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To 'Graze Freely in the Pastures of Philosophy': The Pedagogical Methods and Political Motives of Socrates and the Sophists

Coleen Zoller¹

'Callias,' I said, 'if your sons were colts or calves, we could find and engage a supervisor for them who would make them excel in their proper qualities, some horse breeder or farmer. Now since they are men, whom do you have in mind to supervise them? Who has knowledge of that kind of excellence, the human and political kind? I think you must have given thought to this since you have sons. Is there such a person,' I asked, 'or is there not?' --Socrates in Plato's *Apology* 20a-b²

I. Introduction

Despite the fact that Plato's Socrates denies being a teacher (*Apology* 19c-d, 33a-b), some contemporaries of the historical Socrates thought of him as a teacher no different than a sophist.³ Meanwhile, even among those who read Socrates' disavowal of teaching ironically some observe a great difference between Socrates and the sophists.⁴ Yet, if sophists and philosophers could be distinguished simply by their appearances, then Callias' doorman would have let Socrates and Hippocrates into the house immediately, knowing they were not sophists (*Protagoras* 314d-e). But sophists cannot be identified by mere appearance, and as a result, as Socrates says to Hippocrates, 'As to what *exactly* a sophist is, I would be surprised if you really knew' (*Protagoras* 312c; emphasis added).⁵

In the late 19th century Sidgwick claimed that the difference between a philosopher and a sophist lies in their differing methods of argument.⁶ Nehamas has already shown the shortcomings of describing the difference as a methodological one. However, while I agree with Nehamas' argument that the proper contrast lies in the difference 'between two purposes that argument can serve, one serious and the other

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² Emended translation. G.M.A. Grube's translation in *Plato Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, 1997).

³ See, e.g., Aristophanes in *Clouds* and Aeschines in *Against Timarchus*. For an interpretation of the *Clouds* in which Aristophanes is not intent on depicting Socrates as a typical sophist, see Paul Vander Waerdt, 'Socrates in the *Clouds*', in *The Socratic Movement*, ed. Vander Waerdt (Ithaca, 1994), pp. 48-86.

⁴ For the most part this paper will speak of the sophists as depicted in Plato's dialogues rather than the historical sophists in the same way that it mostly discusses Plato's Socrates instead of the historical Socrates.

⁵ Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell's translation in Cooper, *Complete Works*.

⁶ Henry Sidgwick, 'The Sophists', *Journal of Philology*, 4 (1872), pp. 288-307.

not,⁷ I will argue that the difference between sophistry and philosophy extends to a difference between two methods of pedagogy as well.

My central argument here is twofold. I will show that Socrates and the sophists have differing political motives, and this difference in turn causes them to approach pedagogy differently. In Section II I will show that Plato's *Sophist* invites inquiry into not only the difference between philosophy and sophistry but also into the differences among the sophists. Scholarly treatments of the sophists are good as far as they go,⁸ but they have not paid adequate attention to the distinction between the two strategies employed by sophists. In Section III I will examine the difference between two sophistic strategies, namely, engaging in sly flattery, like Gorgias⁹ and Protagoras, and being forthrightly frivolous like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.¹⁰ I will also show how Socrates' motive for conversing publicly differs from the motives underlying sophistic

⁷ Alexander Nehamas, 'Eristic, Antilogic, Sophistic, Dialectic: Plato's Demarcation of Philosophy from Sophistry', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 7 (1990), p. 9.

⁸ See, e.g., Nehamas, 'Eristic'; W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*. Vol. 3, Part 1, *The Sophists*. (Cambridge, 1971); Rosamond Kent Sprague, ed., *The Older Sophists* (Columbia, SC, 1972); G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge, 1981); C.J. Rowe, 'Plato on the Sophists as Teachers of Virtue', *History of Political Thought*, 4 (1983), pp. 409-427; Jacqueline de Romilly, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, translated by Janet Lloyd (Oxford, 1992); Gisela Striker, 'Methods of Sophistry', in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge, 1996); Roslyn Weiss, 'When Winning Is Everything: Socratic Elenchus and Euthydemian Eristic', in *Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides*, ed. T.M. Robinson and Luc Brisson (Sankt Augustin, 2000); Sarah Broadie, 'The Sophists and Socrates', in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*, ed. David Sedley (Cambridge, 2003); C.C.W. Taylor, 'Socrates the Sophist', in *Remembering Socrates: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Lindsay Judson and Vassilis Karasmanis (Oxford, 2006); and Paul Woodruff, 'Socrates among the Sophists', in *A Companion to Socrates*, ed. Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar (Malden, MA, 2006).

⁹ It should be noted that Gorgias does not describe himself as a sophist, and Callicles, who greatly admires Gorgias, despises sophists (*Gorgias* 520a). Neither does Meno, also a student of Gorgias, see Gorgias as a sophist. Meno offers the picture of Gorgias the orator (rather than a sophist) in response to Socrates' description of sophists as those who profess to be teachers of virtue (*Meno* 95b). He says, 'he ridicules the others when he hears them making this claim. He thinks one should make people clever speakers' (*Meno* 95c). Readers of the *Gorgias* see Gorgias succumb to the pressure to claim that anyone who comes to him without knowledge of justice will 'learn these things from [him]' (*Gorgias* 460a). As a result, Meno ought to consider Gorgias a sophist. At any rate, here I will refer to Gorgias as a sophist, even though Callicles did not see that 'they are one and the same, the sophist and the orator, or nearly so and pretty similar' (*Gorgias* 520a). Pace E.R. Dodds, *Plato's Gorgias* (Oxford, 1959), p. 7, Striker argues that Plato takes the claim that Gorgias is an orator rather than a sophist as 'merely a subterfuge, an attempt to find a more polite label for a sophist' ('Methods', p. 6). Also noting the likelihood of this are Rowe, 'Plato' and E.L. Harrison, 'Was Gorgias a Sophist?' *Phoenix*, 18 (1964), pp. 183-192.

¹⁰ Plato uses the terms 'frivolity' and 'flattery' at *Euthydemus* 278b-c and *Gorgias* 463bff., 501c, 527c, respectively.

education in general. Whereas the sophistic strategies are both directed at popularity and wealth, Socrates' work is always directed at learning. It is this divergence of motivation that leads to a difference in pedagogical method, which I will examine in Section IV. There I will describe, following the agricultural hunger imagery Plato uses at *Protagoras* 320a, *Republic* 498b, and *Phaedrus* 248b-c, Socratic pedagogy as cowherding students toward grazing in the pastures of philosophy. On the other hand, the pedagogy of the sophists is the conventional process of *feeding* lessons to students, which became the conventional method of pedagogy in the West.¹¹

I will offer this metaphor for Socratic pedagogy fully aware that Socrates explicitly employs another metaphor for his practice in the *Theaetetus*, that of the midwife. There Plato has Socrates say to Theaetetus:

For one thing which I have in common with the ordinary midwives is that I myself am barren of wisdom...So that I am not in any sense a wise man; I cannot claim as the child of my own soul any discovery worth the name of wisdom. But with those who associate with me it is different. At first some of them give the impression of being ignorant and stupid; but as time goes on and our association continues, all whom God permits are seen to make progress—a progress with is amazing both to other people and to themselves. And yet it is clear that this is not due to anything they have learned from me; it is that they discover within themselves a multitude of beautiful things, which they bring forth into the light. But it is I, with God's help, who deliver them of this offspring... There is another point also in which those who associate with me are like women in child-birth. They suffer the pains of labor, and are filled day and night with distress; indeed they suffer far more than women. And this pain my art is able to bring on, and also to allay... So I want you to come to me as to one who is both the son of a midwife and himself skilled in the art; and try to answer the questions I shall ask as well as you can (150a-151d).

The midwife metaphor and the cowherd metaphor need not be construed as competing or mutually exclusive. Rather, the conception of his pedagogy that Socrates attempts to convey with his midwife metaphor is reinforced by the cowherd metaphor.

II. Education and *Empeiriai* in the *Sophist*

One might consider sophists like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus¹² so clownish that Plato would not take them seriously or bother to distinguish Socrates from them,

¹¹ At *Theaetetus* 150a-151d we see a parallel contrast between midwifery and impregnation, which is noticed also by David L. Blank, 'Socratic versus Sophists on Payment for Teaching', *Classical Antiquity*, 4 (1985), p. 24.

¹² I follow Sprague, *Older Sophists*, p. 295 in treating Euthydemus and Dionysodorus without distinction despite my agreement with Mary Margaret McCabe, 'Silencing the Sophists: The Drama of the *Euthydemus*', *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 14 (1998), p. 163 that, although the brothers are portrayed at the

concentrating instead on distinguishing him from Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, and Prodicus. I, on the other hand, believe that in Plato's attempt to distinguish Socrates from the sophists he does also have in mind men such as Euthydemus and Dionysodorus precisely because in the popular imagination Socrates may resemble them more closely than the flattering sophists. As Taylor says, Plato's Socrates 'is always fighting against the sophists because he is so close to them... Socrates is thus the paradigm intellectual whose activities are dismissed by the ignorant as mere useless chattering.'¹³

Because Socrates refutes his interlocutors without proffering positive knowledge in the wake of an *elenchus*, Socrates' elenctic practice might seem just like Euthydemus' and Dionysodorus' eristic behavior. In the *Euthydemus* Plato portrays a speechwriter who believes that the trivial conversation he heard from Euthydemus and Dionysodorus is representative of philosophical conversations. This 'no-man's-lander' walks off thinking he knows what philosophy really is. Crito explains that this man told him that he heard nothing but 'chattering and making a worthless fuss about matters of no consequence' and that, as a result, the man considers philosophy and those who practice it to be of 'no value whatsoever!' (*Euthydemus* 3043-305a).¹⁴ Owing to the mistaking of sophistry for philosophy, such a person considers himself well-informed about philosophy and believes it to be the activity of caring 'nothing about what they say, but just [to] snatch at every word' (*Euthydemus* 305a).

Even people who directly converse with Socrates sometimes consider him to be the sort of person who delights in worthless discussions. Think, for example, of when Hippias says of Socrates that he 'always creates confusion in arguments, and seems to argue unfairly' (*Lesser Hippias* 373b).¹⁵ Callicles too confuses Socrates with a frivolous sophist when he mistakes Socrates' attention to craftsmen and their endeavors with the frivolous sophists' conversations about trivial subjects.¹⁶ He says to Socrates, 'You simply don't let up on your continual talk of shoemakers and cleaners, cooks and doctors, as if our discussion were about them!' (*Gorgias* 491a), and he follows this by remarking to Gorgias that Socrates 'keeps questioning people on matters that are trivial, hardly worthwhile, and refutes them!' (*Gorgias* 497b)¹⁷ As a result, Socrates does need to be differentiated from the sophists in general, which is the implicit project of the

beginning of the dialogue as clones of one another, there is a continuing separation between them as the discussion goes on.

¹³ Taylor, 'Socrates', p. 157, p. 163.

¹⁴ Rosamond Kent Sprague's translation in Cooper, *Complete Works*.

¹⁵ Nicholas D. Smith's translation in Cooper, *Complete Works*.

¹⁶ Of course Callicles also repeatedly accuses Socrates of being a '*dêmêgoros*,' which indicates that Socrates could also be mistaken for what I call a slyly flattering sophist (*Gorgias* 482c-e, 494d). In these passages, however, Callicles actually believes neither that Socrates is a flatterer nor that he is a sophist; instead, his motive in making the accusation is simply to discredit Socrates in order to make himself look better in the midst of being refuted by Socrates.

¹⁷ Donald J. Zeyl's translation in Cooper, *Complete Works*. Perhaps Alcibiades' most shining moment occurs when he reveals himself as someone who does *not* mistakenly assess Socrates' arguments 'about pack asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners' as 'totally ridiculous' (*Symposium* 221e-222a).

Euthydemus, *Gorgias*, and *Protagoras*. However, the final division in Plato's *Sophist* reminds us that there are also distinctions to be made among the sophists.¹⁸

The final division of Plato's *Sophist* sets two methods of sophistry apart from each other. The *Sophist* ultimately distinguishes between the 'demagogue,' who 'can maintain his insincerity in long speeches to a crowd,' and the 'sophist,' who 'uses short speeches in private conversation to force the person talking with him to contradict himself' (*Sophist* 268b).¹⁹ This division reflects the distinction between flattering sophists and frivolous sophists, respectively.²⁰ I will explore this distinction further in the next section, but now let's examine how the Stranger arrives at this conclusion.

Reminiscent of *Gorgias* 464b-c, the Stranger leads Theaetetus through a division of the art of cleansing, dividing it into the cleansing of the body and of the soul (*Sophist* 226e). The *Gorgias* passage explains its distinction between sophistry and oratory solely by analogy: what sophistry is to legislation, oratory is to justice. Legislation precedes psychic offenses, while justice follows them. To take Irwin's point further, we can also say that sophistry is the imitation of the true consideration of 'how the *nomoi*, general moral and political norms, should be,' while oratory 'takes the *nomoi* for granted' and is the imitation of true justice, which applies the *nomoi*.²¹ The *Sophist* is aligned with the account in the *Gorgias* by indicating that when the soul is neglected it needs the regulative component of the holistic treatment of the soul and when the soul is dysfunctional it needs to be corrected (otherwise it becomes wicked). However, diverging from the *Gorgias*' account, the Stranger does not call the regulatory care of the soul 'legislation' but rather teaching, which he divides into one sort that teaches the crafts and one that he calls education,²² which gets rid of lack of learning, that is, 'not knowing, but thinking that you know' (*Sophist* 229c-d). He further divides education into admonition and refutation (*Sophist* 229e-230b).

This method of refutation is the Socratic *elenchus*, but shaming the soul through refutation in order to remove mere opinion is a delicate craft. There is additional difficulty surrounding this method because a student may not be able to recognize the difference between a genuine *elenchus*, namely, one that aims to disabuse someone of false beliefs, and a mere imitation of such an *elenchus*. For example, with their eristic arguments the frivolous sophists imitate the method of refutation, perverting it into a means for cheap victory that does not aim to disabuse anyone of false beliefs. While Socrates himself is at times mistaken for a lover of victory (e.g., *Gorgias* 515b), he is

¹⁸ In this regard I am interested in a project similar to Richard S. Bluck, *Plato's Sophist* (Manchester, 1975). However, I do not necessarily agree with him insofar as he concludes that all of the definitions are attempts to identify individual types of sophists.

¹⁹ Nicholas P. White's translation in Cooper, *Complete Works*.

²⁰ Sprague, 'The *Euthydemus* Revisited' in *Plato*, ed. Robinson and Brisson, p. 11 has also noticed that this division in the *Sophist* describes someone 'of the Euthydemian kind'.

²¹ Terence Irwin, *Plato Gorgias* (Oxford, 1979), p. 136.

²² This reflects the *Protagoras*' distinction between education that produces one particular skill (*epi technêi*) and education for the sake of learning itself (*epi paideiai*) (313b-c).

‘driven to win’ rather than ‘being driven to win for the sake of winning.’²³ Socrates believes that refutation is the service one friend does for another.²⁴

The other method of education, admonition, teaches pupils to imitate or repeat behavior that has not been rebuked. Protagoras serves as a prime example of how flattering sophistry relies heavily on admonition. His students are supposed to learn by memorizing and reciting poetry, for instance, and by being corrected when mistakes are made. Failing to win the favor of a particular crowd is perhaps the most imposing reproach of all. These procedures have the effect of encouraging behavior that has been positively reinforced and curtailing the actions that have been dismissed by admonition. However, this results in the student substituting the judgment of teachers and non-expert crowds for his/her own critical thinking. Becoming a student of rhetoric transforms one of the faces in a non-expert crowd into someone who knows what faces in a non-expert crowd find plausible. So, even after the rhetorical educational experience, the unknowing student remains vulnerable to being deceived by someone who knows more precisely because this sort of education does not encourage critical thinking. The vulnerability of uncritical thinkers is easily exploited, and the expert imitator is proud to offer deceit in the place of truth to those who are at a distance from knowledge.

According to the Stranger, the exploitative instructor puts appearances (that is, inaccurate representations) rather than likenesses in front of students (*Sophist* 234d-e).²⁵ Do sophists offer their students appearances deliberately? This question would surely be asked by any former students lucky enough to discover that their previous experiences were with inaccurate representations. The Stranger claims that the sophist is a belief-mimicker, namely, the one who lacks knowledge of how to create an accurate image (*Sophist* 267e). But there are two kinds of belief-mimickers: the first sort is one who is ‘foolish and thinks he knows the things he only has beliefs about’ and ‘the other sort has been around a lot of discussions, and so by temperament he’s suspicious and

²³ Weiss, ‘Winning’, p. 72, n. 7.

²⁴ If one loves wisdom itself, then one will want it to be as universal as possible. As in the *Lysis*, Socrates introduces a broadened sense of friendship that includes the responsibility to educate friends. We see this in practice as Socrates asks his interlocutors to correct him if ever he is wrong; he refers to this as the kindness that should be offered to a friend (*Gorgias* 470c, 504c, 506c). Additional references to friendship in the *Gorgias* should be noted at 473a, 499c, 500b, 507e and 519e. Furthermore, he claims that our concern for the souls of our friends should extend beyond our willingness to refute each other in conversation, but it should pursue justice for them if their souls are ever in need of that treatment. Socrates claims that our obligation to educate our friends requires us to bring anyone for whom we care to justice if they do wrong, since justice ‘gets rid of the worst thing there is’ (*Gorgias* 480d).

²⁵ An appearance differs from a likeness in that a likeness is a proportional, accurate representation of the imitated original while an appearance represents proportions that appear beautiful rather than accurate. As Kenneth Dorter, *Form and Good in Plato’s Eleatic Dialogues: The Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 135 writes, the maker of an appearance ‘compensates for the distorting effect of the audience’s perspective... Thus, in an important sense the semblance [appearance] is not the original.’ But it is more unlike the original than is a mere likeness.

fearful that he doesn't know the things that he pretends in front of others to know' (*Sophist* 268a). The former is *haploos* (a simple imitator), since his deception is unintentional; presumably he would make accurate images if he knew how. On the other hand, the latter is *eirōnikos* (an insincere imitator), since he *pretends* to be unaware of his own ignorance.

This facade is diametrically opposed to Socratic irony because Socrates conceals what we suspect is greater knowledge than he alleges to possess, concealing it because what he secretly possesses may rise only to the level of true belief.²⁶ And when he suspects his own ignorance about something he confesses it and then examines what is perplexing him. But the insincere imitator suspects his own ignorance about something and avoids both the confession and the ensuing examination. Feigning ignorance of one's own lack of knowledge is not only an act of deceit toward others but also shirks one's intellectual obligation, limiting one's own potential for growth.

Still in pursuit of the sophist, the Stranger separates the ironic/insincere imitator into two types, the demagogue and the sophist. Theaetetus draws the conclusion that the demagogue is the imitator of a statesman and that the sophist is the imitator of a wise man (*Sophist* 268c). The demagogue who uses long speeches typically engages the strategic method of flattering audiences, telling them the sorts of things they want to hear and find impressive. Theaetetus' contrast of a demagogue with a statesman is consistent with the notion that a flattering sophist prioritizes conventional political concerns, such as the desire for wealth and a good reputation, over concern for real politics, that is, the care of the soul. Meanwhile, the insincere imitator who forces people into contradictions with short addresses in private conversations engages the strategic method of impressing spectators with a certain command of language. This sophist imitating the wise person who knows how to use words correctly. But unlike the philosopher, he does not apply this knowledge to the pursuit of living well.²⁷ Instead, this sophist rests content with being forthrightly frivolous.

²⁶ Dorter is concerned about what kind of mimicker Socrates is, and I agree with the following assessment. He writes, 'Throughout the dialogues, including the *Theaetetus*, Plato shows himself well aware of the difficulty, and perhaps impossibility, of giving exceptionless definitions of philosophical concepts, that is, perfectly accurate images in words. Does this mean that when he has given us imperfect verbal models (as Socrates often admits to doing) he is producing semblances rather than images, and practicing sophistry rather than philosophy? Unlike the sophists he does not deliberately distort his models in accordance with his audience's point of view. The distortion is involuntary and unavoidable' (*Form and Good*, p. 137). Surely philosophers are not striving for mere likenesses, but perhaps likenesses are the best one can do when trying to articulate ideas about the Forms. One reason that the philosopher would settle for this consolation prize is that these linguistic shortcomings are unfortunate requirements for conversing with others. Furthermore, one may not be able to make one's own soul Justice itself, for example, but one can certainly strive to make one's soul an accurate image of Justice. Settling for images may be a requirement for thinking about, discussing, and instantiating the Forms. The goal becomes then to create the most accurate images possible regardless of how pleasant and popular they may be.

²⁷ Cf. *Euthydemus* 277e-278d.

One may wonder why Plato has the Stranger apply the term ‘sophist’ only to the subdivision of ironic/insincere imitation that uses short addresses. Isn’t the demagogue also a sophist? It seems odd that the Stranger does not in general call ironic/insincere imitation ‘sophistry’ and then proceed to divide that concept into demagoguery and some other term. Let us recall *Gorgias* 464b-465d, which is similar to the final division in the *Sophist* insofar as at *Gorgias* 465c the term ‘sophist’ is neither used as the general term to describe the sort of flattery that imitates politics nor is it applied to both of the two subdivisions of this general sort of flattery. As in the *Sophist*, Plato chooses to apply the term ‘sophist’ to only one of the two subdivisions of the general concept. In the *Gorgias* politics is depicted as one craft with two branches (legislation and justice), and as such it is imitated by one entity (flattery) that likewise has two subdivisions (sophistry and oratory). If it is correct to see flattery in the *Gorgias* as parallel or identical to ironic/insincere imitation in the *Sophist*, then one expects for sophistry to be used the same way in both passages, which would lead the reader to see oratory and demagoguery as interchangeable.

Plato has Socrates hint at this when he says, ‘because they are so close, sophists and orators tend to be mixed together as people who work in the same area and concern themselves with the same things’ (*Gorgias* 465c). Identifying the long speeches of the demagogue with oratory both makes sense and is an attractive interpretation because it has Plato being consistent in his use of the term ‘sophist’ in the *Gorgias* and *Sophist*. What is centrally important about these two passages is that in both, even though Plato has the general concept of sophistry in mind, he attempts to draw attention to the subtle difference between two types of sophistic strategy. Given that sophistry is an image of philosophy, without perceiving the distinction between frivolous and flattering sophistic methods, we lose sight of the two distinct ways sophistry imitates philosophy.

III. Motives in the Polis

The forthrightly frivolous sophistry exemplified by the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus is the impenitent life of verbal contests engaged in merely for the sake of victory and the fame and wealth that follow from victory. The sly flatterers are at heart just as victory-loving as the forthrightly frivolous sophists, but they attempt to hide their love of victory behind a veil of concern for ideas such as citizenship, justice, and virtue. Even though the brothers claim in the *Euthydemus* to be able to teach virtue (273d), these sophists exhibit no interest whatsoever in discussing virtue. The demonstration they give makes clear that they are not serious and their real interest is asserting their cleverness not by testing ideas but by ‘refuting whatever may be said, *no matter whether it is true or false*’ (*Euthydemus* 272a-b; emphasis added). Meanwhile the slyly flattering sophistry exemplified by Protagoras and Gorgias is marked by being persuasive about agreeable ideas rather than refuting them. Thus, even though all sophists engage in public rhetoric because they are motivated by the quest for victory, fame, and wealth, they use different strategies to pursue this aim.

A. Frivolity and Forthrightness in *Euthydemus*

The *Euthydemus* introduces Plato’s readers to the archetypal verbal warrior whose eristic “form of fighting” does not search for truth but instead pursues only

victory.²⁸ Before Clinias first replies to the brothers' questioning, Socrates says, 'Just at this moment Dionysodorus leaned a little toward me and, smiling all over his face, whispered in my ear and said, I may tell you beforehand, Socrates, that whichever way the boy answers he will be refuted' (*Euthydemus* 275e). Such is the character of eristic argument; its business is refuting whichever side of an argument is maintained by one's opponent (*Euthydemus* 275d-276c, 276d-277c). Attempting to explain this method to Clinias who is unfamiliar with it, Socrates describes their method as 'the correct use of words' which is 'the first part of the sophistic mysteries' (*Euthydemus* 277e).²⁹

Socrates is critical of eristic talent because it fails to require anything more substantial than just the clever use of words. As a result, Socrates claims to expect that the brothers will proceed to substantial subject matter; Socrates tells Clinias at the start that the brothers' wisdom 'has to do with important matters and not mere trivia' (*Euthydemus* 273c). However, the brothers have no intention of discussing any of the things Socrates considers important. Finally, Socrates voices his disapproval of this sort of whimsy when he says:

I call these things 'frivolity' because even if a man were to learn many or even all such things, he would be none the wiser as to how matters stand but would only be able to make distinctions in words, just like the people who pull the chair out from under a man who is going to sit down and then laugh gleefully when they see him sprawling on his back. So you must think of their performance as having been mere play (*Euthydemus* 278b-c).

Although Socrates advocates Prodicus' call for knowledge of the correct use of words (*Euthydemus* 277e), Socrates cautions Clinias that mastery of words alone is not what philosophy is. Thus, he urges the brothers to show Clinias 'serious things' (*ta spoudaia*) (*Euthydemus* 278c).

The frivolous sophist has a knack for appearing to use words well. In this way the sophist imitates the logical precision to which philosophers aspire. But, unlike genuine philosophers, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus do not possess any significant respect for *logos*, for words or ideas. The brothers detest Socrates' continued attempts to clarify his answers to their questions, and they chastise Socrates whenever he attempts to qualify his responses (*Euthydemus* 295b, 295e, 296a, 296b, 298a). Socrates is dedicated

²⁸ Imagine someone like Zeno being compared to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Zeno comes off more like a professor pointing out philosophical paradoxes (e.g., the apparent tension between causal determinism and free will, the apparent tension between a standard theistic notion of God and the existence of evil, etc.). These paradoxes, which are more-or-less impossible to resolve, are not presented to students in order to make the professor's ability to argue seem superior to that of the student. Instead, they are presented to open students' minds to philosophically problematic ideas. So it is with Zeno, but Euthydemus and Dionysodorus' presentations are not in this spirit. Instead, they are designed simply to highlight their prowess at winning arguments.

²⁹ This phrase leads the reader to anticipate an account of the sophistic mysteries' second part. However, readers are never explicitly presented with an explanation of what Plato's Socrates has in mind here. Nevertheless, I suspect that the 'second part' is the slyly flattering aspect of sophistry.

to the clarity of the argument and the precise attention to language from which clarity follows; his purpose in providing precise answers is to avoid words and negations that 'may trip [them] up' (*Euthydemus* 296a). By contrast, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus choose to ignore Socrates' careful qualifications in favor of fallacious arguing.

One might suggest that Euthydemus' and Dionysodorus' preposterous arguments are intended to test their listeners' ability to see through their verbal traps. Socrates indeed passes these tests. But it is unlikely that the brothers are using eristic as a way to explore language. For if they were using it as such, then they would not fear following the argument in any direction, even one that opposes what they have previously said. Yet, such a fear is apparent when Euthydemus says to Dionysodorus, 'You are ruining the argument...and this fellow here will turn out to be not knowing, and then he will be knowing and not knowing at the same time' (*Euthydemus* 297a). He makes this remark because he anticipates how this contradiction will defy their claim that there are no contradictions (*Euthydemus* 284d-286b).³⁰ This statement proves decisively that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are interested only in manipulating words to secure victories in verbal contests. So, their attitude towards arguments diverges from Socrates'. As Weiss writes, 'Socrates may be in the game of refutation and he may at times play just as dirty as sophists, but he will do so in the interest of refuting false views, that is, views that he regards as false – not in the interest of refuting any view, whether false or true.'³¹

Socrates possesses an enormous respect for words, ideas, and other serious things. He wants Euthydemus and Dionysodorus to show Clinias these 'serious things,' *ta spoudaia*, but the content of their conversations is cold, empty, what Ctesippus calls 'frigid' (*Euthydemus* 284e). Observing their comfort with being perceived as frigid, Socrates claims to appreciate that the brothers are not slaves to public opinion. He says:

Among the many fine things which belong to your arguments, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, there is one which is the most magnificent of all, that *you care nothing for the many*, or in fact, *for men of consequence or reputation*, but only for persons of your own sort. And I am convinced that there are very few men like you who would appreciate these arguments, but that the majority understand them so little that I feel sure they would be more ashamed to refute others with arguments of this sort than to be refuted by them (*Euthydemus* 303c-d; emphasis added).

There is something admirable in not being intimidated by the judgments of others as well as in being forthright. This may be the only truly admirable quality found in frivolous sophistry. Furthermore, Plato may try to warn the reader not to expect the

³⁰ In addition to their claim that contradictions do not exist, they also argue that falsehood is impossible (*Euthydemus* 283e-284c). One might interpret this to mean that they are relativists in the same manner as Protagoras, since if there is no falsehood, then every statement is true (see, e.g., Kerferd, *Sophistic Movement*, p. 72). However, as the claim that falsehood is impossible is simply part of their eristic gaming, it is not logically substantiated. Furthermore, for an argument that the sophists are not relativists, see Richard Bett, 'The Sophists and Relativism', *Phronesis*, 34 (1989), pp. 139-169.

³¹ Weiss, 'Winning', pp. 70-1.

brothers to discuss serious matters, by distinguishing them at the dialogue's outset from the sophist who takes up important issues. This distinction might be made symbolically when Socrates informs Crito that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus were exiled from Thurii (*Euthydemus* 271c), a colony whose laws were written by Protagoras, the primary exemplar of the sort of sophistry that flatters audiences with discussion of *ta spoudaia*.

B. 'Serious Things': Slyness and Flattery in the *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*

In the *Gorgias* Socrates wonders if one ought to live the way the sophists encourage, that is, 'to engage in these manly activities, to make speeches among the people, to practice oratory, and to be active in the sort of politics you people engage in these days' or if one should live 'the life spent in philosophy' (*Gorgias* 500c-d). He says that this question is the most serious one of all, and to answer it they must figure out how the two lifestyles differ from each other.³² These lives are traditional opponents in Greek tragedy, most notably, in Euripides' *Antiope*, to which Callicles refers. Euripides depicts brothers who represent two different ways of life: Zethus promotes the hands-on business of politics (as politics is usually construed), while Amphion lives the life of study and reflection. In the words of Snell, 'One of them adheres to the *vita activa*, the other to the *vita contemplativa*.'³³ Yet, as Nightingale notes, 'Plato's characters are more complex. On the one hand, Callicles (unlike his prototype Zethus) is no enemy to intellectual pursuits... Socrates, on his part, also diverges from his tragic predecessor. Whereas Amphion had totally removed himself from civic affairs, Socrates is a quite different animal.'³⁴

Socrates involves himself in the public life of Athens by spending his days talking with others in the agora. He is political and calls for us to understand politics in a more wide-ranging fashion than is customary. Just as Callicles is not a mere double of Zethus, neither does oratory turn out to be identical to politics, contrary to Callicles' view. Meanwhile, just as Socrates is not Amphion's asocial doppelganger, neither does philosophy turn out to be the reclusive, apolitical endeavor that Callicles, the *Euthydemus*' speechwriter, and countless others take it to be. For Socrates, politics is more wide-ranging than the life exemplified by professional politicians like Zethus and Callicles because, even though hardly anyone attempts the true political craft, anyone can.³⁵ Socrates also contends that the sort of politics envisioned by Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles is in fact not really politics at all.

What these people call politics Socrates calls flattering oratory (*têi kolakikêi*), which stands in contrast with true oratory (*têi alêthinêi rhorikêi*) (*Gorgias* 517a). Gorgias' pride in oratory's ability to deceive non-experts confirms Socrates' contention that oratory is *kolakeia* (a kind of flattery), which Dodds explains as follows.

Kolakeian is conventionally translated 'flattery', but the Greek term applies to a wider range of actions and also carries a more emphatic implication of moral baseness... The *kolax* is what the

³² Cf. *Alcibiades* 118b-c.

³³ Bruno Snell, *Scenes from Greek Drama* (Berkeley, 1964), p. 70.

³⁴ Andrea Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 70.

³⁵ See, e.g., Socrates' broad understanding of politics compared with Phaedrus' narrow understanding at *Phaedrus* 261a-b.

eighteenth century called a toad-eater or lickspittle and schoolboys called a bumsucker. *Kolakeia* is the antithesis of the forthright integrity of word and act practised by Socrates... In its political application... *kolakeia* stands for the time-serving opportunism which panders to public taste instead of trying to educate it.³⁶

Flattering orators promote whatever is popular without concern for what deserves to be promoted and what deserves to be exposed. As Socrates accuses Callicles, 'If you say anything in the Assembly and the Athenian demos denies it, you shift your ground and say what it wants to hear' (*Gorgias* 481d). In the law courts the speakers argue on opposite sides about justice, but justice is not one thing and at the same time its opposite; so, they cannot all have knowledge of justice.³⁷ In this we see that, unlike true oratory, which engages with something unchanging (that is, justice) and applies it to thinking about our changing world, *rhêtorikê* is occupied by the ever-changing trends in what is popular.

This flattery contrasts with the other sophistic strategy, frivolity, because, while sophists like Gorgias and Protagoras are concerned with *saying* popular things, frivolous sophists are only interesting in *being* popular as a result of winning their rhetorical contests. All sophists pursue fame in order to attract students and make money, but they are distinguished by two different strategies for accomplishing their aim. The flatterers choose a direct path of flattering crowds by appearing to be concerned with civic affairs and saying things that are easy to agree with.³⁸ They believe that, if they were to win verbal battles by resorting to outrageous arguments, they would sound frivolous and become unpopular with audiences. Accordingly, the flattering sophists choose to be sly, while the frivolous sophists are forthright about their hope that appearing clever will win them fame, even though most people do not aspire to talk in the outrageous way that frivolous sophists do.

Examples abound of Gorgias trying to flatter his audiences. When Socrates invites Gorgias, who has offered poor definitions of oratory, to continue their discussion Gorgias says that he is willing but he does not want to inconvenience the members of their audience who may be tired (*Gorgias* 458b-c). Here he tries to preserve his own reputation by avoiding further refutation (there have been four to that point in the dialogue) but masks that motivation behind convenient concern for the audience's comfort. He hopes that in so doing they will believe that he is indeed the same sort of person that Socrates claims to be, namely, one who does not mind being refuted in the process of making a given subject clearer (*Gorgias* 457e-458c). The impulse to say what will be popular is also what leads Gorgias eventually to claim that he would indeed teach justice to any students without prior knowledge of it (*Gorgias* 460a). Gorgias chooses to be dishonest about his ability to teach justice in order to pander to the conventions of society. As Polus and Callicles point out, Gorgias only makes this claim

³⁶ Dodds, *Gorgias*, p. 225.

³⁷ Cf. *Phaedrus* 261d.

³⁸ Scott R. Hemmenway, 'Sophistry Exposed: Socrates on the Unity of Virtue in the *Protagoras*', *Ancient Philosophy*, 16 (1996), p. 6 also suspects of Protagoras that he prefers sounding 'respectable' to being 'more precise about his true offerings'.

because he knows that it would be unpopular with the crowd if he were to admit that he cannot teach justice because he does not himself know what it really is (*Gorgias* 461b-c; 482c-d). As Callicles points out at 482c-e, Polus eventually repeats the very mistake he recognized Gorgias making, namely, assenting to a claim he does not actually believe is true in order to please the crowd.

The desire exhibited by Polus and Gorgias to win popularity also appears in the *Protagoras*. Concerning whether or not virtue can be taught, Protagoras' initial position holds that virtue can be taught, which is predictable given that he is one who makes a living claiming to teach the art of citizenship (*Protagoras* 319a). Thus, in front of a crowd of men in pursuit of virtue and teachers who can impart it, Protagoras begins with a claim that he imagines will be popular with the audience. He claims that older sophists tried to conceal sophistry behind masks, such as poetry, for fear of being hated and that he believes that they never really succeeded at hiding 'from the powerful men in the cities the true purpose of their disguises' (*Protagoras* 316d-a). Here he flatters his listeners by claiming that the people of the cities are too smart to fall for the tricks of the older sophists. He then proceeds to admit that he is indeed a sophist; from this move he gains the audience's respect by appearing to be honest and courageous.³⁹ Yet, the sneakiness of this is betrayed when he says that he had 'given thought to other precautions as well, so as to avoid, God willing, suffering any ill from admitting [he is] a sophist' (*Protagoras* 317b-c). He does not say what these other precautions are, but the reader eventually deciphers that his real defense against being hated is pretending to care for virtue more than money and fame.

Naturally Socrates sees through this pretense, but he worries that Hippocrates and other prospective students of sophists like Protagoras will not. Knowing where to direct one's attention is a problem for the learner, and the intention to direct one's concentration to the wiser teacher will likely lead the student to choose the one who makes a living merely *seeming* to be wise. Protagoras goes to great lengths to seem wise. For example, in the face of Socrates' request to 'take the 'if' out' and put their ideas 'on the line' (*Protagoras* 331c), Protagoras has no motivation to put himself and the argument to the test. Instead, his interest is in keeping the admiration of the audience by *not* putting himself through any test he might fail.

Protagoras sees Socrates merely as a rhetorical opponent, and he treats their conversation as a contest that offers him a chance to preserve and extend his reputation. Protagoras admits to Socrates that not being able to carry on the discussion as he would conduct an argument in a verbal contest makes him uncomfortable because it could cost him his reputation and fame. He says, 'I have had verbal contests with many people, and if I were to accede to your request and do as my opponent demanded, I would not be thought superior to anyone, nor would Protagoras be a name to be reckoned with among the Greeks' (*Protagoras* 335a). This desire for 'a name to be reckoned with' eventually causes Protagoras to resort to the same behavior that he has criticized, namely, masking sophistry as something else (in this case, the interpretation of poetry) in order to shift the heat away from himself and onto Socrates' ability to analyze poetry (*Protagoras* 339a).

³⁹ For an account of Protagoras' apparent courage as in reality 'prudent caution or cautious prudence,' see Hemmenway, 'Sophistry Exposed', pp. 4-5.

Of course this effort is unsuccessful as Socrates handles the poem in question and shifts the heat back to Protagoras, saying that the best people avoid discussing poetry because it leads to an argument 'about something they can never finally decide' (*Protagoras* 347e). Thus, Socrates denounces Protagoras' attempt to derail the conversation that was revealing Protagoras' lack of interest in having the sorts of conversations about virtue that Socrates enjoys. On the whole, Protagoras' attitude toward dialectic reveals what makes slyly flattering sophists especially untrustworthy.

Despite the fact that the *Protagoras* ends in an *aporia* concerning what virtue is, in his conversation with Protagoras Socrates demonstrates his genuine commitment to figuring out what virtue is and whether virtue can be taught. There are three main examples in the *Protagoras* of Socrates being motivated by his commitment to inquiry rather than by a desire to say popular things.⁴⁰ First, when the discussion is on the verge of collapse Socrates suggests that he is willing to yield his preferred role as questioner to Protagoras, if it will enable them to continue the discussion. Protagoras, on the other hand, 'wanted no part of it' but agreed to be the questioner because he realized how much that would be appreciated by the crowd (*Protagoras* 338d-e). Additionally, the role of questioner is turned back over to Socrates when Protagoras is shamed by Alcibiades into continuing with the discussion at 348c. Secondly, at the end of the discussion when Socrates realizes that they have been discussing virtue without knowing what it actually is, he suggests that they 'continue until [they] come through to what virtue is in itself,' which Protagoras declines (*Protagoras* 361d). If Protagoras' defense of teaching virtue is not motivated by his interest in defending the possibility of his own profession, then he should be as enthusiastic as Socrates is about overcoming the *aporia*. Finally, Socrates' genuine concern for discovering truth is demonstrated by his willingness to modify his position on the question of whether virtue can be taught without feeling that he will lose ground in the argument (*Protagoras* 360e-361d).

Unlike Socrates, the flattering sophist hides behind a veil of commitment to popular ideas because inquiry into truth is often difficult and unpopular. What most people want from sophists is a way to make their lives easier. Think, for example, of Strepsiades in Aristophanes' *Clouds* who, looking to argue his way out of large debts, enters the Pseudodokimion because 'for a small fee, these gentlemen ... will teach you how to successfully argue any case, right or wrong'.⁴¹ Philosophy is not typically useful for such purposes as Strepsiades'. In fact, the philosophical activity tends to make life more challenging (rather than less) insofar as it brings us face to face with questions that are either difficult to answer or perhaps unanswerable, and among the scarce answers are some unexpected truths.

Philosophers value the philosophical activity because of its ability to bring philosophers toward truth, which is the object of the philosopher's desire (rather than fame or wealth). The philosopher considers thinking through all of this challenging and beneficial, but not everyone will see it that way. So, faced with maintaining one's reputation and wealth, the flattering sophist who is asked to make life better or easier is

⁴⁰ For passages related to the importance to philosophers (including Socrates) of inquiry, knowledge, and truth rather than popularity, fame, or wealth, see *Apology* 17b-c, 18a, 22d-23a; *Gorgias* 505e; *Republic* 354a-c, 475e, 485d, 501c-d, 537d, 581d-e; *Phaedo* 65a-e, 91a-c; *Phaedrus* 230a; *Protagoras* 338d-e, 360e-361d; and *Theaetetus* 173c-174b.

⁴¹ Aristophanes, *Clouds*, trans. Peter Meineck (Indianapolis, 2000), p. 9.

tempted to feed pleasant appearances to his pupils and audiences. For example, consider when Protagoras pursues the admiration of the audience by telling them that he intends to offer them a story rather than an argument because he thinks it will be 'more pleasant' (*Protagoras* 320c).⁴² There will always be a tension between working to make truth present to a student's soul, which may be unpopular and difficult, and the flattering sophists' self-interest, which leads them to desire to attract more students by being popular speakers, whose words are interesting and easy to follow. A student's soul is endangered when entrusted to a sophist who ignores what is truly good in favor of pleasant appearances.

All things considered there are strengths and weaknesses associated with both sophistic strategies. One can see the frivolous sophists' avoidance of discussing serious ideas as a flaw because it indicates that they lack interest in the subjects that Socrates presents as centrally important. So, one can prefer the orientation of sly flatterers to the empty frivolity of forthright sophists. However, although the flattering sophists claim to be concerned with justice, virtue, citizenship, and the like, they are portrayed by the dialogues as failing to have any genuine interest in inquiring earnestly into such matters. Their main interest is not 'to take a good hard look at things that continually perplex' them (*Protagoras* 348c); rather, their interest is self-interest, just as it is for the frivolous sophists.

As a result, the central distinction between these two sophistic strategies is that flattering sophists have a more devious strategy for being popular than forthrightly frivolous sophists do. Conversely what unifies the sophists is being practitioners of a knack (*empeiria*), as defined at *Gorgias* 463a-465a. The products of an *empeiria* imitate what is crafted, and the practitioners of an *empeiria* aim merely at gratifying the consumer (for the sake of serving their own interests) rather than at producing something truly excellent.⁴³ Their merchandise is made to look as much like first-rate products as possible without putting forth the effort to create something truly well-crafted. Sophists consider *empeiria* sufficient and appropriate for interacting with their

⁴² *Gorgias* 505c-d and 523a also point to the tension between arguments and stories. Nevertheless, Socrates also tells stories himself at the end of the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* as well as at other points as well (for example, in the *Gorgias* he tells the myth of the waterbearers and in the *Symposium* he tells the story of what he learned from Diotima). Does Socrates tell these stories because he is anxious to be popular and believes that telling stories rather than using arguments will make him popular? I believe that the answer to this central question is a resounding 'no'. In contrast with the way he has Socrates use analogies in order to make ideas clearer to interlocutors, the stories he has Socrates tell are not intended to make the ideas in question seem pleasant and/or easy to understand. Instead, it seems that Plato uses myths to make the ideas in question harder to understand rather than easier. I suspect that the myths are intended to challenge the interlocutor to see beyond the tale being considered. Since Plato's use of myth is not the object of my investigation, I'll leave full exploration of this hypothesis for another time.

⁴³ See *Republic* 341c-342e; 345c-d.

followers because they are more committed to sustaining their livelihood than they are to their students.⁴⁴

IV. The Pedagogical Methods of Socrates and the Sophists

A. Teaching Virtue: Cowherding versus Feeding

Revealing his own idea of education as the care of the soul, Socrates claims that ‘everything concerning whether you do well or ill in your life depends on whether [the soul] becomes worthy (*chrêstou*) or worthless’ (*Protagoras* 313b). If Socrates is correct, then what one chooses to learn is of the highest importance. Yet, what students learn is profoundly affected by *how* they learn, by the pedagogical methods of their teacher(s). While it is problematic for students to recognize teachers with the wrong motives, students do have access to the information that can be gleaned from a prospective teacher’s choice of pedagogical method.

Traditionally the term ‘teacher’ has been applied only to those who employ the conventional pedagogical method that consists in a student mastering the knowledge explicitly offered by a teacher. I refer to this conventional pedagogy as the feeding method. Socrates explicitly rejects the conventional feeding method when he says, ‘Education isn’t what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes’ (*Republic* 518b-c). In terms of this conventional understanding of pedagogy, Socrates’ disavowal of teaching is straightforward because he never attempts to transfer knowledge directly to pupils. Nevertheless, Socrates is involved in a public educational project.

In what is perhaps Socrates’ most genuinely insightful self-characterization, he says: ‘I believe that I’m one of a few Athenians--so as not to say I’m the only one, but the only one among our contemporaries--to take up the true political craft and practice true politics. This is because the speeches I make on each occasion do not aim at gratification but at what’s best. They don’t aim at what’s most pleasant’ (*Gorgias* 521d).⁴⁵ By declaring his intention to attempt true political craftsmanship, Socrates announces both his quest to improve himself and others as well as his endeavor to be someone who knows how to aim at what is best and who could give an account of the process by which one comes to be improved. In other words, in this passage Socrates has in effect proclaimed his aspiration to be a moral teacher. This claim stands in tension with his

⁴⁴ Despite her otherwise quite positive review of sophistry, which includes her claim that Athenians were inclined to have conversations with Socrates only because of the intellectual sophistication that sophists brought to Athens, Broadie, ‘Sophists and Socrates’, pp. 90-1 speculates that the angry reactions that refuted interlocutors exhibit are probably caused by ‘the pattern of the sophists [which] had led many to assume that the point of engaging in systematic discourse was to demonstrate one’s superior expertise on the topics in question’. In this regard, sophistry’s wealth- and victory-loving character negatively affects interlocutors who might otherwise have come to believe that to refute someone is the act of a friend. Someone who believes this does not fear refutation and, as a result, is capable of being liberated from ignorance by a Socratic *elenchus*. However, the sophistic movement has trained the people with whom Socrates converses to become embarrassed rather than being excited at the prospect of being disabused of false beliefs, and therefore, their capacity for learning is impaired.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Alcibiades* 119b.

famous denial of being a teacher (*Apology* 19c-d, 33a-b). While Socrates' pedagogical method is on display in every interaction he has with interlocutors, it is symbolized in an interesting way by agricultural hunger imagery that he introduces in the *Protagoras*. The cowherd metaphor calls for attention precisely because it reinforces the point made by the midwife metaphor in the *Theaetetus* about Socrates' pedagogical approach.

Socrates worries that perhaps virtue cannot be taught by anyone. His concern about virtue's teachability appears to stem from his acquaintance with 'men who are good themselves but have never succeeded in making anyone else better, whether family members or total strangers' (*Protagoras* 320b). If knowledge of virtue could be transmitted from one person to another, then virtuous people would certainly teach moral knowledge to their children and friends. Yet, it is clear that moral education does not work this way. On more than one occasion Socrates singles out Pericles as an example of a virtuous person who is supposed to be a 'caretaker of men' (*Gorgias* 516c) but nevertheless fails to step into the role of moral teacher. In two passages Socrates uses agricultural imagery as a tool to communicate his disappointment in Pericles for letting both his sons and his citizens stray. First, Socrates says:

Look at Pericles, the father of these young men here. He gave them a superb education in everything that teachers can teach, but as for what he himself is really wise in [virtue], he neither teaches them that himself nor has anyone else teach them either,⁴⁶ and his sons have to *graze* like stray sacred cattle and meet with virtue *on their own* wherever they happen upon it (*Protagoras* 320a; emphasis added).⁴⁷

In likening Pericles' sons to cattle in need of food,⁴⁸ Socrates makes hunger the symbol of ignorance and eating the symbol of learning; and teaching, as a result, involves a choice between feeding the hungry or putting them out to graze. Moreover, there are two ways of putting the hungry out to graze, namely, either completely on their own, which Socrates critically accuses Pericles of having done, or with a cowherd to tend them.⁴⁹ The careful reader is not at all surprised to find Plato using the imagery of hunger as a metaphor for ignorance here, given that earlier in the same dialogue he has Socrates describe the product peddled by a sophist as the 'provisions upon which the soul is nourished' (*Protagoras* 313c),⁵⁰ going on to compare the sophist to a food merchant (*Protagoras* 313d). Second, Socrates expresses his criticism of Pericles at *Gorgias* 516b-c when he says that Pericles, a supposed caretaker of man, showed his citizens 'to

⁴⁶ Compare this, for instance, to Xenophon's stories of Socrates sending some of his companions to study with other people, such as Dionysodorus (*Memorabilia* 3.1.1-3). For accounts of Plato's Socrates also sending companions to study with others, see *Laches* 180c-d and *Theaetetus* 151b.

⁴⁷ Emended translation. Cf. *Alcibiades* 118d-119a.

⁴⁸ See *Apology* 20a-b for another instance of Socrates using an agricultural metaphor to describe the educational needs of young people. There too he alludes to cowherding when he asks Callias who would tend his two sons if they were 'colts or calves.'

⁴⁹ References to cowherding also appear at *Minos* 318a and *Statesman* 261d, 275a-276d.

⁵⁰ Patrick Coby, *Socrates and the Sophistic Enlightenment: A Commentary on Plato's Protagoras* (Lewisburg, 1987), p. 52 has also noticed this connection.

be wilder than they were when he took them over.’ This language mirrors that of *Ion* 540c where Plato has Socrates suggest that rhapsodes falsely believe that they know better than a cowherd what to ‘say to calm down his cattle when they’re going wild.’⁵¹

While Socrates uses this agricultural hunger imagery as a tool to criticize Pericles, we might think of Socrates’ own relation to the feeding of cattle. We can see Socrates’ interaction with his companions symbolized by the cowherd who gathers up the stray, hungry cattle and guides them toward a pasture, where they feed themselves by grazing freely. This imagery is the ideal metaphor for teaching and learning in the mind of Socrates, given that he says in the *Republic* that future guardians should be protected from grazing ‘in a meadow of bad grass, where they crop and graze in many different places every day until, little by little, they unwittingly accumulate a large evil in their souls’ (*Republic* 401c) and that what philosophers should do once they’re old enough to retire from politics and military service is to ‘graze freely in the pastures of philosophy’ (*Republic* 498b).⁵² Meanwhile, in the *Phaedrus*, another dialogue in which Plato has Socrates emphasize the importance of feeding the soul with proper nourishment (*Phaedrus* 246e, 248b-c, 251b-c), Plato goes as far as to describe ‘the plain where truth stands’ as ‘this pasture (*nome*)’ that ‘has the grass (*leimônos*) that is the right food for the best part of the soul’ (248b-c). All of these passages confirm that the philosopher sees the life of inquiry as something well characterized by agricultural hunger imagery. Furthermore, seeing the similarity between Socrates and a cowherd resolves the apparent tension between Socrates’ denial in the *Apology* of being a teacher (19c-d, 33a-b) and his claim in the *Gorgias* to attempt the true *politikê technê* (521d-e).

All of these agricultural hunger images call to mind a fuller version of what Vlastos begins to suggest when he distinguishes education ‘in the conventional sense, where to ‘teach’ is simply to transfer knowledge from a teacher’s to a learner’s mind’ from ‘engaging would-be learners in elenctic argument to make them aware of their own ignorance and enable them to discover for themselves the truth the teacher had held back.’⁵³ If Socrates is correct in thinking that virtue cannot be fed to a student, then a moral teacher must aspire instead to be like a cowherd who attends to cattle such that they are not stray. In order to flesh out what is meant by enabling students to discover truth for themselves, let me describe Socratic teaching and learning as consisting of the following.

First, if the teacher is going to be able to put would-be learners in a position to chew on conceptual grass, s/he must know where the ideas worth chewing on (food for thought, so to speak) ‘grow,’ steering clear of the ‘bad grass’ of which *Republic* 401c warns. In this regard, even though Socrates claims not to have any knowledge of his own, he knows quite well what is at issue in inquiring into virtue, as is demonstrated by his aptitude for leading discussions. Next, the cowherd-teacher must know how to direct the students toward the pasture where the food for thought grows, that is, where ideas worth examining can be found in order to be chewed on. Socrates is especially

⁵¹ Paul Woodruff’s translation in Cooper, *Complete Works*.

⁵² Thanks to Jeff Turner for pointing out this passage to me.

⁵³ Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 32. One can agree with Vlastos that Socrates does hold something back from his interlocutors, even if questions remain about what, if anything, Socrates knows in the Platonic sense of knowledge.

gifted in this regard. It has oft been noted that his personality has a special power to make others consider ideas that they would otherwise ignore.⁵⁴ To use Kahn's words, 'What looked to the world like Socrates' flirtatious interest in handsome young men was in fact his way of focusing upon them the magnetic power of his own personality and thus drawing them to him 'through the power of love.'⁵⁵ Once drawn in the students of such a cowherd-teacher have the chance to graze on the ideas growing in the pasture if they so choose.

Socrates' work as a cowherd-teacher is complete once he engages students in the conversations we observe in Plato's dialogues. At that point he has put his interlocutors out to graze, that is, he has put them in a position to feed themselves. Hence, Socrates is a teacher, despite the fact that not every interlocutor responds ideally to his particular kind of pedagogy. Once in the pasture students must choose to graze on the conceptual grass or not. And, if they graze, they must decide for themselves which ideas to swallow. By this I mean to suggest that Socrates does not want anyone to believe anything uncritically, even though he does attempt to guide them. He questions his interlocutors in such a way that they must critically examine every idea at hand and decide for themselves whether or not to endorse them. So, the student of the cowherd-teacher is in the presence of ideas rather than being informed of them. In the same fashion, Plato puts various ideas in the mouths of various characters in various settings, leaving the reader to decide what to think about these ideas, and in this way the dialogues put us in the presence of ideas rather than trying to report them to us. It seems clear that Plato learned the pedagogical value of this approach to teaching from Socrates.

Each day Socrates is an exemplar of the philosophical activity, which begins with wondering (*Theaetetus* 155d) about things that are puzzling. His version of education is a mutual exchange that allows him to inquiry alongside his interlocutors. Thus, in Socratic education both 'teacher' and 'student' are learners with the opportunity to be improved by the experience of the dialogue. Socrates chews on ideas with his interlocutors, unlike the cowherd, who does not eat alongside the cattle. In this, finally we see the limit of the agricultural hunger imagery's utility. The cowherd is just an image of the philosophical teacher precisely because it does not capture every aspect of philosophical teaching.

It should, however, be noted that being an exemplar of the life of earnest rational inquiry is not at all the same as encouraging other people to imitate Socrates specifically.⁵⁶ Xenophon writes of his Socrates:

He rescued many from these states by inspiring them with a desire for goodness and offering them hope that, if they took themselves in hand, they would become truly good. At the same

⁵⁴ See, e.g., *Symposium* 216b.

⁵⁵ Charles H. Kahn, 'Aeschines on Socratic Eros', in *Socratic Movement*, ed. Vander Waerdt, p. 94.

⁵⁶ Nehamas, 'What Did Socrates Teach and to Whom Did He Teach It?' *Review of Metaphysics*, 46 (1992), pp 279-306 agrees with me that Socrates is neither a teacher in the conventional sense nor in the sense of offering oneself as a model to be imitated. However, Nehamas does not explore what it means to be a teacher in the sense emphasized here of being a cowherd tending to grazing students.

time he never undertook to teach how this could be done; but by obviously *being* such a person, he made those who spent their time with him hope that, if they followed his example (*mimounenous ekeinon*), they would develop the same character.⁵⁷

Time after time Socrates puts interlocutors in a position to see for themselves that the good life is the life of inquiry, but surely he would want the imitators of whom Xenophon speaks to understand the difference between imitating him in particular and aspiring in general to the pursuit of knowledge. Socrates concedes that some young men do imitate him because they have taken pleasure in watching him question and refute other people (*Apology* 23c-d). Nevertheless, Socrates, unlike the sophists, never encourages anyone to imitate him nor does he endorse imitation.⁵⁸

Socrates' refusal to encourage uncomplicated imitation places an intentional obstacle in front of his interlocutors: they must manage themselves. He wants them to be self-directed because, in the words of Taylor, 'a good human soul is a self-directed soul.'⁵⁹ Those mentioned at *Apology* 23c-d, who may be imitating the wrong things about Socrates, are at least on the right track insofar as they are *automatoi*, following Socrates 'of their own free will.' As a result, Socrates can see in them at least the capacity for self-direction. Despite this capacity, his interlocutors tend to find it difficult to see that the good life is the life of inquiry precisely because they must discover for themselves this notion that Socrates puts them in position to see. On account of this difficulty, Socrates recognizes the utility of associating with those who have the proper disposition (*Theaetetus* 151b, *Charmides* 154e) for chewing on what he puts his friends out to graze on, namely, conversations about serious matters.⁶⁰

The ethical dimension of life is complex enough that there are numerous notions Socrates wants his interlocutors to consider. However, in the dialogues being considered

⁵⁷ Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates*, trans. Hugh Tredennick and Robin Waterfield, (London, 1990), p. 73.

⁵⁸ I agree with Nehamas, 'What Did Socrates Teach', p. 284 that 'we have no evidence for thinking that Plato's Socrates set his life up as a model of what the good life is, even if Plato may have seen and presented him as the best human being of his time.' David Corey, 'How the Sophists Taught Virtue: Exhortation and Association', *History of Political Thought*, 26 (2005), pp. 1-20 offers the contrasting view that Socrates endorses imitation in the same way that the sophists use the method of association.

⁵⁹ Taylor, 'The End of the *Euthyphro*', *Phronesis*, 27 (1982), p. 113.

⁶⁰ Corey, 'The Case against Teaching Virtue for Pay: Socrates and the Sophists', *History of Political Thought*, 23 (2002), pp. 201-3 takes *Euthydemus* 272a-b and 304b as evidence that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are particularly guilty of not being discriminating (with the exception of being able to pay the requisite fee) about those with whom they associate, while he claims that Protagoras, for example, is different. He writes, 'For the fact is that the practice of charging a fee did not *in any way* prevent the sophists from also carefully selecting their students based on other criteria. Indeed, it comes out in the *Protagoras* itself that Protagoras had a number of criteria, some of them used by Socrates as well – age, family, natural talent (as well as being able to pay the fee)' (p. 201). Pace Corey, I suspect that this apparent difference amounts again to the strategic difference between forthrightly frivolous sophists and slyly flattering sophists.

here Socrates is particularly interested in leading students to a critical examination of the value of sophistic education, at the same time as he holds back his actual opinion of it. For example, when faced with Hippocrates' apprehension about whether Protagoras will accept him as a student, Socrates does not announce to Hippocrates his suspicion that what is doubtful is not that Protagoras will take him as a student but rather that there is value in being Protagoras' student (*Protagoras* 310d-312c). Instead, during both the conversation they have in the courtyard as well as the one Socrates has with Protagoras, Socrates puts Hippocrates in a position to evaluate for himself what Protagoras really offers his students. In addition to the ideas involved in their own conversations with Socrates, his friends can also graze on what is revealed by his conversations with the sophists in which he tests their claims about the education they offer.⁶¹

Socrates goes as far as to announce his intention to assist students in inspecting the quality of a sophistic education when he says to Gorgias, 'Perhaps there's actually someone inside who wants to become your pupil. I notice some, in fact a good many, and they may well be embarrassed to question you. So, while you're being questioned by me, consider yourself being questioned by them as well' (*Gorgias* 455c). This comment is intended as much for Gorgias' prospective students as it is for Gorgias himself because Socrates is well aware that embarrassment is not what impedes these students from evaluating a sophist's suitability as a moral teacher. If embarrassment were the only obstacle in front of a student with the same sort of questions Socrates asks about sophistic education, then this problem could be handled relatively easily. In truth it is more likely that these budding learners are simply at a loss about what to ask a prospective teacher. Think, for example, of Chaerephon's inability to question Gorgias effectively (*Gorgias* 447d-448c).

Even once they observe Socrates questioning the sophists on their behalf, most interlocutors still do not understand what is being uncovered. To return to the case of Hippocrates, Plato chooses not to portray Hippocrates as ever really seeing what Socrates has uncovered, namely, that Protagoras is not a craftsman of moral education. This authorial decision calls attention to the limits of what a cowherd-teacher can accomplish. That the *Protagoras* concludes without any account of whether or not Hippocrates remains intent on being Protagoras' student might symbolize that whether students are improved by the guidance of a cowherd-teacher depends entirely upon them, upon their own individual appetites for virtue.

B. Moral Feeding: Feast or Famine?

Sophists like Protagoras and Gorgias turn out to be rather conventional in their method of instruction because they aim to transfer knowledge directly to their students. For example, students were usually required to 'read and memorise writings of the great poets, Homer, Hesiod, and others, chosen because of the moral wisdom which they contained.'⁶² That *memorization* of 'written discussions of important matters' was central

⁶¹ Blank, 'Socratic versus Sophists', p. 7, n27 notes as an example of this sort of testing that at *Memorabilia* 3.1.1-3 Xenophon's Socrates sends one of his friends to study generalship with Dionysodorus and then questions him upon his return about what he has learned, only to send him back once again to Dionysodorus.

⁶² Kerferd, *Sophistic Movement*, p. 37.

to the sophistic curriculum⁶³ demonstrates that the sophists, unlike Socrates, appear confident that sight *can* be put into blind eyes. Mastery of antilogic, the teaching (particularly associated with Protagoras) that for every issue two contradictory arguments can be offered, was one of the elements considered by sophists to be indispensable to a successful citizen. Other pedagogy included question and answer sessions and testing one's ability to speak briefly, which was thought by many, including the author of the *Dissoi Logoi*, to be 'the mark of a man who knows the truth about things.'⁶⁴ In the words of Broadie, 'In short, one would learn to master a range of *formal* devices... The sophists' staple, then, was the study and teaching of communication-skills for exercise in various fairly well defined civic situations.'⁶⁵ While much of this instruction could be directly transferred to students, some of it is fed to students by encouraging them to imitate their teachers. In particular the sophists are famous for including as prominent aspects of the advanced curriculum exhortation ('a speech that inspires its audience to live virtuously')⁶⁶ and association, which Kerferd describes as the 'close attention of teacher with pupil, in a kind of living together.'⁶⁷

From Protagoras' description of the education wherein 'so much care and attention is paid to virtue' (*Protagoras* 326e) we can infer that he champions the use of encouraging and admonishing statements to guide young children toward which actions are to be repeated. He says that the primary education of children consists of statements from their parents and tutors such as 'this is just, that is unjust, this is noble, that is ugly, this is pious, that is impious, he should do this, he should not do that' (*Protagoras* 325c). Once students base their future behavioral decisions on which previous acts were encouraged, they are learning through *mimesis*, that is, they are imitating the guide provided by the instructor. Plato even has Protagoras go so far as to say, 'If [the young student] obeys willingly, fine; if not, *they straighten him out with threats and blows as if he were a twisted, bent piece of wood*' (*Protagoras* 325d; emphasis added). This image could hardly stand in starker contrast with that of a cowherd-teacher tending a student grazing freely in a pasture of conceptual grass. Protagoras goes on to compare the laws, which serve as our moral teachers later in life, to the 'the practice of writing-teachers, who sketch the letters faintly with a pen in workbooks for their beginning students and have them write the letters over the patterns they have drawn' (*Protagoras* 326d).⁶⁸

While mimetic learning is naturally useful in beginning any activity, it is nevertheless a form of being fed, and if the reliance on imitation persists, imitation will limit what one can learn and who one can be in the same way that feeding an animal

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁶⁵ Broadie, 'Sophists and Socrates', p. 74.

⁶⁶ Corey, 'How the Sophists Taught Virtue', p. 5.

⁶⁷ Kerferd, *Sophistic Movement*, p. 30.

⁶⁸ Whether one takes the traditional view that *grammai* are horizontal lines, as Taylor, *Plato Protagoras* (Oxford, 1976), p. 97 does, or the alternative view put forth by J. Adam and A.M. Adam, *Plato Protagoras* (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 131-3 that *grammai* are lines to be traced, the guidance that the instructor provides remains dangerous.

hinders its inclination to feed itself by hunting.⁶⁹ In order to build an intellectual resource that will always be available to the student (even when the guide is not present) the use of imitation must taper off as soon as possible.⁷⁰ (Once again, this is precisely why Socrates would not want anyone to imitate him in particular; rather, he would prefer that someone recognize the life of inquiry as a type of life worthy of aspiration, of which he in particular just happens to be an exemplar.) Protagoras' unqualified endorsement of *mimesis* demonstrates that he is not interested in determining the extent and limitation of anyone's natural endowment.⁷¹ Instead, he walks through cities, collecting students from wealthy families who hunger for knowledge of how to organize and deliver their thoughts in a way that effectively convinces audiences because they unreflectively believe that a successful life follows from possession of this skill, from knowing how to imitate Protagoras.

For the sophists, virtue is being able to speak well in public. However, while having this skill may lead to 'success' in the law courts, 'success' in terms of fame, *etc.*, Socrates certainly does not understand success this way. In contrast, success, for Socrates, is living a life of inquiry and having a healthy (harmonious) soul. What Protagoras and Gorgias teach may yield one kind of success, but it is unrelated (and maybe even runs counter) to the kind of success with which Socrates is concerned. As a result, with respect to the conception of virtue grounded in materialistic success, the sophists are feeding their students both directly and through the encouragement of imitation. Yet, with respect to the Socratic conception of virtue, the sophists are starving their students. As we see most clearly in the *Gorgias*, the sophists have as their goal not the acquisition of knowledge of virtue but simply to create conviction in the souls of an audience and to teach students this art of persuasion.⁷²

⁶⁹ Imitation of good things is at times given positive recognition in the dialogues. A central example of this is the importance of *homoiôsis theôi* for Plato (*Theaetetus* 176b1).

⁷⁰ The ideal pedagogical progression would be to begin to learn how to write a particular letter by tracing over it and then to write it from memory (without the pre-traced guide). However, the writing analogy will take us only so far. We are not, after all, examining how students learn to write but how they learn to be virtuous.

⁷¹ Another example of Protagoras' mimetic instruction is his treatment of punishment as a way of inculcating virtue into the soul (*Protagoras* 324b). His hope is that one's self-interest will lead to the imitation of those living a life that does not entail punishment. Here too this pedagogy of *mimesis* does not yield a broad moral resource.

⁷² Segal, 'Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 66 (1962), p. 106 notes that (because Gorgias claims in the *Helen* that *logoi* are like a psychic drug) 'a reciprocal relationship between the psychic and physical worlds...constitutes a basic and necessary assumption of Gorgianic rhetorical practice.' In this regard, Gorgias joins Democritus in preceding Plato in thinking that there is something that we could, following Democritus, call psychic medicine (Democritus B31). While Plato's use of the body-soul medical analogies is not limited to the *Gorgias*, if Gorgias and Democritus were already considering the psychic *pharmakon* before Plato had Socrates do so, then it is interesting that the *Gorgias* is the dialogue in which Plato chooses to have this analogy figure most prominently. This choice brings into stark relief the contrast between Gorgias' psychic prescriptions (that speakers should say

In his quest to teach his students how to make listeners believe what they hear, Gorgias feeds students examples of what people tend to believe (that is, what is likely rather than what is true).⁷³ After displaying his own rhetorical powers he then encourages students to imitate his ability to make an *epideixis*. The central problem with this is that, while it may be a successful way of teaching persuasiveness, it does not teach students anything about virtue. Furthermore, we can conclude that Gorgias is not really interested in having his students learn about justice from his boasting about how oratory operates without providing knowledge for students but merely providing conviction (*Gorgias* 454e, 458e). This proves that, even though flattering sophists appear to feed their students, because they themselves suffer from what Kahn calls ‘cognitive emptiness’ they are in actuality starving them.⁷⁴

From Gorgias himself comes the most crucial example of how corrupt one is when one starves souls by merely appearing to feed them knowledge. He says:

If an orator and a doctor came to any city anywhere you like and had to compete in speaking in the assembly or some other gathering over which one of them should be appointed doctor, the doctor wouldn’t make any showing at all, but the one who had the ability to speak would be appointed, if he so wished. And if he were to compete with any other craftsman whatever, the orator more than anyone else would persuade them that they should appoint him, for there isn’t anything that the orator couldn’t speak more persuasively about to a gathering than could any other craftsman whatever. That’s how great the accomplishment of this craft is, and the sort of accomplishment it is! (*Gorgias* 456b-c)

Even though an orator is not an expert on a given subject, it *appears* to non-experts that he practices a *technê*. Gorgias claims that the very reason oratory is the supreme power is because the ignorant masses can be deceived by rhetoric (*Gorgias* 459a-c).⁷⁵ Socrates says, ‘Oratory doesn’t need to have any knowledge of the state of [other crafts’] subject matters; it only needs to have discovered some device to produce persuasion in order to make itself appear to those who don’t have knowledge that it knows more than those who actually do have it’ (*Gorgias* 459b-c). And to this Gorgias asks: ‘Well, Socrates, aren’t things made very easy when you come off no worse than the craftsmen even though you haven’t learned any other craft but this one?’ (*Gorgias* 459c) As a teacher, the sophist never asks students to understand serious things sincerely or to care about learning for its own sake. Instead, flattering sophists take pride in their knack for being persuasive and at times deceptive.

what is persuasive to their audiences) and Socrates’ *pharmakon* (that speakers should say what is true and therefore beneficial to their audiences).

⁷³ Cf. *Phaedrus* 260c, 272e-273b.

⁷⁴ Kahn, ‘Drama and Dialectic in Plato’s *Gorgias*’, *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 1 (1983), p. 85.

⁷⁵ Cf. Agathon’s remark to Socrates that ‘if you’re intelligent, you find a few sensible men much more frightening than a senseless crowd’ (*Symposium* 194b; Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff’s translation in Cooper, *Complete Works*).

Even though Euthydemus and Dionysodorus claim to teach virtue 'better than anyone else and more quickly' (*Euthydemus* 273d), they share with Protagoras and Gorgias a reliance on the method that never asks students to take responsibility for their own education. Their students are fed the sort of words that they are to imitate. Socrates tells the brothers that they should guard their style from being imitated by others (*Euthydemus* 303e-304b). If Socrates really considers it fine to learn eristic, then he would not discourage Euthydemus and Dionysodorus from teaching it widely. Perhaps Socrates should not worry so much about the consequences of being a student of frivolous sophists because, unlike flattering sophists who appear to feed students something serious, frivolous sophists do not pose as conventional moral teachers. As Socrates says, 'The two of them are unwilling to give us a serious demonstration...I really think some splendid thing in them will appear whenever they begin to be in earnest, so let us beg and exhort and pray them to make it known' (*Euthydemus* 288b-c). If they have anything to feed students, it has gone unnoticed by Socrates. By never even discussing issues of substance they are starving their pupils. While we may congratulate the frivolous sophists for at least not attempting to be deceptive about whether they love truth, their blatant lack of love for truth still makes them unsuitable educators.

V. Conclusion

Nehamas suggests that Socrates is not a teacher of virtue because (1) he lacks genuine knowledge of the good and the ability to convey that knowledge to students, (2) he never explicitly offers himself to others as an example of how to live,⁷⁶ and (3) even Plato fails to depict Socrates having 'a long-lasting beneficial effect on anyone with whom he came into contact.'⁷⁷ Given what an elusive and complex thing knowledge is for Plato, it should be no surprise if even someone like Socrates lacks knowledge of the Good. So, I agree with Nehamas that Socrates is not a teacher in the conventional sense of education; he is not a teacher who knows something and conveys that knowledge to a student in an explicit fashion. However, Socrates never set out to be a traditional teacher. To demonstrate this is clearly one of the main objectives Plato had in writing the dialogues; another is to show what kind of teacher Socrates did endeavor to be.

When Socrates professes his own ignorance (albeit to some degree ironically) he puts those who know him in a position to conclude that intellectual honesty is more important than one's reputation. For instance, Socrates is not ashamed to admit that he does not know what virtue is, even though his interlocutors assume he would be embarrassed if other people knew this about him (*Meno* 71b-c). Socrates' example stands in stark contrast with that of someone like Gorgias, who prides himself on being honest that his work is the business of persuasion not virtue, but ultimately he is too ashamed to stand by that claim (*Gorgias* 459c-460a). In this regard Socrates exists as an exemplar of how to live a good life.

Given that Socrates inspired Plato's own pursuit of the life dedicated to inquiry, we are left to wonder why Plato does not portray Socrates in the dialogues as having a lasting beneficial effect on anyone. Socrates himself admits in the *Apology* that many promising young Athenians have followed him around and engaged in refutational

⁷⁶ Nehamas, 'What Did Socrates Teach', p. 284.

⁷⁷ Nehamas, *Virtues of Authenticity: Essays on Plato and Socrates* (Princeton, 1999), p. xviii.

question and answer sessions with him, but he does *not* mention how many of these young people turned out very badly. Noting people such as Charmides and Alcibiades III who failed to learn the Good from Socrates, Nehamas and others wonder who was improved by interacting with Socrates.⁷⁸ That these young men appear unmoved by their association with him is supposed to imply that Socrates was not capable of improving others. If that is true, then frankly these discussions are quite charitable. Socrates also had connections to other infamous characters: Acumenus; Adeimantus of Scambonidae; Agariste III; Alcibiades of Phegous; Andocides IV; Axiochus; Charicles; Critias IV; Damon; Diognetus; Eryximachus; Eucrates; Meletus of Athens; and Phaedrus (to name just those implicated in the mutilation of the herms in 415).⁷⁹ The Socrates of the *Republic* knows the dangers to which he exposed those young ‘pups’ (*Republic* 539a-b)! Nevertheless, as Socrates points out, not one of the men he is supposed to have corrupted has come forward at his trial to accuse him nor has any relative (*Apology* 33d-34b). Instead, a substantial group of his friends and their relatives has congregated at his trial to support Socrates.

Meanwhile, there is evidence that more than a few of Socrates’ companions either turned out well or were moved in a positive direction by their association with Socrates. Even Alcibiades, Socrates’ most notorious companion, progressed to a certain extent as a result of his experience with Socrates. Alcibiades acknowledges that Socrates’ words move him deeply (*Symposium* 215c-216a), and he has let himself pay enough attention to Socrates’ words and deeds to learn several things. First, Alcibiades has come to understand that physical beauty is not the stuff of seducing Socrates (*Symposium* 216d-219a), and in the final moment of sexual rejection Alcibiades even manages to grasp enough of Socrates’ way of thinking to feel genuine admiration for Socrates’ ‘natural character, his moderation, and his fortitude’ (*Symposium* 219d). Second, unlike most, if not all, of Socrates’ interlocutors, Alcibiades has paid enough attention to discern Socrates’ tendency to be ironic (*Symposium* 216e). Alcibiades also notes that, while Socrates’ arguments ‘at first... strike you as totally ridiculous’ (*Symposium* 221e), ‘if you see them when they open up like the statues, if you go behind their surface, you’ll realize that no other arguments make any sense. They’re truly worthy of a god, bursting with figurines of virtue inside. They’re of great – no, of the greatest – importance for anyone who *wants* to become a truly good man’ (*Symposium* 222a; emphasis added). In this transformation from thinking of Socrates’ arguments as silly to thinking that they are endlessly interesting and important, we see what Socrates sees in Alcibiades, namely, the vast potential that made Socrates fall in love with him. Yet, by Alcibiades’ own admission, Socrates is only able to affect him *if* he gives Socrates ‘half a chance’ (216a). Alcibiades admits his stubbornness, saying ‘I refuse to listen to him; I stop my ears and tear myself away from him’ (216a-b). Alcibiades’ choice not to give Socrates ‘half a chance’ reveals that he ultimately does not really *want* to become a ‘truly good man’. Alcibiades’ moral failings are not evidence one way or another in the assessment of Socrates’ teaching; that Alcibiades does not ultimately live up to his potential is clearly the result of his own deliberate choice to tear himself away from Socrates sooner than he should have.

⁷⁸ Nehamas, ‘What Did Socrates Teach’, pp. 279-306.

⁷⁹ Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis, 2002), p. 18.

In terms of those who were affected positively by the historical Socrates in an enduring way, of course there is Plato as well as Xenophon and Antisthenes II of Athens, whom Xenophon describes as valuing more than anything else 'the wealth of soul he acquired from Socrates that makes him eschew material things' (Xenophon's *Symposium* 4.34-44).⁸⁰ Furthermore, there are several characters in the dialogues who show signs of philosophical promise in response to knowing Plato's Socrates, namely, Apollodorus, who through his association with Socrates learned that he was 'the most worthless man on earth' (*Symposium* 173a) and left his business (though not his riches) to follow Socrates,⁸¹ Critias III (of the *Timaeus*, not to be confused with Critias IV), Crito, Ctesippus, and Theaetetus, to name a handful. In spite of what we do know about the people connected to Socrates, which is substantial, we could not possibly have accounts of the entire personal life had by every friend, interlocutor, and by-stander of Socrates or of every reader of Socratic writings. These people have all potentially been improved by Socrates' cowherding.

Furthermore, it is crucial to recall when judging Socrates' friends that learning is a *process*.⁸² It is completely consistent with the character of Socratic education that the things in life that are most worth knowing will be the most difficult and time consuming to learn. So, we should not be surprised that someone like Crito needs an entire lifetime to understand Socrates' perspective. Socrates has always worked patiently with him, as a farmer does with the seeds he really cares for and is serious about (*Phaedrus* 276b). On the other hand, we see what a brilliant start Theaetetus was off to so early in his life. The Stranger recognizes what an ideal interlocutor he has in Theaetetus, and as a result, he allows Theaetetus to be the interpreter for the 'friends of the forms' (*Sophist* 248a). We are left to imagine what Theaetetus could have become if he had not, after fighting bravely, died so young.⁸³ Yet, even Theaetetus might not have thought of Socrates as his teacher. This is a probable consequence of Socrates' use of the cowherding method of pedagogy.

A student may not even realize that s/he has a teacher because students tend to define teachers as those who explicitly articulate what is to be learned. Socrates alludes to this himself when he says that there have been 'many cases where people who did not realize this fact [i.e., that Socrates' had served as a midwife in their deliveries] took all the credit to themselves and thought that I was no good. They have then proceeded to leave me sooner than they should' (*Theaetetus* 150e). So too do many graze for a day with Socrates and then fail to choose the life of grazing freely in the pastures of philosophy. By rejecting conventional pedagogy Socrates forces students to assume the responsibility for their own education.⁸⁴ They must choose between teachers who are

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁸² This raises a number of questions about teaching and learning in today's academic institutions. Although these questions are interesting and extremely important, they must be asked and addressed elsewhere.

⁸³ Nails, *People of Plato*, p. 277.

⁸⁴ I wish to express my gratitude to Jeff Turner, Roslyn Weiss, Richard Patterson, Tom Stanley, and an anonymous reviewer at *Polis* for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

'utterly grotesque' and those who are 'serious...few and beyond price' (*Euthydemus* 307a).

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