone else.” Theages, 130a2-5. Driving the point home, Socrates reports a conversation with Aristides, a one-time associate: “By the gods, Socrates, you’re not going to believe this, but it’s true! I’ve never learned anything from you, as you know. But I made progress whenever I was with you (σοίσυχνάμα), even if I was only in the same house and not in the same room—but more when I was in the same room. And it seemed, to me at least, that when I was in the same room and looked at you when you were speaking, I made much more progress that when I looked away. And I made by far the most progress when I sat right beside you, and physically held on to you or touched you.” Theages, 130d2-e2.

41 I would like to suggest that the psychological phenomenon which Plato means to describe through Alcibiades’ mysterious compulsion to take up philosophy only when in Socrates’ presence, is the same phenomenon that the author of Alcibiades treats in the concluding pages of that dialogue. This centres on the question of how one might best acquire self-knowledge. Socrates’ suggestion to the teen-aged Alcibiades is that self-knowledge is gained only when we are able to scrutinize ourselves, just as one does in seeing oneself in a reflection. He adduces an image: just as a mirror “allows us to see both it and ourselves when we look at it” Alc. 132d10-11, “when a man looks into an eye his face appears in it, like in a mirror.” Alc. 133a1-2. From this, Socrates concludes: “Then if the soul,
Unlike other Socratic devotees who report only the salutary benefits of their nearness to Socrates, Alcibiades resents Socrates’ philosophical effect because it is a challenge to his epistemic resolve; it exposes his disordered valuation of goods; it establishes a conflict between the hedonistic and the rational aspects of his psyche and finally, because it reminds him of his moral failure in caring for his soul. Dispositionally incapable of humility, Alcibiades is ashamed, drunk and resentful. Symbolically, he seeks redress through a *graphe hybreos*—a desperate if not transparent attempt at a moral condemnation of Socrates. In the four accusations that follow, what we see in each case is that far from having the effect of disgracing Socrates, Alcibiades’ *graphe* is in its entirety, a self-indictment.

II. Four Accusations of Socrates’ *Hybris*

A. Socrates as Marsyas: Persuasion as *Hybris* (*Symp.* 215b7)

“This, Phaedrus and the rest of you, was what Diotima told me. I was persuaded (*pe;peismai*). And once persuaded, I tried to persuade (*pei;yein*) others too...42

In the opening salvo of his encomium, Alcibiades tries to convince his listeners that the strangeness of his method is vindicated by the integrity of his motive: “I’ll try to praise Socrates my friends, but I’ll have to use an image. And though you may think I’m trying to make fun of him, I assure you my image is no joke: it aims at the truth.” (*Symp.* 215a5-7). On one reading, the likenesses put forth seem playful if not a bit deprecating. “Look at him!”, urges Alcibiades: “Isn’t he just like the statue of Silenus?... Now look at him again! Isn’t he also just like the satyr

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42 *Symp.* 212b2-3

Alcibiades, is to know itself, it must look at a soul, and especially at that region in which what makes a soul good, wisdom, occurs, and at anything else which is similar to it.” *Alc.* 133b6-8. My contention is that Socrates’ ‘presence’ in the *Symposium* functions much as the ‘eye’ does in *Alcibiades*—both serve as psychological mechanisms which allow the subject to see himself in an objective light, thus scrutinizing his own moral condition.
Marsyas?” (215b1-6). The likeness to the satyr Silenus can be taken as a paean to the inner beauty hidden by Socrates’ roughly-hewn exterior; but for all of its evocative imagery, it is a prelude to the claim that Socrates resembles the treacherous and double-dealing satyr Marsyas. Marsyas is a widely-represented mythological figure who by his music has the power to enchant and persuade listeners to his pastimes of lechery and sexual revelry. This is the likeness that Alcibiades produces from his promise to be speak the truth; this is the image that he that leads to his grievous charge: 

The charge of *hybris* is actually grounded in an analogy: just as Marsyas’ music enchants and persuades listeners to debauchery, Socrates’ persuasive words leave one dumbstruck and possessed. Evoking the image of a satyr whose face is contorted and ugly but whose music bewitches mortals and defies the gods themselves, Alcibiades alleges: “The only difference between you and Marsyas is that you need no instruments; you do exactly what he does, but with words alone.” (Symp. 215c7-9). And yet, the charge that Socrates’ gift of persuasion echoes the satyr’s *hybris* appears somewhat more insulting than injurious to Socrates. Nevertheless, Alcibiades succeeds—at least rhetorically—in making his point. He succeeds because he has drawn a connection (however implausibly) between Socrates’ persuasive talent and the corrupting persuasion of Marsyas.

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44 “You are *hybristes*, are you not?” We should understand the charge of *hybris* here not only as ‘contempt’ or ‘insolence’, but as evoking the characteristics commonly associated with satyrs: lust, lewdness and licentiousness. Symp. 215d4. Also calls to mind ‘restrained’ or ‘bridled’—language that evokes Alcibiades’ later admission of slavery or subjugation before Socrates.
45 “Athena, having invented the oboe [i.e., double-reed aulos], threw it away because it distorted her face to play it. Marsyas picked it up and so learned to play on it. He now challenged Apollo to a contest in music; Apollo, having defeated him, took advantage of an agreement that the winner should do as he liked with the loser and flayed him alive.” *OCD* s.v. Marsyas (1).
46 After all, Socrates’ brand of persuasion is founded on the principles of rational discourse, while Marsyas relies on the non-rational sway of his enchanting *aulos*, or ‘flute’.
There is a significance to this rhetorical ploy: Greek law recognized the use of persuasion in the commission of crimes—especially sexual crimes—as graver than the commission of crimes by a simple use of force. MacDowell explains:

It seems strange to us that the Athenians thought that sexual intercourse outside of marriage was a more serious offence if the woman consented than if she did not. Seduction was worse than rape, because it implied corruption not only of the woman’s body but also of her mind. (MacDowell 1986, 124)

What begins as a drunken diversion develops into a damaging claim: that Socrates is guilty of a sort of philosophical luring, trapping his quarry with words and inducing his victims to scandalous moral ideas.

But for all of Alcibiades’ plaintive accusations, the comparison to Marsyas remains just that. What Alcibiades’ rebarbative words reveal is a mind that is disquieted by Socrates’ examinations; a mind, as we noted above, that experiences philosophy as madness or, as he says here, a corybantic reverie: “The moment he starts to speak, I am beside myself: my heart starts leaping in my chest, the tears come streaming down my face, even the frenzied Corybantes seem sane compared to me” (Symp. 215e2-4). The more he protests his vulnerability to Socrates’ philosophical overtures, the more Alcibiades’ maudlin confession reveals the deeply emotional effect of Socrates’ philosophical exhortations on his soul.

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48 In Lysias’ “On the Murder of Eratosthenes” we read:
Thus the lawgiver, sirs, considered that those who use force deserve a less penalty than those who use persuasion; for the latter he condemned to death, whereas for the former he doubled the damages, considering that those who achieve their ends by force are hated by the persons forced; while those who used persuasion corrupted thereby their victims’ souls, thus making the wives of others more closely attached to themselves than to their husbands, and got the whole house into their hands, and caused uncertainty as to whose the children really were, the husbands’ or the adulterers’. In view of all this the author of the law made death their penalty. Lysias (1930) Orat. I §32-33.
At 215e6 Alcibiades takes a new tack: he claims that Socrates’ words are far more persuasive than those spoken by Pericles, the great leader of Athens and, importantly, Alcibiades’ own guardian. But this remark seems less an attempt to praise Socrates for surpassing Pericles’ abilities, than it is an effort to show the ignoble machinations of the Gadfly who can go about turning Alcibiades’ soul upside down and making him feel a “miserable slave” (drapeteu;w) (Symp. 215e5-6).

Surely, it is a kind of intellectual vanity that causes Alcibiades to become indignant with Socrates, Pericles or anyone with the temerity to challenge his grandiose self-image. Here, and in the remainder of this encomium, each additional accusation that Socrates has done him some injury betrays the menace not of Socrates’ philosophy, but of Alcibiades’ own moral conscience. Despite his protest that Socrates has made a slave of him and thereby thwarted his philosophical development, Alcibiades’ lack of progress toward philosophy has a single cause: his immodest, vain character—in short, his hybris.

B. Socrates’ Self-control as Hybris (Symp. 219c5)

The second accusation of hybris occurs in the context of the memorable scene depicting Alcibiades’ failed sexual seduction of Socrates (Symp. 217c2ff). Alcibiades’ charge of hybris

49 “I have heard Pericles and many other great orators, and I have admired their speeches. But nothing like this ever happened to me: they never upset me so deeply...” Symp. 215e5-8.
50 Alcibiades’ father was killed in battle and the young Alcibiades was sent to live in the home of Pericles. We can get a sense of Alcibiades’ character and specifically his intellectual arrogance from Xenophon’s report on the young Alcibiades and his regard for his guardian, Pericles. After being bested in a Socratically-inspired inquiry into the nature of the law (Mem. I.i.40ff), the great Athenian orator remarks on his young charge’s dialectic style: “‘You know, Alcibiades’, said Pericles, ‘when I was your age I was very clever too at this sort of thing; I used to practise just the same sort of ingenuity that I think you practise now’”. To this Alcibiades responds: “‘I wish I could have met you when you were at your cleverest Pericles...’” Mem. I.i.46. At least from Xenophon’s perspective, Alcibiades seems to have had little regard for anyone—even his greatest benefactor, a man who was in his own right among the greatest Athenians.
51 At Symp. 216b7 Alcibiades again refers to himself as a drapeteu;w or runaway slave. As we shall see, Alcibiades’ self-description as a ‘slave’ is crucial for understanding Alcibiades’ shame.
arises generally from his incredulity at having had his affections spurned, and specifically from his indignation at having been rejected by the ugly, Silenus-like Socrates. That Socrates can remain possessed of his self-control (sōphrosunē) is a fact that Alcibiades appears to find incomprehensible. So bent is the young man on bartering himself for philosophical wisdom that Socrates’ initial rejection of the lurid offer seems not to register at all. Socrates’ measured reaction falls somewhere between admonishment and moral instruction: “Is this a fair exchange that you propose? You seem to me to want more than your proper share: you offer me the merest appearance of beauty, and in return you want the thing itself, ‘gold in exchange for bronze’” (Symp. 218e5-8). Driving the point home he adds: “Still my boy, you should think twice, because you could be wrong, and I may be of no use to you” (Symp. 219a2-3). But Alcibiades does not interpret these words as a rebuff; it is clear from what follows that he holds on to the hope that Socrates will capitulate. In a last effort to deflate Alcibiades’ ambition without causing injury, Socrates proposes a way forward. He tells his young pursuer: “In the future, let’s consider things together. We’ll always do what seems best for the two of us.” (Symp. 219b1-2). Blinded to the possibility that these words are the final stamp of rejection, Alcibiades, undaunted, says he “slipped underneath the cloak” (Symp. 219b7-8) and embraced Socrates.

Turning to the symposiasts, Alcibiades—even at a remove of fifteen years from the events recounted in his story—seems amazed that Socrates could muster the fortitude to reject him. But he preserves his haughty self-regard and makes sense of his rejection by suggesting what is for him the only plausible explanation: that Socrates’ self-control betrays the work of forces beyond the human. Socrates’ fortitude, he claims, arises from his being daimoni;wj w[j a]lhyw#v kai ’yamastw#j (Symp. 219c1)—a truly divine and wondrous man. Presumably nothing
but a divine eminence could explain Socrates’ refusal of such an obviously tempting offer.

Then, we hear the substance of his graphe hybreos: 52 “this hopelessly arrogant (ἐγκυρός) this unbelievably insolent (ὑπερφρόν) man [laughed]53 (κατεγέλασε) and spurned (ἐμετόχων) my beauty.”54 The charge of hybris follows not merely from the allegation of arrogance and insolence, but from the fact that Socrates laughed at him.

One might expect to read next that Socrates’ reaction touched off Alcibiades’ fury. Instead, Alcibiades makes a candid revelation: “How do you think I felt after that? Of course, I was deeply humiliated (πλάκατο), but I also couldn’t help admiring his natural character (τά σαυσματικά) his moderation (τὸν καλὸν τάξιν) and fortitude (τὸν ἀνδρείαν)” (Symp. 219d3-5). If Alcibiades feels humiliation, it must be because he views his own actions—his attempted seduction—as an ill-conceived scheme. If the scheme rightly gives rise to humiliation, in what sense is the charge of hybris against Socrates legitimate? Even by Alcibiades’ own account, it is because of Socrates’ wisdom, his exemplary natural character, his virtues of moderation and fortitude55 that he rebuffs the attempt to ‘exchange gold for bronze’. It seems puzzling that these virtues should be the source of Socrates’ hybristic actions. In sum, the charge of hybris is inconsistent with the humiliation felt by Alcibiades. For Alcibiades’ listeners, the charge that Socrates is guilty of hybris on account of his moderation, or self-control (τὸν καλὸν τάξιν) would have been too obviously farcical to treat with any credulity.

52 ἐμετόχων προσέκαμψε τε καὶ κατεγέλασεν καὶ κατεφρόνησεν τῷ εὑρίσκουν καὶ ἔμετοχέν. Symp. 219c3-5.
53 Nehamas and Woodruff render κατεγέλασεν as “he turned me down” rather than preserving the basic sense of ‘jeering laughter’ suggested by LSJ.
54 Here, though ‘beauty’ conveys clearly what Alcibiades thinks is at stake, the text reads ἐμετόχων, literally, to ‘behold’ or ‘look’. Thus, we should think of Socrates’ offence as hubristically rejecting Alcibiades’ ‘self-regard’. The point is an important one since this speaks to Alcibiades’ general estimation of himself, physical beauty being but one aspect.
55 Alternately, we could take ἀνδρείαν as ‘manliness’ or ‘courage’
To any Greek, the very notion that \( \textit{swfrosunh} \), or self-control might be cited as the moving force in an act of \textit{hybris} would have appeared as a preposterous claim. Plato himself offers the following meditation on the contrariety between \( \textit{swfrosunh} \) and \textit{hybris}.

Now when judgement \( \textit{doxhv} \) is in control and leads us by reasoning toward what is best, that sort of self-control \( \textit{kra} \textit{tei} \) is called ‘being in your right mind’ \( \textit{swfrosunh} \); but when desire takes command in us and drags us without reasoning \( \textit{a} \textit{lo} \textit{gwv} \) toward pleasure, then its command \( \textit{th} \textit{arch} \textit{e} \) is known as ‘outrageousness’ \( \textit{ubriv} \) \( \textit{Phdr}, \ 237e2-238a3 \)

Plato’s own estimation of these two contrary psychological dispositions could hardly be clearer. The rule of reason which gives rise to \( \textit{swfrosunh} \) stands in stark contrast to the irrational command of pleasure which has as its source \( \textit{ubriv} \). Again, MacDowell attests that “the word most often used as an opposite to \textit{hybris} is \textit{sophrosune}”. (MacDowell 1976, 21). Echoing this view, Dover elaborates on this opposition, especially as understood in a sexual context:

When an offence contains a sexual ingredient, or when some aspect of the sexual life of a man prosecuted for a non-sexual offence can be exploited maliciously, the hubris-group of words can be applied by an adversary both generically and specifically, in order to create a profitable confusion in the jurors’ minds. A man of strong sexual appetites, more shameless, importunate and headstrong in pursuit of their satisfaction than society regarded as acceptable, was \textit{hubristes}. The man of opposite character, inclined to stop and think before acting in furtherance of his short-term interests or appetites, was \textit{sophron}... (Dover 1978, 35-6)

Not only is this article of the \textit{graphe} false, it is \textit{obviously} false and would have appeared so to Alcibiades’ audience—indeed, even to the hired entertainers.

C. Socrates’ Deceptive Argumentative Style as \textit{Hybris} (\textit{Symp. 221e3})

The substance of this third charge of \textit{hybris} arises from Alcibiades’ telegraphic remark at the beginning of his encomium. Speaking to all those assembled, but directing his remarks to Socrates, he asserts “even a sober and unclouded mind would find it hard to come to terms
(κατάρυγμα)⁶⁶ with your bizzareness! (κατάρυγμα)” (Symp. 215a4). The thread of this sentiment is picked-up again after his testimony regarding Socrates’ valorous comportment in battle. Since Socrates is unique, it is impossible to ascertain anything about him—least of all by looking for someone with similar characteristics. While something of the characters of Achilles and Pericles can be gleaning by comparison with Brasidas or Nestor respectively, there is no fitting comparison for Socrates.⁵⁷ “This man here is so bizarre (κατάρυγμα),” says Alcibiades, “his ways and his ideas are so unusual, that, search as you might, you’ll never find anyone else, alive or dead, who’s even remotely like him” (Symp. 221d2-4).

With the suggestion that there is no human comparable to Socrates, Alcibiades once again invokes a familiar image, that of Silenus and the satyrs, claiming that both Socrates and his arguments have an equal share in both the bestial nature of satyrs and the divine aspects of Silenus.⁵⁸ This allusion is the approach to the charge of hybris. The claim is that both Socrates and his arguments are coarsely clothed on the outside; the arguments, themselves are “clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar satyrs” (σατύροι διακόσμησις). But the coarse clothing of the arguments conceals something unexpected—something both mesmerizing and stupefying. Like the satyr whose hybris is enabled by his constant totems, wine and the aulos or double-flute, Socrates’ words enchant to the point of intoxication, and (according to Alcibiades at least), deprive one of reason. Socrates’ bumbling persona, according to his young lover, is in fact a clever deceit. It is his double nature that makes

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⁵⁶ ‘come to terms’ does not capture the stricter sense of κατάρυγμα to ‘recount in detail’. Alcibiades’ point here is not that it is difficult to make sense of Socrates’ actions for anyone who is drunk or sober, but that his bizarre actions are so numerous that they’re difficult to recount—whether one is drunk or sober.

⁵⁷ Symp. 221c-d

⁵⁸ “The best you can do is not to compare him with anything human, but to liken him, as I do, to Silenus and the satyrs, and the same goes for his ideas and arguments (κατάρυγμα)”. Symp. 221d4-7 (emphasis added).

⁵⁹ Symp. 221e3-4.

⁶⁰ Cf. Graves (1960), §21e-g for an account of Marsyas flayed by Apollo after having lost a contest at playing the aulos.
him appear harmless but which ultimately reveals him to be a duplicitous satyr, one who 
 enchants with his harmonious *logoi* but who leaves a cacophonous resonance is his listener’s 
 soul.

Having outlined the devastating, bewildering effect of an encounter with Socrates’ 
 putative darker nature, Alcibiades puzzlingly punctuates his accusation with the following 
 rehabilitating image of Socrates:

[I]f you see them [i.e., Socrates’ arguments] when they open up like the statues, if you go 
 behind their surface, you’ll realize that no other arguments make any sense. They’re 
 truly worthy of a god, bursting with figures of virtue inside. They’re of great—no, of the 
 greatest—importance for anyone who wants to become a truly good man ([Kalokagathos] 
 ([Symp. 222a1-6])

This characterization is familiar to us from earlier remarks in Alcibiades’ speech. However, 
 there is no question but that Socrates’ exterior masks his ethereal, divine arguments. This 
 assessment resonates for us as readers as well: there is no great difficulty in reconciling these two 
 images of Socrates since we are familiar with both his *daimon*-inspired philosophical persona 
 and his self-described role as gadfly. Thus, we never fail to recognize his true nature by the 
 deftly crafted argument concealed in a rough-hewn exterior. Alcibiades, on the other hand, 
 manages to contrive an encomium that both castigates and praises Socrates for the same thing: 
 for fashioning arguments that “always going on about pack-asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers or 
 tanners [and] always making the same old tired points in the same tired words” (*Symp. 221e4-6*). 
 In this third charge of *hybris* there is a departure from the picture of Socrates which we have 
 consistently seen, one which even Alcibiades has proffered. Far from bringing Socrates 
 ignominy, this charge reveals Alcibiades’ own struggle with conflicting affinities. He both loves 

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61 For a discussion of *kalokagathos*, see Ch. 3 § III.E
62 “But once I caught him when he was open like Silenus’ statues, and I had a glimpse of the figures he keeps hidden 
 within: they were so godlike—so bright and beautiful, so utterly amazing—that I no longer had a choice—I just had 
 to do whatever he told me.” *Symp. 216e4-217a3.*
Socrates for showing him that his arguments are of the ‘greatest importance for anyone who wants to become a truly good man’ and detests him for having shown the inconsistency between the life of philosophy and the life of concerned with pursuit of conventional goods. It is for this reason that the charges against Socrates are a revelation—not of his character, but of Alcibiades’.

D. Socrates’ Disingenuous Eros as Hybris (Symp. 222a8)

The final iteration of the charge follows within a few lines of what we have just considered and stands as Alcibiades’ summary of the harm done by Socrates. Recalling that Alcibiades frames the encomium as quasi-juridical, this allegation reads as a closing argument:

Well, this is my praise of Socrates, though I haven’t spared him my reproach, either; I told you how horribly he treated me—and not only me but also Charmides, Euthydemus, and many others. He has deceived us all: he presents himself as your lover, and, before you know it, you’re in love with him yourself! (Symp. 222b1-5)

Judging from the laughter that this remark ultimately elicits, Alcibiades’ listeners seem hardly sympathetic to the claim that they have all suffered the hybris of Socrates’ disingenuous eros. In light of the details of the attempted seduction, Alcibiades’ peculiar reversal of erotic sentiment—“and before you know it, you’re in love with him yourself”—recapitulates his earlier theme of failed seduction and is perhaps too comical for his listeners to take very seriously. And while we might grant that to know Socrates at all, is to have at some point (as Alcibiades rightly suggests)...

63 “He spurned my beauty, of which I was so proud, members of the jury—for this is really what you are: you’re here to sit in judgement of Socrates’ amazing arrogance...” Symp. 219c5-7
64 Certainly not the Euthydemus in the eponymously named Platonic dialogue. Nails (2002) identifies this Euthydemus (s.v. Euthydemus of Athens) with the young Euthydemus depicted in Xenophon Mem. 4.2. Chroust (1957), 179 contends that “behind the Euthydemus of Memorabilia 4.2.1-10, we may detect not only Alcibiades, but also some other person who defies identification.” This would of course, undermine the identification made by Nails. Indeed, if Kahn (1996) is correct in his thesis that Memorabilia is derivative, then the identity of this Euthydemus is likely to remain a mystery.
65 “Alcibiades’ frankness provoked a lot of laughter, especially since it was obvious that he was still in love with Socrates...” Symp. 222c2-3.
been “bitten by philosophy” (*Symp*. 218a5), Alcibiades’ appeal to the common experience of Socrates’ ‘bizarreness’ falls short of his novel claim: that the subject of Socrates’ affections invariably ends up pursuing the philosopher. Surely, the *hybris* of Alcibiades’ shameless offer is explained by the reversal of erotic sentiment felt by the young man. But to presume that the bite of philosophy would cause others to ‘fall in love’ with Socrates speaks less to the common experience of Charmides, Euthydemus and the others, and more to the nature of Alcibiades’ decent down Diotima’s ladder. Whereas Diotima instructs Socrates that the love of bodies is a *first* step toward the ultimate goal of catching sight of “something wonderfully beautiful in nature [i.e., Forms]” (*Symp*. 210e7-8), Alcibiades begins his journey with a glimpse of something “godlike—so bright and beautiful and utterly amazing” (*Symp*. 217a1-2) in Socrates. But, being unbridled by shame and temperamentally driven to possess that which he perceives as beautiful, the young man then tries to possess the bright, beautiful and god-like soul by trading on his good looks and beautiful body. He sees beauty in Socrates’ philosophical soul and mistakes Socrates’ love of wisdom for the man himself. Thus, we should not wonder that Alcibiades charges Socrates with being a disingenuous lover since the objects of eros for each is so radically different.

1) **The Symposiast-Jury Responds**

As a coda to Alcibiades’ mock trial, we have already noted that the jury does render a verdict of sorts: *laughter*. Here we pause to consider the spirit which inspires the laughter of the symposiasts, for this is a gauge of the effect that Alcibiades’ condemnation of Socrates and his philosophy has had on the listeners.
Citing a “fundamental and recurrent contrast in Greek texts between playful and consequential laughter” (Halliwell 1991, 282), Halliwell remarks that playful laughter is characterized by

lightness of tone; autonomous enjoyment; psychological relaxation; and a shared acceptance of the self-sufficient presuppositions or conventions of such laughter by all who participate in it. Consequential laughter, on the other hand, is marked by, first, its direction toward some definite result other than autonomous pleasure (e.g., causing embarrassment or shame, signalling hostility, damaging reputation, contributing to the defeat of an opponent, delivering public chastisement). Once the playful is exceeded, laughter is invariably regarded in Greek texts as having a human object or target, and it is the intended or likely effect of ‘pain’, ‘shame’, or ‘harm’ on this target (either in person or through his reputation and social standing) which is the primary determinant of its significance. (Halliwell 1991, 283)

What is clear from Halliwell’s analysis is that the laughter directed at Alcibiades is, if anything, consequential—indeed, morally consequential; for, it is through their laughter that Plato has the symposiasts express their reaction to the pain, shame and harm which Alcibiades has acknowledged experiencing in his encounter with Socrates. This dramatic—even theatrical—use of laughter coupled with the cultural context offered by Halliwell brings a deeper significance to this apparently incidental scene.

If we momentarily step back and consider Alcibiades’ stated aim at the start of the speech, it is apparent that the unexpected laughter occasioned by his frank admissions is a humiliating reversal of his intention. Recall that upon being offered the chance to give an encomium of Socrates, Alcibiades replies: “Do you think so Eryximachus? Should I unleash myself (ἐπιστέλλω) upon him? Should I give him his punishment (τιμωρῶ) in front of all of you?” (Symp. 214e3-5). The sort of laughter that Alcibiades hopes to elicit through his encomium is certainly something more biting than playful laughter. This much, Socrates
suspects. He worries aloud: “What do you have in mind? Are you going to praise me only to mock (gelioi;tera) me?” (Symp. 214e6-7).  

If we are correct in assessing the laughter of the symposiasts as more than merely playful, there is a further irony to the episode: that the laughter of the symposiasts is a sign of their hybristic reproval of Alcibiades. Again, Halliwell explains:

the accepted potency of laughter as a medium in which enmities may be publicly declared or pursued creates an emphatic Greek recognition of its dangers to the social fabric of the polis. This recognition is clearest in the extremely common equation, in every kind of source, between derision and to mock or insult a person is one more way of challenging his identity and injuring his status....[T]he essential point, that ridicule can function as an act of aggression and real harm, is one which underlies the common pairing of abusive laughter with hybris. (Halliwell 1991, 287)

While Alcibiades’ immediate complaint is that Socrates’ behaviour toward him constitutes hybris, the ridiculing laughter of the symposiasts is itself, ironically, a manifestation of their hybris toward Alcibiades for his graphe hybreos.

III. Alcibiades’ Hybris

A. The Dramatic Context of Alcibiades’ Hybris

At the conclusion of his fourth charge of hybris, Alcibiades alters the course of his speech. To this point, his oration, which has vacillated in tone between encomium and bitterly accusatory, takes on a gravely admonitory pitch. Turning to the young Agathon, he announces:

66 Perhaps part of Plato’s intention is to portray Alcibiades as sort of accidental buffoon, not unlike “an individual expected to create laughter, such as a parasite or entertainer (gelwtopoio;v) at a symposium.” (Halliwell 1991, 291). Interestingly, Halliwell also remarks that part of the diversions common at symposia, it is a “game of likenesses...regularly indulged at Athenian parties for which we have the most evidence” (Halliwell 1991, 291). This should strike us immediately as the ‘game’ that Alcibiades engages in when comparing Socrates to Silenus, satyrs, Marsyas, divine statuettes etc... (N.B: Halliwell’s evidence for his claim is independent of the Symposium.)
“I warn you, Agathon, don’t let him fool you! Remember our torments; be on your guard: don’t wait, like a fool in the proverb, to learn your lesson from your own misfortune.” (Symp. 222b5-c1).

Socrates, who has been conspicuously silent throughout Alcibiades’ speech, meets these words with a stiff rebuke:

You’re perfectly sober after all, Alcibiades. Otherwise you could never have concealed your motive so gracefully: how casually you let it drop, almost like an afterthought, at the very end of your speech! As if the real point of all this has not been to simply make trouble between Agathon and me! You think that I should be in love with you and no one else, while you, and no one else, should be in love with Agathon—well, we were not deceived; we’ve seen through your little satyr play. (Symp. 222c4-d4)

It has often been observed that Alcibiades’ speech is appended to the drama of the Symposium in much the same fashion that a satyr play follows a dramatic trilogy. Fittingly, at the end of his speech Alcibiades’ corporeal beauty is itself revealed as a mask. It is he, not Socrates that most resembles a satyr—comic, grotesque and outrageous.

i) Alcibiades’ Drunken Truth

The unceremonious entrance of the drunken Alcibiades in the Symposium is certainly among the most vivid dramatic scenes in all of Plato’s writing. It has perhaps occasioned as much speculation about the historical figure as it has inspired commentators to engage in analyses of the dialogue itself. One should hardly wonder at this though. The compelling details

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67 The ‘torments’ here, are those suffered by Charmides, Euthydemus (named at Symp. 222b), as well, presumably, by all those present at the symposium who Alcibiades says have felt the ‘sting’ of philosophy.

68 In our translation, where Socrates calls Alcibiades’ speech a “satyr play” the text reads: —your satyr or Silenus drama has been exposed—[lit. made visible] (my trans). Since there were only ‘satyr plays’ and not ‘Silenus plays’ as such, Socrates reference to Alcibiades’ speech as a ‘satyr or Silenus drama’ illustrates that even he is unsure of what to make of Alcibiades’ spectacle.

69 The spectacle of having a komos or ‘drunken party’ arrive unbidden to a party or symposium is a stock scene in Old Comedy: “the old sequence of fixed incidents in the old order remains the substructure of the action: Agōn, Sacrifice, Feast, Marriage, Komos. Another regularly recurring type of incident is the interruption of the Sacrifice, or the Feast, or both by a series of unwelcome visitors… Cornford (1961), 5
of Alcibiades’ speech redirect the momentum of the Symposium—and especially of the philosophically potent Diotima speech—and cause the reader to almost forget that the single concern of the Symposium prior to the arrival of Alcibiades and his komasts has been to offer speeches in praise of Eros rather than to amuse themselves recounting the details of erotic misadventures. Since he is obviously inebriated, Alcibiades argues that he is at a disadvantage: “do you really think it’s fair to put my drunken ramblings next to your sober orations?” (Symp. 214c8-9). Persuaded by this argument, it is Eryximachus as symposiarch who urges Alcibiades to abandon Eros as his subject and bids him to proceed with his speech ostensibly meant to praise Socrates.

As if to heighten the significance of Alcibiades’ drunken intrusion, we must recall that Plato fixes the dating of Symposium as the evening following Agathon’s victory. In the opening scene, Aristophanes and the other participants agree to “a plan for going easy on the drink” (Symp. 176b2-3). So, conceivably, Alcibiades has been drinking heavily for a second day before he breaches the gates to Agathon’s house.

What we ultimately discern of Alcibiades’ character depends in no small part on how we understand his own claim that he’s drunk. Unforgettably, his entrance is announced in dramatic fashion: “Good evening, gentlemen. I’m plastered (meyu; ontα)” (Symp. 212e4). This is soon followed by his consumption of two neat quarts of wine, an image which paints him

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70 Cf. Symp. 176e. On Phaedrus’ suggestion, Eryximachus sets the topic for speeches as ‘Eros’. Moreover, he indicates that the gathering will not be a ‘drunken party, and that wine will be served merely by way of refreshment’.
71 “Now there’s a good idea, said Eryximachus. Why don’t you give us a eulogy of Socrates” Symp. 214d7
72 Socrates testifies to this: “I’m going to Agathon’s for dinner. I managed to avoid yesterday’s victory party...” Symp. 174a 5-6
73 There is some disagreement as to just how much wine Alcibiades is said to have consumed. Gribble contends that the contents of the krater amount to 8 gallons and calls this addition by Plato a “heroic touch”. Gribble (1999), 78 fn.215). Dover on the other hand, more reasonably suggests that “οκτωκοτλαβ” (Symp. 214a1) indicates a more
unmistakeably as a Dionysian figure\textsuperscript{74} and which, by a symbolic usurping of Eryximachus’ role as symposiarch, threatens a barbaric disorder on the proceedings. Yet, in the opening lines of his encomium, Alcibiades punctuates his confession of Socrates’ influence with a curious remark: “If I were to describe for you what an extraordinary effect his words have always had on me (I can feel it this moment even as I’m speaking), you might actually suspect that I’m drunk! (εἰ μὴν κομιδὴν ἐμνῷ ἔχων ἔχω)”\textsuperscript{75} One might be forgiven for supposing that he actually is drunk; however, the remark conceals something about Greek perspectives on drunkenness. To gauge the importance of Alcibiades’ seemingly incongruous remark, we digress briefly to consider a discussion from Plato’s \textit{Laws}.

ii) \textit{Drunkenness Reveals Character}

In \textit{Laws} I, the Athenian, in conversation with Clinias (\textit{L.} 649b8ff), considers whether and in what manner one might go about making a test of a person’s character. “Suppose you have a man”, says the Athenian,

...with an irritable and savage temper (this is the source of a huge number of crimes). Surely, to make contracts with him, and run the risk that he may default, is a more dangerous way to test him than to keep him company during a festival of Dionysus? Or again, if a man’s whole being is dominated by sexual pleasures, it is dangerous to try him out by putting him in charge of your wife and sons and daughters; this is to scrutinize the character of his soul (χυρὰς ἀσκήσεως) at the price of exposing to risk those whom you hold most dear. You could cite dozens of other instances, and still not do justice to the superiority of this wholly innocuous ‘examination by recreation’ (\textit{L.} 649e3-650a7)

Here the Athenian suggests that one can glean more than truth from the words of a wine-drinker; \textit{how he behaves, what he says}, serves as a gauge of his \textit{character}. Indulgence in wine is a test precisely because of its tendency to temporarily “banish fear and stimulate over-confidence

\textsuperscript{74} The usual Greek practice was to drink wine diluted with water in a 5-to-1 ratio. Only Dionysius himself or drunkards would consume wine neat.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Symp.} 215d5-e2 (emphasis added)
about the wrong thing at the wrong moment” (L. 649a4-5). This candid view of a man’s soul is an ‘innocuous examination by recreation’, but it is of such value, concludes the Athenian, that “this insight into the nature and disposition of a man’s soul ([πεπεπε]σείν τε καὶ εξεσθὲν τὸν χαράκιν) will rank as one of the most useful aids available to the art which is concerned to foster a good character—the art of statesmanship ([πολιτική]) (L. 650b5-7). 76

This private, harmless test is valuable, concludes the Athenian, precisely because it can aid in determining psychological fitness for the politically ambitious. Though there are any number of outrageous or shameful drunken disclosures that would diminish the estimation of one’s character, the Athenian tells Clinias how the most noble soul would conduct himself while drunk:

[H]e would be no less justified [sc. in getting drunk publically] if, confident that he was already equipped by birth and breeding ([πεπεπε]σεὶ καὶ μελέθη καλῶς παρεσκευασθή), he were to plunge into training with several fellow drinkers. While inevitably aroused by the wine, he would show himself strong enough to escape its other effects: his virtue ([ἀρετή]) would prevent him from committing even one serious improper act ([σφαλείς]), and from becoming a different kind of person ([αλλοίους]) (L. 648d5-e4)

Seen in this light, Alcibiades’ larger-than-life claim that Socrates is impervious to the effects of alcohol77 does not imply that Socrates does not feel the effects of alcohol—only that his virtue prevents him from succumbing to irrational behaviour while drunk. If we understand ‘drunk’ as exhibiting thoughts and behaviours one would normally not exhibit while sober, Socrates does not get drunk: there is no ‘other’ character revealed and he does not become a ‘different kind of

76 Little wonder then, that Laws II begins thus: “It looks as if the next question we have to ask is this: is the insight we get into men’s natural temperaments the only thing in favour of drinking parties? ([οίνῳ] συνοικεῖ) Laws, 652a2-3
77 At the start of his encomium Alcibiades observes, “Socrates will drink whatever you put in front of him, but no one yet has seen him drunk” Symp. 214a5-6. Later in his encomium, reflecting on Socrates’ virtues and character, he notes, “[A]nd though he didn’t much like to drink, when he had to, he could drink the best of us under the table. Still, and most amazingly, no one ever saw him drunk” Symp. 220a3-5
person’. In his case, knowledge of virtue does not escape him when he drinks because his knowledge of virtue makes him virtuous—a finding that is completely consistent with the doctrine of Socratic Intellectualism: knowledge of virtue cannot fail to make one virtuous. Apparently, it is a moral condition that cannot be eradicated even by the effects of alcohol.

And so, we return to consider the apparent contradiction in Alcibiades’ statement that while he himself is obviously intoxicated (meyu;onta), he doesn’t wish to be suspected of being drunk (meyu;ein). Certainly, he wishes to persuade his listeners that the story to follow should not be put down to a bit of irrational drunken rambling—that while he is intoxicated, he is not a ‘different kind of person’. His story, he insists, should be taken as the sober truth. As we shall see, the story itself reveals a mind and character that, even in the absence of wine, is torn by conflicting desires, divided by competing passions and profoundly unstable in nature.

iii) Alcibiades Hybristes

While we may be inclined to moralize on the basis of Alcibiades’ inclination for overindulging in drink, Plato’s presentation of Alcibiades as drunk, considered in itself, is not an evaluative measure of his character. However, when coupled with what he reveals while drunk, we can begin to appraise the suitability of his philosophical character. Most important for our purposes is what Alcibiades’ revelations and accusations reveal about his mind and his pattern of behaviour. For it is by his thoughts and actions that we are able to judge his life as an expression of a disreputable character familiar to any Greek: the hybristic man.

While Athenian law reflects the fact that persons who might otherwise be thought of as respectable could be found guilty of committing hybris, in the popular mind, hybris was a phenomenon associated with a certain character type. We have already seen the conceptual
opposition of *hybris* and *sōphrosunē*; but the hybristic temperament extends beyond this. To the Greek mind, the iconic *hybriste* was young, wealthy and lazy. In such a person, all other failings—including a lack of *sōphrosunē*—were a function of this basic disposition. Fisher approaches the general characterization this way:

*Hybris*, we have seen, may be a characteristic fault of thoughtless or ambitious young men, may be induced or increased by drink and parties, may be the usual vice of the wealthy and successful, and may be a strong element in sexual activity. In general, then, one can say that the concept has close connections with those of pleasure, wealth and luxury, and often involves the individual giving rein to his desires for pleasures unrestrained by any respect for other peoples’ rights, honour or decent feelings. (Fisher 1992, 111)

The possibility of suffering outrages from persons inclined to bad behaviour was a significant preoccupation, even for the earliest of Greek writers. We have only to look to two foundational works of Greek literature to appreciate the extent to which the Greeks abhorred a man ruled by *hybris*. Theognis, in addressing himself to a friend Kurnos, advises him that the gods deploy *hybris* as a form of divine retribution: “The first thing, Kurnos, which the gods bestow/ On one they would annihilate, is pride (*u=brin/)* Excess engenders pride (*u=brin/), when money falls/ To men with minds unfitted (*mh' no;;ov a/rtiov*) for its use.”

In a similar vein, we read in *Works and Days* the following admonition:

Perses, listen to right (*dikkhv*) and do not foster violence (*u=brin/); for violence (*u=brin*) is bad for a poor man. Even the prosperous cannot easily bear its burden, but is weighed

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78 Dover discusses the legal requirement for substantiating a charge of *hybris*, citing the importance of establishing hybristic character or intent as the driving cause: “Indictments for hubris coexisted with private claims for damages arising out of simple assault, but to establish that an act of violence was hubris rather than assault it was necessary to persuade the jury that it proceeded from a certain attitude and disposition on the part of the accused: that is to say, from a wish on his part to establish a dominant position over the victim in the eyes of the community or from a confidence that by reason of wealth, strength or influence he could afford to laugh at the equality of rights under the law and treat other people as if they were chattels at his disposal.” Dover (1978), 35 (emphasis added). Similarly, MacDowell observes that “hybris has several characteristic causes and several characteristic results. The characteristic causes are youthfulness, having plenty to eat and drink, and wealth. The characteristic results are further eating and drinking, sexual activity, larking about, hitting and killing people, and disobeying authority both human and divine.” (MacDowell 1976, 21)

79 *Theognis*, (1973),150-54
down under it when he has fallen into delusion. The better path is to go by on the other side towards Justice ( dikaios); for Justice ( dikaios) beats Outrage ( Ubriov) when she comes at length to the end of the race. (Works and Days, 212ff)

*Hybris* is antithetical to right conduct in both the moral and political spheres. Equally, it is an affront to god and man. Little wonder then, that both of these works treat *hybris* as challenge to universal order. Hesiod assures his reader that in the cosmic struggle for order, *Hybris* must inevitably be defeated by Justice, while Theognis warns that the wrathful gods destroy whom they will, not by brutal force, but *by allowing the doomed man to destroy himself*—through *hybris*.80

Plato’s sketch of Alcibiades paints a picture of a man who by his consistently outrageous behaviour is a malefactor, a *hybristes*. His youth, wealth, and sense of entitlement are but the conditions that give rise to his shameless demeanour. The effects of his hybristic persona—his inclination to violence and sexual transgressions especially—are among the most obviously recognizable signs of his temperament to his contemporaries and peers. Our task now is to consider whether we can discern the effects in Alcibiades’ life that are the earmarks of the hybristic persona. As we shall find, his colourful portrayal in *Symposium* is an unexpected ‘examination by recreation’ that affords us a view of his hybristic character and how, despite his natural ability, he is essentially ill-suited for philosophy.

### B. Physical Violence

Since physical violence is among the most common manifestations of *hybris*, it is fitting that almost immediately following Alcibiades’ entrance we should have an indication of the fear

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80 “*Hybris has never arrived at the sober stage (to sophron) of manhood, but blooms and withers again among the young.*” Sophocles (1994) frg. 786
aroused by his threat of bodily harm. Of course, Socrates is the object of his ire; the philosopher’s reaction conveys the clear sense that is familiar with Alcibiades’ temper and has already been the target of Alcibiades’ rage. Seemingly frightened, Socrates turns to his host Agathon and pleads:

I beg you Agathon...protect me (ἐπαμοσειν) from this man! You can’t imagine what it’s like to be in love with him: from the very first moment he realized how I felt about him, he hasn’t allowed me to say two words to anybody else—what am I saying, I can’t so much as look at an attractive man but he flies into a fit of jealous rage (ζηλοδειτά). He yells (γαμαστά’ ἕργαζεται); he threatens (λόδοιρεταί); he can hardly keep from slapping me around (τοίχηρε τοιούτω); Please, try to keep him under control. Could you perhaps make him forgive (διαλλάκτον) me? And if you can’t, if he gets violent (ἐξειρήθη βίαζαι), will you defend me? The fierceness (μανήσαν) of his passion (φιλεστίς) terrifies me!83

What should immediately strike us is the link between Alcibiades’ eros for Socrates and Socrates’ fear that such eros will give way to violence. The connection between eros, philosophy and hybris is unmistakeable. Through his anxious tone, Socrates reports that in the past, the mere thought that he might be speaking with (διαλεξείν) or even looking at someone else has touched off Alcibiades’ rage. Now, leaving aside the fact that by his possessiveness Alcibiades would want to quash Socrates’ characteristic and famous philosophical inclination for διαλεξείν, there is another detail that would have struck anyone of Socrates’ listeners as bizarre, not to say outrageous: that as Socrates’ beloved, Alcibiades should attempt curb his lover’s affections toward any other beloved. Alcibiades’ indignation at Socrates for having other young men in his sights is a reversal of the lover/beloved relationship and in fact prefigures the more often examined reversal in his attempt to seduce Socrates. Alcibiades’ threatening temper and amorous frenzy are driven by a jealously modeled on the eros and emotion one might expect to see in a relationship forged between an older jealous lover and a younger, passive beloved.

81 Lit. “behaves in an extraordinary way”. cf. LSJ yaumastov A.II.
82 “forgiveness” is perhaps too pleading a word. Following LSJ, “reconcile” seems better.
83 Symp. 213d1-9
Socrates’ words here confirm what Alcibiades’ speech discloses in due course: that his *eros* for Socrates is the cause of his trying to dominate the man physically, intellectually—even sexually. Only a man who fears no social sanction, who holds himself above the conventions of law and even the reproach of his peers—a hybristic man—would conduct himself in such a manner.

If we look at the opening salvo of Alcibiades’ accusatory exchange with Socrates, we see a psychological attitude toward Socrates that is as puzzling as it is revealing. Though we have already established that he is as fiercely possessive of Socrates as any (misguided) lover can be, his first reaction to seeing Socrates is argumentative and aggressive: “Good lord, what’s going on here? It’s Socrates! You’ve trapped me again! You always do this to me—all of a sudden you’ll turn up out of nowhere where I least expect you! Well, what do you want now?” *(Symp. 213c1-3).* This is a strange reception from a man who is inclined to violence at the thought of his ‘beloved’ Socrates associating with other young men. But perhaps, Alcibiades’ later admission—that his own failure at philosophy has made his life ‘one constant effort to escape Socrates’—sheds light on this reaction. Knowing he should follow the life of philosophy while at the same time not doing so makes him want to escape Socrates even though, as his subsequent speech makes clear, he desires nothing more than to possess Socrates. Alcibiades’ attitude toward Socrates is one of contempt for him and his ‘traps’ and paradoxically, as we have just seen, one of intimate emotional attachment to Socrates.

This does not mean however that Socrates’ concern is misplaced. As a prelude to the encomium, Alcibiades confirms Socrates’ fears by using language that betrays his vicious temperament. Ignoring a plea for forgiveness or reconciliation, Alcibiades offers the following hybristic and menacing response: “I shall never forgive you...I promise you, you’ll pay

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84 We shall consider this in some detail below.
(Conveying the emotive quality of ‘vengeance’, rather than simply making someone ‘pay’).

Socrates’ response “will you not utter things of good omen?” is literally a question: “will you not utter things of good omen?” It is important to emphasize Socrates’ petition as an appeal for Alcibiades to observe a pious reverence for the gods.

C. Sexual Impropriety

Above, we noted that there is a constellation of behaviours which signify *hybris*. Violence, as we have just seen, is but one manifestation. Here, we turn to briefly consider the subtler expressions of *hybris* shamelessly conveyed by this son of Athens. Specifically, we shall
look for *hybris* in his vainglorious self-regard and overweening belief in the power of his sexual attractiveness.

What emboldens Alcibiades to the success of his designs is an immodest estimation of his own irresistible beauty:

And believing he [Socrates] had a serious affection for my youthful bloom (ילדים) I supposed I had here a godsend (הconciliation and a rare stroke of luck, thinking myself free at any time by gratifying his desires to hear all that our Socrates knew; for I was enormously proud ( shimmer) of my youthful charms (םילוי)"

Perhaps because he considered his good looks ‘a godsend’ it is not surprising that he interprets his youthful bloom as the object of Socrates’ affection. That Socrates’ eros would have been *intellectually* driven does not appear as a possibility. But at a remove of a decade and a half, it is puzzling that, while Alcibiades seems prepared to revisit many details of his past relationship with Socrates, at no point does he concede that in his youthful exuberance for philosophical knowledge, he employed an ill-conceived method of attempting to acquire wisdom. There is *hybris* not only in the details of the seduction, but also in the mind of the man wilfully blind to his youthful transgressions. At least in this unfortunate respect, there is a consistency to his character—one which does not however, commend it.

Whatever else we might imagine as Alcibiades’ motive in his condemnatory encomium, it is clear from our discussion above that at the very least he is looking for retribution, vengeance or simply to ‘get back’ at Socrates. It seems however that with every new charge, there is a new (and embarrassing) revelation. Even Alcibiades appears to understand that while some things can be repeated in mixed company, others details might be risqué, even scandalous. He tells his fellow guests:

87 *Symp. 217a2-6* (translation: Lamb)
Now you admit that my story so far has been perfectly decent (logou kalwv); I could have told it in any company. But you’d never have heard me tell the rest of it, as you’re about to, if it weren’t that, as the saying goes, ‘οἰνοῦσα οὐκ ἔχει· οἰνοῦσαν ἴσην ἀλήθειαν’ (Symp. 217e2-6)

But has Alcibiades’ story been perfectly decent so far? The passage quoted here follows a retelling of three failed attempts to sexually charm Socrates. His first effort (Symp. 217b5ff) amounts to nothing; his second try (Symp. 217c2) comes to nothing, despite his being sure that wrestling nude with Socrates “would lead to something”. His third effort (Symp. 217c8) progresses to a dinner-date, but his plan is stifled by Socrates’ hasty departure. Alcibiades’ willingness to recount these sensational details is taken by Rosen as a sign that “In order to substantiate his indictment [i.e., his graphe hybreos], Alcibiades must humiliate himself.” (Rosen 1968, 303) Rosen may be correct in assuming that anyone recounting these events ought to be humiliated; for, any well-constituted person would rightly find these admissions shaming. But these three failed attempts are a lead-up to Alcibiades’ pronouncement that all of what he’s said so far has been ‘perfectly decent’—logou kalwv. They can only appear as ‘perfectly decent’ conversation only to the person who is not, pace Rosen, humiliated by the revelation, that is, to a hybristic man.89

For all of his youthful indiscretions, Alcibiades is certainly not alone in exhibiting hybristic behaviour at a drinking party. Hybris of any kind—physical, sexual and so on—were

88 Our translators have chosen to render this as “there’s truth in wine when the slaves have left”. Idiomatically perhaps, but it should read: “there is truth in wine without ‘children’ or with ‘children’”. The sense here is whether or not you append ‘children’ to the saying “there’s truth in wine” (i.e., ‘You’ll hear truth from wine and from children’), a discussion fuelled by wine at least, will yield truth.

89 Rosen does go on to rightly observe: “A genuinely philosophical Eros, one may add, would never have driven Alcibiades to attempt the sexual seduction of Socrates. And if we excuse Alcibiades’ youthful error as an exaggeration of the first step in the erotic initiation described by Diotima, we cannot excuse the justifying interpretation given it by the mature Alcibiades.” Rosen (1968), 303. Rosen touches on an important point in this last observation: that the passage of time (some fifteen years from the incident’s occurrence to the report in Symposium) does not seem to have altered Alcibiades’ view of things. Though a mature man, he speaks with the rage of a scorned youth.
not uncommon phenomena at symposia. But what marks Alcibiades’ revelations as shocking is not that they occur in the context of a symposium, but that he admits to behaviour which any contemporary Athenian would have understood to be socially and legally proscribed.

Alcibiades’ plan to barter sex for philosophy would have been considered shameful, even illegal. It goes without saying that, had Socrates accepted the terms of the bargain, he would have been guilty of *hybris*. On the other hand, Alcibiades’ calculated scheming would have struck his listeners as shocking, if only for what it insinuated: that he was hoping to transact a sex-for-knowledge bargain. We find however, that prohibitions were in place to prevent such conduct: “Boys who, under certain circumstances, participated in sexual intercourse with men were believed to have acted for gain and to have adopted a submissive role which disqualified them as potential citizens.” The symposiasts would have clearly understood the implications of Alcibiades’ proposal to Socrates: he had tried to prostitute himself. It is this fact that would have scandalized any contemporary Athenian more so than the ‘reversal’ whereby Alcibiades takes on the role of lover (*erastes*) in pursuit of his beloved (*eromenos*). The reversal itself is a subversion of social convention; Alcibiades’ proposal of sex is what constitutes the act of *hybris*.

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90 “*Hybris* might arise at the *symposion* as guests quarrelled over the competitive games, or over the various sexual objects, boys or girls, that might be present; even more frequently, it might arise when all or some of the participants would roam the streets in a *komos*, seeking out other boys or women, enemies to beat up, or sexual rival to assault or to deprive of the contested object of their passions...” Fisher (1992), 101.

91 “Sexual relations with children, particularly for pay, dishonour them, and under this statute [s.c. Aeschines I, 15] such shame and dishonor for the gratification of the offender constitutes *hubris*.” Cohen (1991), 179

92 Cohen (1991), 181. Cf. also MacDowell: “Male prostitution was not forbidden, but in law it was incompatible with the status of an Athenian citizen.” MacDowell (1986), 126

93 On the development of models of education through the classical period. Cf. Marrou (1964) *A History of Education in Antiquity* esp. Ch. 3 “Pederasty in Classical Education” and Ch.4 “The ‘Old’ Athenian Education”.

94 Commenting on the *erastes/eromenos* dynamic, Dover, observes “There seems to be little doubt that in Greek eyes the male who breaks the ‘rules’ of legitimate eros detaches himself from the ranks of male citizenry and classifies himself with women and foreigners; the prostitute is assumed to have broken the rules simply because his economic dependence on clients forces him to do what they want him to do; conversely, any male believed to have done whatever his senior [i.e., *erastes*] homosexual partner(s) wanted him to do is assumed to have prostituted himself.” Dover (1978), 103

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As a lead-up to the infamous seduction scene which culminates with Socrates’ rebuff of Alcibiades’ ‘irresistible’ beauty, Plato reemphasizes the pivotal roles that attractiveness, desirability and sexual prowess play in Alcibiades self-conception. Alcibiades anticipates Socrates’ ultimate rejection with the words: “would it be fair to Socrates for me to praise him and yet to fail to reveal one of his proudest accomplishments (a/diko;n)”? Against the background of shameless behaviour, the word-choice is laden with irony. Alcibiades would have his listeners believe that that along with the (nonsensical) charge that Socrates’ sōphrosunē makes him hybristes, Socrates’ sōphrosunē is now to be understood as the cause of his gravest injustice: the rebuff his young lover’s sexual advances. A tale which began with revelations of immodesty and even indecency has become in turns a story that suggests base, illegal activities on Alcibiades’ part. Yet, he persists in imagining himself an injured party and in considering Socrates’ refusal a/diko;n—as though Socrates were the one guilty of an injustice.

i) Misguided Eros

Just as our discussion of Alcibiades’ violence cannot be dissociated from his sexual persona, it is evident too that his sexually-charged hybris distorts his intellectual desire for philosophy. While it might be true that all men desire to know, Alcibiades selectively fails to distinguish between his desire for knowledge and his desire for the source of that knowledge: Socrates. Nussbaum, calling to mind Alcibiades’ allusion to Socrates as a Silenus statuette, suggests a reason:

Alcibiades reminds us that the urge to open things up, to get at and explore the inside concealed by the outside, is one of our earliest and strongest desires, a desire in which sexual and epistemological need are joined and, apparently inseparable. (Nussbaum 1986, 158)

95 Symp. 217e6-7. ‘proud accomplishment’ is too figurative. By calling Socrates’ rejection a/diko;n he means to say it is an ‘injustice’.
She concludes that on account of this impulse, “it is easy enough to see structural parallels between sexual desire and the desire for wisdom” (Nussbaum 1986, 158). While Nussbaum astutely observes that there is a symmetry between sexual and intellectual desire, what sets the case of Alcibiades apart surely, is the manner in which sexual and epistemological desire are joined. His impatience with the demands of philosophy leads him to step beyond the limits of acceptable behaviour, trying to satisfy his epistemological thirst by trading sexual favours. While we have referred to this episode as his ‘attempted seduction’ of Socrates, it is so only if we accept Alcibiades in the role of ‘lover’, a role that we have already seen as culturally and socially improper.

All of this however, betrays Alcibiades’ false impression of Socrates’ philosophical method: his mistaken belief that he can come to possess Socrates’ inner beauty, his philosophical wisdom, through what G. A. Scott terms “acquisitive eros”. Though he is aware in some measure of his own ignorance, he imagines his ignorance as arising out of Socrates’ stubborn unwillingness to impart knowledge to him. Rather than seeing himself as a slave to ignorance and philosophy as his liberation, Alcibiades takes Socrates himself to be the cause of his subjugation and thus, he comes to view domination of Socrates as his only chance at intellectual liberation. We should not wonder then, either that in his speech he comes to protest his servile and slavish condition, or that in his drunken state he decides to ‘expose’ the imagined nefarious schemes perpetrated by Socrates. His freedom, he thinks, can only be achieved in one manner: by reversing the order of subjection; he must, he reasons, seduce the seducer.

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96 Scott elaborates: “It is therefore likely, that Alcibiades’ attempt to gain advantage over Socrates stems from the same corrosive impulse that, for Plato, is symptomatic of the acquisitive Eros and its insatiable appetite for possession.” Scott (2000), 125

97 The question of whether virtue is teachable is a perennial problem for Socratic Ethics. In a number of notable cases however, Socrates encounters interlocutors who think that the problems lies not in the philosophical question of teachability, but with Socrates’ unwillingness to offer-up his wisdom. This is clearly the frustration that Alcibiades is expressing.
Beyond noting the structural parallels of epistemic and sexual desire, there is a psychological purpose to Alcibiades’ sexually hybristic display: it is an effort to free himself from epistemic torment by offering himself as an object for what he assumes must be Socrates’ sexual desire. In so doing, he reveals his own implicit belief in the influence of the passions over the authority of the intellect.

As we have seen, the insolence and arrogance he so unhesitatingly ascribes to Socrates are precisely those very qualities of character that are at the root of Alcibiades’ own moral failure. Admittedly, in every other respect he seems suited well to philosophy: he’s attractive; smart; of noble birth and full of political promise. Yet, in his scheme to barter sex for knowledge, he alienates himself permanently from attaining the object of his intellectual eros: the inner beauty he sees so vividly displayed by Socrates. As a consequence of his scheme, his unsuitability for philosophy is manifest and his fate as a failed Socratic is sealed.

All of this, of course, serves to remind us of how deeply Alcibiades’ hybris has penetrated his psyche. Individually, his actions might be characterized as a sign of haughtiness or immodesty; taken together and weighed against prevailing social conventions, his action and beliefs have the stamp of a man who, from his youth onward, has been incapable of seeing himself and his actions in a wider context of morally—and legally—acceptable behaviour. However, it is manifest that Alcibiades is less ashamed of his arrogant attempt at seducing Socrates than he is of having been rejected by him. To add to this, there is no indication that he feels ashamed of his scheme or the unconventional role reversal from eromenos to erastes, which implicates him in action that as we have noted breech acceptable behaviour for a citizen. His beauty notwithstanding, what should be humiliating for Alcibiades is not his lack of success in seducing Socrates, but that he tried.
We have already seen Nussbaum advance an epistemic reading of Alcibiades’ sexual psychology. Elsewhere, she addresses herself to a similar view, claiming of Alcibiades that “his speech makes repeated use of the image of opening up the other: an image which is essentially sexual and inseparable from his sexual aims and imaginings, but which is also epistemic, intended to convey to us this desire to ‘hear everything that he knew and know everything that he was’” (Nussbaum 1986, 189). Presumably, here Nussbaum means to suggest that barter for sex is one way in which Alcibiades thinks he can secure the tutelage of Socrates. But her suggestion that the sexual imagery of ‘opening up’ Socrates by ‘penetrating’ is emblematic of this desire speaks against what the text of the dialogue states: that it is Alcibiades who passively yields to Socrates and not Socrates submitting to him. If we allow for a moment that Nussbaum’s sexualization of the ‘opening of the Silenus’ is plausible, it is difficult to construe the textual evidence which makes plain that it is Alcibiades, not Socrates who is the intended subject of penetration. In her haste to interpret the ‘opening up’ of the statuettes, Nussbaum has fixed upon the lurid details which provide humour even for the symposiasts, but she has done so at the cost of fidelity to the text and receptiveness to the meaning in the myth of Silenus.

On the other hand, Scott and Welton wish to make the diminution of shame a motive for Alcibiades’ pursuit and possession of Socrates although here too, this assertion runs contrary to the textual evidence. It is clear from Alcibiades’ narrative that the sordid tale of sexual misadventure is what occasions a latent humility in the teenager’s soul. The analysis offered by Scott and Welton becomes confused through inattention to the sequence of events recounted in the Symposium. They rightly examine the question of motive and plausibly argue that Alcibiades seeks to gain advantage over Socrates by possessing and ultimately corrupting him through the exchange of the beauty possessed by each. They further contend that “Exposing Socrates’
character as corruptible would reduce the philosopher’s indomitable air of superiority and permit the frustrated young man to feel less ashamed of himself.” (Scott & Welton 1996, 68).

However, this view is mistaken on two counts.

First, in reporting the events which occurred approximately fifteen years prior to the symposium at Agathon’s house, Alcibiades in no way indicates that his pursuit of Socrates was occasioned by his explicit desire to corrupt or sully Socrates’ soul; in fact, Alcibiades plainly states that in his initial courting of Socrates, he tried to mollify the philosopher’s misgivings with the following words: “Nothing is more important to me than becoming the best man I can be, and no one can help me more than you to reach that aim.” 98 Alcibiades did not make the offer in order to corrupt Socrates—even though that would have been the ultimate result had Socrates yielded to the young man’s entreaty. On the contrary, it is apparent that Socrates’ aloofness intrigued and impressed the young Alcibiades and encouraged him to continue his pursuit to understand the nature of Socrates’ sōphrosunē. 99

Second, it is evident that Alcibiades could not have been initially motivated to pursue Socrates in order to ‘permit himself to feel less ashamed’. In point of fact, prior to the attempted seduction, there is no evidence that Alcibiades felt the profound shame that he eventually describes as consequent on the failed seduction. As we’ve seen, the dialogue itself makes clear that there are only two conditions which give rise to Alcibiades’ sense of shame or humiliation: first, the continual reminder that he does not lead the life of philosophy and second, his failure to seduce Socrates.

98 Symp. 218d2-4
99 For instance, Alcibiades indicates that after all of his attempts to seduce Socrates failed, he “…went about in a state of such utter subjection as was never seen before.” Symp. 219e5-6.
IV. The Moral and Social Dimensions of Shame

A. Honour-Groups and Shame

The notion that Alcibiades harbours private shame may seem unremarkable to the modern mind. Yet to a fifth century Greek, private shame would most certainly have been a novel if not thoroughly perplexing concept. Shame, like honour in Greek society, was a decidedly public concept. As Aristotle observes: “honor seems to depend on those who confer it rather than on him who receives it...”\(^{100}\) In addition, Aristotle maintains that “[shame] is defined as a kind of fear of disrepute...”\(^{101}\) On Aristotle’s analysis, the notion of publicity is integral to the meaning of shame. In a passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* which seems remarkably reminiscent of Alcibiades’ portrayal in the *Symposium*, Aristotle has the following to say:

> The emotion of shame does not befit every stage of life but only youth. For we think that young people ought to be bashful because, living by their emotions as they do, they often go wrong and then shame inhibits them. We praise young people who have a sense of shame, but no one would praise an elderly man for being bashful, for we think he ought not to do anything that will bring him shame. In fact, shame is not the mark of a decent man at all, since it is a consequence of base actions.\(^{102}\)

Leaving aside for a moment the fact that Aristotle is speaking explicitly of shame rightly understood (i.e., public), he seems to have captured a few of the salient character flaws present in Alcibiades. As a youth Alcibiades did not check his emotions and instead, vigorously pursued Socrates. The natural inhibition which should have prevented him from imagining himself as Socrates’ lover was suppressed by his impetuous and youthful desires. Even his eventual humiliation was misplaced: Alcibiades regretted his actions *only* because he failed to seduce

\(^{100}\) *N.E.* 1095b24-25

\(^{101}\) *N.E.* 1128b12-13 Interestingly, Plato also makes the observation that shame and fear go together. “Shame is a part of fear just as odd is a part of number...” *Euthyp.* 12c6-7

\(^{102}\) *N.E.* 1128b16-23
Socrates, not because he tried. Even as a man of thirty-five he continues to feel shame in Socrates’ presence, something which Aristotle tells us does not befit any man.

Gabrielle Taylor offers illuminating insight into the ancient mind through the psychological dynamic of shame. Taylor delineates between our modern ‘guilt-culture’ and ancient Greek society which is often characterized as a ‘shame-culture’. She observes that “The distinguishing mark of such a culture, and that which makes it different from a so-called ‘guilt-culture’, is that here public esteem is the greatest good, and to be ill-spoken of the greatest evil.” (Taylor 1985, 54). In this, her observations accord with the general thrust of Aristotle’s analysis of the matter. Taylor remarks:

One is tempted to say that what is of overriding importance here for every member of the group is how he appears in public, never mind the inner man; but this formulation implies precisely that distinction between appearance and reality, between public and private, which is unacceptable within the frame work of the shame-culture....There can be no distinction between private and public; for on the present hypothesis a person can assess himself only in terms of what the public thinks of him. The ‘public’ in this case constitutes an honour-group. (Taylor 1985, 55)

Taylor’s assessment supports the view that anyone claiming to be privately shamed (as Alcibiades does) is by definition not a part of an honour-group. However, by virtue of his birth, citizenship, household, social status and military position, Alcibiades is most certainly a part of an honour group. Yet, his lack of concern over public adjudication and his emphasis on his private or ‘inner’ shame indicates to us that he is portrayed as standing outside of conventional Athenian society. Whatever we might think of the plausibility of him harbouring feelings of shame, such a confession would have struck his audience as an unusual contravention of

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103 Hector’s response to Andromache’s plea for him to fight only from the ramparts is often seen as the locus classicus for the claim that Greek culture was essentially a shame-culture. “Then tall Hektor of the shining helm answered her: ‘All these things are in my mind also, lady; yet I would feel a deep shame before the Trojans, and the Trojan women with trailing garments, if like a coward I were to shrink aside from the fighting.” Lattimore, Iliad, 440-444.
established social practice. Our task as modern readers is to reconcile Plato’s portrait of Alcibiades with Taylor’s suggestion that in the estimation of the ancient Greeks themselves, the ‘inner man’ was of little importance in the shame/honour dynamic.

In order to forcefully illustrate this dynamic, Taylor adduces the heroes of Homer’s *Iliad* as an example of an honour group. The most important aspect of this honour group is that the members “expect certain types of behavior of themselves and others, and judge themselves and others accordingly.” (Taylor 1985, 55). Almost parenthetically she adds: “...slaves do not of course belong to that honour-group....Although they, like the heroes, set great store by public esteem, they are not crushed when this not forthcoming but are rather resentful and angry.” (Taylor 1985, 55). Consequently, a slave is *not* moved by fear of public disrepute. Indeed, he could act with disregard for his reputation since he enjoys no public standing beyond that of mere subjugation. An enfranchised citizen might feel impelled to conceal any potentially shameful circumstance; a slave on the other hand, does not fear disrepute and hence, transmutes shame into injury. This claim should call to mind Alcibiades’ intention at the outset of the speech: to show the *injury* done to him by Socrates. By his willingness to reveal incriminating and sordid details without concern for the public disrepute that will surely follow, Alcibiades is modelling the sort of response that one might expect from a slave, or anyone else with no reputation or standing at stake. Of course, as an enfranchised, high-born citizen and political persona, Alcibiades disregard for the disapprobation of his fellow citizens has a darker cause, his *hybris*.

Let us turn to the evidence in the *Symposium* which confirms the view that Alcibiades’ self-characterization as a slave is a failed means of resolving his confusion over his sense of shame.
B. Alcibiades’ Private and Public Shame

In his tell-all encomium, Alcibiades betrays a feeling of shame arising from his own competing philosophical and political aspirations. It is everywhere evident in his speech that the residual force of Socratic protreptic is something that he seems unable to square with the philosophical failure he acknowledges. We have already seen that proximity to Socrates plays a central role in the compulsion that his young associates feel to take up philosophy. Like the others, Alcibiades marvels at the effect Socrates has on him; but he discloses an additional and important psychological detail:

Socrates is the only man in the world who has made me feel shame—ah, you didn’t think I had it in me, did you? Yes, he makes me feel ashamed: I know perfectly well that I can’t prove he’s wrong when he tells me what I should do; yet the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: I cave in to my desire to please the crowd. My whole life has become an effort to escape him and keep away, but when I see him, I feel deeply ashamed, because I’m doing nothing about my way of life though I have already agreed with him that I should.\(^{104}\)

Socrates’ presence is a powerful reminder for Alcibiades of their philosophical association. It is a reminder that, by his own admission, he has been persuaded of the superiority of a life of philosophy. However, it also calls to mind the painful reality that although he has been persuaded to take up philosophy, he cannot—or will not—live in accordance with the conclusions of his philosophical inquires. Naturally then, seeing Socrates and recalling their conversations induces deep shame in him. Notice that when Alcibiades says “My whole life has become an effort to escape him and keep him away”, what he is desperate to avoid is not philosophy \textit{per se} but rather Socrates, who occasions in him a reminder of the humiliating sting

\(^{104}\)\textit{Symp.} 216b3-c2 (emphasis added)
of his private shame when he calls to mind his moral failure. 105 The truly surprising fact is not only that he is privately ashamed, but that he is indeed susceptible to feeling shame at all.106

The paradoxical conclusion then is that although his hybris emboldens him to say whatever he wishes without regard for conversational decorum or simple good manners, his unguarded admission to harbouring private feelings of shame in both not heeding Socrates’ words and in failing to seduce Socrates, reveals a startling vulnerability to shame. Had he not shown this private vulnerability to his fellow sympsiasts, they might have continued to accept his public excesses and lack of shame as either beastly or god-like. However, in revealing that he has been privately dogged by a feeling of shame, Alcibiades becomes all-too-human in the eyes of those present. He is a laughing stock precisely because his hybris is revealed as a façade and his apparent invulnerability to shame merely a pretence. Unlike Socrates, whose immunity from corruption is likened to the impenetrability of Ajax,107 Alcibiades appears to unintentionally wound himself by showing that his shield against public reproach—his hybristic

A similar dynamic plays out in the Theages. There, Theages expresses a deep desire for philosophy without really understanding what philosophy entails. Nevertheless, he wishes to associate with Socrates. At 122c Socrates intimates to the youth’s father, Demodocus, that “this youngster may not want what we think he wants, but something else.” (emphasis added). Again, at 125e Socrates tells the young man “You rascal! So you want to be a tyrant over us…” thus confirming his earlier suspicion to Demodocus and showing that what the boy thinks of as the acquisition of ‘wisdom’ is in fact a thirst for tyranny. Finally, Theages seems content to bend to Socrates’ wishes that they have a provisional association and himself suggest the course they should take: “If it [i.e., the divine sign] allows us, then that’s what’s best; if not, then we’ll immediately think about what we should do—whether to go and associate with someone else, or try to appease the divine thing that comes to you…” Theages 131a. All of this suggests Theages’ lack of clarity or real knowledge of what philosophy is and why he ought to engage in it.

Thucydides (c.f. Laches), according to Socrates, appears not to have succeeded in part because of his lack of understanding of his own servile condition prior to his association. Aristides: “Doesn’t he [Thucydides] know…what a slave he was before he began associating with you?” Soc. “Apparently not, by the gods” Presumably, self-knowledge and an understanding of the significance of his condition would have prevented him from becoming “indignant and irritated” Theages 130b4. In each of these cases, Socrates trusts in his familiar sign, and the association proceeds despite each of the young men not having clear understanding of what he is aiming at. Whether each prospective initiate to philosophy has the requisite preparation is left, at least in these instances, to the determination of the gods.

After his claim that Socrates makes him feel shame, Alcibiades’ almost parenthetically quips “ah, you didn’t think I had it in me, did you?” Symp. 216b4. This flourish by Plato is clear evidence that he means for his reader to understand that Alcibiades’ hybris is so thoroughgoing that there really is no question about his feeling encumbered by shame. The revelation is meant to truly stun his listeners.

Symp. 219e1 ff. It is perhaps significant that Ajax is the only major character in the Iliad who is not wounded in battle.
persona—is ultimately an inadequate defence against the private slings and arrows of his own conscience.

C. Shame and Self-Sufficiency

As Ajax’s shield makes him indomitable, Socrates is immune to injury, corruption and possession on account of his philosophical fortitude; thus protected, he is a model of moderation and self-sufficiency. Alcibiades at once admires this self-sufficiency and is maddened by it. His incapacity or unwillingness to escape the compelling music of Marsyas’ instils shame: a shame he cannot escape even by reducing himself to a slave. In this light, we see why the young man says of the Gadfly: “Sometimes, believe me, I think I’d be happier if he were dead. And yet I know that if he dies I’ll be even more miserable. I can’t live with him, and I can’t live without him! What can I do about him?”[109] Turn as he might, Alcibiades cannot escape Socrates because he cannot escape his own ‘protesting soul’ which perpetually reminds him of his need for philosophy. What he has not understood is that the first step in finding a release from his misguided bond of love for Socrates is to begin with dialectic.

The narrative of Alcibiades’ speech draws the reader’s attention to the young man’s frustrated efforts to possess and intellectually pry open Socrates the Silenus. To a great extent, it distracts the reader from Alcibiades’ depiction of himself as a slave to the philosopher. Of course, Socrates does not actively seek to possess slaves or objects. For, as we remarked above, “Socratic Eros is not the acquisitive Eros” (Scott & Welton 1996, 72) which so characterizes Alcibiades. Alcibiades errs precisely in making his aim the acquisitive pursuit of ‘Socrates the

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109 Symp. 216c2-5
Philosopher’, rather than his *inquisitive* pursuit of Socrates’ philosophy. Ironically, he does not realize that the inquisitive pursuit of philosophy is precisely the cause of Socrates’ virtue and especially the self-sufficiency which he so admires. It is, in fact, the very quality which allows Socrates to resist Alcibiades’ youthful beauty. In rejecting the young man’s advances, Socrates demonstrates the singular and noble intellectual aims of his philosophy. Rather than take Socrates as an intellectual model and join him in the pursuit of philosophy, Alcibiades, driven by the desire to acquire what Socrates possesses, takes Socrates for a philosophical master, thus making a slave of himself.

Not surprisingly, then, Alcibiades’ makes ‘getting back’ at Socrates an objective of his encomium. His desire to acquire rather than inquire is doomed to failure and so, his speech becomes a litany of complaints of injury against his philosophical Marsyas. Oblivious to public shame (as any slave would be), Alcibiades’ brand of justice is to seek freedom from Socrates’ grip through defamation. He appears certain that by divulging the long-kept secret of Socrates’ unwillingness to exchange intellectual for physical beauty, he will unburden himself of the lasting and private shame he has suffered. By his vindictiveness, Alcibiades extricates himself from his obligations to the honour group. He is a wanton symposiarch, little more than a *drapeteuwm*—a runaway slave. His private shame is not a sign of enlightened self-knowledge, it is a symbol of his slavish social deformity. Aristotle is correct: one cannot coherently claim to be *privately honoured*. Thus, Alcibiades’ claim to be *privately shamed* is equally incoherent. Having previously engaged Socrates in discourse and assented to his philosophic principles,¹¹⁰ Alcibiades knows that he can be rightly expected by Socrates to conform to ‘certain types of behaviour and be judged accordingly.’ His revelation—much to the surprise of those present—

¹¹⁰ *Cf. Symp.* 216b4 ff
that he is in fact capable of shame is actually an admission that he is not so abjectly slavish that he fears no disrepute. It is an admission that despite his self-characterization as a slave, he does conceive of himself as belonging to an honour group. However, in Alcibiades’ case this group consists of just one person: Socrates.

Through his virtuous comportment (and especially his moderation and self-sufficiency which stands in stark contrast to the recklessness and hybris of Alcibiades), Socrates possesses two capacities that are absent in Alcibiades: i) the ability to understand and temper the true intellectual source of his erotic yearning and ii) the intellectual desire to seek the true cause of eros through a transformative ascent, the sort of ennobling pursuit of beauty described by Diotima. Alcibiades’ indictment of Socrates, that he is “crazy about beautiful boys” (Symp. 216d3) is meant as a summary of Socrates’ penchant for philosophizing with Athenian youth; but nothing in Alcibiades’ demeanour suggests that he understands Socrates’ true motive: that, far from the pursuing boys for sexual gratification, this love for beautiful youth is a first step toward, as Diotima puts it, the attainment of Beauty itself.

Ultimately, when Alcibiades exclaims “my very own soul started protesting that my life—my life!—was no better than the most miserable slave’s” (215e8-9), he is confessing to what he has fleetingly observed in surveying his own conscience: that his disordered hierarchy of goods, his dissolute life and his love for ‘the mob’ are the earmarks of his life. We might say that his life is characterized not by the principle of autarkeia but rather, that he is ruled by his attachment to occurrent pleasures which he rightly identifies as a form of slavery.
D. Alcibiades’ Shame Rooted in Slavish Subjection

From a Socratic standpoint, Alcibiades’ most pronounced character defect is his failure to embrace the moral principles which his own reason tells him he ought to desire. What compounds his moral failure is the extent to which he is willing to employ subtle argumentative tactics to recast his weakness as an injury done to him by the philosopher. He paints a picture of himself as a victim, a slave constrained by the philosopher and compelled by his arguments. Rather than simply accept his shame, he prefers to interpret his own rational assent to moral principles as devious sophistry practiced on him by Socrates. He is awakened to his capacity for shame, but does not adequately comprehend its function in forcing him to examine the cause of his slavish condition. Alcibiades’ arrogance permits him to make his shame public, but his vanity forces him abandon convention and reason. Ultimately, social custom and the logic of honour and shame speak against Alcibiades’ self-regarding apology.

i) Alcibiades as Slave

On three occasions in the Symposium, Alcibiades insists that Socrates makes him feel like a slave. We saw above that the young man counterpoises the image of Socrates as a god-like Silenus with the assessment that when in Socrates’ presence, he feels himself to be a “common slave” (\textit{a}ndrapodwedw#v). Next, he complains that his love of politics causes him to keep with the mob, and that in avoiding Socrates he feels like a “runaway slave” (\textit{d}rapeteu;w). Finally, and most powerfully, he reports that despite his every effort to possess Socrates by attempting to ply the philosopher with sexualfavours, he himself is thoroughly “reduced to slavery” (\textit{katadedoulome;nov}) by the impenetrable Socrates. These colourful descriptions, we should

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Symp. 215e5-6} \\
  \textit{Symp. 216b7} \\
  \textit{Symp. 219e5} Joyce (1961) renders \textit{katadedoulome;nov} as “state of utter subjection”, while Lamb offers “abject thraldom”. I have given preference to \textit{LSJ} which emphasizes ‘slavery’ over mere ‘subjection’.
\end{itemize}
remind ourselves, are a testament to the purely psychological effect of Alcibiades’ own ruminations on his association with Socrates.

In a series of vivid self-characterizations, Alcibiades tells his fellow komasts how his conversations with Socrates have left him feeling unable to reconcile the life he leads with the life philosophy tells him he ought to lead. He drunkenly rages:

I have heard Pericles and many other great orators, and I have admired their speeches. But nothing like this has ever happened to me: they never upset me so deeply that my very own soul started protesting that my life—my life!—was no better than the most miserable slave’s (Symp. 215e5-8).

Like Xenophon’s Euthydemus, who decides that he will never become a person of importance unless he associates with Socrates, Alcibiades knows that he ought to associate with Socrates rather than flatterers. But he is too easily persuaded to fall in with those who will gratify his vanity. Remarkably, in a moment of extreme candour Alcibiades confesses his moral failure when he tells them:

I know perfectly well that I can’t prove he’s wrong when he tells me what I should do; yet, the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: I cave in to my desire to please the crowd. My whole life has become a constant effort to escape from him and keep away, but when I see him, I feel deeply ashamed, because I’m doing nothing about my way of life, though I have already agreed with him that I should” (216b5-c2)

So, Alcibiades has neither rationalized a way to devote himself to Socrates, nor has he been able to permanently escape his influence. He is caught vacillating between the devotion that affects Socratic acolytes such as Xenophon’s Euthydemus and the repulsion that Xenophon tells us many others had.

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114 “I am forced to agree once more,’ cried Euthydemus, ‘evidently by my stupidity. I am inclined to think that I had better hold my tongue, or I shall know nothing at all presently’” Mem IV.i.39, Marchant (1979)

115 “Many of those who he [i.e., Socrates] treated this way [i.e., as he treated Euthydemus] stopped going to see him.” Mem. 4.ii.40, Tredennick and Waterfield (1990)
While we have already considered the details of Alcibiades failed seduction, it is worth noting his expression of humiliation at having failed: “I had no idea what to do, no purpose in life; ah, no one else has ever known the real meaning of slavery (ἐνδοδούλωσις).” Notice that Alcibiades begins by saying that his explanation for feeling like a slave was the dawning realization that he was ignorant: ‘my very own soul started protesting that my life…was no better than the most miserable slave’s’, but feeling like a ‘runaway slave’, he goes about ‘in utter subjection to the man’.

\[\text{ii)} \quad \textbf{Weakness of Belief}^{117}\]

Alcibiades’ complaint of psychic upheaval and slavish subjugation gives way to the curious personal revelation that only Socrates can make him feel ashamed. This surprising admission indicates to the symposiasts (and to us) that although Alcibiades believes himself to have been tormented by Socrates’ elenchus, this activity nevertheless induces in him a call to moral action: one which Alcibiades himself knows he should take up but cannot, apparently on account of some weakness. Consequently, each time Alcibiades meets with Socrates, he is reminded of both that which Socrates leads him to believe, and how he has failed to act on a belief of what he knows he ought to do. It is significant in this regard to note that the young man’s shame wells up in him only when he fails to abide by those moral injunctions which he and Socrates have agreed upon. As he acknowledges to the present company:

I know I ought to do the things he tells me to, and yet the moment I’m out of his sight I don’t care what I do to keep in with the mob. So I dash off like a runaway slave, and keep out of his way as long as I can, and the next time I meet him I remember all that I had to admit the time before, and naturally I feel ashamed.\(^{118}\)

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\(^{116}\) Symp. 219e4-6. Here, ‘common slave’ and ‘runaway’ slave have been intensified by ἐνδοδούλωσις—literally, ‘one who has been reduced to slavery’.

\(^{117}\) Burnyeat’s phrase

\(^{118}\) Symp. 216b4-9
By Alcibiades’ own admission, his budding philosophical soul cannot withstand separation from Socrates; it requires constant succour to stay alive. Yet, distance does not foster fondness: only the wish not to be drawn in by the music of Marsyas. Without the constant attention of Socrates, Alcibiades is lured away from that which his own reason tells him he ought to desire. Whether or not one considers it rational not to desire that which one believes to be good, Plato certainly thought Alcibiades to be a compelling example of this failure of moral resolve. Bonelli captures the essence of Alcibiades’ decidedly modern dilemma with the following:

Grandezza e debolezza dell’Alcibiade «storico» vengono fissati in un ricco affresco psicologico all’interno del banchetto che si tiene solo un anno prima dell’inafusta spedizione di Sicilia. Ciò che alla fine (216 b-c) caratterizza questo moderno eroe è la vergogna di sé, la lucidità dell’esame di consciencia accompagnata dall’incapacità di dare esecuzione ai suoi propositi: dramma della volontà, che lo induce a detestare e quasi a voler morto il maestro, l’ostacolo interiorizzato alla sua prepotente ambizione.119

E. Conclusion

The complaint that Socrates ‘turns his soul upside down’ and makes him feel like ‘common slave’ suggests that Alcibiades understands the arguments proffered by Socrates sufficiently to cause genuine turmoil in his own moral life. If he claims to have been injured by philosophy’s bite, he must have the capacity not only to comprehend the logic of Socrates’ arguments, but to appreciate the relevance of the moral edicts enjoined by philosophy. Unlike the adder whose bite is equally effectual on any unfortunate victim, Socrates’ bite only affects those who are prepared for philosophy or whose souls have a latent philosophical potential. In his speech, Alcibiades shows that he is prepared for philosophy but, as Burnyeat puts it, suffers

119 “The greatness and weakness of the historical Alcibiades are captured in a rich psychological portrait at a symposium which is held one year prior to the fatal expedition to Sicily. That which, in the end, characterizes this modern hero is his shame, and the lucidity of his self-examination of conscience accompanied with the incapacity to execute its proposals. It is a drama of the will which induces him to detest and wish death upon the teacher: the interiorized obstacle to his own arrogant ambition.” Bonelli (1991),100. (My translation)
from a ‘weakness of belief’. In spite of himself, Alcibiades can’t help but intellectually prod at philosophy and predictably, he is bitten.

   We saw above Bonelli’s suggestion that Plato’s depiction of Alcibiades in the Symposium presents a ‘drama of the will’. More accurately, though it is problematic to frame it as such, it is a ‘failure of the will’ which this character embodies. It is precisely this failure which Alcibiades attempts to excuse by claiming slavish subjugation to Socrates. The shame which he admits (perhaps truly for the first time), he mistakes as an injury done to him. What this man does not fully understand is that his admission of shame entails his membership in an honour group. Admittedly, it is a small honour group, but nevertheless sufficient to give rise to true public shame. Since no honour group member can be a slave, Alcibiades’ likening himself to a slave is merely a rhetorical device, an empty effort at exculpating himself from his own failure.
Chapter Three: Character and Philosophical Success

I. Theaetetus as Model Interlocutor

A. Introduction

_Theaetetus_ presents us with a young man who in all respects exceeds his peers. While we often find interlocutors who are hostile to Socrates or dismissive of his dialectical inquiries, Theaetetus is portrayed as patiently receptive, methodical and exceptionally intelligent. He is, as we shall see, presented as an engaging young intellectual whose character reveals intellectually and philosophically important qualities. He readily takes up Socrates’ philosophical challenges and immediately proves to be amenable to Socrates’ methods. In the course of the dialogue, Theaetetus evinces a sympathetic stance toward philosophy and a natural aptitude for dialectical investigation. While his amenability to philosophical discussion is certainly tied to his natural intellectual ability and preparation in geometry, his favourable psychological disposition toward philosophical examination and his character play an equally important role in making him a model of philosophical success.

B. Theaetetus’ Ability

Although the dialogues offer numerous examples of young men with whom Socrates is eager to converse, _Theaetetus_ is notable for its presentation of a young man about whom

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120 Here we might include interlocutors such as Callicles (_Grg._ 481bff); Anytus (_Men._ 93aff), and of course, Thrasymachus (_Phile._ 336bff). We should make special note of _Clitophon_ in this regard. It stands apart from the body of Socratica for the direct challenge that Clitophon makes regarding the efficacy and usefulness of Socratic dialectic. The most comprehensive treatment of this dialogue is to be found in Slings, _Clitophon_, (1999)

121 In setting the scene for the dialogue, Euclides reports “Socrates met him and had a talk with him and was very much struck by his natural ability (") Tht. 142c8-9

122 For example: Charmides (_Chrm._ 154bff); Lysis (_Lysis._ 207bff); Alcibades (_Alc.I_ )
Socrates has assurances regarding intellectual capacity and natural ability. After introducing him to Socrates, Theodorus presents his young student as exceedingly bright, liberally educated and particularly talented at geometry. He even goes so far as to dwell on the unflattering physiognomic resemblance between Theaetetus and Socrates—a clear overstepping of the bounds of appropriateness for our modern sensibilities. In truth, it is a testament to Theodorus’ fondness for both Socrates and Theaetetus if not ultimately an awkward attempt to impute an intellectual resemblance between the philosopher and the young man.

Perhaps with a greater intensity than most, Theaetetus is subjected to a Socratic examination that is meant to test his fitness for philosophical discussion by testing his character. Yet, Socrates’ examination of Theaetetus is distinguished from similar discussions by one significant difference: Socrates has a reliable account of the young man’s outstanding intellectual qualities. In the course of what amounts to an almost fawning encomium of the young man, his venerable teacher, Theodorus, gives this report to Socrates: “I assure you that among all the people I have ever met—and I have got to know a good many in my time—I have never yet seen anyone so amazingly gifted (περιποίηθαι).” Seemingly difficult to impress, even Theodorus is clearly awed by the ability of his young student. On his

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123 As evidenced by his study of the classical quadrivium. Soc: “You are learning some geometry from Theodorus, I expect…and some astronomy and music and arithmetic?” *Tht.* 145c11-d1
124 See Theaetetus’ discussion of the incommensurability of rational and irrational numbers. *Tht.* 147d5-148b4
125 “If you’ll excuse my saying such a thing—he is not beautiful at all, but is rather like you, snub-nosed, with eyes that stick out.” *Tht.* 143e8-10.
126 Callicles stands out as an example of an interlocutor whose failure to flourish hinges on a failure of character. Socrates tests the limits of Callicles’ promise to speak frankly and not withdraw from their discussion out of shame like Gorgias and Polus before him *Cf. Grg.* 482cff. However, Like Gorgias and Polus, Callicles willingness to carry on falters once he too becomes too ashamed to contradict himself. He admits as much to Socrates: “Well, to keep my argument from being inconsistent if say that they’re different, I say they’re the same.” *Grg.* 495a5-6. The salient point is this: Callicles does not have the dialectical fortitude, we might even say strength of character to contradict himself.
127 “For although Theodorus often gives me flattering testimonials for people, both Athenians and foreigners, I assure you I have never before heard him praise anybody in the way he has just praised you” *Tht.* 145b7-10.
128 *Tht.*144a1-3 lit: ‘amazingly well grown’. It is important to note that the sense of περιποίηθαι extends beyond ‘grow’ or ‘produce’ to include (*LSJ* s.v. περιποίηθαι B 2) ‘well born’ or ‘descended’. This speaks not only to Theaetetus’ lineage, but telegraphically to his ‘nobility’ of character which we shall dwell on below.
In his first dialectical examination of the young man, Socrates’ questioning establishes that at least as a preliminary criterion, Theaetetus’ intellectual ability is a promising sign of his potential for success in philosophy. Evidence of this keenness for philosophical questions emerges almost immediately. When, for instance, Socrates asks whether there might be a “single account of the many branches of knowledge” (Th. 148d9) the young student shows the ability to grasp the kind of question that Socrates is asking him. “I believe you’re asking just the sort of question that occurred to your namesake Socrates here and myself, when we were having a discussion a little while ago.” (Th. 147c9-d3) Though his formal education has not extended beyond a basic curriculum, in his private musings he gives proof of his capacity for abstract thought; he recognizes that his attempt “to collect the powers in question under one term, which would apply to them all” (Th. 147d11-e1) is structurally parallel to Socrates’ quest for single account of knowledge (Th. 147c9-d3). This almost incidental remark is in fact evidence of an astute insight: that the search for general definitions is common to both geometry and philosophy. Notice that this important insight comes to light simply from Theaetetus’ being examined by Socrates. And while he has learned something through his limited association with Socrates, Socrates seems not to have taught him anything.

The point seems obvious, but it is important for two reasons. First, it is testimonial evidence that in his advance toward philosophy Theaetetus recognizes that the familiar exercise of mental abstraction required to for geometric proofs is the same mental task required in the philosophical search for general definitions. Second, Theaetetus’ revelation stands in sharp contrast to Theodorus’ later remark in which he begs off of having to defend Protagoras. After dabbling in dialect as a young man, Theodorus tells Socrates, “I very soon inclined away from abstract discussion (logon) to geometry” (Th. 165a3). Presumably, the venerable teacher of geometry has not clearly recognized that his own area of expertise is, in its essence, a matter of contemplating abstractions. Theaetetus sees not only this point, but is astute in his observation of the methodological symmetry between philosophy and geometry.
Whether or not geometry is indeed a necessary propaedeutic to philosophy, Socrates’ judicious practice of dialectic (even with interlocutors whose interest or expertise lies elsewhere) illustrates how the practise of being subjected to dialectic can itself be protreptically effective. We have seen that as a result of his preliminary examination, Theaetetus independently observes the logical symmetry between geometry and philosophy: both deal in abstractions and both search for general definitions. While maxims and moral recommendations serve an important function in hortatory protreptic, the first steps in Theaetetus’ turn toward philosophy are taken on a path that begins with a personal encounter with Socrates. What is noteworthy is that despite Theaetetus’ passing familiarity with Socrates’ dialectical method, he reports that his independent efforts at philosophy have met with only a foundering success; it is only after his —his being with Socrates that he is subjected to the sort of directed examination that reveals the transformative power of Socratic dialectical investigation.

C. From Ability to Character

Both in our remarks above and in what follows, the information gleaned from Theodorus’ encomium plays a central role in transforming our understanding of Theaetetus from that of an intellectually gifted young man to one who, in addition, is eminently suited to Socratic dialectic.

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130 R. 526d-e explores the question of whether the study of geometry “makes it easier to see the form of the good.”
131 The benefit of simply being with or associating with Socrates is attested to in Theaetetus. “But with those who associate with me it is different. At first some of them may give the impression of being ignorant and stupid; but as time goes on and our association continues, all whom God permits are seen to make progress....” Tht. 150d2-5. As we read, this question of ‘association’ prefigures any philosophical discussion and must be dealt with before any substantive examination is possible. Socrates names a former associate in his report to Theaetetus: “One of people was Aristides, son of Lysimachus; and there have been many others. Sometimes they come back, wanting my company again, and ready to move heaven and earth to get it. When that happens, in some cases the divine sign that visits me forbids me to associate with them; in others it permits me, and then they begin again to make progress.” Tht. 151a1-6
132 “But I assure you, Socrates, I have often tried to think this out, when I have heard reports of the questions you ask. But I can never persuade myself that anything I say will really do” Tht. 148e1-3
However, the very purpose of the opening section of the dialogue has repeatedly been called into question.

Is 142a-145e of any philosophical importance? Many authors seem to think not. So, for instance, Cornford, Bostock, and McDowell completely bypass Theaetetus 142a-145e when looking for philosophical content. This may be because they think it has none. (Chappell 2005, 30)

The section from 142a-145e offers, as we shall see in due course, some important insights into Theaetetus’ ability and character. But its philosophical importance must be gauged by the manner in which it draws our attention to aspects of Theaetetus’ character as revealed through his discussion with Socrates. The dialogue remains, of course, a work devoted to giving a general definition of knowledge; this is not in dispute. But alongside this epistemological project, beginning with the section 142a-145e, there is a parallel narrative that we can trace through the characterization of Theaetetus. In both the qualities that he possesses and the qualities imputed to him by Socrates, what we observe is the gradual development of Theaetetus as a capable young philosophical mind. To be sure, some of the qualities that we shall see Socrates attribute to Theaetetus are purely aspirational: at times Socrates’ tone is hortatory as he encourages Theaetetus to speak without reserve or in a courageous manner. But the important developments in Theaetetus’ character that we will trace must begin with the recognition that 142a-145e is philosophically important at least in this: it is a frame for the portrait of the young man as he develops philosophically through the course of his discussion with Socrates. Ultimately, the encomium contained in this seemingly perfunctory introduction furthers the development of the dramatic narrative. For through it we learn something about Theaetetus’ physical and intellectual likeness to Socrates; we learn about his personal history; we learn about his temperament and training. Based on this introduction, we can safely guess at whether Theaetetus will be the sort of interlocutor to protest when Socrates employs his mauiotic art and decides to
abandon a phantom,\textsuperscript{133} or whether he will show a warrior’s fortitude and bravely press on in the face of contradiction.\textsuperscript{134} We can even anticipate which sort of life his most resembles in the so-called digression (\textit{Tht.} 172c-177c). Sensitivity to this dramatic narrative and to the interplay of dialectical themes such as contradiction, pregnancy and parturition, and Socrates’ conception of the philosophical versus the practical life affords a perspective from which we come to understand something of Plato’s purpose in crafting the carefully represented image of Theaetetus.

Seizing on the example of Socratic midwifery, Burnyeat takes a similarly sympathetic view of the need, as we have just argued, to assess the dramatic imagery in \textit{Theaetetus}. He illustrates the reasons for seeing literary tropes in \textit{Theaetetus} not only for what they say, but also for what they \textit{mean}.

The passage (148e-151d) in which Socrates compares himself to a midwife is deservedly one of the most famous Plato ever wrote; it should be read with feeling as well as thought. It is an account of the method of education which is at the same time a method of doing philosophy, and there are questions to ask about why it seems especially appropriate to \textit{philosophy}, as opposed to geometry or cobbling, that its procedure should be a discussion in which Socratic questioning engages with one’s own personal conception of things.\textsuperscript{(Burnyeat 1990, 6-7)}

The scope of \textit{Theaetetus}, as Burnyeat has observed, extends beyond the epistemological inquiry to closely related questions: Socrates’ role in facilitating philosophical ‘birth’, giving an account of the method of education, and giving an account of how one ought to engage in philosophy. Burnyeat’s final remark however, that the procedure of philosophy requires sensitivity to “one’s

\textsuperscript{133} Cf. \textit{Tht.} 151c. We will examine this notion in some detail in the next section.

\textsuperscript{134} Compare for instance, Theaetetus’ characterization in this regard with that of Callicles outlined above. Realizing he is about to contradict himself, Theaetetus lays-out his options for Socrates: “Well, Socrates, if I answer what seems true in relation to the present question, I shall say, ‘No, it is not possible’; but if I consider it in relation to the question that went before, then in order to avoid contradicting myself, I say, ‘Yes, it is’,” Socrates points out that if he answers ‘yes’ to avoid contradiction “the tongue will be safe from refutation, but the mind will not.” \textit{Tht.} 154d3-9. Ultimately, Theaetetus resigns himself to contradiction for the sake of the argument rather than answer disingenuously for the sake of his pride.
own personal conception of things”, anticipates the subject matter of the present chapter: the presentation of the psychological dispositions of character necessary for success in philosophical inquiry. It is through Plato’s characterization of Theaetetus that we shall explore this subject, ever mindful of the young man’s singular and striking qualities of character.

II. Character and Dialectic

A. Character and ‘Savage’ Interlocutors

Besides the important implications for method in education and philosophy, Socrates’ midwife example, following as it does on his encounter and preliminary examination of Theaetetus, is a moment in which his reflections on success and failure crystallize in his depiction of two sorts of interlocutors. In the closing remarks of his speech on midwifery, he illustrates how two divergent psychological dispositions result in very different reactions to his dialectical examinations. Socrates urges Theaetetus to follow one example, but not the other.

And when I examine what you say, I may perhaps think it is a phantom (εἴδωλον) and not truth (ἀλήθεια), and proceed to take it quietly from you and abandon it. Now if this happens, you mustn’t get savage (ἀγρίς) with me, like a mother over her first-born child. Do you know, people have often before now got into such a state (ουτε διέτεισαν) with me as to be literally ready to bite (δακνεῖν) when I take away some nonsense (λοβὸν) from them. They never believe that I am doing this in all goodwill... (Thr.151c3-9)

Even when a phantom which bears no truth becomes λοβὸν—outright foolishness or nonsense—one type of interlocutor cannot abide the rejection. It is this psychological pitfall that Socrates urges Theaetetus to guard against. For if philosophy is to take hold of his soul and flourish, he must not permit interrogation to give rise to savagery; he must instead demonstrate a capacity for equanimity in the face of repeated refutation. On the other hand, Socrates’ pedagogical burden is
to demonstrate, as Burnyeat aptly puts it, sensitivity to “one’s personal conception of things”.

But equally, questions of dialectical procedure and philosophical method presuppose that success hinges on Socrates’ young interlocutor being suitably disposed and fit for philosophy. Without such a sympathetic character and a robust intellect, philosophical protreptic is destined to fail.

Theaetetus is Plato’s vision of just such a character and it is through the encomium delivered by his teacher Theodorus that we are offered a glimpse of the temperamentental qualities and psychological characteristics of the ideal student. Cast against the news of Theaetetus’ impending death, the dialogue serves as monument to his intellectual virtue and philosophical promise tragically cut short. Like the kouroi, it can be taken as a funerary portrait, a carefully hewn representation of a model Socratic associate.

B. The Encomium Reveals Character

Quite apart from the fact that Theaetetus is quick (eumayh#); gentle (pra#on); manly (a#reio); acute (oxei#v); keen (a#gci;noi) and retentive (mnh;mnev), Theodorus enthusiasm is punctuated by an added enthusiastic observation about the young man: “I never thought such a combination could exist; I don’t see it arising elsewhere. People as acute and keen and retentive as he is are apt to be very unbalanced (oxu;;rropoi;). The greatest surprise in Theodorus’ estimation is that the improbable collocation of qualities present in Theaetetus does not result in his having an unstable character. Reading further, we see that in those whose character is unstable or unbalanced, what appears as courage (a#ndreio;teroi) is in fact manikw;;teroi: “mad

135 The great series of naked male youths known as kouroi dominates the history of archaic sculpture; their precise functions and significance are usually unclear, though often they stood as idealized memorials of the dead on graves...” Murray (1993), 216

136 All qualities attested at Tht. 144aff

137 LSJ s.v. oξυρρόπος “sudden and quick to anger”. C.f. R. 411b8 μανικωτεροί “unstable temper”

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But in Theaetetus, there is no trace of this rashness or impulsivity. Hence, Theaetetus’ particular advantage is not merely his intellectual capacity, but a psychological disposition that supervenes on his abilities. “This boy”, Theodorus continues, “approaches his studies in a smooth (\(\text{lei}wv\)), sure (\(\text{a\]ptai}stwv\)), effective way (\(\text{anusi}mwv\)), and with a great good temper (\(\text{meta'}\ \text{pollh##v} \text{prajo;theaetov}\)); it reminds one of the quiet flow of a stream of oil. The result is that it is astonishing to see how he gets through his work, at his age” (Th. 144b5-8).

C. Republic on Character

Plato’s meditation on character, nature and nobility is not restricted to the Theaetetus. At Republic 503b he endorses a view consistent with his view of character in Theaetetus. Arguing that success in turning to philosophy hinges not only simply on one’s willingness to take up philosophy, but on one’s ability to do so in a manner that is consonant with the objectives of philosophy itself he says:

You know that ease of learning (\(\text{e\]umayei#v}\)), good memory (\(\text{mnh;monev}\)), quick wits (\(\text{a\]gci;noi}\)), smartness (\(\text{o\]xei#v}\)), youthful passion (\(\text{neanikoi;}\)), high-mindedness (\(\text{megaloprepei#v}\)), and all the other things that go along with these are rarely willing to grow together in a mind that will choose and orderly life (\(\text{kosmi;wv}\)) that is quite and completely stable (\(\text{bebaio;theaetov}\)), for the people who possess the former traits are carried by their quick wits wherever chance leads them and have no stability at all. (R. 503c2-7)

The philosophical soul does not arise from a simple concatenation of intellectual and thumotic virtue: these people are directed by chance. The corrective, Socrates claims, is that such a rudderless character be suffused with order and stability. But here, as in the Theaetetus, Socrates

\[138\] They get swept along with a rush, like ships without ballast; what stands for courage in their makeup is a kind of mad excitement” Th. 144b1-2
remarks that such a combination is rare. Conversely, those whose primary virtue is orderliness and stability of character suffer from what we might call ‘intellectual inertia’. He elaborates:

People with stable characters (μεγαλείς), who don’t change easily (οὐκ εὐμεταβολή), who aren’t easily frightened in battle, and whom one would employ because of their greater reliability, exhibit similar traits when it comes to learning: They are as hard to move and teach as people whose brains have become numb, and they are filled with sleep and yawning whenever they have to learn anything. (R. 503c9-503d4)

If there is a remedy for this condition, we might suppose it to be philosophy. However, Socrates’ point here is precisely that philosophy is unlikely to ever take hold in a sluggish mind. Even the therapy of dialectic, it seems, cannot rehabilitate the intellectually inert. As a consequence, incapable, unprepared or unsuitable prospects cannot benefit from Socratic pedagogy. Socrates’ focus, as always, is in identifying the most promising candidates where they are most likely to arise: among those with a natural predisposition. Though he persists in the view that such natures arise only rarely, frequently not surviving if subjected to unfavourable conditions, Socrates optimistically (and somewhat rhetorically) asks Adeimantus,

Will anyone dispute our view that the offspring of kings or rulers could be born with philosophic natures (μωρομαχίας)?….Could anyone claim that, if such offspring are born, they’ll inevitably be corrupted? We agree ourselves that it’s hard for them to be saved from corruption, but could anyone claim that in the whole of time not one could be saved? (R. 502a2-9).

While corruption of a philosophic nature is not inevitable, the best chance of finding these natures is in ‘the offspring of kings and rulers’—in other words, the noble soul. Socrates’ fond

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139 In cases where the young interlocutor has an interest in philosophy but has not demonstrated ‘natural nobility’, Socrates relies on his daimon to direct the association.
140 Cf. Ch.5§1 fig. 2
141 Wherever it does arise, he wearily says, the philosophic nature is “perverted and altered…. [I]t fails to develop its full power and declines into a different character.” R.497b3-c1
142 While a good part of R. VI is devoted to an examination of the sorts of natures that are and are not appropriate for philosophy, Socrates’ views on the matter are most succinctly found at R. 493e2ff
hope is that when they do emerge from these ranks, philosophy will take hold before they are swept away by distractions\textsuperscript{143} or indeed, before turning their talents to some disreputable end.\textsuperscript{144}

D. Theodorus’ Dialectical Reticence

As a counterpoint to the amenability of Theaetetus to Socratic dialectic, we have the example of Theodorus who, despite his reputation and polymathy, proves to have no discernible advantage over Theaetetus in grappling with Socrates’ questions. To the contrary, Theodorus exhibits a lazy dogmatism in his exchanges with Socrates, especially in shying away from having to respond to questions concerning the theory of his friend Protagoras. For the short span of a few pages, from 170a through to 171c, Theodorus gives the appearance of being a willing interlocutor. But at the culmination of the discussion, he balks at Socrates’ critical conclusion that “the Truth of Protagoras is not true for anyone at all, not even for himself” (Thet. 171c5-6). Theodorus complains “we are running (καταγόμενοι) my friend too hard.” (Thet. 171c8). Foremost in his mind is the goal of safeguarding Protagoras’ reputation from the potential ravages of dialectical examination. Reason compels him to agree with Socrates; but duty prevents him from refuting Protagoras.\textsuperscript{145} In the end, Theodorus’ conscience will not permit him

\textsuperscript{143} As to the young man with a philosophic nature, Socrates muses: “I suppose that, as he gets older, his family and fellow citizens will want to make use of him in connection with their own affairs.” R.494b8-9. A circumstance with which Theaetetus will not have to contend, on account of his being an orphan.

\textsuperscript{144} On this point, cf. R.491bff. Ultimately, Socrates holds that “it’s reasonable to say that the best nature fares worse, when unsuitably nurtured, than an ordinary one.” R.491d6-7

\textsuperscript{145} “Protagoras was my friend Socrates, as you have just remarked. I could not consent to have him refuted through my admissions; and yet I should not be prepared to resist you against my own judgment.” Prot. 162a4-6. Looking back to Socrates’ earlier discussion with Theaetetus, we see the contrary inclination—an inclination toward intellectual honesty—exemplified by the young man. “Well, Socrates, if I answer what seems true in relation to the present question, I shall say ‘No, it is not possible’; but if I consider it in relation to the question that went before, then in order to avoid contradicting myself, I say ‘Yes, it is’” Thet. 154d3-6. Here, Theaetetus is clearly considering the possibilities objectively, without concern given to how he fares in the discussion. A concern for appearances is something that Theodorus is unable to dismiss.
to contradict Protagoras—even in the face of reason. He chooses instead to scuttle the discussion out of an obligation to his friend.

What distinguishes Theodorus and Theaetetus is not merely age; for, despite his age, ability and reputation, it is not Theodorus’ lack the ability that stifles the discussion, it is his lack of commitment to the discussion that restrains him in answering Socrates in a satisfactory manner. In contrast, Theaetetus is not constrained by misplaced loyalty to Theodorus or even by the need to appear intelligent and not foolish. No doubt, his willingness to engage Socrates is benefitted by his intellect; but ultimately, what sets Theaetetus apart are his qualities of character. These are the source of his philosophically sympathetic mind and are evident, as we shall see, in his dialectical comportment with Socrates.

III. Character and Protreptic

A. Wonder [wonder]

Since the question before us concerns the psychological features relevant to protreptic, we might say that the habit of mind or compulsion to search for answers surely rates as an important criterion in assessing any interlocutor’s suitability for philosophy. Intellectual curiosity or wonder is a facet of Theaetetus’ character that emerges early in his discussion with Socrates. While Socrates has already discerned something of Theaetetus’ aptitude for philosophy, Theaetetus himself seems innocently unaware that his ability and manner reveal his philosophical nature.  

146 Socrates’ revelation to Theaetetus of his teacher’s unqualified praise prompts this response: “That’s very well, Socrates; but take care that he wasn’t saying that for a joke.” Tht. 145c3-4. Note also the following exchange: “Soc: Excellent my boys. I don’t think Theodorus is likely to be had up for false witness. Tht: And yet, Socrates, I
Socrates’ first request for a general definition of knowledge is equally a test of the young man’s apparent intellect and his willingness to apply himself to the problem. Socrates urges him on saying, “You must put your whole heart ([χωρίς τούτων]) into what we are doing—in particular into this matter of getting a statement of what knowledge really is.” (Tht. 148d1-3). Theaetetus responds with the pledge that is also a testament to his own indefatigable resolve: “If putting one’s heart into it is all that is required, Socrates, the answer will come to light.” (Tht. 148d4-5).

Even in his moments of self-doubt, Theaetetus reveals an impulse that guides him toward wondering about philosophical problems.

Despite the conversation that follows, Theaetetus still seems not to regard his constant worry over philosophical problems as a distinguishing intellectual achievement; on the contrary, he appears confused by his obsession. This is especially clear in his response to a familiar Socratic logical puzzle outlined at 155a3-c6. The young man replies: “Oh yes, indeed, Socrates, I often wonder like mad ([ματαιάζω]) what these things can mean; sometimes when I’m looking at them I begin to feel quite giddy ([σκοτοδινώ]).” (Tht. 155c7-9).

While reinforcing the image of Theaetetus as dispositionally philosophical, his answer also captures something of his unguarded, youthful spirit. Seizing on this pivotal moment, Socrates shouldn’t be able to answer your question about knowledge in the same way that I answered the one about lengths and powers—though you seem to me to be looking for something of the same sort. So Theodorus turns out a false witness after all.” Tht. 148b5-10

147 Plato’s use of [σκοτοδινώ] calls to mind Aristophanes’ Acharnians (Olsen 2002) which gives us the first attested use of this word. An exchange at the closing of the play reads as follows:

Lamachus: ei'liggiw καρα λιγιανον και'σκοτοδινω.
Dikaiopolis: κα'γω καυζειναι βουλομαι και'σκοτονισμαι και'σκοτοβινώ (Ach.1218-21)

So, while Lamachus complains that he feels he is ‘blacking-out’ ([σκοτοδινώ]), Dikaiopolis responds that he wants to [σκοτονισμαι], “get in the dark and fuck” (Olsen, note. ll.1220-21). Thus, Theaetetus’ complaint that he’s feeling ‘ματαιάζω’ is a lewd allusion to the feeling he has when entertaining philosophical thoughts; he’s not feeling ‘giddy’ as much as he is feeling ‘quite fucked’ by his cogitation. So, Socrates’ diagnosis of Theaetetus’ pregnancy is really a metaphorical refinement of the young man’s confused feeling of what it feels like to “wonder like mad” about philosophical problems.
makes a significant claim about the importance of wonder and its philosophically transformative function. He tells Theaetetus,

> It seems that Theodorus was not far from the truth when he guessed what kind of person you are. For this is an experience (payov) which is characteristic of a philosopher, this wondering (yauma;zein): this is where philosophy begins (arch 'filosofi;av) and nowhere else. (Tht.155c8-d4)

**This is a singularly important Socratic statement.** An inclination to wonder at a philosophical problem is, of course, something that cannot be taught; ‘wonder’ is an activity arising from one’s intellectual temperament: one either has it or one does not. Presumably, someone such as Theodorus might be able to appreciate the difficulty in a problem such as ‘giving a single account of the branches of knowledge’. But merely recognizing its importance does not invariably incline one to wonder about it. It is ability, temperament and an internal life marked by yauma;zein in the relevant philosophical sense that sets Theaetetus apart not only from his peers, but as we shall see, his teacher too. Being favourably gifted with a sharp intellect means Theaetetus has philosophical potential; but it is Socrates’ dialectical examination that is the catalyst which effects transformation by revealing the young man’s sympathetic psychological qualities. The ability to solve a puzzle or argue cleverly is not a guarantee of philosophical awakening: true philosophical achievement occurs in a moment of wonder. Importantly, this moment is captured in the experience of wondering; as such, it is this experience that is characteristic of the philosophical man and marks the beginning of philosophy.

While protreptic arguments such as those outlined in *Euthydemus* and *Clitophon* compel through exhortation or persuasion, Socrates’ unequivocal statement to Theaetetus—that philosophy begins with wonder and nowhere else—suggests that the ‘turning’ of protreptic,
whatever the rhetorical method, is only possible where curiosity and wonder are present first. This is what Socrates identifies in the young man, and it is Theaetetus himself who subsequently demonstrates other qualities which function as a compliment to the necessary condition of wonder.

B. Discontent

Closely allied with one’s disposition to wonder is discontent. From a Socratic perspective, this is the quality of mind which compels one to critique the sufficiency of one’s philosophical conclusions. For instance, when faced with the challenge of giving a single account of knowledge, Theaetetus candidly reveals his latent dissatisfaction with his own philosophical musings:

But I assure you, Socrates, I have often tried to think this out, when I have heard reports of the questions you ask. But I can never persuade myself (πεισάμενον) that anything I say will really do (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that anything I say will really do (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that anything I say will really do (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that anything I say will really do (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that anything I say will really do (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πονηρόντας) that I can never persuade myself (πο

Aside from the note of persistence that we read in Theaetetus’ determination to ‘think out’ problems in a Socratic way, there is also the clear indication that his dissatisfaction arises in cases where either he or others he has heard have fallen short of Socrates’ standard. Importantly, it is not the interlocutors as individuals, but their answers which do not meet the standards of Socrates’ method. Notice also that in this case, Theaetetus is not discomfited by his failed

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149 I have chosen to discuss the present theme under the rubric of ‘discontent’ basing the term on this phrase. Strictly speaking, σαρκασμός (s.v.) denotes ‘sufficiency’ or ‘adequacy’. In context then, Theaetetus’ complaint is that nothing he says is really ‘sufficient’, hence his discontent.

150 We see evidence of Socrates’ preoccupation with testing arguments over individuals in his rejoinder to Gorgias: “Listen then, Gorgias. You should know that I’m convinced I’m one of those people who in a discussion with someone else really want to have knowledge of the subject that the discussion’s about...It’s not you I’m after, it’s our discussion, to have it proceed in such a way as to make thing we’re talking about most clear to us.” Grg. 453b1-c5. Similarly, in his barbed exchange with Thrasymachus late in Republic I he reminds him: “What difference
attempt at definition, but by the failure of the definition itself. Both, of course, might cause one to abandon philosophy; but when courage and wonder are present as they are in Theaetetus, an inadequate definition occasions an immediate philosophical reflex: the renewal of inquiry. This dialectical moment is so commonplace in Socrates’ conversations that we hardly notice it as an intellectual achievement.\textsuperscript{151} When he is faced with dialectical failure, Socrates’ spontaneous reflex is to reformulate his question and resume his dialectical inquiry. In this way, he renews his philosophical discussions by translating discontent into a revitalized philosophical endeavour.

Theaetetus’ dialectical tenacity is clearly patterned after Socrates’ own insatiable philosophical appetite and is imbued with his philosophical spirit. Like Socrates, Theaetetus’ curiosity betrays a compulsion toward grappling with philosophical problems. For this reason, in individuals such as Theaetetus discontent becomes a dialectical virtue. Unlike many of Socrates’ young interlocutors whose dissatisfaction with dialectic terminates in philosophical failure, discontent is the very thing that inspires Theaetetus to persevere in his philosophical inquiries. It is a matter of one’s character, then, whether discontent inclines one away from philosophy or compels one toward it.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item does it make to you, whether I believe it or not [Thrasymachus]? It’s my account you’re supposed to be refuting” \textit{R.} 349a6-7. Hence, \textit{consistency} becomes a Socratic dialectical virtue. When Callicles complains to him “How you keep saying the same things, Socrates!”, Socrates responds: “Yes, Callicles, not only the same things, but also about the same subjects.” \textit{Grg.} 490e8-10. In the conclusion to Lesser Hippias, Hippias challenges Socrates’ consistency: “I can’t agree with you in that, Socrates”, to which Socrates willingly concedes that the \textit{logos} of the argument compels him too: “Nor I with myself, Hippias. But given the argument, we can’t help having it look that way to us, now, at any rate.” \textit{L. Hipp.} 376b11-c2. We see this same requirement for consistency in other Socratic literature as well. Sensing that Alcibiades is harbouring conflicting beliefs, he Socrates tells him: “My question is whether you have in mind what you say you have in mind.” \textit{Alc.} I 106b11-12. Echoing \textit{Gorgias}, Xenophon has Hippias wryly observe “Dear me, Socrates, are you still saying the same things I heard you say all that time ago?”, to which Socrates replies “Yes, and what is eve stranger, Hippias, I’m not only saying the same things but saying them about the same subject.” Tredennick and Waterfield (1990), \textit{Mem.} IV.iv.6. We will have more to say in this regard in the concluding chapter.
\item It is more often the case, in fact, that Socrates’ interlocutors take his repeated calls to renew the discussion as a sign of pestering persistence.
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Along with the instinct for \textit{yauma;zein} or wondering, the impulse toward discontent is not simply a function of Theaetetus’ exceptional intellect; rather, it is the product of some additional quality of mind. Despite his setbacks, false starts and unsatisfactory conclusions, the young man tells him “And yet, again, you know, I can’t even stop worrying about it (\textit{ou\]d a\]pallagh#nai tou\# me;lein})\textsuperscript{152}” \textit{(Tht. 148e4-5)}. Here, we have yet another suggestion of Theaetetus dialectical persistence arising out of his discontent. His determination to dialectically ‘rid’ himself of what has quickened inside him is a condition that Socrates recognizes and diagnoses immediately. “Yes; those are the pains of labour, dear Theaetetus. It is because you are not barren but pregnant.” \textit{(Tht.155e6-7)}. Discontent, when joined to wonder, translates into a temperamental trait that, as Socrates himself points out, is both the sign of philosophical quickening and the starting point for his own maeutic art.

\textit{i) Diotima on Discontent}

At this juncture, it is worth reminding ourselves of Diotima’s observations regarding discontent. After arguing that eros can take the form of philosophical striving, she cautions Socrates to be wary of \textit{contentment} since it functions as a countervailing force and has a stifling influence on philosophical inquiry. She tells her student:

\begin{quote}
For what’s especially difficult about being ignorant is that you are content with yourself (\textit{au\[tw# ei\]nai i\[kano;n}) even though you’re neither beautiful and good (\textit{kalo;n ka\]gayo;n}) nor intelligent. If you don’t think you need anything, of course you won’t want what you don’t think you need. \textit{(Symp. 204a5-8)}
\end{quote}

The feeling of contented sufficiency (\textit{i\[kano;n}) that Diotima warns against is precisely, as we have just seen, what Theaetetus instinctively rejects when he tells Socrates “I can never persuade

\textsuperscript{152} What Theaetetus tells Socrates is that he “cannot get rid (\textit{ou\]d a\]pallagh#nai}) of this concern (\textit{tou\# me;lein})” \textit{Cf. LSJ s.v. \textit{a\]palla;ssw}. It is this innocent expression of the inability to ‘get rid’ of a ‘concern’ inside him that prompts Socrates to introduce the midwife metaphor.
myself that anything I say will really do (Tht. 148e2-3). And just as the lover strives for wisdom because he is not content with his ignorance, Theaetetus’ discontent is translated into an active philosophical striving. This, according to Diotima, is the salient feature of Love: being a lover.

C. Courage and Confidence

While we are most familiar seeing courage treated variously as the subject of ethical, epistemological or definitional inquiry, in Theaetetus courage stands out alongside wonder and discontent as a character trait which serves to advance one’s progress in the practice of philosophy. Instead of being the subject of moral inquiry, and the allied concept (confidence) are used in two ways: first, as a descriptive characterization of Theaetetus and second as a normative standard for his conduct in dialectic.

i)  

If we are considering the importance of courage in the Theaetetus, we should recall that the dialogue as a whole is set against the backdrop of his impending death at the approximate age of 24. The exchange between Euclides and Terpsion in the opening scene of Theaetetus makes clear that the young man who we are about to meet cut an impressive figure on the battlefield. Euclides tells Terpsion: “Only just now I was listening to some people singing his praises (eγκυμισμοῖν for the way he behaved in battle” (Tht. 142b7-8). The suggestion that his exploits in battle are being praised anticipates the unqualified praise which (as we have

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153 “It follows that Love must be a lover of wisdom (φιλοσοφόν) and, as such, is in between being wise and being ignorant.” Symp. 204b6-7
154 Diotima corrects Socrates in his conception of whether Love is a passive or active principle: “On the basis of what you say, I conclude that you thought Love was being loved, rather than being a lover.” Symp. 204c3-4
already seen) Theodorus lavishes on the young man in his report to Socrates. We have already seen that in his encomium, Theodorus’ concern is that Theaetetus’ intellectual abilities—his acuteness, keeness and retentiveness—are the very qualities that normally result in a “very unbalanced” character. We noted his concern that the upshot of such a collocation of intellectual abilities is a quickness to anger. Thus, Theodorus tells Socrates, in these youths “what stands for courage (andreioi) in their makeup is a kind of mad excitement (manikwteroi)” (Th. 144b2). But Theaetetus is unique; his combination of ‘quickness’ and ‘gentleness’ leads his teacher to remark “I never thought such a combination could exist; I don’t see it arising elsewhere” (Th. 144a5-7) Theodorus punctuates his praise of the young man by stating: “to crown it all (diaferontwv) he is as manly (andreion) a boy as any of his fellows.” (Th. 144a5). Here, andreion can be understood in one of two ways. If we take it as a sign that the fourteen year old Theaetetus has the bearing of a man, it a clear signal that despite his status as an orphan, he is not in the least a vulnerable boy. Likewise, his being manly or andreion should be understood together with his corporeal ‘ugliness’: though he is in the bloom of youth, in both body and soul he is not likely to be taken as the object of an older man’s erotic

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156 Here, “very unbalanced” translates oorghini xorropoi. A more literal, though perhaps a less stylistic rendering might be “sudden and quick to anger”. This preserves the essential sense of oorghini as ‘anger’ (C.f. LSJ s.v. oorghini) and xorropoi as ‘turning quickly’ (C.f. LSJ s.v. xorropov). This preferred translation also has the benefit of illuminating with greater perspicacity the psychology behind this type of character envisioned by Theodorus.

157 The precise mechanism which causes these young men to be prone to mad excitement in place of courage is not explained. Perhaps Protagoras can illuminate the matter. Socrates’ investigation into the connection between confidence (yarsoi) and courage (andreioi) (349e ff) leads him to propose that “those with the right kind of knowledge (eipisth;me;nov) are more confident (yarralew;teroi;) than those without it (mhe;me;pnwn) [i.e., right kind of knowledge]” Prot. 350a9-10. Pressing further, Socrates makes his point through an interrogative: “Then these men who are so confident (yarrale;oi) turn out to be not courageous (ouk andreioi) but mad (mainomenoi)” Prot. 350c2-3. If we take Socrates’ example of a cliff-diver, the suggestion is that without the ‘right kind of knowledge’, ability and confidence do not amount to courage, but appear to give rise to a sort of madness. Analogously, the young men contemplated by Theodorus might have an adequately developed intellectual keenness and acuity of mind but might not be informed by the right kind of knowledge; thus, for all their abilities, in their actions these young men exhibit a frenzied madness in place of courage.

158 Socrates and Theodorus both testify to this fact. Of Theaetetus’ father, Socrates remarks “he left a considerable property” Th. 144c7. This prompts Theodorus’ response: “As for the property, I think it has been made away with by trustees” Th. 144d1-2

159 Theodorus: “And if he were beautiful, I should be extremely nervous of speaking with him...But as a matter of fact—if you’ll excuse me for saying such a thing—he is not beautiful at all...” Th. 143e6-9
affections. In fact, his being and manly gives him (prematurely) the air of an erastes and not of a compliant eromenos.¹⁶⁰

Commonly enough, andrei; is translated as ‘courage’ or ‘bravery’. Understood in this way, Theodorus’ depiction squares not only with what we learn in the prologue about Theaetetus’ valour in battle, but with the sort of interlocutor the young man proves to be. Yet, even a gifted young man needs the right sort of encouragement. When Theaetetus’ first attempt at defining knowledge fails, Socrates bolsters his confidence by assuring him “you are not barren but pregnant.” (Tht. 148e7). This claim gives way to Socrates’ colourful midwife analogy, after which Socrates returns to the problem of defining knowledge: “So begin again, Theaetetus, and try to say what knowledge is. And don’t on any account tell me that you can’t. For if God is willing, and you play the man (a;ndri;zhj¹⁶¹ you can.” (Tht. 151d4-6). This time the invocation of courage or manliness occurs against the background of philosophical pregnancy. The not-so-subtle suggestion is that Theaetetus behave in the discussion as a man would in the procreative act: as an active principle. Just as biological pregnancy depends on a male ‘behaving like a man’, by analogy, so too does philosophical pregnancy: it depends on the manliness and dialectical courage of the interlocutor.

¹⁶⁰ Compare this presentation of Theaetetus with Socrates’ assessment of the self-regarding lover in Phaedrus. Commenting on Phaedrus’ recitation of Lysias’ speech, Socrates pinpoints the submissive psychological profile that the lover or erastes looks for in a boy who is the object of his affections. He tells Phaedrus: “That is why a lover will not willingly put up with a boyfriend who is his equal or superior, but his always working to make the boy he loves weaker and inferior to himself. Now, the ignorant man is inferior to the wise one, the coward to the brave (a;ndrei;ou), the ineffective speaker to the trained orator, the slow-witted to the quick (a;gci;nou) Phdr. 239a1-6. Socrates further elaborates on the physical defects that a wily lover will identify and exploit: “You will see that what he [i.e., the self-regarding lover] wants is someone who is soft, not muscular, and not trained in full sunlight but in dappled shade—someone who has never worked out like a man (a;ndrei;;wn), never touched hard, sweaty exercise. Instead he goes for a boy who has known only a soft unmanly (a]!]a;;ndrou) style of life...” Phdr. 239c6-d1. In this regard, it bears pointing out that Theaetetus and his companions have just finished taking exercise when the meet up with Socrates. As Theodorus points out to Socrates: “He and his companions were greasing themselves outside (tw#e//xw dro;;mwjj) just now; it looks as if they have finished and are coming here.” Tht. 144c2-4

¹⁶¹ We should bear in mind that andrei;zhj can equally be translated as “to come to manhood; behave like a man” LSJ s.v. a;ndri;zw.
For all of his intellectual virtue, Theaetetus still seems unsure about whether to meet Socrates’ pronouncements with deference or scepticism. At the conclusion of a particularly abstruse explanation of the flux theory of perception (Tht. 156c8-157c3) he tells the philosopher: “I can’t quite see what you’re getting at—whether the things you are saying are what you think yourself, or whether you are just trying me out (Tht. 157c6-8). Here, Socrates again appeals to the boy’s nobler instinct by gently guiding his conduct: “But you must have courage and patience; answer like a man whatever appears to you about the things I ask.” (Tht. 157d4-5). This is not simply a general recommendation to be manly or courageous, but an encouragement to do so for the purposes of making an advance in their philosophical discussion.

ii) 

Along with the injunction to ‘answer like a man’, we observe another, perhaps equally important instruction: that Theaetetus have confidence. If we look back to the early exchange with Theaetetus, Socrates appeals to him to have confidence in himself, even when he thinks he does not know what to say or how to answer correctly. When, for instance, Socrates senses the young man’s reticence at offering himself up for examination, Socrates presses him: “have the pluck (Tht. 157d4-5).

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162 Our translator overlooks eu in this passage. Fowler (1962) renders the phrase “in a good and manly fashion tell...” Alternately, we see it rendered as “answer like a good brave man” McDowell (1973).

163 Translated (infelicitously) at 157d4 of our translation as ‘courage’. Notice too, that Socrates implores Theaetetus to have karterw—clearly an asset to anyone being asked to embolden himself with confidence.

164 Theaetetus’ reaction to hearing that his teacher has praised his ability is exceedingly modest “That’s all very well, Socrates; but take care he wasn’t saying that for a joke” Tht. 145c3-4.

165 ‘Pluck’ is an unusual word choice, as most translators opt for ‘courage’ or ‘bravery’. As to whether there is any significance to the fine distinction between yarrw (confidence) and andrei, we noted above that the Protagoras deals at length with the connection between yarrw and andrei. It is worth preserving the distinction not only for lexical reasons, but also because the subtle difference in meaning between the two terms forms the basis of a substantial Platonic discussion on the nature of virtue and the connection of these terms to knowledge.
Here, this note of encouragement expresses Socrates’ hope that Theaetetus has confidence to engage in a discussion about the character of his own soul.

When Socrates invokes ὑπηρέτει a second time, his challenge is more pointed. He now demands: “Then do have confidence in yourself (ὑπηρέτει τε) and try to believe that Theodorus knew what he was talking about. You must put your whole heart into it (ὑπηρέτει τε)…” (Tht. 148c11-d2). This time, Theaetetus no longer regards Theodorus’ praise as a παιζων or joke; he responds (as we have seen) to Socrates confidently and admirably: “If putting one’s heart into it (ὑπηρέτει) is all that is required, Socrates, the answer will come to light.” (Tht. 148d4-5). This spirited reply is an indication that Theaetetus has begun to embolden himself and embrace the confident disposition required to make progress in their discussion.

But at least one notable commentator has been puzzled by Socrates’ exhortation in this passage. While rightly recognizing the central importance of courage in dialectical comportment, David Roochnik glosses over the nuanced use of ὑπηρέτει as ‘confidence’. As a consequence he is left unsure of what to make of Socrates’ words:

To urge Theaetetus to answer, Socrates uses a rather awkward phrase: ‘Take courage about yourself’ (ὑπηρέτει τε) (148c9). Apparently, in order to answer Socrates infamous ‘what is it?’ question, one must have courage ‘about oneself’. But why? (Roochnik 2002, 49)

Roochnik surmises that the ‘awkward phrase’ must make reference to the flux theory propounded by Socrates: “the flux always looms large, and it most pointedly threatens us with

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166 Of course, there has been no agreement; Theaetetus has only agreed in principle to the following proposition: “But supposing it were the soul of one of us that he was praising? Suppose he said one of us was good and wise? Oughtn’t the one who heard that be very anxious to examine the object of such praise?” Tht. 145b1-3. Socrates recasts Theaetetus’ affirmation as assent to the proposal.

167 lit. “to be ready, willing, eager to do a thing” Cf. LSJ s.v. ὑπηρέτει
destruction of our selves....[So] courage is needed in order to pursue the ‘what is it?’ question....” (Roochnik 2002, 49). However, if we render as ‘confidence’, we see immediately that the phrase is not only more elegant, but now makes sense—“have confidence in yourself”. While Roochnik acknowledges the role of courage, he does so not because he has noted the importance of but because of the definitional ambiguity of The preferable rendering of as ‘confidence’ makes it clear that the point is to in Theaetetus a positive psychological disposition toward both his ability and his capacity for discussion as he approaches the question of knowledge. It is this fragile but growing confidence that Socrates does not wish to crush as their discussion begins to blossom.

The final use of comes when, in a moment of self-awareness, Socrates realizes he has belaboured his illustration of false judgement (Tht. 189c1ff). Reflecting on his overstated conclusion, he pauses—almost apologetically—to tell Theaetetus, “but let that pass; I don’t want your boldness (to go unrewarded” (Tht. 189d6-7). This recognition of Theaetetus’ budding confidence should be seen against the disingenuous stance toward the discussion taken by Theodorus discussed above. It is worth looking again at the crucial moment immediately before Socrates begins his critique of relativism in voce Protagoras (Tht. 165e9ff). Here Theodorus attempts to recuse himself from the discussion with the following declaration:

Protagoras was a friend of mine, Socrates, as you have just remarked. I could not consent to have him refuted through my admissions; and yet, I should not be prepared to resist you against my own judgment. So take on Th

Theodorus’ willingness to take up the discussion turns on one condition: he will not gainsay any of Protagoras’ theories. And yet, by his own admission, he is unwilling to resist the logic of Socrates’ conclusions. The artificial strictures that he places on the discussion are a testament to his lack of both dialectical confidence and courage. But he does not escape the discussion
without being rebuked. Once he indicates his unwillingness to go any farther Theaetetus registers his astonishment at his teacher’s hasty withdrawal. “Oh, no, indeed, Theodorus!”; the young man protests, “Not until you and Socrates have done what you proposed just now....” (Tht. 183d1-2). It is because he has acquitted himself so confidently both in his discussion with Socrates and in rising to challenge Theodorus that, as we have seen, Socrates tells him “I don’t want your boldness (οῦχ ἀρρενότητάν) to go unrewarded”.

Socrates’ definitive pronouncement on the value and function of courage comes to light in the course of his description of the ‘practical man’ of the law courts. His withering portrait of the ‘small’, ‘warped’ and ‘servile’ soul of the practical or unjust man concludes with this observation:

But there is one accident (οὐχ ἀρρενότητάν) to which the unjust man is liable. When it comes to giving and taking an account in private discussion of the things he disparages; when he is willing to stand his ground like a man (ἠμέρους) for long enough, instead of running away like a coward (ἀφαίρεσιν), then, my friend, an odd thing happens. In the end the things he says do not satisfy (οὐχ ἀρρενότητάν) even himself; that famous eloquence of his somehow dries up, and he is left looking nothing more than a child. (Tht. 177b1-7)

The martial imagery here is unmistakable; so too is the prescription for the dialectician: one ought to stand one’s ground and not run away. This, of course, is what Theaetetus succeeds at doing in both his discussion and ultimately on the battlefield as well. Notice too, the result when the practical man ‘stands his ground’ or persists courageously: “the things he says do not satisfy (οὐχ ἀρρενότητάν) even himself”. Though the practical man appears capable of formulating his discontent, he lacks the courage to ‘stand his ground’ and instead ‘runs away like a coward’ from the discussion. Dissatisfaction with one’s own condition is necessary, but not sufficient for philosophical success since it is only through manly courage that one can muster philosophical

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168 The comparison of the practical life versus the philosophical life is the central focus of the so-called ‘digression’ in Theaetetus spanning 172c3 to 177c7.
169 Cf. Tht. 173a2-3
resolve. Courage in this sense becomes a psychological virtue since it prefigures discontent and makes possible the eventual philosophical awakening that is the earmark of protreptic.

D. ‘Noble Nature’

To this point we have examined in some detail the early exchange between Socrates and Theaetetus. We have looked, for instance, at the encomium of Theodorus and reflected on the many ways in which Socrates has considered the virtues of intellect and character in the young man. Here we shall return again to the opening of the dialogue to consider a series of exchanges that reveal a Socratic preoccupation with the nobility Socrates discerns in Theaetetus’ character.

There is a sense in which all of the salutary dispositions of Theaetetus’ philosophical character are a function of another more comprehensive quality: his noble nature. Beginning with Euclides’ report that Socrates was “very much struck” by Theaetetus’ “natural ability” (πυάσσα) (Tht. 142c8-9), over the course of the dialogue Theaetetus comes to exemplify the nature and ideals of a noble character through his dialectical comportment. Thus, in this section we shall explore Socrates’ assessment of Theaetetus’ nobility or γενεῖα. As we shall see, through the person of Theaetetus, the cultural precepts of nobility are translated into a set of moral and psychological qualities that bear directly on his dialectical persona. Central to the discussion that follows is an examination of the allied notions of freedom (ελευθερία) and liberality (ελευθερία) that are at the core of the noble temperament.

i) Nobility and Liberality

At the conclusion of Theodorus’ encomium there is a short exchange between Socrates and Theodorus that adds important detail to the portrait of the young man who has been so
thoroughly praised. Socrates’ curiosity has been piqued and Theodorus points out the boy in question as “the middle one of this group coming towards us” (Tht. 144c2). It is a minor detail, but one which is nevertheless of some significance since the middle position in a group was conventionally a place of honour and a sign of an individual’s importance. We also learn from Theodorus that he and his two friends have just come from the gymnasium—an activity customarily associated with the leisured class. Oddly though, Theodorus does not remember the name of Theaetetus’ father. However, once Socrates lays eyes on the boy he realizes that he does know him as the son of an eminent man: “He’s the son of Euphronius of Sunium—very much the kind of person, my friend, that you tell me his son is. A distinguished man (εὐδόκημος) in many ways; he left a considerable property too (οὐσίας μαλά πολλήν κατελήφη).” (Tht. 144c5-7). This scant testimony establishes a number of important details. First, that the praise of Theaetetus is equally applicable to his father; that according to Socrates the father was himself a distinguished or honourable man, and that the young man is the heir to a considerable property. The emerging picture is one of a young man who by both birth and nature is a youthful embodiment of a gentleman noble.

The first indication that, despite his youth, Theaetetus is conducting himself in a noble manner follows Theodorus’ report that Theaetetus has had the misfortune of having trustees make off with his inheritance. Theodorus tells Socrates that despite his fortune being squandered

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170 “He and his companions were greasing themselves outside just now...” Tht. 1442-3
171 “Our sources make it clear that the education beyond the elementary stage, predominantly athletic training (gymnastika) and instruction in the “arts” (mousikē) were, practically speaking, available only to young men who had leisure and money—the upper stratum—and that the possession of this kind of education identified the aristocrat.” We read further: “A related advantage was the training in gymnastika was identified with the Dorian ideal of manliness.” Donlan (1980), 156-7
172 Donlan provides a useful discussion of the connection between eugenia, or noble birth and kaloskagathos. Of the latter Donlan states: “Kaloskagathos (beautiful and good) made its appearance only in the fifth century and shows clearly the ‘mood’ of the aristocratic class during the period...If we translate it as ‘gentleman’ in the sense that it was used in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries we can fairly closely approximate its meaning.” (Donlan 1980,129). A fuller discussion of kaloskagathos and its significance in Socratic dialectic is the subject of the final section of this chapter.
by trustees, Theaetetus remains “wonderfully open-handed (ἐλευθερία; θεατητος) about money” (Th. 144d2-3). Socrates’ reaction is telling: “It is a noble man that you describe (γεννικὸν λέγειν τὸν ἀνδρα).” We should expect that Theodorus has a vested interest in his student’s open-handed financial practices; for that is a legitimate concern of a professional teacher. However, financial extravagance seems a quality unworthy of Socrates’ special notice. It is curious then, that Theodorus’ remark does prompt Socrates to his enthusiastic response—γεννικὸν λέγειν τὸν ἀνδρα. What draws Socrates’ attention is not simply the fact that Theaetetus is lavish with his money, but that his liberality with money—his being ἐλευθερία; θεατητος—is a sign of a noble character. Despite his having been dispossessed of his inheritance, by his continued liberality—a quality commonly associated with nobles or aristocrats—the boy retains a dignified bearing.

Indeed, ἐλευθερία; θεατητος is a refinement that besides signalling a generosity with money connotes eloquence in speech and manner. As a rule, liberality with money was taken as a

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173 Having not yet come of age, there would have been few legal remedies available to Theaetetus to recoup his property loss: MacDowell (1986), 94. While it is certainly important to Theodorus that the boy is liberal with money, a contemporary Athenian would have noted Theaetetus’ vulnerable social and legal standing. As MacDowell notes, “The fact that such offences [theft from orphans by trustees] were made subject not merely to prosecution by any volunteer but to eisagelia (in which the prosecutor ran no risk) or phasis (in which he stood to gain a reward) marks the Athenians’ keenness to protect orphans against bad guardians. An orphan child was par excellence the kind of person who needed the community’s protection.” MacDowell (1986), 94-5. All the same, even though Theaetetus has been robed of his inheritance, Plato insists that his penury has not driven him to forget his noble and aristocratic temperment, thus, the reference to his ‘open-handedness’ with money.

174 Th. 144d4. Here, I have chosen to follow Fowler’s translation over that of Levett. Levett captures the spirit but not the precise sense of the passage glossing over γεννικὸν λέγειν so, Levett’s translation reads: “A thoroughbred, evidently”. McDowell (1973) offers the following: “You make him sound an excellent person”. Here, ‘excellent’ comes nearer to translating γεννικὸν λέγειν. However, as we shall see, Plato’s argument demands that we understand γεννικὸν λέγειν in its fundamental sense of ‘noble’. Cf. LSJ γεννικό;

175 ἐλευθερία; θεατητος is someone who exhibits the character of an ἐλευθερία; θεατητος (q.v.), defined in its primary sense as “speaking or acting like a freeman” Cf. LSJ . In this sense, liberality is a function of one’s character and is to be distinguished from the concept of freedom (ἐλευθερία) as a political principle. On the importance of liberality and character for philosophical investigation, we note that in Republic, Socrates proposes to Glaucon, “If it [a nature] is at all slavish (ἀνελευθερία), you should not overlook that fact; for pettiness (σμικρολογία) is altogether incompatible with a soul that is always reaching out to grasp (ἐπορεύεσθαι) everything both divine and human as a whole.” R. 486a3-6. (Note that ἀνελευθερία; should be understood as not as ‘slavish’, but rather as A. illiberality of mind; servility A.2. esp. in money matters, stinginess (LSJ). The connection between liberality and freedom is to be taken up in the discussion below.
marker of virtue—especially the virtue indicative of the aristocratic class. Where we might be led to surmise that Theodorus is gloating over his luck in benefiting from Theaetetus’ profligate habits, he is in fact pointing Socrates to a virtue of character suggestive of the young man’s good breeding and noble stock. Jaeger reflects on precisely this connection:

Thus the code of the nobility had a twofold influence on Greek education. In the first place, the city-state inherited from it one of the finest elements in its ethical system—the obligation to be brave. (In the city-state courage was called manliness, a clear reminiscence of the Homeric identification of courage with manly areté). And, secondly, the higher social standards of the polis were derived from aristocratic practice; as is shown not so much in any particular precepts of bourgeois morality as in the general ideas of liberality and a certain magnificence in the conduct of life.\(^{176}\)

Whereas we modern readers are struck by Theodorus’ account of Theaetetus’ exceptional intellectual virtues, Jaeger confirms what any contemporary Greek reader would have found impressive about the young man: the combination of his manly courage and liberality as a sign of an aristocratic temperament. This is what Socrates guesses at when he hears that even though he has been financially ruined by conniving trustees, Theaetetus remains prideful enough to continue conducting himself in a manner befitting a young noble.

\(\text{ii) Responding Nobly}\)

In the same way that Socrates transforms courage and confidence into dialectical virtues, confirmation that Theaetetus exemplifies the intellectual habits befitting a noble leads Socrates to make repeated appeals for his young interlocutor to be guided by the assumptions of the code of nobility. Consequently, the constellation of qualities that are signs of an individual’s noble manner themselves become dialectically relevant. Take for instance Socrates’ initial approach to the question of how to define knowledge. In this instance, he cleverly appeals to the conventions

\(^{176}\) Jaeger (1939), 5 (emphasis added)
of the student-teacher dynamic as a means of gently provoking Theaetetus into engaging in the discussion:

Well, Theaetetus, you hear what Theodorus says. You won’t want to disobey him, I’m sure; and certainly a wise man shouldn’t be disobeyed by his juniors in matters of this kind—it wouldn’t be at all the proper thing. Now give me a good frank (gennai;wv) answer. What do you think knowledge is?

From our discussion above, it is clear that gennai;wv (here used adverbially) is not a plea to speak frankly, but in fact a call for the young man to act nobly in responding. Theaetetus’ response (which we have already seen noted above) gives a clear signal of his dialectical resolve: “Well, I ought to answer, Socrates, as you and Theodorus tell me to. In any case, you and he will put me right, if I make a mistake.” (Tht.146c5-6). The expression of confidence—that he will be ‘put right’ if he errs—is a an aspiration that reflects not only Theaetetus’ faith in his interlocutor’s goodwill, but also the burgeoning Socratic manner of dialectical comportment.

However, when Theaetetus does answer, he falls well short of giving an adequate response. In fact, the answer reveals that he has not sufficiently understood Socrates’ question.

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177 Though it is not proper, this is precisely what happens in due course when Theaetetus not only disobeys but reprimands his teacher for wanting to quit the discussion before its appropriate conclusion. However, even this insubordinate remark gives one the sense that Theaetetus has begun to come into his own dialectically.

178 Tht. 146b7-c4

179 Here, and in the passages that follow, it is clear that Levett’s decision to translate gennai;wv as ‘frank’ is unwarranted by even the loosest interpretation. When he intends ‘outspokenness’ or ‘frankness’ to be understood, Plato uses parrhsi;a (q.v.). Though parrhsi;a is certainly connected to the ideas of liberality and noble conduct, the usual context is political. “Athenian liberty was first and foremost parrhesia, freedom of speech, which presupposes freedom of thought and guarantees freedom of discussion, the essential right of democratic existence.” Ehrenberg (1967), 30-1. There are exceptions, of course. Plato uses parrhsi;a in a moral sense in Socrates’ admonition to Callicles. Socrates sets out the conditions necessary for anyone who is sincere in examining himself: “I realize that the person who intends to put his soul to the test to see whether he lives rightly or not must have three qualities, all of which you have: knowledge (episth;mhn), good will (eu/noian) and frankness (parrhsi;an).” Grg. 487a2-5. Of course, Socrates statement is ironic since Callicles (like Polus and Gorgias before him) proves to have none of these. In sum, by asking Theaetetus to speak nobly, Socrates is not advising him of his political right as an Athenian; the right to free speech is open to any Athenian. However acting nobly is a moral achievement and so Socrates’ insistence on noble conduct is an expression of his expectation for the young man’s behaviour in the discussion.

180 Socrates gives his assurance of dialectical goodwill early on to Theaetetus in the course of describing the reaction of those who (as we have noted above) turn ‘savage’ in conversation. “They never believe that I am doing this [s.c. ‘exposing a phantom’] in all goodwill.” Tht. 151c8-9
Yet, this makes little difference to Socrates who is nevertheless pleased with way in which Theaetetus has taken up the challenge. In assessing the young man’s response, Socrates begins by focusing not on the correctness of the answer, but on spirited character of the young man’s answer: “That is certainly a frank (gennai;wv) and indeed a generous (filodw;rwv) answer…”\(^{181}\) (Tht. 146d4). Again, What is most encouraging is that the young man has replied in a manner that evinces his dialectical resolve to continue in the pursuit of a definition.

Not surprisingly, then, Theaetetus approaches his second attempt at definition with increased confidence. He boldly offers to Socrates his new formulation: “the way it appears at present, at any rate, is that knowledge is simply perception.” It is no exaggeration to say that the remainder of Theaetetus is devoted to investigating why this response is wrong. Yet, witness Socrates’ approving reply: “There’s a good frank (gennai;wv) answer, my son. That’s the way to speak your mind (crh’ ga’r ou=twv a]pofaino;menon le;gein.)” (Tht. 151e5-6). Socrates repeats his term of approbation, again calling his interlocutor noble but this time adding that Theaetetus has responded as one ought (crh’) to respond—that is, courageously and with an independent mind. For the moment, Socrates could hardly care what answer Theaetetus gives; at this stage he is still investigating whether his young interlocutor has the mental fortitude to respond with noble freespokenness and confidence—both requirements if one is to move methodically through the argument and willingly suffer the disappointments of an uncertain dialectical journey.\(^{182}\)

\(^{181}\) The ‘generosity’ of Theaetetus’ response (in giving numerous examples rather than a definition for knowledge) is surely a playful philosophical allusion to his liberal monetary habits mentioned at Tht. 144d.

\(^{182}\) Toward the closing moments of the dialogue, Socrates faces Theaetetus with the realization that their digression into discussing ‘false knowledge’ has led them back to the problem of defining knowledge. Instinctively, Socrates says “Then, to go back to the beginning, what are we going to say knowledge is?”, before pausing to add “We are not, I suppose, going to give up, yet?” Tht. 200d5-6. Theaetetus demonstrates his dialectical stamina by his response: “Certainly not, unless you give up yourself.” Tht. 200d7. In these last words we see Theaetetus’ conscious commitment to the Socratic model of dialectic.
iii) Noble Character versus Noble Ancestry

In light of the emphasis that has been laid on Theaetetus’ nobility and the qualities of character associated with his nobility, we might be forgiven for thinking that the ideal Socratic candidate for philosophy is to be found only among only those young men who by lineage or bloodline are demonstrably aristocratic or well-born. Undoubtedly, many of Socrates’ young associates were numbered among the privileged class of Athens. But in the course of the so-called ‘digression’ (Tht. 172c-177c), Theaetetus appears to give conflicting testimony on the importance of nobility. In concluding our discussion of nobility and dialectical promise, we turn finally to consider Socrates’ claim that the ideal philosopher would have nothing if not contempt for the view that philosophical merit might in any way be tied to heritable status.

We have already seen how Socrates describes the practical man in the digression. Turning to consider the philosophical man, he does so in colourful, idiosyncratic terms, portraying him as someone who “grows up without knowing the way to the market-place, or the whereabouts of the law courts or council chambers or any other place of public assembly.” (Tht. 173d1-4). Like Thales, who is said to have fallen into a well while studying the heavens,\(^\text{183}\) the philosopher takes no notice of seemingly important matters. And so it is, Socrates claims, “with questions of birth—he has no more idea whether a fellow citizen is high-born or humble (\text{eu} \ de\text{ } \text{h} \ \text{\text{kakw}tiv \ ge;gonen})” (Tht. 173d6-7). Equally, reports Socrates, the philosopher is unimpressed by elaborate familial ancestry or genealogies:

When his companions become lyric on the subject of great families, and exclaim at the noble blood (\text{gennai}o;v) of one who can point to seven wealthy ancestors, he thinks that such praise comes from a dim and limited vision, an inability, through lack of education (\text{a}\text{paideusi;av}), to take a steady view of the whole... (174e6-175a2)

\(^{183}\) Cf. Tht. 174a
Finally, Socrates condemns the fixation on pedigree as “the gaping vanity of a silly mind.” (*Tht.* 175b4-5).

If we presume Socrates’ own views of the nobility to be as deprecating as those of the philosopher he is describing, it seems difficult to square the philosopher’s disparagement of the aristocratic mindset with his obvious enthusiasm for the many aspects of Theaetetus’ noble character. If it were the case that his interest in Theaetetus was motivated by a blind allegiance to social conceptions of status, then we would indeed have an intractable problem. For, his keen reception of the boy as *geniko;;on* would be at odds with the contempt that the philosopher of the digression expresses for those who blindly embrace birth as a mark of distinction.

Of course, to the average Athenian citizen, birth as the distinguishing mark of status and class seemed an unimpeachable assumption:

The autochthonous and noble common ancestry of the Athenian people was a matter of considerable pride to the citizens and was frequently noted in orations as a distinguishing trait that rendered the Athenians superior not only to non citizens living in Attica but to all other Greeks.  

Among Athenians, the unquestioned presumption was that both status and class were inherited traits. Ober gives substance to this claim citing evidence from Aristotle:

The attributes of birth and behaviour were closely intertwined in Athenian thought. Aristotle (*Pol.* 1301b1-4) defines the “well born” (*eugeneis*) as those who are preeminent because of their birth (*genos*) and who thereby claim to merit special privileges; furthermore, the well born are regarded as those to whom the *aretê* and the

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184 Ober (1989), 263. In making this claim, Ober adduces evidence from a variety of sources including Andocides (1.148-9); Antiphon (1.4); Lysias (14.18, 18.12); Lycurgus (1.108).

185 “The ‘status elite’ of Athens could be defined as including anyone whose social standing was notably higher than that of his fellow citizens, because of his possession of any attribute or constellation of attributes that raised him above the norm.” (Ober: 248) While ‘status’ could pick out a person who was merely wealthy, “birth and behaviour are the characteristics that distinguish the category of status from the narrower categories of class and ability.” Ober (1989), 249. Thus, Theaetetus becomes a philosophical representative of the noble class through his behaviour and ability rather than for any prestige that might have followed him by dint of birth alone.

186 “There is also a superiority which is claimed by men of rank ( evils) for they are thought noble ( evils) because they spring from wealthy ( evils) and excellent ( ancestors)” *Pol.* 1301b1-4.
wealth of their ancestors belong.\textsuperscript{187} In this passage Aristotle conflates good birth with wealth (and thus status with class) but also the “genetic” category of birthright with the moral category of \textit{aretē}. The implication is that high birth often leads to moral excellence but also that the two attributes are distinct. An individual with good blood might not be regarded as truly well born if his behaviour was incompatible with his ancestry. The aristocrat must have the right bloodlines, but he must also act the part. (Ober 1989, 249-250)

In the face of this conventional thinking, Plato’s dramatic innovation in \textit{Theaetetus} is to invest an impoverished, dispossessed orphan with the intellect, comportment and qualities of mind generally associated with those of high-born status or social rank. Crucially, it is status attained by birth that Socrates’ criticizes in the digression, \textit{not} the narrower concepts of class and ability. In fact, class (or, more precisely, nobility) and ability, as we have seen, are the very aspects of Theaetetus’ character that Socrates’ finds compelling.\textsuperscript{188} It is the refined qualities associated with a noble character, not status \textit{simpliciter} that attracts Socrates’ notice. And so, it should strike us as unremarkable that while Socrates expresses admiration for Theaetetus’ noble nature, the philosopher of the digression contemptuously dismisses the ‘gaping vanity’ of those fixated on high-birth alone as a marker of nobility.

Seen from this vantage point, it is evident that Socrates’ philosopher is a realization of only noble qualities of character without any thought given to the trappings of status. With so little regard for social standing, it is no wonder that such a man’s actions—in law courts or in public—appear farcical and, as Socrates suggests, ‘cause entertainment’ to all who meet him.\textsuperscript{189} Thus, the Socratic philosopher is a peculiar hybrid, at once embracing the virtues associated with

\textsuperscript{187} Lest we be led to believe that Aristotle is advocating for such an aristocratic social or political regime, we should recall that in this passage Aristotle’s remarks are purely descriptive, not normative.

\textsuperscript{188} Commenting on the importance placed on inter-generational transmission of aristocratic ideals, Starr observes: “Normally, the values of the upper classes were absorbed by the young within their families and surrounding groups; but as time progressed formal schools were established. Nobles, thus consciously guided by example and by education into the proper paths in childhood, as adults were subject to constant scrutiny by their peers...” Starr (1986), 60

\textsuperscript{189} \textit{Cf.} Tht. 174c ff
the aristocratic elite while at the same time paying little mind to the material privilege associated with pedigree or lineage.

iv) **Nobility, Freedom and Leisure.**

Like the nobility whose claim to distinction rests with their attachment to the values of freedom and leisure, Socrates insists that the philosopher’s life reflects an affinity for these same noble virtues. Comparing his philosopher to “the man who has been knocking about in the law courts”, Socrates says, is “like comparing the upbringing of a slave (οἰκεται) with that of a free man (ελευθεροι)”. Unlike the philosopher whose inquiries are conducted with an air of “peace (ειρήνη) and quiet (σκολοχοσ)”, the ‘man who’s been knocking about the law courts’ is said to be “ασκοται” — a man lacking leisure. Added to this, his associates are referred to as “fellow slaves (ομοιοθαληθείς)”. As a consequence of attending only to practical matters in life, the man of the law courts becomes nothing if not morally disfigured for having disregarded the noble values that make philosophy possible. His development and enculturation among like-minded men is a permanent hindrance to the fostering of freedom and leisure — qualities that are

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190 A widely observed aspect of Greek culture. See for instance, Festugière (1987) Ch. I §A-C
191 *Tht.* 172c9-d2
192 *Tht.* 172d5. It is important that we understand τὸν ἀνθρώπον ὡς ‘leisure’ and not simply ‘quiet’ as our translator has suggested.
193 *Tht.* 172e1
194 *Tht.* 172e6
195 Socrates is unrestrained in his attack on this ‘man of the law courts’. He tells Theodorus: “Such conditions make him keen and highly strung, skilled in flattering the master and working his way into favour; but cause his soul to be small and warped. His early servitude prevents him from making a free, straight growth; it forces him into doing crooked things by imposing dangers and alarms upon a soul that is still tender. He cannot meet these by just and honest practice, and so resorts to lies and to the policy of repaying one wrong with another; thus he is constantly being bent and distorted, and in the end grows up to manhood with a mind that has no health in it, having now become—in his own eyes—a man of ability and wisdom. There is your practical man....” *Tht.* 173a1-b4
necessary for philosophy to take hold in his soul. Thus, the turn toward philosophy can never be accomplished by such a man.\textsuperscript{196}

In his final assessment of these two divergent lives, Socrates reiterates to Theodorus the vital differences between the two.

There is the one who has been brought up in true freedom (ἐλευθερία and leisure (σοφία), the man you call the philosopher...Then you have the other, the man who is keen and smart at doing all these jobs, but does not know how to strike up a song in his turn like a free man (ἐλευθερία) or how to tune the strings of common speech to the fitting praise of the life of the gods and of the happy among men. (Th. 175e1-176a2)

As we remarked earlier, it is not a political conception of freedom that is at issue here, but an expansive freedom of mind that, through the prudent exercise of leisure, repays the liberal thinker with a capacity for accomplishing what small, sharp minds cannot. It is the liberal thinker that poetically strikes up a song when it is called for; it is he who proffers speeches in praise of the gods and it is he who through his attachment to ελευθερία and σοφία engages in that most philosophical of endeavours: contemplating the happiness of men.

While philosophical contemplation might indeed be the best activity for men, it is another matter altogether to recommend the life of philosophical contemplation to a particular individual.\textsuperscript{197} Surely, one might say, if any young man were capable of such a life it would be Theaetetus. But Theaetetus is young; he does not yet understand what he might become were he to take up philosophy. Hence, in the digression (ostensibly Socrates’ distracted musings directed at Theodorus), Socrates indirectly presents Theaetetus with an evaluative comparison, perhaps

\textsuperscript{196}The same fate it accorded to despots or kings, says Socrates since their energies are devoted to the business of ruling men. As a consequence, they become “as coarse (ἀσκληπεία) and uncultivated (ἀπαιδευτον) as the stock-farmer” Th. 174e1-2

\textsuperscript{197}The author of Theages suggests a Socratic reticence at freely offering advice. Demodocus’ pleading for direction regarding his son’s vocation leads Socrates to say: “Well, you know, Demodocus, they say advice is a sacred thing, and if it’s ever sacred, then it surely is in this case.” Theages 122b3-4. Though Socrates ultimately agrees to associate with Theages, he is clearly not enthusiastic about the mentorship.
even a *prospectus* of the two sorts of lives open to him. From this perspective, the digression is an ideal vehicle for delivering his judgment, since it allows him to assess each life using uncompromising language. At the same time, Socrates does not oblige Theaetetus to take up philosophy; Theaetetus must assess Socrates’ digression, deliberate, and finally choose whether the life that Socrates has outlined is desirable. This indirect method of protreptic absolves Socrates from the burdens associated with advocating the life of the philosopher directly to Theaetetus or any other interlocutor.

With the closing of the digression and the resumption of the dialogue proper (*Tht.* 177c8), we are left to consider the extent to which Theaetetus’ admirable qualities of character serve to advance his dialectical success. Provocatively, in his final remarks of the dialogue, Socrates poses a question which is, in truth, a test of Theaetetus’ philosophical character. As a gauge of the young man’s reaction to the *aporetic* conclusion of their discussion, Socrates summarizes the results of their lengthy investigation: “Well then, our art of midwifery tells us that all of these offspring are wind-eggs and not worth bringing up?” (*Tht.* 210b8–9). “Undoubtedly”, responds Theaetetus with equanimity. There could not be a sharper contrast between the intellectual composure demonstrated in this simple answer and the madness exhibited by some of Socrates’ other interlocutors. As to the psychological benefits of conducting oneself in an appropriate philosophical manner, Socrates is clear:

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198 “There are two types, Theodorus.” *Tht.* 175e1; “My friend, there are two patterns set up in reality.” *Tht.* 176e3. Socrates presents the two options as a dichotomy. One cannot be fully philosophical while ‘dabbling’ in the practical life. These are mutually exclusive pursuits and Theaetetus is at a point in his life where he must choose one or the other.

199 In the early phase of the dialogue, Socrates prepares Theaetetus for eventual dialectical disappointment in the birth of unviable ideas. It is here that we read how others have reacted to his art of midwifery: “I may perhaps think it is a phantom and not truth, and proceed to take it quietly from you and abandon it. Now, if this happens, you mustn’t get savage (ἐγκαίνειν) with me, like a mother with her first-born child. Do you know, people have often before now been ready to bite (δάκνειν) when I take away some nonsense or other from them.” *Tht.* 151c3-8
And so Theaetetus, if ever in the future you should attempt to conceive or should succeed in conceiving other theories, they will be better ones as a result of this inquiry. And if you remain barren, your companions will find you gentler (καλοὶ) and less tiresome (καλοὶ); you will be modest and not think you know what you don’t know.\footnote{Tht. 210b10-c4}

On this view, success in philosophical inquiry leads to better theories and failure leads to a better disposition of character. But again, either outcome is not guaranteed and hinges on two factors: the correct exercise of the maieutic art and the right kind of student. Socrates puts it this way:

“But this art of midwifery my mother and I had allotted to us by God; she to deliver women, I to deliver men that are young (καλοὶ) and generous of spirit (γενναιοὶ),\footnote{Here again, καλοὶ is only loosely translated as “generous of spirit”.} all that have beauty (καλοὶ) (Tht. 210c6-d2). While we can only guess at the nature of Socrates’ divine inspiration, Theaetetus is clearly recognizable as young, intellectually ‘noble’ and beautiful. It is to this quality—καλοὶ γένειακαὶ beauty—that we now turn.

E. Nobility and Moral Beauty

i) Emergence of καλοὶ γένειακαὶ

In light of what we have learned of Theaetetus’ persona, it is not surprising that Euclides should pay special tribute to him for his valour in battle calling him “a fine man (καλοὶ γένειακαὶ) (Tht. 142b8). From the 5th century onward, this particular appellation—καλοὶ γένειακαὶ\footnote{καλοὶ γένειακαὶ understood as ‘beautiful and good’}. was used as a conventional short-hand to describe persons exemplifying qualities associated with the aristocratic or noble citizen. But the conception of virtue signified by the term was based on qualities historically associated with persons belonging to the class of

\footnote{Tht. 210b10-c4}
hereditary rulers of Athens, the Eupatridai. The eventual decline and dissolution of the Eupatridai left Athens with an aristocracy, but one making no hereditary claim to power and no longer founded on archaic principles of government. And so, in place of the example set forth by the archaic class of Eupatridai, the phrase became a shorthand for recognizing physical beauty and moral virtue of those numbered among the aristocratic classes.

Kaloskagathos (beautiful and good) made its appearance only in the fifth century and shows clearly the psychological ‘mood’ of the aristocratic class during this period, for it evoked a powerful range of responses, combining the ancient (but now disputed) aristocratic self-epithet with one that by universal consent was confined to the noble group. (Donlan 1980, 129)

Thus, Terpsion’s praise of Theaetetus as conveys an updated but (still conventional) fifth-century linguistic formulation for the conception of virtue widely understood as indicative of the Athenian aristocracy. The occurrence of this phrase at this juncture of the dialogue is historically and perhaps philologically interesting; but it is an additional, unconventional use of this phrase set in a crucial point of the dialogue that is of special importance. For, here we find an example of Socrates’ original and imaginative bent for turning common words and phrases to serve his dialectical and philosophical ends.

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203 Sealy elaborates: “At a very early stage, when the unification of Attica had scarcely begun, Athens had a hereditary ruling class, called eupatridai, but in the ensuing centuries of unification the institutions of the several communities were adjusted to one another. The result of these compromises was that, by the time the unification was complete, wealth was recognized as the qualification for public office.” Sealy (1976), 117-8. And so, in the digression, when Plato criticizes those who point to “seven wealthy ancestors” (Th. 174e7-8) as confirmation of their nobility, it is likely that he has as his target those among his contemporaries sympathetic to the antiquated political model of rule by the Eupatridoi.

204 Prompted by his exegesis of Simonides, Socrates comments on his own inclination for inventive usage in Protagoras: “Prodicus corrects me each time I use the word ‘terrible’ (deinous) to praise you or someone else, as, for example, ‘Protagoras is a terribly (deinos) wise man’” Prot. 341a6-b2. Famously, Prodicus is held up by Socrates as particularly good at definition, possessing a “wisdom of ancient and divine origin” Prot. 341a1-2. A comprehensive study of Socrates’ creative and novel usage throughout the dialogues would prove valuable.
ii) From Physical to Moral Beauty

Throughout the latter part of this chapter we have seen Socrates’ dialectical appropriation of the categories of virtue esteemed by aristocrats. But we have noted too, his inclination for re-imagining conventional social, psychological and moral categories in the service of philosophy and dialectic. And so it is that which appears at the start of the dialogue makes a reappearance, this time in a novel context.

Socrates’ invokes the term along with the phrase to emphasize an important moment in Theaetetus’ dialectical advance through their argument. In the course of their inquiry into whether knowledge is to be equated with perception, Theaetetus tells Socrates, “It seems to me that in investigating the common features (of everything the soul functions through itself” (Th. 185e1-2). If we recall that the problem of ‘common features’ or general definition is the subject of the first substantive philosophical exchange between Socrates and Theaetetus (Th. 147ff), it should not surprise us that Socrates is struck, if not elated, by Theaetetus’ independent recapitulation of his earlier insight. He enthusiastically responds: “Yes, Theaetetus, you would say that, because you are handsome (and not ugly (as Theodorus would have it. For handsome is as handsome says.” Here, Socrates’ description freely borrows from the linguistic and conceptual richness of Greek descriptive language. But what is strikingly unconventional is that Socrates finds Theaetetus ‘beautiful and good’ on account of his words alone. Whereas Terpsion invokes the phrase as a token of the fallen soldier’s valour, the young Theaetetus is in Socrates’ eyes beautiful because he speaks beautifully. It is important to

205 The reference here is to Theodorus’ early observation that Theaetetus “is not beautiful at all, but rather like you [Socrates], snub-nosed, with eyes that stick out.” Th. 143e9-10.
206 Th. 185e3-4. Less figuratively, can be translated: ‘for he who speaks beautifully is beautiful and good’.
point out that Socrates’ criteria for finding Theaetetus not to say is (in light of Theaetetus’ obvious physical ugliness) at odds with any conventionally understood Greek usage. Commenting on the Greek cultural conception of Marrou observes:

The guiding ideal of this old education was still an ethical one. It can be expressed in one word—“being a man both beautiful and good.” “Good”—signifies the moral aspect, which was essential, as we have seen, with the social and worldly implications which it had from the very beginning. “Beautiful”—refers to physical beauty, with the inevitable “aura” of eroticism that had come to accompany it. (Marrou 1964, 73)

In whatever way it is that Socrates imagines Theaetetus to be what is clear is that he does not apply the term in the usual sense; for Theaetetus is not physically beautiful and there is no ‘aura of eroticism’ about him. Donlan reinforces Marrou’s analysis in this regard.

In the extant literature from Homer to Pindar gives no indication of having developed social or ethical connotations. There is no observable intensification or extension of meaning, nor is there any hint that it was becoming a predicate of ‘inner’ worth—it’s usage over two and a half centuries remains constant and unchanged. (Donlan 1973, 368)

In contrast to the received cultural practice of recognizing in one individual the presence of the irreducible categories of moral goodness and physical beauty, Socrates appropriates this familiar terminology but transforms into a moral and not just aesthetic judgement. Thus, Socrates’ conception of not only surpasses, but in an important sense subverts the cultural expectation of physical beauty as the measure of a man’s being In Socrates’ idiosyncratic sense might be better understood as ‘moral beauty and morally good’. If Theaetetus is is because of the philosophical and moral beauty he demonstrates as a dialectical accomplishment. Socrates’ praise is at once a rejection of
Theodorus’ earlier slight, an innovation in the Greek conceptual lexicon, and an affirmation of the moral beauty exemplified by Theaetetus’ burgeoning philosophical soul.
Chapter Four: Eros, Psyche and the Turn Toward Philosophy

I. The Masks of Eros

A. Introduction

Having seen in previous chapters how success in philosophy is tied to the character and psychological disposition of young initiates, in this chapter our main objective is to turn our examination to the psyche of each kind of lover portrayed in *Phaedrus*. For success in philosophy depends not just on the persuasiveness of the arguments for philosophy, but on whether one is conducted through the philosophical mysteries by a *self-regarding* or *other-regarding* lover. Thus, the first part of this chapter, *The Masks of Eros*, is a brief introduction to each of the four kinds of lovers that we meet with in *Phaedrus*. Here I propose that the ‘non-lover’, ‘wily-lover’ and ‘lover’ ought to be understood as self-regarding in their stance toward eros and the beloved that each seeks. Unlike these lovers, the other type of lover, the *philosophical lover*, embraces an *other*-regarding conception of eros.

In part two, I shift focus from examining the *kinds of lovers* to examining the *kind of eros* that *drives* each lover. Here, rational eros and acquisitive eros (exemplified in the first three kinds of lovers) are explored. I follow this with a perspective on seductive eros and philosophical eros—both characteristic of the philosophical lover. It is in the examination of philosophical eros that we finally arrive at an understanding of the sort of psyche imagined by Plato as best suited to guide young minds to philosophy.
B. Self-Regarding Eros:

*Phaedrus* presents us with four distinct examples of lovers. We are introduced to the non-lover in Phaedrus’ recitation of Lysias’ speech (*Phdr.* 230e8ff); the wily lover in Socrates’ first speech (*Phdr.* 237a8ff); the lover in the latter part of Socrates’ first speech (*Phdr.* 239e1ff); and finally, the philosophical lover—a persona that emerges largely in the palinode as a counterpoint to the first three. Although our objective in this chapter is to understand the effect of eros on the psyche of the beloved, we must necessarily consider the manner in which eros informs the psyche of each kind of lover. After all, the psyche of the beloved will invariably be a reflection of the sort of lover that fosters it. So, to see the effect of eros on the beloved, we must examine the motives that drive each kind of lover. If there is a philosophical point to the myth that we encounter in Socrates’ second speech, we must take seriously the claim that “everyone spends his life honoring the god in whose chorus he danced, and emulates that god in every way he can…” (*Phdr.* 252d1-2). For the moment, we turn our study to a survey and assessment of the kinds of lovers.

i) Lysias’ Speech: The Non-Lover

Aside from any benefit (promised or implied) which may or may not come to a boy from his association with a non-lover, we begin by considering Lysias’ speech in light of the social and legal conventions. In his catalogue of reasons for why a boy ought to give himself to a non-lover, one reason stands out as not only self-regarding, but as a strategy for *self-preservation*: the non-lover’s promise of *discretion*. The non-lover masks his own sexual yearning by promising the boy that, in giving preference to their relationship, the young man will realize a number of

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207 I will continue to attribute the speech to Lysias, though along with Dover, I accept that “Plato was a skilful parodist…and perfectly able to imitate Lysias at a superficial level”. Dover (1978), 44
advantages from a lover who can exercise power over his desires. He makes his case to the boy in this way:

Now, suppose you are afraid of conventional standards (τὸν μόνον) and the stigma that will come to you if people find out about this. Well, it stands to reason that a lover—thinking that everyone else will admire him for his success as much as he admires himself—will fly into words and proudly declare to all and sundry that his labors were not in vain. Someone who does not love you, on the other hand, can control himself (κρείττων αὐτῷ)208 and will choose to do what is best rather than seek the glory that comes from popular reputation.209

Though we might be inclined to grant that the non-lover who has κρείττων αὐτῷ or power over himself, is someone who would likely be more circumspect about his sexual trysts, there nevertheless remains a certain impropriety in his proposal. For instance, as we saw in Chapter 2, a boy could be disenfranchised for the contravention of social and legal standards of sexual conduct, including submitting to sexual advances. Importantly, we find also that a seducer—such as the non-lover portrayed in Lysias’ speech—would have been subject to considerable risk. As Cohen writes, while “there was no law prohibiting an Athenian male from consummating a sexual relationship without using force or payment”, there was still the possibility that “homosexual intercourse between a man and a boy was prosecutable by the boy’s family under the law of hubris.”210 This would have posed a serious danger for the man given that similar acts especially if committed through persuasion or seduction would have carried the possibility of death.211 Despite the non-lover’s repeated promise to act discreetly for the boy’s sake,212 it is clear that his promise of discretion is meant to conceal their sexual relationship because of the

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208 Here, ‘control’ is κρείττων αὐτῷ power, rather than σοφροσύνη. As we shall see in some detail below, the former is viewed in Phaedrus as an explicitly human achievement and is therefore held in low regard compared to the latter which, being a virtue, calls to mind the divine.
209 Phdr. 231e2-232a5
210 Cohen (1991), 176-177. However, sex with a boy procured by force or through payment was dealt with strictly under the laws of hubris and prostitution.
211 Again, a detail examined in Chapter 2.
212 The non-lover argues “Besides, it’s inevitable that a lover will be found out: many people will see that he devotes his life to following the boy he loves…but they won’t even begin to find fault with people for spending time together if they are not lovers” Phdr. 232a6-b4.
real danger faced by a man pursing a boy for pleasure. Consequently, the non-lover’s ‘control over himself’ and his preference for discretion in sexual matters, far from serving the interests of the boy, rather, serve to protect the pleasure-seeking non-lover from legal or moral recrimination. This is but a single example of the non-lover’s self-regarding motive masquerading as other-regarding beneficence. We will examine the non-lover in greater detail in upcoming sections.

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**ii) Socrates’ First Speech: The Wily Lover**

Since Socrates recants his first speech and offers the palinode as ‘purification’ for the impiety shown toward eros, there is a question among commentators regarding the very purpose of the first speech in the dialogue. Some, like Brown and Coulter, contend that in this speech “Plato is sketching a certain type of rhetorical sophist whose philosophy (or more accurately ‘philodoxy’) is totally unPlatonic.” Others such as Calvo see the first speech as serving to unify the dialogue by showing first that “Rhetoric cannot avoid looking at the genus ‘epithumia

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\[215\] It should be clear then, that Nussbaum does not fully take into account the implications of the potential charge of *hubris* against the non-lover when she adduces the following analogy to explain his proposal. She writes: “I think it will help us to have a sense of the force of Lysias’s advice if we imagine the analogous choices faced by a young woman entering a male-dominated profession in which she knows she will be spending the rest of her life. For in our culture, it is clearly (in terms of the numbers) such a woman who is most likely to be in Phaedrus’ sexual position, more or less surrounded by ‘suitors’ who are more powerful and more established than she is…. If we imagine what a concerned feminist would say to such a young woman (or what she would say to herself) we will be on the way to understanding what is serious about Lysias. Nussbaum (1986), 207-8. Note too, her assumption that the non-lover’s speech is addressed to Phaedrus.

\[214\] Rosen’s examination of the non-lover’s motive is revealing. He concludes (contrary to the view later expressed by Nussbaum) that the non-lover’s proposal, far from liberating the boy and his suitor from conventional mores and offering some genuine advantage to the boy, is instead a corrupting influence. “It is the vulgarity and bestiality of the non-lover’s position, and not his freedom from desire, that makes his suit more advantageous. In fact, the non-lover is moved by Eros, but by a very low form of Eros. The success of his argument turns upon the possession of wealth, and the capacity to corrupt the young by employing the *technē* of rhetoric to excite greed rather than lust. The non-lover is in fact a concealed lover, however base a lover.” Rosen (1969), 435. Although (as this chapter will reveal) I have greater sympathy with Rosen’s position, my focus will be on the expression of self- or other-regarding eros in the types of lovers examined.

\[215\] Brown and Coulter (1971), 405. This paper is a detailed account of the Isocratean influence in the rhetoric of the first speech, although the authors are careful to point out that “We are not here insisting on finding Isocrates himself behind the middle speech of the *Phaedrus*. For the present case it suffices to show that rhetorical culture generally, with its tendency to reject Platonic intellectualism, tended also to reject its intellectualist definition of the virtues and education.” Brown and Coulter (1971), 414.
hedonon’ [desire for pleasure], with the necessary consequence that “the technical incompetence of Rhetoric arises from its own moral misery.” (Calvo 1992, 59)

But when Calvo remarks that, “compared to the Lysianic speech, the speech in the Socratic tale was certainly better from a technical point of view” (Calvo 1992, 59), he risks obscuring a key point in the text with his praise. For, Socrates never claims to be able to give a better speech—only one that is “different” (hetera) and “not inferior” (meceiwrw).216 Looking again at the text, it is Phaedrus who presumes that Socrates has just promised to give a better speech than Lysias: “You’ve just promised to make another speech making more points, and better (hetera) ones…” (Phdr. 235d6-7). If we take the over-translation of hetera together with Phaedrus’ remark, it is understandable why many commentators view Socrates’ first speech as competing to surpass Lysias’ rhetoric.217

Far from competing with Lysias, the speeches that follow complete Lysias’ speech by imagining the influence of a desire for pleasure on the psyche of the lover and wily lover.218 The ‘different’ and ‘not inferior’ speech of Socrates is, I submit, an exercise designed to work-out the implications of eros understood as a desire for pleasure. In what follows, we see that Socrates’ ‘not inferior’ speech points to grave problems for the hedonistic lover.

Notably, the wily lover is a Socratic construct. Our introduction to the wily lover occurs in the first half of Socrates first speech—a speech which Phaedrus forces him to deliver. By Socrates’ own account, the wily lover’s conception of eros is entirely self-regarding and yet, this

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216 Phdr. 235c7. hetera in our translation is rendered as “better” rather than “not inferior”—a slight but important over-translation.

217 In Chapter 4 of his impressive study of Phaedrus, even Ferrari is tempted into interpreting Socrates’ first speech as competing with Lysias. Accordingly, he subtitles a section of that chapter “Socrates to Compete” Ferrari (1990), 95ff.

218 We should note that the lover, wily lover and non-lover share the basic view that “love (erwv) is some kind of desire (epiyumi;a)” Phdr. 237d4. It is an unsophisticated view of eros, one which (as we shall see) has dire consequences for the boy who is the object of desire.
lover presents himself as having genuine care for his beloved. Practically speaking, the wily lover differs from the non-lover in that his criticism of the lover is *disingenuous*. For, the wily lover, as Socrates reports, is in reality a lover who cunningly takes on the guise of the non-lover.

There was once a boy, a youth rather, and he was very beautiful, and he had many lovers. One of them was wily (αυλούντης) and had persuaded him that he was not in love, *though he loved the lad no less than the others.*

Seen in this light, the wily lover’s speech in which he passionately condemns the lover is a stunning self-indictment since his aim is not merely to *appear* to be a non-lover, but primarily to *disguise* the fact that he is a lover. Presumably, if there were a more effective way of attaining his objective, the wily lover would appear in the guise best suited to achieving his aim. His desire to portray himself as a non-lover arises only because as a lover, his yearning is a *sexual* desire for his young quarry. Consequently, he is willing to employ any means necessary to achieve his goal. Were it not for the fact that, as Socrates reports, “he loved the lad no less than the others”, the wily lover would *appear* indistinguishable from the non-lover. The wily lover is in truth a hybrid; he is a duplicitous man whose erotic passion has paradoxically driven him to mask his true persona and denounce madness in the hope indulging his sexual appetite.

Looking more closely at the wily lover’s argument, we see that it is largely a re-working of the Lysianic non-lover’s indictment of the lover. Beginning with the proposition that “love is some kind of desire” (*Phdr.* 237d4), the wily lover posits a bi-partite conception of the soul, pitting the unreasoning “inborn (ἐμφυτός) desire for pleasure” against “our acquired judgment (ἐπικτήτος) that pursues what is best (ἀριστού)” (*Phdr.* 237d8-9).

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219 So, while it is conceivable that a non-lover might both present himself as a non-lover and *believe* that he is a non-lover (because he doesn’t understand the nature of his own desire), a wily lover is fully self-conscious of his scheming nature.

220 *Phdr.* 237b2-4 (emphasis added)

221 Hackforth calls attention to this bipartite model and compares this with the models advanced in *Republic* and *Timaeus*. He sums up his view: “It seems probable that Plato is here using non-technical language, and that the antithesis of (ἐπικτήτος) and (ἐμφυτός) is popular rather than philosophical. We should remember that
satisfied with a simple reformulation of the non-lover’s critique. His appraisal is a rebuke not
only of the unreasoning lover who gives himself over to the madness of eros, but of eros itself!

The unreasoning (unreasoning love) desire that overpowers a person’s considered
impulse to do what is right and is driven to take pleasure in beauty…this desire, all
conquering in its forceful drive, takes its name from the word for force (rhômê) and is
called erôs”. (238b9-c4)

Leaving aside the fanciful etymology, the extraordinary claim that eros is simply an unreasoning
desire certainly diminishes its noble force. But the wily lover deals his most devastating blow to
the power of erotic madness in his suggestion that the desire for pleasure arising from eros is not
only a sign of irrationality, but tantamount to sexual hubris: “[W]hen desire takes command in us
and drags us without reasoning toward pleasure, then its command is known as ‘outrageousness’
(outrageousness)” (Phdr. 238a1-3). The suggestion that sexual hubris arises only when “desire drags us
without reasoning toward pleasure” is of course, calculated to implicitly suggest that in the
contrary position—when desire drags us with reasoning toward pleasure—there is no question of
impropriety or sexual hubris. However, in light of what we have said in relation to the non-lover
above, it is apparent that the wily lover would be no less liable to the charge of hubris than the
non-lover.

Finally, the wily lover betrays his unalloyed self-interest in suggesting “when judgment is
in control and leads us by reasoning toward what is best, that sort of self-control (self-control)
is

Socrates is not speaking in propria persona, but as a mouthpiece of an imaginary (imaginary
genius); we should therefore not attach much importance to discrepancy with Plato’s normal psychological and epistemological terms.”
Hackforth(1952), 41. While it might be of little importance in light of Plato’s ‘normal psychological and
epistemological terms’, it is not without importance in this dialogue. For, if we imagine the principles of desire and
acquired judgement as opposites along a continuum, we might suppose that the wily lover is proposing a zero-sum
model of desire: the greater one’s ‘acquired judgement’ in determining what is best, the weaker the influence of
desire for pleasure’ (and of course, vice-versa).
called ‘being in your right mind’ (swfrosu;nh)” (Phdr. 237e2-4). This is a repetition of the formula used by the non-lover which, as we have already said, shall be examined below.

**iii) Socrates’ First Speech: The Lover**

Although Socrates turns his attention in his first speech from the wily lover to the lover, we should be clear about the kind of lover that is under consideration. We have already seen that the wily lover is, by Socrates’ reckoning, a lover in disguise. Our concern here is to focus on Socrates’ intention in the second part of the first speech (Phdr. 238d7ff), especially as it relates to the lover. Socrates sets out to accomplish two things: first, he considers “what benefit or harm is likely to come from the lover or non-lover to the boy who gives him favors (carizome;nwj)” (Phdr. 238e2-3); second, he sheds light on “the benefit or harm…that will come from a lover’s care and company (omili;a te kai epitropei;a)” (Phdr. 239e1-2).

In light of the critical assessment of Lysias’ non-lover and the ironic defense of the deceitful wily lover, we might be forgiven for presuming that Socrates’ estimation of the lover should prove favourable. After all, Socrates both claims to be an expert in the matters of love.

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222 We should note that the text reads: [гиги] thus, we ought to prefer the translation “its power is called self-control”. Our translators have chosen to loosely offer [гиги] as “self-control” and “being in your right mind” for [гиги] although the latter is more conventionally rendered as ‘self-control’.

223 It is important to remember that the lover of this first speech and the lover that we shall meet in the palinode are not to be conflated. Here we shall treat only the lover of the first speech. Socrates’ depiction of this lover springs from the conception eros (which is first enunciated by the wily lover) as “some kind of desire” Phdr. 237d4. A more nuanced treatment of eros in the palinode begins by first assigning to eros a divine origin: “But if Love is a god or something divine—which he is—he can’t be bad in any way; and yet our speeches just now spoke of his as if he were” Phdr. 242d15-e2. With this said, Socrates poses a challenge: “our opponent must show that love is not sent by the gods as a benefit to the boy and his lover.” Phdr. 245b6-7. What we will ultimately find in the palinode is that in every case where lovers recognize the divine nature of eros—regardless of whether they become philosophical—the lover and his beloved benefit in some way. Where divine eros goes unrecognized as operative in the association of a boy and his pursuer (as in the case of the non-lover who stresses reason over eros and mania) the result is detrimental to the beloved’s flourishing.

224 Famously, of course, Socrates claims to have been schooled by Diotima: “She is the one who taught me the art of love (еμе та еρωτικα ηδιδαχεν)” he tells his fellow symposiasts. Symp. 201d4-5
and is variously portrayed as a lover of young boys. However, his criticism of the lover is not only unfavourable, but withering. The lover’s actions, we find, exceed mere scheming and are positively injurious to the boy’s flourishing. In fact, by Socrates’ account, the lover’s likelihood of consummating his sexual desire increases in proportion to his success in subjugating the boy. Of course, no lover would admit to this. If however, gratification of sexual desire is taken as a measure of a lover’s success, then there is no more effective or more complete strategy than the one Socrates imagines in his depiction of the lover.

Socrates’ absurd proposal is that a lover who desires a boy must seek to promote the diminishing of boy’s psyche, the enfeebling of his body, and the undermining of his material circumstances. Paradoxically then, the lover can only securely possess a beautiful boy by reducing the object of his erotic desire to a state of slavish ignorance and dependence. As Socrates remarks, “It is surely necessary that a man who is ruled by desire (ἐπιθυμητικός) and is a slave to pleasure (δουλευτικός) will turn his boy into whatever is

225 In the opening scene of Phaedrus, Phaedrus deems his conversation with Lysias worthy of Socrates’ attention: “In fact, Socrates, you’re the right person to hear the speech that occupied us, since, in a roundabout way, it was about love. It is aimed at seducing a young boy…” Phdr. 227c2-3. Phaedrus, at least, gives the reader the impression that Socrates ought to be interested because the conversation was about seducing young boys. Note also the opening line of Alcibiades where Socrates proclaims: “I was the first man to fall in love with you, son of Clinias”. Further, Plato deliberately portrays him as vulnerable to the youthful beauty of Charmides. “[A]nd although I thought it would be perfectly easy to talk to him [sc. Charmides], I found my previous brash confidence quite gone….[A]nd when everyone in the palaestra surged all around us in a circle, my noble friend, I saw inside his cloak and caught on fire and was quite beside myself (οὐκετεν έμαυτου)”. Chrm. 155c7-d5

226 Phdr. 239b8
most pleasing to himself.” (*Phdr. 238e3-5*). Eros thus conceived is purely acquisitive and sacrifices the boy’s intellect in the interest of the lover’s sexual desire.

Naturally, one might adduce examples of some lover whose sexual desire is tempered by a measure of concern for his boy. Likewise, one might go on to cite countless instances where such a lover proved faithful to his word and bestowed benefits in return for his boy’s favours. But, if we allow ourselves to imagine (along with Socrates) how a man wholly ruled by desire would conduct himself, the lover in the second-half of Socrates’ first speech seems a complete specimen.

Seen through the lens of Socrates’ critical view, the cultural notion of the lover as an ennobling influence on the beloved is subverted by Socrates’ glaring assessment of the lover as harmful to the beloved’s physical, moral and intellectual success. The light of Socrates’ scrutiny exposes the lover’s carefully contrived image as a mask: one that cunningly portrays the lover’s endless petitions, promises and pledges as beneficence toward the boy. The truth of the lover’s self-regarding action is only borne out when his desire for the boy’s physical beauty causes him to recklessly ravage the boy’s most valuable possession: his soul.

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227 *Phdr. 238e2-3*. Despite Socrates’ stated objective of dealing with the benefits and harm to the boy, his depiction of the lover is unremittingly negative. There is an additional irony in this remark: while the lover seeks to make a slave of his boy, it is the lover himself whose very character is that of a man who is a slave to pleasure.

228 It is, I submit, the same type of acquisitive eros which we have already discussed in connection with Alcibiades’ failed attempt to possess Socrates. *Cf.* below § “Acquisitive Eros”

229 Significantly, this stands in stark contrast to Socrates’ later recommendation for the philosophical lover: that he “[treat] the boy like his very own god, building him up ([κατακοσμεῖ]) and adorning ([τεκτάνεται]) him as an image to honor ([τιμήσων]) and worship ([οργίσων]).” *Phdr. 252e1-2*
C. Other-Regarding Eros: *The Philosophical Lover*

In contrast to these self-serving and predatory pursuers of boys, *Phaedrus* also presents us with a counterpoint to the sexually-driven eroticism of the lover, non-lover and wily lover: the philosophical lover. In the course of Socrates’ critique of the lover we see the first suggestion that the persona embodying the *philosophical lover* differs meaningfully from the other types of lovers. Arguing that the lover’s possessiveness will invariably drive him to intellectually hobble his boy (for fear that the young man might develop an independent mind), Socrates reflects on the threatened lover’s likely tactic:

The necessary consequence then, is that he will be jealous and keep the boy away from the good company of anyone who would make a better man of him; and that will cause him [sc. the boy] a great deal of harm, especially if he keeps him away from what would most improve his mind—and that is, in fact, divine philosophy… (*Phdr.* 239b1-5)

The ‘good company’ of a helpful associate skilful enough to exercise a boy’s mind with divine philosophy suggests a person capable of delivering the benefits so often pledged by lovers and non-lovers alike. However, what distinguishes the philosophical lover from the others is not his record of honouring pledges or promises, but the fact that *he seeks no favour* from the boy beyond the boy’s willingness to engage in dialectic. Thus, the favour that a philosophical lover seeks is coincident with the benefit he returns to the boy: philosophical discussion.

This *other-regarding* concern is again suggested when, in the course of his palinode (*Phdr.* 244a5ff), Socrates describes the fate of the souls that have led lives of justice:

In fact, no soul returns to the place from which it came for ten thousand years, since its wings will not grow before then, except for the soul of a man who practices philosophy

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230 As the text suggests, it is not merely that philosophy will make him a “better man”, but that it would “most make him a man.” In light of the context of subjugation and dominance, the value of philosophy seems rather too important to gloss over as a simple ‘improvement’ for the boy; philosophy here is capable of turning vulnerable boys into capable men.
The man who ‘loves boys philosophically’ arises, on Socrates’ account, from the best sort of soul: the one “who will become a lover of wisdom (μιμαί) or of beauty (μακαλου), or who will be cultivated in the arts (μουσικος) and prone to erotic love (ερωτικος) (Phdr. 248d3-4). In light of the fact that the philosopher seeks discussion with his young interlocutors as its own reward, it is not surprising that philosophical lover is set apart from the others in that his expression of eros is not sexual, but intellectual. Accordingly, the philosopher’s particular erotic desire is consummated by exercising his love of wisdom and beauty through dialectic—an activity which by its very nature aims primarily at stimulating his interlocutor’s independence of mind.  

This inclination stands in direct contrast to the method and motives of the other lovers who understand how philosophy might strengthen the intellect of his beloved. Thus, among the latter, each strives to keep his boy from improving his mind through divine philosophy.

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231 Citing Hackforth, Rowe concurs with the opinion that the man who ‘practices philosophy without guile’ is the same person that ‘loves boys philosophically’. “These are not two different persons any more than the philokalos [lover of beauty], mousikos and erotikos were different from the philosophos at 248d2.” Rowe (1988), 181-2. Rowe adds: “We can then attach a clear meaning to ‘without guile’: philosophy means conversation, and the true philosopher’s conversation will be without ulterior motive.” Rowe (1988), 182

232 Here, I understand μουσικος as Rowe does: “devoted to the Muses” Rowe (1988), 182, rather than narrowly as ‘musical’. Thus the present translation “cultivated in the arts” loosely captures the spirit of μουσικος. Socrates’ later remarks however, convey a more intimate relationship between philosophy and the soul inspired by the muses. Conveying the myth of the cicadas to Phaedrus, Socrates tells his young interlocutor that the cicadas testify to Calliope and Urania who “preside over the heavens and all discourse, human and divine, and sing with the sweetest voice” regarding all those who “who honor their special kind of music (μουσικος) by leading a philosophical life (μουσικος) Phdr. 259d5-8

233 ‘Primarily’, that is, since a basic condition of his being a dialectical midwife is that Socrates is ‘barren’. 

131
II. The Faces of Eros

A. Introduction

To this point our main focus has been the way in which a lover (of any type) appears to his beloved. We have dubbed this presentation the mask of eros. In this section we examine the face of eros—that is, the conception of eros that drives each type of lover. In what follows, we take the self-regarding lovers as driven by either rational or acquisitive eros, while the philosophical lover, by his use both seductive and philosophical eros, seeks to turn his beloved toward philosophy.

Much of this chapter is given over to an examination of the themes of madness, myth and virtue-driven psyche of the philosophical lover. However, the sections that treat rational and acquisitive eros, though brief, are an important counterpoint in which we see how scheming lovers compromise the critical capacity of the boy. As we find, what distinguishes rational and acquisitive eros is the way in which the lover in question either embraces or rejects madness in the account of eros. We turn our attention then, to the conception of that Lysias introduces in his speech.

B. ‘Rational’ Eros

By now we should understand that the non-lover embraces eros, but strictly as a rational enterprise. Though his view of eros is ultimately defective, we cannot dismiss the persuasiveness of the rational non-lover’s argument out of hand. Although the modern reader might be alarmed by the blunt pragmatism of Lysias’ pleasure-driven non-lover, the beloved to whom the speech is addressed would not have been immediately put off by the self-regarding tenor of the speech. Quite plainly, the relationship between lover and beloved would have been

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234 ‘Defective’, that is, from the philosophical lover’s vantage point.
governed by an asymmetry of expectations. For the beloved in such relationships was viewed as a purely passive erotic partner; he would have had no expectation of being fulfilled emotionally and was not meant to be an erotic partner in any modern sense. Whatever affection he might have had for his benefactor would have been purely incidental to the real reason for his association with a lover: material benefit. Thus, the non-lover’s speech is intended to appeal to a boy whose understanding of such relationships is as mercenary and calculating as the prospective non-lover.\textsuperscript{235}

On the non-lover’s account, the lover stands apart from the rational non-lover in his embodiment of eros as an ‘illness’. The non-lover argues that “A lover will admit that he’s more sick than sound in the head (\textsuperscript{nous\, kai\, swfr\, onhn}). He’s well aware that he is not thinking straight; but he’ll say he can’t get himself under control. So, when he does start to think straight (\textsuperscript{nous\, kai\, swfr\, onhn}), why would he stand by decisions he had made when he was sick?” (\textit{Phdr.} 231d2-6). There is something prophetic in the non-lover’s assessment; for, in the conclusion of Socrates’ first speech, we find that the lover’s sentimentality has been washed away and his psyche has undergone a sea-change: “by the time he [i.e., the lover] should pay up, he has made a change and installed a new ruling government in himself: right-minded reason (\textsuperscript{nous\, kai\, swfr\, onhn}) in place of the madness (\textsuperscript{mani;av}) of love.” (\textit{Phdr.} 241a3-5).

Socrates’ account of the lover’s predicament once the “new ruling government” of reason has been installed shows the lover to be suffering from an irreconcilable bifurcation of the psyche: once he has abandoned the stupefying effects of eros, he is a different man (\textsuperscript{a/llov\, 235 I would question whether Phaedrus is such a person. While Phaedrus is full of praise for Lysias’ speech (\textit{Phdr.} 235b1ff), the dialogue gives us no reason to believe that he was persuaded by it. As a lover of speeches, Phaedrus is equally impressed by Socrates’ first and his second speech—despite their wildly contradictory stances regarding eros. If we take seriously Socrates’ claim that Phaedrus is an insatiable lover of speeches, we must be prepared to countenance the view that he can praise Lysias without being persuaded by him. Perhaps we are meant to see that Socrates holds out hope for Phaedrus in his exhortation to philosophy delivered at the end of the palinode (257a3ff).}
he is ashamed of his old mindless regime and afraid of acting as he had before: he has become a refugee fleeing from old promises. In short, the pursuer is now pursued; reneging on his unfulfilled favours, he is humiliated by the actions of his ‘former’ self.

Though both deploy reason in their respective schemes, the non-lover and lover do so in very different ways. One seeks a boy who can be rationally persuaded to transact pleasure for profit while the other embraces reason only after he has profited from the boy’s pleasures.

C. Acquisitive Eros: Cultivating Defects in the Beloved

While the non-lover seeks to make his boy pliant through reasoned force of argument, the lover’s “mindless” conduct compels him to use other means to secure the boy’s favours. As Socrates surveys “what benefit or harm is likely to come from the lover…” (Phdr. 238e2-3), it becomes evident that the lover is driven by a complex of psychological motives. Above all else, the lover seeks to promote his own advantage by conspiring to keep his boy from philosophy. As Socrates tells Phaedrus, “it is necessary for a lover to keep his boy a great distance away” from divine philosophy “out of fear the boy will eventually come to look down

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236 Phdr. 241a6-b5
237 I borrow the phrase ‘acquisitive eros’ from Scott and Welton who employ it as a shorthand for the sort of eros exemplified by Alcibiades. “But Alcibiades’ acquisitive Erōs is representative of that of imperial Athens—greedy for honor, for power, for gain, filled with hubris, in short, incapable of order or restraint” Scott & Welton (2007), 158. Scott further illustrates the possessive nature of ‘acquisitive eros’ by commenting on the relationship of Socrates and Alcibiades. He writes: “It is therefore likely that Alcibiades’ attempt to gain advantage over Socrates stems from the same corrosive impulse that, for Plato, is symptomatic of the acquisitive Eros and its insatiable appetite for possession.” Scott & Welton (2007), 125. We should take care to point out that (while Plato surely would agree with Scott’s assessment) the phrase ‘acquisitive eros’ is itself not Platonic, but has its philosophical roots in Anders Nygren’s Agape and Eros (1932).
on him (καταφρονήσαναι)."

Crucially, the success of the lover’s self-interested machination turns on his ability to further the image of himself to his boy as an infallible authority, as both “mentor and companion (μentor καὶ διδάσκαλος)” (Phdr. 239c3) to the youth whom he wishes to mentally enfeeble and turn into a compliant beloved. To this end, he must deploy any stratagem necessary to keep his boy ignorant and dependent. His fondest hope is that so long as this psychological condition persists in his boy there is little chance that philosophy will take hold. With this in mind, we turn to reflect on the multitude of ways in which the lover aims to achieve his goal.

i) **Acquiring a Beloved**

The key to the lover’s strategy is to find a boy whose mind, body and possessions he can exploit. Since the lover cannot bear being held in contempt or being despised, he is liable to “see anyone who is equal or superior to him as an enemy (ἐχεῖν)” (Phdr. 238e6-239a1).

Accordingly, the lover seeks a boy who is ignorant, a coward, an ineffective speaker and slow-witted. The lover’s preference, of course, is that his beloved be inferior by nature (ξυναυλίζει); however, he stands ready to *make* his boy inferior by fostering or supplying (παρασκευάζει)

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238 *Phdr. 239b5-7*. Hackforth prefers “contempt” for καταφρονήσαναι. Fowler and Rowe each offer “being despised”. My preference is for καταφρονήσαναι to be understood in this stronger sense. The risk of the boy coming to philosophy is not just that he is liable to disapprovingly ‘look down upon’ his lover, but that philosophy will lead the boy to feel contempt and indeed, make the lover appear despicable. For both of these senses cf. *LSJ s.v. katafroneō*.

239 "He [sc. the lover] will have to invent other ways, too, of keeping the boy in total ignorance and dependence on himself” *Phdr. 239b7-8*

240 For a fuller discussion of this tripartite division of goods, see Rees (1972), 327-36

241 "Now the ignorant man (ἀγνώστος) is inferior to the wise one, the coward (δειλός) to the brave, the ineffective speaker (ἀπαθός) to the trained orator, the slow-witted (βραδύς) to the quick” *Phdr. 239a4-6*
these mental defects (κακωματα) as a prophylactic measure against curiosity, wonder, philosophy and most critically, independence.\textsuperscript{242}

Turning to the physical aspect of the beloved, Socrates’ description of the lover’s ideal characterizes the boy as delicate and feeble; he is disinclined to rigorous exercise and can be easily guided into a life of idleness. The lover seeks, in other words, a boy who is by nature physically fragile or one who will passively allow himself to be made so. Socrates brings the image of this boy into relief for Phaedrus:

You will see that what he [the lover] wants is someone who is soft (μαλαικον),\textsuperscript{243} not muscular (ουστερον),\textsuperscript{244} and not trained in full sunlight but in dappled shade—someone who has never worked out like a man (σεβασμος), never touched hard, sweaty exercise. Instead he goes for a boy who has known only a soft unmanly (ανδρους)\textsuperscript{245} style of life, who makes himself pretty because he has no natural color at all. (Phdr. 239c6-d3)

From the point of view of physical stature, Socrates concludes, “a lover wants in his boy [a body] that will give confidence (θαρρουσι) to the enemy in a war or other great crisis while causing alarm (φοβουσι) to friends and even to his lovers.” (Phdr. 239d5-7). As to the additional psychological effect that ‘causing alarm in friends’ and ‘giving confidence to the enemy’ might have on a boy, we can only speculate.

Having considered the lover’s impact on a boy’s mind and body, Socrates turns finally to evaluate the effect of a lover on a boy’s possessions. “His first wish” Socrates tells Phaedrus,

\textsuperscript{242} “By necessity, a lover will be delighted to find all these mental defects (κακωματα and more, whether acquired or innate (κακωματα) in his boy; and if he does not, he will have to supply (κακωματα) them or else lose the pleasure of the moment.” Phdr. 239a5-7

\textsuperscript{243} μαλαικον should be understood not merely as ‘soft’, but as ‘effeminate’ and even ‘cowardly’ cf. LSJ s.v. μαλαικος

\textsuperscript{244} In light of the sexual context, ‘hard’, ‘stiff’ or ‘virile’, (Cf. LSJ s.v. ουστερον) seem apt in place of ‘muscular’. After all, the consistent picture here is of a lover seeking a physically submissive subject; presumably the lover would wish also for his boy to lack any sexual aggression of his own. Thus he seeks a boy who his not ουστερον

\textsuperscript{245} This, in contrast to Theaetetus (for instance) who is physically taut, manly and intellectually courageous.
“will be for a boy who has lost his dearest, kindliest and godliest possessions (kthma;ton)246—his mother and father and other close relatives.” (Phdr. 239e3-4). There is a certain plausibility to this claim since, if the lover’s objective in pursuing his boy is to “pluck his sweet fruit” (Phdr. 240a8), a guardian or overseer might stifle his plan. Likewise, there is also some reasonableness to the claim that the boy’s poverty will prove an advantage for a lover since “wealth in a boyfriend will cause his lover to envy him, while his poverty will be a delight” (Phdr. 240a5-6).247

ii) The Lover’s Paradox

However, we should pause to question the plausibility of Socrates’ proposal. That a lover should purposely wish to amplify a boy’s deficiencies and further injure him by fostering bodily neglect seems as paradoxical as it is absurd. Even if we allow ourselves to imagine a scheming, ill-intentioned lover set on capturing a boy by impairing his intellectual abilities, the notion that such a lover would additionally seek to destroy a boy’s beautiful body which, in the first instance, is the very reason he finds the boy attractive, is not simply counter intuitive but an aim that runs contrary to the ultimate gratification of the lover’s sexual desire. As we hinted at earlier in this chapter, the intentional corruption of the boy’s beauty—corporeal or intellectual—results in what we might term a ‘lover’s paradox’: as the lover increasingly succeeds with his mental and physical subjection of the boy, his possession of the boy is increasingly secured. But to the extent that the lover succeeds in his aim, the boy’s beauty (and hence, his desirability) decreases proportionally.

246 kthma;ton…[is] being interpreted in a wide sense to include relatives and friends.” Hackforth (1952), 42
247 As we saw in Chapter 3, Theaetetus is not wealthy but he carries himself in a manner that reflects his noble birth and bearing.
If we entertain for a moment that such a lover were to find success in carrying out his scheme, could a beloved of such reduced circumstances nevertheless serve as an object of desire? At least from the perspective of historical convention, there is little chance that the diminished beloved envisioned by Socrates would ever have served as an object of admiration or desire for any conventional lover. In fact, the historical evidence regarding the mien of the beloved offers a portrait of the *eromenos* not as weak and acquiescent but instead as the sort of intellectual and physical ideal realized in Platonic characters such as Charmides,\(^{248}\) Lysis,\(^{249}\) Agathon\(^{250}\) and even Alcibiades. Plato’s characterization of these individuals is consistent with historical testimony and substantiates a conception of the ideal beloved that is completely at odds with the picture offered by Socrates. Dover addresses precisely this point in his commentary on Aiskhines:

> [T]he boys with whom men fall in love, and over whom they fight in rivalry…are those who would be regarded by the public at large, of either sex and any age and ‘inclination’, as exceptionally good-looking; they include outstanding athletes, and since erastai are attracted to the gymnasium it seems that a sun-tanned skin and good muscular development must have been regarded as attractive attributes. (Dover 1978, 69)

Naturally, this is a generalization; doubtless, there are examples of lovers who have been smitten by some rather unlovely and unintelligent young boy. What is at issue here is not whether Dover’s observation is falsifiable, but whether Socrates’ critique of the lover *plausibly* outlines the sort of beloved *preferred* and *pursued* by a lover. On this point, Dover’s observations echo the overwhelming and definitive literary evidence.

\(^{248}\) *Cf. Charmides* 154bff

\(^{249}\) *Cf. Lysis* 207aff

\(^{250}\) At *Symposium* 212e Alcibiades calls Agathon “the cleverest and best looking man in town” (*Symp.* 212e9-10) and a moment later accuses Socrates of contriving to sit next to the young tragedian “the most handsome man in the room” *Symp.* 213c6
If, as we have said, the lover’s objective is to dominate, his method and motive seem well suited to achieving his end. But as a matter of social practise, a physically, mentally and materially impoverished boy would never have served as a desirable beloved. The currency in social status so desperately sought by prospective lovers arose from success in consorting with beautiful, wealthy and privileged young boys. Again, Hubbard brings clarity to the issue.

The most desirable boys were precisely those from elite families, like Alcibiades or Timarchus, and the goal of a pedagogical mentorship was not to objectify and subordinate them, but to advance their socialization into the elite male world of the symposium and athletics, and eventually politics and the life of the mind. Indeed, it was to make them as much like their lover as possible, a true mirror image. Only in this sense did a lover have a power over his beloved, but any beloved who did not like the way he was treated in any other respect could easily find another lover, and the evidence is that they frequently did, even with no provocation. (Hubbard 2003, 12)

Even on the assumption that the manipulative lover imagined by Socrates succeeds in dominating his beloved in the manner described by Socrates (thus, pace Hubbard, undermining the apparent autonomy of the beloved), such a youth would be seen as undesirable not just for his mental and physical defects, but perhaps more so because of the social opprobrium arising from a prospective lover’s mere association with such a boy. After all, regardless of what any one lover may wish to accomplish by harming a boy for personal gain, the burden he bears for his mad pursuit is the collective reproach of his peers.

Still, for the sake of argument, it is not unreasonable to assume that a lover might harbour a secret wish to control and manipulate his beloved in the manner described by Socrates. After all, if Hubbard is correct in his claim that a beloved could quit his lover without provocation, it could prove useful for a lover to influence his beloved by either persuasion or force in order to prevent the youth from breaking their association. This would be especially true where the beloved was a very desirable boy such as Timarchus or Alcibiades. Such a lover would promote
the cultivation of a boy’s body and soul and possessions (as described by Hubbard) but at the same time, would do so only to the point that his care and education of the boy might threaten to spark his beloved’s independence of mind. What good is there, one might say, in expending one’s effort to mentor a boy if by one’s own pedagogical effort the boy acquires the intellectual mettle to abandon, for whatever reason, his educational benefactor and lover?

The point of this speculative exercise is to demonstrate that eros of the acquisitive lover must always be in some measure self-regarding; whether his aim is sexual pleasure, or simply the honour of associating with a beautiful boy of dignified lineage, desire driven by ‘human madness’ cannot act disinterestedly for the boy’s well-being. Socrates caricature of the Lover as a thoroughgoing destroyer of the boy’s mind, body and possessions is not meant to identify a type, but to sensitize the reader to the tendency in each lover to put his own desire before the good of his beloved. The real and insidious danger comes from the lover who appears to moderate his pleasure-seeking out of ‘care’ for his beloved or from the lover who covertly and subtly directs the education of his youthful beloved with a view to making his own self-interest appear as mutual benefit. The Lover that Socrates presents is simply a distillation of the destructive tendencies found diluted in the very many lovers that one might have commonly encountered in fourth century Athens. The real threat posed by such lovers, at least from the perspective of Socratic eros, would have been the institution of sexual pederasty itself, which enjoyed wide currency as a legitimate and accepted form of paideia.

And so, we return to Socrates’ critique of the lover and his observation that above all else, a beloved’s tuition must remain incomplete: he must be kept from philosophy. If by chance misfortune befalls the boy and he is taken-in by the lover’s persuasion, he will give himself “to a

251 Discussed below
man who is deceitful, irritable, jealous, disgusting, harmful to his property, harmful to his physical fitness and absolutely devastating to the cultivation of his soul, which truly is and always will be, the most valuable thing to gods and men.” (Phdr. 241c4-7).

D. Seductive Eros: Cultivating the Philosophically Erotic Temperament

i) Introduction

Having just considered the corrosive effect of acquisitive eros and the strategies employed by the acquisitive lover to obstruct his beloved’s progress toward philosophy, we turn now to examine how a Socratic conception of eros is directed toward cultivating an interlocutor’s interest in philosophy. Although I have elected to treat this Socratic strategy under the heading ‘seductive eros’, we shall see that Socratic seduction in this sense is entirely other-regarding. Unlike the self-regarding motives of rational and acquisitive lovers, Socratic seduction seeks not to alienate the beloved from philosophy, but to acquaint him with it.²⁵²

While there are a number of texts that illustrate Socratic seduction,²⁵³ I will focus here on Lysis. It strikes me that this dialogue in particular draws together the influence of Socrates’ dialectical method and his protreptic aims against the backdrop of eros. It is especially important to clarify Socrates’ intentions in Lysis since he appears to be demonstrating for the lovelorn Hippothales the method deployed by the acquisitive lover. Our purpose is to show the

²⁵² For instance, in considering Socratic seduction as a facet of his protreptic to philosophy, Scott writes: “Contrary to the accusation that Alcibiades will make in Symposium, the Lysis shows that Socrates’ erotic approach has more in common with an act of seduction than with any kind of assault. In a seduction, the other is mobilized subtly through an arousal that converts passivity to activity. Socrates seduces others by getting them to begin an unfamiliar process.” Scott (2000), 73
²⁵³ E.g., the final act of Symposium; Alcibiades I (which begins with Socrates’ address to Alcibiades: “I was the first man to fall in love with you son of Clinias…); Xenophon’s Memorabilia 4.ii.—a (likely derivative) account of Socrates’ philosophical seduction of a young man named Euthydemos. On this last point, see Kahn (1996).
philosophical intent in Socrates’ demonstration and to explain the apparent symmetry between Socrates’ philosophical seduction and the sexual seduction hoped-for by Hippothales.

ii) Lysis

We have seen how Phaedrus illustrates the many ways in which an acquisitive lover might go about attacking a boy’s mind, body and possessions for the sake of subjugating the boy to himself. We rightly expect then, that Socrates should condemn such a practise. However, Lysis offers an instance of Socratic dialectic in which Socrates’ method appears to mimic the injurious strategy of the lover. For in Lysis, Socrates’ stated aim is to offer a display of how one ought to speak to a beloved in order to capture him. In the opening scene of Lysis, Ctessipus relates to Socrates how a young man, Hippothales, is hopelessly in love with Lysis but has been unsuccessful in seducing him. When Socrates hears that Hippothales has been gushing with all manner of fawning praise for the boy, his rebuke is stern: “Hippothales, you deserve to be ridiculed.” Besides castigating Hippothales for producing what amounts to self-eulogy (two/nti eγkw;mia), Socrates makes the following observation:

[T]he skilled lover doesn’t praise his beloved until he has him: he fears how the future will turn out. And besides, these good-looking boys, if anybody praises them, get swelled heads (fronh;matov empi;mplantai) and start to think they’re really somebody

254 In response to Hippothales’ question “What different advice can you give me about what one should say or do so his prospective boyfriend will like him”, Socrates replies: “If you’re willing to talk with me, I might be able to give you a demonstration of how to carry on a conversation with him instead of talking and singing the way your friends here say you’ve been doing.” Lysis 206c2-8
255 Cf. Lysis 204c3ff
256 Lysis 205d6
257 Burnet: “full of pride”. Since fronh;matov is clearly meant in a bad sense, perhaps ‘arrogance’ or ‘presumption’ would better suit the context. (LSJ s.v. A.2.II)
... And the more swell-headed (megalauco;teroi) they get, the harder they are to catch.  

In the conversation that follows, Socrates engages with both Menexenus and Lysis. However, in short order, Lysis’ friend Menexenus is temporarily removed from the action (Lysis 207d). It is at this juncture that Socrates turns his attention to Lysis himself. With an eye cast toward Hippothales, he capitalizes on Menexenus’ temporary absence to give a “demonstration of how to carry on a conversation” with a beloved (Lysis 206c6-7). In contrast to Hippothales’ lovesick and shameless attempt at seduction through flattery, Socrates strategy of seduction is threefold: to aggressively set about destabilizing the boy’s belief in the goodwill of his family; to undermine his faith in the power of his own intellect, and to debase the value of his possessions. As is the case in all of Socrates’ protreptic conversations, this strategy of destabilization is methodological—it is not meant to demoralize.

In his first salvo Socrates sets about raising suspicion regarding the love that Lysis’ parents have for him. He suggests to the boy that if his parents have designated a slave to watch over him, Lysis is not really in charge of himself—he is a slave’s slave. Intent on keeping his word to Hippothales, Socrates develops this theme of subjection and slavery baiting Lysis further with the observation that his ignorance that makes him a servant to servants. He warns the

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258 Both megalauci;av and megalaucov should be understood as conveying not merely being “really somebody” and “swell-headed” but “boasting, arrogant” in the case of the former (cf. LSJ s.v. megalaucov) and “boastful, vainglorious” for the latter. (cf. LSJ s.v. megalauci;av). What is most critical is that we understand these qualities of mind as being the target of Socrates’ dialectical interrogation of Lysis.

259 Lysis 206a2-7. Aristotle too, anticipates potential difficulties with the friendships of the sort that appear to be developing between Hippothales and Lysis. On the matter of what lovers ought to expect from each other he writes: “In erotic friendships, however, sometimes the lover charges that he loves the beloved deeply and is not loved in return; and in fact perhaps he has nothing loveable in him. The beloved, however, often charges that previously the lover was promising him everything, and now fulfills none of his promises.” N.E. 1164a3-7

260 Socrates to Menexenus: “Naturally, I won’t ask which of you two is richer. For you are friends (fi;;lw), isn’t that so?” Lysis 207c5-6

261 “It seems, then, that your parents think more even of a slave than their own son and trust him rather than you with their property.” Lysis 208b9-10

262 “Pretty strange, a free man directed by a slave.” Lysis 208c9
boy: “in areas where we haven’t got any understanding, no one will trust us to act as we judge best…And there we are going to be subject to the orders of others (ἐξομολογεῖται ὁ λόγος ὑμῶν ἣν γενέσθαι τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐπιτίθεσθαι)’” (Lysis 210b5-c3). By degrees, Socrates guides Lysis to the conclusion that without wisdom he will be perpetually beholden to those who ought to be his inferiors and that as a consequence of this condition, he will be useless.263

The conclusion of Socrates’ examination of Lysis is revealing for a number of reasons, not least for the manner in which Lysis responds to Socrates’ bitter criticism. The assertion that Lysis’ mind is untrained and that therefore he is not high-minded (μεγαθυμοσύνη), that he is ignorant, friendless and a servant to slaves, prompts a candid reply from the boy: “You’ve got me there, Socrates.”(Lysis 210d12). One might expect a spirited and well-born264 interlocutor such as Lysis to show hostility at being dragged about dialectically by Socrates. But it is his cheerful willingness to concede to the conclusion of Socrates’ argument that indicates to us something of the character of the young man. The equanimity evidenced in his simple response—“you’ve got me there”—hints at his receptivity to dialectical investigation. Rather than lash-out at Socrates he gracefully accepts the logic of Socrates’ argument: that the cause of his epistemological failure is a badly trained mind.265

263 “If you become wise, my boy, then everybody will be your friend, everybody will feel close to you, because you will be useful and good. If you don’t become wise, though, nobody will be your friend, not even your father or mother or your close relatives.” Lysis 210d1-4
264 “[Lysis] stood out among the boys and older youths, a garland on his head, and deserved to be called not only a beautiful boy (καλός) but a well-bred (καλάκτιστος) young gentleman.” Lysis 207a2-4. This use of καλός and καλάκτιστος quite evidently an instance in which Socrates is employing the phrase in its conventional usage and not in the novel manner that we explored in Ch. 3.
265 Compare this to the hostility of an interlocutor such as Anytus whose blind attachment to conventional notions of civic virtue prompts him to censure Socrates for his pestering conversational manner: “I think, Socrates, that you speak ill of people. I would advise you, if you will listen to me, to be careful. Perhaps also in another city, and certainly here, it is easier to injure people than to benefit them. I think you know that yourself.” Meno 94e3-6. Other examples here would certainly include Callicles, Thrasymachus and Protagoras.
In identifying the cause of Lysis’ failure, Socrates has also given him the key to his self-improvement; for it is his amenability to criticism and the frankness of his response that makes him a favourable candidate for further discussion. This sort of revelation is the basis for the **gratitude** that Socrates’ philosophical associates feel toward him. It is also, no doubt, the reason why so many young interlocutors feel such a fervent attachment to him.266

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266 There are examples in Plato and related Socratic literature of young associates whose progress toward philosophy is not effortless and whose attitude toward Socratic dialectic is less than accommodating. *Clitophon*, which we briefly considered in Ch. 1 stands out as a particularly good example. In it, we find Clitophon complaining to Socrates that although he is “better than anyone at turning [protrepein] a man toward the pursuit of virtue” (*Clt.* 410b7-8), Socrates’ brand of dialectical philosophy simply cannot deliver what it *seems* to promise—knowledge of virtue. Clitophon muses aloud to Socrates: “there are only two possibilities: either you don’t know it, or you don’t wish to share it with me” *Clt.* 410c6-7. Even when interlocutors are eventually persuaded to the Socratic position, it is not without a deep suspicion of his methods or motives. We read in *Memorabilia* IV.ii for example, that although the youth named Euthydemus eventually realizes that “he would never be of much account unless he spent as much time as possible with Socrates” (*Mem.* IV.ii.40; Tredennick and Waterfield (1990), we find him reticent, if not entirely sceptical, of Socrates’ brand of dialectic at the opening of IV.ii. Perhaps more dramatic than the example of Euthydemus, is the presentation of Alcibiades in *Alcibiades I*. While Alcibiades promises to Socrates at the conclusion of their discussion that “from this day forward I will always attend on you, and you will have me as your constant companion” (*Alc.* 135d9-10), his initial encounter with Socrates has a decidedly different tone. Socrates’ profession of love for the son of Clinas (*Alc.* 103a1) is met with Alcibiades’ rather argumentative reply: “What do you hope to achieve by bothering me, always making so sure you’re there wherever I am? Yes, I really wonder what you might be up to, and I’d be very glad to find out.” *Alc.* 104d2-5. But Socrates is not always prepared to associate with any willing youth; at times in fact, he appears hesitant. Notice his rather unenthusiastic tone as he grudgingly agrees to associate with Theages.

So this is how it is when you associate with me, Theages. If it’s favored by the god, you’ll make great progress; if not you won’t. So think about it; wouldn’t it be safer for you to become educated in the company of somebody who has control over the way he benefits people rather than taking your chances with me? *Thg.* 130e4-8

Undoubtedly, it is his discovery of Theages’ motive for wishing to become educated that gives Socrates pause; “You rascal!” exclaims Socrates, “So you want to be a tyrant over us…” *Thg.* 124e11. *Theaetetus* makes it even more plain that not all comers are eagerly taken up into the Socratic fold. The midwife analogy offers two important examples. One type of interlocutor falls short in a rather basic requirement. As Socrates tells Theaetetus, “at times, Theaetus, I come across people who do not seem to me somehow to be pregnant. Then I realize that they have no need of me, and with the best will in the world I undertake the business of matchmaking… Many of them I have given away to Prodicus; and a great number also to other wise and inspired persons.” *Tht.* 151b1-7. We have already given consideration to the second sort of interlocutor, but it bears repeating since the quality of character displayed is at the heart of a psychological disposition that does not permit protreptic to take hold. We read: “Do you know, people have often before now got into such a state (ou=tw diete;yhsan) with me as to be literally ready to bite (da;knein) when I take away some nonsense (l#ron) from them. *Tht.* 151c6-8. The failure here is not one of intellect, but of a temperament that impedes progress toward philosophy.
iii)  *Lysis’ Lesson in Love*

At this stage, Socrates demonstration of how to ‘catch a boy’ has been carried-out so thoroughly, and his satisfaction at hearing “you’ve got me there, Socrates” is so complete, that he nearly forgets himself. In the narrative frame of the dialogue, we learn Socrates’ thoughts.

Hearing this last answer I glanced over at Hippothales and almost made the mistake of saying: ‘This is how you should talk with your boyfriends, Hippothales, cutting them down to size (ταπεινοίντα) and putting them in their place (συστηλοντα), instead of swelling them up and spoiling them, as you do (κανούντα και διαλυρποντα).’ (*Lysis* 210e1-4).

Perhaps more clearly than any other passage, this Socratic declaration regarding how one ought to speak to a boyfriend appears to place him firmly alongside the acquisitive lover. Taken at face-value, there seems little that separates Socrates from his ignoble counterpart. Predictably, Hippothales interprets Socrates’ demonstration as a rhetorical model of how a lover might go about acquiring and subjugating a beloved. On the other hand, the conclusion of the dialogue reveals that Lysis has interpreted Socrates’ excoriating speech in an altogether different manner. Far from diminishing the psyche of Hippothales’ beloved in order to make the boy more compliant, the conclusion of *Lysis*—especially in the reaction of the participants—reveals the positive, educative effect in Socrates’ demonstration of ‘how one ought to speak to a boyfriend’.

Looking carefully at the final exchange of *Lysis*, Socrates gathers the threads of the argument and begins a summary of the discussion which has to this point largely explored the nature of friendship. However, in his closing proposal, the discussion unexpectedly returns to the theme of possession and subjugation which, as we have seen, are the core of Socrates’ opening criticism of Lysis. Addressing both Menexenus and Lysis, Socrates makes this suggestion: “Then it is what belongs to oneself, it seems, that passionate love (ἐρωτικα) and friendship (φιλία) and desire (ἐπιθυμία) are directed towards, Menexenus and Lysis.” (*Lysis*...
Rather subtly, Socrates has redirected the discussion: though it begins as an inquiry into the nature of ‘friendship’, at its conclusion friendship, love and desire are invoked to illuminate a *different* issue: the question of possession and *who belongs* (ἐφικτός) to whom. With this in mind, Socrates continues:

> And if one person desires another, my boys, or loves him passionately, he would not desire him or love him passionately or as a friend unless he somehow belonged to his beloved either in his soul (εὐθυμία) or in some characteristic (ἐξουσία), habit (ἐθικός) or aspect of his soul (εἴδος). (Lysis 222a1–4)

The reaction of each of Socrates’ young interlocutors is telling: “Certainly, said Menexenus, but Lysis was silent.” (Lysis 222a5). Menexenus happily assents while Lysis, having been earlier sensitized to the oppressive implications of slavery and servitude, is reluctant to embrace the proposition that the lover *belongs* to the beloved. His reticence anticipates his understanding of what, according to Socrates must follow: “what belongs to us by nature (ἐφικτός) has shown itself to us as something we must love (ἀγαπεῖν...λέγει).” (Lysis 222a6–7). Though Lysis now realizes that he cannot agree with Socrates’ conclusion, he does not recoil; instead, he allows the that the conclusion must follow in light of the propositions to which he and Menexenus have assented. Quite coldly he replies “it looks like it.” (Lysis 222a8). But when Socrates further suggests that “the genuine and not the pretended lover must be befriended by his boy” (Lysis 222b1–2), both Lysis and Menexenus seem to understand the nature of the obligation. It is only with the greatest difficulty and reluctance that both boys grant Socrates his point.267

> Satisfied that he has witnessed a virtuoso performance of ‘how to catch a boy’, Hippothales is visibly thrilled by Socrates’ demonstration.268 But because he takes Socrates’ early critique of Lysis and subsequent concluding remarks as an exposition of the acquisitive

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267 “Lysis and Menexenus just managed a nod of assent” *Lysis* 222b3
268 “Hippothales beamed every color of the rainbow in his delight” *Lysis* 222b3–4
lover’s scheming ploy to have the beloved submissively accede to his desires, he does not see the philosophical design in Socrates’ dialectical seduction. Where Hippothales perceives Lysis’ intellectual destabilization as an opportunity for guiding the relationship toward a physical consummation, Socrates views the same destabilizing suggestions as a gauge of his interlocutor’s temperament and receptivity to philosophical discussion. As the divergent objectives of the two lovers set each on a separate course of shaping the intellectual and psychological vulnerabilities created in the beloved, the method of seduction employed by each is now tailored by each to suit his own end. So, the philosopher enjoins his beloved to have care for his own soul and to devote himself to divine philosophy. But the acquisitive lover, having little care for the state of his beloved’s soul, seeks only to make himself the object of his beloved’s affection. Thus, the superficial symmetry between sexual and philosophical seduction is disambiguated by the other-or self-regarding intentions of the lovers.

iv) Cultivating the Mind

Socrates’ ‘attack’ on Lysis—‘cutting him down to size’ and ‘putting him in his place’—differs significantly from the harm inflicted by the acquisitive lover in another important way. As Phaedrus shows us, the acquisitive lover seeks to make his boy into a slave for the purpose of controlling him. But Socrates’ aim in Lysis is to reveal to the boy the ways in which he is already a slave.269 In contrast to the lover whose aim is to harm the boy in any number of ways, the point of Socrates’ critique is to benefit the boy. It is a benefit realized through coming-to, then practising philosophy. But any ‘turning toward’ philosophy depends on the sort of receptiveness to philosophical discussion that we noted above. This is the goal of Socrates’

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269 It is noteworthy that this very self-realization—a result of his Socratic conversations—is what Alcibiades cannot surmount psychologically. In Symposium, he confesses that because he is ‘overcome by the honour of the crowd’ ([παιδευτευω] (Symp. 216b7), he harbours a private shame ([αἰσχύνει] at his slave-like condition ([δραπετεύω]) C.f. Symp. 216b1 passim
critical ‘cutting down’ of Lysis; through it, he seeks to measure the boy’s reaction to the proposal that his untrained mind—that is, his ignorance—stands in the way of his liberation from a life of servitude. Socrates’ test—if we allow ourselves to call it by that name—is not an epistemic test; after all, he does not test Lysis for knowledge. Instead, it is a psychological test. Lysis’ suitability for philosophy has little to do with what knowledge he already possesses but depends instead on the manner in which he conducts himself following Socrates’ constructive critique. We have seen that some interlocutors react violently and are “ready to bite” (Tht. 151c8) when tested in this way by Socrates. But as we saw in the previous chapter, Theaetetus’ recognition of his own ignorance, far from triggering him to withdraw from Socrates’ challenges, rather, fills him with wonder and stimulates him to further inquiry. Others, however, react less than sympathetically to all of Socrates’ challenges and are said to have conducted themselves in a discreditable manner.  

Cultivating a philosophical mind begins with the identification of a philosophical temperament. Whereas the former depends on the intellectual virtue of a suitable mind, the latter hinges on the emotional resilience of a psyche suited to enduring deflating self-realizations. Perhaps most importantly, it depends on one’s willingness to embrace ignorance as the starting point of inquiry.

Naturally, this calls to mind our earlier examination of Alcibiades as depicted in Symposium. If we consider once more Theages, however, we find a report of another young man whose grandiloquent bearding is said to have stood in the way of his progress in philosophy. We hear that a young associate, Thucydides, has fallen out with Socrates on account of some inconsequential matter. Aristides, another of Socrates’ young companions and friend to Thucydides wonders about the dissolution of the relationship. “I hear, Socrates, that Thucydides is rather indignant and irritated (calepai;ein) with you, as if he were someone important…. Doesn’t he know what a slave he was before he began associating with you?” Thg. 130b4-8. We find that Thucydides’ rage—is said to arise from his estimation of himself as ‘someone important’. Tellingly, Aristides bluntly characterizes the state Thucydides was in before his association with Socrates—that of a slave.
E. Philosophical Eros

i) Introduction

Our consideration of *Lysis* has yielded two important findings. First, that Socrates’ demonstration of how a lover ought to ‘cut-down’ his young quarry differs in both method and purpose from the ill-intentioned lover characterized in Socrates’ first *Phaedrus* speech (*Phdr*. 237b1-241d2). Second, that there is a pedagogical and protreptic purpose to his critical evaluation of Lysis’ unreflective and insular life. To his credit, Lysis proves to be temperamentally well-disposed to philosophy and sustains his composure through Socrates’ challenge. His amenability to Socrates’ provocative discussion is rewarded with a philosophical lesson that heightens his awareness of how passionate love, friendship and desire drive the lover to *lay claim* to his beloved. Socrates’ strategy with Lysis is to allow the boy to infer that a menacing danger awaits a beloved if he fails to sufficiently consider the *kind* of lover he permits as a companion.

However, Socrates takes a less nuanced approach when expressing the same view to Phaedrus. In fact, Phaedrus’ lesson in love is direct and blunt. Socrates’ firm advice to Phaedrus bears repeating since he is admonished to be wary of the sort of man who would become an acquisitive lover. “It follows necessarily”, Socrates tells Phaedrus,

> that he’d be giving himself to a man who is deceitful, irritable, jealous, disgusting, harmful to his property, harmful to his physical fitness, and absolutely devastating to the cultivation of his soul (ὅστοι ἔστω ἐκ τῶν αὐτοῦ ἐνύφαμοι, ἐπιθλοαῖοι, κακοί, αἰμοφόβοι, ὁμοφόροι, κακοὶ στὸ γενετικό, κακοὶ στὸ ἀναπνευστικό, κακοὶ στὸ ἀναγνωστικό), which truly is, and will always be, the most valuable thing to gods and men. (*Phdr*. 241c3-7)

If not for Socrates’ divine sign guiding him to renounce as impious his speech against Eros, this statement could stand as a lasting indictment of both Eros and the lover he inspires. We

271 “But if Love is a god or something divine—which he is—he can’t be bad in any way; and yet our speeches just now spoke of him as if he were.” *Phdr*. 242d15-e2
know however, that Socrates not only recants this view in the palinode that follows, but that he does so as a purification\textsuperscript{272} and “atonement for some offence against the gods” (\textit{Phdr.} 242c4-5) arising from his first speech.

Taking Socrates’ ‘purification’ as our starting point, in what follows the objective is to examine how lovers inspired by eros differ from the lover of Socrates’ first speech. Second, we have before us the burden of disambiguating the lovers presented in the palinode. While most commentators do not distinguish the \textit{kinds} of lovers presented in the palinode, my view is that some are more fully philosophical while others bear a closer resemblance to the lover of the first speech. However, since both the lover of the first speech and the philosophical lover are inspired by madness\textsuperscript{273} and Eros, our task in looking at the palinode will be to elucidate how one lover cultivates his beloved for sexual gratification while the other transmutes his enthusiasm for Eros into philosophical love and care for the young man’s soul.\textsuperscript{274}

\textit{ii) Honouring the Gods}

We begin by considering Socrates’ rationale for the observable difference in the types of lovers. After having set out the details of the heavenly procession of the gods (\textit{Phdr.} 246e5ff), we find that each lover’s life on earth is spent “honoring the god in whose chorus he danced” (\textit{Phdr.} 252d1-2).

\textsuperscript{272} “And so my friend, I must purify myself (\underline{kaih;;rasyai}).” \textit{Phdr.} 243a4

\textsuperscript{273} As we shall see in due course, the acquisitive lover experiences madness as an ‘illness’ while the philosophical lover’s mania is \textit{divine} in origin.

\textsuperscript{274} The question of reconciling the lover’s desire for beauty with the philosophical lover’s benevolence toward the beloved is addressed by Dyson in this way: “Plato’s general view of the nature of love is that it is essentially appetitive, a desire to obtain what one lacks. He needs to explain how an appetitive drive can at the same time exhibit other characteristics necessary for his theory to give a comprehensive account of the phenomena [i.e., eros]. In particular, he needs to explain how love may be procreative, benevolent and reciprocal. In the \textit{Symposium}, Diotima’s speech explores the relationship between the appetitive and the procreative aspects of love. The \textit{Phaedrus}, on the other hand, while virtually silent on procreation, shows how appetitive eros may be both reciprocal and benevolent. It is to explain the benevolence of Eros that Plato invokes Zeus.” Dyson (1982), 309-10. In the next section we shall look more closely at Zeus as a metaphor for the philosophical lover’s eros.
If the man who is taken by love used to be an attendant of Zeus, he will be able to bear the burden of this feathered force [i.e., eros] with dignity. But if it is one of Ares’ troops (περιπατεών) who has fallen prisoner of love—if that is the god with whom he took the circuit—then if he has the slightest suspicion that the boy he loves has done him wrong, he turns murderous, and is willing to make a sacrifice of himself as well as the boy” (Phdr. 252c3-7)

What is more, we read that each lover “spends his life and emulates (μιμούμενον) that god in every way he can…. And that is how he behaves (τρωτῷ) with everyone in turn, not just with those he loves.” Crucially, the temperament and character of the god informs the character and behaviour of the lover in his amorous pursuits as well as his day-to-day affairs. It is clearly not the case then, that (as Symposium suggests) loving or becoming a lover is what initiates the lover’s imitative behaviour. Were he never to become a lover in the relevant sense, a man would nevertheless manifest the character of the god in his daily affairs by virtue of his having been in the heavenly retinue of that god prior to this life on earth. We might suppose, for example, that a man who followed in Ares’ train would take on a war-like or martial aspect in all of his affairs, private or public; he would honour his god by exhibiting an Ares-like character. A Zeus-follower on the other hand, would exemplify the qualities of a kingly paterfamilias, an erotic figure with the sensibilities of an overseer, and a watchful guardian of guests and strangers.

In matters of love too, the character of the gods imbues the lover and guides his selection of a beloved: “everyone chooses his love after his own fashion from among those who are beautiful, and then treats the boy like his very own god, building him up and adorning him as an image to honor and worship.” Now, it is clear that in choosing or according to

275 Phdr. 252d3-5 (emphasis added)
276 Phdr. 252d5-6.  "[ endorsements of Zeus as god of love: ] Our translation glosses over an important detail in the text. I follow Fowler in the opinion that when the lover chooses "[ endorsements of Zeus as god of love: " ] he is
his own character, the lover pays homage to both the god and to the boy. And while it is beyond doubt that “the lover’s divine regard for the boy is no mere metaphor” and that “the boy is a vehicle for the lover’s reminiscence of the original god” (Yunis 2011, 156), it should be equally apparent that the lover’s reminiscence and subsequent behaviour toward his beloved (and anyone else for that matter) will be informed by his imitation of the god’s character. So we should not be surprised to discover (as we noted above) that a worshipper of Ares will have the capacity to ‘turn murderous and sacrifice himself as well as the boy’—despite the fact that the boy has been fashioned and adorned by his lover in the image of a god.

The difficulty at this point ought to be evident. If, as in the case of Ares, the lover adorns his beloved, honouring him and celebrating his beloved as though performing an orgiastic rite (o
\x03rgiáswn), the boy is at once exalted by his lover and regarded as a divine effigy; and yet, this ‘statue to the gods’ (a
\x03galma) is himself subject to the vicissitude—indeed, the whim—of his lover’s temperament. So, the palinode, which is ostensibly meant to redress the grave impiety contained in Socrates’ first speech against love, reveals that the same injurious treatment might still await his beloved even when the lover is inspired by the character of an Olympian god.278

iii) Socrates ‘Purified’

But the rehabilitation of eros in the palinode is not entirely a failure. There is some consolation to be had from the knowledge that followers of other gods take on the salutary choosing “according to his character”, rather than “after one’s own fashion”. Since the discussion is about character, it ought to be explicitly stated rather than implied through the term ‘fashion’.

277 Cf. Yunis (2011), 156 also, De Vries (1969), 161 who suggests that this recalls the “terminology of mystery cults”.

278 Cf. Phdr. 239a1ff. The critique of the lover in Socrates’ first speech leaves little doubt why his influence is so destructive: “Now a sick man (nosουnti) takes pleasure in anything that does not resist him, but sees anyone who is equal or superior to him as an enemy. That is why a lover will not willingly put up with a boyfriend (paidika; who is his equal or superior…” Phdr. 238e5-239a2. Since this critique occurs before the explication of the tripartite soul in the palinode it is difficult to correlate the impulse felt by the lover with any particular part of the soul. We might guess though, that since persons who are nosουnti in respect of the passions can exhibit a sort of ‘madness’ (LSJ s.v. nosουw A.2), it is the ‘bad’ horse that would be implicated.
aspects of their god’s characters. Here *Phaedrus* gives us the example of Zeus and his attendants. In contrast to the followers of Ares, we read that

Those who followed Zeus, for example, choose someone to love who is a Zeus himself (διόν) in the nobility of his soul. So they make sure he has a talent (σύν) for philosophy and the guidance of others (κατανοεῖν). And once they have found him and are in love with him they do everything to develop that talent. (*Phdr.* 252e3-6)

Whatever the character of the remaining Olympian gods, we know that the followers of Zeus are naturally philosophical and are by nature commanding or authoritative in their bearing. In this instance at least, we see that the operation of madness and eros culminates in an association which *benefits* the beloved. Thus we come to the view that it is not by *mere* association with a divinely inspired lover that philosophical benefits are conferred on the beloved, but that these benefits are possible only through the *right sort* of association.

Of course, from the perspective of philosophical success, an association with a Zeus-like lover is the most desirable sort of friendship for a young boy. But problematically, we read that even a Zeus-like lover might *not yet* have discerned his philosophical nature and would thus be unacquainted with his own character. We find for instance, that

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279 Yunis argues that the supposed “allusion to Dion (Diwn) of Syracuse, Plato’s student and friend…is unlikely.” Yunis (2011), 156. Here he cites Nussbaum (1986), 228-32 as advancing this thesis and rejects her view on the grounds that “the only evidence for such a relationship or attachment is the erotic epigram commemorating Dion’s death (in 354) that is attributed to Plato (Dog. Laert. 3.30=Athn. Pal. 7.99) but is a post-Platonic forgery.” He plausibly maintains that for “Plato to introduce an allusion to his private life would reek of melodrama and disrupt the elevated tone that is an essential aspect of S’s message” Yunis (2011), 157. I take Yunis’ objections here to be sound.

280 I think that it is important here to maintain the sense of *σύν* as ‘nature’ rather than ‘talent’. The example of Alcibiades suffices to make the difference clear. In previous chapters we have seen how Alcibiades could rightly be said to have a *talent* for philosophy, but perhaps not philosophic ‘*nature*’.

281 *LSJ* cites this passage as a locus for *κατανοεῖν* as “capable of command; authoritative”. *Cf.* *LSJ* s.v. *κατανοεῖν*

282 Here, I take the passage that follows as explicitly addressing the Zeus-like lover as opposed to lovers in general. Whether or not this is the case is of some importance since the care and educational welfare of the beloved figures centrally in the progress of the lover described. On this point, Thompson remarks “Plato seems to intimate that the ‘follower of Zeus’ is in some cases unconscious of his high vocation until stimulated by the converse of a kindred spirit. If the lover have not [sic] previously been grounded in the study of philosophy, he sets about it now….” Long
If any lovers have not yet embarked on this practice [of philosophy], then they start to learn, using any source they can and also making progress on their own. They are well equipped to track down their god’s true nature (ιευουμενον) with their own resources (ευπορουμενον) because of their driving need (ενθαλησια) to gaze at the god, and as they are in touch with the god by memory they are inspired by him adopt his customs and practices, so far as a human being can share in a god’s life. For all this they know they have the boy to thank… (Phdr. 252e6-253a4)

So once the lover himself has understood his own character, he can go about selecting from among potential young associates a boy whose nature best compliments his own. A lover who chooses a beloved ‘in accordance with his own character’ would necessarily be choosing in light of this self-awareness.

But again, there is a difficulty. Since “the palinode actually insists on a connection between mind and character, each individual will understand himself, others, and the essences in accordance with his own character.” (Griswold 1980, 539). Consequently, lovers—all lovers—will be convinced, each in his own way, that his own god, his own character and manner of living is most choice worthy. In turn, all lovers will “Seek for their own a boy whose nature (πευκεναι) is like the god’s; and when they have got him they emulate (μεμώμενοι) the god,

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and Macleane (1868), 69. Yunis concurs, commenting that “the subject of the verb throughout [this passage] is the lovers who belong to Zeus’ contingent.” Yunis (2000), 157.

The use of ευπορουμενον recalls the myth of the birth of Eros at Symposium 203bff. “Penia schemed up a plan to relieve her lack of resources (αποριας): she would get a child from Poros.” (203b7-c2) Naturally, among Poro’s many attributes, we find he is “resourceful” (ποριμος) (203d6); consequently, the offspring of Poros and Penia, Eros, “springs to life when he gets his way (ευπορησε).” Even through the cycle of birth and death, Eros is reborn and “finds his way (πορισμενον)…” Symp. 203e2-4. Here, the impetus toward philosophy through the psychological dialectic between resource and poverty is driven by a “desire for intelligence” (επιγινωσκει) Symp. 203d6-7. Contrast this with the Phaedrus account of the lover’s use of his ‘resource’ in advancing toward the god’s nature: he is driven not by desire (επιγινωσκει) but by aναγκαιος—constraint or compulsion (Cf. LSJ s.v. αναγκαιος). (We find this same sentiment repeated a few lines later in the suggestion that the charioteer and the good horse feel they are αναγκαιος—“being forced” to do things… Phdr. 254b2). Considered against the dialectical interplay of Poros and Penia, there is a mitigated sense of volition in the lover’s portrayal in Phaedrus.
convincing (thetic) the boy they love and training (thetic) him to follow their god’s pattern and way of life.” (Phdr. 253b4-7)

There is little comfort to be had in the knowledge that a lover will undertake this program of persuading and training his boy to the god’s way of life with “no envy, no mean-spirited lack of generosity toward the boy” (Phdr. 253b7-8). Perhaps generosity and a lack of envy or mean-spiritedness seem reassuring if issuing from a Zeus-like lover; but these qualities do not arouse much inspiration if they spring from a lover devoted to Ares, especially if we consider that a boy induced to adopting this character will be brought ultimately—by persuasion and training—to lead a non-philosophical mode of life. The tension between Zeus- and Ares-lovers that Plato aims to evoke is summed up neatly by Homer. Here Zeus addresses Ares:

Then looking at him darkly Zeus who gathers the clouds spoke to him:
‘Do not sit beside me and whine, you double-faced liar.
To me you are the most hateful of all gods who hold Olympos
Forever quarrelling is dear to your heart, wars and battles. (Lattimore Iliad 895-898)

iv) Beauty, Madness and the Beloved

Drawing on our investigations so far, we see that a lover’s conduct toward his boy is a reflection of the personal piety that the lover owes his divine patron. As for the honour directed at the boy, it is evident that the boy is to be regarded in a divine light, though we now have reason to view the lover’s reverence and awe more critically through the lens of his character.
The apprehension of his beloved’s beauty is what stimulates a lover’s eros. The mania that results is carefully parsed by Socrates in his description of the soul’s recollection of beauty.

Now this takes me to the whole point of my discussion of the fourth kind of madness—that which someone shows when he sees the beauty we have down here and is reminded of true beauty; then he takes wing and flutters in his eagerness to rise up, but is unable to do so…. This is the best and noblest of all the forms that possession by a god can take…and when someone who loves beautiful boys is touched by this madness he is called a lover. (*Phdr* 249d3-e4)

Here, the ‘fourth kind of madness’ refers to the ‘erotic madness’ which makes possible the noetic vision of beauty. We can see this more clearly from the following diagram.

![Diagram](image)

**fig. 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Illness</th>
<th>Divine Inspiration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Madness (I)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Madness (II)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Eros</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apollo</td>
<td>Dionysus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prophecy</td>
<td>Mystic Rites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We note immediately that there are two kinds of mania operative in *Phaedrus*. Consequently, there are two kinds of eros that can be experienced. The erotic love that Socrates attributes to the influence of Aphrodite and Eros arises only through divine inspiration, and then only as a species of madness alongside three other kinds of divine madness.

But there is a difficulty in distinguishing the divine lover’s disposition toward his beloved. Understanding the lover’s psyche is not simply a matter of correctly differentiating human eros from erotic madness. For, we find that some souls inspired by erotic madness are

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sacrifice to his boy as if he were the image (ὡς θεόν τὸ πρέπον) of god.” *Phdr* 251a4-b1. At 252b1, we see again that in looking at his boy, the lover has “reverence (σέβεσθαι) for one who has such beauty”. Finally, Socrates proposes that a lover “treats the boy like his very own god, building him up and adorning him as an image to honor and worship.” *Phdr* 252e1-2

286 Adapted from *Phdr*. 265a9ff

287 “[T]here are two kinds of madness, one produced by human illness (πολλά καταστάσεις), the other by a divinely inspired release from normally accepted behaviour.” *Phdr*. 265a9-11.

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nevertheless *incapable* of correctly recalling the form of Beauty from the apprehension of an instance of beauty.

But not every soul is easily reminded of the reality there by what it finds here—not souls that got only a brief glance at the reality there, not souls who had such bad luck when they fell down that they were twisted by bad company into lives of injustice so that they forgot the sacred objects they had seen before. (*Phdr. 250a1*-6)

A number of factors are implicated in undermining the philosophical success of these lovers: there are those who have a sluggish mind that is not “easily reminded” of the forms; some souls only had a fleeting glimpse of Reality; others suffer once they ‘fall’ into this life. Among these are numbered souls who are “twisted” (or ‘turned’) to a life of injustice by “bad company”. In short, the causes of a divine lover’s failure to correctly negotiate the intellectual course from his beloved’s beauty to Beauty itself are manifold.288

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288 *Symposium* offers a description of the ascent from an instance of beauty to the Form of Beauty in the familiar account of Diotima’s ladder. In the following passage, Diotima outlines the lover’s progress as his encounter with beauty in bodies is translated into intellectual desire.

A lover who goes about this matter correctly must begin in his youth to devote himself to beautiful bodies. First, if the leader leads aright, he should love one body and beget beautiful ideas there; then he should realize that the beauty of one body is brother to the beauty of any other and that if he is to pursue beauty of form he’d be very foolish not to think that the beauty of all bodies is one and the same….

Even in this first step it is evident that the philosophical lover’s orientation in ‘going to’ beautiful bodies is exclusively for the sake of begetting beautiful ideas. Unlike some divine lovers of the *Phaedrus* who are subject to forgetfulness or whose soul might be ‘twisted’ by injustice (thus frustrating their apprehension of the Real), the lover of the ‘higher mysteries’ in *Symposium* (provided he is ‘lead aright’) translates his empirical apprehension of beauty into an intellectual vision. All of this is, of course, conditional on the ‘leader leading aright’. And so, if Eros intervenes correctly to guide the lover’s desire, the sight of a beautiful body will immediately give rise to an urge to beget beautiful ideas. The sight of a beautiful body in this case, does not stimulate the lover’s sexual desire and thus does not necessitate sexual suppression.

Compare this to Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan who maintain that “[T]he basic epistemological model for the content of Diotima’s speech as a whole is sexual intercourse between a man and a woman, and then giving birth to, and rearing, the offspring” Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004), 116. In saying this, Corrigan sounds his objection to Dover’s thesis that Diotima’s speech describes “what is essentially a male homosexual foundation for philosophical activity” (Dover *apud* Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan (2004), 117. It is perhaps stating the obvious to say that in either case, the epistemological model is metaphorically sexual. As we have observed in *Symposium* 210a6ff above, we have reason to hold that the sexual eros is metaphorical model designed to serve as an explanation for intellectual desire.
Aside from these failed divine lovers “a few (ολιγα) remain whose memory (μνημή) is
good enough (καλά)“ (Phdr. 250a6). Although the memory of these lovers is sufficiently good
that they are able to recollect something of the forms through images, they are incapable of
seeing the eternal with sufficient clarity for it to be understood. Their failure stems not (as in the
case of the unjust lovers) from an insuperable intellectual impediment to ‘seeing’ the divine
objects, but from a partial and imperfect capacity to recall the forms. The result is not (as we
might expect) a fractional understanding of the form, but utter and lasting confusion.289

They are startled when they see an image (ομοιωμα) of what they saw up there. Then
they are beside themselves (εκπληκτοι) and their experience is beyond their
comprehension (ευχαριστομα) because they cannot fully grasp (μη ικανα) what it is they are seeing. (Phdr. 250a6-b1)

His experience of ecstasy and bewilderment together are the cause of what we might call an
‘epistemological blindness’: while his memory is just adequate to task of triggering the
recollection of the form, the vision of the form is insufficiently rendered. This faint intellection
results, necessarily, in philosophical failure.291

Finally, Socrates offers one last reason for why lovers fail: they are simply unable to

adequately recognize the instances as sharing in their supervening Forms so, they are necessarily

289 And so, ‘memory’ (as a capacity for recollection, and not simple recall of details) is a necessary but not sufficient
condition for coming to know the forms.

290 To give εκπληκτοι. the sense of being “beside oneself” does the term some justice. This word occurs earlier
in the dialogue and is translated as “ecstasy” Phdr. 234d1: εκπληκτοι. This certainly gives a better sense of the
semantic core of εκπληκτοι. Generally, εκπληκτοι conveys a sense of being ‘astonished’; ‘amazed’; ‘astounded’;
also, to be ‘struck with love/admiration/desire’ (C.f. LSJ s.v. εκπληκτοι). Insisting on these latter senses is
important since the experience of the lover is not just one of perplexity or puzzlement, but one by which he is so
thoroughly ‘struck with love/amazement/desire’ at the sight of the ‘sacred objects’, that what he sees is ‘beyond
comprehension’ and leaves him ‘incapable of grasping’ the vision before him. This is important for fully
appreciating the condition of his psyche.

291 Ferrari seems to think that this experience is not altogether a negative one. He characterizes the act of
recollection here as an exercise (however imperfectly executed) of “philosphic memory”. He adds: “Even the
philosophers, after all, are fallen souls, condemned to remember rather than revisit the Forms.” But it is clear the
section in question (250a1ff) is not a continuation of the discussion of the ‘philosopher whose mind grows wings’
(249c6ff) but is devised as a contrast to the philosopher’s memory which keeps him close to the supervening Reality
and the gods. Cf. Phdr. 249c6ff for a characterization of the manner in which the philosopher successfully recollects.
Cf. also Ferrari (1990), 142-3
incapable of intuiting the Forms themselves. Here, Socrates gives Phaedrus examples of (sacred) objects that “only a few people are able to make out with difficulty” (*Phdr. 250b4*). “Justice (δικαιοσύνη) and self-control (σωφροσύνη)” he says, “do not shine (φαίνεται) out through their images down here, and neither do the other objects of the soul’s admiration…” (*Phdr. 250b1-2*). While justice and self-control and these ‘other objects’ (presumably other virtues, etc…) do not ‘shine’, beauty does forcefully impinge on the lovers perceptions and soul.

v)  **Beholding Beauty and Sôphrosunê.**

In an effort to understand the difference between philosophical eros and the other types of eros, we should perhaps look more closely at what *Phaedrus* tells us that all lovers have in common: a capacity to recognize beauty. As the *Phaedrus* myth states, the ability to see beauty is a common experience deriving from our prenatal vision of the forms. Ultimately, the lover inspired by philosophical eros is distinguished from the other types of lovers not on the basis of some privileged vision of Beauty, but because of the disposition of his soul and how he regards beauty.

The distinctive feature of beauty is that all souls are able to easily recognize it because “beauty was radiant (λάμπεται) to see at that time when the souls, along with the glorious chorus (we were with Zeus, while others followed other gods), saw that blessed and spectacular vision…” (*Phdr. 250b5-8*). So, although the philosophers were with Zeus, all of the other souls in the heavenly procession—no matter who their god—could see beauty “in pure light” (*Phdr. 250c5*). And since vision is the “sharpest of our bodily senses” (*Phdr. 250d3-4*), all who share in this capacity are able to discern beauty in its many manifestations.
In order to illustrate the notion that souls differing in temperament or disposition respond differently to beauty, Socrates gives us the example of two kinds of souls. The first is the sort of soul that was either “initiated long ago ( mh’ neotelh’v) or…has become defiled ( deiﬁarme;n ov)” (Phdr. 250e2-3). This soul, though not precluded from eventually attaining a heavenly vision, “is not to be moved abruptly from here to a vision of Beauty itself when he sees what we call beauty here.” (Phdr. 250e3-4). The second type of soul is “a recent initiate ( artitelh;v…one who has seen much of heaven ( poluyea;mwn)” (Phdr. 251a1-2). Like the god “whose mind is nourished by intelligence and pure knowledge” (Phdr. 247d1-2), the heavenly attendants of the gods follow in the hope that like the gods, they will “have a view of Justice as it is [and] a view of Self-control…”( Phdr. 247d6-7), among other intelligible objects. If we recall that “justice and self-control do not shine out through their images down here” (Phdr. 250b2-3), only recent initiates are capable of recollecting the heavenly Forms. Thus, those burdened with a sluggish memory, those who cannot clearly recollect or in short, those who are ‘uninitiated’, when they do perceive sensuous beauty, become erotically enraptured by their perceptions. For these people, the sight of beautiful things does not give rise to a heavenly vision of the Form and so they “surrender to pleasure…in the manner of a four-footed beast, eager to make babies; and,

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292 This translation here is misleading. Since the reference alludes to the Eleusinian mysteries, it is important to understand the difference between non-initiates, new initiates ( teletes), and those initiated to the highest mysteries (epoptikai). Translating mh’ neotelh’v as “initiated long ago” misses the point that one who is ‘not newly initiated’ in the context of the Eleusinian mysteries means that such a person has never been initiated. Besides, initiates to the teletes generally received the higher mysteries the following year. So, to say that someone is mh’ neotelh’v “not a new initiate”, is to say that such a person cannot (and must not) be initiated into the greater mysteries. “First-time participants in the Mystery at Eleusis were called mystai, and those who participated in the rite a year later were called epoptai (“viewers”).” Clinton (2003), 50. Clinton adds important testimony from Plutarch to this explanation of the mysteries. Commenting on the life of Demetrius, Plutarch writes: “At that time as he was moving his quarters to Athens he wrote that he wished upon arrival to be initiated immediately and to receive the entire telete from the Lesser Mystery to the epoptika. This was unlawful, nor had it happened before: the Lesser were celebrated in Anthesterion, the Greater in Boedromion and the people participated as epoptai after at least an interval of a year. (Plutarch. Demetr. 26.1 apud Clinton (2003), 51-2). This prohibition is alluded to in Plato as well: “You’re a happy man, Callicles, in that you’ve been initiated into the greater mysteries before the lesser ( mega;la memu;hsai pri;ta’ smikra;) I didn’t think it was permitted.” Grg. 497c3-4
wallowing in vice [they go] after unnatural pleasure (πονηρός ἄφθαρτος) too, without a
trace of fear or shame (θρόνος χαίρειν)‘ (Phdr. 249e5-7).

Recent initiates have a more powerful connection between the perception of beauty and
the recollection of ‘things once seen’. Since “Beauty…stands on a sacred pedestal next to Self-
control” (Phdr. 254b7-8), the psyche of the one who has seen much of heaven sees Beauty and is
(because of its proximity to Beauty) reminded of Self-control. The psychological drama that
ensues is illustrated as a contest of will between the bad horse on one side and the good horse
and charioteer on the other. The sight of beauty, which excites the shameless hubris of the bad
horse,\(^{293}\) is finally tamed by the force of the charioteer’s vision of Self-control. As a result, even
the bad horse capitulates so that the integrated psychic disposition is that of a soul which looks
upon its beloved with “reverence and awe” (Phdr. 254e10)

vi) \(\text{Sōphrosunē Thanatos: Human Self-Control}\)

Although Self-control is proximate to Beauty and is divine in essence, there is another
conception of self-control contemplated in Phaedrus: ‘human self-control’ rooted in human
reason. As we shall see, this sort of control is what the non-lover congratulates himself for
attaining. But it is a “self-control (φυσικήμαστρεμόν) of human origin (φυσικήμαστρεμόν)”
(Phdr. 244d4). In the palinode, Socrates contrasts this mortal form of self-control with the true
source of philosophical inspiration, \textit{mania}. He offers these words as atonement:

\begin{quote}
If anyone comes to the gates of poetry and expects to become an adequate poet by
acquiring expert knowledge of the subject without the Muses’ madness, he will fail, and
his self-controlled (καλλιτεχνής ἀρχής) verses will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who
have been driven out of their minds. (Phdr. 245a4-8)
\end{quote}

\(^{293}\) Referred to at Phdr. 254c3: (πονηρός ἄφθαρτος); Phdr. 254e4: (θρό

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Before looking at the effect of divinely inspired self-control, we look first to those who fail and who, despite their failure deem themselves in possession of genuine ἱστορία.

vii) Ἱστορία and the Non-Lover

In our discussion of rational eros we saw the many ways in which (according to Lysias) a non-lover is said to benefit a boy. Looking again at this speech, we find the non-lover disparaging the lover for his inability to exercise self-control: “A lover will admit that he’s more sick than sound in the head (αὐτής ἐστιν ὑπομονή ἀσφυξίας). He’s aware that he’s not thinking straight (ἐγγυττικος ἔσχεσεν); but he’ll say he can’t get himself under control (οὐ δύναται αὐτὸν καταγράφειν).” (Phdr. 231d2-4). In contrast to this ‘sick’ (or ‘passionate’) man, the non-lover assures the boy that “someone who does not love you…can control himself (κρατεῖν αὐτὸν) and choose to do what is best (τέλεσθαι τὸ καλόν).” (Phdr. 232a3-5). The control or power he has over himself is proposed by the non-lover as a rational achievement, and perhaps it is.

However, it is a human and not a divine achievement. There is no vision of Self-control; there is no communication with eternal objects; instead, what passes for self-control is really a ‘power’ over one’s desires exercised as a part of a shameless hedonistic calculation.

viii) Ἱστορία and the Lover

Like the non-lover, the lover of Socrates first speech aims at gratifying his own sexual pleasure. Importantly, this lover differs from the non-lover in this crucial regard: he welcomes the rapturous embrace of madness and only resorts to the rational control of his urges once his pleasure has faded. Socrates outlines the capricious conduct that a lover’s boy might expect:

So, then, by the time he [i.e., the lover] should pay up, he has made a change and installed a new ruling government (κρατεῖν αὐτὸν) in himself: right-minded reason (anaxiasthai) in place of the madness of love (ἐρωτικός). The boy does not even realize that his lover is a different man…. The lover however is
so ashamed that he does not dare tell the boy how much he has changed or that there is no way, now that he is in his right mind (nous) and under control (sophrosunē) again, that he can stand by the promises he had sworn to uphold when he was under that old mindless regime. (Phdr. 241a3-b2)

In either case, the power over himself that each individual exerts is not sophrosunē properly understood as much as a human approximation of Self-control. It is this sense that Socrates has in mind when at the end of the palinode he punctuates his praise of the lover with these thoughts: “A non-lover’s companionship, on the other hand, is diluted (kekrame;n) by human self-control (sophrosunē); all it pays are cheap, human dividends…” (Phdr. 256e4-6). Whatever else one might say to qualify this sort of self-control, understood as a mortal (sophrosunē) self-control, it is as far removed from the eternal, divine objects as one could imagine.

 ix)  Sōphrosunē and the Wily Lover

The wily lover (who we must recall is a lover donning the cloak of a non-lover), proposes his own conception of self-control to his boy. Driven by the madness of eros, but convinced that the non-lover’s method is more likely give him success in attaining pleasure, he disingenuously echoes the non-lover. On the basis of his bi-partite division of the soul, he advances the thesis that reason alone ought to guide the friendship of a man and his boy, not pleasure.

Now when judgment is in control and leads us by reasoning toward what is best, that sort of self-control is called ‘being in your right mind’; but when desire takes command in us and drags us without reasoning toward pleasure, then it’s command is known as ‘outrageousness’ (hubris). (Phdr. 237e2-238a1).

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294 “We must realize the each of us is ruled by two principles which we follow wherever they lead: one is our inborn desire for pleasures (ἐρωτικοὶ λόγοι), the other is our acquired judgement (ἐπιστήμων λόγοι) that pursues what is best (ἀριστουργημάτων).” Phdr. 237d7-9. The division between the irrational and rational anticipates the eventual dichotomy between σωφροσύνη and ἱβρισ that follows.

295 There is a slight difficulty with the translation. Where we read “that sort of self-control is called ‘being in your right mind’”, ‘self-control’ translates κρατεῖ which ought to be translated as ‘power’ or ‘strength’. Doing this would leave us free to replace ‘being in your right mind’ for ἱβρισ with ‘self-control’. The revised translations should run: “Now when judgment is in control and leads us by reasoning toward what is best, that sort of strength [or power or mastery] is called self-control”.

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There are two important consequences arising from this line of argument. First, in identifying the exercise of *reason* with what is *best*, the wily lover parrots the sort of proposal that we might expect from a non-lover; second, and more dramatically, on the basis of this view of pleasure, he defines eros as an “unreasoning desire (ἀνευ λογο...ευνυμία) that overpowers a person’s considered impulse to do right and is driven to take pleasure in beauty.” (*Phdr*. 238b9-c1). On this reading, eros becomes a form of *hubris*—a term that we saw in earlier chapters is riven with connotations of sexual force and violence. Predictably then, the wily lover’s commitment is to human reason and hence, *human sōphrosunē*.

x) **Divine Sōphrosunē: The Philosophical Lover**

We know from our earlier discussion that recent initiates (αρτιτελή) have a keener sense of the divine Forms; we know as well that those capable of effortlessly intuiting Beauty from beautiful things are afforded a glimpse of Self-control because of its proximity to beauty. It should be amply clear then, that divine self-control is possible only if the lover is able to catch sight of Beauty and Self-control besides. It is *this* lover that stands apart from all other lovers. To be sure, the sight of a beautiful body engenders an erotic response, even in a philosophical lover. In fact, Diotima places this ‘love of beautiful bodies’ at the foot of the ‘ladder’, a

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296 I take this to mean that the sufficiently philosophical lover will not fail to see Self-control because of its proximity to Beauty. The soul of lover who sees Beauty but does not also see Self-control would presumably not have the reaction that is in fact described in some detail in the dialogue: “At the sight he [i.e., the charioteer] frightened, falls over backwards awestruck…” (*Phdr*. 254b8-9. Griswold expresses some confusion over this issue. He correctly observes that “according to Socrates the lover’s mind recollects, at this stage, both *Beauty* and *Sōphrosunē* (247b5-7).” Then he immediately wonders: “Does the sight of *Beauty* alone not generate self-control? To this tantalizing question the myth offers no answer” Griswold (1986), 134. Though it may be a ‘tantalizing question’, I am unclear by what principle of Platonic metaphysics such a recollection would be possible.

297 Though we observed this in part above in note 225, it bears discussing more fully here. Recall Socrates’ reaction to laying eyes on Charmides: “although I had thought it would be perfectly easy to talk to him, I found my previous brash confidence (προσεγνωσθαί) quite gone…and when everyone in the palaestra surged around us in a circle, my noble friend, I saw inside his cloak and caught on fire (ἔφλεγομήν) and was quite beside myself (οὐκέτα εν ευαγγελία)”. *Chrm*. 155c7-d6. By his own admission, Socrates claims to have momentarily not been ‘governed by self-control’ (ἐν ευαγγελία), and yet, he recovers himself almost immediately and well enough to conduct an investigation into the virtue of self-control. Again, the salient point is not the fact that Socrates is *aroused* by the sight of Charmides, but that he is able to *overcome* the stupefying effects
process that culminates in catching sight the Forms, or “something wonderfully beautiful in its nature” (Symp. 210e6-211a1).

Like the philosopher of Symposium whose intellectual development begins by “loving boys correctly (οἵτινες παιδαράστειν)” (Symp. 211b6), Phaedrus too, offers numerous injunctions to guide the would-be philosophical lover toward a nobler form of eros. While Zeus-like characters are by nature philosophical, those among the other lovers who hope to advance toward the philosophical life are implored throughout Phaedrus to exercise divine self-control. They are urged to avoid consummating the sexual eros which is aroused by the presence of the beautiful boy and instead turn their minds toward a nobler eros that gives rise to dialectic and philosophy.

In the Phaedrus allegory we find, for instance, that “no soul returns to the place from which it came for ten thousand years…except for the soul of a man who practises philosophy without guile (φιλοσοφών αδίκων) or who loves boys philosophically (φιλοσοφών παιδαράστων)” (Phdr. 248e7-249a3). For this reason, “only the philosopher’s mind grows wings, since its memory always keeps it as close as possible to those realities by being close to which the gods are divine.” (Phdr. 249c6-8). So, memory of the of Charmides’ beauty and regain his familiar dialectical composure. This ‘consistency of character’ recalls our earlier discussion of Socrates apparent imperviousness to drink Symp. 220a3-5. There, as here, the effect of the intoxicant is overcome through his consistency of character and devotion to reason.

298 “A lover who goes about this matter correctly must begin in his youth to devote himself to beautiful bodies” Symp. 210a6-7
299 Also, “honestly; truly; without fraud” LSJ s.v. αδικω. I take the implication here to be that loving boys correctly means loving with a view to benefitting through philosophy—without ulterior sexual motive.
300 Helpfully, Yunis gives an alternate translation for this awkward passage: “for to the extent that he can [the philosopher] is through memory always in close proximity to those things whose close proximity to a god makes him a god.” Yunis additionally points out that “‘those things’ (τὰ ἀληθέα) are the Forms and true Being” Yunis (2011), 147. So, the things that make a god a god—close proximity to Being and Forms—is analogously experienced by the philosopher through memory (i.e., recollection). It is no exaggeration to say then, that exercising memory in the service of philosophical truth is an approximation of this divine activity.
Beautiful (and for the select, memory of Self-control as well) is by its very exercise a reflection of divine activity. Moreover, if this lover

uses reminders of these things correctly ([upomn̄h;masin orw;menov] 301) he is always at the highest, most perfect level of initiation, and he is the only one who is as perfect as perfect can be. He stands outside human concerns ([exista;menov de'; anyrwpi;nwn spoudastwn]) and draws close to the divine ([kai' pro'w twj# yei;wj gigno;menov]). (Phdr. 249c8-d1)

To use the boy correctly is to see his beauty as a reminder of Beauty itself. While Phaedrus does describe lovers who appear to be philosophical (though their desire drives them to pursuing sexual gratification), these lovers are not embracing philosophical eros but are driven by a conception of eros that falls short of other-regarding philosophical love.

xi) Does Zeus Seek Another Zeus or Ganymede?

The description of the philosophical lover and the divine self-control that regulates his erotic desire toward his beloved appears definitive: he is drawn close to the divine by his unfailing recollection of the Forms and thus attains a perfect initiation to the mysteries of eros. All of this has the effect of placing his interests “outside of human concerns”; his conduct toward his beloved is guileless, divinely inspired and philosophical.

This image is reinforced by a detailed account of the lover’s struggle to tame his ‘bad’ horse and allow free rein to the virtuous ‘good’ horse. Looking at the passage in question (Phdr. 253c7-254e10), we note immediately that although (as we have already discussed) he is capable of understanding beauty and self-control correctly,302 this lover nevertheless struggles repeatedly

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301 Yunis again provides important clarification. Commenting on the meaning of [upomn̄h;masin] or ‘reminders’ he is careful to point out that “‘such reminders’ are not the Forms, but things in this world that spur recollection of the Form of Beauty. By ‘using such reminders correctly’ a person makes the transition from perception to the recollected Form…” Yunis (2011), 147

302 “Beauty…stands on a sacred pedestal next to Self-control ([swfrosu;nhv])” (254b7-8). It is important to draw attention to this again for the sake of the argument that follows.
to subdue the hubristic bad horse. Here we see that the movement toward a stable philosophical perspective is a dramatic play that illustrates the difficulty encountered by even the most adept souls. Though he ultimately proves abundantly capable of engaging in a philosophical mode of life, even this Zeus-like lover must overcome his appetite, human desires before his “soul follows its boy in reverence and awe.” (Phdr. 254e9-10).

At 255a1 we have a break in the narrative. Although the lover’s discordant psyche is finally brought into harmony causing him to reverentially follow his beloved, the discussion abruptly begins anew with an account of the effect a lover’s attention will have on the soul of the beloved. Despite the boy’s misgivings about associating with a lover, he ultimately comes to admit the affections of his lover. Once a boy and his lover are established as companions, the beloved begins to indulge his lover’s desire for sexual play and is himself drawn (by his bad horse) to capitulate to the erotic longing of his lover. The boy, on account of his hope that his lover’s “good will is closes at hand” (Phdr. 255b5), gives his favours to the man who is increasingly seen as an object of love. But the boy has no vivid apprehension of the cause of his love.

[T]he boy is in love, but has no idea what he loves. He does not understand, and cannot explain, what has happened to him. It is as if he had caught an eye disease from someone else, but could not identify the cause; he does not realize that he is seeing himself in the lover as in a mirror.

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303 (hubristic) Phdr. 254c3
304 The beloved “initially rejects the lover” but “ripening age and a sense of what must be” lead him to allow the lover to “spend time” (oμιλία) with him. Phdr. 255a7-8. Curiously, there is an ambiguity in this last term that casts a different light on this passage. While the translation “spending time” clearly falls within the scope of meaning for oμιλία it can also be taken to mean “communion or intercourse with one” and “sexual intercourse” (LSJ s.v. oμιλία A; A2). This ambiguity is quite obviously meant to blur the exact nature of the companionship between the lover and beloved, suggesting not only intellectual, but sexual communication.
305 “Meanwhile, the boy’s bad horse has nothing to say, but swelling with desire, confused (αιρων περιβαλλει), it hugs the lover and kisses him in delight…” Phdr. 256a2-4
306 Phdr. 255d3-7. Emphasis added. We see the same image used in Alcibiades I. There however, Socrates uses the image of a mirror as a metaphor for understanding how self-knowledge is to be attained: “I’m sure you’ve noticed
As a consequence of the beloved’s misapprehension of the source of his own burgeoning erotic sentiment, he (understandably) takes his lover to be the cause of the sexual stirring in his soul and soon thereafter capitulates to his lover.

Whether or not this lover and beloved consummate their association with sexual intercourse does not seem to be a settled matter. Hyland, for instance, reads the passage that culminates with the lover following his beloved in “reverence and awe” as continuous with the passage that follows in which the lover and beloved quite clearly engage in sexual touching. It is a suggestion that I resist and will argue for in greater detail. For the moment, let us consider Hyland’s view. He correctly points out that the passage from 253c7-254e10 “is a description specifically of the Zeus lover to resist the desire for sexual consummation and to achieve a genuinely philosophic friendship.” (Hyland 2008, 85)

This much we have already seen above. As for the passage from 255a1ff which describes the companionship of the lover and beloved, he characterizes these two as “Zeus lovers who do not quite succeed in resisting” sexual temptation. (Hyland 2008, 86). But are these two Zeus lovers? While Hyland correctly notes of their relationship that “the purely philosophical character is likely to be compromised” (Hyland 2008, 86), he is clearly reading the passages 253c7-254e10 (i.e., ‘following the boy in reverence and awe’) and 255a1-256a8 (stating ‘if victory goes to the better elements…’) as continuously describing a ‘Zeus lover’. If we look at

that when a man looks into an eye his face appears in it, like in a mirror….Then if the soul, Alcibiades, is to know itself, it must look at a soul, and especially at that region in which what makes a soul good, wisdom, occurs, and at anything else which is similar to it.” Alc. I. 133a1-b8. In Phaedrus though, the beloved is not brought to a higher understanding of himself by seeing his reflection in the eye of his lover, but is confused by the ‘overflow’ of his own beauty, believing it to be beauty emanating from his lover. “and when he [i.e., the lover] is filled [with desire] it [i.e., the ‘stream of desire’] overflows and runs away outside him….It enters through his [i.e., the beloved’s] eyes which are its natural route to the soul…and fills the soul of the loved one with love in return.” Phdr. 255c3-d2. It is at this point that Socrates remarks of the beloved that “he does not realize that he is seeing himself in the lover as in a mirror.” What the beloved experiences is not love proper, but “a mirror image of love in him—‘backlove’ (ὁμοθύματι)—though he neither speaks nor thinks of it as love, but as friendship (φίλαφιλία)” Phdr. 255e1-2. On the question of eros and reciprocity in Alc. I, cf. Halperin (1986), 69-70.
the text however, the second passage quite clearly outlines a different sort of lover, one who is content with finding something less than ‘another Zeus’ in the character of his beloved.

After the lover has spent some time doing this, staying near the boy (and even touching (\textit{apṭeśai}) him during sports and on other occasions), then the spring that feeds the stream Zeus named ‘Desire’ (\textit{iēron}) when he was in love with Ganymede begins to flow mightily in the lover… (\textit{Phdr.} 255b8-c2)

We know already that a Zeus-like lover will “choose someone to love who is himself a Zeus in the nobility of his soul” (\textit{Phdr.} 252e4-5) and that such a lover “treats the boy like his very own god” (\textit{Phdr.} 252e1). In light of this, the erotic encounters with his beloved described here ought to be viewed—at least symbolically—as a sexual outrage or \textit{hubris} committed against a god. Furthermore, Plato sets this lover’s desire for the boy against the image of Zeus’ desire for Ganymede. It is difficult to imagine how, once the lover regards the boy with ‘reverence and awe’, he can indulge his sexual appetites and remain the same kind of lover. Based on the evidence presented in the myth, the Zeus lover is either looking for another Zeus in his beloved, or he is looking for a Ganymede: he cannot remain a Zeus-lover while seeking both.\(^\text{307}\)

The question of compatibility is easily dealt with if we simply read past the distinction that I am arguing for and conflate the ‘reverent and awestruck’ lover with the lover who appears to be ready to steal away with his Ganymede. Nussbaum does just this in her commentary; she makes no special mention of two kinds of lovers. Notice for instance, how she refers to both interchangeably in her remarks on the expression of intimacy between lovers:

\(^{307}\) White takes the opposite view. In his estimation, the Zeus/Ganymede relationship somehow strengthens the philosophical bonds of lover and beloved.

The allusion to the Zeus—Ganymede relationship not only joins the desire of the lover of the beloved [sic] to Zeus, the god of philosophers, thereby connecting the lover’s soul to what it saw when in the company of Zeus at the banquet of reality, but it also epitomizes, in many of its mythical details, the abstract metaphysical circumstances underlying the manifestation of love. White (1993), 163

White does not, however, square this with the clear statement in the \textit{Phaedrus} myth that a philosophical Zeus looks for another Zeus.
Plato’s lovers choose not to have intercourse with one another, even though they express their love regularly in physical caresses that stop short of this (cf. 255b) – because they feel that extreme sensual stimulation involved in intercourse is incompatible with the preservation of reverence and awe for the other as a separate person. (Nussbaum 1986, 217)

The question we must ask is whether, as Nussbaum suggests, the text indicates that the lovers ‘choose not to have intercourse’. If we consider again the circumstance of the confused beloved who is overwhelmed by amorous sentiment for his lover, we find that “his desire is nearly the same as the lover’s, though weaker: he wants to see (o[ra#n), touch (a=ptesi), kiss (filei#n), and lie down (sugkatakei#syai) with him and of course, as you might expect, he acts on these desires soon after they occur.”308 LSJ gives the meaning of sugkatakei#syai as: “lie with, of sexual intercourse”. In fact, this very passage is given as a locus for the meaning of sugkatakei#syai.309 So, Nussbaum, Hyland and others310 who claim that the lovers described here stop short of consummating their friendship must be mistaken.

_xii) Philosophical Victory_

This brings us to Socrates’ summation of the circumstances facing the lover and his beloved.

Now if the victory goes to the better elements in both their minds, which lead them to follow the assigned regimen of philosophy, their life here below is one of bliss and shared

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308 Phdr. 255e2-6 (emphasis added)
309 LSJ s.v. sugkatakei#syaiThe only other meaning given is “recline with at meals” which presumably would be anti-climactic for a beloved whose increasing desire leads him to ‘see’ then ‘touch’ and then ‘kiss’ his lover. To suggest that this erotic escalation is meant to culminate in dinner rather than sex is, I submit, reading too little into the desire of the beloved.
310 Nicholson glosses over the lovers’ sexual consummation by obliquely referring to it as a “struggle with the unruly horse” and concludes that in this passage Plato’s purpose is to highlight their philosophical relationship. Plato continues on from this point to describe the life together of philosophical friends at 255a–e. In the self-consciousness of each, there is certainly a struggle with the unruly horse. But Plato also describes the interaction of the two friends—one usually older, the erôn, and the younger, the erômenos,—in a way that brings out the spiritual and ethical meaning in their philosophizing together. Nicholson (1999), 204 Speaking directly to the passage in question, Buccioni elects to interpret (sugkatakei#syai) as ‘reclining’ rather than ‘sexual intercourse’: “In the case of our Phaedrean pair, the ensuing relationship revolves around the pursuit of the philosophical life. True enough, they do end up sharing a couch…” For the reason that I have outlined in f.n. 307, this seems a rather unlikely reading. Cf. Buccioni (2002), 353
understanding. They are modest and fully in control of themselves now that they have enslaved the part that brought trouble into the soul and set free the part that gave virtue. There is no greater good than this that either human self-control or divine madness can offer a man. (Phdr. 256a8-b3)

Though speculation, it is my feeling that those commentators who insist that these lovers stop short of consummating their friendship interpret ‘victory of the better elements which lead to philosophy’ as a sign that the sexual play of the lovers is curtailed by a victory before consummation. However, if we are working from the premise that sexual consummation is indicated by the text, the conditional statement “Now if the victory…” simply offers up the possibility that earth-bound lovers can, if they choose, redirect their desire toward philosophy—the noblest expression of eros. If they choose to do so, and if the lover begins to ‘practise philosophy without guile and love boys philosophically’, he will have the opportunity to rise to the hyper-uranian realm. 311

But even the most successful of these lovers will fall short of the lover who is able to see Beauty and Self-Control as they really are. Earthly lovers fail precisely because their self-control is not attained through a vision of the eternal Forms, but rather through the exercise of power over themselves. 312 Besides, this power over oneself and one’s desires arises explicitly as a function of human self-control. 313 So, when we read that “there is no greater good than this that human self-control or divine madness can offer a man”, 314 we should understand that although there are greater goods possible (namely, a vision of the Forms as they are) the greatest good one can hope to attain through human self-control or divine madness is a simple power or mastery over oneself. Granted, this is an achievement; but

311 ‘If after the third cycle of one thousand years, the last-mentioned souls have chosen such a life three times in a row, they grow their wings back and they depart in the three-thousandth year Phdr. 249a3-5
312 LSJ s.v. ἐγκρατεῖν. A. to be master of, exercise control over.
313 Also referred to (as we saw above) as human or mortal self-control Phdr. 256e5
314 Of the Forms as they are. Phdr. 256b6-7
it is one that falls well short of the sublime knowledge attained by the lover whose apprehension of empirical objects causes him to recollect immediately the nature of the Forms and of Reality.

As for the lovers who opt for sexual gratification without ever developing a philosophical friendship, “they adopt a lower (ἀνακλιντά) way of living, with ambition (ζήλος) in place of philosophy (φιλοσοφία)…” (Phdr. 256b7-c1) On account of their “undisciplined horses” (Phdr. 256c3), these two are drawn to consummate their relationship and, over the course of time, periodically continue to do so, though they are forever conflicted about their arrangement.315 From a philosophical point of view, their expression of eros is a failure; they remain “wingless” but are redeemed only in the fact that “the prize they have won from the madness of love is considerable because those who have begun the sacred journey in lower heaven may not by law be sent into darkness for the journey under the earth” (Phdr. 256d5-7).

The key to understanding this concession to the earthly lovers lies in the fact that by the expression of their love they do at least recognize the operation of eros in their friendship.

xiii) Engendering Illiberality

The non-lover on the other hand, substitutes what we earlier called ‘rational eros’ in place of divine madness. In the concluding words of the palinode, Socrates reserves his most bitter censure for the man who renounces eros.

A non-lover’s companionship (ὁμοιόθυμος)…is diluted (ἐξελέγχω)316 by human self-control (συνεργεία)…all it pays are cheap (ἀκρυδώματα), human (ἀνθρώπως) dividends (οἰκονομίας), and though the slavish (σκληρωτικός) attitude it engenders in a friend’s

315 “they go on doing this for the rest of their lives, but sparingly, since they have not approved of what they are doing with their whole minds” Phdr. 256c5-7. In this instance, the unruly horse in each has overwhelmed the good horse. Rather than successfully suppressing the desire of this bad horse, they continue as lovers because of a narrow conception of eros limited to fulfilling carnal desire. The suggestion that they do not “approve” with their whole minds suggests that as long as they continue in this manner, both will suffer from an internal conflict pitting the charioteer and good horse against the incorrigible bad horse.

316 The use of ἐξελέγχω calls to mind the mixing or dilution of wine with water (Cf. LSJ s.v. ἐξελέγχω A.1), the suggestion being that strength of the companionship is weakened by human or mortal (ἄνθρωπος) self-control.
soul is widely praised as virtue ($\text{	extcopyright}$, it tosses the soul around for nine thousand years on earth and leads it, mindless, beneath it. (Phdr. 256e4-8)

Since Socrates excoriates the earthly lover equally for his reliance on human self-control in place of divine $\text{s}$ôphrosunê, the ‘cheap dividends’ of the non-lover’s human self-control cannot be the single contributing factor in the condemnation of the non-lover. The difference of course, is that a non-lovers companionship engenders illiberality ($\text{	extcopyright}$) in the soul of his beloved. Predictably, the outcome for the beloved is disastrous. As long as the non-lover continues to exert his influence, the boy’s cultural, moral and intellectual $\text{p}$aideia is forever undermined and his soul’s journey terminates below the earth. As we noted in Chapter 3, liberality is not only a civic virtue by which Athenians distinguished themselves from other Greeks and foreigners alike, but an intellectual virtue at the root of philosophical character. We saw in an earlier chapter that it is an intellectual virtue at the core of Theaetetus’ own character and an important contributing factor in his fitness for philosophy. Like the manipulative lover of Socrates’ first speech, the non-lover’s interest in his beloved is entirely self-regarding and ultimately ruinous to his beloved’s progress toward philosophy.

xiv) Engendering Philosophy: Other Regarding Eros

Over the course of this chapter we have seen how mania and eros are manifest in different kinds of relationships between lovers. I have put forth the view that in the palinode Socrates envisions a number of ways in which eros operates; hopefully, I have shown too that without an adequate understanding or regard for eros, a lover’s attention turns to gratifying his sexual urges at the cost of the beloved’s immortal philosophical soul.

At the start of this section on philosophical eros we noted that the distinguishing mark of the philosophical lover is that he embraces eros and transmutes it into care for his beloved’s soul.
In the final act of *Phaedrus*, at the conclusion of his critique on writing, Socrates gives specific directions as to how this other-regarding care for the beloved’s soul is achieved. It is the philosopher as dialectician who cares for the boy by nurturing his intellectual development.

[T]he dialectician chooses a proper soul (ὡς ἀληθείᾳ φύσις) and plants and sows within it discourse accompanied by knowledge—discourse capable of helping itself as well as the man who planted it, which is not barren but produces a seed from which more discourse grows in the character (ῥήμα) of others. Such discourse makes the seed forever immortal and renders the man who has it as happy (ὥστε ὁ ἀνθρώπος) as any human can be.\(^\text{317}\)

The process being described is one which is familiar to us: philosophical dialectic. While we have argued that the philosophical lover’s intentions are other-regarding, it stands to reason that by benefitting the beloved through ‘planting the seed of discourse’, discourse itself improves through reflection and vigorous examination on the part of the interlocutors.\(^\text{318}\) Naturally then,

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\(^{317}\) *Phdr.* 276e5-277a4 (emphasis added). There is a notable irony in the fact that this protreptic process is described using the language of dissemination, propagation and reproduction. Recall that the same sort of language is used, but rather indelicately and contemptuously, when Socrates’ describes the uninitiated man (ὁ ἄθροισμα Phdr. 250e2) who does not see Beauty and so “sets out in the manner of a four-footed beast, eager to make babies…and go after unnatural pleasure” *Phdr.* 250e6-7.

This passage from *Phaedrus* also recalls Diotima’s lesson regarding birth, beauty and immortality. Beginning with the pronouncement “All of us are pregnant Socrates, both in body and soul…” (*Symp.* 206c2-3), she clarifies the aim of Love: it does not desire beauty, but “Reproduction and birth in beauty” *Symp.* 206e5. From here she fleshes out her main point: “Now why reproduction? It’s because reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality. A lover must desire immortality along with the good, if what we agreed earlier was right, that Love wants to possess the good forever. It follows from our argument that Love must desire immortality.” *Symp.* 206e7-207a4. The passage from *Phaedrus* clearly illustrates the perpetuation of this reproductive process as a dynamic intellectual endeavour.

\(^{318}\) While stressing the benefit of philosophy on the individual psyche, Socrates is careful elsewhere to insist that philosophy ought not to be used to disparage his interlocutor (as we might suppose is happening in *Euthyphro*, say). In *Protagoras*, Socrates makes his point. Regarding the question of whether wisdom and temperance are a single thing (333b5ff), Socrates says he is indifferent to which side he takes up first and explains the rationale for this view to Protagoras: “I am primarily interested in testing the argument, although it may happen both that the questioner, myself, and my respondent wind up being tested” (333c6-8). Similarly, in *Euthydemus*, his advice to Crito regarding the suitability of teachers for his sons makes much the same point; he tells Crito: “pay no attention to the practitioners of philosophy, whether good or bad. Rather give serious consideration to the thing itself: if it seems to you negligible, then turn everyone from it, not just your sons.” *Euthyd.* 307b7-c2 (emphasis added). To illustrate the importance of this dialectical ethic, consider this passage from *Eryxias*:

*If* two people [in a law court] were to offer the same testimony—one with the reputation of a gentleman, the other of a wicked man—the jurors would remain unconvinced by the wicked man’s testimony, but might possibly even do the opposite to what he wanted. But if the one who had the reputation of a gentleman were to say the same things, his words would be judged as absolutely true…. They [i.e., the jurors] believe that they should not concentrate on the argument itself but rather on the character of the people who are arguing.” *Eryx.*399b5-c2 (emphasis added)
philosophical discourse benefits the man who ‘planted’ it as well as the beloved who is now ennobled by his dialectical effort.  

As we might expect, care for the soul is a theme taken up in a number of dialogues. The central message however, is the same and consistently serves to reinforce the view that we have seen amply expressed in Phaedrus. Phaedo, for instance, brings attention to the manner in which a practitioner of philosophy ought to care for himself:

No one may join the company of the gods who has not practiced philosophy (μηθετες μηθετες) and is not completely pure when he departs from life, no one but the lover of learning (μηθετες μηθετες) It is for this reason, my friends, Simmias and Cebes, that those who practice philosophy in the right way (οἱ ὀργών Φίλοσόφοι) keep away from all bodily passions (μηθετες μηθετες) master (μηθετες μηθετες) them and do not surrender (μηθετες μηθετες) themselves to them. (Phd. 82b-8c)

Likewise, the sentiment expressed in Symposium is familiar to us from Phaedrus and enunciates a perspective on care for the soul that we should find familiar. Importantly, this passage occurs in Diotima’s description of the philosopher’s ascent. It explicates the vision of Beauty attained through beholding the sight of beautiful bodies, something we have already seen discussed in Phaedrus.

After this he [i.e., the lover] must think that the beauty of people’s souls is more valuable (μηθετες μηθετες) than the beauty of their bodies, so that if someone is decent (μηθετες μηθετες) in

The example is clearly meant as a rebuke to those who are inclined to evaluate the cogency of an argument based on who is making it.

Ferrari comments on the effect of philosophy on lover and beloved in this way: “[H]ere in the Phaedrus, the supremely other-directed feelings of love are assessed primarily in terms of what takes place within the individual souls of lover and beloved rather than in reference to the structure of the relationship between them…” Ferrari (1990), 161

While Phaedrus clearly indicates that the philosophical lover ought to realize his eros for a beloved through engaging in philosophy, it does not, as far as I can see, prohibit or even discourage the fulfillment of sexual urges outside of a philosophical relationship. As is evident from the passage above, Phaedo implores that philosophers “not surrender” (μηθετες μηθετες) to these urges and “master” (μηθετες μηθετες) them; but this seems not to square with the ideas developed throughout Phaedrus which insist that divine self-control, and not ‘human power’ ought to inform one’s moderation or σοφροσύνη.

“decent” is not attested in LSJ: μηθετες μηθετες A.II.2 of persons, able, capable; A.II.2.b in moral sense, reasonable, fair, good. What is envisioned here is not a boy who is ‘decent’ is a vague moral sense, but a boy with ability, both capable and good.
his soul, even though he’s scarcely blooming in his body, our lover must be content to love and care for him and to seek to give birth to such ideas as will make young men better. (Symp. 210b5-c3)\(^\text{322}\)

A boy with a good or capable soul who is also ‘scarcely blooming’ would in any other circumstance be the perfect candidate for a lover’s sexual affection. But the lover here elevates his gaze to the ideal of Beauty, expressing his affection in the form of intellectual stimulation. Here, the work of eros is realized through the lover giving birth to logoi in the beloved. Where Phaedrus describes this as ‘planting and sowing discourse accompanied by knowledge’ in the soul of the beloved, Symposium echoes the language of Theaetetus in using the metaphor of birthing.\(^\text{323}\)

Finally, in the discussion of rhetoric and writing, Socrates gives Phaedrus an idea of what any good orator must know about his audience before he can fashion a persuasive speech.

Since the nature of speech is in fact to direct the soul, whoever intends to become a rhetorician must know how many kinds of souls there are. Their number is so-and-so many; each is of such-and-such a sort; hence some people have such-and-such a character…. People of such-and-such a character are easy to persuade by speeches of such-and-such a sort…. The orator must learn all this well, then put his theory into practice and develop the ability to discern each kind clearly as it occurs in the actions of real life…. He will now not only be able to say what kind of person is convinced by what kind of speech; on meeting someone he will be able to discern what he is like and make clear to himself that he person actually standing in front of him is of just this particular character… (Phdr. 271d1-272a3)

Without impugning the importance of knowledge and truth, the philosophical lover too must know these things if his dialectic is to resonate with his beloved. Just as his primary concern must be for the care of the soul, he must first understand the soul of any Zeus-like lover if he is

\(^{322}\) Of course, the question of who will make young men better is Socrates preoccupation throughout the dialogues. In Laches he invites his interlocutors to consider the problem: “Then the question whether anyone of us is an expert in the care of the soul (\(\text{\underline{\text{\textsc{\textipa{\textipa}}} \text{\underline{\text{\textipa{\textipa}}}}\text{\underline{\text{\textipa{\textipa}}}}\text{\underline{\text{\textipa{\textipa}}}}\text{\underline{\text{\textipa{\textipa}}}}\text{\underline{\text{\textipa{\textipa}}}}\text{\underline{\text{\textipa{\textipa}}}}\)) and is capable of caring for it well (\(\text{\underline{\text{\textipa{\textipa}}}}\text{\underline{\text{\textipa{\textipa}}}}\text{\underline{\text{\textipa{\textipa}}}}\)), and has had good teachers, is the one we ought to investigate.” Lch. 185e4-6

\(^{323}\) Th. 149aff. There is a slight difference in the way that Symposium and Theaetetus characterize the birth of ideas. Here, it appears that the lover gives birth to ideas in the boy which in turn benefits the boy; in Theaetetus, it is the boy himself who gives birth to those ideas. In either case, the process is meant to illustrate a benefit to the boy.
to identify a potential beloved as Zeus-like. There is little purpose in advancing a philosophical logos that is irrefutable to a beloved for whom philosophical logoi are incomprehensible. This is why, for instance, Socrates’ examination of Lysis yields such a spectacular effect; Socrates knows something of the boy’s character in advance—that he is “spirited and noble”, “beautiful and well-bred”.324 Because of this, his examination of the boy appears to Hippothales to be accomplishing the task of ‘cutting down’ the young beloved, when in fact, Socrates’ insight into his character allows him to rightly suppose how Lysis will react to the suggestion that he is his lover’s possession. Likewise, as we noted in previous chapters, Theodorus’ encomium of his pupil Theaetetus, and Alcibiades’ unwitting revelations in his Symposium speech convey much of the character of each. As we saw with both of these characters, each is capable of philosophizing but only one has the requisite qualities of character to permit him to make progress toward philosophy.

Lastly, turning back to Phaedrus, we find that Socrates, having sought to purify himself in the palinode for the blasphemy of his first speech, concludes with an appeal to Love:

If Phaedrus and I said anything that shocked you in our earlier speech, blame it on Lysias, who was its father, and put a stop to his making speeches of this sort; convert him to philosophy like his brother Polemarchus so that his lover [i.e., Phaedrus] here may no longer play both sides as he does now, but simply devote his life to Love through philosophical discussion. (Phdr. 257b2-6)

This takes the form of a prayer or supplication in which Socrates not only asks forgiveness of Eros for his first speech, but prays too that Lysias be turned toward philosophy.325 There is an

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324 “Well, congratulations, Hippothales, on finding someone so spirited (μεταφραστικά) and noble (μεταφραστικά) to love!” Lysis 208e8-9. “[Lysis] deserved to be called not only a beautiful boy but a well-bred young gentleman (μεταφραστικά) Lysis 207a3-4

325 Tomin feels that at the conclusion of the dialogue Phaedrus himself has been converted to philosophy: “The majority of modern interpreters...cannot see Phaedrus’ conversion to philosophy in the Phaedrus as anything but ironic.” He continues, “Let me begin by demonstrating that in the Phaedrus Socrates imparts to Phaedrus words of wisdom (μεταφραστικά) (discourse accompanied by knowledge) Phdr. 276e7, and that Phaedrus undergoes a profound change in the course of receiving them.” Tomin (2000), 374. I do not see however, how
irony, of course, in the fact that at the conclusion of the dialogue Socrates casts Phaedrus as Lysias’ lover rather than, as he appears to be, the beloved who inspires Lysias’ speech.\(^{326}\) It is evident though, that both need to be turned toward philosophy. Lysias, because his rhetoric (however deficient philosophically) is potent in its persuasiveness on individuals such as Phaedrus, and Phaedrus because of his indiscriminate love of speeches makes him vulnerable to self-regarding lovers.

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\(^{326}\) Among modern commentators there is at least the suggestion that the speech of Lysias is directed at Phaedrus himself: “The name ‘Phaedrus’ signifies ‘bright’ and ‘boy’: Phaedrus is the bright boy, the beautiful boy, who attracted Socrates all along and who, we may assume, attracted Lysias.” Asmis (1986), 166; 166 fn15. In saying this, Asmis gives consideration to the plausibility that Lysias is a pursuer of Phaedrus based on the latter’s suspected age and the dating of \textit{Phaedrus} in relation to other dialogues. I would suggest however, that there is a more definitive clue in the last sentence of Lysias’ speech. It reads: “Well, I think this speech is long enough. If you are still longing for more, if you think I have passed over something, just ask.” \textit{Phdr.} 234c6-7. To my sensibilities, this reads as a parenthetical note or addendum to the speech and not as part of the speech itself. My sense is that this reference to the speech itself is meant as a clue that this rhetorical composition has been written specifically to persuade its recipient, Phaedrus.
Chapter Five: Conduct, Character and Protreptic

I. Dramatic Characterization and Protreptic

A. Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I would like to accomplish two things. First, I propose to briefly offer a perspective on my interest in Socratic protreptic. Here, I follow up by extending the line of inquiry from earlier chapters and consider the function of protreptic as a persuasive tool. Again, as in earlier chapters, this section is driven by an understanding of particular characters from the dialogues. Second, I wish to show how my work to this point is connected to a larger area of inquiry, which is best understood under the heading ‘Dialectical Ethics’. My intention here is to suggest that the rich description of dialectical conduct—both Socrates’ conduct and that of his interlocutors—plays an important but underappreciated role in the advancement and success of Socratic dialectic. My view is that from a Socratic perspective, what one achieves in doing philosophy is intimately connected to how one engages in philosophy. As we have amply seen, one’s conduct in philosophy is tied to dispositions of character. It is in the latter sections of this chapter that I hope to defend this thesis and to offer direction for future study.

B. Protreptic and Persuasion

My decision to explore the psychological dimensions of Socratic protreptic has come about a result of my interest in Socratic protreptic generally. My reading of the dialogues has always been informed by an attempt to appreciate the psychological motives driving Socrates’ interlocutors, so bringing together protreptic with a study of the individual psyche and the
philosophical life strikes me as a challenging and important area requiring detailed study. We often find Plato roundly praised as both a philosopher and dramatist, but infrequently encounter investigations given over to examining the attitudes, emotions, prejudices and foibles of Socrates’ interlocutors. Having examined these with due attention to selective aspects of the dramatic, historical and literary qualities of his work has served, I hope, to complement our insight into Plato’s larger philosophical objectives.

In the introductory chapter my purpose was to motivate the subject of this dissertation by adducing examples (some brief, others more detailed) to illustrate how character or psyche factor into the problem of philosophical protreptic. Since protreptic is often seen simply as a rhetorical genre meant to transform a pre-philosophical individual into a philosophical one (Jordan 1986), the challenge was to elaborate for the reader the complex of attributes written into the characters of Theaetetus and Alcibiades. In the case of Theaetetus, it is clear that even the most capable minds require the practised touch of Socrates’ skillful dialectic. As for Alcibiades, we saw that his character testifies to the fact that even the greatest care and attention often fails to attain the anticipated outcome.

My suspicion is that it is precisely because protreptic is seen as transformative that little attention has been given to the kind of individual being subjected to Socrates’ dialectical persuasion. After all, if one takes the relevant determination of protreptic success to be whether or not an individual has become philosophical, the question of why one fails to be philosophical or indeed, why one succeeds seems largely irrelevant. This, I hope I have shown, is not what Plato thought. Granted, Plato’s protreptic message might not resonate with the modern mind when he discusses nobility or shame; and yet, at other times he does appear sensitive to ideals we do hold close such as courage, liberality and intellectual wonder. In either case, we are obliged
to treat Plato’s works not simply as a digest of philosophical problems, but as one man’s exposition of the varied aspects of the philosophical life.

One noteworthy outcome of our findings is the realization that one’s ability for philosophy is distinct from the question of whether one is suited to the philosophical life. For, Alcibiades is capable of philosophy and even persuaded that he ought to pursue philosophy, though clearly not suited to the philosophical life. Conversely, among those who wish to take up philosophy, the philosophical life is not always possible or advisable. As we saw in our discussion of Theaetetus in Chapter 3, some interlocutors possess an ability to engage in dialectic but are simply not psychologically suited to tolerating refutation. We have taken note already of those who are, Socrates tells Theaetetus, “literally ready to bite when I take away some nonsense or other from them.”327 Those who cling to phantoms or who rebel against Socrates’ efforts to expose their unviable dialectical offspring are the ones who appear intellectually capable are but temperamentally unsuited to dialectic. As we see illustrated below, the dialectical trajectory of Socrates’ interlocutors is not limited to simple philosophical success or failure; but success, failure or any other outcome is dependent on the attitude or bearing of an interlocutor.

Fig 2

327 Th. 151c7-8
328 Adapted from Th. 149a1-151e8
329 Cf. Th. 151b1-2
330 Cf. Th. 150e1ff
331 Cf. Th. 149d3-5
332 Socrates’ characterizes his task of placing barren students with Sophists as “matchmaking” (promnw#mai) Th. 149d-150a; 151b4. But, since it bears a fearful resemblance to the “unlawful and unscientific practise of…procuring” (proagwgi; a) (Th. 150a1-2), its practise is rife with danger. If we compare this to Xenophon’s
Other interlocutors are not suited intellectually to philosophy at all. These are the ones that are matched to sophists, the ones that Socrates gives “to Prodicus…[and] to other wise and inspired persons.” (Tht. 150b6-7). But as the case of Theages attests, this does not mean that such persons do not wish to engage in philosophy. Theages manages, despite Socrates’ apparent misgivings, to secure (provisionally) his association with Socrates not on account of his philosophical ability, but because Socrates’ divine sign appears on the occasion of their meeting not to oppose him. Consequently, Socrates grudgingly relents to this association: “Well if it seems that this is what we ought to do, then let’s do it.” (Thg. 131a9-10). There are those too, who at first show promise but later fail, such as Aristides. In this case, it appears that Aristides is able and sufficiently philosophical but that ‘outside forces’ (precisely what Socrates fears in Republic VI) have drawn him away from Socrates’ influence.

All of this speaks to the necessity of placing Socratic protreptic in its rightful place as a persuasive tool. It is a tool or mechanism that serves as a bridge between a pre-philosophical and properly philosophical life. It should not however, be seen as definitive litmus test for one’s suitability to the philosophical life. For, while “protreptic has as its explicit aim the winning of a student for philosophy”, it is equally true that “the student must be won at different levels” (Jordan 1986, 309). While the value of protreptic should not be undersold, neither should the

Footnotes:

1. Symposium where we find Callias asks Socrates “What are you most proud of?”, Socrates replies “My skill as a Pimp” (Thg. 131a9-10). However, it is clear in Theaetetus that Socrates claims that there is a symmetry between matchmaking and procuring. In fact, his point there is to maintain that he is a matchmaker and not a procurror. If Kahn is correct in his thesis that elements of Xenophon’s Socratic conversations are derivative, this surely shows Xenophon as borrowing material whilst lapsing into inattentiveness.

2. Socrates’ unwillingness to suffer fools is plainly stated in Lesser Hippias: “If the speaker seems to me to be some worthless person, I neither ask questions nor do I care what he says. This is how you will recognize whom I consider wise.” L. Hipp. 369d6-8

3. Of Aristides and others Socrates says: “They have then proceeded to leave me sooner than they should, either of their own accord or through the influence of others. And after they have gone away from me they have resorted to harmful company (μακροεννοούσιν)…” Tht. 150e3-6
importance of recognizing that philosophy and protreptic succeed or fail only when accompanied by the right sort of character.

C. Character and Dialectic

A persistent difficulty facing any attempt to set out a theory of psychological determinants of protreptic success in Plato is his use of dramatic form. While individual characters are dramatically compelling for the reader, general analysis proves difficult. However, if we see the characters presented not merely as tokens but as types, we may move further toward appreciating Plato’s method. After all, the character of each interlocutor is an artful Platonic construct meant to closely link a personality with a philosophical viewpoint. So, when we think of Phaedrus’ character for instance, it is hard to image him defending the transvaluation of values that Callicles promotes;\footnote{Granted, an anachronism. However, on the connection between Callicles and Nietzsche see Dodds (1959), 12-15} likewise, it is difficult to imagine Callicles placidly reposing by a stream with Socrates while discussing eros. Plato’s aim in devising these personae is to make the subject under discussion resonate with the reader through a dramatic rendering of character. When we find, for instance, that the young Theaetetus is driven to learn all he can from a skilled teacher (Theodorus), it is no great surprise that the subject broached by Socrates is the nature of knowledge. Likewise, Callicles’ reactionary and hostile attitude, apparent from his first words to Socrates—“Tell me, Chaerephon, is Socrates in earnest about this or is he joking?” (GrG, 481b6-7)—is a fitting personality to inhabit for a man who bears the standard for amoralism. Just as fittingly, Thrasymachus’ patronizing and dismissive volley—“Tell me, Socrates, do you still have a wet nurse?”—sets the tone for his ferocious and defiantly oppositional defense of a tyrant’s conception of justice. Of course, there are numerous scholars...
who have observed these qualities in the dramatic representation of these characters. But there has been little, if anything, said about Plato’s dramatic characterization of interlocutors and the technique of making each particular character a stand-in for a general type of personality as well.

Of course, there are problems with this approach. For, as we have seen, Plato himself recognizes many of the virtues of character exhibited by Theaetetus in his discussion of the philosophical character in Republic. Here, high-mindedness; nobility; justice; moderation; stability; ease of learning; good memory and youthful passion are among the many qualities characteristic of the philosopher. What Theaetetus does offer us though, is a view of the psyche of the philosophical aspirant before protreptic and before philosophy. While it is hard to imagine a fully-realized philosophical character where justice and moderation are not present, we might be forgiven for allowing that a boy in his teens would exhibit some but not all of the qualities expected of a guardian-philosopher.

D. Diversity of Protreptic Models

Since the present work has not been a study of protreptic per se, I have said very little by way of offering an overview of the types of Socratic protreptic. For the purposes of putting Phaedrus into context, I wish to briefly state a few observations on Socratic protreptic.

In the course this study I have referred to the explicit forms of protreptic such as we see in Euthydemus and Clitophon as ‘model’ speeches. In Euthydemus, they are model speeches which Socrates delivers as a demonstration (ἐνδειξομαι) for Euthydemus and Dionysodorus to

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336 Cf. R. 485a ff; 489e ff; 503c ff
337 Euthyd. 278d4. In commenting on protreptic in Epictetus, Slings proposes epideictic as a form of protreptic Slings (1995), 175-76. Thus, we can interpret Socrates’ epidexitis in two ways: as a demonstration of how he would
emulate. In *Clitophon* Socrates’ speeches are protreptic models to the extent that Clitophon is accurate in reproducing the details of Socrates’ exhortations. But protreptic is not limited to hortatory addresses; it can take numerous *forms*. Mark Jordan surveys a number of these forms and in his estimation,

> It is plain that protreptic cannot be a genre in the ordinary poetic sense, that is, as dictating a certain combination of form, diction, and subject matter. The four protreptics analyzed above [i.e., in Jordan’s paper] were a dialogue, an oration, a letter, and an anthology. Other examples would appear as hymns, aphorisms, biographies and anecdotes of classroom teaching…. The deep structure of Plato’s dialogues is not that of Cicero’s, just as the form of his letters is not that of Seneca’s. (Jordan 1986, 328)

My suspicion is that part of the difficulty in allowing that there are relevant characteristics of the individual psyche that bear on the question of protreptic arises from the inclination to see protreptic in Plato as accomplished exclusively through formulaic hortatory arguments. As Jordan points out however, protreptic can be achieved in any number of ways. Thus, we should not discount the protreptic force of Socrates’ own philosophical persona as an example of ‘a philosophical life’.338 One might find protreptic motivation in the praise accorded Socrates from Laches,339 Crito340 or Phaedo341 (who surely conveys Plato’s own heartfelt sentiment). On the other hand, the brothers to model their protreptic for Clinias’ benefit and as an epideictic protreptic meant primarily to have a protreptic effect on the brothers themselves.

338 Here we might think of Alcibiades hinting at the moment in which he felt compelled to turn toward philosophy. After being rebuffed in his sexual advance, Alcibiades experiences a transformative moment in which he realizes the extent and power of Socrates’ attendance on the principles of the philosophical life: “Well, something much more painful than a snake has bitten me in my most sensitive part—I mean my heart, or my soul, or whatever you want to call it, which has been struck and bitten by philosophy…..” *Symp.* 218a2-5. To his credit, Alcibiades reacts to Socrates’ snub by properly connecting Socrates’ display of virtue with the philosophical life. It is at this moment that protreptic occurs and Alcibiades describes himself as ‘bitten by philosophy’. Of course, Socrates’ philosophical influence is not without its comic effect. In the opening of *Symposium*, Apollodorus describes his source for the details of the dinner-party: “Aristodemus, from Cydatheneum, a real runt of a man, who always went barefoot. He went to the party because, I think, he was obsessed with Socrates—one of the worst cases at the time.” *Symp.* 173b2-5. Levity aside, that Aristodemus’ obsession with Socrates was “one of the worst cases at the time” is a fairly good indication that by his example Socrates drew people to be at least curious about the philosophical life to which he aspired.

339 Questioning Lysimachus’ decision to call on Nicias and himself as advisors in educational matters, Laches testifies to Socrates’ image as a local sage: “I am astonished that you are inviting us to be your fellow counsellors in the education of the young men and are not inviting Socrates here! In the first place, he comes from your own
other hand, one might find protreptic inspiration by coming to appreciate his character as revealed through elenchus where wit, wisdom, irony and his insatiable thirst for truth come together to represent an ideal philosophical character. Yunis’ observations, which we noted in Chapter 1, are particularly apt in this regard: “Plato uses literary art, which in his case includes *but is not limited to philosophical argument*, to move his reader towards a greater readiness to adopt a just way of life.” To this, we might add another of his perspicacious observations also considered above: “All of the dialogues, especially the shorter, aporetic ones, possess protreptic qualities, inasmuch as they contest conventional values, inculcate philosophical method, and offer Socrates as a model.” (Yunis 2007, 15). Our conception of the operative elements in Socratic protreptic then, demands closer study. We ought to broaden our perspective to include *the very relationship between dialectician and interlocutor* as part of Plato’s protreptic strategy.

This is what we have found, I hope, in our reading of *Phaedrus*. If we turn our minds to consider the relationship envisioned between the philosophical lover and his beloved, the philosophical lover’s conduct in discussion ought itself to be exemplum of the philosophical life. As such, it has an alluring effect (as does Socrates’ life) on the beloved.

The goodwill of the philosophical lover is manifest not in the promise of material gifts or rewards for his beloved, but in the conduct which (in the second half of *Phaedrus*) Socrates demands of anyone with the temerity to give speeches or commit his thoughts to writing.

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340 Marvelling at Socrates’ equanimity as he sits in prison awaiting his fate Crito confesses: “Often in the past throughout my life, I have considered the way you live happy (τῷ δὲ διόνυσος τῶν ἀθάνατον), and especially so now that you bear your present misfortune so lightly and easily.” *Cri.* 43b6-8

341 “Such was the end of our comrade, Echecrates, a man who, we would say, was of all those we have known the best (ὁ δὲ ἄριστος), and also the wisest (ὁ δὲ μάχρα διόνυσος) and the most upright (ὁ δὲ δικαιοτάτος).” *Phd.* 118a8-10

342 Yunis (2007), 4 (emphasis added)
Truth; division; collection; definition; rational order; these are formal elements that are lacking in Lysias’ speech. But they are precisely what Socrates demands of rhetors and dialecticians alike. So, where rhetors trade on opinion, obfuscation, equivocation, and the persuasiveness of set-pieces, the philosophical lover treats philosophy as a method for collecting, dividing, defining and understanding problems. He is a benefactor to his beloved not because of what he teaches him, but because the practise of dialectic itself hones the analytical tools and evaluative methods so necessary for critical philosophical discussion. Unlike the rhetor who must be concerned to conceal his method, the philosophical lover aims at developing the beloved’s capacity to evaluate arguments—including any that the philosophical lover himself might make. And it is in this, perhaps more than anything else, that the beloved has proof of the philosophical lover’s other-regarding goodwill.

343 “Won’t someone who is to speak well and nobly have to have in mind the truth about the subject he is going to discuss?” Phdr. 259e4-5
344 “It follows that whoever wants to acquire the art of rhetoric must first make a systematic division (διήθησας ὑφαίνει τε καὶ τὸ πάντα) and grasp the particular character of each of these two kinds of thing, both the kind where most people wander in different directions and the kind where they do not.” Phdr. 263b7-10
345 “Second, I think, he must not be mistaken about his subject; he must have a sharp eye for the class (γένος) to which whatever he is about to discuss belongs” Phdr. 263c3-5
346 “Did Lysias too, at the start of his love-speech, compel us to assume that love is the single thing that he himself wanted it to be?” Phdr. 263d7-9
347 “But surely you will admit at least this much: Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own; it must be neither without head or without legs; and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting both to one another and to the whole work.” Phdr. 264c3-6. That is to say, the argument, like a newborn, must be sound and viable. In his capacity as a ‘midwife’ part of Socrates’ obligation is to expose badly formed arguments.
348 As we observed in Chapter 2: “[T]he dialectician chooses a proper soul (λόγῳ ἐφυλακεῖται) and plants and sows within it discourse accompanied by knowledge—discourse capable of helping itself as well as the man who planted it, which is not barren but produces a seed from which more discourse grows in the character (ὑπὸ τοῦ) of others. Such discourse makes the seed forever immortal and renders the man who has it as happy (εὐδαιμονεῖται) as any human can be.” Phdr. 276e5-277a4
349 Speaking to Phaedrus, Socrates wonders, “[I]s it just the art of speaking that Thrasymachus and the rest of them use, which has made them masters of speechmaking and capable of producing others like them—anyhow those who are willing to bring them gifts and to treat them as if they were kings. Phdr. 266c3-6 (emphasis added). Similarly, we see in Euthydemus that the point of the brothers’ recently acquired (and elementary) sophistic display is not to edify the audience, but to amaze. Quite by accident though, their sophistic trickery is revealed: “You are ruining the argument, said Euthydemus to Dionysodorus, and this fellow here will turn out to be not knowing, and then he will be knowing and not knowing at the same time. Dionysodorus blushed.” Euthyd. 297a5-7
Understanding the psychological dimensions of Socratic protreptic is a task that cannot be accomplished in a definitive way by focussing narrowly on a single or even a small number of dialogues. Of course, this is the strategy that has been employed throughout this dissertation, and with good reason. When one is seeking to substantiate one’s view of Plato’s intentions across dialogues, details are more helpful than sweeping claims. I hope that in this regard, I have offered sufficient evidence to make my case for the importance of attending to psychological dispositions that determine the outcome of protreptic. Any future work would, necessarily, treat a larger number of dialogues in a more comprehensive manner.

II. Dialectical Ethics

A. Philosophical Beloved

In the previous chapter we noted the many ways in which each of the self-regarding lovers conspires to keep his beloved from coming to philosophy. Driven by the desire for sexual consummation, each develops a stratagem suited to his ulterior purpose, designed to thwart his beloved’s critical capacity for independent thought. We saw too, the many ways in which a philosophical lover’s psyche differs from his ignoble counterparts. Conspicuously though, there is little attention given in Phaedrus to the beloved who associates with a philosophical lover. Part of the reason for this, I would like to suggest, is that recommendations for the sort of character necessary in a sufficiently philosophical beloved are to be gleaned from the second part of Phaedrus containing the so-called ‘critique of writing’. We saw a number of these recommendations above in looking at the principles to which any good writer ought to adhere: desire for truth; capacity for division and collection; clarity in defining terms; rational

350 Phdr. 257d5 ff
organization of arguments. To these we might add: ability to identify rhetorical forms and point out logical fallacies; capacity to clearly distinguish rudimentary forms from composite arts; attention to part/whole and particular/general distinctions; systematic methodology. While Socrates’ point is that “Thrasymachus and anyone else who teaches the art of rhetoric seriously” (Phdr. 271a5-6) will inculcate this knowledge in their students, he is of course, being ironic: for, doing so would make Thrasymachus and the others indistinguishable from dialecticians.

Besides the suggestion that this line of argument might be profitably developed, I would like to propose another more comprehensive approach to improving our understanding of the psychological component of Socratic protreptic and elenchus in general. My suggestion is that Socrates’ elenctic conversations be studied with a view not to their content but to the dialectical conduct that Socrates insists on for himself and his interlocutors. The objective here would be to find consistent Socratic recommendations for how one ought to behave in a dialectical argument. As a paradigmatic philosophical lover, Socrates’ counsel ought to be a good indicator of the qualities we should expect to find in any appropriately philosophical interlocutor.

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351 According to Socrates, part of the art of oratory: “First, I believe there is the Preamble…Second come the statement of Facts and the Evidence of Witnesses concerning it; third, Indirect Evidence and Claims to Plausibility etc…. ” Phdr. 266d7 ff
352 Here Socrates gives two examples. First, is the ability to distinguish elements of harmony from harmony itself (Phdr. 268d7-e7) and distinguishing “the preliminaries of tragedy” from “tragedy itself” Phdr. 269a2-3
353 “Do you think, then, that it is possible to reach a serious understanding of the nature of the soul without understanding the nature of the world as a whole?” Phdr. 270c1-3
354 “Consider, then, what both Hippocrates and true argument say about nature. Isn’t this the way to think systematically (διάνοιασα) about the nature of anything?” Phdr. 270c9-d2
B. Saying the Same Things

Progress toward understanding the ‘ethics of dialectic’ might begin by noting Socrates’ insistence on consistency, agreement and harmony\(^{355}\)–not just in the logic of one’s speech, but in one’s approach to dialectical questions. When for instance, Callicles finally enters the action of *Gorgias*, Socrates spares no time in setting the tone for the discussion. Pointing to Callicles’ dual affections—Demos son of Pyrilampes and the Athenian *demos*, Socrates charges, “I notice in each case you’re unable to contradict your beloved, clever though you are, no matter what he says or what he claims is so. You keep shifting back and forth. If you say anything in the Assembly and the Athenian *demos* denies it, you shift your ground and say what it wants to hear.” *(Grg. 481e1-3)*. Now, the whisper of pacifying words to a beloved in a stolen moment is certainly no grave moral outrage; but the same inclination in the Assembly is the mark of a venal political player. In contrast to Callicles’ unprincipled posture, Socrates curtly reminds him, “what philosophy says always stays the same.” *(Grg. 482a8)*

This leads Socrates to pose a challenge: “either refute her [i.e., philosophy] and show that doing what’s unjust without paying what is due for it is not the ultimate of all bad things…or else if you leave this unfuted…Callicles will not agree with you Callicles, but will be dissonant with you all your life long.” *(Grg. 482b5-6)*. At this point, Socrates insists on the importance of living in harmony with oneself. He tells Callicles:

> And yet for my part, my good man, I think it’s better to have my lyre or a chorus that I might lead out of tune and dissonant, and have the vast majority of men disagree with me and contradict me, than to be out of harmony with myself, to contradict myself, though I’m only one person. *(Grg. 482b6-c2)*

\(^{355}\) Cf. fn. 150
The danger for Callicles, according to Socrates, is that his life will be marked by dissonance. He can make this pronouncement because the matter under discussion is of no small consequence—whether or not it is bad to ‘pay the penalty’ for injustice. One must imagine that Socrates has, in some measure, anticipated that Callicles conducts his life—whether the young man knows it or not—with the latent belief that paying the penalty for injustice is good thing. It is for the sake of discussion that he adopts an oppositional character and argues the opposite viewpoint.

But Callicles persists. Undaunted by Socrates’ criticism, the young Athenian continues opposing Socrates, though he eventually tires of Socrates’ harangue and takes aim with a derisive remark: “How you keep saying the same things, Socrates!” (490e8). Having already announced his conviction that “what philosophy says always stays the same”, Socrates boldly adds: “Yes, Callicles, not only the same things, but also about the same subjects.” (490e9-10). It is a stinging remark, and one that reiterates a dialectical value at the core of Socrates’ philosophical method. At a later point, when Socrates decides to take the lead in the discussion, he does so with strict instructions not only for Callicles, but Gorgias and Polus as well. Note that even when he takes the lead in discussion, Socrates remains mindful that dialectic is a collaborative enterprise.

I suppose all of us ought to be contentiously eager to know what’s true and what’s false about the things we’re talking about. That it should become clear is a good common to all. I’ll go through the discussion, then, and say how I think it is, and if any of you thinks what I agree to with myself isn’t so, you must object and refute me. For the things I say I certainly don’t say with any knowledge at all; no, I’m searching together with you so that if my opponent clearly has a point, I’ll be the first to concede it. (Grg. 505e4-506a5 emphasis added)

He is not asking his listeners to weigh-in on the subject under discussion, but to refute him if they find him not agreeing with himself. Even disengaged players often take pleasure at identifying a logical contradiction. Of course, reluctant interlocutors (such as Gorgias, Polus and
Callicles have become) might not have the same goodwill exemplified by say, Glaucon, Crito, Meno (or even Meno’s slave!). However, there is a benefit to enlisting Callicles and the others: they more than any other type of interlocutor will be keen to point out an inconsistency to Socrates. Facing his challengers again, Socrates explains:

And if you or someone more forceful than you won’t undo them [i.e., Socrates’ own views], then anyone who says anything other than what I am now saying cannot be speaking well. And yet, *my account is ever the same*: I don’t know how these things are, but no one I’ve ever met, as in this case, can say anything else without being ridiculous. *(Grg. 509a1-6)*

In an intellectual environment where novelty for novelties’ sake is often taken as a sign of sophistication, Socrates’ message is clear: unadorned simple speech that makes the same points about the same subjects and yet resists refutation is, if not nearer the truth, at least less ridiculous than the alternative. In his final words to Callicles and the others, Socrates characteristically acknowledges his own ignorance and appeals for all present to do the same. His closing address is equal parts peroration, exhortation and admonition. In part, it reads:

> For, it’s a shameful thing for us, being in the condition that we appear to be in at present—when we never think the same about the same subjects, the most important ones at that—to sound off as though we’re somebodies. That’s how far behind in education we’ve fallen. *(Grg. 527d6-e1)*

C. Harmony

Socrates’ claim to ‘always say the same things about the same thing’ must have resonated with other Socratics since we find the claim repeated in Xenophon. Compare for instance Socrates’ response in *Gorgias* (cited above) with a Xenophontic parallel:
Even on the assumption that certain of Xenophon’s writings are largely derivative,\textsuperscript{358} the similarity here is good evidence that this formulation struck Xenophon either as the sort of statement that the historical Socrates would have made (which I am not arguing), or as the type of claim that he also considered representative of (the dramatic) Socrates’ dialectical ethic.

The same might also be claimed in the case of Alcibiades. Here we find Socrates pointing (as he does in Callicles’ case) to the contrary tendencies that characterize a life where \textit{logos} and \textit{bios} do not agree. In his initial advance toward Alcibiades, Socrates succeeds in enticing the young Athenian into a philosophical discussion by suggesting that has already anticipated what Alcibiades will answer. “My question” says Socrates, “is whether you have in mind what I say you have in mind” (\textit{Alc. I}. 106b11-12). Eventually, Alcibiades comes to the view that he is confused about the most important matters and submits, acceding to Socrates’ early suspicions:

\begin{quote}
I swear by the gods, Socrates, I have no idea what I mean—I must be in some absolutely bizarre condition! (\textit{Alc. I}. 116e3-5) When you ask me questions, first I think one thing, and then I think something else. (\textit{Alc. I}. 116e3-5)
\end{quote}

Whether crafted by Plato or not, Alcibiades’ reaction in this dialogue echoes the sort of reply that one might expect from Theaetetus.\textsuperscript{359} Like Theaetetus, Alcibiades is depicted as neither hostile nor irritated (as he is in \textit{Symposium}). His disbelief is directed at his own ‘bizarre condition’—at the phenomenon of finding himself in one state of mind and then another. Ultimately, Socrates

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{356} “Yes, Callicles, not only the same things, but also about the same subjects.”
\textsuperscript{357} “I’m not only saying the same things but saying them about the same subjects.”
\textsuperscript{358} Cf. Kahn (1996)
\textsuperscript{359} Compare for instance, the way in which Theaetetus equably admits his puzzlement to Socrates: “Oh, yes indeed, Socrates, I often wonder like mad what these things can mean; sometimes when I’m looking at them I begin to feel quite giddy.” \textit{Tht.} 155c8-10. Cf. fn.147 above.
\end{quote}
guides Alcibiades to see that he can be cured of this bizarre condition (αὐτῆς) by finding a skill that will aid him in living harmonious life. Pointing to the way in which the power of arithmetic can bring about agreement in numbers among citizens (126c3-d9), Socrates ironically wonders aloud, “And doesn’t it [i.e., arithmetic] also make each person agree with himself?” (Alc. I 126c10). The harmony and concord that Socrates so proudly vaunts to Callicles as a cornerstone of his own dialectical temperament is proposed here to Alcibiades as a requirement for self-cultivation—a first footfall on the path toward philosophy.

From time to time, when Socrates faces an intransigent interlocutor, he turns from the discussion at hand to an explanation of his own method, thereby both mollifying his interlocutor and, in the process, indicating to his audience the sort of attitude or approach that successful dialectic requires. When, for example, Hippias dismisses Socrates’ logical distinctions between the ‘good’, ‘beneficial’ and ‘fine’ as “flakings and clippings of speech (G.Hp. 304a6-7)” adding for good measure that what is ‘fine’ is to be able to speak well in court and defend oneself and one’s property (G.Hp. 304a6-b8), Socrates feigns astonishment at his wisdom:

[W]hen I’m convinced by you and say what you say, that it’s much the most excellent thing to be able to present a speech well and finely, and get things done in court or any other gathering, I hear every insult from that man (among others around here) who has always been refuting me. He happens to be a close relative of mine, and he lives in the same house. So when I go home to my own place and he hears me saying those things, he asks if I’m not ashamed that I dare discuss fine activities when I’ve been so plainly refuted about the fine, and it’s clear I don’t even know at all what that is itself. (G.Hp 304c6-d7)

Of course, Socrates’ ‘close relative’, the man who ‘lives in the same house’ is Socrates himself. But even if we imagine that Socrates is not feigning astonishment, that he has indeed been convinced by Hippias about ‘the fine’, this account of his soul’s deliberation points to an

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360 The skill to which Socrates refers is self-cultivation (ἐπιμελείαν), or care for oneself: Cf. Alc. I. 119a passim.
internalization of the procedure of thesis and refutation. While it is common enough to find examples in Plato’s corpus of contradiction in *argument*, the characterization of a psyche that agrees or disagrees with *itself* gives us significant insight into the process, practise and purpose of Socrates’ method. Driven by philosophical eros, Socrates’ internal contemplation suggests another sort of dialectic, one in which *Socrates must ultimately agree with Socrates* or face the harsh judgment of reason.

What makes Socrates’ protreptic method particularly effective is that his conversations are not blatant advertisements for philosophy. He does not peddle philosophy or proselytize but rather, guides his interlocutor to the point where each feels a need, a *psychological need*, to achieve a quality of mind, disposition of character or moral virtue which *then* fuels the desire to philosophize. While harmony, agreement, consistency, self-cultivation are not themselves *philosophy*—they are realized *through* philosophy. At the conclusion of *Alcibiades* the author points precisely to this problem. Having been lead to the point of recognizing that he must philosophize if he is to avoid living like a slave, Alcibiades turns to Socrates for guidance. When Socrates asks him “Then do you know how to escape from your present [slave-like] state?”^361^ (135c14), Alcibiades, not having fully appreciated his own role in ameliorating the condition of his psyche, anxiously responds “It’s up to you, Socrates” (135d3). To this, Socrates disapprovingly replies “That’s not well said, Alcibiades”, adding “it’s up to the god.” (135d4-6). Philosophy—even *Socratic Philosophy*—is not, after all, governed by Socrates. It is a divine undertaking mediated by the *daimōn* and apportioned to man according to his reason in the form of Truth.

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^361^ The ‘present state’ that Socrates refers to is clearly mentioned a few lines earlier: “Well, my friend”, he tells Alcibiades, shouldn’t we avoid whatever is appropriate for slaves?” *Alc.I* 135c8-9
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**Translations**


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