But Socrates, what is it that you do?
Education and the Discourse of Plato’s Socrates

by

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ABSTRACT

BUT SOCRATES, WHAT IS IT THAT YOU DO?
EDUCATION AND THE DISCOURSE OF PLATO’S SOCRATES

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In this dissertation, I attempt to determine whether or not the discourse of Plato’s Socrates is educational in its nature. I conclude that Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination is essential to the educational enterprise specifically because it creates opportunities for individuals to give consideration to their opinions about human excellence, deliberate upon them carefully, and consider whether or not they are persuaded by the reasons that they use to justify their beliefs about human excellence. In this way, Socrates’ discourse creates opportunities for individuals to educate themselves about human excellence, thereby becoming not just independent learners, but human beings whose beliefs about human excellence are truly their own, and are not just received opinions. In other words, through his discourse, Socrates creates opportunities for individuals to free themselves from being subject to the tyranny of tradition and popular opinion with respect to their beliefs about human excellence. This is an important step in the development of true citizens capable of genuine, responsible deliberation concerning what is best for their community or state as a whole.

However, despite its potential educational benefits, Socrates’ cross-examination does not, and cannot, constitute a complete educational “method” or “programme” by
itself. There is no single form of discourse that qualifies as “educational”; instead, education is an activity that must make use of many different forms of discourse if it is to achieve its aim of improving human beings by directing their attention (and activity) towards the good. Moreover, although Socrates’ discourse can make an important contribution to the education of human beings when utilized the right way, in the right hands, it also has the potential to exert a corrupting influence on people. Hence, Socrates’ discourse shares the same potential for both educational benefit and corruption that other forms of discourse – including ones that are employed by individuals who actively oppose Socrates – do.
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Introduction

1. Subject

In this dissertation, I attempt to determine whether or not the discourse of Plato’s Socrates is educational in its nature. I conclude that Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination is essential to the educational enterprise specifically because it creates opportunities for individuals to give consideration to their opinions about human excellence, deliberate upon them carefully, and consider whether or not they are persuaded by the reasons that they use to justify their beliefs about human excellence. In this way, Socrates’ discourse creates opportunities for individuals to educate themselves about human excellence, thereby becoming not just independent learners, but human beings whose beliefs about human excellence are truly their own, and are not just received opinions. In other words, through his discourse, Socrates creates opportunities for individuals to free themselves from being subject to the tyranny of tradition and popular opinion with respect to their beliefs about human excellence. This is an important step in the development of true citizens capable of genuine, responsible deliberation concerning what is best for their community or state as a whole.

However, despite its potential educational benefits, Socrates’ cross-examination does not, and cannot, constitute a complete educational “method” or “programme” by itself. There is
no single form of discourse that qualifies as “educational”; instead, education is an activity that
must make use of many different forms of discourse if it is to achieve its aim of improving
human beings by directing their attention (and activity) towards the good.¹ Moreover, although
Socrates’ discourse can make an important contribution to the education of human beings when
utilized the right way, in the right hands, it also has the potential to exert a corrupting influence
on people. Hence, Socrates’ discourse shares the same potential for both educational benefit and
corruption that other forms of discourse – including ones that are employed by individuals who
actively oppose Socrates – do.

I have already mentioned that the Socrates with which I am concerned in this
dissertation is Plato’s Socrates (although in Chapter 3, I do make some references to Xenophon’s
portrayals of Socrates’ associates and his accuser Anytus). My treatment of Plato’s Socrates is
not a historical one; that is, I do not attempt to determine to what degree Plato’s character
corresponds with the real, historical figure, and so any claims that I make about Socrates should
be taken as referring exclusively to Plato’s portrayal of him. Moreover, in discussing the claims
made by Plato’s Socrates, I take them simply to be the claims made by Plato’s character, and I
do not assume either that Plato’s Socrates acts as Plato’s mouthpiece, or that Plato’s Socrates
gives an accurate representation of the philosophical views of the historical Socrates. I do
believe that Plato’s Socrates, as a character of Plato’s, espouses a “philosophy” that is at least
somewhat consistent and unified, and I believe that Plato’s dialogues serve to reveal the
philosophical views of his character. However, I shall refrain from making any comment upon
whether the philosophical views of Plato’s Socrates are the same as Plato’s, the same as the

¹ The nature of education, or paideia, is explained at R. 7.518b6-d7: it is the business of directing the soul’s
attention toward the good.
historical Socrates’, all his own, a pastiche of other Greek philosophers’, or any combination of the aforementioned.

2. Structure

In terms of its structure, this dissertation consists of five chapters, and an introduction and a conclusion. I begin this dissertation in Chapter 1 by attempting to clarify Socrates’ notion of wisdom. At his trial, Socrates is, in various different ways, described as an educator. These descriptions of Socrates as an educator either associate him with “wise men” or sophists, or are in some way connected to Socrates’ attempts to understand a divination that his friend, Chaerephon, purportedly received from the Delphic Oracle; namely, that there is no one wiser than Socrates.² I argue that what constitutes what Socrates calls “human wisdom” is not just the honest admission of one’s ignorance and the limits of one’s knowledge, but it is also the active attempt to get beyond one’s ignorance and expand the limits of one’s knowledge. In other words, human wisdom is ultimately demonstrated by the attempt to educate and improve oneself. In the Apology, Socrates maintains that the god of the Delphic Oracle has essentially set him up as a paradigm of human wisdom³; in other words, Socrates constitutes an example by means of which one might educate oneself about human wisdom. As we shall see, creating conditions under which one might educate oneself defines Socrates as an educator, and it is Socrates’ characteristic style of discourse – cross-examination – that makes these conditions possible.

In Chapter 2, I examine the educational effectiveness of the form of discourse known as eristic. In the Euthydemus, Socrates encounters a pair of sophists, the brothers Dionysodorus and

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² See Ap. 21a3-7.
³ Ap. 23a5-b4.
Euthydemus, who claim to be able to teach excellence faster and more finely than anyone else. Apparently the brothers teach excellence by engaging their “pupils” – or would-be pupils – in a combative and agonistic form of question-and-answer discourse in which the questioner never “fights fair”. I conclude that eristic – as Dionysodorus and Euthydemus wield it – is a form of discourse that might be characterized as anti-educational and anti-philosophical. It certainly does little, if anything, to cultivate excellence. However, I also conclude that, despite its largely negative character, eristic can be used for certain beneficial purposes by a thoughtful and philosophically serious educator (which neither Dionysodorus nor Euthydemus is).

In Chapter 3 I discuss the educational value of the characteristic discourse of Socrates’ accusers, Meletus and Anytus: popular rhetoric. As we shall see, Anytus and Meletus are not particularly effective at educating either themselves or other people. Nevertheless, because of its ability to manipulate appearances, the rhetorical discourse in which they engage has the ability to be used for educational purposes by those who genuinely have knowledge to impart to others. As a master of rhetoric knows both how to capture an audience’s attention, and how to persuade his or her listeners to accept whatever beliefs (or knowledge) he or she is trying to impart, rhetoric can be used to transform an unruly mob into an audience of eager learners listening attentively. However, it is rhetoric’s ability to manipulate appearances that also makes it a potentially corrupting form of discourse when used in the wrong hands.

In Chapter 4, I go on to give a general discussion of Socrates’ own form of discourse, cross-examination, which bears a strong resemblance to eristic, and which, like eristic, often generates confusion in his interlocutors. Although it can be very entertaining to see people who are supposedly wise thrown into confusion, Socrates wields his characteristic form of discourse for purposes that are genuinely educational (unlike Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, the sophists

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4 *Euthyd.* 273d8-9.
of the *Euthydemus*). However, Socrates’ discourse requires that his interlocutors (and bystanders to his cross-examination) educate themselves. It is almost entirely the interlocutor’s or bystander’s responsibility to determine what he or she will learn from conversing with Socrates and observing Socrates “in action”. While Socrates’ cross-examination creates opportunities for his interlocutors and bystanders to consider matters of human excellence for themselves, Socrates does not tell his interlocutors (or bystanders to his discussions) what to believe, nor does he instruct them as to how they should go about giving consideration to matters concerning goodness and human excellence. This leaves plenty of opportunity for his interlocutors to become “corrupted” as a result of drawing erroneous conclusions from listening to Socrates discourse.

In Chapter 5, I compare the overall effectiveness of Socrates as an educator with the effectiveness of the “traditional” model of Athenian *paideia* described in the *Protagoras*. I argue that Socratic cross-examination has an essential role to play in education, because it compensates for deficiencies that exist in traditional Athenian *paideia*. More specifically, traditional Athenian *paideia* by itself is not sufficient for the development of critical thought and reason, and Socrates’ discourse serves as a corrective for this. However, although Socrates’ discourse has an essential role to play in the business of education, it does not constitute a complete educational “programme” in and of itself. Obviously, as cross-examination involves asking questions, it is not a particularly suitable means of delivering informational content or explanations. But in addition, while Socrates’ cross-examination cultivates the skills necessary for responsible deliberation and persuasion on the individual level, it fails to cultivate the skills necessary to responsible persuasion and responsible deliberation at the group level.
Overall, the purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate that while Socrates’ practice has an essential role to play within education, it does not constitute a complete education in and of itself, and it is not necessarily a substitute for other educational practices and methods. While Socrates’ questioning creates opportunities for individuals to examine their beliefs about human excellence, develop critical thinking skills, and possibly gain knowledge about themselves and/or human excellence, Socrates’ discourse of questioning cannot guarantee that individuals will seize these opportunities and learn from them. Nor can Socrates’ discourse directly furnish individuals with critical thinking skills, or with knowledge of human excellence. For these reasons, Socrates’ discourse of questioning is insufficient on its own as a model for education, but it is nonetheless essential to educational practice.

All translations in this dissertation are mine unless otherwise indicated. The footnote abbreviations for Platonic texts are the same as those in the Cooper and Hutchinson edition of Plato’s collected works. The footnote abbreviations for other ancient texts follow those in the Perseus Digital Library Greek and Roman Materials Collection.5 The Greek letters eta and omega have been transliterated as “é” and “ô”, respectively, since those are their approximate equivalents on a Canadian Multilingual Keyboard. However, readers should be cautioned that not all of the commentators that I quote indicate etas and omegas when transliterating Greek words.

Chapter 1: Introducing Socrates as Educator

1. What is it that you do, Socrates?

In rendering an account of himself to the jury at his trial, Plato’s Socrates explains the history of, and motivation for, his distinctive practice of questioning – the practice that serves as the model for what is known today as the “Socratic method” of education. In order to set the stage for my ensuing discussion of the educational benefits and drawbacks associated with the discursive practice of Plato’s Socrates, I shall first turn to the question of what Socrates claims is his “human wisdom”. Identifying what this “human wisdom” is, is key to understanding Plato’s Socrates as an educator, for, according to Socrates, it is because of his human wisdom that he has acquired a reputation in Athens, and much slander has been spread around the city about him.\(^6\) This slander, claims Socrates, has influenced his prosecutors, and has ultimately led to his appearance in court on charges of impiety and the corruption of the city’s youth.\(^7\) Simply put, Socrates appears in court accused of being a corrupting educator, and Socrates’ harmful educational practices are somehow tied to what he calls his “human wisdom”. The purpose of this chapter is to determine what constitutes Socrates’ “human wisdom”.

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\(^6\) *Ap.* 20d2-9

\(^7\) *Ap.* 22e7-24c2. Also see 18a7 ff.
In Plato’s *Apology of Socrates*, Socrates – or, at least, Plato’s version of Socrates – attempts to anticipate a question that he believes is on the minds of many jurors: just what has Socrates been doing to land himself in court?

Perhaps one of you might respond, “But Socrates, what is it that you do? What is the origin of these slanders against you? For surely if your occupation is no more peculiar than anyone else’s, and if you were not doing anything other than what the majority of us do, then such rumours and reports about you would not have arisen. So tell us what it is that you do, so that we do not judge you on the spot.” As this seems to me to be a just thing to ask on the part of a speaker, I shall attempt to demonstrate for you what it is that has made me both famous and reviled. So listen: for although some of you might think that I’m pulling your leg, be well aware that I am telling you the whole truth.  

In his defence speech in the *Apology*, Socrates refers to no less than five different descriptions of his activities in Athens, all from different sources:

a) The prosecution against Socrates maintains that Socrates is a marvellous speaker who corrupts the youth by teaching them to believe in novel deities instead of the traditional gods of the Athenians. 

b) The common rumour that circulates about Socrates (initially spread by those whom Socrates calls his “old accusers”) is that he is a sophist who teaches about the things that he investigates; namely, the things in the heavens and below the earth, and how to make a weak speech into a powerful one.

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8 *Ap*. 20c4-d6.
10 See *Ap*. 18a7 ff.
c) According to Socrates’ friend Chaerephon, the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi had
proclaimed that there was no one wiser than Socrates.\(^\text{12}\)

d) The popular rumour that circulates amongst bystanders to Socrates’ public
conversations with people in the agora and elsewhere is that Socrates is wise with
respect to those things about which he questions people.\(^\text{13}\)

e) Socrates himself claims that he was bestowed upon the Athenians as a divine gift by
the god Apollo, and that he makes them happy.\(^\text{14}\)

I believe that there is indeed a philosophical reason for Socrates’ inclusion in his defence speech
of multiple (and conflicting) descriptions of his activities in Athens. While it is possible that (e),
Socrates’ own description of his activities in Athens, is the most accurate, one should also keep
in mind that in the Apology Socrates assumes that the jurors want to know what is the \textit{common
origin} of the rumours, slanders, and accusations that have arisen about him.\(^\text{15}\) Given this, if one
looks at the various descriptions of Socrates’ activity that are mentioned in the Apology, one can
in fact discern something like a “form” that they all share in common: they all characterize
Socrates’ activity as being either educational – or anti-educational – in its nature. Let us look
more closely at how this is so in each case.

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\(^{12}\) Ap. 20e8-21a7.

\(^{13}\) Ap. 22e7-23a5.

\(^{14}\) Ap. 30d6 ff., 36d4-10.

\(^{15}\) Ap. 20c4-6.
2. The charges of the old and new accusers

In the list of descriptions of Socrates’ characteristic activity given above, descriptions (a) and (b) are related: they both explicitly assert that Socrates is some sort of teacher, and also suggest (either more or less explicitly) that Socrates is a teacher who wields a negative influence over his pupils. The charges brought against Socrates by his “new” accusers – that is, his prosecutors (description (a) of his activities in the list above) – assert that Socrates teaches young people things that are harmful to them and that corrupt them. The common rumour that circulates about Socrates in description (b) of his activities in the list above is that he is some sort of sophist who teaches both “natural philosophy” and rhetoric. As we shall see in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, while some people in Athens did think very highly of sophists, others believed that they were charlatans.

In claiming that Socrates is a crafty speaker who disseminates corrupting teachings to young people, Socrates’ accusers maintain that Socrates’ activities in Athens are anti-educational in their nature. The purpose of education is to improve young people, developing them into good individual human beings (at whatever age or stage of development they might happen to be) and ultimately into good adults. According to Socrates’ formal accusers, Socrates corrupts the youth by teaching them to disbelieve in the gods of Athens, and to believe in others instead. The charges brought against Socrates suggest that his activities in Athens are anti-educational because they teach the youth things that fail to improve them as human beings, and that instead make them degenerate examples of what a human being ought to be.

By contrast, the popular rumours about Socrates (which, he maintains, were due in large part to Aristophanes’ depiction of him as a sophist in the comedy Clouds\(^{16}\)) do not explicitly

\(^{16}\text{Ap. 19a8-6.}\)
identify Socrates’ activities in Athens as being corrupting in their nature. Instead, they merely describe Socrates engaging in activities popularly attributed to sophists or “wise men”, who teach their wisdom to others. 17 “They were travelling lecturers, most of whom were not Athenian,” 18 who taught a variety of subjects, with some teaching many different subjects, 19 and others specializing in only one. 20 Most importantly, though, sophists often claimed that they were capable of teaching young people “excellence” (areté). 21 For example, in the dialogue named after him, Protagoras promises that if young people associate with him, they will grow better and better with each passing day. 22 Simply put, sophists acquired paying pupils by promoting themselves as educational experts and improvers of young people. According to W. K. C. Guthrie, however,

The Athenians . . . tended to be suspicious of intellectuals, pundits, professors and the like. Their qualities were summed up in a word . . . : deinotes, with the adjective deinos. . . . [I]t stands for anything terrible or dreadful . . . . Degenerating . . . in popular use [deinos] became coupled with sophos [wise] to mean clever or skillful . . . particularly . . . in speech or argument. 23

Hence, according to Guthrie, “The verb sophizesthai, to practice sophia [wisdom] . . . [came to mean] to trick or deceive, or to be over-subtle. . . . The word sophistes, ‘sophist’, is a noun of

20 For example, Gorgias (who specialized in rhetoric): see Grg. 449a2-b3. Also see Guthrie 39; Ostwald (1986) 243-244.
21 See Prot. 328b1-5; Euthyd. 273d8-9; Guthrie 44-45, 250; Rankin 13; Romilly 203-205; McCoy 7.
22 Prot. 318a6-9.
23 Guthrie 32.
the agent derived from the verb.24 In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates claims that he has been called a clever (*deinos*) speaker by his prosecutors,25 and in using this adjective to describe him as a speaker, Socrates’ prosecutors suggest that he is a kind of tricky and deceitful sophist. Because of this, Socrates goes on to first address the charges of his “old accusers”, those rumours and stories that stemmed from the comic depiction of him as a sophist, before he addresses the more recent accusations that are the subject of his trial.26 According to Socrates, this old story about his being a sophist has influenced his current prosecutors, and so he must deal with it first.27

Plato’s Socrates does not, in fact, fit the description of a sophist, as he does not profess to be able to teach any particular subject, and at his trial he very specifically denies being able to teach excellence.28 Yet Plato depicts Socrates claiming, just a few days before his trial, that young men are indeed improved by associating with him,29 and then, at his trial, Socrates claims that he is not responsible for anyone’s being either improved or harmed by associating with him.30 In other words, it would seem that, according to Socrates, young men are in fact improved by associating with him, but, even so, he is not the cause of their improvement.31 Instead, in the

24 Guthrie 28. Also see Pernot 18 and Johnstone 92 on sophia/sophizesthai/sophistes. See Barrett (p. 3 and Ch. 3, p. 27-33), on negative Greek attitudes towards sophists. That being said, Emile de Strycker in *Plato’s Apology of Socrates*, ed. S. R. Slings (Leiden, The Netherla ns: E. J. Brill, 1994) 50, points out that, “...[A]lthough the average Athenian undoubtedly felt suspicious of cosmologists and sophists, there was no law which made their activities an offence in the legal sense of the word.”

25 Ap. 17a4-b1.

26 In the *Apology* (19a8-c6), Socrates clearly indicates that it is Aristophanes’ portrayal of him (in his comedy, *Clouds*) that has spawned the bulk of the malicious rumours about his purported sophistry. That being said, according to K. J. Dover, in *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley, California: U of California P, 1972) 120, “...[D]uring [Socrates’] lifetime he was ridiculed in several comedies by at least three other poets [besides Aristophanes], in terms similar to those of *Clouds*...” Dover, in his introduction to Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989) xlvii, specifies Telecleides, Eupolis, and Ameipsias as these other three comic poets, who, in addition to Aristophanes, are known to have ridiculed Socrates during his lifetime.

27 Ap. 18a7 ff.

28 Ap. 33a5-6, 20b4-c3.

29 Th. 150c8-d6.

30 Ap. 33b4-6.

31 See esp. Th. 150d6-8.
Theaetetus Socrates maintains that young men are improved when they associate with him because they “give birth to” – or speak and realize – many beautiful things. Socrates acts only as the “midwife” who assists young men in giving voice to the beautiful things they already know and have within them. Once young men recognize that they do in fact know some amazing things, they are the better for it, for now they can act upon this newly-discovered knowledge, rearing up their infant ideas into greater ones that will give birth to still more good ideas that will inspire good actions. Doing and thinking good things is, at least in part, what makes a person good and what leads to a happy life; hence, by delivering young men of beliefs and ideas, and testing these beliefs and ideas for their goodness, Socrates assists young men in developing their potential to live well and to improve the lives of others. Socrates, though, does not profess to teach young men any of the brilliant things to which they give voice; instead, he merely assists in delivering them of these things.

Although Socrates does not fit the description of a standard sophist, the very fact that he assists young men in delivering beautiful beliefs and ideas from themselves causes people to liken him to a sophist. Basically, Socrates resembles a sophist on several grounds – although it should be kept in mind that these grounds for resemblance are just that: they only make Socrates look like a sophist. While Socrates might resemble a sophist in certain ways, these grounds for resemblance are not exclusive characteristics of sophistic practice.

The grounds on which Socrates resembles a sophist are:

a) his main associates are much the same as those of sophists;

b) he converses with his associates in the same places that sophists discourse with theirs;

32 Tht. 150b6 ff.
33 Ap. 33a5-b8.
c) Socrates’ sphere of influence extends beyond Athens;

d) Socrates’ manner of discourse bears a superficial resemblance to that of some
sophists.  

Let us examine these ways in which Socrates resembles a sophist in more detail.

First, Socrates’ main associates are much the same as those of the sophists. While (at
his trial) Socrates insists that he is prepared to converse with anyone (and does indeed do so),
he admits that the people who have the most time to associate with him are young men from
wealthy families. Most of the sophists’ students were young men from relatively well-to-do
families, for they could afford the sophists’ fees. So, while Socrates might not be a sophist
himself, the sort of people who tend to associate with him and converse with him make him look
like one.

Second, Socrates converses with his associates in the same places that the sophists
converse with theirs: “To advertise their offerings, the sophists used a sample lecture – an
epideixis – as an oral public announcement before gatherings in the Agora and other public

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34 Romilly (36-37) also points out that Socrates bears a certain resemblance to a sophist, mostly in terms of his
discourse: “… [Socrates] and the Sophists did share certain characteristics and he often mixed with them. … [H]e
too was concerned with human problems and moral ideas. Like them, he loved to argue, define things more closely,
and confound his interlocutors. … [H]is means and methods resembled theirs. However, many Athenians seem to
have been misled by appearances.”

35 Ap. 29e5-30a5, 33a6-b3.


37 See Marrou 47; Dover 111; Barrow 13; Barrett 5; Schiappa 55; Pernot 15; Frederick Beck, Greek Education
(London: Methuen, 1964) 147, 305; Martin Ostwald, Language and History in Ancient Greek Culture
Rhetoric in Classical Greece (Columbia, South Carolina: U of South Carolina P, 1995) 15-16, identifies the
sophists’ clients as being a mixture of upper and middle-class Athenians. On the other hand, David Blank (14), in
“Socrates versus Sophists on Payment for Teaching,” Classical Antiquity 4.1 (1985), maintains that “… [I]t was
not the nouveau riches who betook themselves and their sons to the sophists but, rather, the aristocrats”; see also
Blank 14-15.

38 See Thomas West, in Plato’s Apology of Socrates (Ithaca, New York: Cornell UP, 1979) 98: “Socrates is
admittedly as guilty as the sophists of drawing the young men away from their fathers and fellow citizens, the
traditional educational authorities.”
places. They held their classes in private dwellings or various public places such as school buildings or grounds. . . .”\(^{39}\) As Socrates himself admits, he converses with Athenians in the Agora and in public places around Athens,\(^{40}\) and Plato’s dialogues frequently depict him conversing with young men (and some older ones, including some sophists) in wrestling schools, gymnasia, and the private homes of the well-to-do.\(^{41}\) In other words, it is not only the sort of people with whom he associates that makes Socrates look like a sophist, but also the locations in which he can be found conversing with them.\(^{42}\)

Third, insofar as the sophists were concerned, “[a]s students of the sophists became people of influence, results of their education were felt in the city and abroad.”\(^{43}\) As Socrates’ supporters during his tenure in prison demonstrate, Socrates’ sphere of influence also extends beyond Athens. Most notably, Simmias and Cebes are two Thebans who attend Socrates’ trial,

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\(^{40}\) *Ap*. 17c7-d1.

\(^{41}\) See Jaeger 35.

\(^{42}\) Blank (5-6) discusses how sophists in Athens were criticized as social parasites regardless of the locations in which they taught, whether they were private homes, public places, or their own schools. Socrates’ seeming resemblance to a sophist very likely makes some Athenians believe that he is not only a clever speaker who corrupts the young, but a parasite as well. (See K. J. Dover’s introduction to Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, xxxii-xxxiv for a summary of Aristophanes’ caricature of Socrates as a parasite.) On these grounds, Socrates’ attempt in the *Apology* to explain the nature of his “work” or “business” is not just an attempt to explain the benign and well-intentioned nature of his philosophizing, but also an attempt to demonstrate that he is someone who actually makes a productive contribution to Athenian society.

Interestingly, according to Martin Ostwald (1986, 238-239), “. . . [S]ophistés from its earliest [5\(^{\text{th}}\) century B. C. E.] appearance . . . describes a person endowed with some special skill or expertise that . . . he activates so as to make a contribution to the life of his society. It is used of poets, of musicians and rhapsodes, of diviners and seers, of a statesman such as Solon, a [sic] religious leader such as Pythagoras . . . .” Given this, the more that Socrates attempts to demonstrate to “anti-sophist” Athenians that he is not a social parasite, but a productive member of his society, the more that Socrates risks making himself appear to “pro-sophist” Athenians to be someone who pretends to be a sophist (but who is not a sophist in fact). It is no wonder then, that Socrates (see *Ap*. 20a7-c3, 22e7-23a7, 33a5-6) disavows having any special knowledge or wisdom (apart from mere *anthrópinē sophia* – see *Ap*. 20d6-9), and insists that he benefits the Athenians not on his own, but as the gift of a deity (*Ap*. 30d6 ff.), for Socrates cannot be mistaken for a sophist (or a sophistic pretender) if he has no expertise (and admits to lacking it).

\(^{43}\) Barrett 5.
offer money and assistance to help him escape from prison, and converse with him during his last hours.\footnote{See \textit{Cri}. 45b2-6; also \textit{Phd}. in general. Also note that in Plato’s dialogues, Socrates is depicted as conversing with a number of foreign sophists.}

Fourth and finally, Socrates’ manner of discourse bears a certain resemblance to that of some sophists. This point will be more fully elaborated upon and discussed in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation. However, for now let it suffice to say that Socrates admits that wealthy young men like to imitate his manner of discourse and test it out on their elders, questioning them (most likely on matters of human and civic goodness), and causing them to contradict themselves and fall into confusion.\footnote{\textit{Ap}. 23c2-9.} The sophists were known for teaching those subjects that were bound up with the study of discourse itself: grammar, rhetoric, argument, and disputation.\footnote{See Guthrie 20, 44, 50-51, 176-181, 204-223; Kerferd Ch. 6-8, p. 59-82; Rankin 13, 14, 15 ff.; Barrett 4, 36, 38-40; Romilly 6, 57, 73 ff.; Schiappa 53-55; Pernot 14; McCoy 7-8, also 11; Johnstone 87, 92, 120; Evans, 232; Ostwald (1986) 242 and (2009) 253; Michael Gagarin, \textit{Antiphon the Athenian: Oratory, Law, and Justice in the Age of the Sophists} (Austin: U of Texas P, 2002) 23; Jeff Mitscherling, \textit{The Image of a Second Sun} (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2009) 58.} More importantly, the sophists were also known for questioning and disputing traditional values and norms.\footnote{See Guthrie 59; Barrow 14; Rankin 14-15; Romilly 9; Gagarin 32.} When Socrates’ young followers dispute traditional Athenian values and norms with their elders, their actions bear some resemblance to what the sophistic practitioners of eristic do. In Chapter 2 of this dissertation, I discuss the educational merit of the discourse of a pair of sophists, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus. The form of discourse utilized by these sophists, eristic, bears a certain resemblance to Socrates’ own style of discourse. But, as we shall see when I discuss Socrates’ discourse in Chapter 4, eristic bears only a \textit{resemblance} to Socrates’ own style of discourse: just as Socrates is not a sophist, he is not a practitioner of eristic.
Even though Socrates, like the sophists, associates with young men from wealthy families in public places and private homes throughout Athens, and even though his discourse might bear some resemblance to that of certain sophists, Socrates is not a sophist. In fact, the ways in which Socrates resembles a sophist are also ways in which many of his fellow Athenians apparently resemble sophists. While both Socrates and sophists may associate with young Athenians from wealthy families, so do plenty of other people in Athens. Moreover, it is perfectly normal for young men from wealthy families in Athens to converse with a wide variety of people in both private houses and public streets; hence, it is not only Socrates and the sophists who converse with young men in public and in private. Nor is it only Socrates and the sophists who are believed to educate and benefit the young; one of Socrates’ accusers, Anytus, whom I discuss in Chapter 3, thinks that any respectable Athenian gentleman can educate and improve young people. Finally, Socrates is not the only Athenian whose discourse has a sphere of influence that extends beyond Athens; in fact, according to Pericles (in his “Funeral Oration” as reconstructed by Thucydides), Athenian culture itself has a sphere of influence that extends beyond Athens; for Pericles, influencing the Greek world (and even the greater Mediterranean world) is simply what Athenians do.

So, as we can see upon inspection, Socrates’ resemblance to a sophist is just that: a resemblance. Nevertheless, Socrates’ particular style of discourse deserves greater examination and discussion, for it is through discourse that Socrates claims to deliver young men of knowledge and of good and beautiful ideas that they might act upon. In other words, it is Socrates’ discourse that is the real bone of contention between him and his prosecutors:

48 M. 92e3-6.
49 See Thuc. 2.41.1, 2.41.4.
Socrates’ prosecutors insist that his discourse corrupts young people, whereas Socrates insists that it does them no harm, and that it might even benefit them.

3. The Delphic Oracle’s prophecy

Besides being called a corrupting teacher and likened to a sophist, there are three other ways in which it is implied that Socrates is an educator, inasmuch as he is identified as a figure of wisdom:

i) According to Socrates’ friend Chaerephon, the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi had proclaimed that there was no one wiser than Socrates.\textsuperscript{50}

ii) The popular rumour that circulates amongst bystanders to Socrates’ public conversations with people in the agora and elsewhere is that Socrates is wise with respect to those things about which he questions people.\textsuperscript{51}

iii) Socrates himself claims that he was bestowed upon the Athenians as a divine gift by the god Apollo, and that he makes them happy.\textsuperscript{52}

These associations between Socrates and wisdom are all related to Chaerephon’s experience with the Delphic Oracle. Many years before Socrates’ trial, Socrates’ best friend Chaerephon consulted the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi concerning the matter of Socrates’ wisdom: Was there anyone who was wiser than Socrates, Chaerephon queried? The oracle responded that there was not.\textsuperscript{53} It is not evident from the wording of Chaerephon’s inquiry that it has anything to do with any potential on Socrates’ part to educate others. However, further examination of what wisdom

\textsuperscript{50} Ap. 20e6-21a7.
\textsuperscript{51} Ap. 22e7-23a5.
\textsuperscript{52} Ap. 30d6 ff., 36d4-10.
\textsuperscript{53} Ap. 21a3-7.
or the Greek concept of it, *sophia* – is, reveals that the question that Chaerephon posed to the Delphic Oracle is very much a question about Socrates’ ability as an educator.

There is some controversy amongst scholars regarding the history of the Greek word for wisdom, *sophia*. According to W. K. C. Guthrie, *sophia* originally “connoted primarily skill in a particular craft”\(^54\) – expertise, in other words. It then eventually evolved to refer to general knowledge and good sense.\(^55\) On the other hand, though, G. B. Kerferd disputes the history of “*sophia*” espoused by Guthrie:

According to the received account . . . [*sophia*] went through a kind of evolution in [its meaning], from (1) skill in a particular craft, especially handicraft, through (2) prudence or wisdom in general matters, especially practical and political wisdom, to (3) scientific, theoretic or philosophic wisdom. . . . [T]his sequence is artificial and unhistorical, being essentially based on Aristotle and his attempt to schematise the history of thought before his own time within a framework illustrating his own view about the nature of philosophy, above all that it proceeds from the particular to the universal. From the beginning *sophia* was in fact associated with the poet, the seer and the sage, all of whom were seen as revealing visions of knowledge not granted otherwise to mortals. The knowledge so gained was not a matter of technique as such, . . . but knowledge about the gods, man and society, to which the ‘wise man’ claimed privileged access.”\(^56\)

In what follows I maintain that there are actually two forms of *sophia* recognized by Socrates in Plato’s *Apology*: a divine form, and a human form. The human form of *sophia* recognized by Socrates corresponds to Guthrie’s characterization of *sophia*. The divine form of *sophia* recognized by Socrates corresponds to Kerferd’s revelatory conception of *sophia*.

According to Socrates, after Chaerephon returned from Delphi proclaiming that it had been divined that there was no one wiser than Socrates, Socrates himself decided to look into what the oracle about him could possibly mean, since he was not aware that he had any sort of

\(^{54}\) Guthrie 27.  
\(^{55}\) Guthrie 27.  
\(^{56}\) Kerferd 24.
wisdom at all. First he went to a politician, and, in entering into discussion with the man and questioning him, he discovered that the politician thought that he was wise, but was in actuality not so at all. Socrates, on the other hand, unlike the politician, was prepared to acknowledge his lack of wisdom concerning all things “fine and good”. Socrates concluded that it must be his readiness to acknowledge his lack of wisdom (and his refusal to pretend to know what he did not) that made him just a bit wiser than the politician to whom he had spoken. After questioning other politicians and finding them also to pretend that they were wise when they were not, Socrates moved on to question poets and discovered that although they believed that they were wise, they could not adequately explain the content of their poems. On this basis, Socrates concluded that poets, like seers, compose their works not by wisdom, but by a combination of natural ability and divine inspiration. Finally, after questioning a number of poets, Socrates began to question craftsmen. According to Socrates, these men did possess some wisdom (presumably in the areas of their respective crafts). However, they also thought themselves to be knowledgeable about things of which they knew nothing, and so Socrates again concluded that, just as he was wiser than the politicians and poets in not believing himself to be wise about what he was not, so too he was wiser than the craftsmen in this very way. Socrates further concluded that it was neither he nor any other human being who was wise (at least not in any significant sense), but rather the god of the Delphic Oracle who was making an example of Socrates, using him to demonstrate to human beings that to be the wisest of human beings is to recognize that one has no real wisdom at all.\footnote{Ap. 21b1-23b4.}
The rather minor, insignificant sort of wisdom that Socrates believes that he has he calls *anthrôpinè sophia*, “human wisdom”.\(^{58}\) Human wisdom is tied to the recognition that one has *limited* knowledge, and in Socrates’ case this limited knowledge is the knowledge that he uncovers about himself, and about those who are commonly believed to be wise. Human wisdom stands in direct contrast to the much greater wisdom of the god of the Delphic Oracle, divine wisdom, wisdom which would presumably be somehow related to the possession of knowledge that is not limited.\(^{59}\)

Several things should be noted here about Socrates’ conception of wisdom. First of all, Socrates does believe that it is possible for human beings to have wisdom: the craftsmen that he interviews have wisdom with respect to their particular crafts, and Socrates possesses a certain kind of wisdom in relation to himself, in that he knows that he is not wise – and he does not pretend to be wise. In this, Socrates’ conception of *human* wisdom seems to entail that it is wisdom about a *specific subject*: the craftsmen are wise with respect to their crafts, and Socrates is wise in sense that he knows the limits of his own knowledge; he does not profess to know what he knows nothing about, and he does not profess to be wise when he is not. More precisely, it would seem that as far as Socrates’ conception of human wisdom is concerned, it involves knowing the *limits* of what is possible with relation to a specific subject.\(^{60}\) Socrates

\(^{58}\) Ap. 20d6-9.

\(^{59}\) In Herodotus’ *Histories*, the Delphic Oracle prefaces its reply to Croesus’ initial inquiry by emphasizing its unlimited knowledge: see Hdt. 1.47.2-3.

\(^{60}\) C. D. C. Reeve in *Socrates in the Apology* (Hackett: Indianapolis, Indiana, 1989), 34 maintains that human wisdom involves admitting only to one’s ignorance of human excellence; “Knowing that one is neither potter nor tanner is not an achievement of human wisdom . . . . Athens must have been full of people who realized that they knew neither craft, nor oratory, nor science. But, if Socrates is right, it contained scarcely anyone, beyond himself, possessed of human wisdom” (34). Surely, though, to pretend to have any sort of knowledge that one does not genuinely have signifies a lack of human wisdom. If one pretends that one has medical knowledge that one does not have, then one is either a quack or delusional; we would not call such a person wise, and we might even consider a quack doctor to be morally reprehensible. Yet even without dismissing all of ancient medicine as unscientific quackery, we can probably safely assume that Athens did have its share of pretend healers. So, I do not think that it is enough to limit human wisdom exclusively to the admission of ignorance concerning human excellence, since
knows that his wisdom is nonexistent (or at least exceedingly limited in its extent), and he knows the limits of his knowledge and does not profess to know things that he does not. Similarly, the craftsmen know what is possible and not possible within their crafts, at least with respect to their own skills and the current knowledge that they possess of their crafts.

That being said, it is possible that the range of knowledge and technique within a particular craft might be expanded, and it is possible for a particular person to increase his or her knowledge and skill with relation to a particular craft. In other words, with respect to a craft, it is possible for the limits of what is possible to be expanded, both within the craft itself, and within individual practitioners of that craft. The *Apology* demonstrates that the same is true with respect to the limits of one’s own knowledge of oneself: it too, can be expanded. When Socrates initially heard from Chaerephon that the Delphic Oracle had proclaimed him to be the wisest of human beings, Socrates thought this to be very strange, since he was certain that he did not have any wisdom at all. However, by looking into the matter of his own wisdom, Socrates learns that he does have a very little bit of wisdom in that he does not attempt to make himself appear to be more knowledgeable than he really is; that is, Socrates knows the limits of his

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61 Note Mark McPherran’s comment in *The Religion of Socrates* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996) 217: “The Oracle at Delphi and its god had long been understood as underwriting the virtue of humility and self-effacing restraint – and insisting on the vice of *hubris* – in the face of divine wisdom. On the walls of the temple at Delphi there were inscriptions to just that effect.” See the rest of the page for examples of these inscriptions; also see Reeve 30. According to Marina McCoy (45), “…[T]he inscriptions on the wall at Delphi… make clear that Delphi is a place in which the human being was supposed to be aware of his limitations as a human being in face of the divine. The appeal to the oracle of Delphi is used to support Socrates’ claim that even the Greek tradition holds learning of one’s own ignorance and limits to be a virtue.”

62 See *R.* 2.360e6-361a2. Note that Glaucón’s suggestion that an unjust person will act like a skilled craftsman might be in error. One would think that an unjust person is someone who does not respect his or her limits, while a skilled craftsman does respect his or her limits insofar as his or her craft is concerned.

63 *Ap.* 21b1-5.
knowledge, and his claims concerning the extent of his knowledge respect its limits.\textsuperscript{64}

Furthermore, by looking into the matter of the Delphic Oracle’s pronouncement regarding his wisdom, Socrates also comes to learn what it means for him to be the wisest of human beings: although there do exist human beings who possess some wisdom (like the craftsmen Socrates interviews), their pretence to knowledge that they do not possess cancels out the wisdom that they do have, and so insofar as wisdom is concerned, Socrates still comes out just a little bit ahead of other human beings.\textsuperscript{65}

So, Socrates’ conception of wisdom essentially amounts to knowing the limits of what is possible with respect to a specific subject – and openly acknowledging and respecting those limits – while \textit{at the same time} working to \textit{expand} the limits of what is possible with regard to that subject.\textsuperscript{66} When Socrates hears from Chaerephon that the Delphic Oracle has proclaimed that no human being is wiser than Socrates, he does not smugly rest on his laurels, nor does he dismiss the oracle’s pronouncement as ridiculous. Instead, Socrates finds the truth of the oracular divination questionable (given what he knows of himself), and goes on to investigate it. More precisely, Socrates goes on to test the truth of the divination (\textit{manteion}) given to Chaerephon and to try to prove it wrong by finding someone wiser than he is.\textsuperscript{67} Eventually, as a

\textsuperscript{64} See Reeve 30: “What we know about the oracle . . . makes it . . . very likely that it was using [Socrates] . . . as an example of someone who was wise because he made no hubristic claims to wisdom.”

\textsuperscript{65} See \textit{Ap.} 22c9-e6. Reeve (38) maintains that it is the craftsmen’s pretence to knowledge of \textit{excellence} that cancels out the wisdom that they do have. However, pretending to be an authority in \textit{any} matters in which one is not an authority is unwise, and, when one is put under scrutiny, the revelation of one’s false pretence to authority is also very likely to be embarrassing.

\textsuperscript{66} See Strycker 63-64, esp. “Two qualities are characteristic of the \textit{philosophoi}: (a) they realize that they are lacking . . . in knowledge; (b) they strive for what they know they lack and start to search for truth” (64).

\textsuperscript{67} See \textit{Ap.} 21b9-c2. Guthrie (407) maintains that

\begin{quote}
What [Socrates] set out to refute was the obvious meaning of the oracle, its words taken at their face value, in order to discover the answer to its riddle. Everyone knew that it spoke in riddles, and any sensible man or city would look past the obvious meaning for what was hidden underneath. When the Athenians, threatened by Persian invasion, were advised to rely on a wooden wall, they did not set about building one: they held a consultation, and many opinions were expressed as they sought to
\end{quote}
result of his investigation, Socrates discovers what would appear to be the upper limit of human wisdom: namely, the fact that to be the wisest of human beings involves openly acknowledging the great extent of one’s ignorance. In reaching this conclusion in the course of his investigation of the oracle given to Chaerephon, Socrates also expands his own knowledge of himself, and he expands the extent of his own wisdom. Socrates’ knowledge of himself increases when he discovers how it is that he is just a little bit wiser than other people, and Socrates’ wisdom increases when he adjusts his claims about himself to accurately reflect the new knowledge that he has of himself.

So, Socrates’ dealings with the Delphic Oracle can be summarized as follows: Chaerephon brings back the infamous prophecy from Delphi. Socrates, puzzled by what the prophecy could possibly mean, determines to try to prove it false. Being unable to prove the oracle false on the occasion of his first test, Socrates feels compelled to continue examining people. He portrays this process of examination as being a series of toils that he was made to solve the riddle, until finally the interpretation of Themistocles was accepted that by ‘wooden wall’ the god meant the navy. The behaviour in which Socrates engages in order to “interpret” the divination about his wisdom is very different from the behaviour in which Guthrie describes the Athenians engaging. Socrates does not consult other people as to what the oracle about his wisdom might mean; instead, he questions politicians and craftsmen on other matters, presumably ones related to human goodness and excellence, since these seem to be the topics of his interchanges with people in Plato’s dialogues. In the case of the poets, he questions them about the content of their poems. (See Ap. 21b9 ff.) While perhaps Socrates should have asked other people for assistance in interpreting the Delphic Oracle’s divination, he does not.

68 Reeve (23) maintains that Socrates’ test of the divination given to Chaerophon was strictly for the purposes of interpretation; if the prophecy turned out to be false, Socrates himself would go to Delphi and pose a question of clarification to the oracle. While this undoubtedly sounds like an action that would be very much in keeping with Socrates’ character and behaviour, at no point in the Apology does Socrates say that he ever planned to consult the oracle at Delphi himself. Instead, Socrates says, “I went to one of those people reputed to be wise, for I thought that there, if anywhere, I would refute the divination and demonstrate to the oracle that ‘This person here is wiser than I am, but you said I was wisest’ ” (Ap. 21b9-c2). There is nothing about this passage that suggests that Socrates intends to ask any sort of question of clarification of the Oracle at Delphi should he prove the prophecy false: rather, his intention seems to be to show the Pythia that either she made a mistake, or she is using the word “wisdom” in a very unusual sort of way. As it turns out, Socrates will decide that the prophecy is correct, but the common conception of wisdom needs to be somewhat modified.
undergo by the god of the Delphic Oracle,\textsuperscript{69} who was using him as an example to human beings.\textsuperscript{70}

Note that, logically speaking, proving the prophecy false would put \textit{only} the reliability of the Delphic Oracle into question; it could not throw into question the reliability of the deity behind the oracle.\textsuperscript{71} Inaccurate predictions on the part of a fortune-teller do not demonstrate that scrying into a crystal ball is \textit{impossible}; rather, the inaccurate predictions only demonstrate that the fortune-teller in question cannot read a crystal ball. While the existence of many unreliable fortune-tellers would throw the whole business of fortune-telling into question, that still would not \textit{prove} that it is impossible for human beings to know the future. Similarly, if Socrates were able to conclusively demonstrate that the Delphic Oracle had given his friend an inaccurate divination, that by itself would not throw the whole business of prophecy and divination into question, nor would it demonstrate anything about what deities do or do not know, or even whether they exist or not. It would only serve to demonstrate that the Delphic Oracle was capable of making mistakes. Socrates’ “attempted refutation” of the prophecy given to Chaerephon does not, as Thomas West claims, “show up the Delphic Apollo as a liar or a fool,” nor does it amount “to a tacit denial either of Apollo’s divinity or of the priestess’ inspiration by the god.”\textsuperscript{72} If the prophecy given to Chaerephon were false, that would not serve to prove that the god Apollo did not exist, nor would it serve to prove that the Pythia was not \textit{inspired} by him; rather, it would only serve to demonstrate that the Pythia’s utterances were sometimes incorrect.

\textsuperscript{69} Ap. 22a6-8.

\textsuperscript{70} Ap. 23a5-b4.

\textsuperscript{71} See Henry Teloh, \textit{Socratic Education in Plato’s Early Dialogues} (Notre Dame, Indiana: U of Notre Dame P, 1986) 111: “We must . . . distinguish between the god and his oracle. The god cannot lie, but the oracle can be misinspired . . . . Socrates flirts with impiety by questioning the oracle, but he does not question the veracity of the god.”

\textsuperscript{72} West (1979) 106, 107.
If a person is divinely inspired (assuming such a thing is possible), that does not automatically mean that everything that she speaks will be true, sensible, reasonable, or intelligible. As a result of his investigations into the truth of the divination that Chaerephon brought back from Delphi, Socrates eventually concluded that to be wise as a human being is to recognize that one’s knowledge is limited, and that one is intellectually fallible and prone to error.\footnote{See Johnstone 129.} Had Socrates proven wrong the divination Chaerephon brought back from Delphi, this would still confirm the notion of human wisdom advanced in the Apology; for, as a human being, the Pythia could still be prone to error. In fact, one could argue that any Athenian who believed that Socrates’ testing the accuracy of the divination from Delphi could put the existence of the god Apollo into question, was in fact an Athenian with an impious belief. It is one thing to prove a divination wrong; it is quite another thing to prove that a god does not exist.\footnote{In Book I of the Histories (46-49), Herodotus recounts how Croesus of Lydia tests the reliability of various famous oracles in the Mediterranean world. This action by Croesus is not portrayed by Herodotus as being impious, and even though Croesus finds most oracles to be unreliable, Croesus does not go on to conclude that their patron divinities do not exist.} One could argue that an Athenian who believes that any human being has the means to prove a deity’s nonexistence is in fact an Athenian who does not recognize the limits of human knowledge.

Of course, given the Oracle’s prominence in the Greek world, a pious Athenian with traditionalist views might very well consider it impious of Socrates to try to test the accuracy of the prophecy that Chaerephon had obtained; in the eyes of an Athenian traditionalist, the Delphic Oracle’s reliability had already been established, and could be verified by the fact that people from all over the Greek world, and even Greek cities themselves, consulted it. Both (noble) tradition and (democratic) mass opinion held that the oracle was reliable – so why should Socrates doubt the accuracy of the prophecy that he had been given? In doubting the accuracy of the prophecy given to Chaerephon, Socrates challenges both tradition and mass opinion; he is not
willing to trust either. However, at the same time, Socrates is also not an individualist who puts total faith in his own opinion; while he does not believe himself to be wise, he will also not dismiss outright the oracle’s claim concerning his wisdom, either. Instead, Socrates sets up for himself a standard that he has to meet in order to be able to assert that his knowledge of himself and his lack of wisdom is correct: he has to prove the Delphic Oracle’s prophecy wrong. If he cannot meet this standard, then he has no business claiming that he is in no way wise. Despite trying repeatedly, Socrates cannot meet the standard that he sets up for himself in order to be able to claim knowledge of his lack of wisdom, so he adjusts his view of himself accordingly, and he revises his notion of wisdom. While Socrates concludes that he is wise in human wisdom, human wisdom, he maintains, is a very insignificant form of wisdom; it is not real wisdom. Instead, true wisdom is the sort of wisdom possessed by deities like the god of the Delphic Oracle, who really is wise— and who, it seems, cannot be mistaken in what he knows.

In maintaining a distinction between “true” and “lesser” wisdom, Socrates is operating very much within the Greek tradition concerning sophia. Guthrie maintains that over time, as part of the development of the use of the term, various Greek writers drew distinctions between “true” and “false” sophia. In the conflict between Guthrie and Kerferd’s conceptions of sophia, we can also see modern scholars taking sides on what constitute “true” and “false” characterizations of sophia. Socrates does not maintain that human wisdom is false wisdom;

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75 Ap. 20d6-9.
76 See Ap. 23a5-6.
77 Emile de Strycker (63) concludes, “Consequently, perfect knowledge is not accessible to man; it is a privilege of God alone. By exposing in this way the insufficiency of human understanding and by contrasting it with divine, absolute knowledge, Socrates gives a new and typically philosophical interpretation to the Delphic maxim gnôthi seauton. This maxim advises man to ‘know himself’, that is, to realize that he is a man, not a god, that he should not extol himself but avoid every form of hubris.”
78 Guthrie 28.
rather, he simply maintains that it is a much lesser and imperfect form of wisdom than that possessed by deities.

Of course, though, this leads us to wonder what divine wisdom is. To repeat it again, human wisdom, according to Socrates, involves knowing and acknowledging the limits of one’s knowledge, and operating accordingly within those limits, while at the same time trying to expand one’s knowledge and the limits within which one is able to operate. Divine wisdom, on the other hand, has the power to compel people to act in certain ways such that the truth is revealed: the Pythia in Delphi is compelled by the god of the oracle to answer the questions posed to her; Chaerephon feels compelled by the answer he gets from the Delphic Oracle to inform other people about it; and, once he has come to an understanding of the oracle, Socrates feels compelled to make revealing human beings’ lack of wisdom his mission in life. By contrast, those who are wise in human wisdom make a conscious choice to tell the truth about the limits of their knowledge (as Socrates does), and to expand the limits of their knowledge (as Socrates does). On the other hand, those who (like Socrates) are inspired by divine wisdom have no choice but to reveal the truth and to expand the limits of others’ knowledge. In other words, those who are wise in human wisdom make a conscious choice to educate themselves and expand the limits of knowledge, while those who are wise in divine wisdom feel compelled to expand the limits of others’ knowledge.

To educate oneself, then, is the hallmark of human wisdom: by actively seeking to learn, one admits that one does not know the very things about which one seeks to gain

79 See Ap. 23b4-c1.
80 Johnstone (129-130) maintains that Socrates’ conception of divine wisdom involves the ability to express one’s knowledge in terms of rational accounts. However, on this account poetry and prophecy are not expressions of divine wisdom. Yet in the Ion (533c9-535a1, 541e1-542b4) Socrates maintains that while Ion the rhapsode is not an expert in a techné because he cannot rationally account for what he does, he is nevertheless able to sing Homer’s praises because he is divinely inspired.
knowledge. On the other hand, to educate others is to be the instrument of the divine, for (according to Socrates) all good things that human beings have come from the gods,\textsuperscript{81} and knowledge is a good thing. If one has knowledge to transmit to others, then its origin must be divine – even if it is knowledge that one has acquired by one’s own efforts. Those who actively educate themselves are individuals who seek out what is divine, for all knowledge (and knowledge is a good thing) is divine in its origins. To seek to educate oneself and to be a learner is, therefore, on Socrates’ account, to be pious, and as far as Socrates is concerned, his act of investigating the prophecy that was delivered to Chaerephon was an act of piety.

So, to summarize, Socrates’ conception of human wisdom essentially entails

a) possessing knowledge of (what is possible and what is not within) a particular subject;

b) prudently keeping one’s actions and one’s claims about one’s knowledge within the limits of one’s knowledge, while at the same time

c) working to expand the limits of one’s knowledge (of what is, or is possible) by testing the limits of one’s knowledge.

In short, for Plato’s Socrates (in the \textit{Apology}, at least), \textit{anthrôpiné sophia} involves acting and speaking in accordance with one’s knowledge (and not imprudently attempting to transgress or misrepresent its limits), while at the same time testing the limits of one’s knowledge in order to determine whether they are fixed or are capable of being expanded – for the more knowledge one has, the greater is one’s (potential) range of prudent and sensible action (and speech).\textsuperscript{82} In this, Socrates’ conception of \textit{anthrôpiné sophia} is something like a richer and more complex version

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Euthphr.} 14e10-15a2.

\textsuperscript{82} Consider West (1979) 119: “Knowledge of ignorance leads directly to the care for ‘prudence, and truth, and how your soul will be the best possible’ ([\textit{Ap.}] 29e1-2). Hence awareness of ignorance implies as its corollary the conscientious search for knowledge to remedy that ignorance.”
of Guthrie’s characterization of *sophia*. Socrates would *seem* to explicitly reject Kerferd’s characterization of *sophia* as being the inspiration that allows poets, prophets, and sages to engage in divine revelation; after all, Socrates does maintain that he has found that it is not wisdom that allows poets and seers to do what they do, but the fact that they were born with a certain nature and have been divinely inspired.\(^83\)

However, we should be cautious about how we interpret Socrates’ claim that it is not wisdom but nature and divine inspiration that allows poets, prophets, and sages to engage in divine revelation. After all, Socrates does admit that the god of the Delphic Oracle, unlike human beings, truly is wise.\(^84\) If poets, prophets, and sages are divinely inspired (assuming that such things as divine inspiration and divinities exist), then it would stand to reason that the words of poets, prophets, and sages are the product of divine wisdom, and therefore reflect it. In other words, when Socrates says that poets, prophets, and sages have no wisdom (at least in the context of their respective occupations), what he is saying is that they have no wisdom *of their own*. Rather, divine wisdom works through them. In Socrates’ case, while he possesses human wisdom, divine wisdom also works through him. Even though Socrates claims to be a divine gift from the god of the Delphic Oracle to the Athenians, he does not suggest that this makes him either wise or an educator; instead it is the *god* who is wise and who educates the Athenians *by means* of Socrates.\(^85\)

As far as Socrates is concerned, if he educates at all, it is not because *he* educates, but because, like a poet or prophet, he is inspired by a deity and the deity works through him. While Socrates may be an instrument of education or a “teaching tool”, he is not an educator or teacher.


\(^84\) *Ap*. 23a5-7.

himself – at least as far as Socrates is concerned. I shall now turn to discussing the nature of the discourse by means of which Socrates educates others. I shall commence this discussion in the following chapter by looking at eristic, a form of discourse that closely resembles Socrates’ style of questioning, but that differs from it in important ways. In Chapter 3, I shall examine the educational merits of the popular rhetoric in which Socrates’ accusers engage. And then, in Chapters 4 and 5, I shall consider Socrates’ discourse and its educational merits in the light of these two others.
Chapter 2: The Eristic of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus

Chapter introduction

What is perhaps most notable about Socrates’ characteristic “business” is that it involves discourse: in order to interpret and understand the Delphic prophecy that claimed there was no one wiser than he, Plato’s Socrates decided to examine people known for their wisdom. In this chapter, I examine the discourse of a set of characters who maintain a certain pretence to wisdom. In the Euthydemus, the sophists Dionysodorus and Euthydemus maintain that they can teach excellence faster and more finely than anyone else. Socrates finds this remarkable, and begs the pair (who are brothers) to give a demonstration of their wisdom. However, contrary to what some might expect, the sophists do not give an exposition of any sort of doctrine, nor do they make a show of providing their audience with sage practical advice. Instead, the sophists put on a demonstration of their prowess in a particular form of discourse: eristic. The aim of

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86 Ap. 21b9 ff.
87 Euthyd. 273d8-274b1.
88 It should be noted that in the Euthydemus, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus do not identify themselves as practitioners of eristic; it is Socrates who identifies them as such at 272b10. Nor do the brothers claim to be sophists, either; it is Socrates’ friend, Crito, who identifies them as such at 271b9-c1. What the brothers do claim to be able to do, however, is to teach excellence and to be able to impart it to their pupils faster and more finely than anyone else can (273d8-9). Also, note that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus do not explicitly claim to be wise; rather, it is Socrates who maintains that the sophists’ self-professed ability to teach excellence must constitute a form of wisdom (274a7-9), and the brothers say nothing in denial of Socrates’ assertions.
this chapter is to demonstrate that eristic is an anti-philosophical form of discourse in that the “rules” of eristic prevent respondents from qualifying their answers or asking questions of clarification. This ultimately causes those who are engaged in eristic discourse to stray away from discussing “being” and “what is”, so that they end up speaking nonsense. Eristic also is capable of having a negative effect upon participants and audiences in that it constitutes a cruel form of entertainment that can be used to antagonize others, cause strife, and shut down civil discourse. Yet even so, in the right hands, eristic might be able to serve certain beneficial, and even educational, purposes. It is possible that in the right hands, eristic might be used as an entertaining introduction to philosophy, or as a means to silence troublesome individuals who would otherwise disrupt civil discourse. That being said, despite its potential positive uses, eristic in and of itself cannot make people into excellent human beings, and it is not, in and of itself, a kind of discourse that is philosophical in its nature. Furthermore, the discourse of the Euthydemus suggests that, in the hands of most people, eristic is much more likely to be utilized in a negative fashion than in a beneficial one. Hence, for the most part, eristic is a form of discourse that is anti-philosophical and anti-educational, for those who engage in it are more likely to turn themselves and others away from knowledge and the good, and less likely to turn themselves and others towards these things.

1. The “rules” of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic

   In Plato’s Euthydemus, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus are a pair of brothers who are generally regarded as being sophists, or “wise men”. While they are capable of teaching both armoured fighting as well as forensic rhetoric, when the brothers make their appearance in the

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89 See Euthyd. 271b9-c1.
Euthydemus they maintain that they have given up on teaching both the martial and the legal arts of battle. Instead, the brothers have taken up teaching yet another kind of fighting: eristic. Eristic is a kind of battle that is not played out on the fields of war or in the law courts, but that instead takes place in the form of a verbal contest. The brothers claim that by teaching this agonistic form of discourse to others, they can make them into excellent human beings.

Socrates encounters Dionysodorus and Euthydemus in a wrestling school in the Lyceum, as they are about to put on a promotional demonstration of their wisdom. Socrates asks the brothers if they can persuade those present that excellence can be taught, and that the brothers are the people best able to teach it and to turn others towards philosophy. The brothers insist that they can indeed persuade people of these things, and they agree to use Clinias, a young teenager who is present in the audience, as their pupil for the purposes of demonstration.

Euthydemus commences the demonstration by asking Clinias who are the learners: the wise or the ignorant? Just before Clinias gives his initial answer to Euthydemus’ question about who are the learners, Dionysodorus smugly whispers to Socrates that the youth will be refuted no matter how he answers, and indeed, this is what ends up happening to Clinias: Euthydemus refutes his answer that it is the wise who learn, and then Dionysodorus refutes the claim that it is the ignorant, and not the wise, who learn. After the sophists have refuted Clinias “both ways”, Socrates steps in to encourage the youth. As far as Socrates is concerned, there is at least one

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90 See Euthyd. 271c6 ff.
91 Kerferd 62: “[Eristic] derives from the noun eris meaning strife, quarrel or contention, and, as Plato uses the term, eristic means ‘seeking victory in argument’ . . . .”
92 Euthyd. 273d8-9.
93 See Euthyd. 274a7-9.
94 Euthyd. 274d4-275c1.
95 Euthyd. 275d2-277c7.
96 Euthyd. 277d1 ff.
correct answer to the question “Who are the learners: the wise or the ignorant?” As Socrates explains to Clinias,

“First,” as Prodicus says, “it is necessary to learn about the correct use of words.” . . . [Y]ou didn’t see that the term “learning” [mathēsis] is applied in two different circumstances: a) when someone who, having right from the beginning no knowledge whatsoever about something, then goes on to acquire this knowledge; and, b) when someone who already has knowledge about something (be it something said or something done), inspects it by means of knowledge. Actually, people usually call b) “comprehension” [suniēsis] rather than “learning” [mathēsis], but it is also called “learning” as well.\(^97\)

According to Socrates, the correct answer to Euthydemus’ question is “both”: on the one hand, some of the people who learn – the unlearned – are people who have no previous knowledge of something, but on the other hand, some of the people who learn – the wise – are people who learn by means of inspecting and attempting to understand what they already know. So, when the ignorant learn, they acquire knowledge, but when the wise learn, they acquire understanding. Socrates’ comments point to the limitations in the “method” of the brothers.

Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ purported wisdom consists in imparting clever verbal techniques that can be used to refute others; that is, the brothers are teachers of what is known as the art of eristic. In order to be able to demonstrate their art of refutation, the brothers must restrict the number of possible answers one could give to a question, typically allowing a respondent in any given situation to choose between only two possible answers, answers which are (or would appear to be) the antithesis of each other.\(^98\) Frequently, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus insist on their “pupils” being able to give only “yes” or “no” answers to their questions, but the restriction of possible answers also appears in other cases. For example, Euthydemus does not allow Clinias to give just any answer to the question, “Who are the

\(^{97}\) Euthyd. 277e3-278a5.

learners?” Instead, Clinias must choose between two options: either it is the wise who learn, or it is the ignorant who learn. It is possible that Clinias might have preferred to answer the question “Who are the learners?” in some other way: perhaps he would have described the various characteristics of a learner, or perhaps he would have identified a particular group of people (such as students) as learners. Permitting answers such as these, though, would not allow Dionysodorus and Euthydemus to control the direction in which the “discussion” would proceed. Further, the best answers to the brothers’ questions are (usually) not among the possible responses permitted to their “pupils”. Indeed, the best answers to the brothers’ questions, in order to be truly understandable and make sense, often must be qualified or explained in some way or another.

For example, in order to answer Euthydemus’ question, “Who are the learners: the ignorant or the wise?” Socrates must explain his answer of “both”, pointing out that there are two senses in which we may use the word “learning” [mathēsis]. Respondents to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus’ questions, however, are not permitted to give explanations or qualifications of their answers. In prohibiting their respondents from giving explanations or qualifications of their answers, the eristic “masters” prohibit their “pupils” – and themselves – from speaking truthfully and accurately about reality or being – “what is”.

In their arguments, the eristics typically take what is true in a limited sense and insist that it represents the whole truth (which it does not), and the eristics’ insistence that their respondents cannot qualify or explain their answers assists them in using what is only a part of the truth to represent the whole. At one point in the Euthydemus, Dionysodorus concludes that because Chaeredemus (the father of Socrates’ half-brother) is not a father to Socrates, then

99 On sophistic discourse’s general “emphasis on dichotomy”, see Rankin 19-20.
100 See Euthyd. 296a1-c7.
101 See Teloh 205. According to Kerferd (62): “Concern for the truth is not a necessary part of [eristic] – victory in argument can be secured without it, sometimes more easily so.”
Chaeredemus is not a father. Now because Chaeredemus is not a father to Socrates, it is true that the description “not a father” can be predicated of Chaeredemus. What Dionysodorus ignores, though, is that Chaeredemus is “not a father” only in a certain sense: he is not the father of Socrates and of many other people, but he is the father of Socrates’ half-brother. Conversely, Euthydemus maintains that his father is the father of all. This statement, as Ctesippus (a brash young admirer of Clinias who is in the audience) implies, is true if Euthydemus means that his original male ancestor is the father of all human beings, but it cannot be the case that Euthydemus’ original male ancestor is the father of every living thing, no matter how staunchly Euthydemus maintains it to be so.

Because Dionysodorus and Euthydemus prohibit themselves and others from speaking truthfully and accurately about “what is”, Socrates accuses the brothers of engaging in discourse that sews not only other people’s mouths shut, but also their own. The brothers “sew” other people’s mouths shut both by refuting them, and by prohibiting them from giving any answers other than “yes” or “no”. “What is”, however admits of complexity, nuance, and degree. Hence, when we speak about “what is the case”, oftentimes what we say must admit of more qualification and detail than simply “This is so; that never is.” Consequently, with the limitations that the brothers place upon their respondents’ answers, each subsequent question the brothers ask takes the respondent yet one more “stitch” away from speaking about the truth and “what is”, and one more “stitch” closer to speaking about nothing, “what is not”. Yet, at the same time, each question the brothers ask also takes them further and further away from speaking about reality and the truth, so that by the time they have actually refuted one of their “pupils”, the

103 *Euthyd*. 298b4-d6.
104 *Euthyd*. 303d7-e4.
conclusion on which their refutation is based is meaningless in the sense that it has nothing to do with what really is the case “out there in the world”; instead, the conclusion “works” only because it is in accordance with the internal rules of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic “game”.105

It should be noted that there are more rules to the game of eristic than the rule that respondents to Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ questions may only answer “yes” or “no”. Another rule of eristic is that respondents to Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ questions cannot in turn ask questions of the sophists; all that they can do is answer the sophists’ questions.106 Even more problematic, though, is that the rule against respondents asking questions also extends to questions of clarification. When Euthydemus poses questions to him, Socrates requests that the sophist clarify what he means so that he might better understand what Euthydemus is asking him. Euthydemus, though, will not allow Socrates to ask questions of clarification; Socrates is to answer only in terms of what he understands.107 To this, Socrates responds,

“Well, then, . . . will you be satisfied if you ask me a question to no purpose; that is, if you ask, thinking in terms of one thing, and I answer you, understanding the question in terms of something else?

“Oh, I certainly will be satisfied,” [replies Euthydemus], “although I suspect you won’t be.”108

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105 In “The Socratic Elenchus,” in Socratic Studies, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), Gregory Vlastos maintains that eristic is “. . . only a method (or set of methods – a whole bag of tricks) for winning arguments, regardless of whether or not you think what you are arguing for is true . . .” (136); “[i]n eristic, where the prime object is to win, one is free to say anything that will give one a debating advantage” (8). According to Rankin (19), the techniques of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, “. . . fail in their philosophical effectiveness, because they are deliberately limited in their application in order to achieve a victory rather than carry forward the argument.” According to Jacqueline de Romilly, “. . . there is no denying that the [sophistic] technique rested upon a latent assumption that success mattered more than the truth” (82).

106 See Leo Strauss, “On the Euthydemus,” Interpretation 1 (1970): 12-13. It should be noted that in their eristic exchanges, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus do not always act as the questioners; however, regardless of who is asking the questions and who is responding, a question on the part of the respondent constitutes an invalid answer.

107 Euthyd. 295b2-c3.

108 Euthyd. 295c4-7.
In the passage above, Euthydemus actually agrees that he would be perfectly happy to ask Socrates questions that essentially serve no purpose other than to “refute” Socrates according to the internal rules of eristic. If Socrates is unsure about what Euthydemus is asking him, and he goes ahead and answers Euthydemus without requesting clarification, then Socrates risks answering having misunderstood what Euthydemus is asking. If this were to happen, the answer that Socrates would be giving Euthydemus would not be an answer to Euthydemus’ actual question, but to Socrates’ confused interpretation of the question. The situation that Socrates is in with Euthydemus, is, of course, not a critical one that demands a precise answer in order to avert serious consequences. Nevertheless, if Socrates does not answer Euthydemus’ actual question, then the whole discussion is at risk of being thrown off-course, with the two participants falling into confusion. If both participants in the discussion become confused and misunderstand what the other is saying, then they might never realize that they both do in fact agree (or do in fact disagree) on the matter that is being discussed in the conversation. Even worse, when participants in a discussion become confused about what the other participants are trying to say, sometimes serious misunderstanding can result, tempers begin to flare up, and the conversation dissolves into strife and bickering.

2. The outcome of the the eristic game

In the previous section, I outlined some of the basic rules of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic game:

a) respondents are allowed to answer questions only in terms of “yes” and “no”;  

b) respondents may not qualify their answers or attempt to explain themselves;

109 According to Teloh (202), “A good dialectician asks his questions in a proper logical order, but he must also respond to the answers and confusions of the learner. The argument must stop and start when there is good reason to do so. Eristic, however, does not stop to clarify confusion or to make distinctions.”
c) respondents may not ask questions of the interrogator, including questions of clarification.

In the game of eristic, respondents are placed under strict limitations insofar as the scope of their answers are concerned, but no such limitations are placed upon the scope of the questions that the interrogator may ask. Given this, the game of eristic seems to be decidedly unbalanced, with the rules tilted sharply in favour of the interrogator.

Indeed, what Dionysodorus and Euthydemus do might be considered to be a kind of game: the pleasure that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus derive from their refutations of people, says Socrates, is similar to the sort of enjoyment practical jokers take in pulling chairs out from underneath people who are about to sit down.\textsuperscript{110} The two sophists like to make fun of people, dancing around them with their arguments, toying with them and teasing them,\textsuperscript{111} and this is all very amusing and entertaining to those who gather around the sophists.\textsuperscript{112} In other words, to some extent Dionysodorus and Euthydemus (at least insofar as their promotional demonstrations are concerned) are in the entertainment business, for they are a couple of jesters. However, they are jesters of a particularly cruel sort, for usually it is not Dionysodorus and Euthydemus at whom the sophists’ audiences laugh, but at their “pupils”, who are left speechless and confused once they have been refuted by the sophists’ arguments\textsuperscript{113} – arguments that are not fair, for an eristic interchange with Dionysodorus and Euthydemus is essentially a rigged contest designed to ensure that the brothers come out victorious.

\textsuperscript{110} Euthyd. 278b2-278c2.
\textsuperscript{111} Cf. Euthyd. 275d3-e6, 277d4-278c7, 283b8-10.
\textsuperscript{112} Euthyd. 276b6-c1, 303b1-7.
\textsuperscript{113} This is what happens to Clinias: Euthyd. 276b4-d2. Rankin (19) refers to the followers of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus as “the vociferous claque that abets them with a psychological warfare of hoots and cheers”.

Given his kind of character, Ctesippus, a “roguish” young associate of Socrates, picks up on the mocking aspect of eristic very quickly.\textsuperscript{114} Ctesippus is quite enthusiastic to adopt the brothers’ cruel, joking style and turn it against them. Yet even if by mocking them Ctesippus gives the brothers their just deserts, Ctesippus’ ridicule would normally seem out of place in civil discourse. Instead of encouraging speakers to clarify themselves or to ask questions to obtain further understanding, mockery and ridicule shut down discourse that would otherwise be productive of knowledge. Though one would hope that observers of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus are mature enough and have been sufficiently well-brought-up not to use ridicule against friends in a discussion, the case of Ctesippus implies that some young people are particularly impressionable and pick up very quickly on the nastier aspects of eristic. This is particularly worrisome in the light of Michael Gagarin’s comments about the educational role played by sophistic teaching:

Performances and debates would have been especially appealing to the young men who would soon be entering careers that would include performances and debates in the lawcourts and Assembly. These young men could get direct, specialized training simply by attending actual meetings of the courts and the Assembly (particularly in the company of an older, more experienced participant); but sophistic performances would demonstrate the more general intellectual discourse that would be useful in other, more private settings, such as symposia.\textsuperscript{115}

One would hope that young men like Ctesippus would not begin to use the nastier aspects of eristic against their friends and companions at symposia. If they did, and this angered and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{114} Ctesippus of Paeania is present in Socrates’ cell during the conversation in the Phaedo (see Phd. 59b5-10); he also appears in the Lysis (see Ly. 203a1 ff.). Socrates refers to Ctesippus’ “youthful arrogance” and “roguish” nature at Euthyd. 273a6-b1 and 300d7-8. He remarks on the fact that Ctesippus has very quickly picked up the brothers’ techniques of mockery at Euthyd. 300d7-8. There are plenty of examples of Ctesippus imitating Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ flippant style of questioning at Euthyd. 298b4-300d8.

\end{footnotesize}
offended people, then they might eventually end up with more enemies than friends – and that would not be good either for their social lives, or for their political careers.

Indeed, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic does succeed at bringing about strife.\footnote{According to Prodicus in the \textit{Protagoras} “Friends disagree with friends with goodwill, but enemies at odds with each other engage in eristics” (337b1-3).} The brothers’ style of discourse easily provokes people to anger, as is demonstrated in the case of Ctesippus, whom Dionysodorus and Euthydemus manage to quickly rile up in several instances,\footnote{\textit{Euthyd.} 283e1-6, 284c9-285d6, 288a8-b3.} and even Socrates eventually becomes angry with the sophists and answers back to them with insulting language as well.\footnote{\textit{Euthyd.} 297b9-d1. Socrates compares himself to Hercules fighting the multi-headed Hydra, with the Crab biting him on his left. Socrates describes the Hydra as a kind of female sophist, and he claims that the sophistic Crab just recently sailed in from the sea. Given that Euthydemus is sitting to Socrates’ right, and Dionysodorus is sitting on Socrates’ left (see \textit{Euthyd.} 271a8-b8), Socrates is essentially “painting” an unflattering “picture” of the brothers as a pair of monstrosities. See Chance 156-157 for discussion of the aforementioned passage and its relation to Heracles’ Second Labour.} It would not be so bad if it were only the sophists’ eristic that drove their respondents to answer them in anger, but Dionysodorus and Euthydemus cannot resist adding “fuel to the fire”, so to speak, for the brothers themselves use insults in order to bully reluctant respondents into answering their questions.\footnote{According to Romilly (82): Plato portrays Euthydemus [and] Dionysodorus . . . as ill-mannered and conceited. Their passionate desire to confound their adversaries renders them intolerant. As the love of truth went under, so did patience, courtesy, and meaningful dialogue.} When Socrates refuses to answer a question of Euthydemus’ on the grounds that he does not understand what is being asked, and so he will not answer until Euthydemus clarifies himself, Euthydemus in turn responds to Socrates with insult, essentially calling Socrates a stubborn and evasive old fogey.\footnote{\textit{Euthyd.} 295c10-11.} There is no need for such insult, and it is completely unfair, for Euthydemus and Dionysodorus stubbornly refuse to answer Socrates’ questions whenever he asks them to clarify themselves or explain
themselves.\textsuperscript{121} Yet even so, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus nevertheless profess to be able to teach excellence.\textsuperscript{122}

In addition, as the case of Ctesippus also illustrates, the laughter and admiration that a successful refutation provokes, especially a particularly witty one, tends to build up the successful refuter’s ego and cause him to develop a high opinion of himself:

Ctesippus, in his usual way, burst out into great, roaring guffaws. “Hey, Euthydemus,” he said, “your brother’s made your argument sit on both sides of the fence, and it’s been defeated and demolished!” Clinias was very pleased and laughed, so that Ctesippus grew ten times bigger.\textsuperscript{123}

While there is certainly nothing inherently wrong with having a high sense of self-esteem, in this case it comes entirely at someone else’s expense. Truly beneficial self-esteem and pride in one’s achievement do not require that someone else’s be destroyed. Furthermore, as the case of Ctesippus suggests, the degree of self-esteem engendered in an individual by means of a successful eristic refutation may be entirely out of proportion to the size and worth of the refuter’s actual achievement. In this, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ teaching does not serve to improve young people; rather, it would seem to encourage young people to develop “swelled heads” at the expense of others.\textsuperscript{124}

Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ defeat at the hands of Ctesippus also points to something else: if Dionysodorus and Euthydemus really understood the sorts of things that they talk about, and if they really were masters of eristic techniques, then a neophyte like Ctesippus should not be able to defeat them in argument. Yet after having listened to the brothers’ discourse for only a short while, already Ctesippus is beginning to master the skills of eristic and

\textsuperscript{121} Euthyd. 286e8-287d6.
\textsuperscript{122} Euthyd. 273d8-9.
\textsuperscript{123} Euthyd. 300d3-7.
\textsuperscript{124} Romilly 82: “. . . [E]asy victories such as these [in eristic] tended to foster self-satisfaction and arrogance.”
use them successfully against his teachers. Ctesippus’ successful refutation of the sophists indicates that although the brothers have picked up the various techniques of eristic, they do not really possess mastery of it, because they cannot reliably control the outcome of eristic debates with their students: \(^{125}\) Euthydemus and Dionysodorus cannot always win their arguments – and they cannot always win even against brand-new pupils. The case of Ctesippus suggests that eristic is an easy “art” to learn, but one that is not worth much once acquired, since experienced practitioners in eristic cannot always defeat inexperienced opponents.

3. The educational benefits of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic

In the previous section, I discussed various ways in which eristic has the potential to be a morally corrupting form of discourse:

- a) eristic can constitute a cruel form of entertainment;
- b) eristic can shut down civil discourse;
- c) eristic can be used to antagonize other people;
- d) a series of successful refutations has the potential to cause a refuter to develop an overinflated ego;
- e) despite being promoted as a means of developing excellence, eristic is indifferent to rightness and wrongness in human behavior and action;
- f) eristic has a tendency to cause strife amongst the participants in it.

\(^{125}\) One who is truly a master of an art can control the outcome of whatever he or she undertakes to do with that art: See *Euthyd.* 280a4-b3; *R.* 1.333e3-334a4, 340d1-341a2, 2.360e6-361a2. As Euthydemus and Dionysodorus cannot control the outcome of their discussions with their pupils, they are not truly masters of the art of eristic. That being said, see David Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1996) 42-57 on ancient responses to the assertion that medicine is not an art (*techne*) because it cannot always succeed at curing illness or preventing death.
Yet despite the problems inherent in it, the eristic discourse of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus can, if used properly, perform two beneficial functions. First of all, the eristic of the sophists can be instrumental in producing knowledge, although it does not, in itself, produce knowledge. Secondly, in the right hands, eristic can be used to maintain civil discourse.

In the right hands Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic might serve as a valuable educational tool in order to make students ready to learn much more serious subject matter than eristic techniques themselves. For example, Euthydemus gets Ctesippus to agree to the claim that it is good for a sick person to drink medicine whenever he needs it. He then asks Ctesippus whether it would be good for a person to always drink as much as possible, and whether anything good would come about if someone pounded up into a mixture a wagonload of medicinal plants. On its own, Euthydemus’ response to Ctesippus is merely a clever comeback. However, if one examines it, one can see that it does point to something worthwhile. It is good for a sick person to drink medicine whenever she needs it, but she should drink only as much as she needs. In other words, medicine is not something that is good without qualification. It is good when the right medicine is administered to the appropriate people at the right times and in the right amounts, but when medicine is administered to the wrong people at the wrong times and in the wrong amounts, that is not good. In Ctesippus’ case, what Ctesippus needs to learn is that the term “good” is applied in two different circumstances: when something is unqualifiedly good in all circumstances, and when something is good only with qualification. If Ctesippus were to inspect the questions that Euthydemus asks him, he might come to recognize this, and the reason why Ctesippus would come to recognize that there is a difference between what is unqualifiedly good and what is not, is that Ctesippus knows what it is for something to be good:

126 Euthyd. 299a9-b8.
it must be beneficial. Presumably, some things are always beneficial, while others are beneficial only under certain conditions and not others. Medicine is one of those things that is beneficial only under certain conditions and not others. Of course, Ctesippus already knows that medicine is good only under certain conditions and not others, but what he has never made explicit to himself is that, while what is good is always beneficial, there is a difference between what is absolutely good, and what is only qualifiedly good.

So, then, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic could be used as a beneficial educational technique, since questions of the sort that they like to pose could be used to demonstrate the different senses in which a word can be used. If one understands the different senses in which a word can be used, one can then go on to grasp something about the being of the thing to which the word refers. In other words, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic could be used for philosophical purposes, since it could be used for the purposes of conceptual demonstration.

The entertaining aspect of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic also enhances its use as an educational tool. Ctesippus picks up the brothers’ techniques quickly, for his “roguish” nature enjoys trying to outsmart the brothers, and discourse with them is a rather fun and enjoyable game for him. If Dionysodorus and Euthydemus were to use their eristic technique as a means to demonstrate or illustrate certain conceptual points, the playful and teasing aspect of their technique might help to make the whole process of learning rather enjoyable.

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127 Socrates points this out at Euthyd. 303e4-8.
128 See Euthyd. 273a7-b1, 300d7-8.
129 Euthyd. 298c5 -300d7.
130 Consider Gagarin 18:

A combination of serious and playful . . . appears in [the] Sophists. . . . Underlying such arguments may be the attitude that a paradoxical, shocking, or outrageous statement can draw the audience’s attention to a serious argument.
Socrates refers to what the sophists do as jesting, *prospaizein*, and identifies it as the playful part of learning, *paidia*, that takes place before the business of learning turns serious.\textsuperscript{131} It is possible, then, that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic could perhaps serve as a sort of entertaining introduction to philosophy. How this might work is demonstrated in Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ original refutation of Clinias. Once the youth’s claim that the wise are those who learn has been refuted by the sophists, Socrates goes on to explain to Clinias that the sophists were able to trip him up because he was not aware that “learning” is used in two different senses: “acquiring new knowledge”, and “understanding or comprehending what one has learned”.

Socrates then goes on to demonstrate to Clinias, through a question-and-answer discussion, that the youth should love wisdom and pursue it through learning.\textsuperscript{132} In other words, Socrates uses Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ refutation of Clinias to essentially demonstrate to the youth that there are two kinds of learning and that he should pursue both: he should not seek merely to acquire knowledge of new things, but he should also examine them carefully and try to understand them.

So, while Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic cannot *persuade* anyone to love wisdom and care for excellence\textsuperscript{133} (for its goal is not to persuade, but to refute), it can, by means of entertainment, *motivate* people to learn.\textsuperscript{134} Furthermore, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic can also serve to prepare students for real learning by introducing certain philosophical

\textsuperscript{131} *Euthyd*. 278b2-4, also cf. 278c1-4.

\textsuperscript{132} See *Euthyd*. 275d3 ff.

\textsuperscript{133} See *Euthyd*. 275a5-6.

\textsuperscript{134} One of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ “tricks” is to have one brother argue for one position, and then have the other argue for the opposite position, with both arguments resulting in the refutation of the interlocutor. Regarding the sophistic technique of juxtaposing opposed speeches or competing claims, Gagarin (30-31) writes,

> Opposed speeches cannot have the aim of persuading the audience. . . . The Sophists may have composed double *logoi* for many reasons — to shock, to entertain, to dazzle, to enlighten — but rarely to persuade. Indeed, the more sophisticated and intellectually interesting argument may for that very reason be the less persuasive . . . .
concepts to them in a clever and entertaining way. However, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic does not actually impart any real knowledge of philosophical concepts to its students; rather, students of eristic can develop understanding of philosophical concepts only if they reflect upon the sophists’ arguments, or if someone explains to them what they should take note of and learn from those arguments (just as Socrates does to Clinias). Consequently, it is not possible for the ignorant and unreflective to learn much on their own from Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic (apart from the techniques themselves); rather, the ignorant and unreflective will learn about philosophy through eristic only if their teacher of eristic is also a competent teacher of philosophy (and Dionysodorus and Euthydemus do not seem to be at all interested in teaching philosophy). That being said, it is possible for a person to learn a great deal from Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic, simply by examining it and considering it on her own. In this case, however, it is not the sophists who are the teachers of the thoughtful and reflective individual; rather, it is the thoughtful and reflective individual who teaches herself.

4. Eristic and the promotion of civil discourse

Although Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic might seem like a negative and destructive form of discourse that has no educational merit whatsoever, closer examination reveals that it can be used for the purpose of introducing students to philosophy. Somewhat similarly, although Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ use of eristic would suggest that it could be used only to shut down civil discourse, and not to promote it, in fact, in the right hands, eristic can also be used for the purposes of promoting civil discourse. However, the beneficial uses of eristic with regard to civil discourse are not evident in the Euthydemus, and can only be discerned if one considers the discourse of eristic independently of its portrayal in the dialogue.
Dionysodorus’ and Euthydemus’ bullying attitude toward their pupils makes the sophists’ pupils very determined to turn the brothers’ techniques against them in order to refute them. Having been “shot down” by the sophists, their “pupils” become determined to shut up their teachers by refuting them using the sophists’ own style of argumentation. Yet while increased determination on the part of the “pupils” to learn the sophists’ technique in order to use it against their teachers might appear to be something along the lines of a desire on the part of the pupils to pursue excellence in discourse, in actuality it is not. What the sophists’ pupils learn by imitating their teachers is how to refute others – that is, what the pupils learn is how to “sew people’s mouths shut”. 135 Shutting people up, though, does not promote intelligent discourse, the sort of discourse in which wise people who seek understanding try to engage. In fact, shutting people up does not promote any sort of discourse at all, not even eristic discourse, for the more Dionysodorus and Euthydemus are refuted (and have their mouths “sewn” shut), the less likely they are to carry on with their teaching, for they will simply not be able to impress people and attract “pupils” if they cannot make themselves appear clever.

That being said, it could be argued that knowing how to shut people up has its uses. Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ techniques might be used successfully against someone who insists upon interrupting a discussion in order to make thoughtless or inane comments. Sometimes reasoning with disruptive individuals simply does not work, and in order for reasonable discussion to be allowed to carry on, one must find a way to put a stop to those who would disrupt it. It is in these sorts of cases that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ techniques might be quite useful. Nevertheless, using eristic refutation in order to silence those who disrupt intelligent discourse ultimately will never be as beneficial as explaining to them why their

opinions (and their behaviour in the discussion) are wrong. Keep in mind that eristic refutation is generally indifferent to “what really is”, and so if it is used to refute the opinions of another individual, the refutation does not serve to demonstrate to that individual why his opinions are wrong. In fact, given that eristic refutation is generally indifferent to reality, if it is used to refute another individual, she might draw the wrong conclusions about why her opinions are incorrect. However, at the same time, using Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ techniques to silence those who would disrupt reasonable discourse might be better than using certain other means (such as bribery) to persuade disruptive individuals to keep silent. Yet even so, those who would employ Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ “art” of refutation need to know when it is appropriate to employ it, and when it is not, and that does not seem to be something that the brothers teach their pupils. Nevertheless, when wielded by the right people, eristic might actually be used to maintain discourse and to keep it civil and to the point, since it can be employed as a kind of “defensive measure” against those who would disrupt civil, intelligent discourse. At Republic 1.333e3-334a8 it is agreed that the individual who is most skilled in an art can use that art to bring about either benefit or harm. On these grounds, it is the master of eristic – that is, the master of refutation, of shutting people up, and of putting an end to discourse – who is most capable of ensuring the continuance of civil discourse, because the master of eristic discourse knows how to use it as a weapon against those who would disrupt civil discourse.
Chapter conclusion

In summary, we might say that in the right hands, eristic can be used as a worthwhile educational tool, as well as a weapon against those who would disrupt civil, productive, and intelligent discourse. In addition to these things, of course, eristic can also be used as means of comic entertainment, as the crowds that follow Dionysodorus and Euthydemus around demonstrate. However, what eristic cannot do is persuade anyone of anything, as persuasion is simply not one of its functions. It is for this reason that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus cannot use eristic to give a successful argument aimed at persuading Clinias to pursue excellence and philosophy. Furthermore, there is little truth to Euthydemus’ claim that he and his brother can teach excellence faster and more finely than anyone else. On the one hand, it is true that anyone who follows the brothers can learn eristic from them fairly quickly simply by imitating them and practising the brothers’ techniques. On the other hand, though, the brothers do not, and do not seem to be able to, teach others how to use their techniques in a beneficial and appropriate manner – even though useful and beneficial applications for eristic do exist. Consequently, we might say that while it is true that the brothers teach eristic in a way, they do not really teach excellence in eristic. A true master of eristic knows how to use eristic both to benefit and to harm, but the pupils of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus will not learn how to use eristic in a beneficial manner from their teachers.

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136 Euthyd. 276d1-2, 303b1-7.  
137 See Euthyd. 275a4-7.  
139 Euthyd. 303e4-8.  
140 Cf. R. 1.333e3-334a8.
As Socrates’ friend Crito remarks, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are representatives of a certain kind of sophist. It might be argued that there are two main kinds of sophists: those that are sincerely interested in understanding “what is”, and those that merely wish to appear clever. Prodicus, whom Socrates describes as stressing the importance of understanding the correct use of words, is one example of the sort of sophist who is sincerely interested in understanding “what is”, since those who concern themselves with using language correctly do so out of a desire to ensure that their speech accurately represents what really is. However, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus are not particularly concerned about their speech accurately representing “what is”. Instead, the sophists are more interested in appearing clever than they are in sincerely discussing “what is”. So, in conclusion, we might say that there are in fact two different kinds of sophistic discourse. Sophistic discourse of the better sort, the philosophical sort, is genuinely concerned about being and truth. Sophistic discourse that is not philosophical in its nature is not concerned about “being” and “what really is”, but is instead concerned merely with maintaining the appearance of cleverness; with amusing others in a witty fashion; or with silencing all critics, opponents, and alternative viewpoints. It is this second kind of discourse in which Dionysodorus and Euthydemus engage.

Although it is indeed the case that asking questions of others can be of great educational importance, while Dionysodorus and Euthydemus do ask questions of other people, they are not interested in learning from them. Dionysodorus and Euthydemus do not employ their eristic for

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141 *Euthyd.* 271b9-c1.

142 *Euthyd.* 277e3-4. Prodicus emphasizes that parties to a discussion should treat each other respectfully as friends; eristic is for mutual enemies seeking to outdo each other in front of an audience: *Prot.* 337a1-c6.

143 According to Gagarin (23), most sophists were concerned at least to some extent with studying logos: “Different Sophists explored everything from specialized linguistic areas, like semantics and etymology, to style and methods of argument, to such overriding issues as truth and falsehood, and the relation of words to reality.” Ensuring that language accurately represents “what is” is a major concern of the dialogue in the *Cratylus*.

144 Indeed, Ctesippus complains that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus do not mind at all if they talk nonsense: *Euthyd.* 288a8-b2.
the purpose of giving careful consideration to any matter. So, while Dionysodorus and Euthydemus present themselves as being very knowledgeable, intelligent people, their behaviour demonstrates that they themselves are not particularly interested in learning.

At one point in the *Euthydemus*, Socrates identifies wisdom with good fortune, and claims that if a person has wisdom, he has no need of any good luck in addition. According to Socrates, “Wisdom makes people absolutely fortunate.” Our ability to acquire learning (at least to some degree) by means of reflecting upon our past experiences ensures that we, as human beings, operate at least to some extent independently of luck or fortune. If we were totally and completely wise then we would have no need of luck or fortune at all, since we would be entirely self-sufficient and would have everything under our control; however, given that our wisdom is limited, we only have a measure of control over our circumstances. Yet even so, our ability to learn from our experiences is extremely important, since it frees us, at least to some degree, from being entirely dependent upon circumstance. Human beings do have the ability to control their circumstances by means of knowledge, and some of this knowledge can be gleaned by human beings taking the time to carefully consider the circumstances in which they find themselves.

According to Clinias, it is the wise who learn. Socrates comes to Clinias’ assistance and implies that the wise are those who learn by reflecting upon what they already know. Furthermore, according to Socrates, wisdom makes human beings absolutely fortunate. Hence, those human beings who are absolutely fortunate (if any are) must have engaged in some

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146 *Euthyd*. 275e7-276a2.
147 *Euthyd*. 277d1-278b2: the wise are those who examine what they know in order to better comprehend it.
reflective learning in their lives. At least with respect to their eristic, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus are not interested in learning (including learning by means of reflection), and so it is not surprising that, at least to some extent, the success of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic technique would seem to depend upon luck, as is demonstrated by the fact that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus cannot consistently defeat their “pupils” in argument (as the case of Ctesippus illustrates\textsuperscript{149}). Given that they cannot consistently defeat their “pupils” in argument, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus do not seem to be particularly wise; instead, they seem rather foolish, especially since they profess to teach excellence. The brothers are not sophists so much as they are clowns.

If Dionysodorus and Euthydemus were a little more willing to learn from their discursive activities – and, in particular, to take the time to reflect upon them – the brothers might have more control over the outcomes of their eristic discourse. If the brothers took the time to reflect upon what they were doing, they might realize that their discourse could be put to specific, beneficial uses; namely, as an entertaining introduction to philosophy, and as a means to shut up those who would belligerently disrupt civil discourse. As it stands, though, the brothers do not perform their discourse with any specific intent in mind other than to grab people’s attention, amuse them, and be paid some money in return for displaying their technique (which can be easily picked up by means of imitation). In other words, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic displays are merely spectacles that serve no purpose other than to generate money by getting people to laugh at their ridiculous comedy. There is no intellectual point to Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic displays (although there could be), and there is no educational or improving aim to the brothers’ eristic displays (although there could be).

\textsuperscript{149} See \textit{Euthyd.} 300d3-8.
Dionysodorus and Euthydemus are not really prepared to meet their pupils’ challenges, for, while their discursive quips have a sort of aim to them, it is not an aim that is directed by means of knowledge acquired by learning: the brothers will say anything in order to win against their pupils, and to get a laugh out of the audience. Further proof that the brothers’ discourse is not based upon reflective knowledge of what they are saying or how they are saying it is demonstrated by the fact that the brothers have no need to teach their discursive technique by means of explanation: it can be easily picked up by means of imitation. The fact that the brothers’ technique can be picked up by means of imitation suggests that the brothers are not so much speaking and discoursing as they are behaving in a certain way that involves making use of certain speech patterns. At least some of the brothers’ discourse is so absurd that it is about nothing – and speech that is not about something is not really speech; rather, it is just noise.

The reason why Euthydemus and Dionysodorus’ speech is so empty in terms of its content has to do with the fact that it is ultimately empty-headed in terms of its basis and direction. There is little thought behind the brothers’ discourse, in particular the sort of thought that is needed to give the brothers’ discourse meaning and purpose. In order for the brothers’ discourse to have a meaningful purpose – and a meaningful educational purpose (for educators are what the brothers make themselves out to be) – the brothers would have to care about, and reflect upon, what they are doing with their discourse.

Having identified and discussed the problematic character of eristic, I shall now turn to the second of the two discursive practices that I seek to distinguish from Socrates’ questioning: popular rhetoric, as practised by Socrates’ accusers, Anytus and Meletus. The specific problems associated with Anytus’ and Meletus’ attitudes toward education and the employment of rhetoric in the (apparent) service of education, are significantly different from those associated with
eristic. However, as we shall see, Anytus’ and Meletus’ employment of rhetoric also exhibits a lack of care and reflection upon their part, just as Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ employment of eristic did.
Chapter 3: The Rhetoric of Socrates’ Prosecutors

Chapter introduction

While the eristic discourse of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus can be used for positive, educational purposes, these sophists of the *Euthydemus* are unable to utilize their characteristic form of discourse in a beneficial manner because they are more concerned about utilizing it to maintain a false appearance of cleverness. While they claim to be able to educate and improve people by means of their eristic discourse, the way in which Euthydemus and Dionysodorus use eristic fails to promote excellence in human beings. In this chapter, I discuss the discourse of another pair of characters who believe that they can educate. The comments of Anytus and Meletus in the *Meno* and the *Apology* suggest that they believe that rhetoric can be used to improve young people. The primary purpose of rhetoric is to persuade,\(^{150}\) and Anytus believes

\(^{150}\) Thomas Cole, in *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991) ix, defines “rhetoric in the narrowest and most conventional sense of the term” as

...a speaker’s or writer’s self-conscious manipulation of his medium with a view to ensuring his message as favorable a reception as possible on the part of the particular audience being addressed. The self-consciously manipulative character of the process distinguishes rhetoric from eloquence, which may be unpremeditated and stem from nothing more than a natural knack for clear and expressive utterance; orientation toward a communicational goal distinguishes rhetoric from the type of verbal virtuosity in which the exploration or display of the resources of a given medium becomes an end in itself; indifference to the inherent character or value of the messages communicated so long as they are put across effectively distinguishes it from some of its modern namesakes – notably those which... would make of rhetoric either an overall science of discourse or an art of practical reasoning and deliberation.
that he, as a self-identified respectable gentleman, can improve young men if they are willing to be persuaded by him.\textsuperscript{151} Something analogous seems to me to be true of Meletus, who purports to care for the goodness and well-being of the youth of Athens;\textsuperscript{152} he believes that as a democratic citizen participating in political discourse (in the course of which he would undoubtedly make use of rhetoric) he promotes the moral improvement of Athenian youth.\textsuperscript{153} However, as we shall see, neither Meletus nor Anytus demonstrates that he actually does anything to improve young people with his discourse.

It should be noted that in this chapter, the sort of rhetoric I associate with Anytus and Meletus is “popular rhetoric”. I am not asserting that Meletus or Anytus ever studied rhetoric formally from a handbook or from a sophist (indeed, as we shall see, Anytus’ comments in the \textit{Meno} suggest that he was very much against doing any such thing). However, there is no reason why Anytus and Meletus could not have learned rhetorical “commonplaces” (\textit{topoi}), techniques, and devices simply by listening to capable speakers in the Assembly and courts, and perhaps even the agora. Furthermore, Anytus, as an experienced politician,\textsuperscript{154} would have had ample opportunities to practice public speaking and develop his own repertoire of rhetorical techniques. By this, I do not mean that Anytus simply learned how to speak up before a large crowd and enunciate; instead, by listening to others and by giving orations in front of audiences (most likely in the Assembly, but possibly in front of smaller groups of his private associates at, for instance, symposia) Anytus probably would have developed his own set of techniques and stock devices that he could use to present his claims to an audience in a persuasive manner. The younger

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{M}. 92e3-6.
\textsuperscript{152} See \textit{Ap}. 24c10-d2.
\textsuperscript{153} See \textit{Ap}. 24c10 ff.
\textsuperscript{154} See \textit{M}. 90b1-2.
Meletus, Socrates’ actual accuser, would not likely be as practised as Anytus, but his prosecution of Socrates would give him an opportunity to develop his skills in the rhetoric of the law courts.

I will not discuss the third member of the team that prosecutes Socrates in the *Apology*, Lycon, in this chapter. Socrates identifies Lycon as prosecuting him “on behalf of the orators.” Lycon was “... a man of Socrates’ generation” who was a democratic politician. Although Lycon, like Anytus, and, to a lesser extent, Meletus, would have been familiar with the techniques of popular rhetoric, he does not appear as an interlocutor of Socrates in any of Plato’s works. Meletus, on the other hand, is cross-examined by Socrates in the *Apology*, and Anytus appears as a secondary interlocutor of Socrates’ in the *Meno* (a dialogue in which the young and wealthy Thessalian, Meno, is Socrates’ primary interlocutor; Anytus is Meno’s host in Athens). Given that Lycon never appears in any of Plato’s works engaging Socrates in dialogue, and given that Plato’s Socrates does not suggest anywhere that Lycon claimed to be able to educate other people, I shall not refer to Lycon in my discussion of popular rhetoric in this chapter.

I begin this chapter with a general introduction to Anytus. Anytus’ personal and political reasons for prosecuting Socrates are most probably tied to issues concerning the education and improvement of young people. Despite his mistrust of Socrates as an educator (and despite his mistrust of sophists as educators), Anytus, as we shall see, is not particularly good at educating either himself or others. Anytus is a closed-minded individual who is not open

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157 Nails 188, 189.


to learning, and he angers quickly whenever his beliefs are challenged. Anytus’ behavior towards the older Socrates in the *Meno* demonstrates that he is a poor discussion companion for an inquisitive young person. Anytus is extremely unreasonable, and his dogmatic attitude makes him difficult to persuade, even in circumstances in which it should be clear to him that he would be better off reconsidering his beliefs. According to Anytus, any respectable Athenian gentleman can educate and improve the young,\textsuperscript{160} but Anytus is likely to be one Athenian gentleman who would have difficulty doing so.

While the first half of this chapter focuses on Anytus, the latter half deals with Meletus. At Socrates’ trial, Anytus acts as the advocate for Meletus, a younger man who is Socrates’ actual accuser. The trial of Socrates provides the politically ambitious Meletus with an opportunity to hone his rhetorical skills. Like Anytus, Meletus thinks that he is wise with respect to human excellence, when he is in fact not wise at all. Meletus mistakes strongly held convictions for knowledge, and is not inclined to give views that oppose his fair consideration. He is also rash, impetuous, and careless in his claims and accusations. Like Anytus, Meletus is unable to educate others with respect to human excellence. He is unable to better others by means of his rhetorical discourse, especially when he brings Socrates to court on charges of impiety and corrupting the youth.

Rhetoric can be used in the service of education, since it can be used to persuade people to exchange wrong opinions for knowledge (or, at least, correct opinion), and to exchange bad beliefs for better ones. Furthermore, rhetoric can also be used to maintain people’s belief in opinions that are worthwhile. In addition, rhetoric can be used to promote trust and confidence in experts and genuine authorities. However, the problem with rhetoric is that in order for its use

\textsuperscript{160} M. 92e3-6.
to have educational benefits, whoever wields it must be a person with knowledge (or, at the very least, beliefs that have been carefully thought out and that genuinely aim at the good). Anytus, as we shall see, is someone who pretends to be wise concerning human excellence when he is no such thing. He cannot wield rhetoric for the purposes of educational benefit, and neither can Meletus.

1. Introducing Anytus

Anytus is a craftsman (a tanner, specifically), the son of a respectable and wealthy father, Anthemion. Indeed, Socrates heaps high praise upon Anytus’ father, describing him as a wise, industrious, “self-made man” of a humble, temperate, and polite demeanour, who, according to the people of Athens, raised his son, Anytus, properly, and gave him a good education. Socrates’ enumeration of all of Anthemion’s good qualities allows for a comparison of the qualities of the father with those of the son. As we shall see, Anytus is no lover of wisdom, and he is neither humble, nor temperate, nor polite. As Meno commentator Domenic Scott says, “Anytus is introduced from the start as the son of a successful father and throughout the discussion reveals himself as worse than mediocre.” While Anytus shares his father’s trade, he does not share his father’s positive qualities. That being said, Anytus also has skills that his father did not have. Anytus is a prominent democratic politician in Athens, and on that basis alone we can safely assume that he is a skilled public speaker.

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161 See M. 90a1-b1. See also Jacob Klein, A Commentary on Plato’s Meno (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: U of North Carolina P, 1965), 223-224; Nails 37-38. Note that, according to Socrates, many Athenians believe that Anthemion gave Anytus a good education; whether or not he actually did is a matter of dispute: Weiss 142; also cf. Dominic Scott, Plato’s Meno (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006) 168.

162 See Klein 224-225, 237; Weiss 142.

163 D. Scott 168.

164 Cf. M. 90b1-3; see Harold Tarrant Recollecting Plato’s Meno (London: Duckworth, 2005) 66; Bluck 126; Klein 223; Reeve 98; Nails 37-38; D. Scott 162.
When it comes to education, Anytus has no use whatsoever for sophists of any sort. Anytus is quite certain that, far from being able to teach excellence, sophists can have only a corrupting influence upon anyone who listens to them. Socrates points out to Anytus that it seems rather strange that a sophist with the renown of Protagoras was, in fact, a corrupting influence on people, for Protagoras became quite wealthy at his craft, and even once he was dead, he still continued to enjoy a great reputation for wisdom – and much the same can be said of a number of other sophists as well. Nevertheless, Anytus continues to insist that the followers of sophists are foolish to give their money to such men, and that the cities that allow them to teach are also foolish. Anytus has never met a sophist in person, nor has he studied any sophistic teachings, but he is quite certain that nothing good could possibly come from them. As far as Anytus is concerned, the best educators of young people are respectable Athenian gentlemen. If one really wants to become a person of excellence, insists Anytus, then one need only listen to what any Athenian gentleman might have to say, for that is how excellence is passed on: gentlemen teach others to become gentlemen. According to Anytus, any respectable Athenian gentleman can make a young man into an excellent human being – if that young man is willing to be persuaded by what the good gentleman has to say. Socrates then points out to Anytus that many Athenians of great reputation (such as Anthemion, although Socrates does not explicitly name him) did all they could to make their sons into good people, but the sons nevertheless turned out to be good-for-nothings. At this, Anytus grows angry and accuses

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165 M. 91c1-5.
166 According to Debra Nails, the story that Protagoras “. . . was charged with impiety in Athens, cannot be corroborated in contemporaneous sources, and . . . is routinely assigned to philosophers by later authors, almost as an honorific, after Socrates” (256).
167 M. 91c6-e6.
168 See Weiss 142; also cf. D. Scott 168.
Socrates of easily speaking ill about people. Socrates must be careful in what he says about people, warns Anytus, for it is easy to do harm to people, but not so easy to benefit them.\textsuperscript{169}

2. Anytus’ personal reasons for prosecuting Socrates

Anytus’ main personal reasons for prosecuting Socrates would seem to be three in number. First, Anytus appears to be angry at Socrates for claiming that craftsmen lack wisdom with respect to human excellence. Second, Anytus detests sophists, and Socrates identifies Anytus as having been influenced by the rumour that he is a sophist. Third, Anytus may very well be angry at Socrates for having supposedly “corrupted” his son. I shall discuss Anytus’ main personal reasons for prosecuting Socrates in this order.

It is also important to note that the latter two of Anytus’ main personal reasons for prosecuting Socrates (as mentioned above) are directly tied to the issue of education (or corruption). The first reason, Anytus’ anger at Socrates’ claim that craftsmen lack wisdom with respect to human excellence, is not \textit{directly} tied to the issue of education. However, in the \textit{Republic}, Socrates maintains that education is the business of directing the soul towards the good.\textsuperscript{170} Presumably, a soul that is oriented in the direction of the good either exhibits excellence or actively pursues it. If craftsmen are not wise with respect to human excellence, then it would seem that they cannot direct the activity of young people’s souls such that the young people in question will pursue the good and act in accordance with human excellence; in short, if the craftsmen are not wise with respect to human excellence, then they are not reliable moral educators of human beings. So, then, on these grounds we can say that Anytus’ personal reasons for prosecuting Socrates are all tied to the issue of education and the question of who is qualified

\textsuperscript{169} \textit{M.} 93c6 ff.

\textsuperscript{170} \textit{R.} 7.518c4-d7
to educate young people in Athens: Socrates, sophists, or gentlemen like Anytus? Anytus’ participation in the prosecution of Socrates for corrupting the youth, and his comments about sophists in the *Meno*\(^{171}\) indicate that Anytus believes that Socrates and sophists are *not* qualified to educate young people and must be actively prevented from doing so.

In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates maintains that Anytus is angry at him and is prosecuting him on behalf of the craftsmen of Athens.\(^{172}\) At his trial, Socrates recounts how he approached some craftsmen and, in conversing with them, discovered that they were indeed wise about some things, presumably those that pertain to their crafts.\(^{173}\) After all, a genuine craftsman knows what his craft can or cannot accomplish; he is an expert in his craft.\(^{174}\) However, in conversing with craftsmen, Socrates also discovered that they pretended to be wise concerning the greatest things,\(^{175}\) presumably matters related to human excellence. We can probably safely assume that Socrates attempted to demonstrate to these craftsmen that they lacked the knowledge that they pretended to have, thereby angering the craftsmen.\(^{176}\) Anytus, says Socrates, is prosecuting him on behalf of these angry craftsmen. Anytus, it would appear, is most irate that Socrates should claim that good craftsmen are not wise with respect to human excellence. Presumably, Anytus, being the proprietor of a tannery, assumes that well-do-to craftsmen like himself are among those fine and good Athenian gentlemen who are capable of making young men excellent.\(^{177}\)

In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates talks about how young men, especially those from wealthy families, enjoy listening to him discourse. These young men take great pleasure in imitating his

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\(^{171}\) *M*. 91b7-92c5.

\(^{172}\) *Ap*. 23e4-6.


\(^{174}\) See *R*. 2.360e6-361a2.

\(^{175}\) *Ap*. 22d4-e1.

\(^{176}\) Cf. the pattern of reaction to Socrates’ questions that develops at *Ap*. 21b9 ff.

\(^{177}\) See *M*. 92e3-6.
style of discourse and turning it against their elders. This seemingly insolent behaviour angers the youths’ elders and they accuse Socrates of being a sophist who exercises a corrupting influence upon the young. Socrates believes that the rumours about his being a corrupting sophist have influenced Anytus, Meletus, and Lycon’s prosecution of him.  

At Socrates’ trial Anytus warns the jurors that if they acquit Socrates, then their sons will all go on to follow Socrates’ teachings and become corrupted.

No further explanation of Anytus’ prosecution of Socrates is provided in Plato’s Apology, but Socrates’ discussion with Anytus in the Meno suggests another possible motivation. One of the topics of Socrates’ brief conversation with Anytus in the Meno is that excellence is not teachable. In order to illustrate this point, Socrates furnishes Anytus with examples of sons who did not turn out to be the good men that their fathers were. These examples lead Anytus to bristle up with indignation and, with a menacing warning to Socrates, fall silent. It appears that Socrates has “touched a nerve” with Anytus. On the one hand, it is possible that Anytus believes that Socrates is implicitly criticizing him, and is implying that Anytus, too, like the other men that Socrates has given as examples, is not the man that his father was. On the other hand, it is also possible that Socrates is implicitly suggesting that Anytus’ son will not turn out to be the man that his father is.

Neither the Meno nor the Apology explicitly indicates that Anytus has a son; however, the historical Anytus did indeed have a son, a fact that was most likely known to most of the

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179 Ap. 29c4-6.
180 M. 93a5-95a4.
original readers of the *Apology* (and perhaps the *Meno* as well). Xenophon (in his *Apology of Socrates*) claims that Anytus’ son was, for a short time, an associate of Socrates, whom Socrates thought to be a promising young man. According to Xenophon, Socrates thought that overseeing the family tannery was too menial a job for Anytus’ son, and this angered Anytus so much that Anytus decided to prosecute Socrates for corrupting the youth of Athens. After Socrates’ death, Anytus’ son (whose upbringing, Xenophon claims, had not been properly overseen by his father) took readily to the pleasures of drink. Xenophon seems to believe that Anytus promoted his son’s dissipation by failing to give his son the sort of education that was appropriate to his nature; presumably, Anytus should have given his son the “academic” education that Socrates recommended instead of the “practical” education that he actually gave his son. Despite Anytus’ best efforts to train his son to manage the family tannery, the son did not, it seems, end up succeeding his father as head of the family business.

Given that Anytus angers quickly when, in the *Meno*, Socrates challenges his beliefs about sophists and the teaching of excellence, Anytus very likely believes that anyone who would dare to even *try* to defend the sophists (as Socrates does to a very limited extent in the *Meno*) is unfit to educate human beings or to teach anything worthwhile; hence, Anytus would no doubt be displeased if his son began associating with Socrates. Furthermore, it is likely that if

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182 Nails (37) puts Anytus’ age at around forty-four at the time of Socrates’ trial, with the approximate date of his death being unknown. She puts Meletus’ age at around thirty at the time of Socrates’ trial, with the approximate date of his death also being unknown (202). Nails (243) puts Plato’s age at around twenty-five at the time of Socrates’ trial. The exact date of the composition of the *Apology* is unknown, but T. Brickhouse and N. Smith in *Socrates on Trial* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1989) 1-2, maintain that the results of scholarly debate indicate that the *Apology* was not likely to have been composed more than ten years or so after Socrates’ trial, and that the *Apology* may have in fact been composed quite soon after Socrates’ trial. Therefore, there is good reason to believe that the early readers of the *Apology* would have been familiar with Anytus and Meletus, at the *very* least by hearsay, and more likely through direct acquaintance.

183 Xen. *Apol.,* 29-31; see also Klein 223. West (1979) also cites Xenophon’s story about Anytus’ son: see 132.

184 See *M.* 95a2-3.
Anytus’ son enjoyed listening to Socrates converse with others,\textsuperscript{185} he might (like the young men from wealthy families mentioned in the \textit{Apology}\textsuperscript{186}) think to try out Socrates’ style of discourse upon his father. In the \textit{Meno}, Anytus angers quickly when his beliefs are challenged by Socrates, a man older than he is, and so there is no reason to believe that Anytus would be any more open-minded when conversing with his youthful son. Hence, Anytus would probably hold whatever it was that his son was picking up from his association with Socrates in low regard. Because of this, Anytus would not consider Socrates to be at all qualified to advise other people on the sort of education their children should pursue. Furthermore, Anytus has no use for intellectuals, be they sophists or Socrates. Finally – and probably most importantly – Anytus gets angry whenever his opinion is opposed. The combination of these factors:

\begin{itemize}
\item a) disdain of intellectual pursuits (and those who pursue them);\textsuperscript{187}
\item b) a low opinion of Socrates’ style of discourse;
\item c) a low opinion of any practical advice Socrates might have to offer;
\item d) anger at his son for daring to use Socrates’ style of discourse to question him;
\item e) anger at having his upbringing of his son challenged; and,
\item f) rumours about Socrates’ alleged sophistic activities,\textsuperscript{188}
\end{itemize}

may well have been what led Anytus to accuse Socrates of being a corruptor of youth (aside from Socrates’ calling into question craftsmen’s wisdom with respect to human excellence).\textsuperscript{189}

\textsuperscript{185} Cf. \textit{Ap}. 33b9-c4: “But why do some people enjoy spending so much time with me? . . . They enjoy listening to the examination of those who think themselves to be wise, but who are not; for it is not unpleasant.”

\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Ap}. 23c2-8. West (1979, 143) maintains that “Anytus and the other public men were angry because the young were making them – the respectable politicians and fathers – look foolish.”

\textsuperscript{187} On Anytus’ anti-intellectual attitude, see D. Scott 169.

\textsuperscript{188} According to Bluck (127), “Indeed [Anytus] probably drew no very great distinction between Socrates and the sophists.”
Furthermore, according to Xenophon, Anytus was bringing up his son to take over the family business. In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates maintains that he spends so much time minding everyone else’s business that he has no time for his own— and presumably Socrates’ business includes raising and educating his own sons, never mind other people’s. In presuming to give advice to other people about how they should raise their children, Socrates “sticks his nose into other people’s business” in a manner that some people might find threatening. Socrates’ advice to Anytus – that he should give his son an intellectual education – threatens Anytus’ family business, because it suggests

a) that Anytus should let the family business – the tanning workshop – pass into the hands of strangers (or, at least, relatives who are not direct descendants of Anytus); and,

b) that Anytus should let family business – that is, the education of his son – pass into the hands of strangers (namely, sophists, who are most likely not even Athenian but from foreign cities).

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189 According to West (1979),

... [I]f Anytus was having trouble with his son’s upbringing, and if his son had spent time with Socrates, these things might help to explain why Anytus, rather than one of the other politicians, became an accuser of Socrates. Perhaps Anytus was cross-examined and refuted by his own son. Surely Anytus associated Socrates with the sophistic, impious circle which was, to him, the most visible token of the decline in the Athenian attachment to its venerable traditions. (132)

190 *Ap*. 31a9-b3.

191 As Socrates’ friend Crito reminds him: see *Cri*. 45d4-7.

192 Harold Barrett (28) explains the Athenian traditionalists’ resentment of sophists:

Traditionalists took the sophists as “progressives” – radical advocates of change – and contributors to a breakdown in moral values that they, the “old guard,” believed was occurring. ... Promising training for better places in the community, these professional teachers intruded upon established structures of rearing the young and preparing them for life. They questioned standing prerogatives. Formal “lessons” by clever – too clever – itinerant strangers challenged the long-relied-upon family group system, the *natural* learning of *association* that occurred in family and community. The sophists’ programs were divisive, coming as a wedge between family and son. And the turning of settled practices into topics for open discussion was found threatening, particularly on questions of morality and codes of behaviour.
In summary, if we combine the evidence from both Plato’s and Xenophon’s versions of the *Apology of Socrates*, Anytus has very personal reasons to take Socrates to court; namely, ones that are related to the education of his own son and the continuity of his family’s business.

All this being said, Thomas West cautions that, “We cannot know, of course, how far to trust [Xenophon’s] story [about Anytus’ son].” West, who advances speculations about Anytus’ motives for prosecuting Socrates that are similar to some of the ones I have made above, warns that, “Our suggestions about Anytus . . . cannot be proved.” However, I think it is worthwhile to consider that Socrates’ accusers may have had distinctly personal reasons for bringing him to trial. Xenophon’s account of what became of Anytus’ son helps to shed light on what Anytus’ personal reasons for prosecuting Socrates might have been.

3. Anytus’ political reasons for bringing Socrates to trial

While Anytus’ personal reasons for bringing Socrates to trial might be somewhat complex, his main political reasons for bringing Socrates to trial are probably rather more straightforward, and only two in number. First, by participating in the prosecution of Socrates and ridding the city of him, Anytus is simply doing what, in his opinion, is best for the city. Second, by participating in the prosecution of Socrates, Anytus might hope to prevent more young men from being (apparently) corrupted by Socrates and causing political instability in the city. Again, Anytus’ possible political reasons for prosecuting Socrates are related to education, or, more exactly, the “miseducation” and corruption of Athenian youth.

193 West (1979) 132.
194 See West (1979) 132.
195 West (1979) 133.
Regarding Anytus’ first reason – the association of Socrates with sophistry – Socrates himself believes that the rumours about his being a corrupting sophist have influenced Anytus, Meletus, and Lycon’s prosecution of him.\textsuperscript{196} At Socrates’ trial Anytus warns the jurors that if they acquit Socrates, then their sons will all go on to follow Socrates’ teachings and become corrupted.\textsuperscript{197} In the \textit{Meno}, Anytus claims that he thinks that cities who permit sophists to teach within their bounds are mad.\textsuperscript{198} So, by participating in the prosecution of Socrates, Anytus is merely, in his opinion, doing the duty of a concerned citizen and ridding the city of an evil sophistic influence upon its youth; namely, Socrates. Note that in the \textit{Meno}, Anytus maintains that he has never had anything to do with sophists.\textsuperscript{199} Hence, if Anytus genuinely knows nothing about sophists, and has never had any sort of personal dealings with them before, it would not be difficult for Anytus to believe rumours that Socrates is a sophist or something like one, since Anytus knows nothing about the teaching or discourse of sophists and how it might compare with Socrates’ activities in Athens.

With regard to Anytus’ second motivation for prosecution, a number of commentators have pointed out that one of Anytus’ political reasons for participating in Socrates’ prosecution may have been Socrates’ association with certain young men who were (to a greater or lesser degree) anti-democratic in their views and activities, and/or who engaged in disloyal (if not downright treasonous) behaviour against their state.\textsuperscript{200} On this point, Xenophon, in the \textit{Memorabilia}, responds specifically to the accusation that Socrates had been associated with (in Xenophon’s words) two extremely violent men, Socrates’ most notorious associates, the

\textsuperscript{196} \textit{Ap}. 23c-24a2.
\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Ap}. 29c4-6.
\textsuperscript{198} See \textit{M}. 92a7-b4.
\textsuperscript{199} \textit{M}. 92b5-10.
\textsuperscript{200} See Brickhouse and Smith (1989) 71-73; D. Scott 162-163; Reeve 97-99. Also see West (1979) 192-193.
murderous and thieving oligarch Critias, and the unruly and hubristic democrat Alcibiades.

According to Xenophon, Critias and Alcibiades were, of all of the Athenians, the ones whose natures made them the most desirous to amass honours. They associated with Socrates because they wanted to acquire, for their own political purposes, Socrates’ ability to – as Xenophon puts it – manipulate a discussant in any way he wished during an argument. As soon as they believed themselves to be superior to the rest of Socrates’ associates, Alcibiades and Critias (rather like a pair of blood-sucking fleas) “leapt off” (apopédésante) Socrates and took up politics.201

Xenophon’s language suggests that Critias and Alcibiades were nothing more than “vermin” that Socrates could not help picking up in his wanderings around the city, given that Critias and Alcibiades were attracted to people they thought they could use to feed their political ambitions. According to Xenophon’s Memorabilia, then, neither Socrates nor his discourse corrupted Critias and Alcibades, for they already had bad characters even before they began associating with Socrates.

The problem with Xenophon’s defence of Socrates against the charge of associating with violent and ruthless men is that it points to Socrates’ discourse as being the very thing that attracted the politically ambitious Critias and Alcibiades to him. According to Xenophon, Alcibiades and Critias wanted specifically to acquire Socrates’ characteristic form of discourse and use it for their own purposes. However, although Critias and Alcibiades may have improved their skills in discussion and argument by associating with Socrates and imitating him, it is clear that the rhetorical manipulation of the Athenians in which these men engaged did not reflect the goals of Socratic inquiry, nor did their rhetorical practice simply amount to the direct application of Socrates’ characteristic form of questioning for political purposes.

201 Xen. Mem. 1.2.12-16.
Finally, note that, unlike Socrates, Anytus, being a democratic politician, would have been rhetorically proficient, and would have routinely made use of popular rhetoric. Hence, the discourse wielded by Anytus to serve his (supposedly benevolent) political ends in prosecuting Socrates, is the same mode of discourse as that wielded by Socrates’ most vicious ex-associates in serving their political ends. In other words, it is Anytus’ characteristic mode of discourse that would seem to be the form of discourse that is at heart of political corruption in the city of Athens, and not Socrates’.

4. Anytus, bad learner and mad educator

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are bad learners in that they give little, if any, thought to what they are saying in the course of their eristic interchanges with their “pupils”. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus do not give the subject matter of their discourse much consideration, nor do they give much consideration to their discourse itself and what it might accomplish. Like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Anytus also demonstrates himself to be a bad learner in the Meno, although he is not a bad learner in the same sense as the brothers are. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus do not think; that is, they do not bother to give what they say or do much consideration. Anytus, on the other hand, is not willing to experience anything that might change his views, nor is he willing to hear out anyone who might have something to say that will change his views: Anytus is not willing to even go anywhere near sophists, let alone listen to them, nor is he willing to hear out Socrates on the matter of why excellence is not teachable, or on the question of whether or not sophistic education has any benefits to it. As soon as Socrates points out that many people would seem to

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202 Cf. M. 92b7-8.
agree that at least some sophists must have something worthwhile to say (otherwise sophists such as Protagoras could not amass such wealth and renown), Anytus only grows more emphatic in maintaining that sophists are a blight upon the cities that they visit. Anytus does not need to have had any experience of sophists or of their teachings in order to know that they are an evil influence; rather, according to Anytus, he just knows they are bad.

As Anytus is both an individual who is prepared to utter his opinions with absolute certainty, as well as a reasonably prominent and popular politician, one might regard Anytus as being something of a stock example of the sort of democratic citizen who wields great political influence, but who is extremely unenlightened, and who seems to have no hope of ever being intellectually improved. Furthermore, Anytus’ own conception of himself is just as unenlightened as his opinions about sophists are. It does not occur to Anytus that he might be the one who is mad, and not, as he asserts, those who pay sophists to teach themselves or their children, or the cities that allow them to teach, for there is no reason for Anytus to have a negative opinion about sophists: he has never met a sophist nor has he read anything by one. Rather, Anytus has just decided that sophists are bad – and he not only believes that, he knows it. Nothing will persuade Anytus that there might be something worthwhile in what sophists have to say, and so it might be worth considering what they have to say.

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203 M. 91c6-92b4; also see D. Scott 172.

204 M. 92c1-5. Tarrant (67-68) compares Antyus’ “inflexibility” to Pericles’ “steadfast adherence” to certain policies on the grounds that both men demonstrate the disposition of “political courage”; however, I think that this is a poor comparison to make. Pericles presumably had reasons for insisting upon adhering to certain policies; Anytus’ opinions about the transmission of excellence – and certainly his opinions about sophists – are not based upon reason at all. Rather, Brickhouse and Smith (1989, 29), call Anytus’ hatred of sophists “mindless” and “fanatical”.

205 See M. 92a7-b4.

206 According to Bluck (127), “. . . [Anytus] is represented as conventional in the extreme, as biased – he knows what the sophists are like although he has had no experience of them (92c4-5) – as very touchy about any apparent criticism of famous politicians, and at the same time as incapable of distinguishing fair and well-intentioned comment from a malicious attack.”
A notable characteristic of Anytus – and one that prevents him from being able to learn – is his tendency to grow angry whenever he is opposed. As Socrates points out, Anytus is “mad” in the sense that he gets angry at Socrates for questioning his beliefs and refusing to accept what he says (mainesthai can mean “to be mad” either in the sense of being possessed, or in the sense of being furious about something). The quick temper of Antyus that rises up whenever his beliefs are questioned makes him unreasonable, and therefore not only a poor learner, but also a poor educator: Anytus is a poor discussion companion for an intelligent and quick-minded young man who enjoys testing and challenging both his own beliefs and those of others. Anytus appears to terminate discussions abruptly once his anger flares up, which means that his discussant must change topics quickly if he wants to carry on the discussion (as Socrates does in the *Meno* after Anytus grows angry at his comments about sophists). As his conversation with Socrates in the *Meno* demonstrates, Anytus’ hot temper and dogmatic attitude prevent any sort of sustained inquiry. In addition, Anytus’ temper and dogmatism also likely serve to squelch any playful and slightly mischievous attempts at intellectual inquiry that a child or youth might make, thereby curtailing a young person’s curiosity. Anytus is therefore very likely to be a poor, if not unsuitable, educator of young people, as he tends to reject and stifle all attempts at independent thought and inquiry.

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208 *M. 95a2-3*. Weiss (142) describes Anytus as “. . . arrogant, pompous, offensive, quick to anger, and vindictive; he rushes to judgment without exercising reason . . . .”

209 As Domenic Scott (172) says, Anytus “. . . certainly makes no attempt to investigate with Socrates. His responses are explosive rather than co-operative; he fails to engage in any friendly exchange of dialogue.”

210 According to Domenic Scott (168), Anytus “. . . shows himself unable to engage in any sustained dialogue, and eventually disengages altogether.”

211 One can imagine Anytus replying to the child’s question, “Why is the sky blue?” with the answer, “Because I said so.”
5. Respectable gentlemen as educators

According to Anytus, if a young man wishes to learn excellence, all he has to do is listen to what any respectable Athenian gentleman has to say. As far as Anytus is concerned, excellence can be learned for free, from one’s own respectable fellow citizens; there is no reason why a young man in Athens – or in any other Greek city – should pay attention to a foreign sophist in order to develop excellence, let alone give that sophist money to teach him excellence. It does not appear to be the foreignness of sophists that bothers Anytus so much, but the fact that they command fees for the teaching of excellence. It would seem that, as far as Anytus is concerned, anyone who tries to make money by teaching excellence sounds like a bad person; as Anytus does not approve of citizens who charge fees for the teaching of excellence, there is no reason why he should approve of foreigners who do. It is not clear why Anytus disapproves of people charging money in order to (purportedly) teach excellence; however, it is possible that Anytus believes that what differentiates a respectable gentleman from a rich scoundrel from a famous family, is that the former has knowledge of excellence to pass on to others – and actually does pass it on at no charge, purely out of his desire to benefit his fellow citizens – while the latter has no knowledge of excellence to pass on to others, and is likely to corrupt them. Unlike respectable gentlemen, sophists do not teach excellence in order to benefit their fellow citizens; rather, they teach excellence in order to benefit themselves, both financially and in terms of reputation. Hence, it is possible that the reason why Anytus dislikes sophists so much has to do with the fact that they have self-interested motives for teaching excellence. It might well be that as far as Anytus is concerned, anyone with self-interested motives behind their actions is seeking

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212 M. 92e3-6.
213 That being said, even if Anytus himself does not feel particularly threatened by sophists' foreign origins, some Athenians probably did resent or suspect sophists simply because they were not from Athens: see Barrett 31.
214 Cf. M. 92a7-b4.
to benefit at the expense of others; in other words, people with self-interested motives behind what they do sound like the sort of people who would take advantage of others and corrupt them.

Now, in the case of the sophists, there is some truth to what I am suggesting that Anytus might be maintaining: sophists do benefit financially at the expense of others, who must pay for their teaching. However, at the same time, as Socrates points out to Anytus, sophists do not gain renown by corrupting their pupils; presumably, sophists gain renown by benefiting and improving their pupils, in much the same way that gentlemen gain respect for benefiting and improving their young fellow citizens. Given this, there is no reason for Anytus to harbour any negative prejudices against sophists, at least not any more than he would for most people plying some sort of moneymaking trade (and early on in his conversation with Socrates in the *Meno*, Anytus agrees that he has no problems with people teaching various crafts for a fee).

According to Anytus, any Athenian gentleman can make any young man into an excellent person – but only if that young man is willing to be persuaded by him. Apparently a significant number of young Athenians are not interested in listening to what respectable citizens have to say concerning matters of excellence: as Socrates points out to Anytus, many respectable Athenian citizens ended up with sons who were good-for-nothings. What this suggests is, at the least, that it is one thing to be able to teach excellence, and it is quite another thing to get the attention of one’s prospective pupils. While the respectable gentlemen that Anytus mentions in the *Meno* may (perhaps) be able to teach lessons about human excellence to youth, they cannot always get youth to listen to them. Why is it that Anytus and his fellow

\[\text{\footnotesize 215 M. 91c6-92a6.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 216 See M. 90b7-e9 and Klein’s (226-227) summary of it.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 217 M. 92e3-6.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 218 M. 93a5 ff.} \]
“gentlemen” cannot reliably get their sons and other youth in the city to listen to, and to be persuaded by, what they have to say about human excellence? In order to answer this question, we must examine the sort of discourse in which Anytus engages.

6. The educational benefits of rhetoric

As a democratic politician, Anytus must frequently make use of popular rhetoric. According to Socrates in the *Gorgias*, rhetoric is capable of effecting doxastic change in an audience – at least in part – by means of the manipulation of appearances.\(^{219}\) Rhetoric is able to manipulate appearances because rhetorical arguments are not concerned with what really *is*, but, rather, with what is likely to be the case, or with what *seems* to be the case.\(^ {220}\) Because it is concerned with what seems to be, as opposed to what really *is*, rhetoric is different from logical argumentation, mathematical proof, and carefully constructed “cases” built up on empirically verifiable evidence. Rhetorical arguments also differ from the arguments that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus construct by means of eristic question-and-answer in that some of the conclusions that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus were prepared to assert in the *Euthydemus* had no bearing on the possible, let alone the probable. In order to be able to successfully persuade his or her audience, anyone utilizing rhetorical discourse will almost always have to ensure that his or her arguments remain in the realm of the possible, if not the probable.

Yet even though eristic – at least as wielded by Dionysodorus and Euthydemus – and rhetoric (as wielded by most people, anyway) do not deal with what in fact *is*, both eristic and rhetoric can be used to *motivate* people to *consider* what “really is”. While Euthydemus and

\(^{219}\) See *Grg.* 464b2-465e1.

Dionysodorus do not utilize eristic for philosophical purposes, as I discussed in Chapter 2, the perplexing arguments of eristic can be used as entertaining philosophical exercises that might serve as an introduction or “warm-up” to deeper and more serious philosophical discussion. In the case of rhetoric, it can be used to persuade people (who might otherwise be reluctant to do so) to give consideration to issues that the speaker believes are important. To put it more simply, rhetoric might be used to convince other people to pay attention, listen carefully, and give serious consideration to some particular matter. In this way, the use of rhetoric might serve as a kind of “preparatory step” that must take place before philosophical discussion can take place.

Before serious, civilized discussion can take place, it is necessary to first capture the attention of the parties who are to be involved in that discussion. In Chapter 2, I discussed how eristic might accomplish this in two ways: first, by silencing disruptive individuals, and, second, by serving as an entertaining introduction to discussion that is specifically philosophical in nature. Rhetoric, like eristic, can also be used to silence unruly individuals who would prevent civilized discourse from taking place, but it does so in a manner that is rather less harsh than eristic. Instead of “shutting up” disruptive individuals by “shooting them down” as eristic does, rhetoric either persuades individuals to keep silent and pay attention – or else simply finds arresting ways to capture audience members’ attention.

In addition, just as eristic can motivate people to pursue philosophy by serving as an entertaining introduction to it, rhetoric can also be used to motivate an audience to listen and to give consideration to a particular subject (including matters concerning human excellence). Furthermore, rhetoric might also be used, on the one hand, to strengthen and affirm someone’s convictions, and, on the other, to motivate that individual to pursue and act upon his or her
convictions. In other words, rhetoric’s ability to inflame the emotions and rouse passions can be used to motivate an individual to pursue his or her beliefs about excellence.

Rhetoric motivates individuals to pay attention to speeches by means of the manipulation of appearances, and it does so in two main ways. First, good rhetoricians know how to make speeches “sound good” to audience members. Because of this, Socrates characterizes rhetoric as a form of flattery in the Gorgias, for it “dresses up” the content of speeches and presents it to audience members in a manner that appeals to them, thereby maintaining their attention during the course of a speech. Second, rhetoric manipulates audience members’ perception of themselves. Flattering an audience with “artful” rhetoric may not only involve making what one is saying palatable to the audience; it also may involve making the audience members themselves believe that they are themselves beautiful (and noble, good, and excellent) and therefore worthy of beautiful (and noble, good, and excellent) things. Audience members who think themselves to be noble people will listen to noble ideas nobly presented. In other words, a speaker needs to convince his or her audience that what he or she has to say is not only appropriate for the audience members, but also desirable for them to hear and to believe, for audience members will desire to hear and to believe what they think is beneficial for them. By flattering audience members into believing that (for example) beautiful and noble people such as they are deserve to hear things that would benefit them, rhetoric “grabs” audience members’ attention before they even get to hear any of the real of content of the speech being presented. Hence, if it is flattery that makes people willing to listen to important speeches and be persuaded by them, then it would seem that rhetoric could very well have an important role to play in education and human betterment.

221 See Grg. 464b2-466a6.
The problem with rhetoric, though, is that if the speeches that a speaker gives do not concern things that really are good and beneficial for the audience, then rhetoric simply amounts to flattery at best (if what the speaker is proposing is harmless) and corruption at worst (if what the speaker has to say will make audience members worse off than they were before). Hence, while in the right hands rhetoric can be used to serve noble purposes, in the wrong hands it can be used to harm people. In the right hands, rhetoric can be used for educational purposes, making people willing to listen to things that would be beneficial to them and improve them; but in the wrong hands, rhetoric is nothing but an instrument used by speakers to control masses of people according to their whim.

7. Anytus tries to appear wise

In order to be able to persuade people to pay attention and listen to someone who has genuine knowledge as opposed to mere opinion, those who make use of rhetoric must either themselves possess the knowledge to which they desire that others should pay attention, or they must be able to identify those people who are knowledgeable and to whom others should pay attention. Yet although he thinks that he knows the truth about sophistic teachings, the education and improvement of young people, and the social and moral merit of Socrates’ activities, in truth Anytus certainly does not know the truth about sophistic teachings, the education and improvement of young people, and the social and moral merit of Socrates’ activities, even though he holds on doggedly to the strong opinions that he maintains about these things. Neither Anytus nor anyone he knows has ever had dealings with sophists, and he seems to be proud of

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222 At R. 6.492a5 ff. Socrates maintains that because rhetoric involves telling an audience what it wants to hear, it is really the speaker who is controlled by the audience, since he must always attend to the audience’s reaction to his words.
knowing nothing of what they teach – although, even so, he is quick to condemn it. 223 Nor does Anytus know who it is that improves the young, as Socrates demonstrates in the *Meno*. While Anytus maintains that any respectable Athenian gentleman can make young people excellent (provided that the young people in question are willing to listen to him), Socrates is able to furnish many examples of respectable Athenian gentlemen whose sons turned out to be rather lacking in human excellence. 224 It is not at all surprising then, given his ignorance of who it is that improves the young, and who corrupts them, that Anytus levels at Socrates the sort of charges that many ignorant people assert about philosophers; namely, that they corrupt young people by teaching them to make the worse speech the stronger, and to disbelieve in the gods and engage in the “scientific” investigation of things in the heavens and below the earth instead. 225

Like the craftsmen that Socrates examines around the city of Athens, 226 Anytus believes himself to be wise concerning things about which he knows nothing. Anytus knows nothing about Socrates’ activities in Athens – but as far as he is concerned, he does not need to know anything about Socrates’ activities in order to take part in the prosecution of Socrates. For, unlike sophists, Anytus actually *has* had some experience discoursing with Socrates, and he did not find it to his liking, for Socrates would not confirm what Anytus maintains that he knows to be true; rather, Socrates demonstrated to Anytus that he would seem to be wrong about at least some of the things that he thinks he knows; namely, the value of sophistic education and the ability of respectable gentlemen to teach excellence. Contrary to what Anytus maintains, some sophists (such as Protagoras) would seem to have something worthwhile to impart to others, and

223 *M*. 91b7-92c5.
224 *M*. 92e3-94e2.
225 See *Ap*. 23c8-e5.
respective gentlemen do not seem to be very reliable improvers of young people. In short, Socrates’ conversation with Anytus in the *Meno* demonstrates that Anytus is prepared to act like an authority on the question of how to make others excellent – even though he really has no knowledge of this subject. If Anytus is prepared to pretend to be wise in matters concerning human excellence in a conversation with Socrates, a man who is older than he is, there is every reason to believe that Anytus would pretend to be wise in matters concerning excellence when he is speaking to people younger than he is. Likewise, if Anytus is prepared to pretend to be wise in matters concerning human excellence in private conversations, then there is every reason to believe that he might, perhaps, try to act like an authority on human excellence and its propagation when he is addressing groups of Athenians who are gathered together – indeed, it seems that Anytus does just this in his advocate’s speech at Socrates’ trial. Furthermore, if Anytus is prepared to act, in a court of law, like an authority on who makes others excellent or base, then Anytus might pretend to be just such an authority when he is giving speeches in front of the Assembly. In other words, Socrates’ conversation with Anytus in the *Meno* suggests that Anytus is the sort of person who desires to make himself appear to be an authority on serious matters – matters of human excellence – even though his knowledge of human excellence and how to cultivate it amounts to nothing more than opinion, and probably very misguided opinion at that. Given that Anytus wishes to make himself *appear* to be an authority on matters of human excellence, it is very likely that he will try to utilize popular rhetoric to his advantage when he is addressing assemblies of Athenians (as Anytus, as a politician, would most certainly have to do).

So, quite possibly one reason why some of the gentlemen of Athens (at least some of whom are rhetorically skilled politicians like Anytus) cannot make their sons good is that they
try to make themselves appear wise when they are not; like Anytus, they pretend to be authorities on human excellence. However, in order to be able to improve others on a consistent basis – and to be able to say that one is responsible for that improvement – one must have knowledge to pass on to others that will better them. While some of the gentlemen of Athens might very well be good people, that does not necessarily mean that their good actions are based upon knowledge. It might just be that more often than not, these men happen to do the right thing on the basis of opinion, and not knowledge. The problem with this, though, is that these gentlemen probably cannot explain to others why what they did was right, and thereby persuade these others on the basis of reason – and not just emotional appeal – to imitate their example. While appealing to others’ emotions and desires can serve to motivate these others to follow a particular course of action in some circumstances, emotions and desires are often fickle. While emotional appeal can motivate right action in some circumstances, it is not sufficient to guarantee consistent behavior over time; only reason and the understanding of right action can do that. Presumably at least some of the good gentlemen of Athens do try to motivate their sons to “do the right thing”. However, if their encouragement and exhortation of their sons is not grounded in knowledge – knowledge that they can explain and demonstrate to their sons – these good gentlemen will not likely be able to ensure their sons’ good behavior over the long term by means of their speeches and exhortations.

8. Summing up Anytus

Whereas Dionysodorus and Euthydemus were bad learners because they were thoughtless and inconsiderate (both in terms of how they treated their “pupils”, and in terms of the fact they simply did not give much consideration to anything that they or their partners in
discourse did or said) Anytus is both a bad learner and a bad educator because he is unreasonable: he will not be persuaded by means of reason, nor (as his comments on sophists illustrate) will he give reasons to support the claims that he makes. Moreover, Anytus angers quickly as soon as anyone questions his opinion. While it is true that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ discourse also displays a certain kind of unreasonableness in that it has a tendency to sometimes fail to refer to anything even remotely related to reality, the unreasonableness of the eristics’ discourse is “unreasonableness with a reason” – it is a deliberate strategy that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus employ in order to win their eristic “bouts”. By contrast, there is no apparent reason for Anytus’ unreasonableness: he is simply a very confident, highly opinionated dogmatist. Anytus may be a democrat, but the Meno does not depict him as being a very open-minded one, committed to hearing out and considering a plurality of views and opinions; if anything, Anytus maintains the authoritarian attitude of a despot.

9. Introducing Meletus

Socrates’ actual prosecutor – that is, the man who filed the charges against him – is a relatively young fellow by the name of Meletus. Meletus is an unknown but ambitious political hopeful who, through his prosecution of Socrates on the charge of corrupting the youth, seems to be trying to make a name for himself by demonstrating his concern about the education

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227 Tarrant (66) discusses Anytus’ “imperviousness to reason”:
We are struck by the man’s tendency to see everything in the ‘black and white’ terms of good and evil, by his absolute confidence in his own unswerving judgement, and by his deliberate avoidance of the kind of experience that might actually confirm that judgement. Since Anytus never doubts the correctness of his evaluation of other people and their behaviours, there doesn’t need to be any proper ethical or epistemological conversation with him. He is simply immune.

228 See Euthphr. 2b1-8.; Ap. 23d9-e5.
and improvement of young people in Athens. It is the goal of Socrates’ cross-examination of Meletus in the *Apology* to demonstrate that Meletus’ prosecution of him has nothing to do with any sort of genuine concern for the education and well-being of the youth of Athens. In the *Apology*, Socrates claims that in truth, Meletus is angry with him and is prosecuting him on behalf of the poets, whom he has questioned and has shown to be lacking in wisdom both insofar as the meaning of their poems is concerned, and insofar as human excellence is concerned. That being said, Plato’s Socrates does not identify Meletus as being a poet himself, and Meletus is not someone with whom Socrates has ever conversed: in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates states that he had never heard of Meletus before he was summoned to answer to the charges filed against him. In the *Apology*, Socrates maintains that Meletus mocked Socrates’ *daimonion* in his written indictment, thereby indicating that Meletus seemed to think that the appearance of Socrates’ *daimonion* was nothing more than a “tall tale” on Socrates’ part. In summary then, Meletus appears to be a politically ambitious young man whose prosecution of Socrates on the grounds of impiety and corruption of the youth is really

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229 See *Euthphr*. 2b8-3a5. According to Bonner (62), “Young men with political aspirations frequently sought to advance their fortunes by prosecuting some public offender.”


231 *Ap*. 23e4-5.


233 West (1979) repeatedly identifies Meletus as a poet (85, 131, 134-135), but Nails claims that, “. . . [I]t is probable that [Meletus’s] father was a [tragic and dithyrambic] poet [also named Meletus; see Nails 201], but not that Meletus II [Socrates’ accuser] was himself” (202). Strycker, on the other hand, comments that “. . . since Socrates says in the *Apology* (23e4-5) . . . that the young Meletus attacked him on behalf of the poets, it is quite possible that he was the son of the tragic poet [Meletus], although he can also be any youth with poetical pretensions” (91). The fact that Meletus is pursuing a career in politics (cf. *Euthphr* 2b7-3a5) instead of a career as a poet, suggests that he might think of himself as an amateur poet, or perhaps Meletus might even be a failed poet (given that he does not seem to be very well-known).

234 *Euthphr*. 2b7-9.

235 *Ap*. 31c7-d2.

236 See West (1979) 144.
nothing more than an attempt to make a name for himself by getting rid of an individual Meletus considers to be a social nuisance.

10. Meletus, careless learner and incompetent educator

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Dionysodorus and Euthydemus were bad learners because they would not give anything (or anyone) much consideration. In turn, the lack of thought that the brothers put into their eristic discourse made them ineffective educators. In the first half of this chapter I discussed how Anytus was both a bad educator and relatively uneducable himself because he was hot-tempered and unreasonable. Meletus presents yet another example of a bad learner and a bad educator, although he is not bad at education for quite the same reasons that the individuals I discussed previously were.

Meletus is a bad learner and bad educator for multiple reasons. To begin with, Meletus (like Anytus) is a bad learner and an ineffective educator because he believes that he is wise when he is no such thing. In addition, rather like Anytus, Meletus also mistakes strong opinion for knowledge. Furthermore, because Meletus is somewhat impetuous, he tends to speak and act without first thinking about what he is saying or doing. Unlike Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Meletus is not an entirely thoughtless or carefree individual – Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are prepared to say whatever it takes to win an eristic “match” because they do not care at all about the subject matter that they are discussing, and they do not care if what they have to say really has anything to do with making a person excellent or not. Meletus (whose name itself means “care”237), on the other hand, does seem to care about pursuing excellence, although because he

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237 See West (1998) 73 n. 39, as well as West (1979) 140-141.
has not thought the matter through very carefully, he holds mistaken notions about how to go about pursuing it.

Despite being a young man, inexperienced in adult public life, Meletus claims he knows who it is that corrupts the young and how it is that they are corrupted. It is Socrates, asserts Meletus, who corrupts young people, by introducing new divinities into Athens and repudiating belief in the traditional gods. Meletus does not have much knowledge of Socrates’ philosophical activities, yet he is quite certain of what they are all about: according to Meletus, Socrates is something of an Anaxagorean materialist who denies the existence of deities, claiming that the sun is made of stone, and the moon is made of earth. Plato’s Socrates, though, makes no claims whatsoever about the nature of heavenly bodies; contrary to the claims that he makes at his trial about how other people have portrayed him, Plato’s Socrates is not oriented towards researching or theorizing about the natures of the “things in the heavens”. Furthermore, while Socrates disputes the traditional Greek depictions of their deities, insisting that deities can only be good, and, unlike human beings, are not quarrelsome or deceptive, he does not deny that deities exist – far from it. Rather, Socrates justifies his philosophizing as an

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238 See Euthphr. 2b8-3a5.
239 Euthphr. 2c3-5.
240 Euthphr. 3b1-4; Ap. 24b6-c1.
242 See Ap. 19a8-d1; note that in this passage, Plato’s Socrates indicates that he does indeed see value in “natural philosophy”, even though it is not the subject of his discourse: see Sandra Peterson, Socrates and Philosophy in the Dialogues of Plato (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011) 25. West (1979, 87-90) maintains that Plato’s Socrates pursued the study of “natural philosophy” in his youth, but then later abandoned it, and from then on saw little value in it; he bases his claims on Phd. 96a5-99e6. In this passage, Socrates admits to having been interested in “natural philosophy” as a young man, but goes on to say that after hearing someone read from one of Anaxagoras’ books, he became disenchanted with the theories of philosophers such as Anaxagoras, gave up on the empirical study of nature, and instead took to investigating the truth of things by means of discourse. Also see McPherran (104-107).
243 R. 2.377d4 ff.
act of religious devotion.\textsuperscript{244} In short, Meletus is the sort of individual who believes that he is very knowledgeable about that of which he in fact has little knowledge; instead, all that Meletus has, at least in regard to the subject of Socrates’ philosophizing, is mere opinion, not knowledge.

It would appear that the reason why Meletus believes that his opinions about Socrates’ philosophizing constitute knowledge has to do with the fact that, like many young Athenians, he has heard \textit{many} people spread false rumours about Socrates, rumours that maintain that Socrates is a conventional sophist.\textsuperscript{245} It appears that Meletus does have some knowledge of the sorts of things that “wise men” say and do; otherwise, he would not portray Socrates as a materialist who maintains beliefs that are similar to the ideas of Anaxagoras.\textsuperscript{246} However, it is evident that Meletus has not studied the works of either sophists or materialist philosophers very carefully; for, if he had, he would not have mistaken Socrates for one of them. Had Meletus accused Socrates of being a sophist of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus’ kind – that is, one who engages in eristic disputation – Meletus’ accusations would have made more sense, since Socrates’ ability to “stump” the people with whom he holds dialogues does bear a resemblance (albeit a shallow one) to what Euthydemus and Dionysodorus do. But when put under cross-examination, Meletus does not hesitate to identify Socrates with materialist philosophers, which indicates that he has not paid much attention to what Socrates actually does or to what either sophists or materialist philosophers have actually said. Furthermore, if Meletus is prepared to assert that certain people are immoral based only on partial knowledge of what they do, he is presumably ready to assert that other people are good citizens and human beings even if he knows very little about them. So, this demonstrates that Meletus is not very careful about obtaining all the facts –

\textsuperscript{244} \textit{Ap}. 22e7-23c1.

\textsuperscript{245} See \textit{Ap}. 18a7 ff.

\textsuperscript{246} See \textit{Ap}. 26d4-e3.
or at least as much information as he can reasonably obtain – before accusing people of immoral or socially pernicious behavior (and likely also before claiming that certain people benefit and improve others).

As Socrates points out, Meletus has charged Socrates with very serious crimes, ones for which Meletus is entitled to demand the death penalty as Socrates’ sentence. Yet in court Socrates does not have much time to justify his actions in the light not only of the charges that Meletus has brought against him, but also in the light of all of the other accusations about him that have been spread around Athens, and that have likely caused the jury to be biased against him.247 While Meletus insists that Socrates is a dangerous criminal who deserves to be put to death, he in fact knows little about Socrates, and he is unwilling to allow Socrates reasonable time to explain and justify his actions before demanding that he be put to death. In other words, it would seem that, while Meletus is willing to “hear” what other people have to say for (or about) themselves and what they believe, he is prepared to give only a partial hearing to what they have to say, because he is an impetuous young man who acts in haste.248 Meletus is quick to judge, and quick to condemn, and he does so on the basis of flimsy evidence. Meletus does not take the time to understand what he judges, so although he claims to know what is best for Athens and for its youth, he in fact does not.249

Now, this is not to say that rash and impetuous individuals like Meletus never have anything worthwhile to contribute to public discourse; however, rather like the craftsmen Socrates mentions in the Apology,250 the value of whatever wisdom they have is diminished by

247 See Ap. 18e5-19a2, 24a1-4, 37a8-b2.
250 Ap. 22d4-e1.
their assertion of wisdom in respect to things about which they really know very little. Yet even though Meletus acts on the basis of false opinion, he nevertheless believes that his opinions are correct and that he does in fact speak the truth.\footnote{According to West (1979), “The answers [Meletus] gives to Socrates’ questions . . . are characterized by a small-minded but deadly seriousness (cf. 26b2-e5)” (131).} It appears that Meletus confuses adamantly held opinion with knowledge: when Meletus is under cross-examination in the Apology, he responds to Socrates’ questions in a vehement manner (and he stresses this himself, too).\footnote{Ap. 23d9-e6, 25a9-11, 26b2-7, 26d1-27a. Guthrie (179) claims that to rhetoric’s credit “. . . it may be said that persuasion is better than force . . . ”; however, Anytus and Meletus seem to think that force is a part of persuasion; that is, he who speaks most forcefully is most persuasive.} The same is also true of Anytus in the Meno; he also answers Socrates’ questions in a fairly emphatic and assured manner. In other words, the way in which Meletus and Anytus respond to Socrates’ questions suggests that they feel quite certain that what they are saying is correct. Speaking emphatically and assuredly, however, is not the same thing as speaking truthfully;\footnote{Speaking emphatically is also not the same thing as speaking seriously: “Seriousness can be feigned. One can put on a solemn face, a grave voice, shamming an earnestness one does not feel” (Vlastos 9).} one can tell lies in a confident and assured manner just as easily as one can speak the truth.\footnote{Cole distinguishes rhetoric from “. . . the simple conveying of a message known to be false (lying) or an argument known to be fallacious (sophistry). . . .” on the grounds that “. . . [rhetoric’s] aim must be to secure in some fashion or another a better reception for the speaker’s message. . . . [O]ften rhetoric may be used to make lies seem like truth or introduce sophistry in such a way that its fallaciousness passes unnoticed” (14); however, rhetoric maintains “. . . the absolute separability of a speaker’s message from the method used to transmit it” (12), so it is not the telling of falsehoods itself that is rhetorical, but the fact that they have been deliberately presented in such a way as to seem all the more believable. Vehemently repeating one’s message is one way in which one might try to convince an audience to accept it, but the truth or falsity of that message (as well as the content of the message) is distinct and separate from the way in which the message is delivered. Straightforward and unenhanced statements of truth or falsity are “nonrhetorical” (see Cole 12-13, although “plain speaking” that is consciously and deliberately adopted also qualifies as a kind of rhetorical technique – see Cole 15).} In other words, what Meletus and Anytus do not understand is that it is not the way in which one speaks that indicates one’s commitment to truth; rather, one’s commitment to truth is demonstrated by one’s desire to seek it out, by either asking questions, engaging in investigation, or giving matters serious and thoughtful consideration. It is not speaking emphatically and assuredly that indicates...
one’s commitment to truth; rather, it is a desire to learn that demonstrates one’s commitment to truth. However, in order to learn the truth from asking questions, one must be prepared to listen to the answers and give them serious consideration, and this is something that neither Anytus nor Meletus wants to do.\textsuperscript{255}

Meletus appears to be different from Anytus in that, unlike Anytus, Meletus is easily influenced by mass opinion. Had Anytus been easily influenced by popular opinion, he would not have been so quick to dismiss all sophists as evil charlatans, for, as Socrates points out to Anytus in the \textit{Meno}, some sophists (such as Protagoras) enjoyed great fame and repute.\textsuperscript{256}

Socrates, however, directly identifies popular slander about the nature of his activities as having had a direct influence upon Meletus’ decision to prosecute him. According to Socrates, Meletus had been hearing stories about Socrates’ purported sophistic activities ever since he was a child, and naturally came to believe these stories because Socrates was not around to refute them.\textsuperscript{257}

However, as an adult, Meletus has no business bringing Socrates to court on a capital charge without first verifying the nature of the rumours about Socrates that he had heard as a boy. It is one thing to believe popular gossip, and it is quite another thing to demand that a person be put to death on the basis of it. As Socrates points out to Meletus while he is cross-examining him, Meletus could have personally confronted Socrates about his activities if he was concerned that Socrates was exercising a negative influence upon the youth of the city, but that is not what he did; instead, he chose to prosecute Socrates in court.\textsuperscript{258} In short, Meletus is guilty of gross negligence in fact-checking, and it appears that the reason why Meletus did not bother to obtain direct, firsthand information about Socrates’ beliefs and activities is that Meletus believes that

\textsuperscript{255} On Anytus’ resistance to engaging in inquiry, see D. Scott 171-172.
\textsuperscript{256} \textit{M.} 91b7-92a2.
\textsuperscript{257} \textit{Ap.} 18b1 ff., esp. 19a8 ff.
\textsuperscript{258} \textit{Ap.} 26a2-8.
popular opinion is just as accurate a source of information as firsthand experience – which it is not (at least in most cases). For Meletus, strongly-held opinions – especially if they are based upon popular opinion and rumour – are just as good and as true as knowledge itself. This demonstrates that while Meletus is not completely indifferent to truth (and to reality, as Dionysodorus and Euthydemus were), he does not exhibit sufficient care for it. If Meletus really did care about the truth, he would take the time to seek it out himself. Instead, though, Meletus is perfectly happy to accept whatever he hears as being true, as long as enough people assert it, regardless of how reliable or informed those people’s opinions are.

11. Summing up Meletus

In summary, Meletus is both a bad learner and a bad educator. Meletus believes himself to be wise when he is not at all wise, and he mistakes strongly held opinions for knowledge, and vehemently asserted claims for truth. He is rash and impetuous, and is not inclined to give people and their views a fair hearing. In particular, the fact that Meletus believes himself to be wise and knowledgeable when he is not makes him a bad learner. Those who believe they already know everything there is to know about a subject, and who believe that they are capable of advising other people on matters related to it, are not likely to be able to learn anything new in relation to that subject.\(^{259}\) It is not possible for an expert in a particular field to maintain this attitude. Those who are experts in a particular area of human endeavour are always seeking to push the boundaries of that endeavour, either in terms of knowledge, or in terms of perfection of skill, or in terms of discovering novelty or creating it in that field. Experts are experts not just

because they have a tremendous amount of knowledge and/or skill, but also because they ensure that they are always at the acme of their discipline.

Meletus, on the other hand, believes that, with respect to the improvement of human beings, he knows everything there is to know already, for he can reliably identify who it is that improves the youth – and it is everyone (that is, all of the citizens other than Socrates) who improves the young people of Athens. But if everyone (other than Socrates) improves the youth, then there are no experts in the transmission of human excellence, and so the transmission of human excellence, it seems, is something that is never in need of any change or innovation. Everyone just educates and improves the youth as they always have, either by following longstanding tradition, or simply by exercising their human nature. In Meletus’ case, he seems to think that it is by following longstanding tradition, as embodied in the laws and customs of Athens (the nomoi), that people improve the youth. Socrates, by contrast, is (according to Meletus) an innovator who does not respect these laws and customs, and so he corrupts the youth.

But if Meletus is right, then how could a corrupting innovator such as Socrates ever appear within Athenian society? Meletus’ answer to this question, it seems, would be that Socrates has arisen as an innovator within Athenian society because he pays too much attention to pernicious teachings. But if that is the case, then it is not Socrates who corrupts the youth of Athens, but harmful teachers – Socrates just happens to be one of their more prominent victims. As Socrates points out to Meletus, though, the books of Anaxagoras can be purchased easily

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enough in Athens; their copying and dissemination are not banned. If it is foreign sophists, philosophers, or “wise men” that corrupt the youth of Athens, then the people of Athens should ban their books and prevent them from teaching in the city – but no such ban has been enacted. Given this, it is therefore the citizens of Athens themselves who corrupt the youth of Athens by not banning foreign teachers and intellectuals from the city. And, given that the citizens of Athens must pass additional laws to prevent their young people from being corrupted by foreigners, then this would seem to indicate that the very laws and customs of Athens are not, as they are, sufficient to protect the youth from being corrupted – instead, they are in need of revision and improvement. It is then, the (supposed) Athenian practice of unquestioningly and unvaryingly following their laws, customs, and tradition that corrupts the youth of the city. So, it is all of Athens’ citizens – those on the Council, and in the Assembly, and on the juries – who are guilty of corrupting the youth. Moreover, Meletus is one of these corrupting citizens.

Like Anytus and Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, Meletus also demonstrates a certain kind of unreasonableness. According to Meletus, all of the Athenians benefit and improve the youth of the city except Socrates. Similarly, Meletus is also prepared to assert that Socrates introduces new gods into the city and also disbelieves entirely in the existence of deities. In short, Meletus seems to have a tendency to assert that x is – or would be – universally true were it not for one notable exception to the rule, y. Meletus claims that all the Athenians benefit and improve the youth except for one notable exception to this rule: Socrates. However, any sensible person would recognize that it is highly unlikely that all Athenians except Socrates

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266 Ap. 26b3-c8.
benefit and improve the youth. There is solid evidence that criminals and scoundrels exist in Athens, for if they did not, then there would be no need for law courts. Likewise, Meletus also claims that Socrates is an atheist who denies that gods exist except when he is introducing new ones into Athens. However, it is unlikely that an atheist would take up proselytizing about the existence of new divinities simply out of sheer malicious fun. In short, the way Meletus goes about attacking Socrates is foolish and rather juvenile. Meletus’ unreasonableness is neither the despotic authoritarianism of Anytus, nor the strategic perversity of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus. Instead, Meletus’ particular form of unreasonableness is the sort that is associated with thoughtlessness and immaturity; that is, the sort of unreasonableness that involves making bold, brash assertions that, if they are not downright false, are unlikely to be true. As far as Meletus is concerned, if one has a strong opinion about someone or something, then the more vehemently one asserts that opinion, the truer and more convincing it is. Whether that opinion is a reasonable one to hold, or whether that opinion is being presented in a reasonable manner, does not matter to Meletus. Rather, what matters is that one voice one’s opinion emphatically. In short, Meletus will not engage in the temperate and reasonable discourse of a sensible and mature person; instead, he makes wild and unreasonable assertions.

12. Meletus and rhetoric

Insofar as Meletus’ rhetoric is concerned, we have already seen that it involves a great deal of vehement speaking, and in this particular way Meletus’ rhetoric is not all that different in general from Anytus’. Meletus, as someone with a particular interest in poetry, probably knows how to make speeches “sound good” – or impressive – to audiences, at least in terms of

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267 See Strycker 91.
the language used in the speech. In his opening remarks to the jury, Socrates insists that he will speak in plain language, unlike his accusers, who have made their speeches using flowery, high-falutin’ language. The tactic of using impressive language to make a case is a rhetorically sound one. By using impressive, learned, and poetic language, not only do the prosecutors’ speeches sound artfully pleasing to the jury, but they also make the prosecution team appear like learned men with lofty ideas and noble aims. If the jury believes that Socrates’ prosecutors seem like noble men who speak well and “know what they are doing” in prosecuting Socrates, then they are more likely to believe them. And here we can see one of the potential educational benefits of rhetoric: people are more likely to listen to, and therefore learn from, people who sound like they “know what they are doing”. However, using language skillfully in order to make a person appear to be knowledgeable will have educational benefits only if the person in question really is knowledgeable. Hence, while rhetoric’s ability to manipulate appearances may have educational benefits, it will serve only to benefit other people if used in the right hands.

Meletus and his co-prosecutors make another sound rhetorical “move” when they warn the jury that Socrates is a marvelous speaker, and that the jurors should be careful not to be misled by him. In claiming that Socrates is a marvelous speaker, Meletus and his advocates urge the jury to pay close attention to what he says – just as Socrates also encourages the jury to pay close attention to what he says. Yet whereas Socrates encourages the jury to pay close attention to what he says in order to determine whether it is just or not, Meletus and his advocates encourage the jury to pay close attention to what Socrates says in order to ensure that

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268 Poulakos (13) maintains that, “… [R]hetorical prose was one of the earliest efforts to break away from the cultural dominance of poetry; but it was a prose relying on the use of the poetical techniques of past poets.”
269 Ap. 17b8-c3.
270 Ap. 17a4-b1.
Socrates does not “hoodwink” them with his clever speaking skills. By cautioning the jury in this way, Meletus and his advocates make Socrates’ simple, plain style of speech appear not as honest talk, but as a deliberate pretence adopted for the purposes of deception. Of course, Socrates insists that the flowery and impressive language that his accusers use in their speeches is merely a deceptive pretence, and their claim that he is a highly adept speaker is a lie. Nevertheless, the warning that Meletus and his advocates give the jury about Socrates’ abilities as a speaker is more likely to impress the jurors and remain in their minds, than Socrates’ request to give careful consideration to what he says. The jurors already know that they are supposed to be giving careful consideration to the words of the speakers at a trial, and so Socrates’ request does not provide them with any new, interesting information. On the other hand, the warning issued to the jury by Socrates’ prosecutors might be “news” to some of Socrates’ jurors, while in the case of other jurors, it simply reinforces what they already believe about Socrates; namely, that he is a crafty and deceptive speaker. By putting the jury “on guard” against Socrates as he presents his defence, Socrates’ prosecutors utilize sound rhetorical strategy to gain an advantage over him. The prosecutors’ warning of potential deceit on the part of Socrates stirs up the jurors’ emotions, causing them to feel anxiety and pay closer attention to Socrates’ words. Socrates’ request that they pay attention, on the other hand, has no real emotional effect upon the jury, for he makes his request in a straightforward and matter-of-fact manner, and not in one that implies urgency or that provokes pity. Socrates’ prosecutors’ tactic of stirring up the jurors’ emotions demonstrates that while getting individuals emotionally “riled up” might get them to pay closer attention to what is being said, it is unlikely that they will consider what is being said in an unbiased manner.
Chapter conclusion

According to Anytus, any respectable gentleman can improve young people if the youth in question are willing to listen to him and to be persuaded by him.\textsuperscript{272} If the youth in question are unwilling to listen, well then – that is too bad. No respectable gentleman can improve them. As Anytus unwittingly points out in the \textit{Meno}, the problem with teaching is that it cannot persuade other people to listen to what is being said, let alone accept it; teaching succeeds at transmitting knowledge only if the audience is willing to listen. Hence, teaching alone is insufficient to promote learning; rather, the business of education must make use of techniques that engage potential learners’ attention and make them want to learn.

When used in the right hands, rhetoric’s ability to manipulate appearances can be used for truly educational purposes:

a) people are more likely to listen to speakers who seem knowledgeable;

b) people are more likely to listen to speakers who respect their audience members and who have a high regard for them – or at least seem to;

c) people are more likely to listen to a speaker if the subject in question is presented as being worthy of the audience’s attention

d) people are more likely to listen to a speaker who discourses eloquently;

e) people are more likely to listen to a speaker who discourses on a topic in a manner that appeals to the general character of the audience; and,

f) people are more likely to listen to a speaker if they are emotionally invested in the subject matter on which the speaker is discoursing.

\textsuperscript{272}\textit{M.} 92e3-6.
In other words, rhetoric can contribute to the educational enterprise by making people more inclined to listen to (or read) what is being presented by a teacher – or anyone, for that matter, who discourses on a subject. Furthermore, rhetoric can make people more likely to be persuaded by what is said and end up believing it. People are more likely to believe those who seem to be credible authorities on a subject, and people are more likely to believe what they want to believe – and the purpose of rhetoric is to make speeches and their subject matter seem appealing to those who listen to them.

Yet just as the entertaining eristic of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus is only a preparatory step before the serious business of real philosophical examination of “what is” can begin (as well as a kind of entertaining “add-on” aspect within ongoing philosophical discourse), so too, does rhetoric serve only to prepare an audience to listen to the truth, and to maintain the audience’s attention. Rhetoric itself is not concerned with the actual speaking of the truth; rather, its business is the manipulation of appearances. For all of its beneficial uses, rhetoric can also be used in harmful ways, either intentionally or unintentionally. Rhetoric can be used to convince people of falsehoods, and it can be used to corrupt people. Anytus and Meletus do not seem to intentionally use rhetoric to corrupt Socrates’ jury; while they want the jury to condemn Socrates to death, it would appear that they desire this because they genuinely believe that Athens would be better off without Socrates. Socrates does not deny that there are many people in Athens who are angry at him because he has questioned their beliefs, “shown them up” in

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273 Romilly (85), in discussing Protagoras, writes,

Rhetoric was not represented [by Protagoras] as being, in principle, a quest for the truth, nor – so far as Protagoras was concerned – could it possibly have claimed to be any such thing. However, that does not mean that, in practice, it did not help in distinguishing and understanding certain forms of the truth.

In Ancient Rhetoric and Oratory (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2005), Thomas Habinek points out that “[t]o elucidate a subject is to bring it from a state of obscurity to state of visibility” (49). This is true; however, rhetoric can be used to distort the truth just as much as it can be used to elucidate it.
conversation, or publicly embarrassed other people besides themselves. Meletus and Anytus use rhetoric to persuade Socrates’ jury to condemn him to death because they believe it is the right thing to do: life in Athens would be improved and the city would be better off if Socrates was not around. However, in order to be able to genuinely improve something, one has to know what really is (and is not) good for it – and that is something that Meletus and Anytus (and many other people in Athens) do not know, as Socrates demonstrates in dialogue with them. Meletus and Anytus do not know what is best for the city, or for human beings, and so Meletus and Anytus cannot use rhetorical discourse properly and improve their fellow Athenians by means of it, or, for that matter, truly educate anyone with regard to what is best for them as human beings.
Chapter 4: Socratic Cross-examination

Chapter introduction

In the previous chapters I discussed the eristic of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, as well as the popular rhetoric of Socrates’ accusers. Both rhetoric and eristic can be used for educational purposes by someone with knowledge – both knowledge of excellence, and knowledge of how to use these forms of speech to direct the attention of others towards the good. Neither Dionysodorus and Euthydemus nor Meletus and Anytus possess this knowledge.

As I said in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Socrates, in his defence speech at his trial, mentions several different descriptions of his activities – all of which, in one way or another, characterize Socrates as being some sort of an educator. The primary means by which Socrates would seem to carry out his educational activities (assuming that they are, in fact, educational) is his characteristic form of discourse. The purpose of this chapter is to examine Socrates’ characteristic style of discourse, cross-examination, and its educational value. I begin this chapter by comparing Socrates’ discourse to eristic, a form of discourse which it resembles on a relatively superficial level, but which differs from Socrates’ discourse in significant ways. I then go on to give a general overview of Socrates’ style of cross-examination in the second section of the chapter. In the third section of this chapter, I discuss how Socrates’ cross-examination
relates to the business of entertainment. In Section Four, I discuss the relationship between cross-examination, education, and punishment. In the fifth section of this chapter, I use the case of Anytus to illustrate some of the educational limitations of Socrates’ discourse. I give an overall evaluation of Socrates’ discourse in Section 6, and further discussion of Socrates as an educator in more general terms will follow in Chapter 5.

1. Eristic and Socrates’ usual discourse

Socrates’ characteristic form of discourse is one that takes a question-and-answer form, and in this way it resembles Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic. However, the resemblance between Socrates’ style of questioning and eristic is a relatively superficial one. Eristic is a clever game of words in which the competitors strive against each other in order to display, in a rather entertaining fashion, a certain kind of intellectual dominance. Socrates, too, might be accused of questioning others simply for the purposes of demonstrating his ability to confound them. Certainly, Socrates admits to questioning others in order to show them that, contrary to what they believe, they are not wise.\(^{274}\) Furthermore, Socrates admits to debunking notable Athenians’ wisdom in the presence of other people.\(^{275}\) However, Socrates himself makes no claims to wisdom (apart from his recognition of the fact that he is not wise\(^{276}\)), and he does not present himself as being a teacher. Socrates insists that he has never taught anyone anything, certainly not human excellence.\(^{277}\) While Socrates admits that it is rather pleasant to see those who believe that they are wise confounded by his questions,\(^{278}\) he also claims that his activities in

\(^{274}\) Ap. 23b4-7.
\(^{275}\) Ap. 29b9 ff.
\(^{276}\) Ap. 20d6-9, 22e1-23b4.
\(^{277}\) Ap. 20a7-c3, 33a5-6.
\(^{278}\) Ap. 33b9-c4.
Athens cause him much pain and misery, for they have led to his being hated and slandered. He continues with them not because they bring him any profit, but only because he believes that he has a divine obligation to continue doing so. By contrast, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus willingly travel around Greece giving demonstrations of their eristic because doing so is financially profitable for them.

Unlike Socrates’ questioning, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus’ eristic is indifferent to reality, and even to logic: the brothers draw seemingly clever but ultimately false conclusions from their opponents’ claims in order to secure the defeat of their opponents. Eristic, as Euthydemus and Dionysodorus wield it, is “unphilosophical” because it is not concerned with developing any sort of understanding of “being” or “what is”. By contrast, while the truth of the conclusions to which Socrates’ chains of questions lead might also be dubious, it is by no means clear that the conclusions to which Socrates’ questions lead are false: even if Socrates’ lines of questioning, might, at times, seem to be logically suspect, the conclusions to which they lead at least seem like they could possibly be correct.

As I have already noted, despite the fact that Dionysodorus and Euthydemus do not engage in eristic argumentation for the purposes of gaining greater understanding of “being” or “what is”, eristic is not necessarily entirely worthless, philosophically speaking. The examination and consideration of eristic arguments may prove useful in the understanding of “being”, even if the arguments themselves are of little worth insofar as the understanding of “being” is concerned. The philosophical benefit to be derived from the examination of eristic arguments follows from the fact that it serves as a kind of “practice” or “training” for real philosophy: carefully considering eristic arguments, and the logical flaws inherent in them.

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279 Ap. 21d8-22a1.
might be useful in educating someone about how the careful consideration of statements – including ones that initially seem bizarre or ridiculous – can lead to greater understanding of the world and “what is”.

Something like this is also true of Socrates’ practice of questioning: Socrates’ questioning an interlocutor creates a situation that furnishes an opportunity for a thoughtful person to give greater consideration to a particular matter concerning human excellence. Socratic questioning seemingly serves to refute popular beliefs espoused by the supposedly “wise” concerning matters related to human excellence; however, the real philosophical benefit that comes from Socratic questioning does not come from any “truths” that it reveals, because it is not clear that the conclusions to which Socrates’ lines of questioning lead are true; instead, the real philosophical benefit that comes from Socrates’ practice of questioning lies in the fact that it leads to conclusions whose truth must be questioned and considered. A genuinely thoughtful person will want to scrutinize carefully the conclusion that Socrates draws from any given chain of questions, along with the line of questioning itself, and the interlocutor’s original belief, in order to determine a) how it was that Socrates was able to lead his interlocutor away from the interlocutor’s original belief, and, b) whether Socrates was right in doing so. In other words, as I said before, Socrates’ characteristic discourse can indeed serve an educational purpose, in that it creates conditions under which a thoughtful person might examine and scrutinize some matter concerning human excellence. Nevertheless, just as eristic can be used as an entertaining introduction to philosophy only by someone who understands how to use it for this purpose, so too Socrates’ discourse will have educational benefits only for those who are naturally thoughtful, or for those who already recognize the importance of giving careful consideration to matters of human excellence. Socrates’ characteristic discourse of questioning will have benefits
only for those who recognize “what to do with it”; namely, to use it as an aid in giving matters of human excellence careful consideration.

2. Socrates’ style of discourse: cross-examination

Socrates displays his characteristic ability to “stun” and “numb” his interlocutors\(^{280}\) in the *Apology* when he utilizes his characteristic form of discourse in his cross-examination of Meletus, reducing the clever and eloquent orator\(^{281}\) to a state in which he is dumbfounded and does not answer Socrates’ questions.\(^{282}\) Yet in doing this, Socrates reveals to the court just exactly what his usual manner of discourse is:\(^{283}\) the discourse of cross-examination, a kind of discourse in which Socrates asks questions, and his interlocutors can give only relatively short responses.\(^{284}\)

Cross-examination is similar to eristic in that one person serves as the primary questioner, while the respondent answers in mostly “yes” or “no” terms. Socrates specifically insists that his interlocutor refrain from giving long-winded speeches as answers to his


\(^{283}\) *Ap*. 17c7-d1, 27a10-b2.

\(^{284}\) I take Socrates’ “cross-examination” to include both what is traditionally known as *elenchos* and what is known as *epagogê*. According to Hayden Ausland, “. . . [I]n forensic contexts, [*elenchus*] refers . . . to refuting the claims of an antagonist by testing them or putting them to proof” (37): see “Forensic Characteristics of Socratic Argumentation” in *Does Socrates Have a Method?*, ed. G. A. Scott (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2002). Also see Robinson 7. Ausland identifies *epagogê* as part of *elenchos* (59). According to Ausland, “Viewed in forensic terms, [*epagoge*] gathers and adduces a series of testimonies pointing to an inconsistency within the overall position of the opposing litigant.” (56). In a more general sense, *epagogê* “. . . can also denote ‘enchantment’; that is, it can refer to ‘leading on’ a listener or interlocutor by magical means of some kind. And this is another way in which Socrates’ style of argument can plausibly be viewed” (50). While there is no reason to believe that Socrates “leads his interlocutors on” by *magical* means, Socrates’ prosecutors do warn the jury against being led on by Socrates’ marvellously clever style of speech – and Socrates warns the jury about being “carried away” by his prosecutors’ speeches: *Ap*. 17a1-b8.
questions;\textsuperscript{285} however, unlike eristic discourse, Socrates’ discourse does not require of respondents that they answer only in “yes” or “no” terms – they can request further clarification or challenge Socrates if they wish, and Socrates generally welcomes questions and challenges.\textsuperscript{286} In this way, Socrates’ style of cross-examination is rather different from the forensic cross-examination that takes place in a law court, for, in a law court, the party being cross-examined is limited in the extent to which he or she can ask questions of clarification, and the party being cross-examined certainly cannot challenge the questioner.

Cross-examination in a law court purports to be concerned with determining whether or not the accused really did do something that was not “good”, “good” in this sense meaning in accordance with the law. Socrates, on the other hand, wants to know what it is for a human being to be good. Furthermore, in his examination of Meletus in court, Socrates seeks to reveal the truth about Meletus’ purported care for the young, in much the same way that he seeks to reveal the truth about the apparent wisdom of various people around the city of Athens.\textsuperscript{287} Hence, just as law court cross-examination purports to reveal the truth, so does Socrates’ usual form of discourse. In court, the jury and spectators want to learn whether or not the accused really is guilty as charged. With respect to Socrates’ discourse, the spectators to his conversations want to learn

\begin{itemize}
  \item a) whether or not the interlocutor’s claims can really hold up under Socrates’ questioning; and,
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{285} Grg. 449b4-c8; Prot. 335b3-c3. Also see Vlastos 7.

\textsuperscript{286} See R. 2.367d5-c3; Phd. 62d9-63a3. David Hitchcock, in “The origin of professional eristic,” \textit{Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides} ed. T. M. Robinson and L. Brisson (Sankt Augustin, Germany: Academia Verlag, 2000) claims that Socrates’ style of discourse is structurally identical to Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’, with the only real difference between the two styles of discourse being the rigid rules that the sophists impose upon their respondents: see 60, 62. Also see Teloh (195) on the resemblance between Socrates’ discourse and eristic.

\textsuperscript{287} See Ap. 24c4-9, 26a9-b2, 23b4-7.
b) whether or not the interlocutor is as wise and knowledgeable as he maintains he is. Hence, Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination is apparently concerned with the revelation of the truth to a body of spectators who are eager to learn.

However, note that a poor performance on the part of a respondent who is being cross-examined does not necessarily mean that the respondent’s original claim is false; instead, it might simply mean that the respondent cannot give good answers to the questioner’s queries. The respondent’s inability to provide adequate answers to the questions posed by the interrogator might mean that the answerer’s original claim is an opinion that does in fact happen to be true, but that is held on the basis of no or flimsy reasons. On the other hand, the blame for the answerer’s inability to provide adequate answers to the interrogator’s questions might lie with the interrogator. Perhaps the questions were not very fair ones in the first place: perhaps they dealt with material that was not pertinent to the situation at hand; perhaps they were phrased in a manipulative or “leading” fashion; perhaps the questioner deliberately attempted to draw conclusions that did not actually follow from the answerer’s admissions. That being said, a respondent’s holding up well under questioning does not necessarily mean that the respondent’s original claim is true: perhaps the questioner simply did not ask very revealing questions; perhaps the questioner did not ask enough questions; perhaps the questioner asked the wrong questions. Hence, while cross-examination appears to reveal the truth about who is the guilty or the just party, or who is wise and who is not, it does not actually reveal the truth. Instead, after being a witness to a cross-examination, one must consider both the process and the results of the cross-examination for oneself, and then judge these for oneself in order to determine what one believes to be true.

Consider what “Protagoras” has to say at Thc. 167d6-168a2: he begs Socrates not to engage in question-and-answer discourse in a mean, unjust manner, with the ultimate goal of merely defeating the answerer.
Of course, some people will not bother to put much effort into considering the process and the result of a cross-examination; for these people, the process of cross-examination seems to make it clearly apparent who stands on the side of the truth. Others, on the other hand, will not put so much faith in appearances, and will instead give the entire matter careful consideration. These people realize that we cannot take appearances at face value, as they are, and expect to find the truth in them, since if we do so we run the risk of being deceived; instead, we must apply thought to what appears to us, in order to determine what, in those appearances, is true or not: in short, appearances must be judged. And, it is in judging what appears to be that we determine what we, as individuals, take to be the truth.

3. Cross-examination and entertainment

Because cross-examination takes place in front of an audience, it can be regarded as a kind of performance, and (like eristic) one that can also be rather entertaining. According to Socrates, it is not unpleasant, but enjoyable, to listen to those who think they are wise being examined and shown to be otherwise. There is something rather satisfying about watching the high and mighty getting punished for their hubris; it is probably one of the reasons why Athenians enjoyed watching tragedy, and it is probably one of the reasons why the general public today enjoys keeping up with the latest political scandals and celebrity gossip. And, indeed, Socrates does suggest that his cross-examination of his “wise” interlocutors is intended to serve as a kind of punishment for their arrogance. At the same time, it is rather comical to watch Socrates’ interlocutors become intellectually frustrated by a rather ugly, common fellow who, at

289 On eristic being entertaining see Euthyd. 276b6-c1, 276d1-2, 277d4-e3, 278b2-c2, 303b1-7.
291 Ap. 41e5-42a1. Socrates will not pretend to be something that he is not; see Ap. 18b5 ff., 22e7 ff.
first glance, appears to ask rather artless, almost childish questions about things that “everyone knows” and seems to have an answer for. Indeed, this seems to be what Socrates’ young imitators enjoy most about interrogating their elders in Socratic style – watching their elders get frustrated and angry at being bested by the “little guy”. So, in other words, some of the pleasure to be found in listening to Socrates’ cross-examination is similar to the pleasure to be found in being a spectator to a drama.

That being said, the pleasure that comes from being an auditor or a spectator to a performance is not necessarily an intellectual one. It is one thing to take pleasure in watching the powerful and arrogant receive their comeuppance; but it is another thing entirely to ask why those individuals met with the misfortune that they did, and whether one can do anything to avoid facing such a similar misfortune oneself. Similarly, it is one thing to laugh at the antics of frustrated individuals who cannot adequately answer the questions put to them, but it is another thing entirely to ask oneself what the reasons are for the individuals’ frustration, and how they might give better answers to the questions being asked. In other words, drama is nothing more than an amusing spectacle if individuals do not put any thought into questioning the actions portrayed on stage (or on screen) for themselves and learning from them. Likewise, Socrates’ cross-examination will be nothing more than an amusing spectacle for some bystanders if they do not bother to give consideration to what they see unfolding in the dialogue before them. And, in much the same way, eristic too is nothing more than an amusing spectacle to most of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus’ “pupils” in the Euthydemus: eristic really has educational value only if one considers “where” it was that a respondent went wrong in answering a question, and how it was that the questioner was able to “stump” him.

292 See Ap. 23c2 ff.
Of course, not all of the bystanders to Socrates’ conversations with others find them very amusing. Many of the bystanders to Socrates’ conversations grow angry when they watch him “stump” his apparently wise interlocutors. For some, their anger is perhaps due to the fact that they think that Socrates – rather like the eristics Dionysodorus and Euthydemus – takes pleasure in being mean to people. While Socrates does not seem to particularly enjoy causing others to feel embarrassment, he does admit that it is not unpleasant to listen to other people’s pretence to wisdom being revealed to them. On other hand, the youths who imitate Socrates (his purported “pupils”) do seem to take great delight in causing their elders much frustration, and in watching them grow angry. In this way, the youths who imitate Socrates bear some resemblance to Dionysodorus, Euthydemus, and their followers. One can therefore understand how some Athenians could conflate Socrates’ questioning with the eristic of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.

Given that Socrates’ cross-examination frequently serves to anger and publicly embarrass people by intellectually “tripping them up”, is Socrates’ style of cross-examination just as mean and unfair as Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ eristic trickery? Certainly, Socrates is no “barrel of laughs” – Socrates is no comedian. While youths might find it quite amusing to imitate Socrates’ style of questioning, we have no reason to think that bystanders to Socrates’ conversations whoop and holler with glee whenever Socrates manages to “stump” one of his interlocutors. By contrast, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus’ audiences (or their followers, anyway) do explode into laughter whenever the sophists manage to successfully “refute”

293 See Ap. 21c8-d2, 22e7-a5
someone. In other words, while Socrates’ cross-examinations of other people may be entertaining in their own way, Socrates does not engage in them with the deliberate intention of mocking other people or creating comedy.

Yet even if Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination is serious in its nature, there does seem to be something rather nasty about it. Cross-examination is a style of discourse that is used primarily in court, a place where, according to Socrates, people are brought in to be punished. And, indeed, Socrates admits to using cross-examination to punish people for thinking themselves to be wise when they are not. But herein lies a problem. According to Socrates, no one willingly pursues what is worse for him or her, and to be wise is always better than being unlearned or ignorant. As Socrates’ interlocutors are ignorant of their lack of wisdom, it is therefore Socrates’ responsibility to educate them: it is Socrates’ responsibility to turn the interlocutors’ attention towards what is better, for this, according to Socrates, is what education is. The apparent “nastiness” of this method, then, is in fact to be understood as something that is really a help.

But attempting to demonstrate the interlocutors’ lack of wisdom by cross-examining them, one might argue, does not serve to turn the interlocutors’ attention towards what is better. Of course, given that Socrates converses with his interlocutors about matters related to human

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296 Euthyd. 276b6-d2, 303b1-7.
297 According to John Beversluis in Cross-examining Socrates (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 43, “...[II]f by ‘serious’ one means humorless, unrelieved gravity, and the complete absence of the sense that he is thoroughly enjoying his interlocutor’s befuddlement, Socrates is seldom, if ever, completely serious; on the other hand, if by ‘not serious’ one means flippant, cavalier, and wholly unconcerned about the right way to live, he is seldom, if ever, not serious.”
299 Cf. Ap. 22e7-23b7; 41e1-42a2.
300 Prot. 358b6-c3.
301 R. 7.518c4-d9.
excellence, he is, in one way, directing his interlocutors’ attention away from the typical concerns that preoccupy many of them (namely, the pursuit of wealth, honours, and reputation), but this refocusing of his interlocutors’ attention is only temporary. Indeed, it seems to me that the ultimate educational result of Socrates’ discourse is that it focuses his interlocutors’ attention on their ignorance of human excellence. It is then Socrates’ interlocutors’ responsibility to decide whether they will continue to consider and pursue human excellence, or merely return to their unthinking beliefs (and possibly also grow resentful of Socrates). Likewise, while bystanders to Socrates’ conversations may temporarily have their attention turned towards the contemplation of human excellence and the good, the ultimate results of Socrates’ dialogue with his interlocutors is to leave bystanders’ attention focused on his interlocutors’ ignorance. While this should lead bystanders to admit to their own ignorance and reconsider their beliefs about human excellence, it is often the case that some bystanders mistakenly assume that Socrates is wise, while others grow resentful and angry of him.

In summary, then, Socrates’ discourse cannot maintain individuals’ attention focused on the consideration of goodness and human excellence. While Socrates can temporarily turn people’s attention towards the consideration of human excellence, it is ultimately up to those who listen to him discourse to keep their own attention (and action) focused on the good. Given this, it is, in the end, those who listen to Socrates converse who must decide whether or not they will continue to educate themselves about human excellence. Socrates’ discourse with others creates conditions in which individuals may choose to educate themselves about human excellence, but Socrates is not responsible for people’s choice to continue to educate themselves.

303 See Ap. 21d8-e4, 22e7-23a5.
304 Socrates is not responsible for what become of those who converse with him: see Ap. 33b3-6.
about excellence and the good. Furthermore, even if those who listen to Socrates converse (and I include his interlocutors among these people) choose to continue to direct their attention towards the consideration of human excellence and the good, Socrates cannot “do the educating for them” any more than someone who directs someone else’s vision in a particular direction can guarantee that they focus their attention on the right things and see what they should. While Socrates’ discourse with others provides his fellow Athenians with opportunities to give consideration to human excellence, it cannot guarantee that those who do engage in the contemplation of human excellence arrive at the right conclusions.

4. Socrates’ cross-examination, punishment, and education

In the Protagoras, Protagoras identifies punishment as being a necessary part of education. According to Protagoras’ account of Athenian paideia, children must be disciplined by means of “threats and blows” in order to develop into human beings displaying the qualities associated with excellence. Chastisement and punishment, and their opposites praise and reward, serve to train and “domesticate” “wild”, not-yet-rational children so that they might then go on to be formally educated at school. If we apply Protagoras’ line of thinking to the

305 In “Erôs and Education,” Laval Théologique et Philosophique, 56.1 (2000), John Russon (121-123) identifies the essence of Socratic education as being the act of redirecting the individual’s attention towards the examination of herself, her beliefs, and her behaviour. Learning from Socrates requires three things of the individual: First, that the individual be prepared to engage in self-examination. Second, that the individual be in fact capable of directing her attention towards the examination of herself. Third, that the individual act upon what she discovers by means of her self-examination, and refocus and redirect her own behavior accordingly.

In this chapter section, I have maintained that Socrates’ discourse creates opportunities for both his interlocutors and bystanders to his discussions to learn about human excellence. However, it would seem that oftentimes this learning does not take place because these interlocutors and bystanders fail to fulfill the three requirements for learning identified by Russon: Those who are unwilling to examine their beliefs about human excellence will not be prepared to learn anything from Socrates’s discourse; those who lack the intellectual ability to direct their attention towards the contemplation of human excellence will learn nothing from Socrates’ conversations; and, those who, after their encounter with Socrates, are unwilling to commit to directing their behavior towards the continued examination of human excellence will not genuinely learn anything from Socrates’ discourse, either.

306 Prot. 325c5-d6.
examination of Socratic cross-examination, Socrates’ cross-examination acts as a preparatory step before actual education can happen, not primarily because it “purges” or “cleanses” people of specific false pretences to knowledge, but, rather like the disciplinary methods that Protagoras mentions, it turns people away from their false beliefs concerning their supposed knowledge, and redirects their attention towards questions concerning human goodness and excellence.

However, as I discussed in the previous section, Socrates’ discourse can direct his interlocutors’ (and bystanders’) attention towards the examination of human excellence only temporarily. The same though, would seem to also be true of other disciplinary methods: while they might succeed at getting someone to stop (or to begin) doing something for a while, they seldom ensure a permanent change in behavior, but must instead be applied over and over again until the individual is trained to “fall into line”. Socrates, though, gets to discourse with only his personal associates (who are mostly young, talented men from reasonably well-to-do families) on a regular basis. More often than not, Socrates converses with someone in the streets of Athens (or some other location in the city) only to demonstrate to that person that he or she is not wise, and then he moves on to questioning and conversing with another person. Hence, one of the reasons why Socrates’ discourse does not appear to be a particularly effective educational method has to do with the fact that it is appears to be oftentimes only a one-time disciplinary method utilized by Socrates on those who believe that they are wise when they are not. After that, it is up to the person who has been questioned and “chastised” by Socrates to determine whether or not he or she will continue to pursue Socrates in order to be able to converse with him.

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307 See Robinson (13) on the notion that elenchus purges individuals of false beliefs.
308 See Ap. 21b9 ff.
on other occasions (and note that some interlocutors do indeed do this\footnote{The old men in the \textit{Laches} (200c2 ff.) are one example; Polemarchus in the \textit{Republic} is another (1.327b2-328b3).}). Just as Socrates does not force anyone to pursue knowledge of the good and human excellence, so too he does not force anyone to repeatedly submit themselves to his “disciplinary” methods; instead, after conversing with Socrates (or listening to him cross-examine someone else) it is up to the individual to decide if he or she is willing to pursue education, either by means of the private examination of beliefs, in association with others, or with Socrates (and his associates).

Note that Socrates never verbally chastises any of his interlocutors for their ignorance; in fact, he rarely accuses any of his interlocutors of being ignorant. For example, in the case of the diviner Euthyphro, Socrates (albeit perhaps ironically) maintains that Euthyphro knows what piety is, but that he is unwilling to divulge what it is.\footnote{\textit{Euthphr.} 15c11-e2.} In the case of the sophist Thrasymachus – who is a hostile interlocutor – Socrates is intimidated by the sophist and assures him that he knows better than to try to “play games” with him.\footnote{See \textit{R}. 1.341a5-c2. More precisely, Socrates assures Thrasymachus that he will not bear false witness against Thrasymachus’ arguments.} In the case of the young interlocutor Theaetetus, Socrates praises the youth for doing his best to answer Socrates’ questions even when the youth’s answers do not seem to hold up under scrutiny.\footnote{See, for example, \textit{Tht.} 154c10-d6.} Even in the case of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, Socrates praises the sophists’ eristic technique (albeit in an ironic tone), and says nothing about the fact that, contrary to what the brothers maintain, mastery of eristic does not constitute excellence.\footnote{See \textit{Euthyd.} 303b7 ff.} In the case of Antyus, it is Anytus who readily admits to his ignorance of the teachings and activities of sophists.\footnote{\textit{M}. 92b5-10.} Socrates does charge Anytus with ignorance, but he accuses Anytus of being ignorant of what \textit{slander} is; Socrates does not accuse
Anytus of being ignorant of whether or how excellence is to be taught. As for Meletus, when Socrates cross-examines him in court, Socrates maintains that Meletus has never cared about the nature of Athenian deities or the improvement of Athenian youth; however, at no point does Socrates openly accuse Meletus of ignorance. In other words, Socrates does not hold other people blameworthy for their ignorance of human excellence; instead, they can only be held blameworthy for pretending to be wise when they are not – or, as in the case of Meletus, for not caring enough to remedy their ignorance of human excellence.

In addition, while Socrates might be said to manipulate people into discussions about matters related to human excellence, Socrates does not actually force anyone to submit to chastisement from him. At the end of one of Socrates’ cross-examinations, it is up to the interlocutor to decide whether or not he feels ashamed of his former pretence to wisdom. In the Symposium, Alcibiades admits that Socrates is capable of making him feel ashamed of how he lives his life, but not all interlocutors are shamed by Socrates: Anytus and Dionysodorus and Euthydemus certainly are not (and, for that matter, some of Socrates’ younger interlocutors, such as Theaetetus and Clinias, have nothing to be ashamed about, as they do not pretend to be wise).

Although, as Protagoras describes, punishment and discipline might be a part of paideia, education, to be an educator is not simply to be an inflictor of punishment. Education involves the turning of the soul towards the good in such a way that that individual will be able and inclined to turn herself towards the good on her own afterward; educating a person should make that person desirous to further educate herself. Socrates’ discourse seemingly has the potential to engender just such a desire, since it appears to divest people of their false pretences

315 See M. 95a2-6.
316 Ap. 25e5-26b2.
317 Symp. 215e5-216b6.
to knowledge of human goodness and excellence, thereby causing them to desire to educate
themselves about what these things really are. 318 Yet the problem with Socrates is that he is not
very good at stimulating people to genuinely desire to educate themselves about human goodness
and excellence. Most – but not all – of Socrates’ adult interlocutors fail to accept that their
supposed knowledge of human excellence may be only a pretense, 319 and the same is true of the
adults who are interrogated by youths in imitation of Socrates. 320 On the other hand, most of
Socrates’ younger interlocutors either already desire to educate themselves when Socrates speaks
to them, 321 or they are at least quite willing to accept that they do not know everything, including
whatever there is to be known about human excellence. In other words, while Socrates does
have the potential to motivate some people to educate themselves, the majority of people do not
respond to him in this fashion.

5. The corruption of Anytus

When I discussed eristic in Chapter 2 I mentioned that it had the potential to be used in
a productive fashion: in order to “shut up” people who will not participate civilly in discourse.
Socrates’ discourse, on the other hand, does not just have the potential to be used in this way; it
actually works in this way. By means of his characteristic discourse, Socrates manages to
temporarily “shut up” people who would otherwise be pretending that their beliefs and opinions
about human excellence constitute teachable knowledge of it. The young men who imitate

318 See Terence Irwin, Plato’s Moral Theory (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 38; T. Brickhouse and N. Smith, Plato’s
Socrates (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) 16-17; Robinson 11-13, 17-18; Teloh 157; Ausland 36.
319 The older men who serve as Socrates’ interlocutors in the Laches – Laches, Nicias, Melesias, and Lysimachus –
are an exception to this rule.
321 E.g. Theaetetus (see Tht. 148c7-e6); Clinias (see Euthyd. 282a1-d4); Glaucon and Adeimantus (see R. 2.366d5
ff.). Even Polus (in the Gorgias), who, though young, is not an interlocutor who is sympathetic to Socrates, is
furthering his knowledge of rhetoric by studying with Gorgias.
Socrates’ style of discourse are also able to temporarily “shut up” their elders as well. People who pretend to know what they do not know are people who do not participate in a civil manner in discourse, because they are not being honest with themselves or others about what they know or do not know to be true. Those who pretend to know what they do not engage in “false speaking” and try to mislead others. This is dangerous, as those who speak falsely in this case cannot be certain of the goodness of what it is that they maintain they can teach and impart to others. Those who speak falsely about human goodness, excellence, and the best life for human beings have the potential to corrupt others if they are able to deceive them, even if it is not really the speakers’ intent to corrupt. Socrates’ discourse serves to stop people temporarily from speaking falsely and potentially corrupting others.

However, just as Socrates’ cross-examination can turn people’s attention towards the examination of excellence only for a short time (and then they must decide for themselves whether or not they will continue to spend time examining their beliefs about excellence), so too Socrates’ discourse can stop people from speaking falsely only for a short time. In the *Meno*, Socrates’ insistence that there are plenty of examples of young men from supposedly respectable families who demonstrate that excellence cannot be taught causes Anytus to grow angry and withdraw as a participant from the conversation—although he continues to listen to Meno and Socrates discourse. Yet at Socrates’ trial, Antyus again falsely maintains (if only indirectly) that he knows who it is who benefits the youth and who corrupts them, with the corruptor in this

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322 See *Ap*. 23c2-d2.
323 Consider *Prot*. 313c6-314b4.
324 See *M*. 93a5 ff.
325 See *M*. 99e1 ff.
case being Socrates (and the benefactors still being, presumably, the respectable gentlemen of Athens whom Anytus cited in the *Meno*).\(^{326}\)

Note that in the *Meno*, Anytus is reluctant to admit that there are plenty of examples in Athens of supposedly respectable gentlemen whose sons turned out to be good-for-nothings.\(^ {327}\) Yet Anytus’ claim that Socrates corrupts the youth of Athens is based upon Anytus’ belief that there are plenty of young men from “respectable” families who behave like good-for-nothings when they imitate Socrates.\(^ {328}\) Furthermore, Anytus’ claim in the *Meno* that sophists corrupt the young also hinges on his belief that there are young men from “elite” families in Athens who behave like good-for-nothings thanks to their sophistic education. In other words, on the one hand Anytus does not want to admit that there are young men from families of high social status who behave in a worthless or despicable manner, but on the other hand, Anytus insists that Athens is “going to the dogs” because Socrates and the sophists are corrupting young men from the city’s leading families. In a way, it almost seems as though Anytus cannot make up his mind as to whether the youth of Athens are behaving well or badly.

Anytus is a prime example of how Socrates’ ability to silence and “numb” people often fails to have educational benefit. While Anytus is temporarily silenced in the *Meno*, that does not prevent him from continuing to spread false opinion later. Furthermore, although Anytus remains present for the rest of the conversation that Socrates has with Meno, it is unlikely that he listens very carefully to it, given his character. At the end of his conversation with Meno, Socrates maintains that he will speak to Anytus again.\(^ {329}\) but there is no evidence that this ever

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\(^{326}\) See *M*. 92c8-e6.
\(^{327}\) See *M*. 93a5-95a1.
\(^{328}\) See *Ap*. 23c2 ff.
\(^{329}\) *M*. 99e2-4.
happens. In addition, at the end of his conversation with Meno, Socrates encourages Meno to continue to speak with Anytus and try to convince him that excellence is not teachable, but that it is instead a divine gift (and therefore not accompanied by wisdom). It is unlikely that Anytus, given his character, has any interest in listening to Meno. Thus Socrates’ silencing of Anytus is of no real benefit to anyone; while it might allow Socrates to get on with his conversation with Meno, that is all that it does. Socrates’ silencing of Anytus does not make him any more open to being educated.

The *Meno* makes it very clear that Socrates’ ability to “numb” or “stun” people into silence does not, in the long run, prevent them from spreading false opinions, nor does it make them any more open-minded or inclined to be educated. While it is possible that Socrates’ ability to “stun” or “numb” people into silence does serve to disabuse people of their false pretence to knowledge, this in itself is not necessarily sufficient to motivate them to learn. It is possible that, after conversing with Socrates in the *Meno*, Anytus realizes full well that his opinions about sophists may be somewhat “over-the-top”, but this realization in and of itself does not make Anytus any more inclined to listen to what sophists say or to change his behaviour and speak more favourably. While Socrates’ discourse may cause people to “inwardly” recognize their false pretence to knowledge, that does not necessarily lead them to change their behaviour or give up on presenting themselves as knowledgeable to others. Instead, Socrates’ discourse may, in the case of individuals such as Anytus, simply change people from being individuals who spread false opinion due to ignorance of their own ignorance, to people who, knowing they are ignorant about the subject in question, knowingly spread false opinions about it in order to try to retain the appearance of being knowledgeable. In this way, we might say that

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330 *M.* 100b2 ff.
Socrates is guilty of corrupting some people, such as Anytus, because his discourse causes them to change from individuals who unknowingly spread false opinions to people who knowingly spread false opinions. However, note that Anytus is not a youth; in Anytus’ case, Socrates is guilty of corrupting a middle-aged man. So, even if Socrates would be guilty of some sort of moral corruption in Athens as a result of his philosophical activities, it is not necessarily the youth that he corrupts, and the corruption certainly does not take place in the manner in which Meletus asserts that it does (namely, through the promotion of foreign deities).331

All this being said, even if Anytus knowingly spreads false opinions about Socrates, we might wish to take into consideration his motivations for doing so. In the Republic Socrates proposes that the leaders of an ideal city will spread false stories about the origins of the city and its people for the purposes of what we would today deem “nation-building”; that is, in order to justify the socio-political organization of the city, and in order to promote harmony amongst its citizens.332 Anytus, too, it could be argued, spreads false stories about Socrates in the attempt to preserve social harmony in Athens and the city’s cultural identity; Anytus is simply a politician looking out for the best interests of Athens, one might maintain. Yet even if Anytus’ participation in the prosecution of Socrates might be motivated out of genuine patriotic concern (at least to some degree, anyway),333 we still cannot let him “off the hook” in a moral sense for spreading false beliefs about Socrates (unless, of course, one happens to be the sort of person who thinks that executing odd, socially irksome, or outspoken individuals on false charges is a perfectly acceptable thing to do – although in that case, one will not feel any empathy for the Socrates of the Apology).

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333 Meletus maintains that he prosecutes Socrates out of patriotic concern: see Ap. 24b4-5.
6. Evaluating Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination

So, there would seem to be about five main educational functions that Socrates’ discourse can serve. First – and perhaps most obviously – Socrates’ discourse temporarily turns people’s attention towards the consideration of matters related to human excellence. Second, Socrates’ discourse can serve to reveal the ignorance that human beings have concerning human excellence, demonstrating in particular that those who believe themselves to be wise concerning human excellence are most likely not so. Third, Socrates’ discourse might perform a kind of disciplinary role, humbling and shaming some of those who believe that they know what they do not. Fourth – and probably most importantly – a Socratic conversation creates circumstances in which individuals can either choose to go on to further educate themselves about human excellence after the conversation is over, or decline to do so. In this way, Socrates’ discourse might be said to reveal who really is concerned about excellence, and who cares very little about it. Fifth, Socrates’ discourse serves to “numb” or “stun” people who, in the course of a conversation, insist upon maintaining ignorant, unreasonable, or false opinions, thereby temporarily “shutting them up” for a while so that one might carry on the conversation with a more reasonable or worthwhile interlocutor (just as Socrates, in the *Meno*, carries on the conversation with Meno once Antyus has lapsed into silence\(^{334}\)).

However, while Socrates’ discourse might have a *role to play* in education, one might argue that the educational benefits of Socrates’ discourse are not really educational *per se*. “Shutting someone up” does not improve that individual; it merely allows the business of civil (and potentially educational) discourse to carry on without interruption and without heading down unproductive tangents. Likewise, turning people away from their false pretence to knowledge and redirecting their attention towards questions of human excellence does not really

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\(^{334}\) See *M*. 95a2 ff.
better them in any positive sort of way; instead, it merely serves as a kind of preparatory step that renders education possible. It is up to Socrates’ interlocutors, along with bystanders to his discussions, to determine whether or not they will move beyond this preparatory step and actively attempt to learn for themselves what human excellence is. If those who pretend to know things about human excellence that they do not are determined to maintain their pretence, then Socrates’ discourse will contribute nothing to the improvement of these people, as it has no disciplinary effect upon these people. Furthermore, it is not clear that Socrates actually betters people by revealing to the general public that supposedly “wise” people do not have the knowledge of human excellence that they are believed to possess. While these supposedly wise people probably do not have knowledge of human excellence, that does not necessarily mean that their opinions are entirely wrong, either. As long as Athenians are cautious about rejecting outright the opinions of the supposedly wise, then Socrates’ discourse can do no harm; but if Athenians take Socrates’ discourse to indicate that the opinions that the supposedly wise have about human excellence are completely wrong and must be rejected, then they might very well end up being misled.

Hence, even though Socrates’ discourse might have a role to play in education, it also has the potential to corrupt. First, Socrates’ discourse does nothing to turn his interlocutors’ (or bystanders’) attention towards knowledge and “being”; instead, Socrates leaves his interlocutors in confusion, and it is up to them to choose to direct their attention towards learning. If the interlocutors do not choose to direct their attention towards learning about human excellence, they might forever be “left in the dark”. Of course, one might say that Socrates’ leaving his interlocutors in confusion has its purpose: it is the interlocutors who must, of their own free will, choose to both reexamine their beliefs about things such as human excellence, and learn from
others where they might have gone wrong in their beliefs: it is up to the interlocutors to make the decision to educate and better themselves. Yet even so, Socrates does not provide his interlocutors with any guidance as to how they might go about further educating themselves about what is good for a human being; instead the interlocutors are left to figure that out for themselves, and that makes them vulnerable to being misled (and even downright corrupted) by other people who might choose to impress their beliefs upon them.

Second, as the case of Anytus demonstrates, Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination cannot get interlocutors to *publicly* change the beliefs that they maintain. While Socrates’ discourse can prevent people from spreading false opinions in the short term, it does nothing to stop them from resuming the spread of false opinion later. Furthermore, Socrates’ discourse has the potential to change his interlocutors from people who maintain false opinions about human excellence out of ignorance, to people who knowingly maintain false opinions about human excellence.

Third, Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination is problematic in that his cross-examination leaves his interlocutor vulnerable. Once an interlocutor’s false belief has been abandoned, that interlocutor is left without any sort of a belief concerning the particular subject that constituted the content of that belief. This means, at least in some cases, that the interlocutor must now “give birth” to a new belief to replace the one that was discarded after having been examined by Socrates.335 But what if the interlocutor in question is as barren of beliefs as Socrates is of wisdom?336 It would seem that perhaps in the cases of some subjects, a former interlocutor of Socrates might decide that adopting a belief – any belief – about the subject in question is better than living without one. Out of panic or desperation, the interlocutor might

335 *Thet.* 150b9-c3, 151b7-d3.
336 *Thet.* 150c3-c7.
then go on to adopt a belief that is even less worthwhile to hold than the one that Socrates
discarded.

Fourth, because Socrates is successful at “stumping” people on matters concerning
human goodness, at least some bystanders to his cross-examinations of others believe that
Socrates is wise in those matters about which he questions others. They therefore we might
criticize Socrates’ discourse on the grounds that it leads some people to draw the wrong
conclusions about what wisdom is; namely, that, like eristic, it is a matter of winning verbal or
intellectual contests, or that it is a matter of asking people questions in such a way that they are
led into perplexity.

So, in summary, Socrates’ discourse can be used to serve certain educational purposes –
although whether or not an interlocutor or bystander is improved by Socrates’ discourse will
depend largely on the character of the interlocutor. Socrates’ cross-examination is very unlikely
to have any sort of a beneficial effect upon those who are closed-minded and unwilling to have
their beliefs challenged. Furthermore, Socrates’ discourse also has the potential to corrupt
certain individuals, by either leaving them in confusion, leading them to knowingly and
deliberately maintain false opinions, leading them to mistaken conclusions about what wisdom
is, or simply leading them to adopt erroneous beliefs about human excellence in place of those
that Socrates has challenged. Still, though, Socrates cannot really be held responsible for any
corruption that his discursive practices cause. Socrates does not presume to tell anyone
(certainly not in any sort of authoritative manner) what they should believe after conversing with
him or listening to him converse; instead, he leaves people responsible for the beliefs and
conclusions at which they arrive. And certainly, Socrates cannot be held responsible if

337 See Ap. 23a3-5.
338 See Ap. 33b4-6.
individuals knowingly and deliberately persist in maintaining false opinions after conversing with him (or listening to him converse). Socrates’ educational “methods” (if they can be called that, even) place a great deal, if not all, of the responsibility for learning and self-improvement on those who partake in discourse with him (or who listen to him converse with others).
Chapter 5 – Socrates’ Discourse and the Practice of Education

Chapter introduction

Although it is an improved mode of educational discourse in comparison to the eristic of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, Socrates’ discourse still fails – or at least has the potential to fail – to achieve its ultimate aim of turning people’s attention toward the good. Even so, in this chapter, I argue that Socrates’ discourse is necessary to *paideia*, educational practice. Yet even though Socrates’ discourse is a necessary part of *paideia*, it does not constitute a complete education in and of itself. I should stress that when I say that Socrates’ discourse is necessary to educational practice, I am speaking of educational practice *as a whole*. I am *not* suggesting that Socrates’ style of cross-examination should necessarily be a part of *everyone’s* education. As I discussed in Chapter 4, not everyone responds appropriately to Socrates’ cross-examination: those who are clearly unwilling to examine their beliefs (about human excellence, or about other matters) and those who lack the intellectual ability to critically examine their beliefs will gain no benefit from participating in Socrates’ discourse, either as interlocutors or as bystanders to Socratic discussion. However, even so, that does not change the fact that Socrates’ discourse serves as an important corrective to certain aspects of traditional education, and that some individuals may very well benefit from Socrates’ discourse.
In the first section of this chapter, I shall demonstrate that Socrates’ discourse is necessary to *paideia* because it compensates for deficiencies within traditional Athenian education – and within any educational system based heavily on tradition. Traditional Athenian *paideia* does not aim to foster original thought or critical thinking, but is instead preoccupied with the handing down of traditional values and norms. Socrates’ discourse, on the other hand, questions and cross-examines traditional values and norms, thereby promoting the critical examination of popular beliefs about the way that people ought to live, and encouraging young people to develop *their own* bodies of moral belief, ones that are justified by reasons that they *themselves* have tested and examined. In this way, Socrates’ discourse promotes the transformation of young people into responsible, autonomous adults.

In the second through fifth sections of this chapter, I go on to discuss the broader political significance of Socrates’ discourse and its relationship to education. More specifically, I argue that Socrates’ discourse does have a preparatory role to play in the cultivation of the excellence proper to citizens, political *euboulia*, but it does not cultivate political *euboulia* by itself. *Euboulia* is the excellence of “sound deliberation” or “good counsel”. Participation in sound deliberation and the exchange of good counsel is a privilege and responsibility of citizens, one that distinguishes them from subjects. I argue that there are two parts to *euboulia*, responsible persuasion (that is, convincing people to accept genuinely good counsel) and responsible decision-making (or “sound deliberation”). While Socrates’ activities in Athens do aim to cultivate sound deliberation and responsible persuasion *within the self*, Socrates’ discourse is quite limited in its ability to cultivate the sort of responsible persuasion and deliberation that concerns people who are assembled in groups. Therefore, while Socrates’
discourse has the potential to cultivate the sort of *euboulia* that is the proper excellence of a human being, it does not cultivate that sort of *euboulia* that is the excellence of a citizen.

Given that Socrates’ discourse does not directly cultivate the excellence proper to a citizen, Socrates’ discourse is not, by itself, sufficient for education. The reasons why Socrates’ educational “methods” are insufficient to constitute a complete education in and of itself will constitute the subject matter of the sixth section of this chapter. Socrates’ cross-examination does not constitute a complete educational “method” or “programme” primarily because it lacks content: cross-examination is about asking questions, not providing answers to them.

Traditional Athenian *paideia* furnishes Socrates’ discourse with something to cross-examine; namely, beliefs about human excellence and the right way to live that have been handed down over generations. Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination develops critical thinking and autonomous deliberation in young people by questioning traditional Athenian *paideia*. Socrates’ discourse and Athenian *paideia* are therefore necessary to each other, and to the development of young people into excellent human beings and citizens.

1. Socrates’ discourse is necessary to *paideia*

   In the *Protagoras*, the sophist Protagoras provides a description of the content of traditional Athenian *paideia*. According to Protagoras, *paideia* is the practice that concerns itself with improving human beings; it is concerned with the development of excellence in the human being and the citizen.\(^\text{339}\) Traditional Athenian *paideia* had a broad focus in order to develop well-rounded gentlemen.\(^\text{340}\) Protagoras emphasizes that the “programme” of *paideia* that he describes

\(^{339}\) *Prot*. 325c5-327e1; also cf. *Ap*. 20a7-b5.

\(^{340}\) According to Marrou, “In spite of . . . democratization Athenian education kept closely to its aristocratic origins, and in its principles and organization it remained an education for gentlemen . . . (38); “[the Greeks’] distrust of over-specialization was one of the noblest and most lasting characteristics of the Greek genius . . . . The child and
is one that the wealthiest and most powerful Athenians put their sons through. Even so, most male Athenians (with the exception of slaves and perhaps the very poorest) would have been educated to some degree in the manner that Protagoras describes.

The programme and content of Athenian paideia is, according to Protagoras, as follows. As soon as a child is able to comprehend language to a degree, parents and caregivers begin to point out to children what is good and bad. Punishment and coercion, also meted out by parents and caregivers, serve to direct an unwilling individual’s attention towards the good – or at least regulate his behaviour. Instruction imbues the soul with notions of goodness and excellence, and demonstrates to individuals the difference between right and wrong. Imitation also plays an important role in education, as young people are given examples of noble deeds and role models to copy. According to Protagoras, these exemplars of human character are mostly to be found in the works of the great Greek poets; in addition, poetry has an important role to play in educational practice because of its ability to praise and exhort. Instruction in music habituates the soul (and to some extent the body) to graceful and harmonious movement, while athletic training develops the strength and endurance of the body. While the bulk of education takes place when people are young, it continues throughout a person’s life. The laws of a city instruct the adolescent to study, ‘not to become experts but to educate themselves’ . . . ” (57). According to Beck (72), “The education provided [in Athenian schools] was cultural, not technical, directed towards character training and citizenship, not towards craftsmanship and personal profit.” See also K. J. Freeman, Schools of Hellas, ed. M. J. Rendall (London: Macmillan, 1907) 42-44, 287-290.

Prot. 326c3-6.

See William Barclay, Educational Ideas in the Ancient World (London: Collins, 1959) 102-104; Mark Golden, Children and Childhood in Classical Athens (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990) 63-64; Freeman 49, 281-282; Marrou 39-40. According to Barclay (109-110), “It is not certain how far [formal] primary education was compulsory in Athens. . . [I]t is certainly true that, whether or not education was compulsory in the primary stage, it was certainly universal.” Barclay’s assertion that primary education was “universal” in Athens might be somewhat of an exaggeration (and it certainly cannot be proven), but again – probably almost all Athenian males were educated to some extent in the manner that Protagoras describes in the Protagoras. According to Barclay (113), “Instruction in letters and in music were to all intents and purposes universal; only the very uneducated did not know music.” Note that this means that Plato’s Socrates did not receive a particularly good education as a boy: in the Euthydemus (272c1-5), the aging Socrates tells his friend Crito that the young boys with whom he takes lyre lessons laugh at him as he struggles to learn music.
people as to how they are to act, and they have the power to call for the punishment of those who would break them. According to Protagoras, the majority of people are all more or less equally adept at the improvement of human beings with respect to the excellence of their souls. Only a select few have a somewhat greater ability to improve their fellow human beings than the average person, and Protagoras considers himself to be one of these people. Protagoras maintains that he teaches the art of politics (he politiké techné), good counsel (euboulia), in both personal and public affairs.

Protagoras’ account of traditional Athenian paideia demonstrates that everyone (or almost everyone) in society has the potential to contribute to the education of the young. According to Protagoras’ account of Athenian paideia, even slaves are involved in the education and betterment of the young. However, when it comes to human excellence (as opposed to crafts, trades, and other specialized areas of human endeavour) most people educate completely artlessly; that is, there is no method behind what they do, no expertise, and no specialized set of skills. Certainly, it is true that music teachers, elementary teachers (grammatistai), and trainers do have specialized skills and expertise, but the excellence that they teach in subjects such as lyre-playing, writing, and wrestling is of a limited and specialized sort. It is not clear what these teachers actually know – if anything at all – about improving young people and making them better as human beings (as opposed to readers, writers, musicians, or athletes). Elementary

343 Prot. 325c5-326e1.
344 Prot. 326e6-328b5. Also compare with what Socrates says to Meletus at Ap. 25c5-e5.
345 Prot. 318e5-319a7.
346 Prot. 325c5-d7. The nurses and “governors” that Protagoras cites as being involved in the education and upbringing of the young would have been, in most cases, slaves. On the role of slaves in general in the upbringing of children see Golden 147-150, 155-157. On paidagógoi specifically, see Freeman 65-68; Beck 105-109.
347 “The grammatistes taught reading, writing, and some arithmetic, and made his pupils read and learn by heart the great poets, Homer and Hesiod and others”: Freeman 50. See also Barclay 112. For a detailed discussion of the subjects taught by the grammaticés see Beck 114-126.
teachers give boys the works of great poets to read, and make them memorize the passages
illustrating heroic deeds, encouraging them to emulate the characters of heroes. Music teachers
seek to develop harmony and moderation in their pupils. Trainers seek to develop determination
and love of competition in their pupils. 348

But how do elementary teachers know which heroes boys should seek to emulate, and
which of these heroes’ exploits are the noblest and the most worth committing to memory? How
do music teachers know that it is best to develop harmony and moderation in their pupils?
Perhaps their pupils would do better to learn how to make use of dissonance in an artful manner,
and how to vary their tempo. And how do trainers know that determination and love of
competition is really what they should be attempting to instill in their pupils? Perhaps the
trainers are simply making their pupils overly aggressive and desirous to win at all costs.

In other words, while it might be true that many people contribute to the improvement
of the young, they are not attempting to improve young people on the basis of knowledge. While
parents, domestic servants, and all manner of people might point out to small children what is
good and bad, how do these adults know what is good and bad? 349 It would seem that when it
comes to the matter of excellence in traditional Athenian paideia, “knowledge” of it is largely
based upon tradition and what “everyone says”. “Everyone says” this is good and that is bad, so
it must be. 350 Memorizing certain passages from Homer is a matter of tradition, and so
elementary teachers continue to require their students to memorize these apparently “exemplary”

348 Cf. Prot. 324d2-326e5.
349 See Prot. 325c5-d5.
350 On this point, an observation by Freeman (281-282) is worth keeping in mind, “. . . [T]he unanimous feeling of
Hellas based ethics not upon duty, but upon happiness . . . . . But this eudaemonistic attitude was qualified by an
important consideration which is often forgotten. Owing to the solidarity of Hellenic life, the happiness which was
sought was primarily not that of the individual but that of the community. . . . The solidarity of Hellenic life, which
converted eudaemonism into patriotism, was carefully encouraged by the educational system.”
passages. Music teachers teach young people to learn the traditional songs because this music is said to make the souls of youth more measured, harmonious, and graceful, thereby leading to similar behaviour.

Considered in this way, in some ways Athenian paideia is not really as broad in scope as perhaps it should be, if it is supposed to make young people into human beings in the fullest sense. Much of traditional Athenian paideia is just that: based upon tradition. Because of this, Athenian paideia has little use for “why” when it comes to the matter of human excellence: boys are not taught why they should do certain things and not others. While Athenian paideia might seek to make young people into truly good human beings, it does not do so on the basis of accounts and explanations, but rather on the basis that “these things have always been so” and “everybody says so”. Furthermore, because of its focus on tradition, Athenian paideia discourages innovation, and, by discouraging innovation, to some extent it discourages improvement, since without innovation and change there can be no improvement. Change and innovation allow not only for qualitative improvement, but also both greater comprehensiveness

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351 Concerning poetry, Barclay (118-119) writes that, “The amount of memorising which was done would be by our standards fantastic. . . . Greek education certainly did one thing – it turned out boys soaked and saturated in the poets of the past . . . .” According to Freeman (280), “The literature studied in the schools was expected to be full of improving suggestions and life-histories of heroes worthy of imitation . . . .”

352 See Prot. 325e4-326b4. Marrou (42) notes that, “Athens attached just as much importance as did Sparta to the moral quality of [the] songs [learned by young people] and to their value as moral training . . . .”; according to Griffith (44), “[The] use of music and dance to align corporal, emotional, and intellectual impulses into a ‘harmonious’ set of ‘habits’ . . . is typical of Archaic and Classical Greek attitudes.”

353 See Golden 65: “Methods of instruction, like the emphasis on order [in the classroom], seemed tailor-made to stifle originality and self-expression, relying as they did on mimicry and memory.” One (possible) result of this sort of education was that “The young Athenian . . . was exceedingly eager to learn. In fact, his eagerness was excessive; he was too much in a hurry; he desired to have his information given to him ready-made, not having the patience to think or to undertake researches on his own account” (Freeman 286). Freeman does not question how the attitude he describes might have developed in young Athenians; he seems to think that it was a natural characteristic of Greeks, and that elementary, music, and wrestling schools had no part in developing it (see Freeman 285-287). Comments by Barrow (13) suggest otherwise:

There was nothing in the formal Athenian education to encourage or promote what we might call intellectual curiosity, enquiry or critical thought. If that seems odd, when we consider the reputation that the Athenians had for being acute and agile-minded . . . . it should be remembered that the way of life of the city itself constituted a powerful informal education. Such critical acumen and reasoning
and greater variety. Hence, while traditional Athenian paideia might aim at the good, and might seek to improve young people, it is ultimately flawed because it is mired in tradition.

In response to this criticism of traditional Athenian paideia, its defenders might argue that there is no reason to believe that Athenian society and Athenian educational practices would benefit from change and innovation: There is nothing wrong with Athenian society as it is, and it does not need improvement. However, Socrates’ discussion with Anytus in the Meno disproves these claims. In the Meno, Socrates points out to Anytus that many Athenian gentlemen of great renown and repute gave their sons the best educations possible, but the sons still turned out to be good-for-nothings. If young people are turning out to be good-for-nothings even after being given an apparently excellent education, then clearly there is something in Athenian society that needs improvement (at the very least, these good-for-nothing young people). Furthermore, as the education of these young men was not particularly effective at improving them, then it would also seem to be the case that Athenian education could stand some improvement as well. So, contrary to what defenders of traditional Athenian education might claim, their society is not perfect and their educational “system” does need improvement.

Hence, a significant problem associated with Athenian paideia is that it is an “artless” practice; that is, people who seek to improve the young do not do so on the basis of knowledge,

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354 M. 93a5 ff.
but on the basis of tradition, or on the basis of common opinion. So, young people are taught that whatever has traditionally been believed to be right and good is so, and whatever is commonly believed to be right and good is so. But another problem associated with Athenian *paideia* that might, perhaps, stem from its “artlessness”, is that traditional Athenian *paideia* does not demand that the individual being educated make any sort of active personal contribution to his education. Now, granted, when a youth is told by his trainer to do five laps around the racecourse, he is being “active”, and the same is true of a pupil who obeys his music teacher’s injunction to practice a particular tune on his lyre twenty times a day. However, although these youths are performing some sort of activity within the context of their education, they are not being required to put any original thought into what they are doing. While practising the lyre and running laps do qualify as activities, they are not *critical* or *deliberative* activities.

Traditional Athenian *paideia* does not demand, encourage, or expect young people to think critically very much; instead, they are to do what their elders tell them and imitate those models of good behaviour that they are told to imitate.

Athenian *paideia* (and really any system of education based heavily upon tradition) is, by itself, insufficient to make young people into excellent human beings. Socrates’ discourse serves to highlight and correct some of the problems inherent in Athenian *paideia*. Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination examines commonly-held beliefs about what is right and good, and frequently shows that these beliefs do not really constitute knowledge. This results in individuals being challenged to examine what they have been taught by their elders and by society in general, consider this supposed “knowledge” for themselves, and determine on their own whether they will choose to believe it. Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination expects an individual to put self-critical effort into his education through the examination of his own beliefs,
particularly those about human excellence. When faced with “Socratic” questions that threaten to destabilize his beliefs, it is up to the individual to attempt to reconsider his beliefs for himself and determine whether it is right that he should give them up after the course of questioning, or continue to hold on to them. If the person being questioned decides to give up his beliefs, he must determine why he should do so, and with what new beliefs about human excellence he will replace his old ones. If the person being questioned decides to retain his old beliefs, he will need to attempt to discover better ways of justifying them than those he used in the past. In other words, Socrates’ style of questioning assists individuals in ridding themselves of beliefs grounded in popular prejudice or personal bias, and in reconfirming worthwhile beliefs with their own reasons, as opposed to commonly-held opinions. In short, Socrates’ cross-examination encourages individuals to examine their beliefs and make them *their own*, as opposed to simply accepting “teachings” or “truths” handed over by other people.

Because Socrates’ style of questioning demands that an interlocutor consider his beliefs for himself and consider abandoning old beliefs in favour of new ones, Socrates’ cross-examination encourages an interlocutor to develop a certain amount of creativity and an openness to novelty. Nevertheless, as the case of Clinias in the *Euthydemus* illustrates, Socrates’ cross-examination need not necessarily cause an individual to change his beliefs; instead, it can also result in the confirmation and reinforcement of an individual’s beliefs.355 The main difference between Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination and traditional Athenian *paideia* is that *paideia* attempts to inculcate the individual with the knowledge, beliefs, and practices of the society in which he dwells, while Socrates’ discourse encourages the individual to develop a body of belief that is his own, to justify his beliefs with reasons that are his own, and to seek out

355 See *Euthyd.* 278c5-282d8.
knowledge on his own, instead of expecting others to hand it over to him. Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination is a necessary part of education because it challenges individuals to develop into something more than just creatures that are taught and trained by other human beings; more specifically, Socrates’ discourse challenges individuals to develop into beings that seek to educate and better themselves on their own, desiring knowledge for its own sake (or at least for reasons that are personal to them), and maintaining beliefs for reasons that are wholly their own. In other words, Socrates’ discourse plays an essential role in developing young people (and perhaps even older people) into rational, autonomous, adult human beings.

2. Education and the citizen

In the Protagoras, Protagoras maintains that he teaches euboulia in domestic and political affairs. Socrates then wonders if by this Protagoras means that he teaches hé politiké techné, the art of politics or good citizenship,356 to which Protagoras answers in the affirmative. Socrates then asks if Protagoras means that he teaches excellence, to which Protagoras again replies in the affirmative.357 My concern here is not to determine whether or not Protagoras really does teach euboulia; rather, my concern is whether or not the discourse of Plato’s Socrates cultivates euboulia. In order to do that, though, we will need to get clearer about what euboulia is.

356 More specifically, Protagoras agrees to Socrates’ (Prot. 319a3-5) suggestion that, “You seem to me to be talking about the art of politics [i.e. civics or citizenship, the art of the polis (iēn politikēn technēn)] and to profess that you make men good citizens [agathous politas, good members of the polis, good members of civil society].” Protagoras is not talking about the “art of politics” in the sense of the art of the politician; note that Protagoras does not specifically claim to make men good politicians or statesmen (politikoi); instead, he merely claims (Prot. 319a1-2) to teach his students how to become extremely capable in speech and in action with respect to the affairs of the state. An extremely capable citizen need not necessarily become a career politician.

357 See Prot. 318e5-320c2, 328b1-c4.
Euboulia means “good counsel” or “sound deliberation”. Good counsel and sound deliberation are important to human happiness and well-being. When people engage good counsel, they are not seeking just any advice – they want good advice, advice that will lead them to do well and be successful in their aims in life. When people engage in sound deliberation, they are not just thinking about something; instead, they are giving a particular matter careful consideration in order to arrive at the best decision possible. Euboulia, then, is the employment or engagement of “good thinking” in order to achieve one’s aims in life, do well, and ultimately live well. We all want what is good, and euboulia makes our achievement of it much more likely. Euboulia, then, is critical to promoting human happiness and well-being.

Socrates’ cross-examination of Protagoras reveals that the sophist maintains that euboulia is excellence in the art of citizenship. Socrates, though, does not teach the art of citizenship, or any art at all. Indeed, Socrates does not profess to teach anything whatsoever. Socrates maintains that he has no wisdom other than human wisdom. While craftsmen are wise with respect to what their crafts can and cannot accomplish, Socrates does not possess any technical expertise. He is not versed in any art. Therefore, Socrates could not teach the art of citizenship even if he wanted to do so. On these grounds then, it would appear that Socrates cannot cultivate euboulia because he is not an expert in the art of citizenship.

However, perhaps it is the case that Protagoras has it wrong, and euboulia is not excellence in the art of citizenship; instead, perhaps it is simply excellence in citizenship. Perhaps there is no such thing as an art of citizenship. Rather, euboulia might very well just be

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358 Consider M. 78a4-b2; Euthyd. 278e3-5.
359 Ap. 33a5-6.
362 And Socrates specifically disclaims being able to do so: see Ap. 20a7-c3.
excellence in being a citizen. It would seem that being a citizen (or, at least, a genuine citizen) is quite different from being a subject. Subjects have no responsibility; instead, they are only to do what they are told. Subjects are not free to challenge the decrees under which they must live. Citizens, on the other hand, must decide how they are to act. Citizens are responsible for what they choose to do or not do, and for how they choose to live in general, and citizens must deal with the consequences of their choices. While laws might limit what citizens can and cannot do, citizens are free to challenge them and demand that they be changed. Changing laws, though, will require that one persuade those who have the power to change them that it is right to do so.363 So, there would seem to be at least two major activities involved in being a citizen: decision-making and persuasion. If euboulia is excellence in citizenship, then it would seem at least to be excellence in these two things, decision-making and persuasion. More specifically, euboulia would seem to involve responsible decision-making or “sound deliberation”, and responsible persuasion, or the exercise of “good counsel”.

So, the question that must now be answered is: Do Socrates’ discursive practices foster responsible decision-making and the responsible exercise of persuasion? In the next section of this chapter, I shall turn my attention to discussing the question of whether or not Socrates’ discourse promotes the responsible exercise of persuasion. Discussion of whether or not Socrates’ discourse promotes responsible decision-making will follow in the subsequent section.

363 Consider Cri. 51c6-52a3, esp. 51a5-52a3.
3. Socrates’ discourse and responsible persuasion

We normally think of persuasion as being the practice of getting someone to do or not do something by giving them reasons (which might not necessarily be reasonable in and of themselves) to do or not do the thing in question. Socrates, though, does not give people reasons as to why they should act in any particular way, nor does he give them reasons as to why they should or should not believe something. Instead of “handing over” reasons to people to either believe or not believe, Socrates asks a lot of questions. Yet in the Apology Socrates claims that he does nothing other than to go around the city persuading people not to care more for bodies or material goods than for the goodness of their souls.\(^{364}\) Is Socrates lying and perjuring himself in court?

Socrates’ claim to persuade other people to care for the goodness of their souls is false if we think of persuasion in the conventional sense; that is, as the handing over of reasons to believe or not to believe. Socrates does not attempt to persuade people by giving them reasons to believe or not to believe. Instead, Socrates’ claim that he engages in persuasion is true if we take Socrates’ persuasion to be constituted by his attempts to get people to find their own reasons for believing that they should care for the goodness of their souls more than anything else. By means of his discourse, Socrates sets up the conditions under which interlocutors and bystanders to one of his discussions might persuade themselves to accept or reject certain claims or notions about human excellence.

For example, in the Euthydemus, Socrates attempts to persuade Clinias to pursue wisdom and excellence,\(^ {365}\) but he does so by asking a chain of leading questions, and not by giving Clinias reasons to pursue philosophy and excellence. Instead, it is Clinias’ responsibility

\(^{364}\) Ap. 30a7-b2.  
\(^{365}\) Euthyd. 278d1 ff.
to see the reasons as to why he should pursue philosophy and excellence in Socrates’ chain of questioning. The purpose of Socrates’ questioning Clinias is to get Clinias to find his own reasons for pursuing philosophy and excellence, and not simply to accept whatever Socrates tells him. Clinias, however, is quite willing to “go along” with Socrates’ chain of questions and offers little, if anything, in the way of challenge to what Socrates says. Clinias appears to be a well brought-up young man, and he is not inclined to argue. Hence, the character of Clinias illustrates one of the pitfalls of a traditional Athenian education; namely, the development of the tendency to obey authority and to avoid challenging it. While we do not know what is “going on in Clinias’ head” as he holds discourse with Socrates, it is very possible that the questions that Socrates asks Clinias do not cause him to examine his own reasons for maintaining that he should pursue philosophy and excellence; instead, Socrates’ questions may very well simply serve to reinforce the beliefs that Clinias already maintains unthinkingly. While the purpose of Socrates’ discourse might be to get Clinias to see for himself why he should desire to pursue philosophy and excellence, it is not clear that that is what actually happens in the Euthydemus.

So, Socrates’ discourse does not give people reasons as to why they should do or believe anything. Instead, the purpose of Socrates’ discourse is to use leading questions (sometimes

366 Compare Teloh (153): “[In the Meno.] Socrates denies that he teaches (82e, 84c-d) where by ‘teach’ he means ‘give-over and state positions’ like a rhetorician (84d). Learning is the recollection of beliefs already present somehow in the psyché (85b-d).” Note, though, that in order to genuinely learn from Socrates’ discourse, an interlocutor must do more than just recollect beliefs – he must also examine, consider, and judge them.

Also compare G. A. Scott, Plato’s Socrates as Educator (Albany, New York: State U of New York P, 2000) 40-41:

The additive model [of teaching] assumes that learning is defined by an increase in the sum of the factual information at one’s disposal, and so, from this view, new information is merely added to whatever knowledge one previously had, like new data is added to a data bank or inventory is added to a warehouse. Socrates does not think teaching is a matter of conferring facts upon others or showering them with speeches, in large part because he does not subscribe to the “additive” view of the learning process. He refuses to conceive of education as a knowledge transfer (cf. Symp. 175d-e and 217a).

For my part, I think that Plato’s Socrates associates the “additive model” with teaching or instruction, didaskalia, and that is why he denies ever having been anyone’s didaskalos (Ap. 33a5-6). That is not to say, though, that Socrates does not see a place for didaskalia within paideia; instead, a) didaskalia does not describe what Socrates
backed up by stories, myths, and analogies that the interlocutor is supposed to consider) to get the interlocutor into a position where he must decide whether or not he is persuaded by the reasons he maintains for his own beliefs, which may or may not correspond with any conclusions that seem to follow from various lines of Socrates’ “leading questions”. In other words, the purpose of Socrates’ discourse is to get an interlocutor to develop his own body of convictions based upon reasons that interlocutor himself believes are valid and persuasive, and in this sense we might say that Socrates’ discourse does serve to develop responsible persuasion. However, Socrates’ discourse does not really aim to persuade other people of anything. Socrates’ interlocutors (and bystanders to his discussions) are under no obligation to accept the seeming conclusions that follow from his chains of “leading” questions, and, they would probably demonstrate their genuine commitment to philosophical discourse if they could give intelligent challenges to these conclusions (but instead of challenging the apparent lines of argumentation developed by Socrates, most interlocutors do not know what to say in response to Socrates). Also, Socrates’ discourse does not aim to develop the ability of the interlocutor to exercise persuasion upon other people. Instead, the sort of persuasion that Socrates’ discourse aims to achieve is persuasion within the individual himself: the interlocutor (or bystander) must determine for himself if he finds the reasons as to why he holds his beliefs to be persuasive, and, if not, then he must find new reasons to persuade himself to hold the beliefs that he has, or else

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367 Note that in the Euthydemus (277e3-278b2), Socrates explains to Clinias that “learning” can be used in two senses: in the sense of acquiring new knowledge, and in the sense of giving consideration to what one knows in order to really understand it. Socrates wants Clinias to truly understand what he has already learnt; namely, that he should pursue wisdom and excellence. However, Clinias must inspect and judge his own reasons for believing that he should pursue wisdom and excellence before he can really understand why he should pursue these things.

368 Plato’s readers are also under no obligation to accept the conclusions that follow from Socrates’ chains of leading questions. Indeed, one probably cannot begin to genuinely appreciate the philosophical worth of Plato’s dialogues until one attempts to formulate intelligent challenges to the conclusions of Socrates’ “arguments”.

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change his beliefs on the basis of the persuasiveness of new beliefs. That being said, it is often the case that Socrates’ discourse does not achieve its aim and Socrates’ interlocutor fails to genuinely examine the beliefs that he has and his reasons for holding them.

While Socrates’ discursive practices do serve to promote and cultivate responsible persuasion of a certain kind, it is not the sort of persuasion that is commonly associated with the term “persuasion”. Socrates’ discourse does not participate in cultivating the sort of persuasion that involves responding to the reasons of others; instead, it participates in the cultivation of persuasion that makes one responsible to oneself. However, although Socrates’ discourse might serve to cultivate the responsible persuasion of the self, it is not Socrates who actually persuades; instead, Socrates only provides the impetus for concerned people (who might be either interlocutors or bystanders to his discussions) to examine their beliefs and their reasons for holding them, and thereby begin to engage in the responsible persuasion of the self.

Note that there is a close connection between persuasion and critical examination. “Conventional” persuasion aims to get people to do or not to do something by giving them reasons to do or not do it. Conventional persuasion is a dangerous thing in a society that does not cultivate critical thinking, because people who fail to give close examination to what others are trying to get them to believe can be misled. When faced with persuasion, people without critical thinking skills are almost like the subjects of a despot: while they might not be directly commanded to do anything, they can be easily led around and controlled (like beasts on chains or leashes) by means of persuasion. Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination makes an important – and necessary – contribution to paideia because it aims to cultivate the critical thinking skills that Athenians need to ensure that they are not hoodwinked and manipulated by persuasive speakers (who might seek to deprive Athenians of their liberty). Unfortunately, though, Socrates
himself is not always very successful at cultivating critical thinking skills in his fellow Athenians.

In addition to scrutinizing the beliefs of others, the careful scrutiny of one’s own beliefs is important because it ensures that any beliefs that one holds are really one’s own, held on the basis of reason, and are not simply beliefs that one repeats because one has been inculcated with them by one’s elders or by popular culture. Furthermore, the careful scrutiny of one’s own beliefs is important in order for a person to be able to be honest with herself: sometimes we try to persuade ourselves of things that, on another level, we know are not true, and sometimes we try to make excuses for ourselves when we do things that we know that we should not. Hence, critical self-scrutiny is essential if a person wishes to live as a responsible and authentic individual. Given this, Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination is necessary to paideia because it has the potential to cultivate practices that are essential to living as an autonomous, authentic individual, and as a true citizen who is capable of participating freely and responsibly in political deliberation and decision-making.

4. Socrates’ discourse and responsible deliberation

When it comes to responsible deliberation and decision-making, Socrates’ discourse cultivates responsible deliberation only in a limited sense, just as it cultivates responsible persuasion in a limited sense as well. Socrates’ discourse contributes to the cultivation of responsible deliberation in the individual, but it does not allow for people to practise responsible deliberation at the group level. Also, when people engage in deliberation in groups, they are usually deliberating matters of practical importance, especially the question of “What do we need to do in order to achieve our goals?” Socrates’ discourse, though, focuses on defining concepts
related to human excellence and “the good life”; it does not seek to determine how one should go about living a good life (and it certainly does not take up questions about how one is to achieve the specific good ends that one might seek in a particular endeavour).

As I have discussed, Socrates’ discourse promotes what might be known as “critical thinking skills”: the ability to give a particular belief or idea, and the reasons for maintaining it, close examination and careful judgement. Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination not only gives his interlocutors this opportunity to develop their deliberative abilities, but bystanders to Socrates’ discussions have perhaps just as much, if not more, of an opportunity to reflect upon and consider the discussion that they have been overhearing. The problem that bystanders to Socrates’ conversations face, though, is that they are, for the most part, excluded from taking part in the conversation. They cannot “jump in” easily to ask a question or raise a point without seeming rude. The focus of Socrates’ conversations is not to get a group of people to deliberate together about matters of excellence. Instead, the focus of Socrates’ conversations is to question and examine a particular interlocutor, or, alternatively, to deal with a pair of interlocutors (as he does in the Phaedo and in Republic from Book 2 onward), or to switch from one interlocutor to another in what is more or less a series, dealing with one at a time (as Socrates does in the Gorgias and in Book 1 of the Republic). At no point does Socrates ever open up a conversation to “questions from the audience”. Hence, Socrates’ discourse does not allow people to actually practise responsible deliberation at the group level.

Instead of being able to participate directly in the discussion of the nature of human excellence (or a particular kind of excellence), bystanders to Socrates’ conversations have to examine the claims and propositions being made during the course of one of his conversations by themselves, to themselves, as opposed to doing so in a group. Of course, bystanders to Socrates’
exchanges with his interlocutors can organize their own conversation circles afterward if they so wish, but they do not have much of an opportunity to raise a question or a point on the spot, thereby contributing to (and perhaps furthering) the conversation that Socrates is having with his interlocutor. So, because Socrates’ discourse is mostly a one-on-one undertaking, it really serves to promote responsible deliberation only on the individual level, and not at the group level. Socrates’ discourse might prompt people to question and examine their beliefs, or those of others, about human excellence to themselves (or, in the case of an interlocutor, with Socrates), but it does not really encourage group dialogue – at least not in the immediate circumstances where Socrates is present.

Another problem with Socrates’ discourse is that, while it serves to cultivate sound deliberation, it is a kind of deliberation in which one partakes when one is more or less at peace and at leisure, and is untroubled by other matters that might distract one’s attention from the consideration of concepts related to human excellence. Yet oftentimes determining what the right thing to do is (morally, professionally, and possibly even aesthetically) is a pressing and urgent matter that demands immediate attention and swift action. The demands of life will not wait for us to determine what temperance is, or what the best sort of life for a human being is; we must act even if we do not know what exactly is temperate or what a truly excellent life is. Most of the time, the average person will not have time to thoroughly consider all of the alternatives upon which she may act, and most of the time she will not be able to conduct a thorough examination of the principles upon which she believes she should act, before she must act. Socrates’ discourse, however, is not geared towards cultivating sound deliberation and decision-making in times of crisis, or even under the ordinary conditions of life.
Certainly, knowing what excellence is (or what various different kinds of excellence are), or being well aware of our reasons for believing what a particular excellence is, will undoubtedly help to guide a person’s action, and for this reason, Socrates’ examination of excellence and matters related to it is worthwhile. However, we cannot all be Socrates in the sense that we can spend all of our time examining and discussing human excellence and matters related to it. And indeed, when people gather together to debate a course of action, not everyone in the assembled group will have the intellect and character of a Socrates. Dealing with practical and political matters in a group context (or even just the everyday decision-making that individuals must undertake) requires that people work within limits that are rather more complex than those that Socrates works under when he conducts his (usually one-on-one) conversations with his interlocutors. As Socrates insists upon discoursing with only one or two interlocutors at a time, with minimal involvement from other parties in the conversation, Socrates’ discourse does not cultivate those skills that are specific to group deliberation, as opposed to deliberation in general.

5. Socrates’ discourse cultivates euboulia only in part

*Euboulia*, or excellence in citizenship, involves both responsible persuasion and responsible deliberation and decision-making. Socrates’ discourse aims to cultivate responsible persuasion and responsible deliberation on an *individual* level, but it does little to cultivate responsible persuasion and responsible deliberation on a *group* level. However, an excellent citizen must be able to engage in dialogue with his or her community, and he or she must be capable of engaging in discourse with more than one person at a time. In conclusion then, we can say that while Socrates’ discourse might *aim* to cultivate the excellence proper to a citizen,

euboulia, and while it might be essential to the cultivation of this excellence within the broader context of paideia, Socrates’ discourse can participate in cultivating euboulia only in part; that is, Socrates’ discourse can participate in cultivating the sort of euboulia that must be possessed by individuals if they are to be responsible, autonomous human beings, but Socrates’ discourse cannot cultivate the sort of euboulia that a citizen must have if he or she is to engage in responsible political deliberation with his or her fellow citizens.

It should also be stressed that Socrates’ discourse can only participate in cultivating euboulia in the individual person; it cannot make people partake of sound deliberation and good counsel. In order for individuals to be improved by Socrates’ discourse, they must put effort of their own into the improvement, or else it will simply not happen. Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination will confer absolutely no benefit whatsoever upon individuals who simply refuse to engage in the critical examination of beliefs, claims, and ideas, and it will confer absolutely no benefit whatsoever upon individuals who lack the ability to engage in critical examination. It is therefore important that whoever wishes to utilize Socrates’ discourse to improve people possess the additional ability to persuade or motivate reluctant individuals into putting effort of their own into examining and evaluating their beliefs and those of others. Persuasion, though, is not Socrates’ forte, and it would seem that he is not especially talented at motivating his fellow Athenians, either. Therefore, if Socrates’ discourse fails to adequately develop his interlocutors’ ability to engage in individual critical deliberation and self-persuasion, that should probably be taken to be more the result of Socrates’ inability to skillfully utilize his characteristic discourse for educational purposes, than a reflection upon the educational value of Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination itself.  

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369 Socrates disavows possessing any educational art: Ap. 20a7-c3.
Socrates’ discourse participates in cultivating *euboulia* on the individual level, but not on the group level. While Socrates’ discourse, then, serves to contribute to making people into excellent *human beings*, it does little to make people into excellent *citizens*. Of course, it could be argued that excellent human beings are more likely to make excellent citizens: responsible individuals who engage in sound self-critical deliberation and responsible self-persuasion are more likely to engage in responsible deliberation and responsible persuasion amongst their fellow citizens. Furthermore, it is almost certainly easier to develop the necessary skills to engage in responsible political deliberation and the responsible persuasion of an audience if one is already a responsible, autonomous adult individual with good critical thinking skills. But still, the fact remains that Socrates’ discourse serves only as a kind of preparatory step in the cultivation of *euboulia*: while it serves to cultivate the exercise of responsible persuasion and sound deliberation in the individual, it does not cultivate these things in a group context – and yet, it is absolutely necessary for citizens to be able to exercise responsible persuasion and sound deliberation in a group context.

6. **Socrates’ discourse is not sufficient for education**

As I discussed in the previous section, Socrates’ discourse participates in the cultivation of *euboulia* but, as it focuses on the cultivation of *euboulia* in the individual, it is insufficient on its own for the cultivation of *euboulia* as a whole. Socrates’ discourse is not concerned with teaching or developing the sort of persuasion required in order to produce conviction in an audience, and it does not focus on developing the sort of skills involved in group deliberation. While Socrates’ discourse participates in the cultivation of the kind of *euboulia* necessary for
excellence in *individual* human beings, it cannot, by itself, develop the “broader” sort of *euboulia* that constitutes excellence in citizenship.

The fact that Socrates’ discourse cannot, on its own, cultivate *euboulia* as a whole, should alert us to the fact that Socrates’ discourse does not constitute a complete educational “method” or “programme” in and of itself. It will be necessary to utilize some other form or forms of discourse besides Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination to cultivate the responsible persuasion of assembled groups of people, and to cultivate the necessary skills involved in deliberation within a group context. In addition, Socrates’ discourse focuses on the relatively leisurely examination and consideration of the nature of concepts related to human excellence; it does not concern itself with deliberating questions of “life or death”; that is, moral (or perhaps professional or even aesthetic) questions that demand an immediate answer even in the face of incomplete information. Hence, Socrates’ discourse is limited in its ability to cultivate responsible deliberation.

Sound deliberation and good counsel are essential to the excellence of *euboulia*. Sound deliberation and good counsel are activities that partake of discourse, even when we deliberate with ourselves or attempt to convince ourselves of something. When one deliberates upon a matter, even though one might be thinking the matter over in silence, one still holds a kind of “conversation” with oneself in one’s mind. Likewise, when one tries to persuade, advise, or remind oneself of something, one will be doing this by means of speech. Hence, *euboulia* involves discourse, regardless of whether it is realized in individuals or amongst groups. Discourse, though, if it is to be meaningful, must be *about* something; it must have content. Socrates’ discourse concerns itself with asking questions *about* matters related to human excellence and the good. But what is it that supplies the content of Socrates’ questions? Where
do these beliefs about human excellence and the good that Socrates questions come from? And, for that matter, what is it that supplies the content of good counsel and sound deliberation?

It is in part traditional Athenian *paideia* that supplies the subject matter of Socrates’ questions, and that supplies some of the content of persuasion and deliberation. Traditional Athenian *paideia* is directed toward the cultivation and development of excellent human beings. Socrates’ discourse questions the traditional beliefs about human excellence and the good that *paideia* inculcates in young people. In addition, whenever Athenians deliberate, as individuals or in groups, about matters related to the practical pursuit of the good life, to some extent their deliberation will make reference to traditional notions of what the good life is, and, of course, it is traditional Athenian *paideia* that is concerned with the transmission from generation to generation of traditional notions about what it is to live a good human life, and about what it is to live a good Athenian life. Furthermore, whenever Athenians attempt to counsel or persuade others (or themselves) as to how they should live, their counsel or persuasion will either reinforce or challenge the notion (or notions) of the “good life” propagated by traditional Athenian *paideia*.

Hence, Socrates’ discourse – whether we think of it simply as “cross-examination” or as a means to cultivate the excellence of *euboulia* in the individual – needs traditional Athenian *paideia* if it is going to have anything to question, discuss, and deliberate. While at some times the beliefs inculcated by traditional *paideia* are what Socrates’ discourse questions, at other times, the subject matter that constitutes the “programme of study” of traditional Athenian *paideia* also provides the answers to some of Socrates’ questions – or at least the foundation for the answers to some of Socrates’ questions. Without *paideia*, Socrates’ discourse has no subject matter to question and examine, and it is ultimately empty in nature. Therefore, Socrates’
discourse needs to be situated within a context of paideia in order to be meaningful and purposeful.

In the Euthydemus, Socrates points out that “learning” [mathésis] is used in two different ways: in the sense of learning new knowledge, and in the sense of understanding the knowledge that one has acquired. Because it is primarily concerned with the examination and definition of concepts related to the subject of human excellence, Socrates’ discourse is not concerned with developing the understanding of knowledge so much as it is with developing an understanding of beliefs and opinions, and of the foundations on which they rest. Just as there is a difference between knowing facts and understanding how they relate to each other to form a body of knowledge, so too there is a difference between holding beliefs and being cognizant of the reasons why one holds those beliefs. In addition, there is also a difference between being cognizant of the reasons underlying one’s beliefs, and being able to explain why those underlying reasons are in fact good ones that serve to adequately justify one’s beliefs. By developing an individual’s faculty of critical examination, Socrates’ discourse assists in developing the individual’s understanding of beliefs concerning human excellence and “the good”.

However, Socrates’ discourse cannot supply a learner with the basic opinions that serve as the foundation upon which a certain conception of human excellence and the good can be developed. Instead, these basic opinions are inculcated in individuals by their upbringing, acculturation, formal education, and life experience. To a great extent then, traditional Athenian paideia is responsible for the development of basic beliefs about human excellence and the good (in Athens, of course). Socrates’ discourse cross-examines and questions these beliefs,

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370 Euthyd. 277e5-278b2.
prompting individuals to examine and re-examine these beliefs about human excellence and the
good, and their reasons for holding them. It is only when individuals examine their beliefs about
human excellence and the good that they can free themselves from subjection and servitude to
the traditions of their society, while at the same time, potentially making these traditional beliefs
and practices genuinely their own, maintained on the basis of their own carefully examined and
tested reasons. It is for this reason that Socrates’ discourse need not necessarily result in the
complete rejection of all beliefs about excellence inculcated by traditional Athenian paideia (one
would hope that Athenian tradition has at least some sensible things to say about human
excellence and the good), although it may very well result in the modification of many of them,
and the rejection of some of them.

It might be objected at this point that there is some danger inherent in Socrates’ style of
questioning. Because it can destabilize individuals’ beliefs about human excellence and throw
them into confusion, Socrates’ cross-examination has the potential to cause confused young
people to develop an attitude of cynicism or extreme skepticism with respect to the notions of
goodness and human excellence. In response to this objection is might be argued that when
Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination is embedded within a more traditional context of
paideia, paideia serves to act as a check on some of the more negative aspects of Socrates’

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371 At R. 7.539b1-c3, Socrates suggests that people should not be introduced to forms of argumentation at too young
an age, because young people have a tendency to assume that arguing well is simply about contradicting other
people. Like puppies, (skulakia, “little rippers”), young people enjoy “tearing people to shreds” with their
arguments. However, once they have become experienced at refuting others, and once they have had their own
beliefs refuted on several occasions, they oftentimes reject all of their previous beliefs. Socrates does not indicate
what then happens to these young people; whether they manage to replace their old, rejected beliefs with newer and
better ones, or whether they end up denying the existence of anything like goodness and excellence. Presumably,
what holds for argumentative discourse in general also holds for Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination. As
Socrates describes in the Apology, young men enjoy turning his discourse of cross-examination upon their elders in
order to refute them with it (Ap. 23c2-8.) Once these young men have become experienced at refuting other people
by means of questions, there is the possibility that they will reject all of their previous beliefs about goodness and
human excellence, including the belief that goodness and excellence really do exist, are worth pursuing, and can be
discussed meaningfully.
discourse. For example, one of the problems with Socrates’ discourse is that it has the potential to leave individuals morally adrift and liable to sink into corruption after it has loosened individuals’ adherence to traditional or popular beliefs about what is right and good. However, individuals who have been well-brought up within the context of Athenian *paideia* should not be too vulnerable to this danger inherent within Socrates’ discourse. *Paideia* uses a wide range of activities and subject matter to enrich, inform, and improve the human person, and (as Protagoras describes) also places a great deal of emphasis on repetition, habituation, practice, and custom (to the detriment of the development of independent thought and innovation). Because of its emphasis on habituation, practice, and custom, traditional *paideia* is able to improve human beings and get them to behave in ways that are at least “moving in the general direction of” goodness and excellence, even though it does little to develop individuals into people who think and reason like autonomous human agents. For example, education in music serves to habituate the soul to grace and measure, and gymnastic training habituates the body to discipline and exertion.372 Given this, even if an individual were to find his traditional beliefs about, for example, temperance and moderation being challenged under Socratic cross-examination, this should not result in the individual giving up all sense of temperance and moderation. Instead, one would assume that the individual would continue to behave in the temperate and moderate manner to which he has become accustomed by his upbringing and training, while at the same time abandoning, or at least questioning, his beliefs about temperance and moderation, or his reasons for holding such beliefs.

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372 See *Prot*, 325e4-c3; also *R*, 3.401d5-402a1, but note that at 3.410b5-8, Socrates maintains that one should engage in gymnastic exercises with an eye towards cultivating the spirited part of the soul, as opposed to using them to develop the strength of the body. Socrates’ claims about the purpose of gymnastic exercises here are probably somewhat untraditional, although not entirely opposed to Protagoras’ claim that parents send their children to trainers in order that they might become as good as possible. By claiming that the purpose of gymnastic exercises is to strengthen the spirited part of the soul instead of the body, Socrates makes sure that gymnastics fits into his conception of *paideia*; namely, that the purpose of education is to improve the soul.
In summary, an upbringing informed by traditional Athenian *paideia* should mitigate the potentially negative effects of Socrates’ cross-examination. Because Athenian *paideia* places so much emphasis on habituation, practice, and custom, it serves to train and discipline individuals to behave in certain ways, which, at least to some extent, are oriented towards the good. Therefore, traditional Athenian *paideia* (or, at least, the disciplinary elements inherent in it) serves as an essential complement to Socrates’ cross-examination because it helps to ensure that young people’s behaviour remains “on track” and generally directed towards the good, even if their reasons for acting in certain ways are questioned.

**Chapter conclusion**

Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination can make a positive contribution to the education and improvement of human beings in a number of ways; indeed, it is essential to the practice of *paideia*. Perhaps most obviously, Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination serves to challenge prejudice and personal bias, “pushing” people to examine their beliefs and the reasons why they hold them. Socrates’ discourse is not concerned with the “handing over” of knowledge, but is instead concerned with testing and examining the reasons why people hold the beliefs that they do, often revealing that these reasons are either weak or absent. Socrates’ discourse challenges people to “own” their beliefs and the reasons why they hold them, instead of simply accepting what they have been told by their elders, teachers, and society in general. In this way, Socrates’ discourse serves to both challenge and complement traditional *paideia*.

Socrates’ discourse challenges the role that tradition plays within education, causing people to question the soundness of some traditional beliefs and practices. Because it questions traditional education, Socrates’ discourse also encourages expansion, improvement, and
innovation within the educational “programme”, helping to ensure that it remains focused on the genuine improvement of human beings, rather than simply on the maintenance of tradition. In addition, by “pushing” paideia to be more innovative and comprehensive, Socrates’ discourse ensures that education serves to expand the limits of human knowledge. Socrates’ discourse also challenges those who would set themselves up as authorities on the matter of human education and improvement, sometimes revealing that these supposed authorities are not the expert educators that they pretend to be. Furthermore, Socrates’ discourse also reveals the limits of the knowledge of less illustrious individuals. Given that it reveals the limits of the knowledge of people who are both well-known and obscure, we can say that Socrates’ discourse reveals the limits of human knowledge in general.

Even though Socrates’ discourse might seem to be capable of being used only for challenging beliefs, authorities, and tradition, it can also be used for more constructive purposes. As the case of Clinias in the Euthydemus illustrates, Socrates’ questioning can be used to reinforce positive, worthwhile beliefs that individuals might hold. It succeeds at doing this not by repeating what the individual believes, but by questioning it, and encouraging the individual to re-examine his beliefs and to come up with even stronger reasons for maintaining what he does. In addition, as Socrates describes in the Theaetetus, he can use his methods of questioning for the purposes of “midwifery”, revealing the “bright ideas” that young individuals hold, and assessing these ideas to be positive and worth keeping (while at the same time encouraging young men to discard beliefs that do not stand up to scrutiny).

So, in summary, Socrates’ discourse is essential to the educational enterprise.

Traditional methods of “handing over” knowledge – while still important – fail to develop

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373 See Euthyd. 278c5-282d8.
374 See Tht. 150b6 ff.
individuals’ ability to consider things for themselves, to innovate and think creatively, to deliberate carefully, to question themselves and others, and to consider matters collaboratively in discourse with others. Socrates’ discourse serves to address the limitations inherent within “systems” of education that rely heavily upon custom, tradition, repetition, habituation, and memorization as educational practices. However, at the same time, Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination is insufficient by itself as an educational method primarily because it lacks content; after all, Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination is about asking questions in order to develop people’s “thinking” abilities, and so it is incapable, on its own, of furnishing knowledge. Because of its inability to transmit knowledge, and because it is a discourse of questioning, Socrates’ discourse needs traditional *paideia*.

At the same time, though, Socrates’ discourse of questioning and examination serves to compensate for the fact that traditional “systems” of education, such as Athenian *paideia*, do not expect learners to put much critical effort of their own into their studies. Because they demand little critical, creative, or original input on the part of learners, traditional “programmes” of education such as Athenian *paideia* do not cultivate *euboulia*. Socrates’ discourse is essential to the business of *paideia* because it participates in cultivating *euboulia* in the individual. However, Socrates’ discourse does not directly cultivate what we might call political *euboulia*, the sort of *euboulia* that involves the exercise of good counsel on a larger community or state scale. That being said, by participating in the cultivation of individuals’ ability to engage in sound deliberation and responsible self-persuasion, Socrates discourse might be said to contribute to laying the foundations for the development of the *euboulia* of the citizen, since people who are already able to engage in sound deliberation and responsible persuasion on the individual, personal level are more likely to develop into citizens who engage in the responsible
deliberation and discussion of political questions. Socrates truly is a gift to Athenian society because he encourages Athenians to develop the very sort of excellence that they need in order to be good citizens (and not subjects) – and for this, Anytus and Meletus should be thanking Socrates, not attempting to have him executed.\textsuperscript{375}

\textsuperscript{375} Cf. Ap. 30d6 ff.
Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have endeavoured to demonstrate that Socrates does engage in discourse that is to some extent educational in its nature. Nevertheless, this claim – that Socrates’ discourse has educational value – must be made with certain qualifications. The following sections constitute a summary of the reasons why Socrates’ discourse can be said to be educational, and a brief overview of the reasons why the educational value of Socrates’ discourse is limited.

1. Establishing conditions to draw attention to the good

Education is the practice of directing the attention (and activity) of a human being towards the good.\textsuperscript{376} If one wishes to assert that Socrates’ discursive practices in Athens are indeed educational in their nature, then one must be able to demonstrate that Socrates’ discourse directs individuals’ attention towards the good. However, the “problem” with Socrates’ discourse is that it does not actually direct individuals’ attention towards the good. Instead, it establishes conditions under which an individual might choose to direct his attention towards the

\textsuperscript{376} R. 7.518b7-d7.
good, and it establishes these conditions in four ways. First, Socrates’ discourse frees individuals from unquestioning obedience to authority (real or imagined) on matters of excellence and the good. Second, Socrates’ discourse temporarily silences those who would disrupt productive discourse about human excellence and the good, thereby allowing this discourse to continue. Third, Socrates’ discourse can prompt an individual to question and examine beliefs that he is determined to maintain, thereby ensuring that these beliefs are in fact supported by reasons, and reasons that are either the interlocutor’s own, or ones which he has closely examined and considered. Fourth, Socrates’ discourse can help to ensure that young people pursue philosophy, and do not become overly confident in their supposed knowledge.

First, Socrates reveals that individuals who believe themselves to be wise with respect to human excellence are not so. By revealing individuals’ lack of wisdom to them, Socrates redirects their attention away from their false assumption of knowledge and authority and instead turns it (if only temporarily) towards the examination of matters related to human excellence, thereby giving these individuals the opportunity (should they choose to exploit it) to gain greater insight into their beliefs about human excellence. In addition, by demonstrating that those who are believed to be wise are not so, Socrates liberates bystanders to his conversations from believing that they must accept the claims of these purported authorities on human excellence, and instead allows them to determine what they wish to believe about human excellence for themselves. In doing this, Socrates’ discourse transfers the responsibility for determining what excellence is from supposed authorities to ordinary individuals.

Second, Socrates’ discourse acts like a kind of punitive measure, temporarily silencing those who would disrupt civil discourse about excellence, or who would insist upon claiming
that they know what excellence is when they do not. By silencing disruptive individuals and bullies who would force their beliefs upon others, Socrates’ discourse permits civil discourse about human excellence to continue, thereby creating conditions under which parties interested in the dialogue might continue to examine matters of excellence. Furthermore, by silencing disruptive individuals, Socrates gives these people an opportunity to genuinely partake in the examination of excellence – if they so choose – instead of merely asserting their ill-founded “knowledge” of it.

Third, as the example of Clinias discussed in Chapter 2 demonstrates, Socrates’ cross-examination can be used to lead individuals along a particular path of argumentation in question-and-answer form that terminates in a conclusion that ultimately reinforces the interlocutor’s beliefs about human excellence and the good. The moral beliefs that Socrates’ interlocutors hold are most likely ones that they either have been taught, or have acquired by means of acculturation. By leading his interlocutors through an argument, Socrates implicitly gives his interlocutors a choice: they can either follow the argument along unthinkingly and arrive at a conclusion that simply reinforces those beliefs about excellence that they already maintain unthinkingly, or they can closely examine Socrates’ line of argumentation, questioning him and challenging him along the way. By questioning and challenging the line of argumentation that Socrates develops through his cross-examination, the interlocutor plays an active role in testing the “scaffolding” that Socrates constructs in order to support the belief about human excellence that is held by the interlocutor, determining whether it is sound, or whether some other line of reasoning must be developed in order to support the belief.

377 The sophist Thrasymachus might be an example of just such an individual: see R. 1.336b1 ff.
378 Meletus, with his vehement professions of certainty, might be an example of just such a bully: see Ap. 25a9-11, 26b2-7, 26d1-5.
Note, however, that when Socrates uses this type of questioning upon his interlocutors, he is not necessarily improving them: instead, he is merely reinforcing what they already believe. Whether or not an interlocutor is improved by Socrates’ reinforcement of his belief will depend on how the interlocutor approaches Socrates’ cross-examination. If the interlocutor merely tries to give Socrates the “obvious” answers to his questions, and allows himself to be led along unthinkingly by Socrates, then the interlocutor will not be improved by Socrates’ reinforcement of his beliefs, as the interlocutor will simply continue to maintain the same unexamined beliefs that he has always held all along. In order for an interlocutor to be improved by Socrates’ “leading” form of cross-examination, the interlocutor must be prepared either to put up some challenge to Socrates’ questions, or to give consideration to the train of the conversation on his own. In other words, whether an interlocutor is improved by Socrates’ “leading” form of cross-examination will depend on whether the interlocutor is prepared to put effort of his own into “owning” his beliefs, or whether he simply accepts what he has been told in the past, and Socrates’ leading him along back to it. The compliant Clinias does not appear to be an example of an interlocutor who is improved by Socrates’ “leading” form of cross-examination.

Fourth, Socrates’ discourse contributes to educational practice because Socrates wields it for the purposes of what he calls “midwifery”.379 In addition to questioning prominent Athenians who believe themselves to be wise, Socrates also cross-examines the beliefs about excellence held by bright young men from relatively well-to-do and “respectable” families. These young men are likely to become prominent citizens in their city in the future. The purpose of Socrates’ examination of these young men and their beliefs is to determine whether perhaps some of their beliefs need to be discarded, thereby requiring them to give more thought to the

379 Th. 150a8 ff.
matter of human excellence, or whether some of their beliefs should be retained and nurtured.\textsuperscript{380} In testing young men’s beliefs about matters related to human excellence and determining that they are flawed, Socrates’ “midwifery” ensures that bright young men do not become too cocky and begin to think themselves wise about human excellence when they are not. However, at the same time, by testing young men’s beliefs about matters related to human excellence and demonstrating to them that there might be something in their beliefs that is worthwhile, Socrates demonstrates to these young men that they are not necessarily completely lacking in philosophical ability – should they choose to exercise it.

2. Socrates’ discourse does not necessarily result in improvement

However, even though Socrates’ discourse creates conditions in which individuals, if they choose, can turn their attention towards the good and the pursuit of it, Socrates’ discourse does not necessarily result in the education and improvement of the people with whom he converses. This is so for two reasons. First, Socrates’ discourse only sets up conditions in which an individual may choose to direct his attention towards the good; Socrates does not force anyone to direct his attention towards the good. Of course, one could argue that if someone becomes entangled in a conversation with Socrates, his attention will end up being turned towards questions of human excellence and the good whether the interlocutor likes it or not. Yet even so, Socrates does not prevent his interlocutors from quitting the conversation, either by physically leaving Socrates’ presence (as Cephalus does\textsuperscript{381}), or by “clamming up” and refusing to participate in the conversation any further (as Anytus does). Socrates will not chase after an interlocutor who excuses himself from the conversation on some pretence, nor will he try to

\textsuperscript{380} See Tht. 150a8 ff.
\textsuperscript{381} R. 1.331c1-d9.
pester an interlocutor who has “clammed up” into continuing the conversation. It is up to the interlocutor to determine whether or not he will continue to examine and consider matters related to human excellence, and it is up to the interlocutor to determine whether he will do that with Socrates, by himself, or with others. There is no rule that says that once an interlocutor has left Socrates’ presence he cannot continue to consider matters related to human excellence and the good on his own; indeed, to the contrary, the purpose of Socrates’ discourse would seem to be to encourage Athenians to give consideration to matters of human excellence and the good on their own, without having Socrates there to converse with them.

Second, Socrates lacks the ability to improve other people with his discourse because, as Socrates himself says, he is not skilled in any art of education. There are two reasons why Socrates’ practice of examining people’s beliefs does not constitute anything like an art of education. First, Socrates’ cross-examination is not an art because Socrates’ cross-examination does not proceed on the basis of knowledge, and it is not grounded in any systematic study of how to go about questioning people; Socrates is not a modern lawyer with formal training in cross-examination, nor is he an Athenian with expertise in the discourse of the law courts. Second, according to Socrates, it is not he who, by his skill alone, delivers his interlocutors of their beliefs; instead, Socrates maintains that it is some divinity that compels them to answer his questions. Therefore, Socrates’ “art” of midwifery is not an art at all, and so it does not qualify as an art of education (or even as an artful educational method).

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382 *Ap.* 20a7-c3.
383 See *Ap.* 17d1-3.
384 Note that on these grounds midwifery (or at least the traditional practice of it) is not an art, either. Greek midwives did not normally receive any special training, and women in labour will give birth to infants on their own, whether a midwife is present or not; the presence of a midwife (while very helpful) is not really necessary at the delivery.
The artlessness of Socrates’ discourse is demonstrated by the way in which he wields it. It is not clear that Socrates is particularly perceptive as to when it might be appropriate to engage a particular individual in discourse about matters of human excellence, and when it might be best not to bother to attempt to challenge the individual’s beliefs. For example, in the *Euthydemus* a legal expert listening in on Socrates’ interchange with Dionysodorus and Euthydemus thinks Socrates’ willingness to engage such individuals in discourse reflects poorly upon him,\(^{385}\) and it was likely a mistake on Socrates’ part in the *Meno* to question Anytus about the teachability of excellence, after Anytus had already demonstrated himself to be a very closed-minded individual (specifically concerning the possible benefits of a sophistic education). Furthermore, Socrates persists in wielding his discourse of cross-examination in public even when it makes people angry, and even when it prompts imitators to engage in his style of discourse without, it seems, any interest in using it to benefit others.\(^{386}\) Someone who genuinely possessed an art of education, or an artful method of educational discourse, would wield his art appropriately, and would likely do his or her best to try to prevent the misuse of his or her techniques (so as not to bring disapprobation upon his or her art, and so that its techniques might not be used to either intentionally or accidentally harm other people). Socrates, though, seems neither to wield his discourse entirely appropriately, nor to restrain those who would misuse it.

3. Socrates’ discourse is essential for education

Yet despite being unable to reliably direct individuals’ attention towards the good, Socrates’ discourse is essential for education. More specifically, Socrates’ discourse compensates for what is missing in Athenian *paideia* and in all “programmes” of education that

\(^{385}\) *Euthyd*. 304d4-305a8, esp. 304e6-305a4.

\(^{386}\) See *Ap*. 21b9 ff., 23c2 ff.
focus heavily on the transmission of traditional or popular “knowledge”. Educational “systems” whose aim is to impart traditional knowledge tend to emphasize rote learning, memorization, obedience to recognized authority, and adherence to cultural traditions. Their aim is not to promote innovative or original thought, or to encourage criticism of authority or tradition. However, in order for individuals to become citizens as opposed to mere subjects obeying the law and the commands of authority, it is necessary for individuals to be able to criticize and deliberate about the law, the commands of authority, cultural traditions, and the principles upon which their society is based. Furthermore, in order for individuals to become truly authentic individuals, as opposed to mere followers of “the herd”, they must be able to exhibit some degree of original thought, and to be able to support the beliefs they hold about what is important in life with reasons that are their own, as opposed to merely received opinions.

Socrates’ discourse is an essential complement to Athenian paideia because it gives Athenians opportunities to question and consider popular and traditional beliefs about human excellence, in order to determine for themselves if they agree with these beliefs, and, if so, on what grounds. It is not only Socrates’ interlocutors who are given the opportunity to do this by means of his discourse, but also bystanders to Socrates’ discussions, who may consider for themselves what they hear being said in the conversation before them. Socrates’ discourse also allows his interlocutors, as well as bystanders to his discussions, to determine for themselves on what conditions they will be persuaded to accept certain claims about human excellence. In this way, Socrates’ discourse creates conditions in which his fellow Athenians might determine for themselves on what grounds they will allow themselves to be persuaded, thereby determining for themselves the extent to which persuasive discourse may be allowed to affect them.
4. Different kinds of discourse needed for education

While it is true that Socrates’ discourse is essential to the practice of education, it does not constitute a sufficient or complete education in and of itself. Just as the intensive study of any single subject does not constitute a complete human education, no single method, and no single mode of discourse will, by itself, be sufficient for human education. All subject matter, all practices, and all modes of discourse that serve to direct human attention and activity towards the good have a role to play within paideia, either by bettering human beings directly, or by making possible the conditions under which human beings might better themselves. Because of this, the modes of discourse employed by individuals who might be regarded as standing in opposition to Socrates also have their part to play in the education of human beings. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the eristic of Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, which resembles Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination to some extent, but which also differs from it in other aspects, does have some educational value when used appropriately and in the proper contexts. The same is also true of the popular rhetoric in which Socrates’ accusers engage (which I discussed in Chapter 3). That being said, the key point here is that these modes of discourse will only qualify as educational when they are used for the right purposes, in the right contexts; otherwise, they all, including Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination, have the potential to lead to the corruption of human beings by directing their attention and activity away from the good.

Therefore, no mode of discourse – including Socrates’ discourse of cross-examination – is, in and of itself, educational. Instead, whether or not a particular mode of discourse qualifies as educational depends on how it is used. (Indeed, the same can be said of many other practices besides discourse as well: whether or not they qualify as educational depend on how they are used.) In this way, discourse is just like any other instrument: whether or not its use brings
about good results depends on whether one is using the right sort of instrument for the job. Speech is the instrument that directs the soul.\(^{387}\) In order to be able to orient a soul towards the good, one must use the appropriate mode of speech on the soul, one that appeals to the kind of soul in question, given the circumstances that it is in.\(^{388}\) Using the wrong mode of discourse on the wrong kind of soul in the wrong circumstances will not likely bring about educational results, namely, the improvement of that soul. Given that people and their souls are very diverse, and the circumstances in which they find themselves even more so, the modes of discourse used in the practice of education will themselves have to be varied and diverse, and which of these modes of discourse is best employed for the purpose of education will be contingent upon circumstance. Socrates’ cross-examination is not a suitable educational technique in circumstances which demand the straightforward delivery of content, nor it is a suitable educational technique to use upon individuals who are incapable of examining and considering the subject matter at hand, either because they lack the intellectual ability to do it, or because they are simply unwilling.

It is this last point – that Socrates’ discourse is not suitable to use upon those who are unwilling to consider matters of excellence and the good for themselves – that is important. By being unable to guarantee the improvement of those upon whom it is used, Socrates’ discourse reveals the limits of educational discourse. In the *Meno*, Anytus insists that any Athenian gentleman can make a young person excellent – if the young person in question is willing to be persuaded by him.\(^{389}\) Anytus’ statement directly implies that if a young person is unwilling to be persuaded by the good gentleman in question, no improvement in the young person’s character will occur – thereby revealing the limits of rhetorical discourse. Rhetoric, as a mode of

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\(^{387}\) See *Phdr.* 271c10.

\(^{388}\) Consider Socrates’ remarks on rhetoric at *Phdr.* 271c10-272a8.

\(^{389}\) *M.* 92e3-6.
educational discourse, cannot be used to improve those who stubbornly refuse to be persuaded by it. Likewise, Socrates’ discourse will have no effect upon anyone who is unwilling to give consideration to matters of human excellence and the good. No one will be educated and improved by Socrates’ discourse unless he makes the attempt to improve himself. Education will not happen if people simply refuse to be educated.

However, what differentiates Socrates’ discourse from, for example, the sort of popular rhetoric in which Anytus engages, is that all a young person needs to do in order to be improved by a gentleman like Anytus is listen and obey – assuming that is, that Anytus or the gentleman in question is really attempting to persuade the young person in question of what is right, and knows what is right. By contrast, no one will be improved simply by listening to Socrates; instead, the responsibility for education and improvement is solely the responsibility of the individual who is listening to Socrates engage in cross-examination. One must actually give serious consideration to matters of excellence and the good, and to the reasons for one’s beliefs about these things, in order to benefit from Socrates’ discourse. Therefore, Socrates’ discourse will have no positive effect upon those who are simply unwilling to give consideration to matters of excellence and the good. Now this means that it is possible that not everyone necessarily needs to be exposed to Socrates’ discourse, as some people might already be inclined to question and criticize the beliefs that have already been inculcated in them, or that others attempt to convince them to accept. Nevertheless, Socrates creates further opportunities for the critical examination of excellence for those who are inclined to do so, and creates opportunities for the critical examination of excellence for those who perhaps have never had them before, or who never thought to give much consideration to matters of excellence before.
It might be objected that certain other types of discourse – such as, perhaps, dramatic discourse – can also serve to create opportunities for the critical examination of human excellence; therefore, Socrates’ cross-examination is not essential to the practice of education; rather, it is only essential that an educational “programme” utilize some form of discourse that serves to cultivate critical examination and reflection. Indeed, Socrates’ cross-examination is not a “sure-fire” means of promoting critical examination and reflection. Not everyone is prompted to give thoughtful consideration to their beliefs about human excellence as a result of participating in, or listening to, dialogue with Socrates. Some interlocutors (Anytus being a prime example) respond negatively to discussion with Socrates, and others, like the compliant Clinias of the *Euthydemus*, seemingly allow themselves to be “carried along” by Socrates’ lines of questioning, without bothering to challenge anything that he says. While Socrates’ cross-examination is essential to the business of cultivating critical reflection, not everyone will respond to it. Therefore, other forms of discourse that have the potential to create conditions in which individuals can cultivate their ability to engage in the critical reflection and examination of their beliefs (and the reasons for holding those beliefs) will also be essential to the educational enterprise, just as much as Socrates’ cross-examination is.

For example, some Athenians might be more inclined to give critical reflection to popular beliefs and prejudices after watching a dramatic performance, than they would be after listening to Socrates discourse. However, at the same time, other Athenians may very well be carried away by the dramatic spectacle (or the comic jokes, or the tragic pathos, etc.), and give no thought whatsoever to the beliefs that they hold about human excellence and the good. While dramatic discourse might be used to cultivate critical reflection, like Socrates’ cross-examination, it also does not serve as a “sure-fire” means of accomplishing this – at least not in
any given individual. So, even if Socrates’ discourse is only one among several forms of discourse that might be used to cultivate critical examination and reflection, it is still necessary to the educational enterprise, because human beings are not all alike, and different souls respond differently to different forms of discourse.\textsuperscript{390} Discourse that serves to promote critical reflection in one person might not do so in another. Therefore, it is likely that Socrates’ cross-examination is not, and cannot be, the only form of discourse that is used to promote critical examination and reflection, but it is nevertheless essential to the business of education – as are any other forms of discourse that serve to promote critical examination and reflection.

5. Socrates as an educational paradigm

Besides being an educator in the sense that, through his discourse, Socrates creates opportunities for human beings to direct their attention towards the examination and pursuit of the good, we can say that Socrates is an educator in another kind of sense. Socrates maintains that the god of the Delphic Oracle has set him up to act as a kind of model or paradigm from which other human beings can learn. The lesson that we are to learn from him, maintains Socrates, is that human wisdom is worth little or nothing, because it consists primarily in acknowledging the limits of one’s knowledge – and one’s complete lack of knowledge in many cases.\textsuperscript{391} In this way, the god of the Delphic Oracle (apparently) uses Socrates as his instrument to educate human beings. However, if we examine the case of Socrates, using him as the paradigm or model that he claims to be, we shall see that Socrates’ definition of human wisdom in the \textit{Apology} is inadequate: human wisdom is more than just admitting the limits of one’s knowledge; it also entails seeking to expand the limits of one’s knowledge, and especially the

\textsuperscript{390} Cf. \textit{Phdr}. 271c10-d7.

\textsuperscript{391} \textit{Ap}. 23a5-b4.
limits of one’s knowledge about what is good and excellent. Plato’s Socrates is the paradigm case of an individual who, recognizing the limits of his knowledge, seeks to educate and improve himself. By engaging others in dialogue in the attempt to educate himself about human excellence, Socrates, by means of his discourse of cross-examination, also creates conditions in which those who are rather like him – in that they are prepared to educate and improve themselves – may do so.
Works Cited

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, the medium for all sources cited is print.

Greek Texts


Reference Translations


Secondary Literature


