Following Plato

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Following Plato: A study of twelve of the dialogues

Stanley Raffel
Preface

My interest in Plato is a consequence of my involvement in the form of theorizing developed by Alan Blum and Peter McHugh. Perhaps uniquely, they have written a series of papers and books that have avoided the conventional view that Plato and Socrates, while of course significant are also, alas, outmoded. Instead they incorporate them as part of a living tradition that they, in their own work and that of their students, seek to sustain. As such, their work contains, indeed is replete with, various ideas extracted from, the dialogues and appropriated, sometimes even intact, in their own theorizing.

However, as is inevitable given their purposes, individual dialogues are never considered in the way they were written by Plato, with beginnings, middles, and ends. It is the possibility of adopting this alternative method, which is to say considering various of the dialogues as wholes, that has generated this book. While I am far from believing this is the only valid way to engage with Plato, I have adopted it here with the hope, indeed the conviction, that it can yield something of value.

Treating the dialogues in this way is no novelty. It has become the de rigueur ‘exegetical’ approach of Plato scholars. At the cost of not being considered one of these ‘scholars’, my approach has been to engage each text with fresh eyes, not filtered with the views of the innumerable other interpretations that each of the dialogues I deal with has, by now, engendered. So there will be no ‘literature reviews.’ Of course, where major contemporary theorists (and not just Blum and McHugh) have influenced my readings, their contributions are referenced.

There is also another feature of this book that must be acknowledged. While I think it is as wrong to believe that no intellectual progress has been made since Plato as to

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1 See, notably and among many other works that could also be cited. Blum, 1974, Blum, 1978, Blum and McHugh, 1979, 1-17, Blum and McHugh, 1984.
2 Something similar has already been done by a fellow student of Blum and McHugh. See Bonner, 2013 and 2014.
believe that no one has composed music worth listening to since Mozart I have not, by and large, sought to relate Plato’s points to contemporary developments. The exceptions are when I am so convinced that there are current ideas available that build on what is in the dialogues in ways that manage to make them even more illuminating than I firmly believe they already are, it has seemed foolish not to at least mention these new ideas.

Finally, it must be stressed that what will be offered are interpretations. That does not mean we are unable to make discoveries in the sense of credible versions of the text that seem revealing in hitherto underappreciated ways. Indeed, were there not this possibility interpreting seems pointless. But, as McHugh has pointed out, the very idea that one needs and wants to interpret precludes the possibility of finding ‘the’ truth.

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3 McHugh, 1996
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In the dialogue *Lysis*, Plato sets Socrates a very challenging task. Hippothales is deeply in love with a young man, Lysis, but is having great trouble getting the love reciprocated. He turns to Socrates for help. Socrates’ suggestion is that Hippothales is going about it the wrong way. Though the tactic of praising the beloved is virtually universal, Socrates disagrees because:

> Praise and flattery of beautiful people fills them with pride and arrogance...and the more arrogant they are, the harder they are to win... (206a)

Socrates will adopt an alternative strategy. Hippothales agrees to watch him in action ‘out of Lysis’ sight, because he didn’t want to irritate him’. (207b)

Initially Socrates does not get to speak with Lysis alone because he arrives with his ‘best friend’, (206d) Menexenus. Socrates asks Menexenus:

> ‘Which of you two is oldest.’ ‘That’s a bone of contention between us.’ (207c)

We are of course surprised to find them unable to agree about this. Though we are only at the beginning, this first interchange stimulates some conclusions. First, if it is even unclear who is older and, as is soon added, ‘which of you two has more noble blood’ (207c) Hippothales and Menexenus are probably, at least in superficial ways, very similar. This fact will become highly relevant later in the dialogue because the first serious theory of friendship entertained is that ‘like must always be friend to like.’ (214b) It can be noted that, if this is what the basis of friendship is, while it might help us to understand why Menexenus and Lysis are friends, it makes Hippothales’ goal a hopeless one since he is much older than Lysis. Whatever could make them friends, it is unlikely to be similarity.

However, still considering this first interaction between Socrates and Menexenus, if he and Lysis cannot even agree about who is older, it would certainly seem that they have quite a contentious relationship. While our initial reaction to this fact is to wonder why exactly they are friends, in fact this could fit with the second theory of friendship that will be entertained, ‘the more A is contrary to B, the more they are bound to be friends’. (215e) If this theory proves the more accurate one, not only will it enable us better to understand what could be binding Lysis and Menexenus. To the extent that it is a plausible idea, a relationship involving major differences, which a Hippothales-Lysis link could not avoid exemplifying, would not seem out of the question.

Before Socrates can talk further with him, Menexenus is called away. Socrates now gets the chance to begin to display, for Hippothales, how he thinks one actually should talk to a beloved. He begins by getting Lysis to see how much his parents and
others stop him from fulfilling his desires and then asks him why they do this. Lysis says:

That’s because I haven’t come of age, Socrates. (209a)

Whatever the merits of this explanation, the glaring problem with it is that it makes Socrates’ task impossible: if Lysis thinks he is simply too young to fall in love, then he cannot be persuaded to fall in love with anyone, much less Hippothales. However, if Socrates simply tries to persuade him that he is not too young, besides the obvious charge that he would be using the dubious sort of arguments we associate with paedophiles, he would also seem to be forgetting his own idea that the correct tactic is not to praise the beloved. Any straightforward argument that one is not too young would surely amount to flattery.

Socrates proceeds by getting Lysis to see that the real reason no one is allowing him to do what he wants is not because of his age. It is because he does not know enough about the things in question. For example:

So your father isn’t waiting for you to come of age before he lets you take responsibility for everything. No, once he reckons that you understand things better than him, he won’t wait another day before entrusting both himself and his possessions to you. (209c)

What can we make of this conclusion? Certainly we can agree that Socrates no longer can be accused of not sticking to his plan. To indicate that someone’s problem is ignorance is not at all to flatter them. Indeed, Lysis confirms that he hardly feels flattered. He says: ‘By Zeus, Socrates...I don’t feel proud.’ (210d)

Furthermore, if this as distinct from age is what is holding him back from an interest in falling in love, there is hope for Hippothales. If Lysis’ ignorance in this area can be remedied, at least their age difference will not be a problem. Perhaps Socrates is thinking along these lines because in response to Lysis’ statement of his feelings, he says:

I looked at Hippothales-and almost made a mistake. I was on the point of saying: ‘That’s how one should talk to the boy one fancies, Hippothales. One should make him feel humble and unpretentious, not boastful and conceited as you do.’ But the sight of how the conversation had distressed and upset him reminded me that, although he was standing close by, he didn’t want to be seen by Lysis. (210e)

We can add that it is likely that there is an additional reason why Hippothales could be upset at this point besides that his presence might be revealed. While it is true that if Lysis’ problem is ignorance, that no longer rules Hippothales out as a lover (if Lysis can learn what love is, perhaps he can see how Hippothales can offer potential in that regard) at the same time Hippothales may be having second thoughts. Why exactly does he love Lysis if the young man is so clearly ignorant?

At this point, Menexenus returns. Lysis asks Socrates to start talking to him. Socrates claims to be hesitant because: ‘You know how he always tries to win arguments.’
(211b) Lysis answers: ‘That’s why I want you to be the one who talks to him. (211c, his emphasis) Socrates begins the conversation by asking Menexenus:

Is it the one who loves the friend of the one who is loved, or is it the other way round? (212b)

He then formulates Menexenus’ answer (basically that this does not matter) as meaning that:

All it takes is for just one of them to love the other, and then they’re both each other’s friends. (212b)

Menexenus is not showing any awareness of the need for reciprocity in a friendship. We can note that this could explain why, clearly annoying to Lysis, he always needs both to argue and to win. He would become a better friend if he could see the need for some give as well as take between friends.

But we know that Socrates’ main focus is not on the friendship between Menexenus and Lysis but on trying to develop the relationship between Lysis and Hippothales. Thinking about that sort of relationship, is it true, as Menexenus thinks, that one can be friends with someone even if they do not love you back? First Socrates makes it clear that this sort of relationship is certainly possible:

Isn’t it possible for the one who loves not to be loved back by the one he loves?...In fact, isn’t it possible for the one who loves even to be hated by the other person? For instance, as you know, this is supposed to be the response even lovers sometimes meet from the boys they fancy: even though they love them passionately, some feel their love isn’t returned and others even that they meet with loathing. (212b-c)

In such cases one surely cannot say that they are both friends. Then should we say that there can be one-sided friendships? If so, when this is the case, we should be able to say who the friend is (the lover or the loved).

Now Socrates invents a case where he thinks it does make sense to think of a one-sided friendship:

Very young children, for instance, don’t feel love and may even hate their parents when they are punished by them, but that doesn’t make any difference: even at the precise moment when they’re hating their parents, they’re still unconditionally dear to their parents. (212d-213a)

Whether one thinks of the young child or the parents as the friend, clearly this is a friendship that is not mutual. If one thinks of the parents as the child’s friend, it can be formulated as not mutual because the child then has a friend who it hates. Or, if one thinks of the child as the friend, then the relationship is not mutual because the parents have a friend who hates them.

So non-mutual friendships can exist. However, if this is the sort of relationship we have in mind, Lysis is unlikely to think they have exhausted the types of non-
mutuality. In this relationship, the only reason it is not mutual is because the child is too young to appreciate how fond of it its parents are and Socrates has just persuaded Lysis that, whatever is limiting his ability to understand, it is not his age. Therefore, he is unlikely to be satisfied with explanations of non-mutuality that turn on the beloved being simply too young to understand how loved he is. Nor is Hippothales likely to be content that this is the form non-mutuality must take. Clearly, in that he is trying to make Lysis love him, he would not be happy just to keep loving Lysis, like parents do, no matter how Lysis treats him. Furthermore, if we were right when we speculated that one reason why Hippothales was distressed by the outcome of Socrates’ early conversation with Lysis is that it made him wonder whether Lysis was actually worthy of his love, he may not be prepared to love him with the unconditional attitude that parents typically display toward their children.

At this point, Menexenus admits confusion as to who could be friends. Socrates suggests that they should approach the subject in another way and begins to do so, with Lysis now taking over the role of interlocutor. It is here that Socrates puts forward the idea, associating it with unnamed poets and philosophers, that friendships form among people who are alike. He interprets this to mean that good people make friends with those who they are like, i.e., equally good people, whereas bad people make friends with equally bad people. But then he immediately dismisses half of the idea because:

The closer a bad man gets to another bad man and the more time he spends in his company, the more he becomes hated as a result of the wrong he does the other person. (214c)

We can note that Lysis, Menexenus, and (the still hiding) Hippothales are already learning an important lesson: if they want to have friends, they will at least have to try not to wrong them.

They do proceed to agree that it is plausible that two people who are both good could be friends. But Socrates suggests a problem with this possibility:

But wouldn’t a good man be self-sufficient, precisely in so far as he is good? (215a)

Being self-sufficient is inconsistent with the neediness of having friends. Lysis agrees and we can say he and the others are learning additional important lessons: in that they either have (Menexenus and Lysis) or crave (Hippothales) a friend they must not be self-sufficient and also must not be totally good.

However, these lessons might not hold if those who are friends are not alike. This is the possibility Socrates now proceeds to entertain, this time citing Hesiod as his authority:

...friendship is the property of things which are utterly different from one another...The more A is contrary to B, the more they are bound to be friends. (215d-e)
Probably because such a basis for friendship resonates with his own antagonistic stance toward Lysis, it is Menexenus who agrees that this could be right. But Socrates suggests that nothing could be more opposite than good and bad. Surely they cannot be friends. Indeed this was basically the incongruity they have already discovered in thinking through the ramifications of the enmity present in one-way love.

So now they are at the point of facing the fact that:

Not only is like not friend to like, but opposite is not friend to opposite either. (216b)

The most promising idea raised so far is surely friendship among the good. However, it was rejected on the grounds that the totally good do not need friends. Perhaps a version of this idea can be rescued if we can imagine someone who is needy because, while she is a long way from being bad, she is not totally good either. This is the possibility that Socrates now begins to develop, first by arguing for the existence of ‘that which is neither good nor bad.’ (216d) Next he becomes much more precise about the way some badness could be present in a person without that person becoming totally bad (and so incapable of friendship):

There may be occasions...when something that is neither bad nor good is not yet really bad, despite the presence of badness but there may also be occasions when it already has really become bad...(217e)

In the former sort of case:

When, despite the presence of badness, it’s not yet really bad, the presence of badness makes it desire goodness. (217e)

One with a capacity for friendship would be like this. She has some badness in her but is not so totally bad as to be irredeemable. Her desire for friendship is a need for another who can remedy or help remedy the bad quality or qualities she knows she has. And, besides being a plausible version of why one would make a friend, this account also avoids the two ideas already seen to be erroneous. If this is the basis of friendship, the two friends would be ‘neither opposites or similars.’ (218b)

Socrates expresses his belief that they have now discovered why people become friends. Lysis and Menexenus offer their ‘total agreement.’ (218c) Though Socrates then reverses himself, deciding that ‘this conclusion of ours was wrong’ (218c), the fact that they do agree probably suggests that their friendship may well be like this. But really nothing said so far helps us see what could be wrong with this, surely plausible, version of the basis of friendship.

Socrates begins to identify a possible problem with it by asking Menexenus to imagine what it would be like if one did not have the bad quality that, according to their current formulation, is motivating the friendship. The point of this thought experiment, he explains, is that, were such the case:

We wouldn’t need anything to help us, and this would make it perfectly clear that we value and love the good because of the bad. It’s as if the good
were a remedy for the sickness that is bad: if there’s no sickness, there’s no need for a remedy. Is that what something good is like? (220d)

Assuming, as none of his speakers would deny, that friendship is something good, is this the kind of good it is? Good only as a remedy for the bad?

Then, in what must be his original move thus far in the dialogue, Socrates asks his listeners to imagine a world in which ‘badness really were eradicated’. (221a) His suggestion is that, in such a world, certain things would still exist. For example:

...there would still be hunger-provided that human beings and other living creatures exist, that is—but it will stop being harmful. And there will still be thirst and the other appetites and desires, but they’ll stop being bad, given that badness has been eradicated. (221a)

So, even if humans no longer need things because of some evil-flaw- of theirs that the things can remedy, they will still experience desire. Clearly, Socrates is now saying, contrary to an impression he created earlier, that no matter how good one is, so long as one is human, one will not be exactly self-sufficient because one will have desires. But, even more to the point, we can intuit that he is making a space for a different kind of friendship; one that would not be based on the friend’s ability to remedy one’s flaws. Instead there could be friendships based on desire, like a desire for a food or drink. In this case, presumably the desire would take the form of attraction, being attracted to someone and so desiring to be with them.

Obviously, this works better than earlier formulations as a characterization of what Hippothales feels toward Lysis but it does not seem to make it any more likely that this friendship would be reciprocated. Perhaps it does not, but in order to decide we will need to see what Socrates argues follows from this new idea that ‘desire is the cause of friendship.’ (221d) He asks his interlocutors to consider the nature of any thing one could desire. He suggests that it is something ‘close to one’ or, as it can also be translated, what one could desire is what one finds ‘congenial’ (221e)4 While it does seem odd to picture foods one desires as ‘congenial’, on reflection that perhaps does capture something of what it is to like them. Thus, liking them could be finding them congenial in a sense like being able to relate to them, as in being able to relate to a particular kind of sweetness. At any rate, with regard to a friend, that to desire them or be attracted to them amounts to finding them congenial does not sound at all odd.

4 In my translation, the translator concedes in his notes that the Greek word oikeios can also be translated in this way. Jowett does translate it as congenial. If Derrida had accepted this translation rather than his own version that oikeios means ‘suitability’, he would have been less inclined to include Plato in his critique of those whose version of friendship is biased toward ‘familiarity of the near and the neighbour. (Derrida, 1997, 154, emphasis in original.) However, I would not claim that even this translation would allow him to recruit Plato for Derrida’s own purpose which can be described as seeking a type of friendship compatible with democracy rather than formulating friendship per se. In addition, see Gadamer who, like me, resists the idea that oikeios must signify the familiar. (Gadamer, 18-9 in Logos and Ergon in Plato’s Lysis 1-20 in the book)
One consequence of this formulation of the bond of friendship that Socrates does not stop to note is that it offers a solution to the similar-dissimilar conundrum that flummoxed them earlier. We can say friends do not need to be either totally similar or totally dissimilar. They need to be congenial.

If one desires what is congenial, what follows? The first thing Socrates derives is that a person:

Wouldn’t feel desire or lust or affection unless he were in some respect close (congenial) to his beloved, thanks to his soul or to some cast of his mind or to his personality or to his appearance. (222a)

Despite the fact that, at this point, Socrates is talking to both boys, only Menexenus agrees with this ‘but Lysis kept quiet.’ (222a) Perhaps he has started (quietly) thinking about his friendship with Menexenus and perhaps what he is thinking is that it is not this being attracted, desiring, finding congenial kind.

As some evidence, an incident at the beginning of the dialogue that we passed over now becomes worth attending to. Lysis did not join the conversation straight away. Socrates says:

Lysis kept turning around and frequently looked in our direction; it was obvious that he wanted to come over. For a while, he didn’t know what to do—he was too shy to come over on his own—but then Menexenus took a break from the game...he came down and sat down next to us, and the sight of him doing so spurred Lysis to do likewise. (207a-b)

In Socratic terms, shyness would be a bit of evil in him. He is clearly using Menexenus to help him deal with this problem. If this is the only basis of their relationship, what he may now be seeing is that his friendship lacks something essential, namely desire/attraction and that is an effect of him not finding him congenial.

While we might conclude that, if Socrates has managed to make Lysis question his relationship with his ‘best’ friend, he has done enough in one day to further Hippothales’ cause but that would require ignoring the next and, arguably, most surprising turn in the dialogue. According to the version of friendship that he has just put forward, Socrates says:

It follows, then, that a genuine lover, one who is not pretending, is bound to be loved by the boy he fancies. (222a)

Socrates then reports his interlocutors’ reaction:

Lysis and Menexenus could hardly bring themselves to nod their assent to this, but Hippothales’ pleasure showed in the variety of colours he turned. (222b)

As Lysis and Menexenus’ reaction presumably indicates, even though it is obvious why this statement would delight Hippothales, the validity of it is far from obvious.
However, if we are open to the previous arguments in the dialogue, while it remains
counter-intuitive, it also does have a certain sense to it. While it is probably more
normal for the beloved to wonder whether he or she is faced with love as distinct from
lust, in this dialogue Socrates has made the point that even being lusted after can say
something significant to the beloved about the nature of the relationship. It can say
that the would-be lover’s interest in one is not merely instrumental, not merely
because one is being used to remedy some defect of theirs. Attraction is, then, a good
sign. For example, we just said that the fact that Lysis may not be attracted to
Menexenus (but is using him) is a bad sign. At the same time, Socratic lust will be
misunderstood if we (or the beloved) think of is as necessarily appearance based. As a
passage quoted above indicated, in the Socratic version, while it can be only one’s
appearance that is genuinely desired, it can also be things like one’s mind or one’s
personality. If X loves one’s mind, it may become a little bit clearer why one might
love her back.

In fact this second point will be even more plausible if we see it in the light of the idea
that the object of desire (whether mind, body, or whatever) is best seen as what is
congenial to the lover. Even if it is just a food that is congenial to one, that would tend
to mean more than just that one likes it. It would also tend to mean that it likes you as
in the expression ‘that food agrees with me.’

If the object of desire is a person rather than a food, that it agrees with one would have
quite a significant consequence. It means that the desirable one would not have to
change to be compatible with their would -be lover. They could, as it is said, just be
themselves. And a final point is that this last consequence could be particularly salient
for Lysis in that we have just seen that he is currently in a relationship in which his
‘friend,’ far from finding him agreeable, is arguing with him about everything and so
not letting him just be as he is.

So, if one genuinely loves someone, it makes some sense that they would love one
back. But there is also the issue of discovering whether this might be the case. As the
beginning of the dialogue makes clear, this can be problematic because some ways of
trying to find this out can be counter-productive, putting off potential lovers. Two
further aspects of the beginning of the dialogue that we also overlooked are worth
considering in this light. While Socrates rebuked him for going about his declaration
of love in a flattering way, in fact Hippothales was also making an additional mistake.
Basically, he was not declaring his love to Lysis at all. Thus, another speaker reports
that Hippothales has been behaving in a way that is:

Totally absurd...I mean, how could it not be absurd for a lover, someone
who thinks about the boy far more than anyone else does, to have nothing
personal to say. (205b-c)

Clearly, Hippothales is afraid to declare his love in so many words. While this is not to
say that the mode of expression ceases to be an important issue, if it makes some sense
that genuine love has a good chance of being reciprocated, the otherwise
understandable fear of declaring it openly may be unfounded.

Also, at the beginning of the dialogue, it is said that of all the young men present,
Lysis ‘was by far the best looking of them.’ (207a) This means that he is likely to have
heard so many declarations of love that it would be hard for him to take them seriously. If it makes some sense that, if any of these declarations are non-instrumental, it means that there must be something for him to love in the would-be lover, it would certainly incline him to take declarations that he decides have this character more seriously than he otherwise would.
Charmides

Plato’s dialogue on temperance, *Charmides*, begins with Socrates agreeing to a proposal that seems completely intemperate. Charmides’ guardian, Critias, says that Charmides:

Has been complaining lately of having a headache when he rises in the morning: now why should you (Socrates) not make him believe that you know a cure for the headache? (155b)

Socrates says: ‘Why not.’ (155b)

But, as Socrates begins to converse with the youth, that he might have the resources to cure this particular headache begins to seem a little more possible. Socrates asks Charmides:

Have you or have you not this quality of temperance? (158c)

Charmides replies that:

He really could not at once answer either yes or no, to the question which I (Socrates) had asked; for, said he, if I affirm that I am not temperate, that would be a strange thing for me to say against myself, and also I should give the lie to Critias, and to others who (according to him) think that I am temperate: but, on the other hand, if I say that I am, I shall have to praise myself, which would be ill manners; and thus I do not know how to answer you. (158d)

The question of his temperance seems to require a yes or no answer. Yet he cannot answer either yes or no. We begin to sense that Socrates might have the ability to help with his headache because Charmides’ headache might not have a physical cause. It could be the apparently conflicting demands of being temperate that are giving him his headache.

What is so far mere speculation becomes more plausible once we note the relation between Charmides’ initial definitions of temperance and Critias’ assessment of him. Charmides says first that he thinks temperance is ‘a kind of quietness’ (159b) and then ‘that temperance is the same as modesty.’ (160e) Critias has already told Socrates that Charmides is ‘the great beauty of the day.’ (154a) And besides that ‘he is...a philosopher already and also a considerable poet.’ (155a) Further that he is ‘not only pre-eminent in beauty but also in that quality...temperance.’ (157a) If one simultaneously believes that one should be temperate and that to be temperate is to be modest, all while one’s guardian is so extravagantly praising one, that really could give one a headache.

Using the plausible arguments that temperance is a virtue and that anything virtuous must necessarily be good, Socrates convinces Charmides that, as neither quietness nor
modesty is necessarily good, these properties cannot adequately define temperance. We can suggest that, by now appreciating that he does not necessarily have to be modest to qualify as temperate, a way is already being somewhat eased for Charmides not to feel compelled to underplay his talents in order to achieve temperance. Adhering to the virtue of temperance already seems potentially less of a headache.

At this point, perhaps emboldened that he can be temperate and yet more assertive by the turn in their conversation, Charmides offers a third definition:

I should like to know what you (Socrates) think about another definition of temperance, which I have just remembered that I heard from someone, ‘temperance is doing our own business.’ (161b)

Socrates suspects, rightly as it turns out, that ‘this is what Critias...has told you.’ (161c)

We shall need to consider whether this version of temperance, particularly as we know that it encapsulates Critias’ teaching, bears some responsibility for Charmides’ headache. But also, that doing one’s own business is what temperance requires would amount to a near perfect formulation of why Socrates’ action at the beginning seems so intemperate: his ‘business’ can hardly be curing headaches.

Socrates, however, does not accept this version of temperance. He begins to resist it by suggesting that craftsmen and others, for example someone who makes shoes, cannot be said just to be minding their own business since they do not make shoes only for themselves. Yet they can hardly be said to be doing anything ‘meddling or intemperate.’ (161e) What is being implied is that Critias’ definition seems to rule out ever using any ability one has to benefit others. As having an ability without being able to exercise it could easily give one headaches, one can see why Socrates’ work on temperance could be continuing to help Charmides. It also provides an initial potential defence of Socrates’ action because perhaps he should not mind his own business if he really does have the ability to cure a headache.

At the same time, it must be admitted that what is being addressed so far probably does not capture what Critias has in mind by his definition. This is confirmed by the fact that he now feels compelled to enter the conversation. He objects:

Did I ever acknowledge that those who do the business of others are temperate? I said those who make not those who do. (emphasis added) (163a)

Socrates asks him to explain how making and doing are not the same and Critias responds with this long speech:

No more, he replied, than making and working are the same; this much I have learned from Hesiod, who says that ‘work is no disgrace.’ Now do you imagine that if he had meant by working and doing such things as you were describing he would have said there was no disgrace in them—for example in the manufacture of shoes...? That, Socrates, is not to be supposed: but I conceive him to have distinguished making from doing and
work; and, while admitting that the making of anything might sometimes become a disgrace,...to have thought that work was never a disgrace at all. For things nobly and usefully made he called works; and such makings he called workings, and doing; and he must be supposed to have deemed only such things to be man’s proper business, and all that is hurtful, not to be his business: and in that sense Hesiod may be deemed to call him wise who does his own work. (163b-d)

This is such a rambling speech that it is difficult to form it into a clear-cut argument. Perhaps even this is part of Plato’s point: If Charmides has been forced to try to adhere to the doctrine of someone it is so hard to make sense of, that could certainly cause him headaches.

However, the speech does begin to make some sense if it is seen not just as an attempt to validate his definition but also an attempt by Critias to argue that in their respective relations with Charmides, he, by minding his own business, is temperate whereas Socrates, because he is not, is intemperate. He can rightly object that the previous argument that makers do meddle is irrelevant because both he and Socrates, in their relations with Charmides, are not making but doing. Furthermore, it is surely his relationship with Charmides rather than Socrates’ that can be called ‘proper’ in that he is the youth’s appointed guardian. It is relevant here that Socrates himself, near the start, actually acknowledges that, without Critias’ blessing, his own intervention would be improper:

Even if he (Charmides) were younger than he is, there could be no impropriety in his talking to us before you (Critias), his guardian and cousin. (155a)

Finally, there is Critias’ suggestion as to what is intemperate about not acting properly. It can be ‘hurtful.’ Here, Critias can be seen to be offering a version of temperance that is in line with the conventional view that it is indeed best to mind one’s own business. Such an orientation is thought to shield one from the responsibility of potentially harming other people.

But can those who do what is proper to them really be said to be minding their own business? Socrates raises the case of ‘a physician who cures a patient.’ (164b) While it is undeniable that, unlike Socrates’ intervention with Charmides, there is nothing that can be said to be improper about such an act, surely this is as much ‘doing another’s work’ (164a) as when craftsman make something for someone other than themselves. Therefore, Critias’ attempt to rescue his idea of minding one’s own business by insisting it applies to doing rather than making does not seem to resolve anything.

Furthermore, as clear as it continues to be that Socrates is no physician, there is also an additional problem with utilizing this fact to confirm Critias’ views on temperance. Critias claimed that what was definitely not temperate was doing ‘what is hurtful.’ Socrates suggests that a physician ‘may sometimes do good or harm, without knowing which he had done.’ (164c) This is because even the most proper physician is not oriented to anything other than curing an illness and so is not to trying to decide whether that might be a good or bad thing to do. If, as Critias believes, temperance
requires deciding whether what one is doing is good rather than bad it now seems that one cannot resolve the matter by sticking to one’s ‘proper’ tasks.

At this point Critias acknowledges that he may have been mistaken and offers what he now thinks temperance is:

...I would almost say that self-knowledge is the very essence of temperance...Shall I tell you (Socrates) why I say...this? My object is to leave the previous discussion...and to raise a new one in which I will attempt to prove, if you deny it, that temperance is self-knowledge. (164d-165b)

We can say that Critias’ version of temperance is developing. It would no longer require either never intervening or acting ‘properly’ since, on the first point, certainly some self knowing selves would allow or even encourage interventions in the affairs of others, e. g. someone who knows he is a doctor. On the second point, acting out of self-knowledge does seem a distinct matter from necessarily acting ‘properly’. And, while it is not yet fully clear what he means by self-knowledge, such knowledge will surely mean more than the kind of knowledge a craftsman or even a physician would have. At the same time, what it seems that Critias has not abandoned is his conviction that Socrates is not acting temperately whereas he is. If typical physicians need not have this self-knowledge, surely it is even less likely to be possessed by a person who acts like a physician without knowing what a physician knows.

Socrates draws from Critias’ speech, the reasonable conclusion that Critias thinks temperance is ‘a species of knowledge’ and therefore ‘a science of something.’ (165c) But it is then worth considering what it is a science of. Most sciences, medicine and architecture for example, have some visible effect, in these cases health and buildings. The science of one’s own self does not seem to have any such effect.

Critias replies with the valid point that he can think of many worthwhile sciences that have no obvious effect, e. g. computation and geometry. But Socrates points out that even these have ‘a subject which is different from the science.’ (166a) For example, computation’s subject is ‘odd and even numbers in their relations to themselves and to each other.’ (166a) He suggests that, if temperance is a science, there must be something that is not it because it is its subject.

This leads Critias to suggest that temperance is a special, indeed a unique science:

All the other sciences are of something else, and not of themselves; (this one) alone is a science of other sciences and of itself. (166c)

Not demurring at this point, Socrates now gives a summary, which Critias accepts, of the definition of temperance they have arrived at:

The wise or temperate man, and he only, will know himself, and be able to examine what he knows or does not know, and to see what others know and think they know and do really know; and what they do not know, and fancy they know when they do not. (167a)
Though, as we saw, Critias claimed he was moving on from their previous discussion, what can now be seen is that, as it has developed, Critias’ new idea of self-knowledge really amounts to an improved version of his old idea. An actor can be temperate without never intervening and without always acting ‘properly’ so long as his interventions and improprieties are driven by what he knows. He is temperate and still in the sense of minding his own business by only doing what he knows and leaving to others what they know. So it is still the case that Critias who, among the many things he thinks he knows, knows he is no doctor, is seeing himself as temperate and Socrates as intemperate because Socrates seemingly does not know what he does not know, in particular, medicine.\(^5\)

At first glance, what Critias at this point considers temperance to be, an ability to know what one knows and what one does not know seems adequate. However, the rest of the dialogue is devoted to a detailed consideration of it. Doubts as to what good such knowledge would do anyone and, as to whether it is even possible arise.\(^6\)

First, it is demonstrated how odd such knowledge is compared to what all our other powers are like. For example, it is not at all like seeing because if seeing saw itself it would be ‘seeing no color, but only itself and other sorts of vision’. (167d) So this form of knowledge ‘is certainly a curiosity if it really exists.’ (168a) Does it?

If so, it must be about something. As a plausible example of what it could be about-what it could know-Socrates suggests the magnitude of things. It would then be about what is greater and what is lesser. Perhaps we could decide that it is greater than some other things. Given that it is about itself, the ‘other’ that it would have to be greater than would be itself. But then it would also be less than what it is greater than, i. e. itself, which means it would have the property ‘of being greater and also less than itself.’ (168c) Having such a property seems impossible.

As odd and probably impossible to achieve as the endeavor to know what one does know and what one does not know now appears, there remains the question of why it seems, as it does to Critias, the essence of temperance. Socrates and Critias begin to explore what this form of knowledge would amount to. They agree that ‘if a man has only knowledge of knowledge, without any further knowledge, he will only know that he knows something and has a certain knowledge’. (170b) This is quite limiting because:

\[
\text{He who has this knowledge will not be able to establish whether a claimant knows or does not know that which he says he knows. (170d)}
\]

This is to say that Critias’ earlier expressed hope that this form of knowledge would enable him to see what people ‘fancy that they know when they do not’ (167a) is now discovered to be unrealistic. Knowing that he knows something and does not know

\(^5\) Relevant here is Blum’s idea that ‘Critias’ formulation of temperance as self-knowledge...catches the...sense of temperance as “doing one’s own business.”’ (Blum, 1974, 57.) Also, see his argument that Critias’ view ‘limits us from venturing beyond ourselves.’ (56)

\(^6\) That the knowledge must be good goes back to the earlier idea that, temperance being a virtue, it has to be, in some sense, a good.
other things will leave him unable ‘to distinguish the pretender in medicine from the true physician.’ (170c) The choice of example is hardly likely to be accidental. While he can continue to feel, with some justification, that it remains hard to see Socrates’ intervention as temperate, he is now facing the fact that his own preferred form of knowledge does not actually supply the necessary resources to challenge Socrates even on his medical credentials.

Though we now see just how limited a position Critias’ idea leaves him with, this is not to say we yet have an adequate defence of Socrates’ intervention. Though Critias has been shown not to have the resources to enforce his idea, does it not remain the case that it would be best if everyone, albeit with the proviso that knowledgeable interventions such as a shoemaker making other people’s shoes or a qualified physician curing other people’s headaches, did their own business? In short, would it not be temperate for Charmides to be treated by a genuine physician rather than Socrates?

The dialogue proceeds to explore this question and arrives at an answer that not just Critias but Socrates himself agree is ‘very strange.’ (172e) They imagine what is, in effect, Critias ideal, a world in which:

> We should not attempt to do what we did not know, but we should find out those who know, and hand the business over to them and trust in them. (171e)

About such a world, Socrates now says:

> We were far too ready to admit the great benefits which mankind would obtain from their severally doing the things which they knew, and committing the things of which they are ignorant to those who were better acquainted with them. (172d)

What they have neglected to consider is whether:

> By acting according to knowledge we shall act well and be happy. (173d)

Critias certainly thinks so but Socrates teases him by asking if it is by the knowledge of a shoemaker or the knowledge of the game of drafts. Becoming more serious, he then asks him if it would be knowledge of health. Critias can only say that is ‘nearer the truth’ (174b) and then volunteers that what would be even nearer the truth would be if a person had ‘the knowledge with which he discerns good and evil.’ (174b)

Having arrived at this conclusion himself, Critias is in no position to deny that this sort of knowledge is essential to the good and happy life. Nor does he. But what he does suggest is that perhaps as the ‘science of sciences’ temperance ‘will have this particular science of the good under her control.’ (174a) But Socrates notes that knowing what is good and bad certainly does not seem a power that would derive just from knowing what one knows and what one does not know. (174c)

This development occurs very near the end of the dialogue. As is typical in Plato’s early dialogues, all Socrates now makes explicit is what they do not know. In this case,
they do not know what temperance is because, on the one hand: ‘temperance, I (Socrates) believe to be really a great good’ (175e) and the definitions of temperance they have been considering, modesty, quietness, and knowledge of what one knows and does not know, do not appear to do any good.

Concerning the third and most extensively discussed idea we can say that if such knowledge is not only probably impossible to possess but not even beneficial, then we do know at least one thing: it may actually not be as temperate as it seems to leave experts unchallenged. Intervening—we could even say meddling—could at least sometimes be good, namely when an intervention is driven by the ‘knowledgeable’ one’s obliviousness to questions of whether their proposed form of action is good or bad.

Here we have the justification for Socrates’ intervention: even if an expert doctor could cure Charmides’ headache, it is not clear how much good that would do him. But also, it is always the case in Plato that there is the irony that realizing what we do not know can be more productive than what we do know. Perhaps that is best dramatized in this particular dialogue by the effect of them discovering that temperance does not require either quietness, modesty, or needing to decide and act only on what one knows. There is evidence that being relieved of the burden to seek to adhere to any of these ideas does more than any doctor could to ease Charmides’ headache. As his response to the ‘inconclusive’ ending of the dialogue, Charmides says:

I am sure that I do not know, Socrates, whether I have or have not this gift of wisdom or temperance; for how can I know whether I have a thing, of which even you and Critias are, as you say, unable to discover the nature? Yet I do not quite believe you. (176a)

He then adds that he wants to be taught ‘daily’ by Socrates ‘until you say that I have had enough.’ (176b)

On a superficial level (and here we see more of Plato’s irony) this speech sounds like the one he gave at the beginning in that he still does not know what temperance is. The difference is that whereas before this lack of knowledge lead to agonizing indecision (‘I do not know how to answer you’), now it takes the form of a kind of knowledge (‘I am sure’), not being cowed by his elders even including Socrates (‘I do not quite believe you’) and the decisive ability to intervene in his own future (insisting Socrates teach him). While none of this is to say that Charmides has definitely become temperate, it can be said that even without knowing what temperance is, at least the pursuit of this virtue has ceased to be a headache for him.
Laches

After they have all watched a man fighting in armour, Lysimachus explains why he and his friend Melesias have invited two generals, Nicias and Laches, to join them in witnessing the performance. The reason is a desire for their advice about whether they should offer their sons training in this activity. Nicias agrees to offer his advice. So does Laches but he adds that they should also ask Socrates who, as it happens, is standing near by. Nicias agrees, adding to his endorsement of him:

Quite recently he introduced to myself a music teacher for my son-Damon...who is not only the most exquisitely skilled of musicians, but in every other way as profitable a companion as you could wish for young men of that age. (180d)

While later revelations in the dialogue will compel us no longer to take this remark at face value, we can note even at this early stage that one can detect something strange: Nicias' claims for Damon seem rather excessive.

In response to Laches' and Nicias' recommendations, Lysimachus recalls both that he knew and admired Socrates' father and that his and Melisias' boys have often been praising someone called Socrates. He asks them: ‘Is this the Socrates whose name you have mentioned so often?’ In his only line in the dialogue, one of the sons replies: ‘to be sure, father, it is he.’ (181a)

Lysimachus expresses his delight that it seems Socrates has been keeping up his father’s good name. This stimulates Laches to join Nicias in endorsing him. He says:

...I have observed him elsewhere...keeping up not merely his father’s name but his country’s name. He accompanied me in the retreat from Delium, and I assure you that if the rest had chosen to be like him, our city would be holding up her head and would not have had such a terrible fall. (181b)

Here again while Socrates is certainly being praised, we will come to better understand the significance of this remark later.

Socrates having been endorsed so strongly by these two, Lysimachus now decides to ask him, perhaps even instead of them:

What is your view? Is the accomplishment of fighting in armour a suitable one for our boys to learn or not? (181c)

In his first lines in the dialogue, Socrates replies:

On that matter, Lysimachus, I will do my best to advise you, as far as I can...It seems to me, however, most proper that I, being so much younger than you and your friends, should first hear what they have to say, and learn from them and then, if I have anything else to suggest as against their
remarks, I might try to explain it and persuade you and them to take my view. Come, Nicias, let one of you speak. (181d)

Although it is obviously impossible to determine Socrates’ opinion from these remarks, still they are worth examining. Firstly, we can note that, while there is resistance to Lysimachus here, it takes quite a subtle form. He manages to refuse to do what Lysimachus wants him to do while in no way leaving himself open to the charge that he is saying no. More than this, his mode of refusal leaves him with increased scope to enter later on his own terms. Particularly if we bear in mind that, given what the boys have said, it is likely that they already have been taught rather a lot by him, Socrates’ apparent deference to his elders could seem disingenuous. Another way to see it, though, and a way that will soon seem more plausible, is that even though we are in the dark as to Socrates’ views about fighting in armour, what he is doing, e. g. letting others speak first, not disclosing his full relationship with the boys, is fighting in armour.

Nicias agrees to offer his opinion and comes down wholly in favour of fighting in armour. One of his points is undeniable: It will improve fitness. Others of his points, while plausible, perhaps show (as later discussion will confirm) his personal predilections. e. g. when he says the skill will be particularly useful ‘in retreating yourself and beating off the attack of another.’ (182b) Still others of his points seem highly dubious, especially that learning this skill will encourage one to ‘push on to attain the whole art of generalship.’ (182c) We suspect (and this too will be confirmed later) that Nicias is not sufficiently clear on what more than fighting in armour (in the metaphoric sense already flagged in our interpretation of Socrates’ entry in the dialogue) is required to be a good example of what he is, a general. Finally, he offers a claim that, even if not impossible to believe, is certainly one that the next speaker, Laches, would find outrageous. He says fighting in armour ‘will make one individually a great deal bolder and braver in war.’ (182c)

Laches does speak next and his views are the exact opposite of Nicias’ His first point amounts to a direct attack on Nicias’ idea that the skill is needed to make one brave. He notes that the Spartans do not teach it and, if any Greeks are brave, it is surely them. Then he offers an anecdote, based on his personal experience of how the fighter they have just seen performing behaved in an actual battle. He got so tangled up in his own weapons that he was unable to fight and ended up a laughing stock.

Next he engages even more directly with Nicias’ idea that this skill could teach bravery. He suggests that:

If a man who was a coward believed he possessed it (this skill) his only gain would be rashness, which would make his true nature the more conspicuous. (184b)

While it does seem plausible that a cowardly person could think of himself as safe because of the extent of his armour and so, venture where he would be wiser to avoid, a possible weakness in Laches’ view here is that he seems to be working with an implicit sense that cowardice is just a fact of nature and so courage nothing that can ever be learned or developed.
Just as he thinks that fighting in armour cannot benefit the coward, he also thinks it has nothing to offer the courageous. Here his reason is that:

If he were brave, people would be on the look-out for even the slightest mistake on his part, and he would incur much grievous slander; for the pretension to such skill arouses jealousy, so that unless a man be prodigiously superior to the rest in valour he cannot by any means escape being made a laughing-stock through professing to be so skilled. (184c)

Against the fact that we can agree that a person who is really courageous could end up failing to show his true nature in just this way, it should be noticed that while Laches clearly has an interest in courage, he also seems somewhat over interested in appearing courageous. If the nature of courage is such that it may not always look like what it is, that might tempt Laches to opt just for actions that will tend to make him appear courageous.

Having heard such contrasting views, Lysimachus is understandably confused and asks Socrates to ‘cast your vote.’ (184d) Socrates does no such thing. Turning to Lysimachus’ friend, Melesias, he gets him to agree that the matter ‘must be decided by knowledge, and not by numbers.’ (184e) As reasonable as this reaction to Lysimachus’ request sounds, it also amounts to a second time that Socrates has found a way of resisting him. And, again, in that the invocation of the need for knowledge functions as a kind of shield that enables him to avoid an immediate decision, his way of fending off Lysimachus can be interpreted as another case of fighting in armour.

As his method of managing to make their decision based on ‘knowledge’, Socrates asks Melesias ‘what was the skill of which we are looking for the teachers.,’ (185c) Milesias is understandably confused in that everything said so far has led to the conclusion that Socrates should not have to ask this question. The skill to be discussed is surely fighting in armour.

Nicias tries to assert exactly this but Socrates objects that that would be like trying to assess the value of a medicine without knowing what it is for. In this case he says, what the medicine is for is ‘for the sake of young men’s souls.’ (185e)

How then to proceed? Socrates suggests that, since Nicias and Laches are differing from each other, Lysimachus should question them both, not just about fighting in armour but about how, in general, one might educate the sons. Lysimachus thinks this is a good idea with the proviso that Socrates rather than he do the questioning.

Nicias responds first to this request. While he does not exactly refuse to participate, the thrust of his remarks, quite characteristic for an enthusiast of fighting with the protection of armour, are to warn Lysimachus that he does not know what he is getting into. He says to Lysimachus:

You strike me as not being aware that, whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and has any talk with him face to face, is bound to be drawn round and round by him in the course of the argument-though it may have started at first on a quite different theme...In fact I knew pretty well all the
time that our argument would not be about the boys if Socrates were present, but about ourselves. (187d-8c)

Against the fact that Nicias is saying that whenever one starts talking with Socrates one will never get a direct answer, we need to balance the fact that in an analogous situation he did get a direct answer. Lysimachus may not be about to get a recommendation of a fighting in armour teacher but Nicias got a recommendation of a music teacher.

What could explain this difference? If Lysimachus had not been open to some of the initial arguments that Socrates has made, such as letting elders speak first and the need to refrain from a vote, it may well have been that Socrates would not have been able to do what Nicias perceives as changing to ‘a quite different theme.’ Besides this hypothesis providing for the two different outcomes it suggests that Nicias has been shielding himself from Socrates, so actually fighting in armour. Furthermore, if it turns out that the subsequent discussion is productive, we can say that we have had a first glimpse on how at least one version of such fighting can be counter-productive. Now that, albeit not with regard to his own son, Nicias has agreed to consider broader issues, it become possible that he will learn both that such discussions with Socrates are not to be feared and, more specifically, that at least some ways of fighting in armour are not as valuable as he currently thinks.

Laches does not share Nicias’ wariness about how the discussion may develop. He says: ‘When I hear a man discussing virtue or any kind of wisdom...I am exceedingly delighted.’ (188c-d) In view of how quickly his own ignorance in these matters will be revealed, we can say if Nicias is too reserved, he is the opposite, leaving himself too vulnerable, a trait which, of course, fits with his view that armour is no use at all.

Laches now goes on to say how he evaluates anyone’s words. He judges them against their deeds. Referring again to Socrates’ admirable behavior in the retreat from Delium, he says that unlike Nicias:

> Of Socrates’ words I have no experience, but formerly...I have made trial of his deeds; and there I found him living up to any fine words however spoken. (189a)

We will see that finding the words that would allow him to understand his admiration for Socrates’ deeds will not be easy for him. We will also see that even an awareness of the difficulty of finding the words will be a first step toward being less inclined to devalue fighting in armour.

Having received both Nicias’ and Laches’ agreement that they should enter into a dialogue, Socrates, speaking to Laches, proposes (as Nicias might well have predicted) that their actual topic is not fighting in armour but ‘the way in which virtue may be joined to Lysimachus’ and Melesias’ sons souls.’ (190b) And then that they will make no progress ‘if we had no idea at all about what virtue actually is.’ (190c) And, finally, that as it ‘may well be too much for us’ to work out the whole of virtue, they should only consider the part of virtue ‘which the art of fighting in armour is supposed to promote.’ (190d) Socrates puts forward courage as the part of virtue they should therefore consider and, in typical Socratic fashion, asks Laches to define it.
While proposing a link between fighting in armour and courage may seem the obvious move, we should recall that it was actually the enthusiastic supporter of the activity, Nicias, who spoke in favor of such a link. In fact the initial definition of courage that Laches now offers, namely that it applies to ‘anyone who is willing to stay at his post and face the enemy and does not run away’ (190e) only confirms that he is one who cannot see any possible link between courage and fighting in armour. The skills taught by that activity would surely include when to retreat and so to be able to see that the activity could conceivably promote courage, Laches would have to move away from identifying courage only with never leaving one’s post.

While he is at first reluctant to admit there can be any alternative forms of courage, once Socrates points to a case where in order to eventually win a battle, even the Spartans did some initial fleeing, Laches eventually concedes to Socrates that courage need not be restricted to just staying at one’s post. We can note that actually such a concession is necessary if he is to satisfy his own previously expressed desire to harmonize his words with a deed, i.e. his admiration for the courage he says Socrates displayed since that was courage in how he retreated.

Already Laches is learning that there is more to courage than he originally thought but because of this new realization he now struggles to say what courage is. Socrates seeks to help by providing examples. He says there is:

The courageous not only in war but in the perils of the sea, and all who in disease and poverty, or again in public affairs are courageous and further, all who are not merely courageous against pain or fear, but doughty fighters against desires and pleasures, whether standing their ground or turning back upon the foe. (191d-e)

Laches does make an effort to work out what could be common to all these instances. What he comes up with is ‘a certain endurance of the soul, if I am to speak of the natural quality that appears in them all.’ (192c)

Laches is now seeing courage as the ability to resist, to not be held back by powerful forces, when giving in to either a pain or a desire would be the easier option. Certainly this better captures all the examples of courageous people listed by Socrates. For example, even though Socrates was retreating when Laches observed him, he was presumably not letting his fear dominate his behavior as when one panics. So this new version of courage could help Laches formulate how he could have found this behavior by Socrates admirable.

While Laches has arrived at a much less limited version of courage, it is relevant to the main issue of the dialogue that he continues to think of it as a ‘natural quality,’ i.e. something that cannot be taught. A question that Socrates soon asks him is therefore germane. He asks whether it is not ‘endurance joined with wisdom’ that is ‘noble and good.’ (192c) While Laches agrees, further discussion between them indicates that it is no straightforward matter to integrate the kind of endurance that would be courageous with wisdom. For example, they agree that ‘if a man endures in spending money wisely (192e)’ that kind of endurance cannot be seen as courageous.
Next Socrates raises two opposing cases. On the one hand there is a man who ‘endures in war, and is willing to fight, on a wise calculation whereby he knows that others will come to his aid, and that the forces against him will be fewer and feebler.’ (193a) On the other hand, there is ‘a man in the opposing army who is willing to stand up against him to endure.’ (193a) Laches says that the second man is clearly more courageous. We see that there are forms of wisdom, in this example a rational calculation of likely outcome, which do not require the kind of endurance Laches sees as needing courage.

The following example shows that courageous endurance may not even coexist, not just with those who calculate, but with those who have a skill. Thus Laches says he thinks ‘he who in a cavalry fight endures with a knowledge of horsemanship is less courageous than he who endures without it.’ (193b) While even in this case, Laches’ reluctance to agree that the skill in question could not only enhance endurance but do so in a way that would make one qualify as more courageous makes a certain sense, the next example and his reaction to it suggest that he is not actually happy with where the logic of his current position is taking him:

Socrates: And anyone who agrees to descend into a well and to dive, and to endure in this or other such action, you would say is more courageous than the adepts?

Laches: Yes, for what else can one say? (193c)

While it might be right than many forms of knowledge, even including some useful skills, can help one endure in a way that it does not seem appropriate to class as courageous, if one rejects any and all skills, even ones that help one to endure huge risks, one winds up believing to be truly courageous one would even have to be willing to dive into a well without any professional expertise whatsoever.

While Laches does not know what to say at this point (‘What else can one say?’) we can say that fighting with at least some armour should now appear to Laches as a more valuable activity than it appeared to him at the beginning. It cannot be denied that it could help one with something he has depicted as valuing, enduring in a fight and while it is true that one might appear braver if one endured (if one could) without the armour, letting oneself be that exposed to risk is no less foolish than being a rank amateur and diving headfirst into a well.

The dialogue, then, has thus far offered an argument for fighting in armour. We have added that it is also an argument for the sort of –reserved-guarded-behaviour Socrates has been engaging in throughout, i. e. in a metaphoric sense fighting in armour.

Further we can note that the fact that the person who did not initially see any need for armour now admits defeat (in his attempt to define courage) perhaps provides a further argument for it. That is, his defeat could be due to the fact that, in his over eagerness to say things that even he can be quickly made to see have unpalatable consequences, in the metaphoric sense he has been leaving himself with very little armour and that does seem to be getting him into trouble.

The difference between him and Nicias in this respect becomes immediately apparent. Nicias’ initial comment certainly seems much more likely to protect him from a similar defeat in that he claims that what he is expressing is not just what he personally...
thinks. It is what he has learned from Socrates. What better way to shield oneself against an opponent’s attacks than to quote him? He says first, and Socrates confirms, that he agrees that ‘every man is good in that wherein he is wise’ (194d) He adds that therefore ‘courage is a kind of wisdom.’ (194d)

While this does sound like something Socrates would say, it also of course suits the mind-set of someone who would not at all share Laches’ reservation that certain sorts of knowledge making it too easy to endure and so hard to seem courageous. For Nicias’ view to become at all credible, he will need to show that there could be a kind of wisdom that could be courageous. But if his experience with Socrates is going to be anything like the one that Laches just had, we can anticipate that in the course of his attempts to show this he too will be offered hints that, even if he thinks it represents a kind of wisdom, his current view of fighting in armour may be both excessive and not consistent with a credible definition of courage.

Even though Nicias claims his ideas are Socratic, Socrates actually soon starts making fun of what Nicias has said. Furthermore, the (satiric) examples he begins with can be seen to be also mocking Nicias’ original claims about the Damon recommendation. Socrates asks whether the courage he has in mind that is a kind of wisdom is ‘flute playing’ or ‘harping.’ (194e) These of course would be the only skills that Damon would really be qualified to teach. We can begin to doubt, then, that Socrates really agrees with Nicias claim that Damon is ‘in every other way’ a ‘profitable companion’ for his sons.

Goaded by this question, Nicias offers his first definition of the kind of wisdom that he thinks would equate to courage. He says it is ‘knowledge of what is to be dreaded or dared, either in war or in anything else.’ (195a) Two reasons why this has a certain plausibility are first that it seems to allow for the intuitive idea that we cannot be courageous unless we are daring-risking- at least something. Thus, in Laches terms, some risk to their selves could be exactly what the courageous are forced to endure. But, second, that the risk could be guided by knowledge fits with the sense that has been developing from the conversation so far that there must be something wrong with undertaking something so daring as to be completely foolish, e. g. daring to jump in a well without any expertise.

However, as Laches clearly realizes by the questions he now asks Nicias, it remains to be seen how anyone with this sort of knowing can be seen as particularly daring. For example don’t doctors and farmers ‘know what is to be dreaded and dared’ in their fields and is it not right that ‘they are none the more courageous for that?’ (195c)

Nicias replies that even doctors do not have the kind of knowledge he means because they do not know ‘whether health itself is to be dreaded by anyone rather than sickness.’ (195c) In common with the way he began, this reply too sounds like something he could have heard from Socrates. However, in the context of this dialogue, it raises the question of exactly who could possibly have this knowledge. Laches can only think that the persons Nicias has in mind must be seers. It does seem right that only they would ever be able to claim to know what is to be dreaded and

7 Thus see the earlier chapter on Charmides where Socrates is making an argument that sounds much like this against the pretensions of the medical profession.
risked. But obviously Laches’ subtext is that it is both the case that he thinks no one can know this and, even if they could, would not having such knowledge be more like possessing not courage but an alternative to even needing that virtue.

Without exactly denying the usefulness of seers, Nicias retorts that he has someone else in mind because:

the seers business is to judge only the signs of what is yet to come—whether a man is to meet with death or disease or loss of property, or victory or defeat in war or some other contest; but why it is better among those things for a man to suffer or avoid suffering, can surely be no more for a seer to decide than for anyone else in the world. (195e-6a)

As indicated by Laches’ frustrated reaction that he cannot now imagine who can be courageous according to Nicias ‘unless perchance he means it is some god’ (196a) it certainly seems obvious that, according to Nicias, courage is not at all common. It comes as a surprise, then, to learn what Socrates asks him next. He says he assumes that, according to Nicias, ‘a pig cannot be courageous.’ (196e) If the being that Nicias imagines as courageous sounds like some god, why bother to ask him if he thinks a pig would qualify? It turns out that Socrates has in mind a particular pig, the one that, according to legend, Theseus chose to prove his mettle by defeating. While it is right that even this pig could not know ‘what is to be dreaded or dared’ otherwise, presumably, it would never have engaged with Theseus, still it rather diminishes Theseus if we deny this animal any sort of courage. In a similar vein, Socrates suggests that, according to Nicias, a lion and a monkey ‘have an equal share of courage.’ (196e)

Nicias tries to object that he does not need to attribute more courage to lions than monkeys because both are ‘thoughtless’ (197b) and, according to his definition, clearly courage requires thought. On the one hand, it certainly seems right that lions and pigs are not exactly thoughtful. On the other hand, there does seems to be something wrong with someone who proclaims an interest in courage being quite this dismissive of the example of a lion. Further developments in the dialogue will enable us to get much clearer on what could be Nicias’s problem here.

Unlike Laches, Socrates does not seem so inclined to deny that what Nicias means by a thoughtful person could exist. Instead he agrees with Nicias that there could be such a person and that one of her characteristics would be to have a sense of what ‘coming evils are to be dreaded’ and ‘things not evil, or good things that are to come to be safely dared.’ (198b) However, he also derives, with Nicias’ agreement, that actually such a person would know more than just this because they would ‘comprehend goods and evils not merely in the future, but also in the present and the past.’ (198b)

Who Nicias’ thoughtful person might be is now coming into view and what can be said about them is that they would clearly have ‘other parts’ which are included in what constitutes their virtuousness. That is, their knowledge of good and evil would certainly requires ‘besides courage...temperance, justice, and other similar qualities.’ (198b) While this might amount to a convincing version of a thoughtful person, Socrates complains about it that ‘what you now describe, Nicias, will not be a part but the whole of virtue.’ (199e) We can add that it is a version of the whole of virtue in
which it is much easier to see the need for temperance, justice, and other similar qualities—all of these surely being required to differentiate good and evil whether in the past, present or future—than it is to see any particular need for courage.

That is, what is emerging is a much clearer sense of what could make a dare safe but a much less clear sense of why it is still a dare. It is safe if one’s sense of what is wise, temperate, and just requires but, still, it would amount to a dare if it also requires courage. Such would be the case whenever doing it does leave one in any way seriously vulnerable, e.g., to personal harm, to possible failure, etc. Vulnerability in these and other ways may not be avoided, in Laches’ terms it may have to be endured, even when and sometimes especially when what one is doing is perfectly just, temperate, and wise.

It is being hinted to Nicias, we suggest, that while he quite rightly aims to be virtuous, he has tended to forget that courage is actually a part of virtue and so cannot just be subsumed under virtue as a whole. As with Laches, the lesson can be expressed as a critique of his version of fighting in armour. That Nicias would have more understanding of the need for temperance, justice, and wisdom surfaces in the excessive enthusiasm for fighting with armour. Whereas Laches is actually reluctant to wear any (metaphorical) armour as he fears it would mean he was not courageous, Nicias is too reluctant to come out from behind his armour, to ever dare anything.

While to be told, as we say Nicias is now, that he has a stronger grasp of the whole of virtue than he does of a particular virtue is not all that different from being told that he does not know what courage is, particularly as the only virtue they are supposed to be considering is courage. However, there is still a key difference between the two ways of putting it. The way Socrates puts it leaves him less vulnerable to the charge that he is insulting Nicias. Socrates, then, manages to resist Nicias’ view of courage without openly insulting him. Socrates, we can say, is still fighting in armour.

While the dialogue has shifted its focus to Nicias, as he rightly says, that should not allow Laches to follow ‘the average man’s practice of keeping an eye on others rather than oneself.’ (200b) One way to not allow Laches to not have the spotlight fall on him as well is to suggest that his errors can also be expressed in terms of how courage relates to the whole of virtue. If Nicias is inclined to forget that courage is indeed part of virtue, a virtuous person will have to dare, risk some things, Laches is inclined to forget that courage is only a part of virtue and so needs to be integrated with the other parts, notably wisdom. He forgets that is a matter of what it is wise (and just and temperate) to dare if by that we mean reserving our daring deeds for those that are required for us to be acting virtuously.

There is some evidence that both Laches and Nicias are learning their necessary respective lessons. Laches’ final remark in the dialogue shows him to be much more guarded than he was earlier. He says he has been so impressed by Socrates that he would let him educate his own boys ‘were my sons old enough.’ (200c) What is striking is that while he cannot be said to not be endorsing Socrates, he also is not exactly unreservedly offering up his own sons to him.

Nicias returns to the events surrounding Socrates’ recommendation to him of a music teacher for his son in quite a contrasting way:
I should be only too glad to entrust him to Niceratus, if he should consent: but when I begin to mention the matter to him, he always recommends other men to me and refuses himself. (200c-d)

We can say he is no longer so constrained by the cowardly fear of rejection that it made him unwilling to stick his neck out sufficiently to enable Socrates even to have a sense of what Nicias actually wanted. He is no longer using armour merely to, as would a coward, try to avoid any risk whatever, here the risk of rejection that is attached to a request that it would be safe (virtuous) for him to make.

Taken as a whole this dialogue provides a clear image of the person who possesses the virtue of courage. She would not need to conduct herself in an unguarded, fully exposed way. She would consider such a course of action too unwise, intemperate, and unjust.

At the same time, this courageous one would not be using the shield merely as something to hide behind, i.e. as a way to avoid any and all risks. Having the armour would help protect against unnecessary risks but could never be used to avoid all risks. Some exposure that would be fearful will be faced and even welcomed though with the knowledge that this exposure if required by one’s sense of what would be just, temperate, wise, and, of course, courageous.

If something like this is courage, a question that admittedly goes beyond the scope of the dialogue can be raised. Is the realms of courage everywhere? Even if one is courageous, is courage required in all of one’s interactions? This question amounts to whether one can/should ever expose oneself-act in unguarded way-without that being an at all courageous thing to do. Where, in other words, though one is certainly very vulnerable, it would be a gross exaggeration to depict this behavior as requiring courage. In fact, so inappropriate would this label be that it would be a total violation of the phenomenon as it is experienced to treat it as sticking one’s neck out?.

What can be suggested is that there is at least one form of interaction that does fit this emerging characterization, the settled behavior that can be witnessed among persons in an ongoing intimate relationship. They certainly and constantly expose themselves to each other much more than Socrates ever does in this dialogue and yet it would belittle what this particular virtue-courage-actually requires for them or others to credit their constant mutual exposure as courageous acts.⁸

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⁸ For an analysis of the form of exposure that intimacy rather than courage requires see McHugh, 2007,
Gorgias

Callicles has invited Socrates to his house to meet his visitor, Gorgias. The first line of the dialogue finds Callicles angry. He says:

This is the way they say you ought to join a battle, Socrates. (447a)

Socrates has done something that certainly appears rude. He has arrived late. Clearly Callicles has taken offence, hitting back by, in effect, calling Socrates a coward. If what we have seen at work in previous dialogues is any indication, even this early Plato could be flagging his overall theme. So it will prove since, as we will see, the dialogue as a whole does consider, in depth, why what could be seen as rudeness might be a principled form of behavior.

However, Socrates’ first major intervention is not so much rude as puzzling. Gorgias was nothing if not well known and yet Socrates tells his companion Chaerophon to ask him ‘who he is’. (447d) Explaining that Gorgias is ‘worn out’ (448a) by the talk Socrates missed, his student, Polus, volunteers to answer in his stead. In fact he proceeds not to answer the question, finally saying not who he is but only that ‘he shares in the finest of the crafts.’ (448c)

Here, Socrates does intervene, objecting that Polus, presumably by offering praise rather than a definition is preferring ‘the rhetorical craft’ to ‘dialogue.’ (448e) Perhaps agreeing that exactly this is what his student should be doing, Gorgias enters with what amounts to the first satisfactory answer to the question of who he is. He says he is a practitioner of just this ‘the rhetorical craft.’ (449a)

Socrates’ first question having been answered, the task becomes to depict Gorgias’ role, qua rhetor, in some detail. First it is easily established that he thinks he is (as the example of Polus suggests) ‘capable of making other people rhetors too.’ (449b) Answering the next question, the precise subject of rhetoric, proves more of a challenge. Eventually he agrees with Socrates that rhetoric is

The craft of persuasion in jury-courts and in other mobs...about the things which are just and unjust. (454b)

Socrates has no quarrel with this definition but what he does now begin to consider is what the phenomenon of persuasion amounts to. Being persuaded, he gets Gorgias to appreciate, amounts to being convinced but being convinced needs to be distinguished from having learned. (454c-d) The point is that rhetoric can and often does persuade people-convince them-of things that are false.

What is clearly at issue now is the use of rhetoric if it only ‘yields conviction but does not teach about the just and unjust.’ (455a) Gorgias seeks to defend it by telling a story. His brother is a doctor and

I have often in the past gone with my brother and the other doctors to some sick man refusing to drink a medicine...when the doctor couldn’t persuade him, I persuaded him, by no other craft than rhetoric. (456b)
As Gorgias says, this does demonstrate that rhetoric does have a ‘kind of power.’ (456c) However, with still no way to distinguish whether what one manages to persuade someone of is just or unjust, the power seems as useful for doing evil as for doing good.

The way Gorgias tries to handle this dilemma is by arguing that, like any other power, rhetoric is subject to abuse:

But I think that if someone acquires the rhetorical craft and then does injustice with this power and craft, we should not detest the teacher... (457b)

Socrates responds by asking Gorgias to further consider his own medical example. While Gorgias might be more persuasive than his brother in getting someone to take his medicine, ‘he won’t be more persuasive than the doctor among those who know.’ (459a) In other words, Gorgias is surely unable to persuade his brother that he knows better than him what medicine to give the man.

Generalizing, we get a clear statement about what is required of the rhetor:

There is no need for it to know how things actually are, but only to have found some persuasive device so that to those who don’t know it will seem to know more than those who know. (459c)

Gorgias agrees, even enthusing that they have hit on the beauty of it. Because the rhetor does not need actually to know anything:

Doesn’t that make it very easy, Socrates? You needn’t learn the other crafts, but only this one and you never lose... (459c)

But while it perhaps does seem acceptable to persuade persons about some things one does not know, is it really legitimate if one considers the likely actual subjects of most persuasion? Socrates asks Gorgias to consider:

Whether the rhetor is the same way about the fine and the shameful, and the good and the bad as about the healthy and the other things which the other crafts are about—he doesn’t know the things themselves, which is good or bad, what is fine or shameful or just or unjust, but has devised persuasion about them so that though he doesn’t know, among those who don’t know he appears to know, rather than the man who knows. (459c-d)

What is emerging is an unattractive picture of Gorgias himself, i.e. as not knowing anything about such important matters. Probably not only to save his reputation but also honestly believing that he does know about such things, Gorgias decides to withdraw his opinion that the rhetor can function well in the absence of such knowledge.

But if he knows about justice, injustice, etc. he can no longer so confidently escape responsibility for students who use his teaching wrongly. So he now says, concerning his students
I think that if someone in fact doesn’t know these things, he will learn them also from me. (460a)

Socrates summarizes the position he and Gorgias have arrived at as that ‘the rhetor is powerless to use his rhetoric unjustly and to be willing to do injustice.’ (461a) On the one hand, rhetoric now seems a much more responsible activity than it did at the outset of their conversation. On the other hand, if it can convince but not teach and especially if it is especially useful only among the ignorant, any sense of it as possessing great power is being lost.

Polus, clearly unable to accept such a diminished version of his activity, now intervenes. Presumably thinking that part of the problem with their results lies in the fact that Gorgias let himself be questioned by Socrates (and so used the method Socrates preferred), he asks Socrates what ‘you say it is.’ (462b) (emphasis in original). Socrates replies that rhetoric is ‘a knack of...the production of a certain gratification and pleasure.’ (462c) Polus’ immediate reaction is to argue that in that case ‘rhetoric’s a fine thing, the ability to gratify people.’ (462c)

But Socrates offers an analogy which greatly clarifies what could be wrong both with the knack of gratifying and with rhetoric. One can have the knack of gratifying the body. His example is cookery. This is quite different from doing what is good for the body. He says it is better seen as ‘flattering’ the body whereas only medicine is the fully developed craft which knows what is good for the body. This applies to rhetoric because there is a similar division in treatments of the soul. Whereas justice treats the soul like medicine treats the body, rhetoric treats it like cookery treats the body. Rhetoric is ‘flattery’ for the soul; ‘it does not care a bit for what is best, but lures and deceives foolishness with what is pleasant at the moment.’ (464d)

Now that we see that Socrates thinks flattery, even as it gratifies, is a bad thing, one thing that begins to be clear is how he could defend his initial lateness. Though Callicles obviously felt insulted, perhaps Socrates thought being flattered (by his prompt arrival) would not be doing Callicles any good. Later, when we gain a sense of Callicles’ character, this explanation will become much more plausible.

The dialogue’s current concern, however, remains with Polus. While he has no objection to Socrates’ idea that rhetoric is flattery, what he can’t see is why that is not good. He says it offers the surest route to ‘the greatest power in the cities.’ (466b) Showing, perhaps, that, contrary to Gorgias’ revised claim for his students, he sees no need to utilize rhetoric only for just ends, he suggests rhetors are ‘like tyrants: Don’t they kill whoever they want to, and expropriate and expel from the cities whoever they want.’ (466c) Socrates does not deny that rhetors (and tyrants) may well do this. What he does doubt, though, is whether Polus is right to see this as the greatest power.

Polus’ conviction that rhetors and tyrants do have great power stems from his understanding that they can do what they want to do. But Socrates suggests a more accurate version of this ‘power’ is that they can do what they think fit. With such freedom one could certainly kill the people one sees fit to kill but if a tyrant or rhetor does that thinking it is better for him when in fact it turns out worse, Socrates asks whether he has done what he wants to do. Polus, now appreciating that there is a
distinction between what one thinks fit and what one wants, (when for example an outcome one thinks fit produced a result that one does not even oneself actually want) says, in such case, ‘No. I don’t think he does what he wants to.’ (468d) In that the tyrant and rhetor do not necessarily get what they want by freely killing, their ability to kill no longer seems so clearly to be a power.

But, even if people who can kill at will may not have the power to get what they want, surely it is wrong to think of them as exactly powerless. Socrates, in dismissing the tyrant as having power, seems to be advocating a position that leaves one, not with more power but with less. Hence Polus’ next question to him:

You aren’t envious whenever you see someone has killed or expropriated or imprisoned anyone he thought fit? (468e)

What ensues is a discussion of who Socrates envies and for whom he feels the opposite emotion, pity. He agrees with Polus that ‘the man who is killed unjustly is pitiable and wretched’ (469b) surely, then, not to be envied but then he totally surprises Polus by saying that there is one person he pities even more: ‘the man who kills unjustly.’ (469b) At this point, we have Socrates declaring that while he would certainly not want to suffer injustice

But if it were necessary for me to do or to suffer injustice, I’d elect to suffer injustice rather than to do it. (469c)

Even though Socrates’ position makes it quite clear why he personally would not crave the power to kill freely, the choice he opts for seems incredible to Polus. His reaction to Socrates’ statement that doing injustice is more to be pitied is: ‘What? Is that the greatest (of evils)? Isn’t suffering injustice greater?’ (469b)

Nor is Polus alone here. In our time, Hannah Arendt is only able (as she wishes) to defend Socrates’ conclusion by arguing that ‘it is a subjective statement’, i.e. not applicable to everyone. (Arendt, 1971, 181) Just how subjective it is can best be determined if (unlike Arendt) we look at how the argument unfolds. If Socrates can actually defend his position effectively in the face of intelligent counter arguments by his interlocutors, it cannot be totally subjective. With Polus, the main focus is further considering the worth of doing injustice. One thing Polus does agree with Socrates about is that ‘it’s more shameful to do injustice’ than ‘to suffer it.’ (474c) That is, he would not exactly feel pride in doing injustice. Such acts are, he agrees shameful, but he cannot see how that makes them worse than suffering injustice.

The implication is that his favourable view of injustice could be shaken if he can see what is bad about what he finds shameful. Perceiving this, Socrates now embarks on an analysis of shame. His first move is to consider the opposite of shameful things, fine things. He proposes, with Polus agreeing, that the basis for deciding that something is fine is its ‘being either beneficial or pleasant or both.’ (474e) Polus himself now volunteers that one can ‘define the fine by pleasant and good.’ (475a) Socrates and Polus proceed to agree that they can ‘define the shameful by the opposite, distress and evil.’ (475a)
Next we see that working out the properties of the shameful does help change Polus’ mind. It makes the idea that suffering injustice is actually less bad than doing it begin to seem at least somewhat more plausible because, while Polus remains convinced that doing injustice ‘certainly...doesn’t exceed in distress’ (475c) (one possible source of shame) he is not so sure that it does not exceed in the other source of shame, evil. That is, at least some of his incredulity toward the idea that doing injustice is worse was really his sense that suffering it causes more distress, a point Socrates does not dispute. Before this latest phase of their discussion, the only problem Polus has been able to imagine with doing injustice is that ‘someone who acts that way is bound to be punished.’ (470a) But Socrates now suggests that with their new understanding of what is wrong with committing an injustice, even the status of some forms of punishment, namely having to pay ‘the just penalty,’ (476a) will need to be rethought. Offering a formulation that we can perhaps relate to more easily if we think he has in mind what Emile Durkheim called restitutive rather than retributive justice, (Durkheim) Socrates imagines this activity as a man who ‘pays justice’ and thereby ‘is rid of evil of soul,’ (477a) Socrates formulates just punishment as doing for the soul what medical treatment, when one is ill, can do for the body.

He asks Polus ‘Is medical treatment pleasant? Do patients enjoy it?’ (478b) To which Polus replies ‘I don’t think so.’ Yet ‘still it is beneficial. (478b) Making just compensation for wrongs one commits is like this, certainly not one’s preferred action (just as one would not prefer to be ill) and also not at all pleasant, indeed often quite painful, but still making one better off because it is a way to release one from some of the guilt for what one has done.

And now Socrates relates their conclusion to the issue that has not been directly addressed since Polus replaced Gorgias as the interlocutor: the nature of rhetoric. If one is not as responsible a rhetor as Gorgias claimed to be (at least after the issues were clarified for him by Socrates) surely when rhetoric seems most of use is ‘for someone’s defence for his own injustice.’ (480b) The trouble is that now that we can see that it can actually be better, after committing an injustice, ‘to pay justice and become healthy’ it begins to seem that ‘rhetoric is no use at all to us.’ (480c)

Next Socrates finds a dramatic way to sum up what he and Polus have discovered. Imagine ‘our enemy treats someone unjustly’ and we want to do everything in our power to cause him harm. Socrates advises that first

Prevent him from paying justice and appearing before the court of justice. And if he appears, we must arrange it so that he escapes and doesn’t pay justice..., and if he has done injustice deserving death, we must see he does not suffer death-best of all never, to be immortal in his baseness, bit otherwise to live the longest possible life in this condition. (481a-b)

This speech is too much for their host, Callicles, who now enters the dialogue, declaring with some justification that
If you’re in earnest, and all the things you say are really true, then wouldn’t the life of us men be upside down? And don’t we apparently do everything that’s the opposite of what we should do? (481c)

Socrates does not deny the revolutionary implications of his views but what he does do is change the topic to an explanation of why Callicles would never speak as Socrates just did. He says Callicles has two beloveds, a youth called Demos and another demos, his city of Athens. With regard to both Socrates notices that

Whatever your beloved says and however he says things are you can’t contradict him, but you change this way and that. In the Assembly, if you’re saying something and the Athenian demos says it’s not so, you change and say what it wants... (481e)

Socrates, on the other hand, clearly has just shown how prepared he is to contradict his fellow countrymen and so not to change his speeches merely to please them.

Several observations follow. Socrates can be seen to be beginning to defend not just how he speaks to Athens but the rude way in which he first arrived at Callicles’ house. Probably, arriving on time would have been just the sort of indulgent treatment that would merely have left Callicles in his comfort zone. Also we begin to get a defence of Socrates’ form of speech as representing his alternative to rhetoric. Whatever Socrates is doing, he is certainly not flattering his interlocutors. And, finally, we may be getting an explanation for something thus far taken for granted: Callicles readiness to host Gorgias and Polus. If he wants to develop additional skills for continued indulgent of others behavior that Socrates has criticized him for, he can have no better teachers than these two masters of rhetoric.

Callicles, though, certainly does not accept Socrates’ criticisms of him. In fact he offers some compelling criticisms both of Polus and Socrates. Polus was too quick to accept the fact that there was shame attached to doing injustice as constituting a valid objection to it. He says it is only according to the rules of the many-convention- that injustice is shameful. Polus was speaking ‘according to rule’ whereas one only gets an adequate understanding both of shame and injustice when one speaks ‘according to nature’ (483a)

By nature everything is more shameful which is also worse, suffering injustice, but by rule doing injustice is more shameful. (483a)

Callicles proceeds to provide a vivid and very negative picture of anyone who suffers injustice. He says

It’s what happens to some slave for whom it’s better to die than to live for if he suffers injustice and abuse, he can’t defend himself or anyone he cares about. (483b)

It is this person who in reality should be ashamed. And then he suggests what is perhaps the example foremost in his mind of needing according to nature, feel ashamed
It is not shameful for someone to philosophize when he is a boy. But whenever a man who’s older still philosophizes, the thing become ridiculous...when I see an older man philosophizing and not giving it up, I think the man needs a beating. For this man is bound to end up being unmanly. (485a-c)

This unmanliness is best seen in the fact that he will end up in exactly the position that Socrates is so wrong to admire: being wrongly accused of doing injustice but through weakness unable to offer a manly defence and so, in his feebleness, suffering it instead.

As a way of beginning to enable them to get clearer on what Callicles is actually saying, Socrates tries to get Callicles to see who he envisions as this naturally superior person who would never be so weak as to suffer injustice. This person, Callicles admits, is not necessarily characterized by ‘bodily strength.’ (489c) He should be ‘wise in the city's affairs and brave’ ‘rule cities’ and qua ruler should, in some way that Callicles does not specify ‘have more than the ruled.’ (491d)

Socrates does not, at this point, challenge Callicles’ picture of this person but does ask him whether the superior person, besides ruling others, should also ‘rule himself.’ (491d) Callicles seems authentically puzzled by this as if the idea of needing to exert any sort of rule or control over himself has never occurred to him. He does though immediately understand when Socrates explains what he means is being ‘temperate master of himself, ruling the pleasures and appetites within him.’ (491e) While he now understands, Callicles also now completely disagrees. Temperance is anathema to his notion of the superior person. It is only the many—the weak—the ones who accept suffering—who are temperate. Only they, due ‘to their own powerlessness’ ‘say that intemperance is actually shameful.’ (492a) His version of the superior man is now clearly emerging. He

Must not restrain his appetites...but should let them grow as great as possible and find fulfilment for them from anywhere at all. (492d)

If he is to make any sort of headway with Callicles, clearly Socrates is going to have to show there is something wrong with a life totally devoted to pleasure. To his first attempt, that really ‘those who need nothing are happy’ (492e) Callicles rightly objects that that sounds more like the life of ‘stones and corpses’ (492e) than living human beings. Nor is Callicles persuaded by Socrates’ image of intemperate people as like leaky jars that must be filled ‘day and night.’ (494a) Callicles retorts that the problem with a jar that doesn’t leak is that once it has filled up there will be ‘no pleasure at all any more.’ (494a)

Socrates does not exactly deny that there are pleasures that stop when one has the fill of them but what he does wonder is how thoughtful is Callicles version, even of pleasure, if because a specific pleasure would then cease, he is opting never to be filled up. He asks him what sort of pleasures he has in mind and they agree that he is thinking of

Being hungry and eating when you are hungry ...being thirsty and drinking when you’re thirsty. (494b-c)
Socrates gets him to reflect on exactly when experiences like these are pleasurable and they agree that it is only when you are thirsty that it is pleasurable to drink, only when you are hungry that it is pleasurable to eat. There therefore begins to seem something odd about wanting to do these as much as possible. That is, while it would give one a kind of constant pleasure, it would be a form of pleasure that is mixed with a form of pain.

The trouble with it can be expressed as what can be observed about persons who do tend to eat or drink incessantly. We say that, sadly, they seem never to be satisfied, never fulfilled. On the other hand, to have one’s fill is not to deny that eating or drinking are pleasurable but it is to deny that the best way to enjoy these things is inconsistent with a commitment to temperance. Socrates tries to get Callicles to see that his current version of eating and drinking imagines them as offering the same sort of pleasure as scratching an itch that never goes away. Scratching of this sort does offer pleasure but the pleasure is so mixed with pain that, after even a short while, we do wish for some sort of fulfillment, e.g. the kind even a quite greedy person feels when they have had enough to eat or drink. (494c)

Socrates also offers another argument against validating as best of all a life devoted to constantly having pleasure. Callicles, particularly in view of his commitment to not acting in ways perceived as weak does not ‘call fools and cowards good men.’ (497e) But he cannot deny that he has seen such people enjoying themselves. Indeed he even admits that when in a war ‘the enemy withdrew’ while both the cowards and the brave ‘had enjoyment, perhaps the cowards had more.’ (498b)

Especially after experiencing this development of the argument, Callicles is no longer prepared to defend a life devoted to a constant pursuit of any and all pleasures. Instead he says that ‘everyone, including him, agrees that some pleasures are better and others worse.’ (499b) Callicles has been shown, then, that the fact that something gratifies does not mean it is good and, in the same vein, that something causes distress does not mean it is bad. Now Socrates reminds him of the earlier discussion with Polus which established that rhetors do not ‘consider what pleasure is better or worse nor care about anything else than giving gratification.’ (501b-c)

Socrates now challenges Callicles to name at least one rhetor who does not merely flatter. Callicles confesses that ‘I can’t mention any of the present rhetors to you’ (503b) but does suggest that there were previous leaders such as Pericles and Thermistocles who ‘proved himself a good man.’ (503c) Socrates suggests that even these did not have the kind of virtue he has in mind. Here he begins a detailed discussion of what, according to him, would make for virtue, ‘a soul with its own proper order’ (506e), someone who ‘would do just things’, would ‘pursue and practice temperance’ etc. (507d) And he concludes by repeating his earlier conclusion: ‘doing injustice is the greater evil, and suffering it the lesser.’ (508c)

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9 See Nussbaum who correctly points out that ‘the central appetitive pursuits are in important ways not like itching and scratching’ (Nussbaum, 1986, 153, emphasis in original) but fails to see that Socrates is making the comparison only because Callicles is conceiving of them in this erroneous way.
But what is most striking about this portion of the dialogue is that Callicles at first gives only cursory answers, e.g. ‘Let it be so.’ (505a) and then, for most of the depiction of virtuous behavior even refuses to participate, making Socrates not just ask the questions but also, himself answer them. Clearly, something is blocking Callicles from finding Socrates’ views at all convincing. It is therefore important to locate the point where, perhaps in spite of himself, he does reenter in other than a half-hearted way. The moment is when Socrates begins to reflect on an aspect of the phenomenon of suffering injustice that he has not yet considered. He asks, with regard both to not doing injustice and not suffering it whether one needs ‘power or wish.’ (509d) What Callicles clearly reveals is that what he is interested in is not suffering injustice and he answers that the way to avoid it would be ‘by having a power.’ (509d)

We see that the reason Callicles is not much interested in what doing justice entails is that he is still oriented, above all, to not suffering any injustice. What confirms that this is his mindset is that when Socrates proceeds to suggest ‘the craft equipping us to suffer injustice not at all or as little as possible’ (510a) for the first time in the entire discussion Callicles actually becomes enthusiastic. He says: ‘See how ready I am to praise you, Socrates, if you say something well.’ (510b) What he thinks is praiseworthy is when Socrates says the way to avoid suffering justice is that

Someone should himself be ruler in the city or even tyrant, or he should be an ally of the political system in power. (510a)

But it soon turns out that this suggestion is double edged. Socrates goes on to consider the notion of ally ing oneself to a tyrant. The only way to be a friend to such a man is to

Have a similar character, blame and praise the same things and be willing to be ruled by the ruler and be subject to him. (510c)

The would-be ally

Must accustom himself from youth to enjoy and hate the same things as the tyrant, and manage to be as like the tyrant as possible. (510d)

Callicles cannot but agree that all this would be necessary but, then, when Socrates draws the conclusion that therefore the practice will actually lead to the greatest evil of all for the tyrant’s ally (doing injustice), Callicles can only marvel at what he imagines is Socrates extreme naiveté

Don’t you know that this imitator will kill that non-imitator of yours, if he wants to, and confiscate all he has? (511a)

But Socrates says he is far from naïve

Yes, I know it, my good Callicles, if I’m not deaf. I’ve often heard it from you and Polus just now, and from practically everyone else in the city. (511b)
Callicles replies ‘and isn’t that exactly what is deplorable? (511b) Socrates goes so far as to say ‘No, it is not’ and his reason, we will say, begins to offer Callicles, at the very least, a new way to understand suffering injustice. It is not deplorable because

Surely you don’t think a man should equip himself for this- to live the longest time he can, and should practice those crafts which save us from dangers any time, as rhetoric does. (511b-c)

What is different is that Callicles has always opposed suffering injustice on the grounds that it appears weak and slavish. What is beginning to be suggested is that it could be just reverse if the only real rationale for Callicles’ recommendation is because it will allow one (slavishly) to cling to life.

Socrates starts listing various professions that, in certain circumstances, are highly useful for ensuring our survival, e. g. swimming coach, pilot of ship, and points out that Callicles thinks so little of them that he ‘would never be willing to marry your daughter to his son.’ (512c) If preserving life is what rhetoric can accomplish, he should start thinking of it as not much better than these.

In a significant change from being totally dismissive of Socrates’ argument, Callicles now says only ‘I’m not quite convinced by you.’ (513c) So, he no longer shows an interest in allying himself with a tyrant, certainly progress of a sort. But what they have not directly considered but start to now is the alternative that we know from how Socrates first characterized him is the one that really tempts Callicles. There is no suggestion that he himself is inclined to commit the clear-cut injustices of the tyrant and his friends but he still cannot see anything wrong with the form of leadership epitomized by figures like Thermistocles and Pericles, the form depicted by Socrates as pleasing the demos by ‘filling up appetites.’ (503c)

Callicles is still convinced that Pericles and others were good citizens and Socrates now proceeds to test this by a careful assessment of Pericles’ career. His most salient observation is that

At first Pericles had a good reputation...but...at the end of Pericles’ life, they convicted him of theft, and nearly condemned him to death, clearly because they supposed he was base. (515e-516a)

Callicles, convinced that these charges were unjust, is outraged on Pericles’ behalf and exclaims ‘So what? Did that make Pericles bad? (516a)

What is most striking about Callicles’ reaction is the ‘so what’ because it means that he is starting to think differently about the meaning of being put to death. It does now matter to him whether this is justified and if it is not it apparently can be met with what almost amounts to insouciance.

However, what still remains to be considered is whether Callicles has a valid sense of why Pericles does not deserve his fate. They begin to consider what Pericles has done for Athens and discover that he has accomplished much: ‘ships, walls, dockyards, and many other things.’ (517c) All this does make it seem that the Athenians were simply ungrateful and so it was not Pericles but them who were bad.
But Socrates suggests that while it is undeniable that these are achievements, proving that Pericles was far better than most at ‘supplying the city with what it had an appetite for’ (517b) they must analyze what fulfilling appetites amounts to. It amounts to merely indulging the city. Therefore, not doing anything about ‘persuading and forcing them towards what will make the citizens better.’ (517b) Pericles then does deserve his fate because he is like ‘a keeper of donkeys...who...if they did not kick or butt or bite him when he took them over, and finally left them doing all these bad things from wildness.’ (516a-b)

Here Callicles is seeing that there is another sort of weakness that he really was unaware of at the beginning. At the beginning Callicles was accusing Socrates of being weak because he was willing to suffer unjustly. Now he is seeing that there are at least two behaviours that are weaker than that, orienting too much merely to survival and indulging-gratifying-serving appetites rather than even attempting ‘to struggle, as a doctor would, to make the Athenians as good as possible.’ 521a) After this, in the end, negative assessment of Pericles and other respected former leaders of Athens, Socrates asks Callicles, in the light of their entire discussion, ‘what kind of care for the city you’re urging on me’ (521a)

Callicles attempts a rather vague answer but then admits that what he is really suggesting is that Socrates practice flattery because if not ‘you’ll...be dragged into court, perhaps by some wretched scoundrel.’ (521c) What to make of this? Against the fact that Socrates has still not managed to convince Callicles can be balanced the fact that the latter’s arguments are growing ever weaker. He can no longer argue either that it is Socrates who is being servile (refusing to flatter is certainly not servile) or that it is only according to convention that his opponents should be ashamed (being a wretched scoundrel is a source of shame irrespective of the conventions). In short, he has learned that suffering undeservedly, according to his own revised understanding of both Socrates (stubbornly refusing to flatter) and his likely opponents (wretched scoundrels by his own admission) must not be nearly as bad as it seemed to him when he first entered the conversation.

He has learned things but still he is not fully convinced that Socrates’ way is the right one. At the point at which the dialogue has now reached, we can say that they are experiencing the opposite problem with Socrates’ (non-rhetorical) method to the one that, very early on, Socrates and Gorgias discovered with the rhetorical method. Whereas rhetoric can convince persons even without them learning anything, under Socrates’ questioning Callicles has learned things, e. g. that there are circumstances in which not being able to prevent one’s own murder is no sign of weakness and that certain forms of behaviour that might well guarantee survival are a sign of weakness, yet without being fully convinced, in this case that Socrates is right to behave in a way that will virtually guarantee he will suffer undeservedly.

It is a fact that, while the dialogue with Callicles ends roughly at this point (with Callicles still unconvinced) Gorgias only concludes after Socrates does something uncharacteristic or at least unexpected given the themes of this dialogue. He gives a long speech the substance of which is that while he and people who follow his path are indeed likely to suffer undeservedly in this life, they will be vindicated by the gods in the after-life. Though she should have noted that, as Socrates is at pains to emphasise
and as the substance of the speech confirms, his is not at all the flattering type of rhetoric, Arendt rightly suggests that it does seem odd that a dialogue devoted to critiquing rhetoric should end with Socrates, of all people, engaging in it. (Arendt, 1971, 180)

Both the fact that Callicles, as we saw, was not fully convinced by Socrates’ normal procedure and the fact that even Socrates now abandons that procedure are what lead Arendt to conclude that the idea that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it is just a subjective notion. But that Callicles has learned things from the discussion suggests that they have developed beyond what did start as only Socrates’ view. However, if he has learned should he not also be convinced? But that presupposes too close a link between what we have learned and what we do. One way in which the link can be broken is when what one has learned is better still requires at least some and usually immediate suffering. Thus Callicles can have learned that certain forms of suffering are not as shameful as he thought while still not being certain whether the undeniable pain of that way is better avoided. If in fact as does seem to be the case in this dialogue, even the (objectively?) just option is not at all painless, that can be the place where even Socrates will have to resort to a form of persuasion without, as Arendt assumes, that amounting to an admission that his arguments are no more than his own personal opinions. In other words what could integrate the at first puzzling rhetorical ending with the rest of the dialogue is the fact that it might be necessary to take on the roles of both Gorgias’ doctor brother and Gorgias himself, not just teaching what the best medicine is but finding ways to convince us to go so far as to actually take it.

This account of Socrates’ final resort to rhetoric focuses on his continuing attempts to convince Callicles. But we can also consider how it might be serving Socrates himself. By refusing to flatter, it is now clear both that Socrates will not deserve to suffer and, though it is not the worse fate, it is also for him and those who follow him, quite a likely one. We cannot help but wonder if there is any way he can seek to avoid a fate that, if not terrible, he does confess he would find ‘annoying.’ (522d) Reiterating that his form of rhetoric is not flattery, while it is not how rhetoric is normally used, there is no contradiction so long as one uses it (as he is here) in an attempt to convince persons to be just, including toward him, and so as part of an effort to avoid the (admittedly annoying) fate of having to suffer undeservedly just because he is unwilling to flatter anyone.
Meno begins with Meno asking Socrates:

Is Virtue something that can be taught? Or does it come by practice? Or is it neither teaching nor practice that gives it to a man but natural aptitude or something else? (70a)

As intrinsically interesting as this question is, still it is worth considering why Meno is asking it. Much later in the dialogue we learn that, whenever Meno’s teacher, Gorgias, hears people who claim to be able to teach virtue: ‘he laughs...when he hears them do so. In his view his job is to make clever speakers.’ (95c)

We are entitled to conclude that, somewhat disappointed that his own teacher cannot teach him about this important matter, he is asking in the hope that Socrates would be more helpful in this regard. Imagining Meno to have this motivation will help us interpret the dialogue.

For example, while it is tempting to treat Socrates’ objection to Meno’s initial attempt to define virtue: ‘I wanted one virtue and I find that you have a whole swarm of virtues to offer’ (72a) as only his standard request for the single underlying form of anything, it is worth noting that there is an additional defect with how Meno has begun to think about virtue besides his failure to collect it. Meno has said:

First of all, if it is manly virtue you are after, it is easy to see that the virtue of a man consists in managing the city’s affairs capably...Or if you want a woman’s virtue, that is easily described. She must be a good housewife...Then there is another virtue for a child, male or female, and another for an old man...(71e)

If this is what virtue is, it does sound much more like a natural aptitude, of a normal man, a normal woman, a child, an old man, etc. than anything that could be taught.

As Socrates begins to help him to develop a single definition of virtue, we should be looking to see how the matter of whether it can be taught is also developing. Socrates’ next major move is to use an aspect of Meno’s definitions to suggest how virtue could still be a single thing. He says to Meno:

Didn’t you say that a man’s virtue lay in directing the city well, and a woman’s in directing her household well? (73a)

Then he adds that directing anything well is impossible if it is not done ‘temperately and justly.’ (73a) They could be on the way, not just to finding what underlies all the instances of virtue, i. e. temperance and justice, but also to seeing that, in that justice and temperance are surely not natural, virtue might indeed lend itself to teaching.
However, even though Socrates goes on to indicate that justice and temperance would also characterize virtuous cases of Meno’s additional categories, children and old men, when Meno attempts to articulate the single quality they have found, he says: ‘It must be simply the capacity to govern men.’ (73e) On the one hand, unlike his earlier version of virtue, if this is virtue, it surely makes much more sense to imagine it could be taught. No doubt, for example, Machievelli’s whole enterprise suggests he was pretty confident on this score. But, as Socrates points out, this definition of virtue clearly neglects to incorporate what they have already established would characterize any of the cases Meno initially mentioned, much less all of them. He neglects to state that the men and women would have to govern justly to be virtuous and, besides this, he forgets that he said children and old men could be virtuous, in their cases presumably not by how they govern people.

Meno now agrees that for the capacity to govern to be done virtuously, it must be done justly ‘for justice is virtue.’ (73d) If justice is virtue, then virtue still seems potentially teachable and, furthermore, one would not need the mentality of a Machievelli to be inclined to undertake the task. However, recalling that, even if what he perhaps was hoping to learn when he was asking if virtue could be taught was about ‘the capacity to govern’ it remains true that Meno’s initial question was about the teaching of virtue. As Socrates now points out, to be satisfied that one has learned virtue when one has learned justice is rather like being satisfied that one has learned about shape when all one has learned about is roundness.

Meno shows that he understands how limited such an understanding would be by asserting that, besides justice:

In my opinion...courage is a virtue and temperance and wisdom and dignity and many other things. (74a)

A point we can make is that, without realizing it, to a certain extent Meno already is learning about virtue. For one thing, he has learned that to govern virtuously he would have to govern justly. Now he has also learned that there is more to being virtuous than just one’s conduct in the act of governing. There are also virtues, courage, temperance, wisdom, etc. that should orient one’s behavior as a whole.

None of these phenomena likely to occur any more naturally than justice, it remains true that virtue still seems more teachable than it did according to Meno’s original definitions. At the same time, if one is expected to teach all this, it certainly seems an extraordinarily daunting task. In the light of the specific question of the dialogue, while the difficulty cannot be denied, that there is such a variety of virtues means another advantage of Socrates’ method now become visible. Even though there are many virtues, if they have one thing is common, that could reduce the difficulty of teaching all of them because one would be less likely to have to proceed piecemeal, assuming of course one could find that one thing.

Later in the dialogue they do find such a thing. First however, Socrates seeks to make their task clearer. Hearkening back to his analogy of virtues to shapes, he offers to try to say what all shapes have in common with the proviso that Meno will then try to do the same with all the virtues. He suggests they can define shape ‘as the only thing
which always accompanies color.’ (75b) He adds: ‘I should be content if your definition of virtue were on similar lines’ (75b) Meno objects that this definition will not help someone who ‘doesn’t know what color is.’ (75c)

There are two ways to take this remark. On the one hand, since Meno presumably does know what color is, it is likely that his response merely reflects a desire to postpone the task he has promised to do. Indeed his subsequent behavior tends to confirm this. When Socrates becomes careful to offer a new definition of shape which only uses terms Meno agrees beforehand that he understands, instead of accepting the definition Meno now asks Socrates to define color. Asking this question at this point only makes sense as a delaying tactic.

On the other hand, Meno’s objection to the first definition does establish the precedent that a definition ‘conducive to discussion’ ‘must not only be true, but must employ terms with which the questioner admits he is familiar.’ (75d) As we shall see, when Meno finally does offer a definition of virtue as a whole, without exactly insisting that the definition is false, what Socrates does do is demand that Meno elaborate in just the way he has just seen Socrates agree to do.

The definition that Meno offers is:

Virtue is, in the words of the poet, ‘to rejoice in the fine and have power’, and I define it as desiring fine things and being able to acquire them. (77b)

It can be agreed that this comes closer to meeting Socrates’ requirements than either of his earlier definitions. Not being restricted to governance, it could apply not just to men and women but also children and old people. It will be seen that in his response to it, by not directly challenging the definition’s truth, Socrates does not depart from the principle they have just agreed to as necessary for a productive conversation.

But in line with this principle, Socrates does feel free to require that Meno be willing to express himself in terms that Socrates is thoroughly familiar with. The thrust of Meno’s definition is probably that, whereas the virtuous desire ‘fine’ things, those who do not have desires that are less worthy. However, ‘fine’ is not a term that is apparently familiar enough to Socrates since he now questions Meno about it. In response to the request that he express himself in a more familiar way, Meno agrees that ‘fine’ means good and not fine means evil. Therefore his position amounts to the non-virtuous actually wanting evil for themselves. Under more questioning He agrees that this is impossible or, to put it positively, he now sees that everyone desires what they think are good things.

What this conclusion immediately makes clear is that at least the first part of Meno’s definition does not manage to distinguish the virtuous from the vicious. As Socrates puts it, with regard to desiring good ‘the wish is common to everyone and in that respect no one is better than his neighbor.’ (78b) (emphasis added). Could it then be the second part of Meno’s definition that distinguishes people, namely the ability to acquire good things? But Socrates, again exercising his right to hear what is meant in terms more familiar to him asks if he means the ability to acquire these things by any means whatsoever. Meno now realizes that he cannot mean this in that, as he has
already asserted, justice, temperance, etc. are parts of virtue and so one would need to be oriented to these when one tried to acquire anything.

It can be noted that at least two important things about virtue have been discovered, those without it are suffering from a kind of ignorance and whatever it is, it is not the sheer power to acquire. Furthermore, at least the first point makes it much more plausible that virtue could be taught. But instead of noticing these potential lessons, what Meno now focuses on is what, admittedly, is also true, namely that even his best attempt at a definition is not successful. Understandably, he is very frustrated.

It is at this point that Meno launches his famous attack on Socrates for not just looking like a sting ray but also acting like one by numbing people, i.e. leaving them unable to say anything even though he has ‘spoken about virtue hundreds of times, held forth on the subject in front of large audiences, and very well too, or so I thought.’ (80b)

Apparently unfazed by this criticism, Socrates urges him to carry on looking for what virtue is. Meno objects:

How on earth are you going to set up something you don’t know as the object of your search? To put is another way, even if you came right up against it, how will you know that what you have found is the thing you didn’t know? (80d)

Or, as Socrates translates what Meno is saying:

A man cannot try to discover either what he knows or what he does not know. He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the enquiry, nor what he does not now, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for. (80e)

While it looks like Meno is now experiencing general despair at the possibility of learning anything, nothing either he or Socrates says amounts to an attack on the conventional view of the activity of learning in which someone who does not know ‘learns’ because someone who does know ‘teaches’ him.

Having experienced it, what Meno is actually objecting to is Socratic teaching, teaching which, as we just saw, he does not yet see what he could be learning from. Socrates’ response which takes the form of an equally famous part of the dialogue, a demonstration of how, without Socrates appearing to teach him, Meno’s slave can learn to calculate the area of a square, makes sense as an oblique way of indicating to Meno that he may be learning something after all.

The metaphor that Socrates invents for this form of learning shows how this form of learning resolves Meno’s puzzle. In that one comes to know without apparently being told anything, it feels like remembering something one knows but must have forgotten. As such, on the one hand it does require a search but on the other hand one will know it when one finds it. One experiences recognition which does feel like remembering.

The point is that not just Meno’s slave but Meno himself has been learning in this way. Examples include when, in response to the question as to what he meant by
persons desiring fine things, he learned that he meant, i.e. had in mind without quite recognizing it yet, good things. Or when he learns that he meant acquiring things justly when he said that acquiring things per se was virtuous.

A further parallel between the demonstration and the way Meno is being taught is that there are two stages to this method of teaching and learning. Half way through the demonstration, the slave admits that he does not in fact know the area of the square but Socrates points out that is actually progress because:

At the beginning, he did not know the side of the square of eight feet. Nor indeed does he know it now...Now however he does feel perplexed. Not only does he not know the answer; he doesn't even think he knows. (84a)

The implication for Meno is that his perplexity too is a kind of progress and so no cause for frustration. In the end the slave does know the answer so for the parallel to be complete Meno too would need to move beyond the perplexed stage he is at now. Having successfully completed the demonstration, Socrates asks Meno whether he is now ‘ready to face with me the question: What is virtue?’ (86c) Meno replies: ‘Quite ready. All the same I would rather consider the question as I put it at the beginning...; that is, are we to pursue virtue as something that can be taught, or do men have it as a gift of nature or how?’ (86c-d)

As in a previous case that we pointed to, there are two ways to interpret Meno’s reply. On the one hand, in that he appears to be balking at continuing to be questioned, he seems to have missed the point that questioning can be productive. On the other hand, given that we have seen from the beginning that what he actually wants is an answer to his question, now that he has just seen that the method can provide answers, it is not surprising that his preference would be to get one. 10

What is surprising, though, is that Socrates says: ‘I shall let you have your way.’ (86d) We can not help wondering, not just why Socrates is suddenly abandoning the method that supposedly characterizes him, the insistence on what is questions but also, in the context of the dialogue, if he is willing to do this now, has Socrates, in all that came before, been even more guilty of procrastination that we saw Meno to be. However, careful examination of how Socrates proceeds will reveal both that he is not exactly abandoning his method and how dependent he is, albeit without Meno fully appreciating it, on what has been established in the first (bewildering to Meno) half of the dialogue.

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10 Klein has produced the most extreme version of the alternative interpretation of Meno’s request. He says that it proves that Meno is ‘a man unwilling to learn and incapable of learning’ (Klein, 1965, 185). But Klein is overly influenced by the admittedly puzzling question of why, if Plato (as I believe) wished to demonstrate that virtue could be taught, he had Socrates teach someone who, according to the verdict of history, was ‘an arch villain’. (Klein, 37) But since, as far as we know, Meno and Socrates never actually met, it can be speculated that Plato is suggesting what would have happened if they had. If exposed to Socrates, even such a one as this would have become more virtuous.
What Socrates suggests they do is ‘inquire into a single property about whose essential nature we are still in the dark.’ (86e) While it is true that if they can find such a property they cannot be said to have a full definition of virtue, it can be suggested that settling for this is not quite the radical departure it appears to be. Earlier in the dialogue, when Meno was struggling to come up with a definition, we saw that Socrates said they would be able to answer the question if Meno could come up with a statement about the nature of virtue ‘on similar lines’ to how Socrates defines shape. He defined it as ‘the only thing which always accompanies color.’ In that what he is now looking for amounts to a property of virtue that will be like what color is to shape, arguably he has not really abandoned his method after all.

The property that Socrates proposes virtue always accompanies is knowledge. As he points out, if this is what all virtues have it certainly does suggest it will be possible for them to be taught. So if this property could be established as there, we would be some way to providing Meno with the answer he is hoping for. Although it does take a few rather cursory questions, it is surprising how quickly Meno agrees that knowledge is a property of virtue. We can suggest that the reason he offers so little resistance at this point is because the hard work in establishing this connection has already been done.

In developing the problem with Meno’s definition of the virtuous as being distinguished by their desire for fine things, we saw that Socrates had to get him to see that everyone desires what they at least think is fine and that then implies that the problem the non-virtuous are suffering from is ignorance. If ignorance accompanies the non-virtuous, it is certainly likely that knowledge will accompany the virtuous. His lack of resistance at this later point, then, stems from the fact that all he is being asked to do now is to recognize the implication for the virtuous of what he has already discovered about the other group. In that the non-virtuous are ignorant, virtue as Socrates soon says with Meno’s agreement ‘must be a sort of wisdom.’ (88d)

The kind of definition of virtue that Socrates said earlier he would be satisfied with, one in which they find out, not what virtue is, but what it accompanies, has now been achieved. However, one obvious loose end remains. Earlier they established the principle that, to be useful, even an imperfect definition must be couched in terms with which conversants are familiar. If even color can be seen as such a term, surely knowledge must fall into the same category.

Arguably, the rest of the dialogue is devoted to achieving some clarity on what could be meant by the kind of knowledge that accompanies virtue. When Socrates asked his initial what is virtue question, Meno replied with a series of different examples of virtue. On the one hand Socrates made it clear this was really not what he was looking for. On the other hand, he did not exactly reject the examples. Instead he argued Meno should use them to try to work out what they all had in common. This time, no doubt in deference to the fact that, at this point, Meno is hardly likely to take kindly to another what is question, it is Socrates himself who proposes they begin with examples.

Another difference is that Socrates does not look for examples of those who have the knowledge necessary to teach virtue with Meno but with someone who ‘by a piece of luck...has just sat down besides us,’ (90a) Antyus. In that Meno has said from the start
that he does not know if anyone can teach virtue, it makes sense not to expect him to
take on this task. But while Socrates does offer reasons for choosing Antyus besides
his fortuitous arrival, e. g. that he comes from a ‘decent, modest’ family and has been
elected, by his fellow Athenians ‘into the highest offices in the State’, and is therefore
‘the right sort of man with whom to inquire’ (90b) about this matter, we can hardly
take these criteria at face value. We know from The Apology that Antyus is also one of
the three people who brought the charges against Socrates that led to his execution. As
such, while the main issue of this section of the dialogue remains what could be meant
by the kind of knowledge that could teach virtue, there will also be the side issue of
seeing what his role in the discussion can reveal about the substance of Antyus’
objections to Socrates.

Socrates begins exploring the question of who might have the requisite knowledge
with his new interlocutor by asking Antyus how he would decide who to go to if he
wanted to learn anything, e. g. how to be a doctor or a flute player. Would it not be
foolish, Socrates asks, not to approach a professional but instead to:

Bother other people instead—people who don’t set up to be teachers or take
any pupils in the subject. (90e)

According to this logic, would it not be sensible for Antyus to go to those who profess
to teach virtue, i. e. some sophists (though not Gorgias)? But Antyus rejects this
suggestion out of hand. Far from successfully teaching virtue, he thinks sophists:

Are the manifest ruin and corruption of anyone who comes into contact with
them. (91c)

But if they are not examples of those who have the knowledge required to teach virtue,
who are? Antyus reveals his own opinion on this subject. So long as one avoids
sophists, it will be not at all difficult if he wants to find such a teacher because:

Any decent Athenian gentleman who he happens to meet, if he follows his
advice, will make him a better man than the Sophists would. (92e)

Attempting to keep the discussion focused on whether virtue is teachable, Socrates
asks him how these gentlemen themselves learned to be decent. Antyus replies:

I suppose they in their turn learned it from forebears who were gentlemen
like themselves. Would you deny that there have been many good men in
our city? (93a)

On the one hand, he is giving a kind of answer but, on the other hand, instead of
maintaining an interest in what kind of thing virtue is (To be taught? Not to be
taught?) he worries that if we even consider this matter, we might be implying that no
one is virtuous. Socrates responds by asserting, probably even exaggerating, how
many good men he thinks there are and have been in Athens. It is just that even the
best, as witnessed by the fact that none of their sons ended up as good as them, were
not actually able to teach what they themselves possessed.

At this point Antyus says, in his last comment in the dialogue:
You seem to me, Socrates, to be too ready to run people down. (94e)

The unfairness of this comment, Socrates certainly was pointing to a *limit* of even the best Athenians, but that is hardly the same as ‘running them down’, shows that Antyus is not really a suitable interlocutor to further the discussion. It also shows, of course, why he would be capable of making unjust accusations against Socrates.

However, the main point, and the one now pursued with Meno who resumes the role of conversational partner, is that they have thus far failed to find an example of anyone with the requisite knowledge to teach virtue, it being at this point that Meno reveals that his own teacher, Gorgias, did not even pretend to be able to do so. We can say that the best sophists make no such claim and the other obvious candidates, good men, no matter how good they are themselves, do not seem able to pass their own goodness on to others.

Meno nicely summarizes what we too should be wondering at this point:

> It makes me wonder, Socrates, whether there are in fact no good men at all, or how they are produced when they do appear. (96d)

In reply Socrates develops what is probably the key distinction in the entire dialogue. He suggests that there are actually two ways in which people can be good. They can either have what they have been assuming was necessary, knowledge, or they can have something else, something close to knowledge, namely right opinion. The good Athenians only have or had right opinion and that explains why, while they could be good, they could not transmit that goodness to others.

While this solves the problem of how a person could be good without being a successful teacher of virtue, it raises a new problem. Meno notices this. He says:

> I wonder why knowledge should be so much more prized than right opinion, and indeed how there is any difference between them. (97d)

Socrates now uses a metaphor to answer this question and thereby provides a clear-cut distinction between right opinion and knowledge and a sense of why the latter should indeed be more prized.

> True opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in place; but they will not stay long. They run away from a man’s mind, so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason. That process, my dear Meno, is recollection as we agreed earlier. (98a)

What right opinions lack is that they are not secure. The becoming secure of them, the tying down, is what we can call knowledge. This is valuable because the opinions in this new state are no longer in danger of escaping from us. Socrates makes it
explicit that this is a formulation of the process of recollection, i. e. what Meno has been doing throughout the dialogue, with the help of Socrates. For example, that a commitment to vice requires a kind of ignorance is not wrong but it is only a right opinion until it is ‘tied down’ by Meno managing to ‘remember’ that no one would actually harm themselves willingly.

Having established all this, it is evident that we should not take too literally Socrates’ conclusion that with regard to virtue ‘there are no teachers of it.’ (98e) There is at least one, Socrates himself, though besides it being too presumptuous were he to state this outright, the statement is literally true if we recall his earlier point, in the demonstration of how the slave learns, that he was ‘only’ questioning him rather than teaching him anything.

Two final points. First, while this interpretation is probably more speculative than anything else offered in this chapter, it may even be that not just Socrates but even Meno himself will now become a teacher of virtue. Socrates’ last words are to request that Meno ‘will allay the anger of your friend Antyus by convincing him that what you now believe if true.’ (100b) The grounds for suspecting that Meno may be in the process of becoming a (Socratic style) teacher are that it is probably only when one’s belief is no longer subject to escaping that one is likely to be able to convince anyone else that it is true.

Second, an additional reason besides his commitment to what is questions for Socrates’ reluctance to just answer Meno’s original question is now surfacing. It has no yes or no answer in that while Socrates is, in a sense teaching virtue, in that he does so by getting people to ‘recollect’, it is what is already in them that is brought out and that amounts to a version of relying on persons’ ‘natural aptitude’ in teaching them.
Like several other dialogues, the beginning of *The Protagoras* has Socrates intervening in someone else’s life. In this case, a young man, Hippocrates, noted for his ‘fighting spirit and his excitement’ (310d), arrives at Socrates’ house before it is even light with a request. The famous sophist, Protagoras, has arrived in Athens and Hippocrates wants Socrates to arrange for him to become his student.11

Socrates does agree to go with him to meet with Protagoras but what is noteworthy is what he insists they do first. He asks Hippocrates ‘a few questions’ (311b) and what the answers stimulate Socrates to impress on him is how ill thought out and even dangerous Hippocrates’ plan is. He is already fully intent on becoming Protagoras’ student and yet is actually thoroughly in the dark as to what he would actually get from him. As Socrates formulates his situation:

Do you see what kind of danger you are about to put your soul in? If you had to entrust your body to someone and risk it becoming healthy or ill, you would consider carefully whether you should entrust it or not...But when it comes to something you value more than your body, namely your soul..I don’t see you getting together with your father or brother or a single one of your friends to consider whether or not to trust your soul to this recently arrived stranger. (313b)

Soon they do enter a discussion with Protagoras but only with the proviso that Hippocrates attend to the discussion so as not to ‘risk what is most dear to you on the roll of the dice.’ (314a)

Once they arrive at the house where Protagoras is staying, it is he rather than Hippocrates who becomes Socrates’ interlocutor. They find Protagoras in the company of a huge crowd of admirers. Socrates explains that Hippocrates would like to become his student and asks him whether ‘we should talk about this alone or in the presence of others.’ (316b) Protagoras opts for a public discussion. He then gives a long speech which Socrates interprets, with Protagoras’ agreement, as him ‘promising to make men good citizens.’ (319a) At this point, Socrates remarks: ‘The truth is, Protagoras, I have never thought this could be taught.’ (319b)

We are torn between admiring Socrates’ courage and suspecting that he has forgotten the advice he has just offered to avoid rushing in without thinking. What could be more dangerous than asking *this* question to the man whose entire reputation is built on his ability to do the precise thing that Socrates says he thinks is not even possible?

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11 Though Nussbaum notes that Hippocrates: ‘came to Socrates’ house before dawn, full of eagerness to go and enrol himself as a pupil of the visiting sophist Protagoras’ (Nussbaum, 93), she fails to appreciate how his eagerness become a topic. For this interpretation, see below.
However, without denying that Socrates’ initial behavior with him is risky, so is Protagoras’. Socrates suspects that the reason Protagoras has opted for a public discussion is ‘that he wanted to show off...and to bask in glory because we had come as admirers.’ (317d) Therefore, it could also be Protagoras who, like Hippocrates, is failing to consider the risks in that he has opted for the less safe choice. Had he opted for the discussion to stay private, that would have suited him more if his subsequent performance does not leave him basking in glory.

To justify his scepticism, Socrates mentions the same example he used in *Meno*. It seems very unlikely that virtue can be taught because the children of very good people never seem themselves to turn out to be so good. But unlike Meno and Antyus, Protagoras does find a way to challenge the example. Whereas every decent citizen can teach virtue ‘to the best of his ability,’ (327e) the advanced teaching of it is a special skill, only possessed by a few. He says:

> I consider myself to be such a person, uniquely qualified to assist others in becoming noble and good. (328b)

He makes this claim as part of a long speech that Socrates labels ‘his virtuoso performance.’ (328d) Protagoras is clearly someone with ability but Hippocrates and we need to see if that includes an ability to teach virtue. That will be the issue as Socrates begins to question him.

In his speech, Protagoras mentioned various virtues. Socrates asks:

> Is virtue a single things with...parts, or are all the things...all names for a single entity? (329d)

Although Protagoras says ‘this is an easy question to answer,’ (329d) it soon becomes apparent that the issue of how the virtues are related causes him problems.

He thinks of each of them as having different functions like ‘parts of the face’ and therefore ‘unlike each other.’ (330b) But if they do not much more closely resemble each other than parts of the face, that leads to conclusions that Protagoras ‘would be ashamed to say...although many people do...’. (333c) For example, if the virtues are quite different, being wise is very different from being just and so it seems to follow that ‘some people are being sensible when they act unjustly.’ (333d)

The dilemma such a position creates for a would-be teacher of virtue is that in teaching his students to practice one virtue, wisdom, he may make it impossible to get them to practice another one, justice. At this point in their discussion, Protagoras is getting ‘really worked up and struggling.’ (333e) Attempting to avoid the consequence that he would be teaching injustice he says about possible actions: ‘even if they are not advantageous to people, I can still call them good.’ (333e) While this has the cost of making at least the most obvious form of wisdom (sensibly assessing what is to one’s advantage) no longer seem good, it does seem to rescue Protagoras from the charge that he is actually advocating injustice.

53
However, this answer leads him to a further difficulty: if a virtue is not advantageous, what exactly is good about it? Or, as the problem would surface for the teacher, how could one teach someone things if learning those things is not at all advantageous to them? Socrates’ next question reflects the fact that if something does not need to be advantageous to be good, there are at the very least questions about what could be good about it. Concerning the things that Protagoras says are good but not advantageous he asks:

Do you mean things that are advantageous to no human being, Protagoras, or things that are of no advantage whatsoever? Do you call things like that good? (334a)

Protagoras replies:

Of course not...But I know of many things that are disadvantageous to humans, foods and drinks and drugs and many other things, and some that are advantageous neither to humans but one or the other to horses...some that are good for the roots of trees, but bad for the shoots, such as manure...Or take olive oil, which is extremely bad for all plants and is the worst enemy of the hair of all animals except humans...The good is such a multifaceted and variable thing that, in the case of oil, it is good for the external parts of the human body but very bad for the internal parts...(334a-c)

This answer throws the entire conversation into crisis because whereas the rest of the audience just treats it as another virtuoso performance, Socrates actually threatens to walk out unless his interlocutor will ‘cut his answers short.’ (334e) We will need to see both what impresses the audience and why Socrates would refuse to continue.

The beginning of his speech is an attempt to justify his problematic idea that something could be good without being advantageous. His idea is that it can be good without being advantageous to everyone. It only has to be advantageous to someone or, indeed, even some thing. At this point he comes up with his examples, this probably being (due to their cleverness) what the audience apart from Socrates so admire. Not just the virtues but olive oil and even manure can be called good and no one would argue that they are advantageous to everyone.

But while Protagoras is now able to deny that he thinks something can be good without being advantageous, he has done so only at the cost of making the good, as he says, a completely ‘multifaceted and variable thing.’ Perhaps this is one version of what the good is like but, if so, they are no longer even considering the specific things that all humans must learn if they are to be good. That is, he has shifted the discussion away from the virtues. Therefore the objection that Socrates now raises, that if a speech is too long, ‘I tend to forget the subject of the speech’ (334d) actually refers to what Protagoras is doing here. This explains Socrates threat to walk out.

None of the audience wants the conversation to end and eventually they agree a new format. Instead of making a long speech, Protagoras will ask a question. He says:
My line of questioning now will still concern the subject of our present discussion, namely virtue, but translated into the sphere of poetry. (339a)

It turns out that his plan is to compete with Socrates over who can manage a better interpretation of a poem. While it is clear that Protagoras is still trying to use the occasion to show off, it should also be noted that even he is admitting that if they are going to get anywhere, they will have to stop thinking about ‘goods’ like olive oil and manure and return to the subject at hand.

Protagoras’ new attempt to display his ability proves as unwise as his earlier decision to opt for a public discussion. Socrates’ alternative interpretation works better, to the extent that it ‘favorably impressed’ (347b) even Protagoras’ most loyal disciple. But besides it showing Socrates’ superior ability as in interpreter, there is a part of his reading of the poem that is worthy of note because of its bearing on the dialogue’s substantive issues. Considering a phrase in the poem which states:

\[
\text{All who do no wrong willingly}
\text{I praise and love. (345d)}
\]

Socrates says, according to how he interprets it, it should read:

\[\text{‘All who do no wrong’ (This is where the pause should be, before ‘willingly’) ‘Willingly I praise and love.’(346e)}\]

Though part of his aim here must be to show that, far from being the less than adept interpreter Protagoras was anticipating, Socrates can even parody those who pride themselves on ‘close readings,’ his interpretation also does have a potential relevance to the dialogue. According to Socrates, the lines mean that the poet:

\[
\text{Was not so uneducated as to say he praised all who did nothing bad willingly, as if there were anyone who willingly did bad things. I am pretty sure that none of the wise men thinks any human being willingly makes a mistake or willingly does anything bad or wrong. (345e)}
\]

The reason this conclusion could matter is because it would potentially help with the conundrum with which we saw Protagoras struggling. He would no longer need to hold that something could be good without it being advantageous if non-virtuous things that people do can be shown to be mistakes on their part.

Suggesting that they can make no further progress if all they insist on doing is interpret poems, Socrates proposes they renew their discussion of the relations between the virtues. He reminds Protagoras that he has identified five virtues: ‘wisdom, temperance, courage, justice, and piety’ (349b) and that it was Protagoras’ contention that each was ‘dissimilar to the whole of which they are parts and to each other.’ (349c) He asks him if this is still his position. Protagoras replies:

\[
\text{What I am saying to you, Socrates, is that all these are parts of virtue, and that while four of them are reasonably close to each other, courage is completely different from all the rest. The proof that what I am saying is true}
\]
is that you will find many people who are extremely unjust, impious, intemperate, and ignorant and yet exceptionally courageous. (349d)

While it is not really clear whether Protagoras has a sufficiently clear grasp of wisdom, temperance, piety, and justice to be able to depict how they actually do resemble one another, it is at least clear that he has a better appreciation now of the relevance of considering how the virtues are related. If they are not closely related then, as he discovered, it seems one could only teach people to be virtuous by the contradictory act of avoiding teaching them all of the virtues. His new idea would at least allow him to teach everything with the exception of courage. And, given his understanding of courage, this is no embarrassing concession on his part because he believes that courage is the one virtue that cannot be taught because it comes from ‘nature.’ (351b) Furthermore, no one is even going to expect him to teach it if, as he thinks, it is considered to lead to evil.

Everything now depends on whether Protagoras’ version of courage is sound and this begins to be the topic. Socrates asks him:

Would you say courageous men are confident or something else? (349e)

Protagoras replies:

Confident, yes, and ready for action where most men would be afraid. (349e)

In response, Socrates imagines an action that most men would not be ready to do, precisely because they would be afraid. He asks Protagoras to consider someone ‘who...dives into wells.’ (350a) However, it is true that some people (professional divers) do even this with confidence and both Socrates and Protagoras are happy to agree that these people are both courageous and confident. But then Socrates asks Protagoras if he has ever seen someone who is not a professional diver jump confidently into a well. Protagoras says, yes, someone who is completely ‘out of his mind.’ (350b)

What is emerging is the possibility of false confidence and how it stems from being, as it were, too fearless in the sense of oblivious to danger, in the example the sort of dangers or risks that would only make it sensible to dive into a well if one knew what one was doing. False confidence, it is clear, could make one ready for actions it would be much better not to undertake. In such cases, there is nothing wrong with being afraid. However, there is a problem with the example. It makes being oblivious to danger seem too far fetched as Protagoras actually indicates by his assertion that one would have to be mad to do this unless one were a professional. False confidence will only be a real problem if one does not have to be a complete fool to be oblivious to danger. It can be suggested that the rest of the dialogue is primarily devoted to demonstrating that false confidence is much more likely than this first example of it would lead us to believe.
Socrates begins with two simple propositions. Firstly, he claims that a person does not live well ‘if he lives distressed and in pain’. (351b) Second, ‘if he completed his life having lived pleasantly, he...has lived well.’ (351b) Therefore, a rational actor would seek by his actions to gain pleasure and avoid pain. The first complexity, however, is that almost all actions, no matter how pleasurable, will have at least some elements of pain attached to them. If we wish to act rationally and so live well, Socrates now recommends a ‘weighing’ process, in making decisions as to what to do, asking oneself ‘does pleasure outweigh pain?’ (356a)

But while he does not cease to recommend weighing, he now points to a major problem that can affect our ability to weigh successfully. The problem stems from a deceptive feature of appearances:

Things of the same size appear...larger when seen near at hand and smaller when seen from a distance. (356c)

In other words, while we of course want to act in ways that achieve greater pleasure and avoid greater pain, due to the power of appearance, our judgement tends to be faulty. Confronted with a possible act, we could be deceived by either how close the pleasure is and far away the pain or vice versa. In the former case, we could make the mistake of choosing the act that only seems on balance much more pleasurable than painful because the pleasurable aspects are near and the painful aspects not so immediate. In the latter case, we could make the mistake of avoiding acts that seem too painful because the pain, being near, seems much larger than the pleasure, it being more long range.

Whereas diving into a well really does seem irrational because, in that case, the pain is not very far away, it will not be easy even for those of us who are not out of our minds to work out what to do when faced with a pleasure that, because it is very near, seems much larger than it would appear if we had any distance from it or a pain that also appears huge because of how immediately we are facing it.12

The last part of the argument is to apply these points to issues both of false confidence and the warranted confidence that both Socrates and Protagoras are prepared to associate with courage. False confidence can easily arise when, failing to weigh things properly, one eagerly rushes into an act because of how large the amount of pleasure it will bring seems while failing to consider any possible pains just because being more distant, they seem much smaller than the likely pleasure. Similarly, the justified confidence that the courageous display can be seen in their realizing that they would be well to shrug off (not be fazed by) clear-cut immediate pains because these pains are actually only seeming to be larger than probable resultant pleasures because the painful aspects are the ones that are immediately in front of them.

At this point, Socrates reminds him of his original statement that there are:

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12 Nussbaum has offered a critique of the validity of this weighing process that seems plausible until one realizes that she fails to see the connection of the problem of mistaken appearances to the issue of the distinction between false confidence and courage that is central to the dialogue. (Nussbaum, 113-17) In fact, Nussbaum never even refers to the dialogue’s discussion of courage.
Four (virtues)...very similar to each other, but that one differs very much from the others, that one being courage. And he said that I would know this by the following evidence: ‘You will find, Socrates, many people who are extremely impious, unjust, intemperate and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous. (359b)

He says that it is inaccurate in two ways. First, courageous people, as distinct both from those with false confidence and cowards are not ignorant in that they have the art of seeing that the pains they undeniably endure are not as large as they seem and are balanced by pleasures that are not as small as they seem. Second, if courage takes this form, it begins to be plausible, because it does require a kind of knowledge, i. e. ability to maintain perspective, that courage does bear a resemblance to other virtues such as wisdom and temperance.

The dialogue ends with Socrates point to an irony. He says about himself:

Socrates, you said earlier that virtue cannot be taught, but now you are arguing the very opposite...Protagoras maintained at first that it could be taught, but now thinks the opposite. (361b)

A further irony is that Socrates has actually been using just this method of teaching he has just explained to teach the virtue of courage throughout the dialogue. The most obvious example is his treatment of Hippocrates when he arrived at Socrates’ house. Hippocrates was clearly ‘ready for action’ and this eagerness was caused by the fact that Protagoras was in Athens, i. e. very near to him. Protagoras’ nearness did make it appear that he was definitely in store for very large benefits if only he could become his pupil. He only began to gain some perspective on this situation once Socrates got him to consider (weigh) certain dangers that, because of their lack of immediacy, seemed small or, indeed, even non-existent.

But besides teaching caution can the art of weighing also teach, more specifically, courage? Here what is relevant is Socrates’ own early behavior toward Protagoras. As we said, asking him whether virtue can be taught was undeniably risky but was it such a big risk as to be mad? While it still seems risky, in the light of how successfully in the course of the dialogue Socrates has defended the need for this question and even suggested how to answer it, we can say that the consequences of the question only seemed too negligible to justify the risk because they were distant when the question was asked.

Finally, even what happens to Protagoras could be a third case of this form of teaching. He does seem chastened at the end, even complimenting Socrates:

Socrates, I commend your enthusiasm and the way you find your way through an argument. (361e)

It is not too much to expect that he might be inclined to practice the art of weighing the next time he faces a situation which seems to offer a big opportunity to show off.
Phaedrus

*Phaedrus* begins with what are eventually discovered to be two bad speeches about love. As such, it can potentially teach us, both about the nature of love and the nature of bad speeches. The first speech is the work of Lysias, though it is delivered by Phaedrus. He is going outside the city walls, apparently to see whether he could recite by memory this speech, which it turns out he is holding in written form under his cloak. Socrates requests that he read it to him.

The substance of the speech is that it is better to yield to a non-lover than a lover. As Phaedrus reads it, we begin to see why it would require much practice to memorize it. It is in the form, not of an organized essay, but of a long list or, as Socrates later puts it (264b) ‘the various parts give the impression of being thrown together at random’

The most compelling points that can be extracted from the list include the following:

Non-lovers, never having passion in the first place, will never produce the regret that is inevitable when passion cools. Non-lovers, because they will not neglect their other business, can never complain, as lovers do, that their love has made them forget all other matters. Non-lovers are much less likely to fall in love again and so dismiss their earlier love. Lovers are not in their right mind and who can trust someone in that state? If one can choose from the batch of non-lovers, one will have more choice. Non-lovers are less like to blab to outsiders. Non-lovers are less likely to be jealous. Lovers are too focused on physical attraction. Non-lovers are more likely to validly criticize those they seduce and also less likely to take offence at trifles. If we are to accede to the wishes of those most evidently in need of us, it is like having a party and inviting ‘not our friends but beggars.’ (233e) If one can select from the batch of non-lovers, one can pick someone who is ‘best able to make a return.’ (234a) More or less repeating an earlier point, non-lovers are less likely to break with one ‘when your good looks have vanished.’ (234a) Non-lovers are less likely to be mocked by their friends and (here also repeating an earlier point) be accused of ‘neglecting their true interests.’ (234b)

Phaedrus asks Socrates what he thinks of this speech and discovers he is less than impressed. Phaedrus tries to defend it, insisting in particular that:

If the speech has one merit above all others, it is that no single aspect of the subject worth mentioning has been omitted; no one could improve on it either in fullness or quality. (235b)

This stimulates Socrates to claim that even he could produce a better speech in favor of the non-lover over the lover. He makes only one proviso. He will not be able to depart from Lysias on one point:
If one is arguing that the non-lover is to be preferred to the lover, how can one avoid taking the obvious line of praising the good sense of the former and censuring the folly of the latter? (236a)

Indeed, as we will see, Socrates actually begins by emphasizing what was much less central in Lysias’ speech, the nature of this folly.

According to Socrates, the lover is under the sway of ‘irrational desire,’ (238b) which is to say what we have given the name ‘Eros or passionate love to.’ (238c) A first problem with Eros is that it will lead one to wish the beloved will offer no opposition. One will therefore wish to keep him in a state of inferiority.’ (239a) One will especially wish to deprive him of philosophy ‘for fear of ensuring his contempt.’ (239b) He means that traditional philosophy, including to some extent his own, would tend to favor reason over ‘irrational desire’ and so incline the beloved to mock the lover’s sentiments. We can already note a significant difference in the two speeches: Lysias certainly did not note being deprived of philosophy as one of the disadvantages of acceding to a lover.

Socrates goes on to consider physical as well as mental deprivations lovers will impose. The lover will also prefer the beloved to be physically weak, ‘effeminate.’ (239c) Furthermore, he will grudge his favorite wealth or possessions, because these will leave the beloved less dependent on him.

There are also issues of the pleasure of the lover’s company. Socrates says his presence can only be a source of irritation. He will be too old and not nice to look at. He will also be too demanding. Lovers are ‘a tedious nuisance’ (240e) when in love and when the passion cools, unlikely to keep earlier promises. They eventually become ‘a different man’ (241a) In the end, they tend to run away and end up being, instead of the pursuer, the pursued berated ‘with angry reproaches’ (241b) for all their broken promises. Here he returns to his main theme of the qualities of Eros. After all, one has yielded to someone who is ‘out of his mind’ (241c) and so it is no surprise that he will change his mind.

In sum, if one has yielded to a lover, one has:

put oneself in the power of a man who is faithless, morose, jealous, and disagreeable, who will do harm to one’s estate, harm to one’s physical health, and harm above all to one’s spiritual development. (241c)

Now Socrates says his speech is finished but Phaedrus objects:

But I thought you were only half way, and I was expecting you to balance what you have said already by describing the advantages to be derived from yielding to the man who is not in love. (241d)

On reflection, Phaedrus is right. Socrates has said nothing really positive about what the non-lover can offer. Furthermore, in that his most emphatic point, as evidenced by the fact that he makes it at the end as well as at the beginning, is that the lover will deprive the beloved of spiritual development, we can speculate that what Phaedrus is
most hoping to hear next is how the non-lover can *enhance* one’s spiritual development. One way to understand what follows is that while Socrates continues to refuse to list any advantages of the non-lover, he certainly does *not* drop the topic of what can lead to *this* sort of development.

Encouraged by Phaedrus’ wish that they ‘stay here and discuss what we have heard’ (242a) but, especially, believing that he may have been unfair to and even blasphemed love, Socrates gives a second speech. Stripped of its mythic content and poetic style, the gist of it is that, while the madness of the lover definitely exists, it can actually be seen as a blessing both for the lover himself and the beloved. From the lover’s point of view, the blessing is that he is given a unique form of access to an extremely valuable realm that is otherwise much harder to access. This is the realms of ideas such as justice, temperance, and courage. Beauty, too, is one of the ideas but there is a crucial difference between it and these others. They appear only in very imperfect form in the real world and, as a result, their ideal form can be grasped only by the intellect, only with great difficulty, and only by the few. Beauty, on the other hand, compare to other ideas, ‘still gleams clearest’ (250b) in the empirical world and, furthermore, is an idea that is grasped much more easily because it is available not to the intellect but to sight.

When some of us—the lovers Socrates wishes to defend—see an instance of beauty it is true that they react in ways that are undeniably mad. Initially, he ‘shivers.’ (251a)

He gazes upon it and worships it as if it were a god, and, if he were not afraid of being thought an utter madman, he would sacrifice to his beloved as to the image of a divinity. (251a)

It feels as if he is growing wings, is in great pain whenever he is separated from the beloved and when he can gaze upon him/her again ‘wins relief from his pain and is glad.’ (251e) He can think of nothing but the beloved and so will neglect his friends, his relatives and his property.

Turning to how the beloved is treated, he now completely rejects the picture of ill treatment that was his focus in his earlier speech. Instead of hoping to deprive the beloved of spiritual development, the lover does everything in his power ‘to encourage natural (good) tendencies’ without any ‘room for jealousy or mean spite.’ (253b)

As such the beloved is treated extremely well. Indeed he is quite amazed at the good will of the lover and realizes that he is experiencing an incomparable kind of friendship. ‘Being treated like a god and receiving all manner of service from the lover’ he cannot help but begin ‘to feel kindly toward his admirer.’ (255a) Over time, the beloved too will, as a result of this extraordinary treatment, come to be in love. She too will be in pain when they are apart and will find herself longing for the lover’s presence. While they will around this time probably go to bed, Socrates’ emphasis is more on the kind of life they will lead together. A state of ‘happiness and harmony’ (256b) is how he characterizes it. He concludes:

Such...are the divine blessings that will accrue to you from the friendship of a lover. But intimacy with one who is not in love...will breed in your soul the ignoble qualities which the multitude extols as virtues...(256e)
Phaedrus says he is ‘lost in wonder at the immense superiority’ (257c) over the other two of this speech and that leads away from the specific topic of love and toward a discussion of what makes for a good speech about any subject. Socrates asks whether a good speech requires some ‘knowledge of the truth about the subject of the speech.’ (259e) Phaedrus replies that this is not an argument he has ever heard but Socrates does proceed to deny that anyone totally ignorant about a subject could give a good speech on it. Phaedrus, probably reflecting on why he found Socrates’ second speech so convincing, surely not by believing that Socrates knows nothing about love, now does agree that no successful speaker can be completely ignorant about his topic.

At this point Socrates begins to work out why the rhetor would need such knowledge. He acknowledges that a committed rhetorician would argue that ‘without... assistance the man who knows the truth will make no progress in the art of persuasion.’ (260d) That is, the truth will not help one convince people; only rhetoric will. In that, as Socrates immediately acknowledges, rhetoric can make an audience ‘approve a course of action at one time and reject the same course at another’ (261d), it certainly does seem, then, that knowledge of the truth is not an aid to convincing anyone.

However, Socrates suggests that what the rhetorician here is managing to do is:

Make anything appear like anything else within the limits of possible comparison. (261e)

For example, this is what one is doing if one makes someone think ‘the same action just one moment and unjust the next.’ (261d) Socrates’ major idea is that if one wants to do this, the best way is to proceed by slight differences because ‘a slight difference between two things is more likely to be misleading.’ (261e) An important conclusion now follows: the most adept misleaders would need to have ‘an exact knowledge of the likenesses and unlikenesses between things.’ (262a) A kind of knowing, then, namely this particular sort of knowledge, does appear to be an aid in any attempt to convince people.

Socrates offers to explain what he means with an example and for his example, he chooses his own two speeches. This is highly relevant because what Socrates has done with love is precisely what rhetoricians are known for, i. e. giving first a speech for and then a speech against what appears to be the same thing. As such, it seems highly unlikely that the truth about the thing has contributed anything to his results.

However, Socrates asks Phaedrus to consider his method of reasoning in the two speeches. One thing he did was take ‘many scattered particulars and collect them...so as to make clear the exact nature of the subject.’ (265d) The collecting process leads to a ‘generic notion.’ (265e) The generic notion he arrived at in this case was ‘irrationality.’ (265e) He means that, in considering various instances of love-the various behaviors detailed in both of his speeches-what he found could collect them all is irrationality. They all display this property.

While irrationality could, then, be said to be a truthful quality of lovers, in that Socrates first dismisses this as bad and then proceeds to argue that, actually, it is good, it does seem as if the truth can be playing no part in how he argues. However, Socrates
now says there was a second aspect to his method. Besides collecting, he has also needed ‘the ability to divide a genus into species again, not mangling any of the parts like an unskilful butcher.’ (265e) As it applies to this case, his idea is that, as he was able to suggest that, in truth, there are two types of irrational love, there is not necessarily a contradiction (and so no lack of a commitment to truth) in the two speeches. Love can be both good and bad because, while it does always lead to irrational behavior, not all of this irrational behavior is bad.

Commenting on the method he has just displayed, Socrates calls it ‘dialectic’ and praises it as ‘what enables me to speak and think.’ (266b) But without denying that it does seem to put him in touch with the truth, in this case the truth about love, a problematic consequence of the method is presenting itself in glaring form. When, as in this case, his knowledge of the truth does not allow him to decide even whether to praise or blame his topic, how does he decide?

Socrates asks at this point whether rhetors need to know dialectics. , Phaedrus answers that all the rhetors he is aware of ‘are quite ignorant’ of the dialectic method. (266c) Socrates is concerned about this fact because he doubts that anything can be ‘worth having...if it is divorced from dialectic.’ (266d) What the dialogue will show next is that rhetoric is indeed not worth having if it is divorced from dialectic but also that if it is not divorced from dialectic, it could be worth having precisely because it could help with the problem just identified. It can help one understand how to speak when different and even apparently contradictory speeches are equally truthful.

The first point about rhetoric is just to list what Socrates calls ‘the technical refinements of composition.’ (266e) It turns out that Socrates is well versed in techniques such as having an introduction, stating facts, arguments from probability, recapitulation, etc. He even displays familiarity with what some would call the darker arts of rhetoric: the use of insinuation, indirect compliments, how to convey pathos, casting aspersions, etc. He then asks Phaedrus whether there is anything he ‘would like to add about the art of rhetoric.’ (267e) In response, Phaedrus adds only that utilizing these techniques can have ‘a very powerful effect.’ (268a)

Without denying this, Socrates suggests that being satisfied to treat all these techniques as constituting the art of rhetoric is very much like being satisfied that a doctor has fully grasped the art of medicine when the doctor knows how to ‘induce heat or cold or, if he saw fit, vomiting or purging’. (268b) And there is a further parallel with medicine. Knowing these respective techniques is a necessary preliminary but for the actual art, in both cases a nature needs to be analyzed, in one the nature of the human body and in the other the nature of the soul.

What the art of rhetoric is basically for-is ‘to produce conviction’ in human souls. (271a) An important conclusion follows: The rhetorician would only be advised to give one sort of speech if the same speech would be likely to produce conviction in everyone. If not, he will only be able to achieve his aim-producing conviction-if he understands ‘why a particular sort of speech invariably produces conviction in a particular sort of soul and fails to do so in another’. (271b) Already we begin to suspect where Socrates is going with all this: The solution to how one must speak when ‘the truth’ could produce various speeches-sometimes even apparently
contradictory ones—is that certain speeches are more likely to induce conviction in certain souls.

Besides providing a solution to the problem noted above, we also have arrived at a very different conception of the art of rhetoric. Instead of it being a matter of learning various techniques, the actual art (producing conviction) requires three things, learning the types of possible speeches there are, learning the types of souls there are and (probably most important) being able also to single out a particular individual and make clear to himself that there he has actually before him a specific example of a type of character...and this is what he must say and this is how he must say it if he wants to influence his hearer in this particular way.’ (272a)

Socrates does not add, no doubt because it would not influence his hearer (Phaedrus) in the way he wants that, obviously, both the poetic-mythic quality and the substance of his second speech have been selected because he thinks this is the kind of truths about love that Phaedrus types need to hear to become convinced.13

The dialogue concludes with a few pages made famous by Jacques Derrida’s use of them, as a main building block for his groundbreaking book Of Grammatology on ‘the propriety and impropriety of writing.’ (274b) However valid Derrida’s point that these comments on writing leave us with an impoverished version of its potential, that should not distract us from considering their appropriateness for the themes of the dialogue. What is said about writing is that it creates the false impression of being an aid to memory and necessarily adding to our wisdom. Instead, writing:

Will create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters, and not remember themselves...(Writing will only supply) not truth but only the semblance of truth; they will be hearers of many things and will have learned nothing. (275a)

Recalling the beginning of the dialogue, even though Phaedrus was extremely impressed with Lysias’ speech, in the light of this depiction, of writing’s limitations, we can now appreciate that the fact that he needed to carry the speech around because he was finding it hard to remember it, shows its inadequacy: it could not manage the art of impacting on his soul.

On the other hand, when Socrates depicts the only kind of writing that he is prepared to endorse without reservations, ‘an intelligent word graven in the soul of the learner, which can defend itself,’ words ‘planted’ in a ‘congenial soul’ and therefore ‘not unfruitful; this is not just a succinct summary of the art of rhetoric. (277a) It is also a fair description of the likely effect of Socrates’ speech (different of course from normal writing, which is not specifically tailored toward particular people) on Phaedrus. He accepts Socrates’ hope that, having heard it, he will ‘no longer halt

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13 Nussbaum’s highly speculative idea that the motivation for the second speech is a change of heart due to ‘the relationship between Plato and Dion (Nussbaum, 1986, 230), even if correct, distracts from even noticing the dialogue’s argument that seemingly contradictory speeches can be equally true and (depending on who is one’s audience) equally necessary.
between two opinions, but will dedicate himself wholly to love and to philosophical discourses.’ (257b) Quite the opposite of this speech being hard even to remember, it seems that it will effect his behavior, by no longer making him waver in his view of whether love is good or bad, for his entire life.

**Theaetetus**

Near the beginning of the *Theaetetus*, Theodorus, Theaetetus’ teacher, identifies him to Socrates as follows:

He is very like you, for he has a snub nose and projecting eyes. (143e)

It becomes clear that this form of identification troubles Socrates but not for the obvious reason that his (and Theaetetus’) ugliness is being announced. What troubles him is the general danger of being too quick to assume things are alike, particularly when the person making the judgement is no expert in the area. Thus Socrates makes the, it has to be said odd, observation that only a painter should be entitled to judge whether faces are all that similar.

His stricture seems much less odd once we realize that his actual target is not those who judge facial similaritie. Beginning his conversation with Theaetetus, he asks whether ‘wisdom and knowledge are the same.’ (145e) Theaetetus replies ‘certainly they are’ (145e) but we can note that surely he is unwise to make such an equation without becoming more of an expert on these two concepts. Arguably, it takes the entire dialogue to accomplish this task.

Socrates’ first move toward this end is his standard one. He asks Theaetetus to say ‘What is knowledge.’ (146a) Both his answer and Socrates’ critique of it could also said to be standard. Theaetetus says:

I think that the sciences which I learn from Theodorus-geometry and those which you just now mentioned are knowledge; and I would include the art of the cobbler and other craftsmen; these, each and all of them, are knowledge. (146c-d)

To which Socrates replies:

Too much, Theaetetus, too much; the nobility and liberality of your nature make you give many and diverse things, when I am asking for one simple thing. (146d)

It is true that the form of this exchange is familiar to us. Like Meno, Theaetetus is only able to list parts whereas Socrates wants a definition of the whole. However, this
similarity could distract us from noticing an additional problem with Theaetetus’ answer. If he thinks all this, including even cobbling is knowledge, he should not really be so certain that wisdom is the same as knowledge since it is doubtful whether cobbler and similar craftspersons are particularly wise. As, in the course of the dialogue, his understanding of what knowledge could be develops, it will be worth considering the bearing of what knowledge is on the issue of how like and unlike wisdom it might be.

Encouraged by Socrates, Theaetetus does eventually offer a first definition of knowledge. He says:

As far as I can see at present, knowledge is perception. (151e)

What we perceive being objects’ appearances, given that, as we saw, the dialogue actually began with the warning that similar appearances (whether of Socrates and Theaetetus or wisdom and knowledge) are not sufficient to determine objects’ nature, it is highly unlikely that what we perceive can be equated with what we know. Also, against the viability of this definition is the fact that the things Theaetetus himself listed in his first-inadequate-explanation of what knowledge is, notably geometry, are surely not products of perception.

It is tempting to add that no one who believes that wisdom is the same as knowledge could equate perception with knowledge except that Socrates actually begins their consideration of this first definition by remarking that Theaetetus has stumbled on the doctrine of someone who is thought to be ‘an almighty wise man.’ (152c) That knowledge is perception is Protagoras’ idea though he expresses it by claiming ‘that things are to you such as they appear to you, and to me as they appear to me.’ (152a) Socrates begins what constitutes an extremely thorough consideration of Protagoras’ (and Theaetetus’ current) version of knowledge by pointing to a common sense phenomenon that makes it plausible:

The same wind is blowing and yet one of us may be cold and the other not. (152b)

This is a good example from Protagoras’ point of view because no definitive statement about whether the wind is cold or not seems possible. What each of us can ‘know’ about it does seem a matter of what each of us perceives.

But then Socrates produces additional derivations from this doctrine that do fly in the face of common-sense understandings. If knowledge is what we perceive:

You cannot rightly call anything by any name, such as great or small, heavy or light...There is no single thing or quality, but out of motion and change and admixture all things are becoming relatively to one another...(152d)

And soon Socrates is deriving perhaps the most counter-intuitive of all the conclusions that Protagoras and like-minded others actually endorse. Imagine:

Six dice which are more by a half when compared with four, and fewer by half than twelve-they are more and also fewer. (154c)
According to Protagoras, therefore, something can become greater or less without increasing or decreasing.

While not, at this point, volunteering an alternative conception of what knowledge could be, Socrates does provide grounds for believing there must be something wrong with a view that leads to the just noted conclusion. The trouble with the conclusion is that it flies in the face of ‘axioms’ (155b) that he is confident of such as:

That nothing can become greater or less...while remaining equal to itself. (155a)

And:

Without addition or subtraction there is no increase or diminution of anything, but only equality. (155b)

But, without denying that the counter-intuitive conclusions he supports remain troubling, next Socrates indicates that, with a deeper understanding of Protagoras’ and similar thinkers doctrine, we will be able to understand how even these axioms can be refuted, how, for example, ‘I who am of a certain height and taller than you, may within a year, without gaining or losing in height, be not so tall—not just I should have lost, but that you would have increased.’ (155b) This is a possible result if, as Protagoras would insist:

There is no one self-existent thing, but everything is becoming and in relation; and being must be altogether abolished, although from habit and ignorance we are compelled even in this discussion to retain use of the term. (157a-b)

Learning, as he is now, much more about the radical implications of his first idea, Theaetetus does ‘not know what to say.’ (157c) He is even more confused when Socrates adds that it would be consistent to conclude that even ‘the good and noble’ (157d) have no being.

But now, having shown how Protagoras’ idea can make sense so long as we revise our conception of something admittedly as basic as whether there is being, Socrates now turns to three clearly existing phenomena, dreams, madness, and physical illness, all of which provide fresh problems for Protagoras’ views. If what we know is everything we perceive, then what we perceive when we are dreaming, insane, or physically ill must be as true as what we perceive when we are awake, sane, and otherwise healthy.

And yet, though the existence of these phenomena certain do prove problematic for any straightforward interpretation of a knowledge-perception equation, Socrates immediately admits there is a way round even these problems. Socrates sick and well, or asleep and awake will certainly have different perceptions but there is no particular reason to assume that one set are more valid than the other.

Having provided a counter even to these arguments against the validity of what we perceive, Socrates indicates that at least they now have a clear view of what the idea
that knowledge is perception claims. It claims as do many great philosophers (not just Protagoras) that ‘all is motion or flux’ (160d) and (with Protagoras) that ‘man is the measure of all things.’ (160d)

Earlier we made the point that it seemed unlikely that Theaetetus could hold to his initial idea that knowledge is the same as wisdom while continuing to believe that what we perceive is what we know. To do so would leave him in the odd position of being satisfied that whenever he perceives anything, no matter how trivial, not just his knowledge but his wisdom is increased. However, that Protagoras known, even renowned for his wisdom, equated knowledge with perception made it seem plausible that this doctrine might after all not be incompatible with equating being wise with being knowledgeable. But now Socrates raises a new issue that casts doubt on whether the fact that a so-called wise man supports the doctrine can be used to buttress its credibility:

Should Protagoras be preferred to the place of wisdom...and we poor ignoramuses have to go to him if each one is the measure of his own wisdom? (161d-e)

That is, if knowledge is perception and so each man the measure, according to his own doctrine, whatever Protogoras can claim, how can he claim to be wise?

However, Socrates who, throughout, is clearly doing his best to be fair to Protagoras does now find a way that would enable him to preserve both his doctrine and his claim, presumably essential for his reputation and indeed his very profession, to be wise. He imagines him saying:

I declare that the truth is as I have written, and that each of us is a measure of existence and of non-existence. (166d)

But, at the same time:

I am far from saying that wisdom and the wise man have no existence; but I say that the wise man is he who makes the ends which appear to man into goods...these which the inexperienced call true, I maintain to be only better, and not truer than others. (166d)

By basing his claim to be wise, not on what he knows to be true, then, but on his ability to make people better, Protagoras can still maintain that each man is the measure (of truth) and yet still purport to be wise.

However, as the cost of this ‘solution’ is to abandon Theaetetus’ initial intuition of the close relation of knowledge and wisdom, it remains to be seen how viable such a complete severing of these two concepts actually is. Protagoras’ claims for himself positions him as one who can advise States on what it is ‘good or expedient’ (177e) for them to do. As such, his advice will necessarily take the form of which ‘laws are passed in after-time which in other words is the future.’ 178a) His reputation, then, depends on a claim to have knowledge of future effects. Therefore, it does seem that what he means by possessing wisdom actually cannot be separated from possessing some form of knowledge.
This means that either Protagors’ claim that he is wise or the claim that knowledge is perception must be abandoned. As such, the fact of Protagoras’ support for the doctrine of perception emerges as more a way of criticising Protagoras than a way of validating the doctrine. Socrates now moves on to consider whether ideas of any of the philosophers he respects more than he respects Protagoras can be used to defend this definition of knowledge. If perceptions per se give us knowledge, they should be able to reveal more than just that something exists. They should be able to determine what it is. The question now becomes whether there is any respectable philosophical version of whatness that would agree that perceptions can give access to whatness.

Socrates thinks it is sufficient to consider the two opposing doctrines about being that had adherents in his time, the one advanced by Parmenides and the one advanced by Heraclitus. But he does not even think it is worth discussing whether Parmenides would agree that we can know by perceiving, presumably because it is impossible to believe that his idea that ‘all being is one and self-contained’ (180e) could be a notion that was arrived at merely by looking at the world.

But there are also problems with defending Theaetetus’ idea if one believe, with Heraclitus in ‘the universal flux.’ (179d) Key here is working out what a consistent advocate of the doctrine that ‘all things are in motion’ (181c) must maintain, namely not just that there is the kind of motion in which ‘a thing changes from one place to another’ (181c) but also ‘when a thing, remaining on the same spot, grows old... or undergoes any other change.’ (181c-d). The problem is that if ‘nothing is to be devoid of motion’ (181e-82a) everything is always undergoing this second kind of motion and, if so, nothing would ever be ‘caught standing still.’ (182d) In such a situation, what one would perceive would never amount to a what and so it seems wrong to be satisfied that one is managing to obtain what can be called knowledge of anything rather than a mere passing impression of it (if one can even determine there is an ‘it.’)

It can be concluded that actually there is no prevalent existing position that supports identifying perception with knowledge. Socrates now begins the task of getting Theaetetus to consider whether he can come up with an alternative-more viable-conception of what knowledge is. He does so by getting him to pay attention to the role that perception does play when we attain knowledge of any object. For example, when we judge ‘likeness and unlikeness, sameness and difference’ (185c) what role do perceptions play? Their answer is first that, obviously, there is more than one way of perceiving. Besides sight, there are hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Second, while any and all of these may be relevant to working out what a thing is and/or what else it is like and unlike, ‘essence and what they are, and their opposition to one another and the essential nature of this opposition’ (185c) is accomplished not by perception but by ‘the mind’ (185e) collating, as it were, all that is perceived. They therefore conclude that ‘knowledge does not consist in impressions of sense but in reasoning about them.’ (186d)

Having managed to get him to accept that ‘knowledge has now been most distinctly proved to be different from perception’ (186e), Socrates asks Theaetetus what he now thinks knowledge might be. Theaetetus says that he thinks it could be a species of opinion but:
I cannot say, Socrates, that all opinion is knowledge, because there may be a false opinion; but I will venture to assert that knowledge is true opinion. (187b)

As thus far Socrates has conducted a thorough investigation of Theaetetus’ opinion that knowledge is perception, what we now expect is a thorough investigation of the idea that it is true opinion. What Socrates does instead could seem a diversion. He says:

There is a point, which often troubles me and is a great perplexity to me, both in regard to myself and others...How there can be false opinion. (187d)

Why consider this when Theaetetus has just made it clear he does not think this could be knowledge? First there is the fact that if we could solve this, even though we would not have defined knowledge, we would have accomplished something that is at least relevant to this issue: we would have worked out the possibility of mistakes. Second, solving this would clearly be of relevance to Theaetetus since, while it may or may not be true that his current opinion, i.e. that knowledge is true opinion, is true, it is certainly true that before arriving at it, he himself had a false opinion, that knowledge was perception. If he could discover how false opinions are possible, it could help him see both what produced this mistake and how to avoid other ones.

The difficulty with understanding how false opinions are possible has to do with the fact that it is not just correctly identifying anything that requires knowledge of it. Even misidentifying it would seem to be only possible with knowledge. As Socrates puts it, it is not possible that if a person 'knows neither Theaetetus nor Socrates that he fancies that Theaetetus is Socrates or Socrates Theaetetus.' (188b) The way Socrates answers this question of how misidentifying is possible is by suggesting that we need to accept that we can be in a state in which we are not exactly ignorant and perhaps even a long way from being ignorant without having what deserves to be called knowledge. One is not ignorant of a thing when one can have some ‘impression’ (191d) of it. But these impressions vary greatly in quality. For example, they can be ‘indistinct.’ (195a) They can be ‘easily confused and effaced.’ (195a) They can be ‘jostled together in a little soul that has no room.’ (195a)

False opinions, then, would easily be possible when, though we are not exactly ignorant about two things, we do have such indistinct impressions of them that we are apt to confuse them. And we can add that Theaetetus’s recent discovery of his false opinion does follow this pattern. That is, the way he has learned that perception is not knowledge is by developing a clearer impression of perception and simultaneously (though less explicitly) of knowledge. Concerning perception examples of his coming to have a clearer impression include that it will not allow one to make definitive statements about or even assign names to things; that it leads to disbelief in the existence of being; and that it is inconsistent with any claim to wisdom. Concerning knowledge, even without yet having a particularly clear impression of it, he has become much less likely to confuse it with perception by seeing for example that it should enable us to know more about anything than merely that it exists; that it should not be a totally separable matter from having a sense of what is good; and that it could not coexist with a disbelief in being.
However, Socrates choice of example at this point can alert us to the fact that he may well not have, as yet, fully solved the problem of how false opinions arrive. Against the fact that he says to Theatetus that:

> The only possibility of erroneous opinion is when, knowing you and Theodrous...I try to assign the impression but I fail and transpose them (193b-c)

Must be balanced the fact that the original and most likely confusion was between Socrates and Theatetus, not Theodorus and Theatetus,

And now Socrates does say that not all cases of false opinion arise in the way he just depicted. To explain a second way in which one can arrive at a false opinion, he imagines:

> In the mind...there is an aviary of all sorts of birds...We may suppose that the birds are kinds of knowledge. (197d-e)

According to this image, a false opinion will arise:

> When the various...forms of knowledge are flying about in the aviary; and wishing to capture a certain sort of knowledge out of the general store, he takes the wrong one by mistake. (199b)

Socrates also adds an account of how this ‘aviary’ is likely to have been produced in one’s mind. Someone ‘transmitting’ the pieces of knowledge ‘may be said to teach them’ (198b) and someone ‘receiving them to learn them and when having them in possession in the aforesaid aviary, he may be said to know them.’ (198b)

While they have still not defined knowledge nor even assessed Theaetetus’ second definition of it, i. e. that it is true opinion, a distinction concerning knowledge is now available that will subsequently prove important. When one knows it is certainly the case that one has knowledge but in so far as catching only the right bird depicts coming to know, it is not quite right to assume there are only two cases, namely having knowledge and not having knowledge. Instead Socrates suggests that there is also the case, prior to successfully knowing when one may ‘possess’ and yet not ‘have’ knowledge. (197b) This would be when the knowledge is instilled in one’s mind (possessed), presumably having been ‘transmitted’ by a teacher, but still not had until one gets hold of the right bird.

Now they do start considering whether true opinion is knowledge. Socrates makes the claim that one can have true opinions without what one has deserving to be called knowledge. His reason is that someone can persuade one of something justly but one can still not be said to know it because one can know only by ‘seeing’ (201b) it for oneself. In that Socrates has gone to so much trouble to convince Theaetetus that perception is not knowledge, ‘seeing’ it must not refer to physical visibility. He must
mean that knowing requires more than being persuaded by others. It requires seeing it in a sense like grasping it for oneself. 14

The picture of how the mind comes to know that Socrates just put forward offers support for this version of what it is to know. One could possess even knowledge that might be true and yet not know it until, having selected it out from all the other bits that are flying around, one manages to grasp it for oneself. Clearly stimulated by this possibility, Theaetetus suddenly does find something relevant that, as he has not mentioned it before, must have been flying around in his ‘aviary.’ He says there:

Is a distinction, Socrates, which I have heard made by someone else, but I had forgotten it. He said that true opinion, combined with reason, was knowledge, but that the opinion which had no reason was out of the sphere or knowledge; and that things of which there is no rational account are not knowledge-such was the singular expression which he used-one that things which have a reason or explanation are knowable. (201c-d)

Theaetetus ‘possesses’ this knowledge but he does not really ‘have’-grasp- its meaning. That this is his current state with regard to the idea that even true opinions are not knowledge is reinforced by his calling the idea of a rational account a ‘singular expression,’ He has been told the idea but he does not actually know what it means.

Socrates now offers a first version of the form a rational account and so, if Theaetetus’ new idea is valid, knowledge could take. One could accept that:

The primeval letters or elements out of which you and I and all other things are compounded have no reason or explanation; you can only name them...None of these primeval elements can be defined; they can only be named. ...And the things which are compounded of them, as they are complex, are expressed by a combination of names, for the combination of names is the essence of a definition. (201e-2b)

Commentators have tended to be puzzled by this idea, unable to locate any likely author of it. Thus Frances Cornford:

It is obviously a philosophic theory which would not occur to common sense. It must belong to some contemporary of Socrates or Plato, whom Plato does not choose to name...there seems to be no evidence sufficient to identify the author. (Cornford, 143-4)

But Socrates offers this idea in response to Theaetetus’ statement that ‘he does not recall’ the details of what he ‘heard made by someone else’ (201c) and when Socrates asks him if this could be what is meant by a rational account, Theaetetus says ‘precisely.’ (202c)

14 Here see Blum and McHugh’s discussion of the difference between right opinion and knowledge, a discussion strongly influenced by this section of the Theaetetus. (Blum and McHugh, 1984, 128-34)
What can be suggested is that this is an idea that Theaetetus has ‘possessed’ since the beginning of the dialogue, probably because it was ‘transmitted’ to him by his teacher, Theodorus, but he comes to express it because only now is he beginning to ‘have’ it. But there are two glaring difficulties that this interpretation must overcome. What is the evidence for the idea that he already ‘possessed’ this idea and, if so, why is it only now that he ‘has’ it? Concerning the first question, recall Theaetetus’ first attempt to answer the question of ‘What is knowledge?’ He said:

I think that the sciences which I learn from Theodorus-geometry and those which you just now mentioned- are knowledge; and I would include the art of the cobbler and other craftsmen, these, each and all of them, are knowledge. (146c-d)

Can’t this now be seen, not just as the typical mistake all Socrates’ interlocutors make but, more precisely, an attempt to depict a thing, in this case knowledge, by treating it as a compound and doing no more than naming the elements, e. g. geometry, etc. out of which it is composed? Still another ground which makes it plausible that Theaetetus already possesses this knowledge is that it is a doctrine that Theodorus, qua geometry teacher, would be very likely to teach, geometry being a discipline that does its work by beginning from axioms, i. e. unquestioned and unquestionable primary elements.

But why would Theaetetus only ‘grab’ on to this idea now when we saw that he quickly abandoned it when Socrates insisted that the task was to define knowledge? Socrates was clearly right in dismissing Theaetetus’ first effort on the grounds that it was not a definition. Listing some or even all of the elements that make up a thing is not the same as defining it. However, the topic now under consideration is when one can be said to know a thing when even having a true opinion about it is not sufficient. It does make some sense to propose that one knows what X is when one is at least able to name, albeit, without being able to explain them further, the elements that compose the thing. So, even though Theaetetus was right to abandon the idea earlier, it is still a good move to ‘recall’ it now.

To his credit, then, Theaetetus does seem to have some grasp of an idea with the potential to be offered as a way of conceiving of knowledge as requiring more than even a right opinion. But, as Socrates points out, much depends on the adequacy of the analogy between how letters relate to syllables and how the elements of knowledge relate to knowledge as a whole. In their discussion, first Theaetetus and Socrates concede that there is something to be said for the idea that one can know a syllable without having the same sort of knowledge of the letters. They agree that if asked to define a syllable, one might give the letters that compose it but if asked to define each letter, as Theaetetus puts it:

How can any one...tell the elements of an element...letters may be most truly said to be undefined; for even the most distinct of them...have a sound only, but no definition at all. (203b)

But the aptness of the analogy would clearly require that the parts of knowledge be as indefinable as letters. Clearly, this is not the case. For example, they have never doubted that geometry is part of knowledge and Theaetetus would surely not claim
that it is possible for him to know what knowledge is and yet impossible for him to define geometry.

However, even though such a description does not apply to Theaetetus, it should be conceded that there are people who would be able correctly to list parts of knowledge without being equally able to explain the nature of any of the parts. But what to make of such a process and, in particular, does it deserve to be called knowing? To gain a sense of this possibility—both the kind of accomplishment it is and its limitations—Socrates asks Theaetetus to remember ‘the process of learning to read.’ (207d) There was plenty of room for mistakes, i.e. misspelling and one certainly can say one is correct when one finally ‘knows the order of the letters and can write them out correctly.’ (208b) By analogy, clearly one could incorrectly name something as a part of knowledge. But being able to list, no matter how correctly, various parts of knowledge is like managing to spell correctly without (as is impossible in the case of spelling but not in the case of knowing) being able to account for why the parts/letters deserve to be there. Therefore, this type of accomplishment, while not negligible, is better seen as correct opinion rather than knowledge.

Now Socrates offers a different version of what it might mean to manage a rational account that suggests one knows something. He says there is the idea

   Of telling the mark or sign of difference which distinguishes the thing in question from all others. (208c)

Theaetetus is puzzled and request an example. Socrates says:

   As, for example, in the case of the sun, I think you would be contented with the statement that the sun is the brightest of the heavenly bodies...(208d)

Theaetetus agrees that this ‘certainly’ would satisfy him.

Being the brightest body in the heavens does distinguish the sun from all other heavenly bodies. Also, as it happens, it is a property that one can determine for oneself. That is, its being the brightest is not just the argument that others need to convince one of. For example, it is extremely unlikely that any one, no matter how clever, could every manage to convince one that actually another body is brighter. So this is a property that, once you find it by searching the heavens, can make you feel satisfied that you do not just have an opinion of which body the sun is. Thus, the level of confidence one can achieve of which is brightest is sufficient so that so long as this property actually does distinguish the sun, one can feel one has more than an opinion, even more than a true opinion of which body is the sun. By applying this criterion, one can be content that one knows (in the sense of seeing for yourself and not just being convinced by others) which heavenly body the sun is.

It is true that Aristotle has invented an objection that this distinguishing mark would not work at night. (Aristotle, Topics cited by Derrida) Presumably he is worried that someone who applied the brightness criterion at night is likely wrongly to conclude that the moon or perhaps the North Star is the sun. However, the objection fails to appreciate that a person interested in satisfying himself of the truth—Socrates’ version of what it is to move from just an opinion to knowledge—would surely be likely to take
the trouble of looking for the brightest body at both relevant times, i. e. during the day as well, rather than just at night. Having done so, surely any reasonable doubt as to which body is the brightest of all and therefore the sun would vanish.

Socrates goes on to explain the particular reason why, in the event that one can know-satisfy oneself- that one has located some property that actually manages to distinguish a thing, it would be important. The reason is that there is a problem with discovering, even being certain- about other characteristics of a thing. This problem is that:

While you lay hold only of the common and not of the characteristic notion, you will only have the definition of those things to which this common quality belongs. (208d)

Quickly, Socrates proceeds to indicate that the mode of accounting just developed would (at last) enable them to no longer have a false opinion concerning the case-indeed the problem-with which the whole dialogue began. If they could find a distinguishing mark, not only would they no longer be in danger of confusing Theaetetus and Theodorus. They would no longer be in danger of confusing Theaetetus and Socrates even though they both do share common characteristics, in their case ‘having a snub nose and prominent eyes.’ (209c)

But there are at least two problems with concluding that the whole point of the dialogue has been to find a solution to this problem. Firstly, there are surely more important matters than finding a way to distinguish people who look alike. Second, in fact the dialogue does not come up with any one or more ‘marks’ that one could identity that would help us not to confuse the two of them. Perhaps then there are other more important things discussed in the dialogue that both could be confused and for which distinguishing marks have been discovered. We shall suggest that one such thing or things can be extracted from all that has been analyzed so far and another such thing or things can be extracted from the otherwise puzzling conclusion of the dialogue.

The way the problem of knowledge has been developed, it has been conceded that knowledge-knowing anything-shares a common characteristic with some types of opinions, namely true opinions. The common characteristic is that, in both cases, one has arrived at something true. Therefore, these two cases are easily confused. Indeed, we have seen that Theaetetus does confuse them. But, in addition, and now unlike possible Socrates-Theaetetus physical resemblance confusion, in the case of possible and indeed very likely knowledge-true opinion confusion, Socrates did develop a way to distinguish them-a distinguishing mark. In this case the distinguishing mark was that or if one could see (though not in the physical sense of the word) it for oneself. So while the dialogue may not have developed a way of distinguishing, physically, Socrates and Theaetetus, it has developed something that is more important, a way to distinguish knowledge and even right opinion.

On the one hand, what Socrates is discovering here seems very important. On the other hand, it is very hard to deny that the criteria for knowing are hard to achieve in specific cases. Not only must one find a characteristic that does manage to differentiate two things that are easily confused. One must also not just have an opinion, even a true one, as to whether the characteristic applies to one of the things
but not the other. One must also satisfy oneself (feel one knows) that one of the things has it but not the other. These conditions may be met with regard to the sun and with regard to the general knowledge versus true opinion issue but one can wonder if these cases are more exceptions than the rule.

Socrates can be seen to be warning Theaetetus to this effect when he reminds him that even whenever he manages to ‘acquire a right opinion of the differences which distinguish one thing from another’ (209d) all he has so far is a right opinion. He still needs to satisfy himself both that it is a characteristic that would manage to differentiate the two things and that only one of them has it. But if this warning seems to end the dialogue on a negative note, it is balanced by what Socrates now says has been one clear benefit of their results. For now on, Theaetetus:

Will be too modest to fancy that you know what you do not know. (210c)

We can suggest that, besides developing criteria for knowledge of the sun and knowledge of the difference between right opinion and knowledge, Socrates has also developed a criterion for knowing the difference between wisdom and knowledge-two other things that are easily confused as witness the fact that Theaetetus equated them at the beginning of the dialogue.

Knowing that one needs to have more than even a true opinion that two things are different or even a true opinion about the characteristic that differentiates them is not knowing enough not to confuse them but it is something that is easily confused with knowledge because it too makes one ‘all the better.’ (210c) It is a form of wisdom.

Even if one accepts that it ends on this positive note a possible critique of the dialogue’s results is that the things that will so far no longer be confused thanks to the discovery of distinguishing marks are either extremely general (knowledge and wisdom, knowledge and right opinion) or already obvious (the sun versus other heavenly bodies.) We wonder whether the method can be used to avoid confusing anything at once more specific and less obvious.

The dialogue ends with Socrates hoping to see Theodorus ‘tomorrow morning.’ (210d) In fact they do meet again and begin another dialogue, The Sophist. We will deal with this next and one thing we will discover is that it does do much more to demonstrate the practical value of the method first articulated in Theaetetus. The dialogue will begin with a character having a true opinion about two more things that can easily be confused, in this case philosophers and sophists. It proceeds by developing various differentiating marks that can enable one to know (be satisfied) that in spite of all the potential ambiguities whether one is dealing with one or the other can be revealed.
Sophist

Near the start of *The Sophist* Socrates asks the Stranger, the person who will be leading the discussion, whether he differentiates Sophists from Philosophers and Statesmen. He answers that he has no:

> Difficulty in replying that they (he and his countrymen) regard them as three. But to define precisely the nature of each of them is anything but a slight or easy task. (216b)

What the dialogue will reveal is that a main reason for the difficulty will be that it is in the nature of the Sophist to seek to hide his nature. One interest of the dialogue, for us, will be to see what method Plato adopts when faced with a phenomenon that practices self-concealment.

The way the Stranger begins is to ‘first practice the method of discovery in something easier’ and, for his example, he selects an angler. (218d-e) About this person, first it is established that he is ‘a man of art.’ (219a) Then that his art is one of acquiring things rather than producing them. Next that he gets these things through force rather than voluntarily, with the proviso that it is secret rather than open (as with fighting) force.

Around now, further elaborations of the angler, while undeniably apt, begin to seem unnecessarily detailed, for example we ‘learn’ that he catches living things, that he hunts on water, and even that he hunts with a hook rather than a net or spear. However, all this elaboration begins to make sense when the Stranger reveals why the angler is worth considering in such detail. It is because the Sophist catches things as well and furthermore he too even sometimes hunts in water, albeit ‘water of another sort—rivers of wealth and rich meadow-lands of generous youth’. (222a) Indeed the only significant difference that the Stranger is willing to concede is that the animals the Sophist hooks with *his* bait turn out to be tame ones, i.e. vulnerable youths.

Faced with the problem of defining someone who practices concealment, the Stranger’s initial tactic, then, is to depict someone who we can more easily see through. He then proceeds to show that this is what the Sophist is like. The message that is already getting across is that he is an artful deceiver and we could therefore
quite easily be caught by him. However, we will need to learn much more about his art before we can be at all safe from him.

The Stranger now admits that there is at least one big difference between anglers and Sophists: unlike anglers, Sophists offer something in return. What this means is that they are also like merchants. They too go from city to city selling things that normally they have not themselves produced, but in their case it is ‘the food of the soul which is bartered and received in exchange for money.’ (223e) The Stranger calls the particular thing they ‘hawk’ knowledge and also says that doing this ‘is certainly not less ridiculous than other sorts of hawking.’ (224b)

We can agree that being a kind of hawker does make the Sophist begin to seem somewhat ridiculous. Also, we can suggest that seeing this aspect of his ‘art’ begins to make it seem less likely that we will be susceptible to it. On the other hand, while having to pay for this product will certainly continue to taint it, if what the sophist offers really amounts to useful knowledge, perhaps it really is worth paying for. As such, further work is needed both to begin to elaborate the kind of knowledge on offer and to reflect further on what this requirement of having to pay for it indicates as to its nature.

The Stranger engages with both of these issues by suggesting still another activity that sophistry is like. It is like the art of fighting. The Sophist is ‘pugnacious’ except in his case the art is not ‘a contest of bodily strength.’ (225a) Instead: ‘the war is one of words.’ (225b) That is, the Sophist’s art is: ‘to dispute about justice and injustice and about things in general.’ (225c)

Here he also offers a further distinction, one which returns us to the question of what the Sophist’s commitment to getting a fee reveals about him. While he does a great deal of talking, there is a kind of talking that could be said to ‘waste money.’ (225d) The Stranger has in mind: ‘the habit which leads a man to neglect his own affairs for the pleasure of conversation.’ (225d) Clearly, the Sophist’s interest in conversation does not take this form.

From this latest set of distinctions here is how the Sophist new appears:

He is the money-making species of the Eristic-disputatious, controversial, pugnacious, combative, acquisitive...(226a)

Certainly he and his art are seeming ever less attractive. However, it has to be said that in so far as some potential good could be gained from falling under the influence of someone as pugnacious as this, even if one does have to pay for his service, it might still be hard to see why that is definitely a mistake. What the Stranger could be said to do next is begin to develop a sense of what this good could plausibly be.

Yet another type of activity, namely dividing or separating things, is now noted. The Stranger calls this ‘discerning.’ (226c) The branch of discerning he focuses on separates ‘the better from the worse.’ (226d) An example would be (even in its non-metaphoric sense) separating the wheat from the chaff. He calls this type of discerning ‘purification.’ (226d) An example would be the work of medicine when it rids our bodies of disease. However, there is also purifying activity which accomplishes
'taking away evil from the soul.' (227d) The evil that concerns him is ignorance but it is one specific type of ignorance that he has in mind because it is a source of so many errors. This is when a person ‘thinks that he knows and does not know.’ (229c)

It is ‘education’ (229d) that manages this particular type of purifying work. But there are also different types of education. First there is the type which ‘our fathers commonly practiced toward their sons,’ some doing it roughly and others more smoothly.’ (229e-30a) In both cases one ‘admonishes’ them in the expectation or at least hope that they will thereby see the error of their ways. (230a)

However, the Stranger points out that in so far as (as he believes) ignorance is involuntary, admonition won’t work. The problem is that if one actually thinks what one is doing is right, someone merely insisting one is wrong is not going to change one’s mind. What will work in such circumstances is a different form of education:

They cross-examine a man as to what he is saying, when he thinks he is saying something and is saying nothing; he is easily convicted of inconsistency in his opinions; these they collect, and placing them side by side, show that they contradict one another about the same things...He seeing this is angry with himself, and grows gentle towards others, and thus is entirely delivered from great prejudices and harsh notions... (230b-c)

This form of instruction really would purify one of the ignorance that produces evil because the subject would be ‘cleaned out, and learn to think that he knows only what he knows, and no more.’ (230d)

What is troubling, however, is that, notwithstanding all the negative phenomena that it has been demonstrated that he is like, this highly beneficial activity certainly sounds like what the Sophist is doing. Now, what the Sophist is like appears to be something good. Thus, it has been established that he is disputatious and certainly for ‘eradicating the spirit of conceit’ (230d) disputing would be essential. That this sounds like the Sophist is confirmed by the Stranger’s interlocutor, Theatetus, who says ‘the description just given has a certain likeness to the Sophist.’ (231a)

In response, and for the first time in the dialogue, the Stranger tries to say that, besides finding likenesses it also can be important to distinguish things that, in many respects, are alike. He says:

Yes, the same sort of likeness which a wolf, who is the fiercest of animals, has to a dog, who is the gentlest. But he who would not be found tripping, ought to be very careful in the matter of likenesses, for they are the most slippery things... (231a)

Of course wolves and dogs are very alike, probably even much more alike than anglers and Sophists in that it certainly easier to confuse them but it is right that the differences between them are much more important than the many similarities. The method the Stranger has adopted so far, seeking to depict the Sophist by what he is like is no longer going to suffice if, as it now appears, he must also be differentiated from someone who is very similar to him.
Critical to how the Stranger proceeds at this point in just starting his attempt to
differentiate Sophists from those who they are similar to is his identifying a claim that
Sophists make that they cannot possibly fulfil. This is the claim to ‘understand all
things.’ (233a) And yet it is this impossible to achieve ideal that accounts for their
power because it makes ‘young men believe in their ...supreme and universal wisdom.’
(233b)

The question becomes how they could manage what amounts to a deception, i. e. that
they can produce understanding of everything. The explanation involves returning to
the very early point that sophistry (like angling) is an art. Now the nature of their
particular art will be revealed. One can say that there is an art that seems to do
something that is even more impossible than understanding everything. Some people
can appear to make everything, even ‘the sea... Furthermore these people can make
these things ‘in no time, and sell them for a few pence.’ (234a) The Stranger is
referring to artists, e. g. highly skilled painters with their ability to imitate things. The
Stranger’s idea is that the Sophist has the power to impress at least impressionable
youth because he is like a good painter except what he is imitating is ‘the art of
reasoning.’ (234c) Like young children who, when shown a picture at a distance could
be fooled into thinking they are seeing real objects:

Is there any impossibility in stealing the hearts of youths through their ears,
when they are still at a distance from the truth, by showing them fictitious
arguments and making them think that they are true? (234c)

That the Sophist is only imitating those who have the art of reasoning really does
suggest how he could be different even from someone he appears very much like.
However, we have to face the fact that where we have arrived at now is not nearly the
conclusion of the dialogue. The Stranger now confesses that there is an argument they
must now confront. They are saying that the Sophist is not what he appears to be, in
other words that he has a sort of negative being or existence. The trouble with this
conclusion is that there is a very respectable view arguing that this form of existence is
actually not possible.

The Stranger attributes this doctrine to his own teacher, Parmenides because, as the
Stranger points out, Parmenides warned: ‘Keep your mind from this way of inquiry,
for never will you show that not-being is.’ (237a) So, if we identify the Sophist as a
not-an imitative appearance—we do seem to be making the very mistake that
Parmenides warned us against.

But the Stranger points to a concept that indicates that, contrary to Parmenides, there is
a sense in which it can be said that not-being does exist. In the key passage, the
Stranger argues:

When we speak of not-being, we speak not of something opposed to being,
but only different. (257b)

He offers an example:
When we speak of something as not great, does the expression seem to you to imply what is little...? (257b)

That is, those who Parmenides rightly would think of as mistaken would assume there is no problem about negative existence because they can certainly refer to the not great. But, argues, Parmenides, what the not great depicts is actually not some form of negative existence but another form of positive existence, in this case the little. However, the Stranger points out that there are many things that, while they are certainly not great, are certainly also not little. He means all the things that are different from the great (and also of course the little). All these things could be said to exist in this (negative) form.

Therefore, the Stranger says he has pointed to the possibility of something that Parmenides ‘forbad us to investigate.’ (258c) He quotes him again:

Not being never is, and do thou keep thy thoughts from this way of enquiry. (258d)

Whereas the Stranger has shown ‘not only that things which are not exist, but we have also shown what form of being not-being is.’ (258d)

He means that the form of being not being can take or be is when something’s existence can be depicted by depicting its difference from something else. He does not add that while there would no doubt be many cases where this is not the best or only way to depict the existence of a thing, it is likely to be the most appropriate way when a thing is imitating some other thing. In such a case, in order to avoid confusion, what one most needs to know about a thing, what best identifies it is, in the sense the Stranger has just developed, i. e. what it is different from, is what it is not.

Exactly this applies to the Sophist. The best way to get a grip on the Sophist’s type of existence is to differentiate him from those he is imitating. As was already suggested earlier in the dialogue, the ones he is imitating are practitioners of ‘the art of reasoning.’ The task now is to depict what distinguishes him from them.

Another of the Stranger’s distinctions will prove to be an extremely productive tool for this task. We know that the Sophist practices imitation but it is worth noting that the Stranger suggests there are two types of imitation, one of which manages a much less accurate copy than the other. He says:

Generally a likeness is made by producing a copy which is executed according to the proportions of the original, similar in length and breadth and depth...(235d-e)

But sometimes:

in works either of sculpture or of painting, there is a certain degree of deception; for if the true proportions were given, the upper part, which is farther off, would appear to be out of proportion with the lower, which is nearer. (235e-6a)
In this latter case it is only ‘the unfavourable position of the spectator that makes us think the copy is at all accurate’ (236b) This latter type ‘is not really like’ what it is copying. (236b) Whatever we think of this as an aesthetic theory, as it applies to the case at hand, it can be seen to offer a helpful way forward because the Stranger thinks that the Sophist can manage only to achieve this second, inferior, type of imitation.

If he is right, there should be aspects of his copying that will be very much unlike what is being imitated. In other words, while undeniable similarities will remain, at least on close inspection, differences should surface.\(^\text{15}\)

Certainly the dialogue as a whole has been ‘closely inspecting’ the Sophist right from the beginning. What can be suggested is that many of its results can best be seen not just as showing what the Sophist resembles but also as detecting some of what could enable us to differentiate him from those he is imitating. In particular, the latter would not be trying to catch anyone who will take his or her bait. Nor would she be especially aiming to fish in wealthy waters. Nor would she make herself ridiculous by hawking her wares. Nor would she think it a waste of time if she were not recompensed for her efforts. While she would need to practice refutation, it would be less likely to be in an especially pugnacious form. Finally, while she would claim to increase understanding, she would certainly not claim to understand everything.

If, as seems likely, these attributes really do differentiate the sophist from the ones he is imitating, looking for them would be a matter of great importance because, as reasoned above, when confronted with an imitation it is only differences that can enable one to identify it.

It has to be said that seeking to locate what can be termed tell tale signs is quite a different process from any straightforward application of the method of education depicted earlier, the one the Sophist is imitating. One seems to have abandoned ‘cross-examining him’ with the promised result of ‘easily convicting him of inconsistency.’ A further distinction made by the Stranger could amount to a justification for the development of this alternative approach. He says the Sophist is no ‘simple being, who thinks that he knows that which he only fancies.’ (268a) Instead he:

> Has knocked about among arguments, until he suspects and fears he is ignorant of that which he pretends to know. (268a)

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\(^{15}\) As is clear here, the ability to utilize the stranger’s method depends on it being possible to distinguish better from worse or, in other words, more from less accurate, copies. If, perhaps thinking of the relation of a painting to whatever it depicts, one takes the position that the painting can never be accurate, meaning only that it can never be the thing it copies, one can easily think that what the stranger is asking us to do is impossible. Nothing could be \textit{this} accurate. But, unlike a painting of anything, if one \textit{could} accurately imitate a philosopher (which a sophist, to his cost, cannot) that \textit{would} be the same as the real thing. Rosen’ conclusion that the sophist’ method is ineffective is generated by the fact that he cannot see that there is this difference between the relation between a painting and its subject and the relation between a philosopher and a sophist. (See Rosen, 1983, 147-74 and 186-203)
It is reasonable to expect that his previous experiences of arguments, his current suspicions and fears as to his ignorance, and not least his awareness of how much is at stake will all help him to avoid the more typical fate at the hands of those he seeks to imitate of being easily convicted of inconsistency.

Being much easier to refute, then, would be one very major way in which one cannot expect to detect a glaring difference between him and those he is imitating. Hence, the need for the development of a more roundabout and, admittedly less conclusive (because no conviction of inconsistency, at least to the Sophist’s satisfaction, can be expected) way of dealing with him.


**Philebus**

*Philebus* begins with Socrates summarizing a conversation we have not been privy to. Philebus has been arguing that pleasure is the good whereas Socrates has countered that wisdom is the good. We gather that their conversation has resulted in a stalemate. At the point at which the dialogue does begin, Philebus’ student, Protarchus, has taken over the role of Socrates’ main interlocutor. One of his early exchanges with Socrates indicates why this change of speaker is necessary. Socrates proposes something that he clearly never suggested to Philebus. Perhaps they are both wrong:

> What if there be a third state, which is better than either...If this life...turns out to be more akin to pleasure than wisdom, the life of pleasure may still have the advantage over the life of wisdom...Or suppose that the better life is more nearly allied to wisdom. Then wisdom conquers and pleasure is defeated. (11d-e)

Asked whether he agrees, Protarchus says ‘certainly’ (12a), but Philebus will not even agree to this:

> I say, and shall always say, that pleasure is easily the conqueror. (12a)

So great is his commitment to pleasure that he even refuses to be reasonable.

The discussion with the more reasonable one begins with Socrates saying about pleasure:

> You would imagine that she is one, and yet surely she takes the most varied and even unlike forms. For do we not say that the intemperate has pleasure, and that the temperate has pleasure in his very temperance-that the fool is pleased when he is full of foolish fancies and hopes, and that the wise man has pleasure in his wisdom. (12c-d)

To which Protarchus replies:
Why, Socrates, they are opposed in so far as they spring from opposite sources, but they are not in themselves opposite. For must not pleasure be of all things most absolutely like pleasure,-that is, like itself? (12d-e)

Socrates may not be being unreasonable here but he certainly sounds uncharacteristic. We are used to his interlocutors being unable to say what apparently different things have in common whereas here it seems to be Socrates who insists on differences and is accused by the interlocutor of neglecting what the seemingly different things share.

Their next exchange makes the way Socrates is arguing in this particular dialogue seem less strange. He says:

There can be no argument to show that the pleasant is not pleasant; but whereas we say that most pleasures are bad, though there are some good ones as well. (13a-b)

Protarchus replies:

What do you mean, Socrates? Do you think that anyone who asserts pleasure to be the good will tolerate the notion that some pleasures are good and others are bad? (13b-c)

To which Socrates replies:

But perhaps you will acknowledge that they are different from one another...? (13c)

So, the pleasures of the fool and those of the wise man do have something in common, namely that both are pleasures. Yet, in this case, unlike say what we saw earlier, in other dialogues, with regard to the virtues, it must not be the similarities among them all but the differences that need to be discovered. However, whatever these differences, they cannot simply be, as the concession that Socrates’ last remark implies, that some of them are good and others are bad. He will need to find much more specific differences in pleasures than this in order to get Protarchus to agree that there are many and diverse pleasures, Socrates has to admit that this is also true of the thing he ‘affirmed to be good,’ (13e) wisdom. Protarchus does now agree ‘that there are many and diverse pleasure and many and diverse sciences.’ (14a) The issue now becomes how to accomplish anything’s differentiation.

As the appropriate method, Socrates invokes:

My own favorite way, which has nonetheless often deserted me and left me helpless in the hour of need. (16b)

He means when what one does is:

Begin by laying down one idea of that which is the subject of inquiry...Having found it, we may next proceed to look for two, if there be two or, if not, then for three or some other number, subdividing each of
these units, until at last the unity with which we began is seen not only to be one...but also a definite number. (16d)

After some discussion, Protarchus arrives at a clear understanding of how this method will be applied to their topic. He says:

Socrates, if I understood him rightly, is asking whether there are or are not kinds of pleasure, and what is the number and nature of them, and the same of wisdom. (19b)

But before Socrates can begin the task of depicting the kinds, both of pleasure and wisdom, Philebus makes a rare intervention in the discussion. He says to Socrates:

Consider, then, whether you will divide pleasure and knowledge according to their kinds; or you may let the matter drop, if you are able and willing to find some other mode of clearing up our controversy. (20a)

There is little doubt that the motive for this remark is that such a committed pleasure seeker cannot envision sufficient pleasure in having to listen to two presumably long lists and is therefore hoping there could be a short-cut.

Socrates replies:

I remember hearing...discussions about wisdom and pleasure...they were to the effect that neither the one nor the other of them was the good, but some third thing, which was different from them, and better than either. (20b)

A first step toward articulating this ‘third thing’ will be to develop a considered critique of both Philebus’ and his own original arguments.

He suggests that the idea that pleasure is the good and that wisdom is the good both presuppose that there is such a thing as the good. In such a case, either pleasure or wisdom would have to be sufficient on its own. Socrates shows Protarchus (and presumably also the listening Philebus) that really neither is sufficient on its own. With regard to pleasure:

If you had neither mind, nor memory, no knowledge, nor true opinion, you would... be utterly ignorant of whether you were pleased or not, because you would be entirely devoid of intelligence. (21b)

And, with regard to wisdom, certainly few

Would consent to live, having wisdom and mind and knowledge of all things, but having no sense of pleasure or pain, either more or less, and wholly unaffected by these and the like feelings. (21d-e)
So, contrary to what both Socrates and Philebus were arguing, neither pleasure or wisdom is the good or, to put it positively, they are both parts of the good or, as Socrates expresses it, a good life is a ‘mixed life’ (22c) of pleasure and wisdom.

It is a fact that from this point on, the dialogue will avoid a stalemate. While we will need to explore the nature of this productive part of the conversation, it is also worth considering how they have finally arrived at the point where a productive discussion becomes possible. Clearly the key is Socrates reluctantly and eventually admitting that wisdom is not the good. What is less clear but important to note is the way he achieves this new insight is by applying his method of division not so much to pleasure or wisdom but to the good. That is, he has discovered or remembered that the good must be divided into at least two, namely pleasure as well as wisdom. It was the fact that he (and of course also Philebus) failed to make that division that was dooming them to make no progress in their discussion because unable to see any value in what the other was saying. Socrates was probably referencing this mistake on his part when he said, as he began to elaborate the way he thinks they should proceed that his ‘favorite way...often deserted’ him. (16b) In this case, what deserted him was remembering that there could be divisions even in the good.

The overall theme of the productive conversation is the process of adequately mixing things. While the ultimate topic will be how best to mix knowledge and pleasure in one’s life, Socrates and Protarchus begin with other cases of good mixes. For example, they consider the problem of how to mix two opposites, cold and heat so as to produce the seasons or how to mix two other opposites, high and low notes, in a way that will ‘perfect the whole frame of music.’ (26a) Socrates suggests that what is needed is ‘reconciliation between opposites’ (25d) and that this is accomplished by an understanding of such matters as ‘the equal or...the double, or any other ratio of number to number.’ (25d) He means that, in general, one needs an understanding of when to ‘introduce a limit.’ (26a) Certainly we can agree, as does Protarchus, that there need to be limits to both hot and cold and, furthermore, what amounts to a reconciliation between them if seasons we can enjoy are to exist. Similarly, limits to high and low notes and ways of reconciling them are needed for music.

Having shown the benefits of limits for things like hot and cold and high and low, Socrates offers what amounts to a tribute to the need for limits, directing himself to his original interlocutor and the most resolute defender of pleasure, Philebus. He says:

O my beautiful Philebus, methinks the goddess of harmony, seeing the universal wariness and wickedness of all things, and that there was in them no limit to pleasures and self-indulgence, devised the limit of law and order, whereby as you say, Philebus, she extinguished, or as I maintain delivered them. (26b-c)

Socrates proceeds to ask Philebus whether pleasure does have a limit or, more precisely: ‘Have pleasure and pain a limit?’ (27e) He must be thinking that what he and Protarchus have discovered about hot weather and high notes, that they need to be limited by their opposites, could also apply to pleasure.

But Philebus refuses to accept that pleasure needs to have any limit. It has to be said that he has a point. Pleasure does seem quite different from heat in at least three ways.
It seems much less clear why it actually needs to be limited. Second, even if it does it is hard to see why what should limit it would be pain. Indeed the previous discussion would lead us to believe that this aspect of the analogy with heat is faulty since it has only been suggested that pleasure needs to be mixed with knowledge and now Socrates seems to be suggesting it needs to be mixed with pain. Third, it is certainly hard to see how limiting pleasure by pain would ‘deliver’ pleasure to us rather than, even at best, lessen it.

However, that the relation between pleasure and pain is like the relation between hot and cold and therefore that one needs to consider how best to mix them begins to make more sense once we see how Socrates understands the generation of pleasure. Pleasure is clearly a mental ‘sensation’ (34a) and the question then becomes how to produce this sensation. First, considering obvious cases such as eating, drinking, and the like, pleasurable sensations follow painful ones. There is the painful sensation of being ‘empty’ followed by the pleasurable one of ‘replenishment.’ (34d-35a) That there would actually be no pleasure without a preceding pain makes it evident that there must be at least some pain in the mix.

But while it does seem that the best way of mixing would be to minimize the pain and maximize the pleasure, that proves problematic. The problem arises because ‘the pleasure appear to be greater and more vehement when placed side by side with the pains.’ (42b) He means that what can maximize one’s experience of pleasure, both in anticipation and even sometimes when attained, is the extent of the current pain. For example, even a glass of water can be a huge source of pleasure if one is sufficiently thirsty.

Indeed, Socrates goes on to suggest that:

People who are in a fever, or any similar illness, feel cold or thirst or other bodily affections more intensely. Am I not right in saying that they know deeper want and enjoy greater pleasure in the satisfaction of their want? (45b)

Therefore:

If a person would wish to see the greatest pleasure he ought to go and look, not at health, but at disease. (45c)

This is an even clearer example demonstrating that a full-blown commitment to maximizing pleasure would actually require not minimizing but maximizing pain as well.

Socrates now goes on to explore a ‘family of pleasures’ (46b) which do not really fit his replenishment idea and also, arguably, allow us to experience even greater pleasure. These too are not without pain in that they are:

Mixtures of pleasures with pain, common both to soul and body, which in their composite state are called sometimes pleasures and sometimes pains. (46c)
Describing someone experiencing a bodily case of this, Socrates says:

He will say of himself and others will say of him, that he is dying with these delights. (47b)

In such a state:

He even leaps for joy, he assumes all sorts of attitudes, he changes all manner of colours, he gasps for breath, and is quite amazed, and utters the most irrational exclamations. (47a)

Socrates is accurately describing the experience of some types of sex. Even though there is an element of pain involved, so overwhelming does the pleasurable aspect appear that there seems no reason not to pursue an unlimited amount of this. However, his interlocutor Protachus’ enthusiasm for too single-minded pursuit of this form of pleasure understandably wanes when Socrates points out that, while sex can certainly be like this, so can ‘the relief of itching...by scratching.’ (46a)

Socrates now proceeds to consider ‘purely mental’ (47d) examples of this types of mixed pleasures and pain. The case Protarchus has most trouble understanding is comedy, both how there is some pain as well as pleasure in it and also, even if pain is present, why this form of pleasure should be limited. Socrates’ idea is that our pleasure in this case is a sense of the simply ridiculous. The reason that this is painful as well as pleasurable and, ideally, not a common source of pleasure (and so, ideally, limited) is that it is produced by witnessing one or more misfortunes, harmless to us personally, because afflicting our friends. What we experience is some conceit on their part, ‘the vain conceit of beauty, of wisdom, and of wealth.’ (49e) While there is undeniable pleasure-laughter- to be had in experiencing these, at the same time there is pain at their misfortune and certainly no legitimate hope that there be more rather than less of this.

The problems with the extent of pain required for both pleasures that take the form of replenishment and pleasures like itching and comedy stimulate Socrates to consider whether there are other kinds of pleasure. Looking for pleasures that have no necessary admixture of pain, he suggests the pleasure that comes from contemplating ‘beauty of colour and form’ (51b) and, as ‘a less ethereal example’ the pleasure ‘which arises from smells.’ (51e)

We can add that, while it would certainly not affect the general argument that, contrary to what Philebus thinks, these activities have to have limits set to them if they are to give us pleasure, it is possible to engage in eating, drinking, and sex in ways that enable us to derive experiences that are more like this third kind of pleasure from them. Not all eating and drinking only provides relief from pain. Not all sex provides the same kind of ‘delight’ as scratching an itch.

Besides these sorts of pleasure being differentiated from the others by the absence of pain, they also fulfil us in a different way. In the case of the other pleasures, we want as much as possible of the experience. In this new type of pleasure, we are content with ‘a small amount’ in ‘pure’ form. (53b) As this would apply to eating, drinking, and sex, it does seem right that the person who can extract from these activities
another sort of pleasure than either relief from pain or the peculiar mix of pleasure and pain that is like scratching an itch is less likely to crave, a la Philebus, merely as much of the activity-sheer quantity- as h/she can manage to fit in. If so, it is clear that even though Socrates (and Plato) probably are giving a one-sided interpretation of the possible pleasures of eating, drinking, and sex, that does not contradict their fundamental point that these activities can play only a limited role in an overall mix.

Socrates’ main argument against the pleasures that are wanted in as large a quantity as possible is that the magnitude of pleasure requires an equal or even greater magnitude of pain. But he also has another way of appreciating what is wrong with someone ‘who when they are cured of hunger or thirst or any other defect by some process of generation are delighted at the process because it is a pleasure.’ (54e) He says there is something laughable about people who would rate this phenomenon very highly. The critique is that they prefer ‘generation’ over ‘being or essence’ (55a) rather like a person who, as Protarchus says, thereby showing an understanding of what could be wrong with this attitude, it is as if they would rather build ‘ships for the sake of ship-building. Instead of ’ship-building...for the sake of ships.’ (54b)

Protarchus is now convinced that ‘he who would make us believe pleasure to be a good is involved in great absurdities.’ (55a) However, in that all Socrates’ points with the exception of this last one have used the fact of concomitant pain to argue for the need to limit pleasure, he can be forgiven if inclined to think that the main reason Socrates thinks pleasure is not good is because he thinks pain is bad. If so, it would contradict the initial idea that pleasure and pain, rather like hot and cold, both need to be limited in order to produce the best mix. It is relevant, therefore, that Socrates now does make an argument which is less against pleasure than in favor of pain. He cites, as he does in many other dialogues, some of the virtues. He says:

Is there not an absurdity in arguing that... courage or temperance or understanding, or any other good of the soul is not really a good?-and is there not yet a further absurdity inn our being compelled to say that he who has a feeling of pain and not of pleasure is bad at the time when he is suffering pain, even though he be the best of men? (55b-c)

He is conceding, then, that there are some goods that unavoidably do involve at least an element of pain and so, unless we would go so far as to deny that they are goods, something that Protarchus for one has not prepared to deny, we can see how some pain must be added to the mix and therefore how, contrary to the impression some of Socrates’ own earlier arguments in this dialogue have created, pain per se is not necessarily bad and so pleasure and pain are, indeed, like hot and cold.17

Having completed their exploration of the kinds of pleasure, Socrates now turns to the kinds of knowledge. There are both ‘productive’ and ‘educational’ knowledge. (55d)

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16 See Nussbaum, 1986, 155 for this critique.
17 However, it should be noticed that Socrates and, for that matter Plato, are clearly missing the point only developed in recent times that some types of pain and some types of pleasure can inform one of whether something is good, much in the way that doctors can treat some pains as a symptom of illness. For this argument, See Blum and McHugh, 1984., esp. 117 and Raffel, 1992, 17-28.
Within both categories, further distinctions can also be made. For example, within productive knowledge—the whole realm of making things—one can distinguish forms of knowledge that are more exact from those that involve ‘guessing’ by whether the particular field is able to use ‘arithmetic, mensuration, and weighing.’ (55e) Music is one case of the former, the art of the builder a case of the latter because ‘the builder has his ‘rule, lather, compass, line and a most ingenious machine for straightening wood.’ (56b-c)

Whereas Protarchus is happy to conclude that arithmetic is the most exact form of knowledge, Socrates goes on to point out that even within this category, there are degrees of exactitude. For example, he distinguishes the use of computation in ‘trading’ from ‘philosophical geometry.’

Ample cases are offered to show that ‘the arts have different provinces and vary in their degrees of certainty.’ (57b) Now Socrates explains to Protarchus what we too may well have been wondering: ‘Why I have discussed the subject.’ (57a) His idea is that the same criterion that he has used to differentiate pleasures can now be seen to also differentiate forms of knowledge: Their agreement that some forms of knowledge are much more exact and depend less on guesswork means that, just as they were able to say that some pleasures were much purer than others, now they can be said to have learned that ‘one sort of knowledge is purer than another.’ (57b) Thus, Protarchus himself volunteers that the ‘mathematical and geometric sciences’ are purest and the branches of these ‘animated by the ...philosophic impulse’ are purest of all. (57d)

Protarchus thinks their discussion of the types of knowledge now is as complete as their discussion of pleasure has been but Socrates says they are forgetting the form of knowledge which, of them all, has the most ‘clearness and accuracy and the greatest amount of truth.’ (58c) He is referring to his own form of knowledge, dialectic. Protarchus is not convinced that this is the greatest or best or usefulest form of knowledge because he has heard Gorgias arguing that ‘the art of persuasion far surpassed every other.’ (58a) However, he becomes convinced once Socrates reminds him what their current issue is, namely what is clearest and most accurate rather than most useful. Dialectic deserves this title because it is seeking to discover things that have ‘eternal being’ not things that are ‘becoming.’ (59a)

Though Socrates does not make this explicit, we can note that another similarity between pleasure and knowledge has emerged. Just as there is a form of pleasure that was interested in becoming rather than being, now we see there is also a form of knowledge that is only interested in becoming rather than being, the art of persuasion.

Having identified the various forms of pleasure and knowledge, they now need to decide what ‘mix’ of them is most likely to produce the good life. Initially Protarchus thinks that they should ‘perhaps....mingle every sort of pleasure with every sort of wisdom’ (61d) but Socrates proposes that it will be ‘safer’ (61d) if they proceed more slowly, assessing each sort of pleasure and wisdom in turn.

Beginning with the types of wisdom, he wonders whether it will be sufficient just to include in the mix the purest types of wisdom, such as knowledge of ‘the divine circle and sphere.’ (62a) But Protarchus immediately objects that that would be ‘ridiculous.’
They decide every sort of knowledge, no matter how ‘impure and uncertain’ should be included.

And now, turning to pleasure, Protarchus makes a very important discovery, namely that he does not think it sensible to treated pleasure as they have just treated wisdom. Asked whether ‘we shall in like manner let them all go in at once’ he says no: ‘Let the purer ones in first.’ They end up saying that, whereas the mix should include all forms of wisdom, it should not include all forms of pleasure, only the pure and necessary ones. While this would obviously not rule out eating, drinking, and sex, it would tend to omit the less restrained forms of these activities, i.e. those that either depend, as we have seen, on maximizing prior pain or, like itching, so mix pain with the pleasure that it is not clear whether the activity is even best seen as a pleasure.

We can now say that Socrates has found one way to answer the question that set him and Philebus at loggerheads. His answer is that, while neither wisdom or pleasure is the good, still wisdom must be better than pleasure because if we consider both the varieties of wisdom and the varieties of pleasure, the conclusion we will reach is that wisdom must be better because whereas it seems ridiculous to exclude any of its varieties from a composition of the good life, it is not so ridiculous to exclude at least some of the varieties of pleasure out of the good life.

A further point is that knowledge also can be seen as better because it can be used to decide what pleasures to include in the mix whereas using the extent of pleasure as one’s criterion to decide what sorts of knowledge to include does not seem so advisable as their sheer intensity would be confused with value. Indeed, to the extent that the dialogue’s conclusion as to the best ingredients for the mix seem right, that provides some confirmation of this point since the categorising that has been integral to Socrates’ method is a case of him using a form of knowledge, i.e. knowledge of various pleasures and especially knowledge of differences among them, to assess pleasure.

However, see the point made in the previous footnote.
Cratylus

Cratylus begin with Hermogenes telling Socrates how mystified he is by the view of names that his friend Cratylus has just been defending. According to Cratylus, names are ‘natural and not conventional; not a portion of the human voice which men agree to use but that there is a truth or correctness in them, which is the same by nature for all, both Hellenes and barbarians.’(383a-b) Socrates begins exploring the issue by getting him to confirm that his own, contrasting, view is ‘that the name of each thing is only that which anybody agrees to call it.’ (385a)

As it is next established that he holds this view of language ‘whether the giver of the name be an individual or a city’, (385a) we might expect that Socrates is about to challenge him by anticipating Wittgenstein’s argument that there can be no private language because that would make communication impossible. But, as we shall see, Socrates’ objection to Hermogenes’ view is not really by the use of a Wittgenstein style argument and, while it does constitute a way of demonstrating the impossibility of a private language, actually it does more by suggesting, if not the impossibility, at least the inaccuracy of some Wittgenstein inspired views of language, notably John Searle’s notion that language is merely a set of ‘acoustic blasts’ whose meanings are entirely dictated by rules. (Searle, 1969, 3)

Socrates begins to ask Hermogenes to consider the implications of his view by getting him to agree that if:

I call a man a horse...you mean to say that a man will be rightly called a horse by me individually, and rightly called a man by the rest of the world. (385a)

Using this example, Socrates does get Hermogenes to see that if there is no one correct name, there is a problem but the problem he identifies is not that one would not be understood. It is that if it is acceptable for someone to call a thing whatever he likes, it becomes hard to see how one could ever locate a ‘falsehood.’ (385c) That is, how can it be wrong for me to call a man a horse if that is just my (particular) name for him?
Hermogenes is beginning to see that his view that 'there be so many names of each thing as everybody says there are' (385d) leads to a conclusion, i.e. that it is hard to see how there could be a falsehood, that he would not welcome. But he still does not see how there can be such a thing as a correct name. At this point he offers his strongest (because empirically based) argument against the view that there can be a correct name for a thing. No one calls a man a horse but:

In different cities and countries there are different names for the same things; Hellenes differ from barbarians in their use of names, and, the several Hellenic tribes from one another. (385e)

Socrates now embarks on the daunting task of trying to argue that, even though it is true that different cities behave as Hermogenes says, that does not mean that there can be no correct name for any thing.

His first move is to get Hermogenes to agree that speaking is one of our actions. As such, like any action it should not just be done ‘according to our opinion of them.’ (387a):

When, for example, we set out to cut something, can we do so in any way we please and with any chance instrument? (387a)

By analogy:

Names ought to be given...with a proper instrument, and not at our pleasure; in this and no other way shall we name with success. (387d)

If naming is an instrument, we can think about what we do when we name. While Hermogenes does not know what we do, suggesting that his sense that names can be completely arbitrary could stem from a lack of clarity as to what the purpose of names are, he readily accepts Socrates’ suggestion that what we are using names for is to ‘give information to one another and distinguish things according to their nature.’ (388b)

In common with other instruments, this one too will have to have been invented. Hermogenes agrees that the inventor or inventors of this, like other inventors, must be skilled. Certainly not everyone would have this skill. Socrates now asks who has the particular skill of assigning names. Herrmogenes again has trouble finding an answer. Socrates next makes it easier for him by asking a more specific question: ‘who gives us the names we use.’ (388d) Hermogenes can agree that what seems to ‘give us them’ (388d) is the law.

On the one hand, this image of how names appear to exist fits with his original position that names are conventions. But now that he has realized that the invention of these conventions must surely be as much if not more of a skill than the invention of other instruments, he is no longer so insistent on seeing the inventors of the conventions as just anyone. He does not resist Socrates’ suggestion that the person best placed to do this would be equivalent to the person best placed to invent any law, namely a legislator. It fits, then, that they consider the inventor of names a ‘skilled
Socrates’ points so far have done much to dispel the impression that the names of things are likely to be completely arbitrary. However, it has to be said that nothing established so far has done anything to explain how there can be correct names when there are different but equally valid languages. Socrates’ next point addresses this issue. He says that in making anything, the maker must use whatever material is available. For example, weaving in different parts of the world would not be able to use exactly the same materials to produce what are still roughly equivalent garments. In the case of language, ‘sounds and syllables’ (389d) are the local materials that the various legislators in each city must use for their compositions. So:

We must not misinterpret the fact that different legislators will not use the same syllables. For neither does every smith, although he may be making the same instrument for the same purpose, make them all with the same iron..And the legislator, whether he be Hellene or barbarian, is not therefore to be deemed...a worse legislator, provided he expressed the form of the name proper to each subject in whatever syllables this or that country makes no matter. (389d-90a)

That there are different languages, then, need not indicate that the names of things are arbitrary if the differing words can be seen as merely reflecting the fact that differing local materials mean that, even if the ‘legislators’ are expressing the same nature, they would need to use at least slightly different sounds to say it.

Now, still sticking with his analogy between language and other instruments, Socrates suggests that there is another important actor besides the legislator. Just as it is not, in the end, the carpenter who designs the shuttles but ‘the weaver who is to use them’ (390b) who determines ‘whether the proper form is given to the shuttle’ (390b) someone else besides the legislator must determine whether the names given to things are the right ones. The person equivalent to the weaver will be the ‘user’ of the names. While everyone uses names, it does make sense that this person cannot be everyone but someone with the critical capacity to arrive at judgments as to whether things are indeed properly named. The passage in which this person’s identity is arrived at is worth quoting in full. Attempting to identify the person, Socrates asks:

Socrates: Might not this be he who knows how to ask questions?

Hermogenes: Yes

Socrates: And how to answer them?

Hermogenes: Yes.

Socrates: And him who knows how to ask and answer you would call a dialectician?

Hermogenes: Yes; that would be his name. (390c)
While he does not seem conscious of what has occurred, the fact that Hermogenes has here arrived at what he explicitly refers to as a ‘name’ and one that he seems confident suits the person they are looking for by a process of questions and answers does provide some indication that it is indeed dialectics that is needed to assess the adequacy of names. Still, as that amounts to only one example of the process, we can empathize with Hermogenes statement that he finds:

A difficulty in changing my opinion all in a moment and I think I should be more readily persuaded if you would show me what this is which you term the natural fitness of names. (391a)

There follows a long section of *Cratylus* in which Socrates, utilizing, in keeping with what they arrived at, the dialectic method, does try to show how various names ‘express...in letters and syllables’ (390e) (what various things ‘by nature’ (390e) are.

It begins with Socrates suggesting that even some famous proper names were correctly given. (For example, Orestes, which means the man of the mountains had the right name because of the ‘mountain wildness’ (394e) of this hero’s nature. Similarly, Agamemnon, which means admirable for remaining was properly called because of his noteworthy ‘persevering in the accomplishment of his resolves.’ (395a)

Then Socrates shows that the names of some of the gods that persons have given them can be seen to be right because they reflect these gods nature. For example, since the word Pluto means wealth, this god is rightly called because he is conceived to give wealth. Or, as Hera means ‘the lovely one,’ (404c) she has the right name because, according to the tradition, she was so beautiful that she attracted Zeus’ love.

While admitting that he cannot explain how every natural phenomenon has a suitable name and sometimes resorting to the explanation that we can only understand how right the word for these things might be by realizing that the Hellenic word is derived from a foreign language, Socrates next shows the rightness of many of the names of these sorts of things. For example, the word for stars is right because it means ‘blinding light’ (409c) or the word for the seasons is right because it derives from a word meaning ‘divide’ (410c) and we can say that the seasons have the nature of dividing in the sense of separating things such as when it snows from when it is hot.

Even while offering quite convincing evidence that the names for many things do reflect something of those things’ nature, Socrates never claims either that he can analyze all names in this way or that ‘the legislators’ have necessarily gotten all the names right. It is the latter issue that becomes most prominent when he turns to the names of things that are presumably dearest to his heart. When Hermogenes asks him ‘how you would explain the names given to the virtues’, (411a) before he embarks on this task, Socrates complains

That the primeval givers of names were undoubtedly like too many of our modern philosophers who, in their search after the nature of things, are always getting dizzy from going round and round. (411b)
As a consequence, they misinterpreted the nature of these things and gave them the wrong names. Being dizzy:

Then they imagine that the world is going round and round and moving in all directions; and this appearance, which arises out of their own internal condition, they suppose to be a reality of nature; they think that there is nothing stable or permanent, but only flux and motion, and that the world is always full of every sort of motion and change. (411b-c)

His point is that the erroneous notion of the world as just flux and motion has caused them to misunderstand the nature of the virtues and so, in this instance, produce misleading names.

For example, the name for wisdom means either ‘perception of motion and flux’ (411d) or ‘the blessing of motion’ (411d) and Socrates thinks these ideas do not adequately capture the nature of wisdom. Or the word for judgement means ‘consideration of generation’ (411d) and Socrates would disagree that the focus of what needs judging is generation because that attends to becoming rather than being. With regard to justice, disagreements about its nature are even reflected in different versions of how the word fits so one person who things ‘that justice is the sun’ (413b) is impressed by the fact that the word for justice seems similar to the word for burning whereas another person, when confronted with this idea ‘answers with the satirical remark, ‘What is there no justice...when the sun is down.’ (413b)

Socrates has gone some way toward convincing Hermogenes that it is not the case that all names are as arbitrary as he originally thought. Reflecting this, Hermogenes praises him for having ‘hammered away manfully.’ (421c) But now he asks him whether he can also account for ‘the names which are the elements of all the other names and sentences.’ (422a) For example, whereas Socrates suggests that we get the Greek word for ‘good’ by combining the words for ‘admirable’ and ‘swift’ (422a) can he also account for why the words for both admirable and swift have been chosen?

In reply he suggests that, like ‘secondary’ names, ‘primary’ names are also chosen in an attempt to ‘show the nature of things, as far as they can be shown.’ (422e) The question now becomes how the first, most basic words, might have been selected in line with the principle that they too must attempt to show the nature of the things they are naming. Admitting that his answer can only be ‘truly wild and ridiculous’ (426b) he suggests that the letters for things were arrived at by deciding what sort of movements of the tongue in forming the various letters was most appropriate for expressing the nature of things to be named. For example, a Greek letter that requires ‘the tongue slips’ (427b) was chosen to be included in various words that have in common the expression of things that all feature smoothness. Or a letter that the legislator ‘observed to be sounded from within’ (427c) was used in words that share ‘a notion of inwardness.’ (427c)

Having offered this admittedly speculative idea, Socrates declares that he has done his best to account for how ‘the legislator seems to have created signs and names for every existing thing; and from these he proceeded to design compounds in order to perfect his imitation.’ (427c) Hermogenes seems satisfied and now asks Cratylus if this is what he meant when he said that names ‘are natural and not conventional.’ (383a)
Initially, Cratylus is pleased with how the discussion has developed, presumably because Socrates has produced a way of understanding how names need be no mere conventions. He says Socrates has managed ‘to give answers much to my mind.’ (428c) But, as Socrates begins to probe his position, a serious disagreement between them begins to emerge. They are able to agree that ‘names...are given in order to instruct and that naming is an art’ (428e). But then Socrates asks him if ‘this art grows up among men like other arts’ (429a) so that there are better and worse name legislators just as there are better and worse painters. It is here that Cratylus balks, claiming that legislators never fail. He claims ‘all names are rightly imposed.’ (429b)

His position is difficult to fathom. It can perhaps be suggested that he is using aspects of what Hermogenes and Socrates established, but only in a highly selective fashion. He would like the idea that what seemed so improbable to Hermogenes before they began, i.e. that even a proper name such as Orestes or Agamemnon might be seen to fit its subject. If so, one can perhaps say that these names are ‘theirs’, i.e. they belong with or to them to an extent we may not have thought. We might say anything else would not be, to the same extent, ‘them.’ If one then combines this with Socrates’ further idea that, unlike say normal parents, it is likely that the legislators of the names of things, the sort of things Cratylus is presumably really interested in such as the virtues, were highly skilled at naming. If so, one can perhaps convince oneself that those names would be a totally reliable source for information about those things. Such a view might seem even more convincing if we think as, we see later Cratylus does, that really the only way to know what a thing is is by what it is called. Furthermore, this view is consistent with one view (Augustine’s) that how we learn what a thing is by learning to name it.19

In response, Socrates tries to get him to give more careful consideration to how names actually function in language use. The interchange in which his argument is developed is worth quoting in full:

Socrates: ...What do you say to the name of our friend Hermogenes, which was mentioned before:-assuming that he has nothing of the nature of Hermes in him, shall we say that this is a wrong name, or not his name at all?

Cratylus: I should reply that Hermogenes is not his name at all, but only appears to be his, and is really the name of somebody else, who has the nature which corresponds to it.

Socrates: Must we not add that one who calls him Hermogenes does not speak falsely? For there may well be a doubt whether you can call him Hermogenes, if he is not. (429b-c)

Socrates is referring back to some banter that occurred in his discussion with Hermogenes. The way he began to establish that such a thing as a right name might be possible was by suggesting that Hermogenes’ own name was not merely, as

19 But note that Augustine’s view has been convincingly refuted by Wittgenstein. See Wittgenstein, 1958, esp. 2-16.
Hermogenes had been assuming, a convention but actually the wrong one for him because he was not (as his name in Greek indicates) a true son of Hermes because, unlike this god, he is ‘always looking for a fortune and never in luck.’ (384c)

Of course, even Cratylus cannot deny that, even if skilled legislators cannot, parents as they did in this case, gave someone the wrong name. What he does try to argue, though, is that when this happens, the consequence is not just that he should not be called this but that it only appears to be his name. To which Socrates replies that, while this certainly can be the wrong name for him, that does not mean we cannot call him that and so be understandably referring to him, albeit in a sense wrongly, the sense being that we do not capture his nature. By analogy, it is certainly imaginable that, while it is true that there could be a right name (rather than a mere convention) for a thing that does not mean that whenever we manage to refer to it that means we have the right name for it in the sense of the name that captures its nature.

Socrates now begins to be more precise than he was with Hermogenes about the way in which a name can capture (or not) a thing’s nature. Among other things, this discussion will provide us with additional understanding of what is blocking Cratylus from accepting that there can ever be a wrong name. They begin by agreeing with Socrates’ previous contention that namers are rather like painters in that both are attempting to imitate things. Socrates suggests that just as ‘in pictures you may either render all the appropriate colours...or there may be too many or too much of them...in like manner, he who by syllables and letters imitates the substance of things, if he renders all that is appropriate will produce a good image, or in other words a name; but if he subtract or perhaps adds a little, he will make an image but not a good one; when I infer that some names are well and others ill made. (431d). Doesn’t this show that ‘the artist of names may be sometimes good, or he may be bad.’? (431e)

But it is here the Cratylus manages an objection that admittedly does capture a peculiarity of names. He says:

But the case of language is different...if we add or subtract, or misplace a letter, the name which is written is not only written wrongly, but not written at all. (431e-2a)

It is right that, particularly if we have in mind proper names but even with other words as well, it can be said that one has not identified the thing is one does not get all its letter right. It is easier to see how a picture of a thing can be bad while still being a picture of the thing than how a name can have this property. So long as what is missing in the picture is not absolutely essential to our being able to recognize the things, we can still accept that we have a picture, however poor of X but if anything is missing from X’s name, we do say that is not his/its name at all.

But, without exactly denying that one can say in such cases that that is not his name whereas one would be less likely to say that is not his picture, Socrates, says this difference does not matter, basically because of his earlier idea that even an incorrect name can still refer to a thing. As he puts it now, allows features or elements not appropriate to the matter, and acknowledge that the thing may be named and described, so long as the general character of the thing which you are
describing is retained...even if some of the proper letters are wanting, still the thing is signified. (432e)

That is, some names are better than others because they do more to capture the nature of the things depicted but even the ‘wrong’ names can often do the job of conveying what thing we are attempting to refer to. One can still know who or what someone is trying to talk about even if it is true that the word they are using for the thing is not the ideal word for it.

At least to the extent that he prefers this conception to the alternative that all names are mere conventions, Cratylus now seems willing to accept the view of names put forward by Socrates, including the conclusion that some names of things are better than others.

Socrates now asks him ‘What is the use of names?’ (435d) Cratylus answers ‘that he who knows names knows also the things that are expressed by them.’ (435d) But, of course, if the names things are called by can be wrong, clearly just to know what something is called is *not* to know its nature. Or, as Socrates puts it:

> He who follows names in search after things...is in great danger of being deceived. (436b)

Cratylus tries to object that this would not be the case if the legislators had ‘knowledge’. (436c) While this is true, it has already been established that while skilled, they can also be misguided and so they certainly do not have, in every case, knowledge. In confirmation of this point, Socrates repeats his earlier point that in fact the legislators had a particular bias, ‘the assumption that all things are in motion and... flux.’ (436e) And this led to the names of many important things, especially the virtues, being unreliable. He concludes that ‘we must rest content with the admission that the knowledge of things is not to be derived from names.’ (439b)

While he also says at this point to Cratylus that ‘how real existence is to be studied or discovered is, I suspect, beyond you or me’ (439b) we can have some reservations about the definitiveness of this conclusion if we recall that talking earlier to Hermogenes, he proposed that the dialectician must adopt the role of overseeing the work of the legislator. While it would not be like Socrates to claim that dialectics can lead to knowledge of things, it is safe to assume that he would advocate it as a wiser way to attempt to grasp the nature of things than the way he and even Cratylus have just discovered to have clear-cut flaws associated with it.

What to make of this dialogue as a whole? While it is perfectly possible to read it as a self-contained and informative critique of two theories of language, it can be suggested that, more than any other dialogue we have interpreted, it benefits from being seen in the context of Socrates method in other dialogues. The point is that though Hermogenes’ and Cratylus’ theories of language are very different, one thing they have in common is that both would block believers in them from even considering the merits of the typical way a Socratic dialogue develops. If Socrates suggested to Hermogenes that we should not call a one-sided relationship a friendship or every person diving into a well courageous or a modest person temperate or a person with
correct opinions knowledgeable, Hermogenes simply would not be able to understand why it even matters what they are called because he would not be able to see that Socrates is not just changing names (as according to Hermogenes is his right) but attempting to revise our conception of these things’ nature.

If Socrates made the same suggestions to Cratylus, he would object that Socrates is taking on the illegitimate role of legislating, proposing drastic changes in our understanding of the nature of things, things that Cratylus would believe would not have had the names they have long been given if Socrates’ way of understanding them were to have even the slightest merit.

By the same token, we can say that the theory of the relation of names to things that Socrates develops in this dialogue is precisely the one that enables him to discourse with his interlocutors in the way he does in all the other dialogues we have been discussing. When he objects to Charmides or Critias that various ideas they have do not fully capture temperance, to Laches and Nicias that their ideas do not capture courage, to Phaedrus that the idea he has learned from Lysias does not capture love, etc., because he knows that these things can certainly be referred to by the terms his interlocutors use without these terms being the best names for the things in question, he is able to understand both what his interlocutors are trying to designate and how these things can still have other natures than the ones the interlocutors initially believe they have.
Timaeus

Timaeus, the main speaker in this dialogue, is given a rather challenging task. As he has ‘made the nature of the universe his special study’ he will discuss ‘the generation of the world and...the creation of man.’ (sic) (27a) Socrates role is to listen which he is happy to do because Timaeus has agreed to entertain him today. (17b) But Socrates does offer one key intervention before Timaeus begins. He says he should be ‘calling upon the gods.’ (27b) Timaeus does so and, furthermore, underlines this orientation by explaining that he is endeavouring not to blaspheme. (29c)

So far, then, we are expecting an account that is not blasphemous but also entertaining. One additional feature is also insisted on. Timaeus says it will be ‘enough if we adduce probabilities as likely as any others.’ (29c) What most commentators have taken from Timaeus’ acceptance that his will be only a likely story is that he is admitting that he does not actually know whether all he tells us is accurate. In this respect he is indeed fortunate because certainly his explanations for both the universe’s and our existence are wildly at variance with the discoveries of modern science.

However, there is another version of the requirement that the account be likely that will retain an interest in the dialogue even for those with superior scientific knowledge. Likely can mean in keeping with all the facts that Timeaus does know, in other words respectful of visible reality rather than sheer fantasy. Can one be entertaining while also neither blaspheming nor flying in the face of reality? It will be suggested that in so far as we can appreciate that he is orienting to all three of these requirements, Timeaus’ approach will at once seem more intelligible and more successful than would otherwise be the case.20

20 Here see Derrida’s question: ‘Does one do justice...by continuing to rely on the alternative logos/mythos? We shall suggest that Timaeus avoids both the lack of reality of myths and the aspiration to full scientific validity of (in Derrida’s sense) logos. We will discover what Derrida would agree is a ‘third genre of discourse.’ (Casey, 1998, 354, footnote quoting Derrida, 1987, 266)
As his way of beginning to depict the origin of the universe (by which he means our solar system) and everything in it, Timaeus suggests that it had a creator, i.e. it has not always been here but one thing he cannot describe is this creator:

The father and maker of all this universe is past finding out, and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would be impossible. (28c)

While this is a good start at not being blasphemous, his next idea is more interesting because besides continuing not to be blasphemous, it also manages to be (in the sense that it does fit with the facts) likely. He says:

Finding the whole visible sphere not at rest, but moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion, out of disorder he brought order. (30a)

Assuming, as he must, that God is good, certainly his creation should not be merely chaotic but, equally, Timaeus must also be noticing that the universe that he sees is orderly. So in suggesting that the creator created order out of disorder, Timaeus is managing both not to be blaspheming and not to be flying in the face of known reality.

Just that the universe is moving in an orderly way, however, is hardly a sufficient accomplishment to attribute to a God or, for that matter, a specific enough description of reality as seen by Timaeus. What he says next about the universe offers a more enthusiastic compliment to its creator. He says it cannot be ‘like any imperfect thing.’ (30c) To put this positively, then, he is saying that the universe is perfect. Of course, we will need to see both what he means and then how it relates to the two requirements of not blaspheming and fitting the facts.

His central claim in this respect is that God ‘made the world in the form of a globe.’ (33b) It is an all-inclusive globe, including within it all the other things. It is not stationary, its orderly motion taking the form of ‘circular movement.’ (34a) A first version of why this form seems perfect to him is ‘that it should be free from old age and unaffected by disease.’ (33a) As it is external forces such as heat and cold that can age things or make them ill, the fact that it is an all-encompassing circle means that it cannot be disturbed by the externals because, for it, there is no external. The particular characteristic of its perfection that is being argued for here is its permanent endurance. While it cannot exactly be eternal because in that case God could not have created it, it is also not finite. It is as it were the next best thing to eternal, having been created, infinite. It will keep circling forever. A second aspect of its perfection for Timaeus is just his sense that because it has ‘its extremes in every direction equidistant from the center’ (33b) a circle is the most perfect shape.

So far we have seen two ways in which he can legitimately says its being a circle circling forever with nothing outside it makes the universe perfect but can he also say such a shape is likely? The likeliness consists in the fact that Timaeus can actually witness aspects of the universe moving in orderly fashion but also moving in ways that suggest the whole thing is a circle. Thus he sees the probability that his account could be accurate in the fact that whatever goes away, e.g. the sun, the moon, the stars also keeps coming back.
Of course some of these points that seem probable to Timeaus, notably that there is nothing outside the solar system, have easily been refuted by modern science. He now makes a series of statements about the world that have certainly not been challenged by any subsequent discoveries. He says the world has no eyes, ears, mouth, hands or feet. While we cannot deny these facts, what we can do is doubt their relevance. Why does Timeaus think it worth noting that the solar system does not have various properties that only we, or in some cases other animals, have? We begin to understand his rationale if we appreciate how he explains these ‘absences’. He suggests that the world has no mouth or for that matter no organs of elimination because:

Since there was nothing which went from him or came to him:

He goes on to say that this lack of a mouth reflects the fact that he is ‘self-sufficient,’ for there was nothing besides him.

Similarly, his lack of hands is because ‘he has no need to take anything or defend himself against anyone.’ His lack of feet stem from the fact that his form of movement does not require ‘the whole apparatus of walking.’ In every case his explanation is that the reason the world does not have any of these things is because it does not need them.

Timeaus’ overt reason for mentioning these lacks is to provide another demonstration of how excellent and even perfect the creator has made it, now in the sense of its complete self-sufficiency. But it is hard not to notice that, as we do have all these things, the additional message being hinted at is how imperfect we are. Furthermore, if it is these sorts of things that make us imperfect, because we are certainly not inclined to treat having a mouth or feet as among our flaws, we are starting to see that we have limits of which we are not normally aware. The forcible realization of limits can be the stuff of either tragedy or comedy. However, it is surely more apt to treat these as comic rather than tragic flaws unless we are prepared to rue the facts that we have mouths and feet.

If Timeaus is introducing an element of comedy (at our expense) into his account, that means he is beginning to succeed at his third challenge. His account is starting to be entertaining. Also, as we suggested by remarking that no scientist is going to dispute his observations that the universe lacks eyes, etc. his story continues to be likely. But, if Timaeus is starting to make fun of what is, after all, at least one of God’s creations, a question that must be faced is how this mockery does not violate the third precept by amounting to blasphemy.

The general answer will be that Timaeus is able to escape the charge of blasphemy, even while making fun of one of God’s creations, because he does not think God is fully responsible for everything that we are. To explain, a much more detailed version of Timeaus’ account is necessary. First he says that besides creating the physical universe, God also created the race of other gods, e. g. Zeus. We can note that had Timaeus not recognized the existence of these, given conventional thought in his time and place, he would really have been guilty of blasphemy. Even Socrates never questions the existence of Zeus and his like.

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21 Timaeus calls the universe ‘he’.
The way Timeaus thinks God exempts himself from full responsibility for the creation of humans is by, with regard to us, stipulating only general parameters and leaving the details to the lesser gods. With regard to the task of creating us, he quotes the creator addressing the lesser gods as follows:

The part of them worthy of the name immortal, which is called divine and is the guiding principle of those who are willing to follow justice and you- of that divine part I will myself sow the seed, and having made a beginning I will hand the work over to you. And do ye then interweave the mortal with the immortal and make and beget living creatures, and given them food, and make them grow, and receive them again in death. (41c-d)

He also adds additional instructions. However the final product is constructed, it should have ‘the faculty of sensation.’ Included in this ‘they must have love in which pleasure and pain mingle. And finally ‘fear and anger.’ (42a-b)

Timeaus actually says that the reason Gode gives the lesser gods the task and these instructions is ‘that he might be guiltless of future evil in any of them.’ (42d) In terms of our concerns, this is to say that so long as the real joke at our expense is our capacity for evil (which still needs to be shown of course) then Timeaus’ mockery of us is no blasphemy toward the creator, since he is not responsible for that aspect of us. But if his account thus far exempts Timaeus from blaspheining God, it also leaves him with two glaring dilemmas. First, will he not be blaspheining, if not God, then certainly the lesser gods, Zeus and his colleagues, if it is how they create us that is responsible for us doing evil? Second, how can our capacity for evil be funny and so the source of comedy and therefore the entertainment that Timeaus is charged to provide? Furthermore, will Timeaus be able to do both these things without departing from his third requirement? It still must all be likely, and so no departure as far as he knows from the way our bodies actually are constructed.

First he says the gods decided how to give us the capacity to be just. ‘Imitating the physical shape of the universe’ they created what ‘we now term the head.’ (44d) The rest of the body is designed to enable us to move but in a way that will make these parts ‘servant’ of the head. (44d) Our form of motion is to be not circular, like the universe, but ‘mostly in a forward direction’ and it is in order to accomplish this that we are given hands and legs. (45a)

Next Timaeus offers an account of why we have two parts of our faces, eyes and a mouth. His explanation of the presence of eyes is straightforward enough. The gods ‘contrived the eyes to give light.’ (45b) Clearly without access to light we would not be able to move very well. However, his explanation of the existence of mouths is more surprising. He refers to the power of speech whereas, since the gods work is at such a preliminary stage, it would have seemed much more logical to attribute mouths to our need to eat and drink. (47c)

What Timaeus says next explains why he is not yet in position to assign the more obvious function to the mouth:

Thus far in what we have been saying, with small exception, the works of intelligence have been set forth and now we must place by the side of them
in our discourse the things which come into being through necessity for the
creation of this world is the combined work of necessity and mind. (47e-48a)

In producing us, these gods are not omnipotent. Nor can they merely follow the
creator’s instructions (to give us the capacity for sensations of pleasure, pain, fear, hope, etc.) They must do these things in a way that also supplies us with what is necessary. We can guess that the reason the eating and drinking function of our mouths has not yet been depicted is that Timeaus will be attributing this, not to our possessing intelligence but to being confronted with necessities. We can also guess that needing to allow for necessities as well as intelligence will play a major role in how the design for us that the gods will come up with will at once enable us to do evil and enable them not to feel responsible for the evil that we do. However, not only does this remain to be seen. Also it is still very questionable whether they can do this in a way that besides not being blasphemous, will also be entertaining now in the sense that, as far as possible given what is necessary for us, our bodies are designed not to facilitate evil (so we can be laughed at if we do it). Finally, will it all be likely by managing to be a description of what our bodies are actually like?

Before beginning his detailed description of why our bodies are the way they are, Timeaus reminds his listeners of the instructions the ultimate creator gave to the lesser gods. The gods must allow us to be subject to:

First of all, pleasure, the greatest incitement to evil; then pain, which deters from good also rashness and fear, two foolish counsellors; anger hard to be appeased, and hope easily led astray. (69d)

While it is undeniable that we have all these sensations, it is tempting to object that the creator is being overly fearful of their results. But Timaeus would say we are objecting only because we are taking for granted the very thing he is going to entertain us with, the ingenious construction of our bodies. That is, how our bodies can let us experience pleasure without it being all that likely to incite evil; pain without it being likely to deter good; fear without it like to be a foolish counsellor, etc. It is to a detailed account of the ingenuity of our anatomy that Timaeus now turns.

The first thing he speaks of the gods giving us are necks and whereas the most obvious way to understand them is as serving the purpose of connecting our heads to the rest of us, Timeaus emphasizes a different aspect of them. We already heard how precious and special what is in our heads is. His idea of the neck is that it forms a ‘boundary’ keeping what is best in us ‘apart’ from the rest. (69e) Yet, if what is in our heads is the only good bit of us, then surely the gods have hardly made it easy for us not to be deterred from doing good, to avoid listening to foolish counsellors, etc. That this is not how Timeaus sees the rest of our bodies immediately becomes clear when we see how he begins to interpret some of the things that are below the neck.

First he suggests that there is a part of us that, while it cannot reason can still ‘join with it.’ (70a) This part is ‘endowed with courage and passion and contention.’ (70a) He is thinking, of course, primarily of the heart but what is most noteworthy is the way he remarks on the ingenuity both of where it has been placed and what it does. Its location is good because it is much nearer the head than some of the other parts he will
discuss. The head’s ally is not too far away. But also when ‘the might of passion was roused by reason making proclamation of any wrong assaulting them from without or being perpetrated by the desires within’ (70b) it is the case that the whole body is going to need to do something. He means that when one’s head and heart join in believing that something wrong is about to happen, action will be called for. What he admires is how the heart can enable this by being ‘the fountain of the blood which raises through all the limbs.’ (70b) So now we see how Timaeus can argue that the gods have given us not just the ability to recognize injustice (thanks to the head) but also the ability to be roused and even competent to resist it (thanks to the heart).

We know, as does Timaeus, that there is another quite important organ that is near the heart, the lung. Timaeus has a way of thinking that make both what and where this is equally ingenious. According to him, what it is is ‘soft and bloodless’ (70c) so it is quite different from the heart. And what it can do is ‘receive the breath.’ (70c) So far he might be anatomically correct but the ingenuity of it only becomes clear when he explains that, as much as he admires the heart, he is also concerned about it. The heart facing the sort of situations just described will ‘swell and become inflamed.’ (70c) It will be palpitating. While in such a state, while injustice could be fought, there is also a clear danger that passion might not be joined with reason. What the creator called ‘the foolish counsellors’ (69d) could easily prevail. Timeaus’ basic idea is that the nature and placement of the lung is an ingenious attempt to help us avert these dangers. It provides ‘a soft spring’ (70d) that can serve to cool a beating heart. Perhaps we experience this potential function of the lungs that Timeaus is pointed to when, before deciding what to do about something that has made us furious, we follow the advice to take a deep breath.

In order for us to get what we need and also to experience, as the creator demanded, pleasure, we must desire food and drink. Obviously, in order to offer his theory of how the gods dealt with these problems, one thing Timeaus will need to discuss is the stomach. He suggests that our stomachs have been placed farther away from our heads than our hearts have been so that ‘the best part’ (71a) will be less likely to be subject to their influence. It seems strange that he explains this location as so there is ‘as little noise and disturbance as possible’ (71a) until we remember the fact that our stomachs often do rumble. Timeaus is saying that where our stomachs are is good because, though they will try to tell our heads what to do, where they are means we are protected against necessarily having to listen to them. Here is one example of a pain (hunger pains) that could deter good actions. Ingeniously, the gods have put them in a place that helps up combat their influence.

At this point, Timeaus offers a tribute even to our small and large intestines. Accepting that food and drink are not just necessary but also
sources of great pleasure, he says that we are inclined toward gluttony and, because of it, disease. Against these possibilities, ‘the convolution of the bowels’ helps ‘so that food might be prevented from passing quickly through and compelling the body to require more food, thus producing insatiable gluttony.’ (73a)

We know that the creator dictated that we are mortal beings. A major problem that the gods faced was how to protect us, not against dying as that is beyond their mandate, but against dying too soon. It is in response to this problem that Timaeus points to the great value of flesh; how it can insulate us from many dangers. It can:

Serve as a protection against the summer heat and against the winter cold, and also against falls, softly and easily yielding to external bodies, like articles made of felt... (74b-c)

Timeaus notices, though that one thing the gods did not do was make our heads fleshy but he thinks, that all things considered, particularly the fact of our mortality, that this was actually a good idea. While it is true that, because we do not have fleshy heads, our heads are much more vulnerable to accidents than other parts of our bodies, an unfortunate fact about flesh leads to the conclusion that, on balance, it was better to not make our heads fleshy. The trouble is that the presence of too much flesh tends to dull perception. If the gods had given us fleshy heads, our type

would have had a life twice or many times as long as it now has and also more healthy and free from pain. But our creators, considering whether they should have made a longer-lived race which was worse, or a shorter-lived race which was better, came to the conclusion that everyone ought to prefer a shorter span of life.. (75b-c)
In this aspect of the design of the head, the gods have had to give up one thing (very long life) in order to protect another thing (our intelligence). In that it is designed in such a way that no such compromise between what is necessary and what is good is needed, it can be said that Timeaus gives us a reason to be particular admirers of the mouth. We said how it enables us to do what is best, i.e. speak, but now he notices that it can also do what is necessary (and also of course pleasurable) eat and drink. It can do both because it has the ability not just to take in (food and drink) but also to let out (speech) (75e).

And his final point about the head even gives us a reason to admire the fact that there is normally hair on top of it. Timeaus sees this as the gods’ way of giving our heads at least some protection against the elements given the fact that, on balance flesh there would not have been a good idea. (76c-d)

We have a sense of why Timeaus thinks we have the bodies we do. Having been so constructed, what are our lives like? The gods have not made us fully grown. Growth occurs when ‘meats and drinks...come in from without and are comprehended in the body.’ (81c) Thanks to this nourishment we ‘grow great.’ (81c) However, this is not to imply that, given the way we are constructed, that there are not bound to be both conflicts within us, e.g., between the head, the heart, and the stomach and dangers from without our bodies, in particular our heads, being quite fragile. Even if we are lucky enough to avoid accidents from without, eventually our bodies:

Having undergone many conflicts with many things in the course of time...are no longer able to...assimilate the food which enters...In this way every animal is overcome and decays, and this affliction is called old age. (81c)
We know that it has been determined that we must die. Timeaus suggests that as long as we die at this point, even how we die has been ingeniously designed. Such a death, he thinks will be ‘the easiest of deaths...accompanied with pleasure rather than pain’ (81e) presumably because, if our bodies are no longer able to function properly, are likely to lose a strong desire to keep living. As some confirmation of his idea, one does hear some people in their nineties who are becoming very frail say that they have ‘had enough.’

Timaeus also recognizes, as he must, that there are deaths not of old age ‘caused by disease or produced by wounds.’ (81e) It is clear how Timaeus can continue to admire the work of the gods if we die so long as it is of old age. It was the creator who decreed that we have to die and what they have done is arranged it to potentially occur at a time when it can even be, at least in Timaeus' opinion, pleasant. But how can he also admire the design of our bodies while facing the fact that we are subject to so many diseases?

In considering the causes of disease he asks us to remember that the gods were not just ordered to produce a being that would die. They were also tasked to make a being capable of sensations, notably the sensations of pleasure and pain. Hunger pains are a typical example. We saw that the gods ingeniously situated the stomach far away from the head. Knowing our proneness to gluttony they tried to encourage us not to pay too much attention to these pains. But that does not mean, particularly if, as is still said today, we do not ‘use our heads’ that, particularly because we are averse to pain, we would still devote more energy to assuaging even the slightest hunger pains than is good for us.

In general, Timaeus can manage to not deny the fact of disease while continuing to admire the construction of our bodies by attributing most diseases to violations of the design of our bodies driven by too great an interest in avoiding any pain or experiencing as much immediate pleasure as possible. In our example, by paying too much attention to our stomachs.
Now Timeaus goes on to consider what he calls ‘disease of the mind.’ (86b) He suggests excessive pains and pleasures can even cause this:

For a man who is in great joy or great pain, in his unreasonable eagerness to attain the one and to avoid the other, is not able to see or hear anything rightly; but he is mad, and is incapable of any participation in reason. (86b-c)

Madness does exist but since it is certainly based in the head that would seem to provide a problem for the unstinting praise that Timaeus reserves for how the gods designed this organ. But, to the extent that madness has the cause he says it has (and this is not implausible), he is not contradicting himself. It is when, as it is still said we are ‘out of our minds’ due, in his opinion to excessive orientation to sensations, and so not anything inherent in the minds themselves that this organ leads us astray.

Madness being a producer of evil actions, Timaeus would seem also to have a theory of evil that does not just blame the gods. However, the theory only works if we assume that everyone who commits evil is mad. Does Timaeus have a way to face the fact that there are plenty of evil acts committed by people who, to all appearances, do have their wits about them. Does he, on the other hand, have to either deny that this form of evil occurs or concede that he is, after, excessive in his praise of the capacity of the head to achieve justice?

In attempting to answer this question, it will be helpful to look more carefully at how Timeaus defines mental illness. He says, reasonably enough, that it amounts to ‘a want of intelligence’ (86b) but then adds that ‘there are two kinds: to wit madness and ignorance.’ (86b) (Emphasis added). We should not let the fact that the second type violates usage distract us from seeing what it is saying about the relationship between having a well-designed head and the problem of
justice. It seems there is another way in which a head can lose its way without ceasing to be, because of its design, the main force in potentially making us just. Our heads can suffer, so much so that Timaeus can consider such suffering a disease, through ‘bad education.’ (86e) Our heads per se, then, are not responsible for evil but they are capable of it. Evil happens when our heads are distracted either by an excessive pursuit of pleasure and excessive avoidance of pain or by not being given the right sort of education.

Concerning the need for this education, Timeaus suggests that it is not just the body that needs food. The head needs the ‘food’ appropriate to it. In its case, the nourishment needed is ‘to cultivate the arts and all philosophy.’ (88b) He formulates this form of education as the essential exercise the head needs to stay healthy, adding though that, as it would also not be good ‘when a weak or small frame is the vehicle of a great and mighty soul’, (87d) it is advisable that our bodies too be exercised. What Timaeus particularly recommends for this purpose is ‘gymnastic’ (89d), presumably thinking that this is a good example of a pain that we would be well advised not to let act as a deterrent.

What to make of Timeaus’ account, considered both as a whole and in relation to all the other dialogues we have studied? Timeaus, like Socrates, can be seen as a theorist of the sources of good and evil. And, with regard to this problem, their answers are actually identical. Evil, they think, is unintentional because it is a product either of a faulty education or poor judgment in pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain. But though their basic theories are identical, this is not to say that Timeaus is not adding something. Since it is undeniable that we are interested in pleasure and pain and that ignorance is another potential characteristic of us, Socrates’ basic position can appear to explain evil only by attacking our very nature. He can appear, then, to be complaining about the imperfection of our bodies, bodies that after all do crave pleasure, fear pain, and are quite capable of ignorance.
It is as a way of countering this particular objection to Socrates’ views that Timeaus’ overall account becomes most relevant. He is agreeing that our bodies are imperfect. Were they perfect they would be symmetrical; we would not even have arms and legs, much less that peculiar long bit that separates our heads from the rest of our bodies. But these and other ‘imperfection’ actually help us, as far as possible, to avoid evil. Timeaus’ account leaves us, as it were, with one less excuse. First this means that, with his account as supplement, Socrates’ ideas do not require making unrealistic demands on our bodies. But also it means that it seems very wrong for us to feel sorry for ourselves if we do commit evil. We seem more figures of fun, with even our bodies imperfections no source of tragedy because helping us resist doing things that we persist in doing anyway.

Timeaus is not blaspheming (because our imperfections are either ingenious devices to protect us from self harm and evil, necessary, or both). He has produced a likely story (because even though, as we must nowadays, we can doubt he knows why we have the bodies we do, still nothing he says contradicts their actual anatomical features). Finally, by giving us something to laugh at, i. e. us, he has managed to be entertaining.
One limitation of the method of interpreting separate dialogues is that it could blind us to ways in which they are related. The most obvious way in which they are related is that all have the same author. He is an author whose image over time has been as subject to different and conflicting interpretations as any of the individual dialogues. By moving from interpreting his texts to interpreting our interpretations of them we should be in a position to supply another, certainly not definitive but, hopefully, credible version of Plato.

In our view, he appears to return to material but always in ways that do not merely repeat. Initial examples are the differing discussions of courage in *Laches* and *Protagoras*. Firstly, with the idea that the particular thing the courageous, as distinct from the merely foolhardy, need to know is how to measure immediate versus long-range pleasure and pain, one can say that by the time of *Protagoras* he has finally arrived at an idea that could have rescued Nicias from the charge that he was merely engaged in a cowardly attempt to avoid any risk at all. Plato has found a specific form of knowledge that those managing to be courageous would indeed require. Second, with the later dialogue’s discussion of the unity of the virtues, Plato has managed to arrive at a general version of what, in *Laches*, appeared only to apply to two virtues, courage
and wisdom. So the earlier insight that courage and wisdom must be integrated has been developed into a principle for the virtues as a whole.

Another way in which material resurfaces is that Plato becomes able to make a topic of what he has hitherto been using without being explicit and, possibly, conscious about it. An example is the issue of the teaching of virtue as it is dealt with, on the one hand, in *Lysis*, *Charmides*, and *Laches* and, on the other hand in *Protagoras* and *Meno*. While in the earlier dialogues Plato was using Socrates’ teaching ability to help drive the action, it is only in the later dialogues that having this ability to teach virtue becomes a phenomenon that he can theorize the possibility of, which is to say, make into a topic. Similarly, right from the beginning Socrates has been depending on the fact that there can be false opinions. If not, there would be nothing for him to criticize in the views of friendship, courage, temperance, virtue, etc. that his interlocutors propose. It is only, however, by the time of *Theaetetus* that the possibility of these false opinions—when and why they are likely to occur—becomes a topic he is able to address.

As to how such teaching, whether of virtue or what is wrong with particular opinions actually is possible, that becomes sufficiently clear first in *Meno* (and again in *Theaetetus*) because the characteristic quality of one who cannot teach, i.e. that they have only right opinion but not knowledge, is not yet articulated even in *Protagoras*. As we saw, this distinction between right opinion and knowledge was developed, especially in *Meno* as part of an attempt to understand the limits even of good leaders (but not good teachers) such as Pericles. Pericles cannot pass on his own goodness because, it not being secure—tied down— for him in the way knowledge is, it is no more than a matter of opinion.

The treatment of Pericles can remind us that the reuse of the same example is another way in which material appears more than once in the dialogues. His limitations were also a topic earlier, in *Gorgias*. But even when returning to the same example, Plato is not at all standing still. The later idea that Pericles’ flaw was an inability to teach stemming from his having opinions but not knowledge manages to give an explanation of why he fails whereas the earlier idea that he was reluctant to challenge the Athenians reads more like just a description.

Another area where repetition can be seen is in the asking of what is questions. *Charmides* asks what is temperance. *Laches* asks what is courage. *Lysis*, what is friendship. *Gorgias*, *Meno*, and *Theaetetus* the same question about respectively rhetoric, virtue, and knowledge. Even in the early dialogues, as we stressed, since in the course of not directly answering much about the subject under discussion actually is revealed, Socrates’ own ‘inability’ is ironic, what we did not stress at the time is that, in later dialogues, based on what we have come to expect, Socrates sometimes surprises us. For example, in *Gorgias*, when pressed by Polus, he does himself cease to profess total ignorance and instead tells us something about rhetoric, i.e. that it is, in the realm of the soul, what cooking is in the realm of the body. And in *Meno*, when faced with his interlocutor’s continuing struggles to answer the what is virtue question, Socrates himself supplies him with a property of it, i.e. that it is accompanied by knowledge. As neither an analogy to a thing nor a single property of it constitutes a full definition, Plato’s Socrates, even in the later dialogues, cannot be
said to have lost his ignorance—he is still Socrates—but by these additions to his repertoire he is certainly a less limited figure than he formerly was.

To further consider links between the dialogues, we can also attend to another aspect of Plato’s treatment of rhetoric, the fact that besides analysing it in Gorgias, he analyses it again in Phaedrus. One thing does remain the same, the conclusion that while rhetoric can be used for bad ends, it can also be used for good ones. But it is worth looking at the different ways he gets there. Firstly, while in both dialogues Socrates wants to argue that rhetors actually must know something, in Gorgias this has the status merely of something Gorgias affirms out of shame whereas by the time of Phaedrus, a fact about rhetoric has been discovered that does make such knowledge necessary. Since one will be best able to convince persons if one’s misleading argument is only slightly different from the reality, even would-be misleading rhetors will benefit from knowing the truth about their subject. But even if one has firm knowledge of the topic, that still leaves open the question of why one would tell it to others. It is by way of answering this question that, in Gorgias, Plato has Socrates offer his analogy. A rhetor who refuses to speak the truth is like a cook rather than a doctor because he merely flatters rather than offers the treatment that is good for us. In Phaedrus this gets revised into the idea that such rhetors are like doctors but doctors who have totally forgotten the whole point of what they are able to do, e.g. by making a patient vomit without even considering why that treatment might be a good idea.

Managing to come up with the latter analogy does make the critique of bad rhetors much more defensible both because being able to produce an effect without having thought through the consequences for the audience’s well-being does seem a defect of rhetors who are indifferent to the truth and because, while some of us might be reluctant to accept that, in the scheme of things, doctors actually are more beneficial than really good cooks, presumably none of us would want to be doctors who think it is a sufficient display of their expertise to produce vomit at will.

Probably reflecting the fact that, by the time he wrote Phaedrus he had a better understanding both of why rhetors to be successful would benefit from knowledge and of what a bad rhetor was doing wrong, Plato no longer needed always to condemn what does seem on the face of it and did seem to the author of Gorgias the most nefarious feature of rhetoric, its ability to argue both for and against the same thing. In Phaedrus even this is seen as allowable, albeit only in cases where what the rhetor knows first is that some subjects have more than one side to them and second, like a good doctor, that different audiences will benefit from being ‘treated’ with different parts of the whole.

Without changing his basic belief, first displayed in exchanges with Callicles in Gorgias, that many pleasures are not as good as we think they are, it is remarkable how much more rounded Plato’s analysis of pleasure is by the time he wrote Philebus. Most responsible for the difference is the discovery of a new way of reflecting on pleasure. In Gorgias, Socrates’ preferred analogy that he is like a doctor is perhaps limiting him more than Plato realized. As a doctor would, the fact noticed about pleasure is how harmful it can be. Philebus moves to what is not a doctor’s but a philosopher’s question about pleasure, i.e. what property it would have to have to be the good.
While the answer, self-sufficiency, means that it is still the case that pleasure cannot be as good as we tend to think it is, there is the consequence that, in so far as there are pleasures than can co-exist with what, because it is not self-sufficient, pleasure does need, i. e. various sorts of accompanying wisdom, there is no need to be dismissive of all pleasures. The upshot is a much less punitive view of many pleasures, namely those that cannot be said to be unwise, than Gorgias was able to make available.

Another way to see development in Philebus is by noting, as we did in Meno what more Plato now is able to say about what is questions. Even more than what is virtue, the question of what is the good is a matter that it is surely Socratic to maintain ignorance. To be sure the ignorance is ironic but still it is ignorance. As in Meno the ignorance dictum was relaxed to the extent that Socrates was able at least to identify a property of virtue, its being accompanied by knowledge, now in Philebus we are even given a property of the good, i. e. self-sufficiency.

An additional topic that resurfaces in a later dialogue is the phenomenon of sophistry but certainly a much clearer picture of sophists’ nature emerges from Sophist than from Protagoras. The idea that sophists basically are only pretending to be able to do something remains. However, what appears to have occurred to Plato is that, if this is what identifies a sophist, then, if one can articulate what they are really like and who (appearances to the contrary) they are really unlike, that can actually be a way to fully characterize them. That is, because of their character as attempted imitators, all one needs to know about them is who they are like and unlike. At the same time, with regard to method, since the analysis in The Sophist is virtually nothing but metaphors, Plato has managed to show that, at least when dealing with some topics, metaphoric reasoning can be even more useful than its (very limited) deployment in Gorgias revealed it to be.

Finally, it is worth noting that toward the end of his career, Plato was, for the first time, able to write about a topic that he had never dealt with at length before, the body. The possibility of Timeaus depends on a realization that once he had invented a very particular way of talking about the body, entertaining, not blasphemous, and only a likely story, even it could be analyzed without any need to depart from his fundamental commitments such as to the good, to the virtues, to irony, and to not claiming to know.

In conclusion, the particular Plato who has emerged from our twelve interpretations is someone who never stopped developing though even his earliest works are still fecund after well over two thousand years. Furthermore, he develops without ever exactly changing his mind. This feat is possible because he was constantly able to realize more and more that the way he started (the tradition founded by Socrates) makes possible.
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