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SOCRATES AND THE TRUE POLITICAL CRAFT

J. CLERK SHAW

Οἶμαι μετ' ὀλίγων Ἀθηναίων, ἵνα μὴ εἶπω μόνος, ἐπιχειρεῖν τῆ ὡς ἀληθῶς πολιτικῆ τέχνῃ
καὶ πράττειν τὰ πολιτικὰ μόνος τῶν νῦν.

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 the true politics.

—Plato, *Gorgias* 521d6–8

THIS CRUCIAL EVIDENCE¹ concerning Socrates' self-ascribed epistemic condition is widely cited in passing, but receives relatively little sustained treatment. Most scholars assume that Socrates here claims to have political expertise—or that he claims to practice or use the political craft, or to be a true statesman, which amount to the same thing. Call this the “strong reading.”² A minority deny that Socrates makes any such claim here; call this the “weak reading.”³ Some scholars are either of two minds or seek the middle ground.⁴

In this paper, I defend the weak reading. While others also endorse the weak reading, the view faces two explanatory burdens that have not yet been met. First, if Socrates falls short of political expertise, we should say precisely

1. All texts are taken from Burnet 1900–1907 and all translations from Cooper 1997 unless otherwise noted. In discussing *τέχνη*, I move freely among “craft,” “expertise,” “knowledge,” “wisdom,” and their cognates.

2. For example, Jowett 1875, 276, 278, 292, 311; Guthrie 1962, 264–65, 395–96, 414, 499 n. 4; Kahn 1983, 101 (cf. Kahn 1988, 75, and 1996, 51, but more cautiously at 130); Reeve 1989, 159–60; Nightingale 1995, 70–71, 78–79; Woolf 2000, 14, 17, 21 n. 31; Blondell 2002, 69, 390 n. 300; Levy 2005, 208, 219–25; and Stauffer 2006, 161–67.

3. For example, Irwin 1979, 240 (cf. Irwin 1995, 371 n. 21); Kraut 1984, 236 n. 76, 299 n. 80; and Benson 2000, 247–49.

4. For example, Dodds 1959, 330, 351, 355, 368–69; Rowe 2007, 150–51, 175 n. 39, 218 n. 12; and Bickford 2009, 132–33, 135. Woodruff (1990, 66 n. 10, 73) endorses the strong reading but simultaneously denies that Socrates claims “special epistemic status” (cf. Villa 2001, 15, 26–28, 36–39). This makes it difficult to understand Socrates' claim to be virtually unique (cf. Benson 2000, 241 and n. 16 below). Vlastos (1991, 31–32, 236–42) defends a nuanced moderate view. He invokes distinctions between two kinds of knowledge (divine vs. human) and two kinds of teaching (teaching that simply transfers knowledge to the learner vs. teaching that requires active engagement by the learner). But even if Socrates recognizes two kinds of knowledge and typically only claims to have the weaker variety (cf. Vlastos 1985; Howland 1998, 34, 85), the meaning of τῆ ὡς ἀληθῶς πολιτικῆ τέχνῃ at 521d is fixed by the criteria for that craft given elsewhere in the *Gorgias*—criteria that Socrates fails to meet (see §II). Like Vlastos, I attribute a sort of wisdom and a sort of teaching to Socrates (see §III). However, on my view, Socrates strives for and approaches divine knowledge, and this actually constitutes his human wisdom (so there are not two fundamentally distinct kinds of knowledge), and no knowledge of any kind can be transmitted without active engagement by the learner. (Roochnik [1996] and, following him, Howland [1998, 179, 313 n. 12] argue that the need for active engagement by the learner vitiates the craft analogy. I disagree, but cannot pursue the point here.)

how. Second, Socrates claims *some* sort of superior grasp of politics properly understood, and we should characterize that superior grasp without collapsing into the strong reading. So, after reviewing the text and replying to some arguments for the strong reading in §I, I take up these two burdens. In §II, I consider in more detail what true political expertise is, the criteria for having it, and Socrates' accomplishments with respect to each criterion. This investigation shows that Socrates lacks political expertise, but begins to clarify his claim to attempt it.⁵ Then, in §III, I characterize Socrates' epistemic condition positively. I begin by noting that a familiar puzzle also constitutes an objection to the weak reading: if Socrates lacks wisdom, and wisdom is necessary both to be virtuous and to help others attain virtue, then Socrates cannot do either of those things.⁶ But Socrates thinks that he *is* virtuous and that he *can* help others to attain virtue. I propose an account of Socrates' epistemic condition that both solves this long-standing puzzle and explains how Socrates attempts politics while remaining consistent with the weak reading. Briefly, I argue (1) that the etiology of Socrates' superior epistemic condition is divine dispensation; (2) that his divinely engendered condition is coherent true belief on the topics of true politics; and (3) that this coherent true belief, which constitutes considerable progress toward political expertise, just is Socratic wisdom concerning his own epistemic deficiencies. Socratic wisdom falls short of political expertise both by lacking determinate answers to certain questions and by failing to grasp the first principles of politics. However, Socratic wisdom still counts as virtue; moreover, Socrates can and does try to transmit it to others.

I

In this section, I argue that the text of *Gorgias* 521d6–8 itself does not decide between the strong and weak readings, and that an argument for the strong reading based on the passage's wider context fails.

Advocates of the weak reading emphasize that ἐπιχειρεῖν can mean “attempt,” and their opponents that it can mean “perform.”⁷ Both are correct; this verb is consistent with either reading. Related occurrences of ἐπιχειρεῖν in the *Gorgias* do not decide the issue either (513e5, 514c7, d3–4, e7, 8, and 515b4; cf. 507e2, *Chrm.* 171e1). In the most important of these, Socrates exhorts Callicles to ἐπιχειρεῖν true politics. He then insists that before doing so publicly, Callicles should reveal his epistemic accomplishments through private success (cf. *La.* 186a–87b, 189d–e, and see §II). This may seem to suggest that to ἐπιχειρεῖν true politics is simply to exercise political expertise. However, along the way Socrates mentions certain people who senselessly ἐπιχειρεῖν public medicine precisely in that they fail to first exhibit private success at producing health. This makes it clear that, at least in some uses of the verb,

5. My topic is Socrates' self-ascribed epistemic condition, but I draw on evidence beyond what he says about himself, and I frequently talk in terms of Socrates' actual epistemic condition. Plato, whatever limitations he attributes to Socrates, does not intentionally portray him as self-deceived concerning his own epistemic achievements (see esp. *Ap.* 20d–23b; on possible counterevidence in the *Charmides*, see §III).

6. Vlastos 1971, 7–8; Graham 1997; and Benson 2000, §10.3.

7. Irwin 1979, 240; Vlastos 1991, 240 n. 21; and Irwin 1995, 371 n. 21.

nonexperts can ἐπιχειρεῖν the expert's task. Of course, Socrates' political undertaking surely is supposed to be sensible, but it is unclear whether his sensible undertaking requires expertise, particularly since he does not attempt politics on a large scale. (Proponents of the weak reading might even argue that Socrates' private practice reveals that he does not take himself to be a political expert. However, Socrates' other reasons for avoiding public politics suffice to explain this [*Ap.* 31d6–32a3, *Resp.* 496c–e].)

It may seem that the second part of what Socrates says, that of people at present he alone does politics, decides the issue for the strong reading. Plausibly, his political activities just are exercises of the political craft he claims in the same breath to undertake. In both cases, he undoubtedly has in mind a special kind of politics that aims at the good state of the soul (503a5–9, 504b4–e3, 506d2–507c5, 515b6–c4; see further §II).⁸ But the connection is satisfactorily explained if, when Socrates says that he does politics, he means precisely that he attempts true politics. There is nothing strange about this way of talking; one who persistently attempts carpentry can rightly be said not to have the craft of carpentry or to be a carpenter, without utterly failing to do carpentry.⁹

Gregory Vlastos draws on a slightly wider context to argue for the strong reading.¹⁰ At 521e–522c, Socrates compares himself to a doctor “judged by a jury of children if a pastry-chef were to bring accusations against him.” A doctor will not always give people what produces bodily pleasure, but will sometimes “give them the most bitter potions to drink and force hunger and thirst upon them” in the interests of bodily health, which is the aim of medicine (464a–c, 477b, 478a–b, 479a–b, 504a–b, 522a). Because a chef gives people what pleases them, he will be much more popular with the hypothetical jury than the doctor with his potions and strict regimens. The situation would be substantially the same were Socrates accused by an orator. Socrates does not tell people what they would like to hear; hence the orator, who flatters the jury, will be much more popular with them.

Socrates here compares himself to a doctor—that is, to someone who not only attempts medicine, but who has and uses medical expertise. So, Vlastos argues, the analogy implies that Socrates has and uses political expertise, and we should read 521d6–8 accordingly. However, Socrates' comparison, like any analogy, requires only that relevant features be similar. In this case, the similarities that underwrite Socrates' predictive and explanatory claims (δὲ ὅτι ταῦτα προσδοκῶ, 521d4) are these: (1) both he and the doctor use painful methods in the service of some good (of the soul or body);¹¹ (2) the orator and chef aim to please; and (3) those to whom the painful treatments are applied fail to see the benefit in them (522b5–6; cf. 479b6–7). Hence the doctor is said to treat children, who are not capable of understanding that painful

8. See Vlastos 1991, 240 n. 21, 241; Woolf 2000, 21 n. 31; and notice that Zeyl (1987, published also in Cooper 1997) translates πράττειν τὰ πολιτικά by “practice the *true* politics” (emphasis added).

9. What does doing politics without being a politician amount to? Read on, especially n. 16 and the characterization of Socrates' psychological condition and its relationship to political expertise in §III.

10. Vlastos 1991, 240 n. 21, followed by Levy 2005, 225.

11. For this point see Kraut 1984, 236 n. 76, and cf. Irwin 1995, 371 n. 21. Aiming at the same good as a given craft does not entail possession of that craft, at least not obviously so (see §II, esp. nn. 16–17).

medicines can benefit (479a5–b1; cf. 456b, 459a3–5, 464d2–e2, 470c4–5, *Symp.* 199a1–2). They cannot distinguish goods from pleasures (i.e., appearances of goodness) and bads from pains (i.e., appearances of badness). This incapacity to distinguish appearance from reality explains why the juries favor the orator over Socrates and the chef over the doctor.

At best for the strong reading, the doctor's expertise as such is irrelevant to Socrates' analogy. Suppose that someone merely attempts medicine (i.e., aims at the good condition of her patients' bodies without expertise), and that in so doing she orders painful treatments. When faced with Socrates' hypothetical situation, her prospects of acquittal certainly will not be better than those of a medical expert. Indeed, her chances may be worse, since as a nonexpert she is less reliable at realizing health in herself and others (518d).¹² Hence the doctor's being a medical expert is not what explains the jury's verdict, except insofar as exercising medical expertise involves painful procedures—and the use of these is not specific to experts. Even the fact that Socrates and the doctor both seek to benefit may only be relevant to the question of how bad the jury's decision is. Presumably the jury would reach a guilty verdict even if the accused were acting not so as to benefit, but were actually engaged in painful quackery. The jury decides as it does precisely because its members cannot distinguish these cases. So, Socrates need not imagine that he is a political expert for his analogy to work.

Further, one crucial difference between the cases of medicine and politics positively requires that we not read the analogy as Vlastos would: political expertise entails getting one's patients to recognize that they are benefited by the political expert (520e; cf. *Resp.* 463a–b, *Plt.* 301d), while medical expertise does not. A doctor's failure to convince his patients to take their medicine or to allow him to cut or burn them evidently does not call his expertise into question (456b, but cf. *Leg.* 720c–e). Hence the unjust conviction of a doctor by his patients does not show that he fails to be an expert, while that of a purported politician by his fellow citizens does (cf. §II on 515c–517c). On the strong reading, Socrates explains that the political expert will never be treated unjustly by those he helps, but less than a Stephanus page later says that he (Socrates) will actually be unjustly convicted because of his own practice of the political expertise—an unhappy result. Perhaps this is ultimately the best reading, but we should at least try to give Socrates a more coherent view.¹³

12. This does not require that the jury use health as its standard, but only that health is more pleasant than illness, so that the jury, utilizing its hedonist standard, will come to the correct decision about an expert doctor more often than they will about a nonexpert who attempts medicine using painful techniques.

13. Vlastos (1991, 242) also argues for the strong reading by appealing to passages in the *Laches* and *Apology*. However, *Laches* 189b1–3 and 200c2–d2 are weak evidence; it is Laches and Nicias who there suppose that Socrates teaches virtue. In the former passage, Laches also offers to teach Socrates what he knows, but he is later refuted. In the latter passage, Laches calls Nicias wise as well (though this drips with sarcasm; cf. 200a1–b2). In contrast, Socrates denies knowing how to make men good (186c5, d8–e3, 200e2–201a1), and Nicias comments that this is not unusual (200d2–3). *Apology* 30a5–7 is entirely consistent with the weak reading (cf. also *Ap.* 36d9–e1 and *Grg.* 505c3–4). Socrates could easily think that removing the false conceit of knowledge is a great good (*Ap.* 30e, *Meno* 84a3–c9, *Th.* 210b–c, *Soph.* 230b–d), and even that he has helped to make some others just and happy without being able to do so fully and reliably, as one with expert knowledge would (see §§II–III). And of course in the *Apology*, Socrates disavows knowledge of human and political excellence and the resulting ability to teach it as one with knowledge would (20a–c).

II

I suggest that interpretation of *Gorgias* 521d6–8 is most likely to advance by considering the nature of the political craft and the extent to which Socrates fulfills his own criteria for possessing it. I begin this task by placing true politics relative to other practices. True politics comprises justice and legislation, the τέχναι of which rhetoric and sophistry are images (463d–465e). Hence Socrates also sometimes refers to one of its parts, justice, as “true rhetoric” (517a4–6; cf. 460e2–461a7, 502d10–503a9, 504d5–e3, 508c1–2). Philosophers aspire to true politics (500c–d, 505c3–4, 521d6–8),¹⁴ which explains why Plato regularly distinguishes philosophy from rhetoric and sophistry (e.g., *Grg.* 500c–d). These practices imitate what philosophy aspires to, and so they appear the same as philosophy to the ignorant (e.g., at *Euthydemus* 304e–305a).

More particularly, three things distinguish true politics from standard oratory. First, as mentioned above, politics aims at what’s best for the soul rather than at what’s most pleasant to it. Second, because politics is a craft, it considers, can give an account of, and so knows two things: its object, including that object’s good condition, and the procedures by which it achieves that good (464b3–465a6, 500a8–b3, 501a1–3). So, for Socrates to think that he has political expertise, he must think (1) that he aims to make souls good, (2) that he knows the soul, and particularly its good condition or excellence, and (3) that he knows and can explain how his political activities realize that excellence.¹⁵

The first criterion is easily disposed of by examining Socrates’ stated reason for his claim that he attempts the true political craft (521d8–e1):

ἄτε οὖν οὐ πρὸς χάριν λέγων τοὺς λόγους οὐδὲ λέγω ἐκάστοτε, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ βέλτιστον, οὐ πρὸς τὸ ἥδιστον.

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.

Socrates aims at what’s best for his fellow citizens (that is, for their souls), and this is also the aim of the political craft; so far, so good.¹⁶ His failure to

14. For a slightly different view see Heath 1989, 156–58.

15. Textual difficulties make these criteria controversial: see Dodds 1959 ad 465a2–5, 465a4; Irwin 1979 ad 465a, 500e–501a; and Benson 2000, 156 n. 55 and 247–48. I consider separately knowledge of the object, knowledge of the object’s good state, and knowledge of the procedures that produce and maintain that good state. This is merely a convenience; Socrates could well think that these are all aspects of a single psychological condition (see Benson 2000, 156 n. 55, and *Phdr.* 270b–272b), and even that aiming at what’s best is related to one’s epistemic condition (see n. 16 below).

16. For πρὸς τὸ βέλτιστον, πρὸς τὸ ἥδιστον, and related phrases in the *Gorgias*, see 456e (ἐπὶ τῷ δικαίῳ χρῆσθαι), 464c, 502e, 503d (ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιστον), 503e (πρὸς τὸ ἔργον), 521a (πρὸς χάριν), and 527c (ἐπὶ τὸ δίκαιον). If all action is done for the sake of the good (468b), how does acting πρὸς τὸ βέλτιστον distinguish Socrates from others? I consider three proposals. First, Benson (2000, 247–48) suggests that only Socrates acts πρὸς τὸ βέλτιστον because he alone recognizes that he and others lack the good, i.e., knowledge. However, a hedonist who recognizes that he and others lack the “good,” i.e., pleasure, would not act πρὸς τὸ βέλτιστον by striving to make his and their lives more pleasant. That is, Socrates is special not in that he thinks he lacks (what he takes to be) good, but because of some superior grasp of the good. Second, Taylor (1998, 47) suggests that Socrates “alone cares for the good of his fellow-citizens.” This is false if it means that only Socrates cares whether his fellow citizens get what he thinks good for them (Kamtekar 2005, 324–25; cf. Bobonich 2002, §§1.3, 1.15). It may be true if it means that only Socrates cares whether his fellow citizens get what is really

mention the further criteria here affords some suspicion that he does not think he fulfills them. However, this argument from silence is not in itself compelling, and there is further evidence to consider.¹⁷

Socrates does express more than minimal views about what the soul is. It is something incorporeal that makes a living human alive (523e, 524b), and it is presumably the proper subject of a person's psychological states.¹⁸ He also claims that the soul persists after death with at least some of its acquired features intact (524b–d). Socrates' confidence in these matters is various; he calls his speech on the persistence and fate of the soul a λόγος rather than a μῦθος, on grounds of its truth (523a1–3; cf. 524a8–b2, 526d3–4, 527a5), but he admits some uncertainty as to the details (524b1–2) and mentions the possibility of a better and truer account (527a6–8; cf. *Phd.* 114d, *Ti.* 29b–d). Beyond that, Socrates reflects little on the epistemic status of his beliefs about the soul.

As for the good condition of the soul, Socrates presents his views by analogy (502e2–508a8). In general, craftsmen qua craftsmen aim at order and organization in the object of their craft—which just is to say that they aim at the good of that object (503d5–504b6, 506d2–507a7). The object of the political craft is the human soul, so its goal is to order and organize the soul's elements. The elements so ordered and organized must be the person's psychological attitudes, such as her beliefs, fears, pleasures, desires, and loves. The organization of these elements requires the removal of inconsistencies among the psychological attitudes and the placement of surviving attitudes into such explanatory relations that the person can, under Socratic examination, defend her beliefs, fears, pleasures, desires, and loves.¹⁹ Socrates also thinks that the more substantial practical commitments he argues for against Polus and Callicles (e.g., that doing injustice is worse than suffering it) must be present in any orderly soul, because he has found that every soul contains attitudes that entail those commitments (474a5–b5, 482b2–6, 509a4–7).²⁰

good for them, but again this boils down to a superior grasp of the good. Third, Socrates' comment about Meles at 502a could suggest that if X's actions reliably realize Y, then X acts πρὸς Y. However, Socrates' humorous intent makes it difficult to use this passage as decisive evidence, and other evidence makes this reading insupportable. Socrates requires stronger criteria than this for individuating practices (*Resp.* 346a–b; cf. n. 40 and Benson 2000, 209). Moreover, Socrates' activities do reliably produce pleasure (*Ap.* 23c, 33c; cf. *Grg.* 458d1–4), but do not reliably make others good (see below).

17. Brickhouse and Smith (1994, §5.1.2) make aiming at the good the sole criterion for being a practitioner of the political craft, which sits uneasily with their endorsement of the weak reading. Presumably they would want to say instead that aiming at the good suffices for attempting politics, while more is necessary for political expertise. Benson (2000, 247–48) also notes that 521d8–e1 by itself warrants only the weak reading.

18. This despite one passage in which Socrates appears to attribute ἐπιθυμία to the body (517d). Socrates also attributes ἐπιθυμία to the soul (493a), though in the context of something he heard from a wise man; elsewhere he is indifferent for his purposes (496e). In any case, the rational rule of desires, pleasures, pains and the like puts the soul in order, so such states must be in some sense attributable to it, even if only by virtue of its connection to the body (cf. *Resp.* 611a–612a, *Phd.* 64c–67b, 78b–84b).

19. Cf. Woolf 2000. Socrates is not explicit, but this must be how he thinks of the order and organization of a soul, especially in light of his elenctic activities (see below). Lack of such order explains the failure of orators and tyrants to do what they want (realize their good); cf. Brown and Shaw 2007. For an alternative account of order and organization in the *Gorgias*, see Berman 1991, §6.

20. This is claim A in Vlastos 1983, revised and reprinted in Vlastos 1994, chap. 1. This article has provoked many responses, but most scholars agree that Socrates endorses some form of A in the *Gorgias*.

So, Socrates has an elaborate view about the soul's good,²¹ as we might expect; plausibly, having some such view partially constitutes any genuine attempt at the political craft. Further, he repeatedly affirms the truth of his views (e.g., 468e3–5, 472b4–6, 473b10–11, 479e8; cf. 486e5–6, 487e6–7) and claims that they are “held down and bound by arguments of iron and adamant,” though he allows that someone might loosen the argumentative bonds (508e6–509a4). But for all that, Socrates' presentation of his views includes a characteristic disavowal of knowledge (506a3–4), and he follows up his bold claims with another: “And yet [ἐπεῖ] for my part my account is ever the same: I don't know how these things are [ὄτι ἐγὼ ταῦτα οὐκ οἶδα ὅπως ἔχει], but [ὄτι μέντοι] no one I've ever met . . . can say anything else without being ridiculous” (509a4–7), where being ridiculous is seemingly a matter of holding inconsistent views.²²

This last assertion has been read in two ways. Depending on whether ταῦτα looks backward or forward, Socrates either disavows expertise concerning the psychic effects of doing injustice vs. suffering it, and of paying the penalty for injustice vs. not (cf. 508b7–c3), or else he is uncertain about how to explain his observation that nobody he has met can maintain the opposite of what he has said without being ridiculous.²³ So, either Socrates lacks knowledge of the soul's good or else he fails to know the relevant causal relations into which the soul enters, and hence the technical procedures appropriate to making it good. Hence, he recognizes that he fails to satisfy either criterion 2 or criterion 3 above, and so he cannot think that he has the political craft.

As for the technical suitability of Socrates' characteristic activities, his exhortations and refutations make good sense as treatments of the soul designed to produce what he thinks of as its good. Certainly he conceives of them that way (505c3–4). His refutations of people's claims to ethical knowledge amount to revealing their incoherent psychological attitudes.²⁴ Furthermore, he often refutes people using arguments that reveal the explanatory relations in which various psychological attitudes could stand. As above, these facts support Socrates' claim to attempt politics as he understands it.²⁵

21. Pace Irwin 1979 ad 521d.

22. See also Kraut 1984, 236 n. 76.

23. Levy (2005, 211–13) endorses the latter reading, which might support the beginning phases of the story about recollection in Vlastos 1994, 28–29. However, this reading requires, implausibly, that ταῦτα in the first ὄτι clause looks forward to something in the second, coordinate ὄτι clause. Brickhouse and Smith (1994, §2.2) make this passage a centerpiece of their argument that Socrates thinks he knows certain truths about value, but does not know how they obtain (ταῦτα . . . ὅπως ἔχει; cf. Reeve 1989, 52). But as Irwin (1995, 371 n. 20) replies to Reeve, οὕτως at 509b1 corresponds to ὅπως, and the same point applies to ἄλλως and ὡς at 509a3, since these adverbs also pertain to what is said. This tells against Brickhouse and Smith's use of this passage (cf. also 459b8, 470e6), but not necessarily against their view (with which I sympathize; see §III). Irwin's point also shows that ταῦτα looks backward (and forward to 509b1–3).

24. This even when Socrates reveals an inconsistency among stated claims, some of which his interlocutor asserts out of shame (as Polus and Callicles say at 461b–c and 482c–e happened to Gorgias and Polus, respectively). The very fact that an interlocutor believes that *p* but is ashamed to aver *p* publicly (i.e., fears for his reputation if he does, *Euthphr.* 12b9–c2), especially when *p* is an other-regarding practical attitude, can reveal internal psychological conflict and not merely conflict between the interlocutor's words and deeds (contrast Kahn 1983, 76, 110). However, such a refutation does not reveal the source of the conflict, as does a refutation proceeding from sincerely asserted attitudes. Obviously, I cannot substantiate these claims here.

25. So, while Socrates' use of elenchus is relevant to the question of whether Socrates practices a craft, it is a mistake to frame the inquiry by asking whether elenchus *is* a craft. It is as though we asked whether

However, we have good evidence for the failure of Socrates' methods. This point can be put forcefully by considering the argument that Socrates employs when Callicles says that such past leaders as Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Pericles practiced the true political craft:

1. The true politician reliably makes people's souls just (515d3–10, 516b–c).
2. After Pericles had been giving speeches in Athens for a long time, the Athenians turned on him unjustly (515e10–516a3).
3. People who act unjustly have unjust souls (516a–c).²⁶
4. So, after Pericles had been giving speeches in Athens for a long time, the Athenians had unjust souls (from 2 and 3).
5. So, Pericles did not, in making his speeches, reliably make the souls of the Athenian people just (from 4).
6. So, Pericles was not a true politician (from 1 and 5).²⁷

Socrates' point is perfectly general (519b8–c2), and Plato practically directs the reader to examine Socrates' effects on others by having him raise the question without pursuing it (515a3–4; cf. 514d6–8). At first glance, then, since Socrates was unjustly put to death by the Athenians after a lifetime of philosophizing among them, the argument about Pericles above applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to himself.²⁸

The argument might be thought inapplicable to Socrates. First, he was not a public speaker like Pericles; he even avoided the official political life of

cautery is a craft, rather than whether medical experts employ it, how and when they employ it, and what we can learn about someone's medical expertise by observing how and when they employ it. Neither cautery nor elenchus is a craft; either may be used by those who have political expertise, by those who attempt it, and by those completely ignorant of it. Here I deny, contra Franklin 2005, that technical procedures are individuated teleologically in a strong sense, so that only doctors, or those under their direction, perform cautery strictly speaking. There is a weaker sense in which I would be willing to admit that procedures are individuated teleologically: actions are done for reasons, and the reasons for which X burns Y partially determine whether X performs cautery.

26. Here lurks a worry about the relationship between order in the psyche and temperate or just action as usually understood (cf. Irwin 1979 ad 507ab). This problem receives less attention than its cousin in the *Republic*, made famous by Sachs (1963). I cannot explore the issue here, but it does seem to be an interpretive advantage if a proposed solution to the Sachs problem also solves the parallel problem in the *Gorgias*, at some level of abstraction. In other words, solutions that make essential reference to features of the *Republic* absent from the *Gorgias* are to that extent less satisfactory than those that explain why Plato proceeds as he does in both dialogues.

27. Premises 1 and 3 are also implied by claims Socrates makes throughout the last part of the *Gorgias*. Still, lest this argument be thought peripheral, notice that Socrates argues the same way when refuting Gorgias. At the crucial point, he proceeds on the assumption that oratory knows justice (460a–461a; cf. 452e1–4 and 454b5–7 taken with 449e4–6, and see Penner 1988, 292–93), i.e., that oratory is true oratory. Insofar as knowing justice entails being just, then, there cannot be unjust orators (460b4–c6; I leave aside disputes about this passage). Now Gorgias claims not only to be an orator, but also to be able to make others orators (449b1–3, 458e5–6). Since true orators will never be unjust, he cannot avoid being blamed for the injustices of his students (456c7–457c3, 460c7–d6). But he also strongly implies that he produces students capable of injustice (452e4–8, 456b6–457c3; cf. 460e8–461a1). So, Gorgias is not a true orator, just as Pericles is not a true politician.

28. Cf. Aelius Aristides (Behr 1986, 3.434–39, 444–46), to whom Olympiodorus responded (Jackson et al. 1998, 41.3–5 and 261 n. 773). Among moderns, see Nehamas 1986, 313; Pangle 1991 (followed by Euben 1996, 339–40, 357 n. 47); Benson 2000, 248 n. 92; Villa 2001, 36; Stauffer 2006, 162–63; and Bickford 2009, 135–36. Crucially, Socrates receives quasi-prophetic power to foresee his fate at 521b–522e. Also importantly, the argument does not say that the true politician can make everyone just; not even the gods can do that (525c1–4)!

the city as much as possible (*Ap.* 31c4–32a3, *Grg.* 473e6–474a1). Hence we cannot say, as in the case of Pericles, that his failure to make the citizens in general just counts as evidence of his inability to do so. However, Socrates did engage in his search with a large number and wide variety of people in the city, including politicians, poets, and craftsmen (*Ap.* 21c–22e), and he was willing to speak with “anyone . . . young and old, citizen and foreigner” (*Ap.* 30a2–3; cf. 23b4–6, *Euthphr.* 3d6–9). Much as in the *Gorgias*, in the *Apology* Socrates represents his practice as “nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul . . .” (30a6–b1; cf. 36c3–6). He applied himself to this task so assiduously as to leave himself and his family poor (23b–c, 31b–c). Yet in that same city in which Socrates spent so many years philosophizing thus, he was unjustly put to death. By his own lights, that death sentence constitutes evidence that his fellow citizens did not have good souls, despite his activities.²⁹ Socrates’ retreat from official public life and from dogmatic teaching may make his educative failures blameless; still, those failures do indicate lack of expertise.

Nor need we look to Socrates’ conviction to see that he does not reliably improve people’s souls. Several of his companions, such as Alcibiades, Critias, and Charmides, turned out vicious.³⁰ Further, Plato’s Socrates generally fails to convince his interlocutors even that they are ignorant and should continue inquiring, let alone that his views about the good human life are true; often, they even reject Socrates angrily. A vivid example of the latter occurs in the *Gorgias* when Callicles describes his attitude to being refuted: “I don’t know how it is that I think you’re right, Socrates, but the thing that happens to most people has happened to me: I’m not really persuaded by you” (513c4–6). Even more than what he says, Callicles’ sullen intransigence testifies to Socrates’ failure to improve his soul.³¹ And even when, as in the *Charmides*, people do stay to inquire with Socrates, the reader is all too aware of the ultimate outcome. It is of course no accident that Plato chose Charmides and Critias as Socrates’ interlocutors for a dialogue on temperance.

Again, it might be thought that Socrates’ failures are properly explained by the pervasive influence of other, corrupt people, especially in childhood. To extend the craft analogy, even the best carpenter cannot build a good house when many others rot the timber and tear her construction down around her. Perhaps the reader is intended to have this thought in anticipation of views to come (e.g., *Resp.* 494d4–e7, *Symp.* 216b; cf. *Alc.* 132a), but there is no

29. Socrates mentions the difficulty of removing slander from the souls of the jurors in one day (*Ap.* 19a, 24a2–4, 37a–b; cf. *Grg.* 455a2–6); this mitigates the point when it comes to those he hasn’t spent time with before.

30. Many others have noted this. Socrates’ recognition of the point could be thought difficult to reconcile with *Ap.* 33d–34b, but not corrupting is not the same as making just.

31. Again, Socrates has an explanation; Callicles’ love for the people stands against him. However, he also thinks that if they went over the same arguments together frequently and better (N.B.!), Callicles would be convinced (513c7–d1; cf. 506c, 508d5–6, 517c, *Lysis* 211a–b, *Meno* 85c–d, *Phd.* 77e9–10, 105a5–6, *Resp.* 532d4–5, *Phdr.* 274e–275b, *Phlb.* 24d8–e3, 59e7–60e7, 66d4–10). Lack of frequent repetition presumably cannot be the explanation for cases in which Socrates’ long-term companions were corrupt.

direct evidence for the idea in the *Gorgias*.³² Similarly, one might argue that successful politics requires certain antecedent psychic conditions in the citizens. Both doctor and politician need their patients to recognize the benefit of what they do, and so cooperate with them, to succeed in their proper aims. However, as we saw above, the true politician must be able reliably to make his patients recognize this benefit, even from quite inauspicious beginnings (515a5–7; cf. *La.* 187a6–8), and so he cannot use this excuse to explain regular failure. Finally, allowing Socrates these responses, but not Pericles and the others, would be a double standard.

Socrates is not just being coy when he denies knowing how to make others good. His psychological treatments commonly fail to have their intended effects, and this is in part due to his lack of knowledge about the nature of the soul and the effects that different kinds of speeches have on it (cf. *Phdr.* 270b–272b, *Resp.* 537d–539c, taken with *Ap.* 30a2–b1 and 33a6–8), though he has given the matter some thought (e.g., *Grg.* 513b8–c1). Given the evident unreliability of his methods, it is hard to imagine that Socrates thinks he knows the proper technical procedures of politics and can explain how they work.³³ If he does think he knows this, then Plato, who persistently confronts Socrates' failures, portrays him as massively self-deceived, just like those whose examinations he recalls in the *Apology* (21b–22e). That would be a surprising, not to say shocking, result.

III

Now I raise an objection to the weak reading based on Socrates' view of himself as good, just, and happy. Consider his response when Callicles asks whether someone like Socrates, who cannot protect himself from prosecution, is admirable (522c7–d5):

Εἰ ἐκεῖνό γε ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχοι, ὃ Καλλίκλεις, ὃ σὺ πολλάκις ὠμολόγησας· εἰ βεβροθηκῶς εἶη αὐτῷ, μήτε περὶ ἀνθρώπους μήτε περὶ θεοῦς ἄδικον μηδὲν μήτε εἰρηκῶς μήτε εἰργασμένως. αὕτη γὰρ³⁴ τῆς βοήθειας ἑαυτῷ πολλάκις ἡμῖν ὠμολόγηται κρατίστη εἶναι. εἰ μὲν οὖν ἐμέ τις ἐξελέγχοι ταύτην τὴν βοήθειαν ἀδύνατον ὄντα ἐμαυτῷ καὶ ἄλλω βοηθεῖν, αἰσχουνοίμην ἂν . . . ἐξελεγχόμενος

Yes, Callicles, as long as he has that one thing that you've often agreed he should have: as long as he has protected himself against having spoken or done anything unjust relating to either men or gods. For this is the self-protection that you and I often have agreed avails the most. Now if someone were to refute me and prove that I am unable to provide *this* protection for myself or for anyone else, I would feel shame at being refuted.

32. However, Socrates is always particularly concerned about the youth and their upbringing, even in "Socratic" dialogues (e.g., *Euthphr.* 2c–3a, despite the irony directed at Meletus, *Euthd.* 275b, *Chrm.* 153d, *La.* 180c2–4), and he notes that the slander against him was particularly effective when directed at children (*Ap.* 18b–c). Note too that his divine sign has appeared to him since childhood (*Ap.* 31d2–3; more on this in §III).

33. At *Grg.* 474a5–b1, Socrates may initially appear to claim expert political technique. However, his ability to produce a witness merely involves eliciting the relevant psychological commitments from an interlocutor, not getting him to assent to them wholeheartedly by fully removing conflicting beliefs (cf. n. 31). This is clear when Socrates claims to have produced Polus as a witness already at 475e7–476a2. Socrates has not made Polus good, even if he has accomplished something worthwhile (472b6–c1).

34. Burnet (1900–1907) has an acute accent on γάρ, presumably an error that found its way into the text via the dominant ms. reading, αὕτη γὰρ τις βοήθεια.

Donald Zeyl's translation, given here, implies that Socrates claims he can avoid injustice and help others do so; one can be refuted only if one makes a positive claim. We need not translate the passage this way,³⁵ but other evidence in the *Gorgias* demonstrates that Socrates considers himself happy (527c4–6), good (503d6–7 taken with 521d8–e1, 511b3–5, 521b4–6, 526d6–7, 527c5–d2), and just (521c9–d3, 522b9–c1), and he links these closely together (469b8–9, 470e4–11, 472d1–6, 507b8–c5, 508a8–b2).³⁶ He also claims to benefit others (505c3–4; *Ap.* 30a5–7, 31d8–e1, 36d9–e1), and despite the unreliability of his attempts to make others just, some evidence supports his claim. Socrates convinces some members of the jury to vote for his acquittal,³⁷ and he sways the attitudes of several interlocutors in the dialogues, including notably *Gorgias* (463a5, 463e3–4, 506a8–b3). Finally, Plato almost certainly thinks that Socrates helped guide Plato himself to a just way of life.

To avoid injustice, though, Socrates thinks that one must acquire a δύνάμιν τινα καὶ τέχνην (509e1, 510a4; cf. 457b5–7, *Hp. Mi.* 375d8–376a4). Hence, he must either have the craft that cares for the soul, whether one's own or another's (i.e., the political craft), or he must have some other power that enables him to avoid injustice and aid others in doing the same.³⁸ The former move concedes the strong reading, so advocates of the weak reading must account for Socrates' power in some other way. Accordingly, I now argue that Socrates' ability to avoid injustice and help others to do the same stems from divine dispensation, and that his resulting power is coherent true belief.³⁹ I then present textual evidence for attributing this condition to Socrates, explain

35. LSJ suggests that ἐξελέγγειν τινά + participle be translated "to convict someone of φ-ing," which lacks the relevant implication. This alternative translation resonates with the extended legal example, and Socrates' mention of another kind of protection clearly refers to his unwillingness to flatter the jury at his trial (522d7–e2; cf. *Ap.* 38d–e). Indeed, LSJ's alternative may seem positively required by 522d6–7, since refutation is not typically fatal, while a court conviction can be (cf. 521b4–d3). Using Brandwood 1976, I found that the construction is unparalleled in the Platonic corpus (though LSJ wrongly gives *Grg.* 482b). There are seven instances of ἐξελέγγειν followed by the result of a refutation (i.e., the negation of the claim refuted), and that is how Zeyl translates. In all seven cases, though, Socrates uses a conjunction rather than a supplementary participle—sometimes ὅτι (*Grg.* 467a9–10, *Euthd.* 288e5–7, *Resp.* 610a–b, [*Hipparch.*] 226e) and sometimes ὡς (*Grg.* 482b2–4, 508a8–b2, *Thr.* 166c). Against LSJ's alternative, the process apparently could be carried out one-on-one (μόνος ὑπὸ μόνου, 522d6, recalling 472b–c, 474a, and 475e–476a). And even if we accept the alternative translation, Socrates may imply that he thinks he can avoid doing injustice at 522d5–7, when he says he would be annoyed and angry if he were convicted of not being able to do so (αἰσχυνοίμην ἄν, ἀγανακτοίην ἄν; contrast 458a). Jowett (1875), Woodhead (1971), Allen (1984), and Lamb (1991) accord with LSJ; Lodge (1890, 256) and Irwin (1979) accord with Zeyl.

36. Brickhouse and Smith (1994, §4.5) argue that Socrates considers himself good and happy but not virtuous. This distinction, and the contrast between acting virtuously and being virtuous with which they attempt to explain it, contradict the *Gorgias* (506d2–4, 507b3–4, 508a8–b2). Moreover, Socrates thinks a good person avoids doing injustice (470e9–11), so Brickhouse and Smith do not thereby avoid having to explain how Socrates can avoid injustice without having knowledge. (They do recognize this problem and try to resolve it.) Cf. Penner 1973, 59 n. 32; 1988, 319 (which implies that Socrates is not even good); 1992, 137, 163 n. 58; Irwin 1995, 371 n. 21; Scott 1995, 44–45, 49; and Benson 2000, §10.3.5.

37. This is the least important point. First, Pericles et al. surely matched this feat. Second, there is little reason to think that Socrates makes a deep difference to the jurors' souls.

38. On this view, καί at 509e1 cannot be strongly epexegetic, i.e., it cannot specify τέχνη as the only relevant δύναμις, to the exclusion of other δυνάμεις. It may still specify a particularly relevant δύναμις in context (see next paragraph).

39. Irwin (1977, 39–40) proposes that Socrates could be understood as having true opinions; for a contrary argument, see Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 126–27. *Laches* 186e1–2 could be read as a disavowal of true belief, but only if either Laches or Nicias has expressed true beliefs.

how it constitutes virtue but not knowledge, and conclude with reflections on the relationship between Socrates' condition and the true political craft.

Socrates clearly treats power as the genus of which craft is a species at 509c–510a. There he says that a power beyond wishing is needed to achieve either of two aims: not suffering injustice and not doing it. He only specifies that the latter power is a craft, and for good reason; the former aim is achieved, at least as Callicles would do it, through a knack (462b–465e).⁴⁰ And while this specification might seem to rule out the possibility of avoiding injustice through a power other than knowledge, it does not. Socrates there considers powers that we can intentionally try to procure (*παρασκευάσασθαι*, 509e1) as the aim of a chosen way of life (500c), as cannot be done with divine dispensation. The idea that Socrates avoids injustice by a power other than knowledge also coheres with 522c–d. He there implicitly talks about the power to avoid injustice generally; in the counterfactual scenario in which he cannot keep from doing injustice, he describes himself as suffering from powerlessness (*ἀδυναμίαν*, 522d6; cf. *ἀδύνατον ὄντα*, 522d4), not specifically from lack of knowledge.⁴¹ But what other power could Socrates have?

In fact, Socrates famously claimed to hear a divine voice or *δαίμόνιον* that had warned him ever since childhood whenever he was about to do something bad (*Ap.* 31c–d, 40a4–7).⁴² While most daimonic interventions portrayed in Plato's dialogues are not of this sort, at least once the *δαίμόνιον* warns Socrates away from impiety (*Phdr.* 242b–d), namely, injustice toward the gods (*Euthphr.* 12e–13a, *Grg.* 507a–b; cf. 522c8–d2). Socrates surely thinks that the voice, which intervenes even in small matters (*Ap.* 40a6), guides him in matters of the utmost importance as well, including whether he is ever about to speak or do wrong to either gods or humans. Socrates' divine voice seems like just the thing to help explain his power to avoid doing injustice. Indeed, in the *Republic* Socrates states explicitly that the *δαίμόνιον* made his philosophical life possible (496c3–5) by keeping him out of ordinary politics and so saving him from servile flattery of the many, as happens to most others

40. "As Callicles would do so," because the true political craft also (ultimately, alone?) reliably prevents one from suffering injustice (517a; cf. §II), though that is not its aim. For an alternative reading of 509c–510a, see Benson 2000, 196 and 196 n. 28; this though he too believes that there are *δυνάμεις* other than *τέχναι* (195–97) and that among these are the *ἐμπειρίαι* of the *Gorgias* (203).

41. On this reading, knowledge is not necessary for virtue in the *Gorgias*. This view faces two problems. First, it is true that when Socrates calls ignorance (*ἀγνοεῖν*, 472c9) the most shameful thing, this by itself is not a problem; true opinion could stand between ignorance and wisdom (*Symp.* 202a). However, in the same passage he implicitly identifies ignorance with lack of knowledge (*μὴ εἰδέναι*, 472c8). Further, the *Symposium* calls the person between ignorance and wisdom neither good nor bad, not good (201e–202b; cf. *Lysis* 217e–218b). Presumably such a person would be neither just nor unjust (contrast *Grg.* 519d2–4?), neither courageous nor cowardly, and so on (cf. Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 133–34). Kahn (1988, 96–98) handles this differently: he denies the unity of virtue in the *Gorgias* (cf. Kahn 1996, 132–33) and argues that in Plato's earliest dialogues, Socrates thinks he has other virtues, but not wisdom. However, Kahn cannot account for *Gorgias* 495d3–e1. Second, Socrates seems to imply that a good person has expertise (500a4–6, 503d6–e4 [*ὁ ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ βέλτιστον λέγων . . . ὥσπερ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι πάντες δημιουργοὶ . . .*; if *καί* here is exegetical, then on the strength of 521d8–e1 Socrates must consider himself good (cf. nn. 16, 36)], and 516e2–3 [cf. 516b11–c1, d2–3, and §II above]). The weak reading can accommodate these passages, without denying that Socrates thinks himself good, by supposing that Socrates paints a picture of the perfectly good person while leaving open the possibility that "good" and "virtuous" can be truly predicated of some who do not meet the ideal (cf. *Resp.* 472b–e).

42. Several parts of what follows rely on McPherran 1996, chap. 4.

of a philosophical nature (*Resp.* 484a1–497a8; cf. *Ap.* 31c–32a, *Grg.* 481d–482a, 517b, 518a–b). He clearly thinks this has kept him from becoming seriously unjust (*Resp.* 491e3–5, 495b3–5), and he characterizes the cause of his escape from injustice as divine dispensation (θεοῦ μοῖραν, 493a1–2; N.B. αἴτιον at *Ap.* 31c).⁴³

Moreover, in the *Theaetetus* Socrates attributes the progress of his associates to himself and the god (150d–e) and claims that under certain circumstances the δαίμόνιον informs him whether he should allow others to associate with him; when it allows the association, they make progress (151a). Likewise in the [*Theages*], Socrates says that his δαίμόνιον explains any improvement shown by his companions (128d–e). These claims are helpful to the weak reader, since they allow Socrates to help others, and not just himself, through a power other than knowledge. In both the [*Theages*] and the *Theaetetus*, Socrates also mentions the instability of the aid that the power of the divine sign (ἡ τοῦ δαίμονιου δύναμις, [*Thg.*] 129e7–8; cf. 129e1–3, 130c8, and *Ion* 533d3, 534c6, 535e9) provides to his companions ([*Thg.*] 130a–e, *Tht.* 150d–151a; cf. *Symp.* 216b–c).⁴⁴ So, even the benefits of extended association with Socrates, unlike those that would be rendered by a political expert, are consistent with the later unjust acts of some associates.

The δαίμόνιον alone can only do so much for Socrates. First, the very fact that it has sometimes had to warn him when he is about to do wrong may seem to indicate that Socrates has false beliefs about value, and that those false beliefs would, without the intervention of the voice, lead him to act unjustly and impiously. If so, then it does not prevent him from having false beliefs about value. Presumably, though, the condition of Socrates' own soul, and in particular whether he suffers from just this sort of false belief, is of primary importance when deciding whether he meets his own standards for virtue (cf. *Grg.* 458a8–b1).⁴⁵ Second, there is the problem of how Socrates identifies the divine sign as providential. Third, the δαίμόνιον apparently only intervenes to warn Socrates away from particular acts, but does not reveal the reasons behind its warnings.

Socrates overcomes all these limitations through rational investigation of the divine sign. Not only can he recognize by enumerative induction that following the δαίμόνιον's advice is beneficial, but he can also come to recognize why the divine *must* intervene for his benefit (*Resp.* 379b–c, 382a, 382e; cf. *Ap.* 20e6–8, 21b, 31d6, *Euthphr.* 6a–b, *Phd.* 97c–d, *Tht.* 151c–d, *Ti.* 29d–30a). By inquiring into and recognizing why the divine voice warns him when it does, he can eliminate false beliefs about value from his soul (as he relates at *Ap.* 31d–32a and *Resp.* 490e–496e with respect to the dangers of ordinary

43. Pace Penner 1988, 318. Also cf. a fragment of Aeschines' *Alcibiades* in Giannantoni 1991, VI A 53; I encountered this passage in Kahn 1996, 21.

44. *Tht.* 150b2–3, 151c7–d3 support my claim below that Socrates has reliably true beliefs about value, since he there claims that he can distinguish true from false ideas, and that this is the source of the greatest benefit he provides to others. This is consistent with attributing his power to help others to the δαίμόνιον precisely because it is, in turn, the source of his reliably true beliefs (see below).

45. Brickhouse and Smith (1994, §4.5.9) do not face this problem, because they think successful action determines happiness, but cf. n. 36.

politics). The voice can even help guide those inquiries (*Ap.* 40b).⁴⁶ And since it has appeared to him continually since childhood, it is plausible that Socrates has rooted out his false beliefs about value over time.⁴⁷ Importantly in this connection, the only time we actually see the δαιμόνιον intervening because Socrates was about to act unjustly or impiously, Socrates clearly already recognized that he was verging on impiety (*Phdr.* 237a4–5, 243b4–7; presumably the aim of helping Phaedrus saves his first speech from being impious). This is the easiest way, perhaps the only way, to depict the divinity's ability to correct Socrates' false beliefs about value without allowing that he still has any.⁴⁸

Philosophical inquiry, including inquiry into the meaning of divine messages, does not compete with divine dispensation when it comes to explaining Socrates' reliably true beliefs about value and his concomitant ability to avoid injustice and help others do so. Philosophy and the δαιμόνιον do not compete for explanatory space because they work together to make Socrates the way he is. His philosophical activities are crucial to his understanding, internalizing, and using his divine provision, but the divine plays an ineliminable role as a reliable source of true beliefs that provide material for fruitful inquiry. Perhaps even more importantly, Socrates conceives of his philosophical activities as themselves divinely inspired (*Ap.* 23b, 29d, 30a–b, 33c, *Cri.* 54e, with 46b4–6)—not only by Chaerephon's oracle, but in every known way in which divine messages have come to a human (*Ap.* 33c; cf. *Cri.* 44a–b, *Phd.* 60d–61a). In the present context, the following commonplace bears repeating: Socrates thinks his mission of examination and exhortation is beneficial to himself and others (*Ap.* 30a, 30e–31b, 38a, *Cri.* 54d–e, *Grg.* 505c); hence he declares himself god's gift to Athens (*Ap.* 31a). Here again, the ultimate etiology of Socrates' ability to benefit himself and others is his peculiar connection to the divine.

Plausibly, then, Socrates' association with the divine has provided him with reliably true beliefs about value. Further, the mechanism for ensuring the reliable truth of his beliefs about value has required him to arrange his attitudes into justificatory and explanatory relations, because that mechanism involves carefully examining relations of consistency and support among his attitudes. The resulting condition of Socrates' soul is coherent true belief about value.⁴⁹ Notice that this condition of the soul counts as orderly and organized in the

46. Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 9) deny that the δαιμόνιον ever intervenes to guide elenchus on the grounds that Plato never portrays such interventions, but this passage almost certainly implies that it has happened.

47. Hence I agree with Penner (1988, 317–18) on one point: one could not just luck into reliably true beliefs about value. However, I countenance a wider range of feasible alternatives to luck than does Penner. I further situate my position on true belief and divine dispensation relative to Penner's in n. 54.

48. Contrast Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 21 n. 35. The δαιμόνιον has a further role even if it no longer needs to keep Socrates from injustice. It frequently appears to Socrates because a certain course of action will, unforeseeably, have better consequences. In the *Euthydemus*, for instance, it is better for Socrates to stay and meet Euthydemus and Dionysodorus (whether because this will benefit him, others [e.g., Clinias], or both), but not because leaving would be unjust. Obviously, this implies that one can act justly without foreseeing all relevant consequences of an action (cf. *La.* 195e–196a, *Chrm.* 173c–174a), and so perhaps that virtue is not good primarily for its consequences (contrast Irwin 1995, chaps. 5–6).

49. Cf. Vlastos 1994, 26–28, and the response of Brickhouse and Smith (1994, 8–9 n. 12; cf. 21 n. 35, 27). In talking about coherent true belief about value, I do not mean to imply that the only attitudes involved in such

sense explained above (§II), so that Socrates counts as good and virtuous (in particular, temperate and just) on his own criteria. Below, I expand on how this condition falls short of political expertise. First, though, I defend further the textual basis for the claim that Socrates thinks he has coherent, reliably true beliefs about value. My evidence comes mainly from the *Meno*, *Apology*, and *Gorgias*.

The *Meno* entertains the possibility that some people are virtuous through true belief. Like knowledge, true belief uses conditional goods correctly, so that they benefit (97a–c; cf. 87d–89a). Hence, someone with true belief lives just as beneficially as someone with knowledge. Such a person cannot teach others (99b, 99e–100a), but can guide and so benefit others (97a, 98c–d, 99a, 99b–d). Finally, virtue in the form of true belief comes through divine dispensation (99c–100b). All of these look like features shared by Socrates and those with true belief. It is tempting to conclude that Socrates introduces the topic of true belief not merely as a theoretical possibility, but as a way of understanding how *he* can be virtuous without knowledge (71b, 98b). This suspicion is confirmed by how Socrates introduces and concludes the main discussion of true belief.

First, consider Socrates' introduction of this theme. Meno and Socrates reach aporia about the teachability of virtue (96d1–4),⁵⁰ so Socrates observes that they have not been adequately educated by their respective teachers (96d5–7). Hence, he says, they must turn their attention to themselves (προσεκτέον τὸν νοῦν ἡμῶν αὐτοῖς, 96d7–8) in order to find someone who improves them. But if neither of them has been adequately educated, and if that is precisely why they have not yet been able to determine whether virtue is teachable and who teaches it, how will turning their attention to themselves help? This is a variation on Meno's eristic paradox (80d–e). Turning their attention to themselves would seem to help only if one of them already knows whether virtue is teachable and who teaches it. But neither of them knows that; hence their inquiry.

Socrates then explains why they should attend to themselves: they failed to see that people succeed not only when guided by knowledge (96e1–4), but also when guided by true belief (97a–c). To reiterate, their failure to recognize true belief as a kind of virtue explains their failure to determine how good people come to be (96e4–5).⁵¹ Now, this proposed explanation and remedy work only if at least one of them has true beliefs. But the point is ambiguous; true belief might be relevant in either of two ways. First, perhaps Socrates thinks that he and Meno have true beliefs concerning virtue's teachability, and can recover those true beliefs through recollection (cf. 85b–86c). Alternatively, perhaps he thinks that one of the two of them has true belief about

a condition of the soul concern properties that anyone would immediately accept as value properties (see *Grg.* 508a and Benson 2000, §§10.4.2–3).

50. The aporia stems from a dubious inference: there are no teachers of virtue, so virtue cannot be taught, and so it is not knowledge. The lack of teachers does raise the puzzle of how a knowing teacher of virtue could ever arise, except through another knowing teacher of virtue. The use of divine dispensation to solve this puzzle chimes with the Platonic view that crafts in general come from the gods (*Ion* 537c, *Euthphr.* 15a1–2, *Prot.* 321d–322d [θείας . . . μοίρας, 322a3], *Symp.* 197a–b). Contrast Polus at *Grg.* 448c4–9.

51. Accepting Madvig's emendation of ἦ to ἧ at 96e4.

the very same things that (they have been supposing) the person with virtue knows.

In the event, Socrates considers the latter possibility—that someone might have true beliefs on the topics that enable him to guide his own and others' actions well (reliably, not occasionally; cf. 97c).⁵² His examples of leaders with divinely inspired true belief are politicians—Themistocles et al. (93a–94e, 99b–d)—but we have seen in the *Gorgias* the extent to which Socrates considers their leadership beneficial; there only Aristides is singled out as a truly good person (*Grg.* 526b; cf. *Meno* 94a). But now, recall that Socrates initially proposed that they turn their attention to themselves. He must suppose that either he or Meno is such a person. The choice between them is clear; Socrates must be talking obliquely about himself. Hence when Socrates says that by attending to those with true opinions about virtue one becomes better and comes to understand how good men arise (*Meno* 96d8–e1, e4–5), this implies that others should philosophize with him and become better. One might even say that this counts not as a form of teaching, but as a further operation of divine dispensation (*Ion* 535e–536a).⁵³

The end of the dialogue provides even better evidence. When Socrates mentions that Meno could benefit Athens by persuading Anytus of their conclusions (100b), this can only refer to Socrates' prosecution (cf. 94e–95a). But exactly what should Meno persuade Anytus of, and how would this have helped to prevent the prosecution? The key claim that Anytus needs to be convinced of seems to be precisely that the divine gift of true belief provides the benefits of virtue to the person so gifted and to others (100b2–4). Here we should recall that Meletus ridiculed the *δαμόνιον* in his deposition (*Ap.* 31d1), presumably as part of the charge of impiety. The *Meno's* conclusion, then, connects the flaws of the two charges much as the *Apology* does: far from being impious, Socrates has received the divine gift of virtue in the form of true belief; far from corrupting, he benefits Athens thanks to his divine gift of true belief.⁵⁴

52. See Kraut 1984, 301 n. 81.

53. This does not imply that Socrates does not himself have a *δύναμις*, as *Ion* 533d–e makes clear. It also does not imply that Socrates speaks without any understanding (*νοῦς*), as he says of the poets, rhapsodes, prophets, and so on (cf. Kraut 1984, 301–3 n. 82, 2C). Part of what sets Socrates apart is precisely his insistence on rationally examining divine signs (cf. McPherran 1996, chap. 4).

54. Penner (1988, appendix II) argues that Socrates never seriously thinks that one could live well through systematic true belief due to divine dispensation (cf. Scott 1995, 43, 46–47, 49). Most of Penner's claims get something right, but require further qualification. Penner is right that reliably true beliefs must be causally connected with knowledge. However, Socrates' reliably true beliefs are causally connected to (divine) knowledge, though he does not share that knowledge. Penner is right that divine dispensation in the *Apology* is sincere, and that divine dispensation, just by itself, does not guarantee success. However, it is more than a little helpful; Socrates' gods help those who help themselves through philosophy, but they encourage and aid that very philosophical examination. Penner is right that Socrates is ironic in attributing divinely provided true belief, and so virtue, to Athenian politicians (except, perhaps, Aristides). However, this is a complex irony (cf. Vlastos, 1991, chap. 1); he really thinks true belief can constitute virtue, though he does not believe that, e.g., Pericles has such virtue. (On these issues, cf. Kraut 1984, 301–3 n. 82, 2A–B.) Penner is right that Socrates does not mention divine dispensation as the source of the auxiliaries' true beliefs in the *Republic*. However, he does mention it to explain why certain souls avoid corruption (493a1–2, 496a–e). Penner is right that conviction-persuasion in the *Gorgias* is not useful. However, that is precisely because such persuasion proceeds without concern for truth. Finally, though, when Penner says that true belief is absent from the Socratic dialogues other than the *Meno* and *Gorgias* (454c–e), he is simply wrong. True belief can be present without being thematized (see below on the *Apology*).

This brings us to the *Apology* itself, which provides further evidence in support of my claim about Socrates' condition. If there is one persistent claim in the *Apology*, it is that Socrates tells the truth (17b, 17c, 20d, 22a, 22b, 24a–b, 26a, 28a, 28d, 31c, 31e, 32a, 33c, 34b, 38a; these are only the explicit cases) in contrast to his accusers, who speak falsely (17a, 18a–b, 19d, 23d, 34b, and wherever he claims to have been slandered). Some of these cases are general avowals of truth telling (17b, 17c), while others primarily involve mundane facts (28a, 31c, 32a, 34b, perhaps 38a). However, many explicitly involve truths relevant to genuine politics, whether because they concern the goodness or excellence of certain actions and persons (28d, perhaps 38a), the way the human soul is affected by and responds to various things (31e, 33c), or both (20d, 22a, 22b, 24a–b). Other comments also commit Socrates to claiming true belief on topics central to politics as he understands it—for example, his claims not to have corrupted the youth (33a–b, 33d–34b). He also draws a close connection between telling the truth and doing just things (17b7–c3, 18a3–5) and is quite emphatic throughout that he is acting justly in court, as he has in the past (17c2–3, 18a1–5, 28b5–9, 31d–33a, 35b9–c2, 37b2–5). Socrates even says, in a particularly significant phrase for the present topic, that by virtue of telling the truth he might be considered a certain kind of orator (17b4–6). Despite all these strong claims to the truth on topics central to genuine politics, Socrates explicitly disavows the expertise that would allow him to inculcate human and political excellence (20b–c). On his view, then, true belief and knowledge come apart.

When it comes to the coherence of Socrates' true beliefs, two aspects of the *Apology* are particularly relevant. First, we should note the linguistic relationship between a word Socrates frequently uses in the *Apology* to describe the examinations he subjects people to, ἐξέτασις, and a word that he uses to refer to the organization that constitutes the good of each kind of thing at *Gorgias* 503d–508a, τάξις.⁵⁵ An ἐξέτασις of the soul considers whether it is in its proper order or τάξις. Hence the unexamined life is not livable for a human (ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ, *Ap.* 38a5–6). Someone who lives the unexamined life fails even to consider whether the thing most properly herself, the soul, is in a good state or not, and having one's soul in a good state does not just happen by good fortune, even when the gods help.⁵⁶ Second, Socrates gives an example of how, through philosophical examination, he places true beliefs into coherent relationships. When he hears that the oracle has declared that nobody is wiser than Socrates (21a4–7), he realizes that the oracular utterance must be true (21b6–7), but it seems to conflict with his recognition that he is not wise (21b4–5). Socrates resolves the conflict by determining that his unsurpassed wisdom consists in not thinking he knows something, particularly the most important things, when he does not (21c5–22e5). This inquiry not only resolves the conflict among his beliefs, it also

55. Following Goldman 2004, 26–33.

56. Goldman (2004, 32 n. 99, and 2006) gives a military-political reading of Socrates' use of these terms. I think Socrates' claims must carry psychological import (even at 28d6–29a2), though I agree that psychological τάξις and political τάξις (= being at one's station = doing one's own) are closely related, insofar as psychological justice and practical or civic justice are closely related (see n. 26).

places them in an explanatory relationship: it is because Socrates recognizes that he lacks the most important wisdom that he is wisest.

Finally, these arguments do not merely project evidence from the *Meno* and *Apology* onto the *Gorgias*. In the latter dialogue, Socrates explicitly distinguishes knowledge from conviction and allows that conviction can be true (454d; cf. 458a8–b1).⁵⁷ His argument for distinguishing knowledge from conviction does not reveal why knowledge is not simply true conviction, but Socrates clearly does distinguish them when he divides persuasion into two forms, one of which produces conviction without knowledge, and the other knowledge (454e3–4). If he does not emphasize the distinction between knowledge and true conviction here,⁵⁸ nevertheless he does emphatically and repeatedly claim that his views about the soul and its excellence are true, but no less emphatically disavows knowledge (see §II above).

Socrates also makes two other bold claims to the truth in the *Gorgias*. At 472b5–6 he accuses Polus of trying to exile him from his property (οὐσία), the truth. Then, in his final speech, he claims to practice the truth (τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀσκῶν), and connects this to his trying (πειράσομαι) to be the best person he can (526d6–7). But one can only practice the truth if one can determine what is true. In neither case does Socrates say that he has true opinions, but it is hard to see what true cognitive state Socrates could have besides true opinion or knowledge.⁵⁹ Finally, and famously, Socrates thinks he is in harmony with himself, that he is consistent in what he says (482a–c, 490e9–11, 509a4–7),⁶⁰ and that “the truth,” which he has, “is never refuted” (473b10–11). So, he evidently considers his true beliefs to be orderly and organized.

In conclusion, I return to an earlier question: how does Socrates’ coherent true belief fall short of political expertise? Coherent true belief does not entail possession of a sufficiently rich and precise range of explanatorily integrated true beliefs to count as knowledge. There are at least two aspects to this. First, Socrates can believe truly that one among a range of possibilities obtains, without being able to figure out which one. He attributes this sort of limitation to himself when discussing the soul’s post-mortem fate in the *Apology* (40c–41b). This may also be his position with respect to the human soul generally. Second, Socrates can believe truly that justice is a virtue, that virtue is good, and that the good benefits, and draw far-reaching practical

57. Kahn (1981, 311–12 n. 16, 1988, 87–88) argues that the *Gorgias* and *Meno* distinctions differ. Benson (2000, §4.8.1) argues that Socrates implicitly distinguishes knowledge and true belief in various “Socratic” dialogues, since he recognizes that he can show that someone lacks knowledge of a claim without thereby showing that the claim is false. (However, refutation must surely involve some false belief or other.) Benson (2000, 94 n. 151) makes it clear that he would dissent from my claim that true belief suffices for virtue in the *Gorgias*. Finally, Benson (2000, 84) proposes that Socrates could have stable, consistent belief without having true belief. I cannot imagine that Socrates would allow that as a real possibility (cf. Vlastos 1994, 25–26).

58. On this fact, see Nehamas 1986, 282 n. 17.

59. At *Symp.* 201c, Socrates says that it is hard to challenge the truth, not himself. That might seem to suggest that Socrates denies having reliably true beliefs. However, Socrates’ point could simply be that the view is hard to challenge qua true, not qua his. He surely wants to avoid mindless veneration of whatever he says, since that does not yield understanding (cf. n. 4 above and *Phd.* 91b–c, *Grg.* 473b; *Arist. Eth. Nic.* I.6).

60. The first of these three passages is key, since Socrates there says explicitly that philosophy always says the same things, and that he says the same things as philosophy. The second passage is a joke, but a serious joke; the third presents some interpretive difficulties (see §II above). Contrast Kraut 1984, 287 n. 64, 311–16, and in response, see Vlastos 1994, 27 n. 68.

conclusions from these true beliefs (e.g., at *Grg.* 521b–c), and yet not be able to explain why justice is a virtue, or give an adequate account of the good (cf. *Resp.* 354c1–3, 435c9–d5, 506b8–c9). So, someone with coherent true belief can lack answers to questions for which an expert would have answers. But an unanswered question is not the same as either an incoherence or a falsehood in one’s soul—provided that one recognizes which questions one can answer and which one cannot.⁶¹ Thinking that you know what you don’t know both introduces false beliefs into your psyche and also introduces or manifests psychological conflict. Hence, coherent true belief requires recognizing that you don’t know what you don’t know—namely, human wisdom (*Ap.* 29e1–3).

Indeed, as I now argue, these are one and the same condition of the soul. Arguing for this claim requires showing not only that coherent true belief requires human wisdom (again, recognizing that you don’t know what you don’t know), but also, at a minimum, that human wisdom requires coherent true belief.

I begin here: Since Socrates’ evaluative beliefs are true and coherently organized, any political expert will agree with his views about ethics and psychology. However, the expert also has more determinate beliefs (where Socrates only truly believes that one of a range of possibilities obtains) placed into a wider explanatory framework (where Socrates’ true beliefs are insufficiently wide-ranging). Hence Socrates can identify what the expert of *Crito* 47d1–48a11 and the remarkable sailor of *Gorgias* 511e–512b will know, without himself having the knowledge they would have.⁶²

However, this is precisely the ability that leads to puzzles at *Charmides* 169d–172c.⁶³ There, Socrates raises a puzzle about how anyone without a given expertise such as medicine can examine either himself or another and thereby determine whether or not he is expert in that area. The puzzle is that Socrates claims to be able to do precisely this in the *Apology*: he lacks the knowledge that everyone should seek, but nevertheless claims to be able to tell that neither he nor anyone else he has questioned has that knowledge. How can he, if the arguments in the *Charmides* show that expertise is necessary to carry out the examination? Only, I think, by having a capacity in his soul other than expertise that provides a reliable guide to what the expert will know. But this, I have just argued, is precisely what coherent true belief allows him to do. Plausibly, then, human wisdom requires coherent true belief.

So, recognizing one’s own lack of knowledge not only prepares the way for learning (*Meno* 84c, *Th.* 210b–c), but also already requires substantial epistemic progress toward knowledge. This makes attaining human wisdom no simple matter, but that is exactly what we should expect. The example of Socrates’ interlocutors testifies to the difficulty of coming to realize that one lacks knowledge of the most important things, and in fact it does seem important to avoid the comfortable thought that one can easily recognize one’s

61. So, I do not attribute to Socrates a definition of knowledge as the power to produce “an interrelated coherent system of true cognitive states,” as does Benson (2000, §9.3.3, 234), since I think one can be in such a state without having knowledge. This may amount to a disagreement over what coherence is.

62. So these passages do not imply that Socrates thinks he has knowledge, contra Vlastos 1985, 10–11.

63. See Benson 2003, with references to previous treatments of the problem.

epistemic limitations. The difficulty of attaining this condition also explains why Socrates is the wisest of men rather than one humanly wise person among many others (but cf. *Ap.* 23a7–b4), and why he is practically the only person to do politics. Socrates can determine whether someone contradicts what the expert would say on a substantial range of topics, and this is enough to determine that that person is not an expert. Further, using his own well-organized psychological attitudes, Socrates can expose the incoherence in a purported expert's psychology and help to harmonize his or her psyche. This, then, is the sense in which Socrates can reasonably claim to do politics (*πράττειν τὰ πολιτικά*, 521d7–8) and strive for political expertise without having it.⁶⁴

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