SOCRATIC METHOD
AND MORAL MOTIVATION

by

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Abstract

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I argue for a new account of the role of philosophical argument in changing a person’s core values. As philosophers, we tend to think it is possible to cause someone to change his values by directing some piece of reasoning at him. But that is often naïve, as can be seen by the trajectory of many political disputes: one side takes an argument to be persuasive, and the other refuses to accept it. As it happens, this is the exact progression of many Platonic dialogues. Socrates argues that his interlocutor’s core values are mistaken, and his interlocutor, despite being unable to identify where, if anywhere, the argument goes astray, rejects its conclusion. Is, then, argument out of work when it comes to changing a person’s core values? Many scholars, including Martha Nussbaum, Gregory Vlastos, and Alexander Nehamas, hold that Plato believes as much. On the standard view, Plato thinks that philosophical argument is an ineffective way of reforming a person’s life, and he rejects Socrates’ project, as outlined in the Apology, of using philosophical argument to persuade his interlocutors to value wisdom more than money, honor, and everything else.
Against this standard view, I argue that Plato offers a compelling account of how philosophical argument can be effective at transforming a person’s values. As has not been appreciated by other scholars, Socrates uses his methods of refutation and exhortation in most cases not to advocate wisdom’s overriding importance, but rather to motivate pursuing wisdom merely for its instrumental value, and this because it is the instrumental pursuit of wisdom that is meant to be transformative. Socrates’ overall strategy, then, is not unlike that of the professor who recruits a student to philosophy with the promise that it will improve her LSAT scores, all the while anticipating that, once the student experiences the thrill of abstract, intellectual inquiry, she will lose her legal ambitions and devote herself to philosophical studies. What justifies this strategy, in our eyes and Plato’s, is that, in some important contexts, including the choice of a way of life, the right reasons can come into view only after taking up some practice, and so the practice cannot be motivated by the right reasons until it is taken up on some other basis.
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Abbreviations

Alc. Alcibiades
Ap. Apology
Chrm. Charmides
Cr. Crito
Euthd. Euthydemus
Eu. Euthyphro
G. Gorgias
Hi.Ma. Hippias Major
Hi.Mi. Hippias Minor
Ion Ion
La. Laches
Ly. Lysis
M. Meno
Phd. Phaedo
Phdr. Phaedrus
Phil. Philebus
Prt. Protagoras
Rep. Republic
Smp. Symposium
Tht. Theaetetus
Thg. Theages
Introduction

What if someone has not been properly brought up?... [It is a] massively implausible implication that someone who has not been properly brought up—someone who has slipped through the net, so to speak—can be induced into seeing things straight by directing some piece of reasoning at him. On the contrary, reasoning aimed at generating new motivations will surely stand a chance of working only if it appeals to something in the audience’s existing motivational make-up... and the trouble with someone who has in some radical way slipped through the net is that there may be no such point of leverage for reasoning aimed at generating the motivations that are characteristic of someone who has been properly brought up. What it would take to get such a person to consider the relevant matters aright, we might plausibly suppose, is... something like conversion.¹

For Plato, and for Socrates as Plato represents him, the commitment to philosophy is conceived as something comparable to a religious conversion... This involves a radical restructuring of the personality in its values and priorities...²

Plato not only develops philosophical views in the dialogues. He also depicts Socrates trying to convert his interlocutors—that is, to transform their values and ways of life. Socrates gives an overview of this project in the Apology:

I will obey the god... I shall not cease... to exhort you [ὑμῖν παρακελεύωμενός] and in my customary way [ὁδέπερ εἰσώθη] to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: ‘My good man, when you’re an Athenian, belonging to the greatest city and the one with the highest reputation for wisdom [σοφίαν] and strength, are you not ashamed [οὐχ ἀσχόλην] to care about [ἐπιμελούμενος] getting as much money, and as much reputation [δόξης] and honor [τιμῆς], as you can, while as for getting as much wisdom [φρονήσεως] and truth as you can, and getting your soul into the best condition, that you don’t care about, and don’t give any thought to [οὐχ ἐπιμελῆ ὁδὲ φροντίζεις]?’ Then, if one of you disputes this and says he does care about these things, I shall not let him go at once or leave him, but I shall question him, examine him, and test him [ἐρήσωμα αὐτὸν καὶ ἐξετάσω καὶ ἐλέγξω], and if I do not think he has acquired excellence [ἀρετὴν], though he says he has, I shall reproach him [ὀνειδω] because

he attaches little importance to the most important things and greater importance to inferior things... Be sure that this is what the god orders me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing for the city than my service to the god. For what I'm doing as I go about is nothing other than [οὐδεν γὰρ ἐλλο πράττων ἐγὼ περιέχωμαι] trying to persuade both the younger and the older not to care about [ἐπιμελεῖσθα] bodies or money in preference to, or as strongly as, getting your soul into the best possible condition...” (Apol. 29d-30b).³

My aim in this thesis is to answer the question of how, if at all, Socrates’ methods, as depicted by Plato, can be effective at accomplishing the task of converting his interlocutors, as outlined here.

### Standard account

The standard answer is that Socrates’ methods cannot accomplish it and that Plato realized as much. In fact, it is difficult to resist that impression. Plato rarely, if ever, depicts Socrates convincing an interlocutor outright. Most often his arguments elicit negative emotions, emotions that cause his interlocutors to insult him and stop the conversation short. It is tempting to conclude, as scholars often do, that these responses show that Socrates’ conversion efforts have failed. Nehamas 1998 asks rhetorically, “How could Socrates... claim success for himself in light of such a record?” (66).⁴ Beversluis 2000 writes, “... if the early dialogues show anything, they show Socrates’ monumental failure” (34). Blondell 2002 is just as emphatic: “... the most striking overall pattern [to Socrates’ persuasive efforts] is the failure of his elenctic mission, as outlined in the Apology, to convert anyone who does not already share his outlook to a Socratic way of life—or even to reform their character for the better (125-126).⁵

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³ Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Plato are from the Cooper and Hutchinson Complete Works, with occasional revision.
⁴ See also Nehamas 1999c: 70-71.
The shared inference here is that, because of how Socrates’ interlocutors respond to his arguments—some become hostile, others are unimpressed, and few, if any, are completely persuaded—we can conclude that he has failed to convert them. But ought we to make that inference? We might think the answer is obvious: Yes, if the interlocutor has not pledged to reform his way of living by the dialogue’s end, then Socrates has not converted him. But we should keep in mind that conversion of the magnitude that Socrates is trying to achieve—conversion that radically changes a person’s fundamental values—rarely, if ever, happens after a single conversation. Most often it is the culmination of a process that includes multiple steps. Moreover, in the case of a conversion that targets a person’s core values, it would not be surprising if one of those steps resulted, at least initially, in his becoming defensive and irritated. Thus, we should be hesitant to conclude that Socrates fails to convert an interlocutor from just the fact that his arguments upset the interlocutor or that, by the end of the dialogue, the interlocutor has not promised to reform his life. Plato’s dialogues depict only single conversations, and it may be that the conversations he depicts are but one step in the process of conversion.\(^6\)

Now, the mature Plato is often taken to hold that Socratic argument is not only useless but actively harmful. The key evidence is Republic 7, where Plato criticizes a “questioner” whose arguments tend to corrupt people:

And then a questioner comes along and asks someone of this sort, “What is the fine?” And, when he answers what he has heard from the traditional lawgiver, the argument refutes [ἐξελέγχῃ] him, and by refuting him often and in many places shakes him from his convictions, and makes him believe the fine is no more fine than the shameful, and the same with the just, the good, and the

\(^6\) It is thus too quick to infer that Socrates “[f]ailed as a teacher, since he is not shown to have made anyone else good” (Nehamas 1999b: 48). It may be that the dialogues show Socrates only starting his interlocutors on the process of becoming good. Note, too, that the argument sketched here suggests the outline of an answer to why Plato never depicts any cases of sudden, outright conversion: he did not believe that such radical transformations happen all at once. Cf. Scott 2000, summing up Plato’s views on the matter: “To the extent that modifications in one’s character are possible at all after basic habits and proclivities have been formed, they will be the result of gradual, vigilant, and sustained exercise...” (167).
things he honored most... Then, when he no longer honors and obeys those [earlier] convictions and can't discover the true ones, will he be likely to adopt any other way of life than that which flatters him?... And so, I suppose, from being law-abiding he becomes lawless (Rep. 7.538d-539a).

The questioner asks ‘What is x?’ questions, where x is a fundamental evaluative concept, and repeatedly refutes his interlocutor’s answers. This behavior is not unfamiliar; Plato often depicts Socrates behaving in exactly this way. We might think, then, that Plato means for his readers to understand that this ‘questioner’ is just Socrates thinly veiled—in which case, the message is clear: Socratic argument tends to corrupt. That, in fact, is the prevailing line of interpretation. Commenting on the passage, Nussbaum 1980 writes, “Plato charges his teacher [i.e. Socrates]... with contributing to moral decline by not restricting the questioning-process to a chosen, well-trained few... Plato, with Aristophanes, believes that for the ordinary man questioning [of moral values] is destructive without being therapeutic” (88). Vlastos 1988 echoes her: Plato came to think if people “come to [discussions of right and wrong] unprepared they would be sure to be corrupted. Premature exposure to such inquiry will undermine the beliefs about right and wrong inculcated in them from childhood and they will lose their moral bearings... Where in the annals of Western philosophy could we find a sharper antithesis to this restriction of ethical inquiry [in the Republic] to a carefully selected, rigorously trained elite than in the Socrates of Plato’s earlier dialogues?” (110). Similarly, Nehamas 1999c reads the passage as Plato’s “criticism” of Socrates (60-61).

We will evaluate this interpretation in a moment. Note first how well it fits with a common way of reading the Republic as Plato’s parting ways with Socrates on the issue of moral education, and especially on whether argument has a place in it. In book 1, Plato depicts Socrates’ arguments spectacularly failing to convince Thrasymachus to adopt the life of justice. Then, in books 2 and 3, he proposes a method of moral education that makes no use of argument. It looks, then, like Plato is rejecting Socrates’ argument-based form of moral education and replacing it with his own, one that, in a radical departure from Socrates, relies wholly on art and gymnastics. Book
7 would thus be making explicit that argument is an ineffective tool of positive moral reform, in case we missed the point when it was left implicit in books 1-3.⁷

Now, the main issue here is Plato’s attitude towards Socrates’ style of argument. Is he pessimistic about its ability to change people for the better? One possibility is that Plato thinks Socrates’ method corrupts most people but can convert a few in just the right way. If so, then it would still be worth investigating how that conversion can happen. But I do not think we should read the book 7 passage as expressing a Platonic pessimism towards Socrates’ style of argument in the first place. The reason is that, on closer inspection, the ‘questioner’ whom Plato criticizes cannot be meant to represent Socrates after all. After the passage quoted above, Plato goes on to describe the questioner as “someone who plays at contradiction for sport” (τὸν παιδῶν χάριν παιζοντα καὶ ἀνιχλέγοντα, 539c7-8).⁸ He contrasts this person with “someone who is willing to engage in discussion to look for the truth” (τὸν δὲ διαλέγεσθαι ἐθέλοντα καὶ σκοπεῖν τἀληθὲς, 539c6-7). Clearly, the second description, and not the first, fits Socrates. Further, Plato specifies that the corrupting questioner refutes the core evaluative beliefs of “young people” (οἱ μεγαλόσκοι, 539b2). Plausibly, it is their youth that explains why the refutations tend to instill in them a sort of moral nihilism. With one exception, however, Socrates reserves refutations that concern a person’s core evaluative beliefs for adults.⁹ Thus, Republic 7.538d-539d should not be read as Plato’s

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⁷ Note that this way of reading the Republic is open both to a developmentalist and non-developmentalist interpretation. It may be that, in writing dialogues that came before the Republic, Plato held the view that argument can be a useful tool for positive moral reform, and only came to reject this view in writing the Republic. Or it may be that Plato all along had doubts about the persuasive powers of Socrates’ arguments; after all, as noted, Plato depicts those arguments accomplishing very little with the interlocutors whom Socrates tries to convert.

⁸ The first mention of ‘playing at contradiction’ in the context is applied at 539b2-3 to the young people who imitate the questioner. But that characteristic is mentioned again just later, and there it applies to the questioner. Socrates says, “… an older person [in contrast to the young people]… will imitate someone who is willing to engage in discussion in order to look for the truth, rather than someone who plays at contradiction for sport” (539c6-9). The comment implies that young people imitate the sort of questioner who plays at contradiction—that’s the sort who turns people from law-abiding to lawless—while older people imitate a questioner who looks for the truth.

⁹ The one exception is Charmides, whose definition of temperance Socrates refutes. Importantly, though, Socrates is encouraging and not combative towards Charmides, he does not emphasize
criticizing Socrates for corrupting people by means of arguments, and thus not expressing pessimism about the ability of Socratic argument to improve people. Instead, it should be read as making explicit a point left implicit in the *Euthydemus*, namely that the games of contradiction played by people like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus can be morally damaging for the young.

We might still think, though, that the form of moral education Plato proposes in books 2 and 3, which makes no use of argument, is meant to replace Socrates’ strategy of morally educating people by means of argument, and thus that, aside from *Republic* 7, Plato is still pessimistic about the ability of Socratic argument to convert people to the right way of living. But that does not follow. It may be that, in the best society, all children would undergo the moral education recommended in the *Republic*, and it would be so effective and lasting that a method of converting people later in life from mistaken values to correct values would not be needed. But in societies less than best, such as Plato’s Athens, some, and likely most, people will have mistaken values, and thus a way of transforming their values will be needed, a way that can be effective even once they are adults. So far as the dialogues go, Socratic argument is the leading candidate for that.

Charmides’ failures, and he even apologizes for them: “there is nothing remarkable in [Charmides’] being ignorant of the matter at his age” (162e). The *Lysis* might be thought to be another exception, but there Socrates does not refute the core evaluative beliefs of the boys; he does not refute their beliefs about the fine, shameful, just, or good (cf. *Rep.* 7.538d).

That is not to deny, however, that Plato thinks that Socrates’ arguments can occasionally have a harmful effect on people. It is just to deny that *Republic* 7.538d-539d is evidence of that.

Indeed, we come closer to the sort of ‘questioner’ Plato has in mind by thinking of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, whom Plato describes as occupied with “the frivolous part of study” (τῶν μαθημάτων παιδᾶ) and as merely “playing” (προσπαίζειν); accordingly, Clinias is counseled to think of their arguments as mere “child’s play” (παιδᾶ, *Euthd.* 278b-c). The verbal similarities between these descriptions and the description in *Republic* 7, plus the fact that the brothers do play at contradiction for sport, supports thinking that people like them are Plato’s targets for criticism in *Republic* 7. He targets this sort of person also in the *Phaedo*: “... those in particular who spend their time studying contradiction [οἱ περὶ τῶν ἄντιλογων λόγων ἀντιφάσεις] in the end believe themselves to have become very wise and that they alone have understood that there is no soundness or reliability in any object or in any argument...” (90c).

It is relevant here also that the educational program of books 2 and 3 is not sufficient to make a fully mature, moral adult. For that, a person must continue with the program of dialectic described in book 7. Also, at 6.500d, Plato describes a philosopher even in the ideal city concerned to shape an
One last reason why we might be skeptical from the outset about the ability of Socrates’ arguments to convert his interlocutors is that, we might think, most of his interlocutors are irrational to such an extent that argument will be unable to change their core values. We observe them, for instance, assenting to premises that entail they ought to reform their ways of living, but, instead of doing that, and despite being unable to identify where, if anywhere, the argument went astray, they reject the conclusion. Recently, Scott 1999 and Woolf 2000 have argued that this tendency is the result of interlocutors’ having strong, misplaced desires. Further, they think that Socratic argument is unable to change such desires, and thus that Socratic argument will be ineffectual on people whose desires are not already properly oriented. If that is correct, then it is a serious problem for Socrates’ project of conversion, since those are the exactly the sort of people whose lives he is trying to reform.

My main response to Scott and Woolf is in Chapter 5. As I will argue there, Socrates has a form of argument that exploits his interlocutors’ strong, misplaced desires as a means of motivating them to do philosophy, one that succeeds in doing just that in the *Phaedrus*, *Lysis*, and *Alcibiades*. Thus, it is mistaken to think that these desires always present insurmountable obstacles to Socrates’ project of conversion. In fact, Socrates suggests at one point that the presence of such a desire helps his cause (*Alc.* 105e-106a).13

So, interpreters have found three reasons to conclude that Plato is pessimistic about Socrates’ ability to convert his interlocutors by means of arguments. But none of the reasons secure that conclusion. Even though Plato depicts Socrates’ interlocutors reacting to his arguments with negative emotions, and even though he does not depict outright cases of success, it is too quick to infer that he thinks Socrates’ arguments are always ineffective at converting people, let alone harmful. In fact, as I argue in Chapter 2, Socrates intends to cause his interlocutors to experience negative emotions. Further, Socrates is not whom Plato means to criticize in *Republic* 7, and thus neither

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13 I address worries about the authenticity of the *Alcibiades* in chapter 5.
it, nor Republic 2 or 3, ought to be read as rejecting Socrates’ argument-based form of moral education. Lastly, the presence in some interlocutors of strong, misplaced desires is no reason to think that Socrates will be unable to convert them; for, as I show, Socrates has a form of argument that works by exploiting those desires.

Overview

I argue that Plato offers a compelling narrative in the dialogues about how Socrates’ methods can be effective at transforming the values of his interlocutors. The basic structure of this argument is as follows. I use the Apology to identify the goal of Socrates’ conversion project and the methods he uses to try to achieve it. The goal is to persuade his interlocutors to adopt ‘the life of philosophy.’ I mean to use this phrase somewhat technically; it is the life that Socrates wants to persuade his interlocutors to adopt, and adopting it counts as being converted. I clarify exactly what I mean by it in Chapter 1, but, for now, it can be understood as the life of valuing knowledge and wisdom the most. The methods Socrates uses to try to persuade people to adopt the life of philosophy are refutation (elenchein) and exhortation (parakeleuesthai). In the rest of the thesis, I consider how these two methods contribute to accomplishing that goal. I argue that Socrates uses both refutation and exhortation to motivate his

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14 As will become clear, Socratic exhortation is a type of protreptic, a genre of discourse intended to turn someone towards a specific end. This genre emerged in the fourth century BCE especially as a way for philosophers to market their new schools and philosophical practices to potential students (Collins 2015: 1). I use the term ‘Socratic exhortation’ instead of ‘Socratic protreptic’ for two reasons: to stay true to the language Socrates uses at Apology 29d (parakeleuesthai), and to make clear that this is a very specific and rather unusual form of protreptic, one that primarily works by exploiting an interlocutor’s erōs. For a fascinating and detailed treatment of protreptic in Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle, see Collins 2015, which builds on the work of Gaiser 1959 and Slings 1999. The method that I call ‘Socratic exhortation’ does not appear in these works.

15 Some readers may object to my calling Socratic refutation and exhortation “methods” because neither meet the criteria that Plato gives for a practice to be a craft (technē). But by calling them “methods” I do not mean that they are crafts. I mean rather that they are practices that exhibit a “common form, a common strategy, and a common epistemological presupposition” (Benson 2010: 179). For readers interested in the question of whether Socratic refutation is a technē, see Brickhouse and Smith 2002: 147-156 and Wolfsdorf 2003: 297-308.
interlocutors to undertake philosophy, albeit merely as a means to repairing their self-esteem or social standing, or to satisfying one of their misplaced desires. This is a surprising result, for the life of philosophy requires one to do philosophy not only as a means but for itself. Why, then, do Socrates’ methods present philosophy as merely instrumentally valuable? For two reasons, I argue. The first is that, if they were to try for anything more, they would fail. This point is a consequence of Plato’s moral psychology, and it requires understanding the influence of erōs, Plato’s preferred term for a ruling desire, on our evaluative beliefs. The second reason is that doing philosophy even as a mere means can be transformative. In particular, it can lead one to adopt the belief that knowledge and wisdom are of ultimate value. Thus, Socrates’ methods are finely-tuned to meet the demands of Plato’s moral psychology, and they aim to convert his interlocutors by a process of two stages. The first stage consists in motivating them to do philosophy as a means. The second stage consists in this instrumental pursuit causing a transformation after which they value knowledge and wisdom for themselves.

I make this argument by examining two sets of dialogues: those where Socrates employs refutation or exhortation; and those where Plato reflects on Socrates’ conversion project, especially on the obstacles and the moral psychology relevant to it. This first set includes the dialogues where Socrates conducts refutations (the Apology, Euthyphro, Charmides, Laches, Hippias Major, Hippias Minor, Ion, Euthydemus, Protagoras, and Gorgias) and the dialogues where he conducts exhortations (the Euthydemus, which features a forerunner to exhortation; Alcibiades, Lysis, and Phaedrus). The second set of dialogues includes the Gorgias, Phaedo, Theaetetus, Symposium, and Republic. Dialogues that do not display Socrates’ methods of conversion or comment on his conversion project (e.g., the Parmenides and Timaeus) are set aside.

16 Roughly, these dialogues are those that Nails 1995 characterizes as “Socratic dialogues” that “illustrate the Platonic character Socrates in the plausible context of everyday oral philosophical activity” (204). Nails contrasts these dialogues with what she calls “didactic dialogues” that “set out a complex or large theory or body of information, subordinating the role of interlocutor to yes-man” (204).
Thus, even though my main question concerns the project of conversion that Socrates outlines in the *Apology*, I do not limit myself to the usual set of ‘Socratic’ or ‘early’ dialogues. The reason is straightforward. Socrates tries to achieve that project in dialogues outside the standard group of early dialogues (e.g., in the *Phaedrus*), and dialogues outside this group include reflections that help elucidate how he can achieve it. Insofar as I am inclined to see continuity to Plato’s views on Socrates’ project, my reading of Plato is anti-developmental on this issue. But it is non-dogmatic; as I aim to show, it will be borne out by the evidence. What we will find is a coherent, unified, and compelling narrative on how Socrates’ methods can transform the values of his interlocutors.

By ‘Socrates’ I mean the Socrates of Plato’s dialogues. I do not mean the historical Socrates. It is plausible that in writing about Socrates, especially in the early dialogues, Plato is reflecting on the life of the historical Socrates. But I make no claims about

17 I presuppose a common and traditional ordering of the dialogues, one on which the early dialogues include the *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Minor*, *Hippias Major*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Menehenus*, *Meno*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic* 1; the middle dialogues include the *Cratylus*, *Parmenides*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic* 2-10, *Symposium*, and *Theaetetus*; and the late dialogues include the *Critias*, *Laws*, *Philebus*, *Politics*, *Sophist*, and *Timaeus*. This ordering is found in Vlastos 1991: 46-47 (though he separates the early dialogues into ‘Elenctic Dialogues’ and ‘Transitional Dialogues,’ a distinction that I have no use for) and, with occasional and small variations (e.g., considering *Republic* 1 as a middle dialogue), also in Irwin 1992 and Benson 2000. Nothing I say will require making more fine-grained distinctions in chronology (such as concerning the dating of dialogues within these three major groups) and, indeed, at no point do I appeal to chronology to secure a conclusion. I introduce the labels ‘early,’ ‘middle,’ and ‘late,’ then, merely as terms of convenience for talking about certain groups of dialogues. It is worth noting that the stylometric evidence largely confirms this conventional way of ordering the dialogues, though, in some studies, one or two dialogues get rearranged. For helpful overviews of the stylometric evidence, and comments on what we should and should not conclude from them, see Nails 1995: 97-139 and Kahn 1996: 42-48.

18 Cf. Moore 2015: “The Socratic project announced in the *Phaedrus* is contiguous with the Socratic project encountered elsewhere...” (183).

19 There are two points in my thesis where I might be thought to assume an underlying unity. In Chapter 3, I use the *Symposium* to identify *erōs* as the desire for an object *qua* constitutive of happiness, and I consider occurrences of *erōs* elsewhere in the corpus as such a desire. But this is not baseless; *erōs* in those other dialogues has the same overpowering psychological effects on people that, I argue, is explained by its being a desire for an object *qua* constitutive of happiness. In Chapter 6, I gather passages from several places in the corpus to solve a central problem concerning Socrates’ project of conversion. But my point there is just that Plato has the resources to solve this problem.
how accurately Plato represents that life. Occasionally I refer to the Socrates of Xenophon’s dialogues. Most often I do so just to note an interesting parallel to Plato’s presentation of Socrates. At other times, I use evidence from one of Xenophon’s Socratic works to support an interpretation of a specific word or concept. For that point, it is sufficient that one of Plato’s contemporaries understood the word or concept in the relevant way; that the person happens to be Socrates, as depicted by Xenophon, is not important.

_Apology_ as starting point

I use the _Apology_ as a starting point in thinking about what Socrates is trying to accomplish in Plato’s dialogues. This is not an arbitrary decision. Only in the _Apology_ do we find Socrates giving an extended description of the main goal of his interactions and the methods he uses in trying to accomplish it. Moreover, in many core dialogues Plato depicts Socrates trying to accomplish this goal using these methods. As we will see, the main evidence for this claim is that is what we find Socrates doing. But we can note a simple reason in support of it from the outset. The reason is that, in the _Apology_, Socrates gives an overview of his life, and in much of the rest of the corpus Plato purports to depict Socrates’ life. It is of course imaginable that, in the _Apology_, Plato would have Socrates describe a way of life that elsewhere in the corpus he does not depict. But it is implausible that is what Plato did: when Socrates describes his goals and methods elsewhere in the corpus, they repeat, or at least are compatible

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21 For thorough discussions of Xenophon’s Socrates, see Dorion 2011 and 2013, both of which include useful considerations of the main differences between Xenophon’s Socrates and Plato’s.
with, those that he outlines in the *Apology*, and Plato has Socrates present his speech in the *Apology* as a “Platonic manifesto or prospectus.” Indeed, it is customary for scholars to use the *Apology* as a starting point for thinking about what Socrates is trying to accomplish in Plato’s dialogues.

Recently, however, the legitimacy of using the *Apology* as such a starting point has been called into question. Doyle 2012 claims that “we may not assume, as so many have, that the way of life Socrates ascribes to himself in the *Apology* may be used as straightforward evidence for what he is up to in Socratic dialogues” (73).

Doyle’s argument for this claim is subtle and deserves consideration. He thinks that, in the *Apology*, Socrates describes himself undertaking “missionary philosophizing” that elsewhere in the corpus he in fact does not undertake. Doyle thinks missionary philosophy was enjoined on Socrates by the god, and that *Apology* 29d-30b gives “the content of the command” (44). Now, *Apology* 29d-30b, quoted at the beginning of the introduction, is foundational for my project. It is where Socrates

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22 Other passages where we find descriptions of Socrates’ goals and methods include *Laches* 187d-188c, *Gorgias* 457c-458b, *Meno* 80a-86c, and *Theaetetus* 150b-d. In the *Laches*, Nicias describes Socrates’ practice of examining people’s lives and not letting them go till “he has well and truly tested every last detail” (188a). This description echoes Socrates’ description of his activities at *Apology* 29d-30b. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates says he often refutes people and specifies it is beneficial insofar as it removes false beliefs; and, in the *Meno*, he adds that refutation is beneficial insofar as it encourages further inquiry. In the *Theaetetus*, he describes helping people give birth to certain ideas. All of these descriptions are compatible with the account Socrates gives in the *Apology* of his main goal and methods.

23 See Rowe 2007: in the *Apology*, “Socrates himself expressly refers... to a new generation that will carry on his mission and irritate [the people who voted to put him to death] even more than he has done. Since Plato (a) is younger, (b) is named as one of the young men Socrates is supposed to have corrupted, and (c) appears to endorse, because—in his writing—he goes on repeating, Socrates’ (his Socrates’) plea to people to review and rethink their ways, the proposal in question—to treat the *Apology* as a Platonic manifesto or prospectus—ought to be unobjectionable” (86).

24 See, for instance, Irwin 1995: 7 (“Plato attributes to Socrates a specific method of argument and inquiry [in the *Apology*], and claims to represent this in the dialogues”), Benson 2000: 24, 26, 32 (“Only in the *Apology* does Socrates furnish us with anything like a description of his method. In the other early Platonic dialogues, he practices it with a passion”); Weiss 2006: 243 (“Without the *Apology* Plato’s readers would have scant hope of understanding just what it is that Socrates is doing in the other dialogues”), and Rowe 2007: 89 (“The dialogues are in any case, fictionally, a large part of what the *Apology* summarizes in its account of Socrates’ life”).
mentions his main persuasive methods, refutation and exhortation, and he gives the template of refutation. It is also one place where Socrates’ specifies the goal of these methods. If Doyle is correct that what Socrates describes at *Apology* 29d-30b is not represented elsewhere in the corpus, then my project cannot get off the ground.

Doyle uses the *Gorgias* as a test case to see whether Socrates’ project, as outlined in the *Apology*, is continued elsewhere in the corpus, because the *Gorgias* is “the most methodologically self-conscious of the putatively ‘Socratic’ dialogues” (73). The structure of his argument is simple. He thinks that *Apology* 29d-30b specifies two essential features of “missionary philosophizing,” that these two features are absent in the *Gorgias*, and thus that the *Gorgias* does not depict Socrates engaged in missionary philosophizing—that is, engaged in trying to convert his interlocutors. The first feature is that Socrates has a “special interrogative role” in that he asks the questions, not his interlocutors (64-65). The second is that Socrates is ready to “coerce his interlocutor if that should be necessary” to make him submit to being examined (65).

Now, regarding the first feature, Doyle admits that Socrates “does ask most of the questions in the *Gorgias*,” but nevertheless he thinks that Socrates does not play a “special interrogative role” because Socrates answers his interlocutors’ questions; instructs Chaerophon to ask a question instead of asking it himself; and invites all discussants to ask whatever questions they please, instead of insisting on a “special prerogative” of being the only one who asks the questions (65). However, there is no reason to think that such behavior conflicts with the behavior Socrates describes at *Apology* 29d-30b. Socrates says that he “questions, examines, and tests” (ἐρήσομαι ὑτὸν καὶ ἐξετάσω καὶ ἐλέγξω) his interlocutors. This falls short of saying that he only ever asks questions and forbids anyone else from asking them. Moreover, Socrates calls the behavior he describes at *Apology* 29d-30b his “customary way” (οἷάπερ εἰσώθα) of refuting people. We ought then to read that description as giving a template of refutation, and it will not do to rule out an interaction as not meeting that template merely because it adds components that the description lacks (e.g., allowing an interlocutor to ask a question). So long as an interaction displays its main components, it counts as meeting the template. But Socrates’ interactions in the *Gorgias* do display
its main components: Socrates does question, examine, and test Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles.

The second feature Doyle thinks absent from the *Gorgias* is Socrates’ readiness “to coerce his interlocutor if that should be necessary” to make him answer questions. I am suspicious that, in the *Apology*, Socrates identifies this feature as an essential part of his practice. Socrates says that he will “not let [his interlocutor] go at once or leave him” (οὐκ εὐθὺς ἀφῆσω αὐτὸν οὐδ’ ἄπειμι, *Ap.* 29e), but not letting someone go “at once” is weaker than coercing him to answer any questions that you ask. For the sake of argument, however, let us grant that this feature is essential to Socrates’ project of conversion. Is it absent from the *Gorgias*? That depends on what counts as coercion and when coercion is necessary. As it happens, *Apology* 29d-30b is permissive on what counts as coercion. One can ‘not let someone go at once or leave’ by several means, including forms of explicit pressure, no doubt, but also including forms of implicit pressure, e.g. implying that leaving the conversation would be cowardly or using charm and flattery. These are also ways of ‘not letting someone go.’ And, in fact, in the cases from the *Gorgias* that Doyle cites to show that Socrates is not being coercive in the narrow sense, he is being coercive in this broader sense.  

25 As for the second question—when coercion is necessary—the *Apology* passage provides a clear answer: it is necessary if that is the only way to get an interlocutor to the point when Socrates can detect his priorities are askew and “reproach” him for it. But, again, Socrates does keep his interlocutors in the *Gorgias* involved in the conversation until this point.

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25 Doyle’s examples are *Gorgias* 447b4-c4, 458a1-b3, 461d2-462a1, and 504c-505e. In the first, Socrates simply does not need to be coercive; he asks whether Gorgias “would be willing” to have a discussion, and Gorgias agrees. In the second, Socrates says he’ll continue questioning Gorgias if Gorgias is “the same kind of man” as him, but otherwise he’ll drop it. He then proceeds to give a flattering description of himself, thus baiting Gorgias to assert that he too is that kind of man and so will continue the inquiry. In the third, Socrates is simply polite to Polus, asking him to curb his tendency to make long speeches. Polus protests, but then Socrates makes a charming joke to win Polus’ sympathies, thus using a form of subtle coercion. Immediately after, Socrates commands Polus to “refute or be refuted” (ἐλέγχε τε καὶ ἐλέγχου, *G.* 462a)—a point Doyle neglects to mention. In the fourth, Socrates allows Callicles to stop answering questions, but only after he has thoroughly refuted him.
Thus, Doyle’s argument fails to show that the *Gorgias* does not display Socrates engaged in the project of conversion that he outlines at *Apology* 29d-30b. (However, Doyle does convincingly show that the way of life Socrates recommends to people in the *Apology* is not his own way of life, a point to which I return in Chapter 1.) Of course, it may be that Socrates is not concerned with that project in every dialogue. But, as we will see, he is concerned with it in many core dialogues, and so the question is still live: How, if at all, can Socrates’ methods in those dialogues be effective at accomplishing the goal he specifies in the *Apology*, the goal of transforming his interlocutors’ values?

**Chapters**

What follows is a brief outline of my overall argument.

In Chapter 1, I start by clarifying the goal of Socrates’ project of conversion. In the *Apology*, he is consistent in phrasing his goal as changing what his interlocutors care about (*epimeleisthai*), but what it means to care about something is not clear and has not been properly discussed in the literature. I argue that ‘caring’ is a complex unity consisting of valuing an object, taking an interest in it, and acting on behalf of it. These parts are causally connected: one values an object, and, because of that, takes an interest in it and acts on behalf of it. I show that Socrates’ goal is to persuade his interlocutors to care the most about knowledge (*epistêmê, mathêma*) and wisdom (*sophia, phronesis*). We do not need to distinguish between these for our purposes. In the *Apology*, Socrates insists that he wants people to care the most about the excellence of their souls (30b)—*this* appears to be at the core of his conversion project—and, throughout the corpus, he alternates between ‘knowledge’ and ‘wisdom’ when specifying what the excellence of one’s soul consists in (see, e.g., *Apology* 29e,

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26 As it happens, I think that Socrates’ interactions with at least Polus and Callicles do not display his customary way (*e charismatic* ξωθα*) of refuting people, as described at *Apology* 29d-30b, though they do still display Socrates trying to convert his interlocutors in the general spirit of his descriptions in the *Apology*. I return to this point in Chapter 2.
Protagoras 313d, Meno 87-89, Theaetetus 153b, and Alcibiades 133b), without any indication that he understands them to be fundamentally different states of one’s soul.\(^{27}\)

Now, while one arguably might go about caring the most for knowledge and wisdom in many ways, the way Plato’s dialogues consistently recommend is by living the life of philosophy, the life centered on acquiring knowledge and wisdom for oneself. In what follows, I consider how Socrates can persuade his interlocutors to adopt the life of philosophy by using the two methods he mentioned in the Apology: refutation and exhortation.

In Chapter 2, I ask how, if at all, refutation can be effective at accomplishing that task. One reason to think it cannot be effective is that Socrates’ interlocutors most often react to being refuted with negative emotions. I argue, however, that one of the aims of refutation is to cause these negative emotions, and that they are exactly the sort of responses that would motivate Socrates’ interlocutors to start reforming their ways of life. I argue for this by way of developing a novel account of Socratic refutation. As I show, a key feature of Socratic refutation has so far gone unnoticed, namely that it centers on role-based epistemic duties. I show that, in many core dialogues, starting with the Apology, Socrates refutes people’s claims to know what their social roles require them to know, and that, in doing so, he causes them to feel ashamed and angry. These experiences are crucial: they motivate interlocutors to start doing philosophy, albeit merely as a means to repairing their self-esteem and social standing. However, this result raises a problem. Socrates wants to convert his interlocutors to the life of philosophy—not merely to convince them to do philosophy as a temporary resource. What explains, then, why refutation does not aim for more? And what long-term value is there, if any, in motivating interlocutors to do philosophy merely as a means? I return to this second question in Chapter 6. I answer the first question in Chapters 3 and 4.

\(^{27}\) In fact, he identifies them in the Theaetetus (ταύτων ἃρα ἐπιστήμη καὶ σοφία, 145e).
My starting point for Chapter 3 is the observation that, in the few cases where Socrates attempts to directly argue his interlocutor into adopting a new way of life, the attempts fail. What explains this? In the *Gorgias*, we find an answer: Socrates identifies erōs as the reason why his arguments fail to convince Callicles to change his way of life. I take this remark seriously; but, to understand why erōs would be a major obstacle to Socrates’ project of conversion, we first need to understand what it is. This is a major source of controversy in Platonic scholarship. Some scholars think Plato gives no unified account of erōs in the corpus. I oppose this tendency. I argue that, throughout the corpus, erōs is the desire for an object qua constitutive of happiness, and that discussion of such a desire is more prevalent in the corpus than we might think. Often Plato indicates it merely by using a ‘philo-x’ compound (e.g., philotimia, philarguros) and sometimes simply by depicting an interlocutor fixated on amassing as much of some object as he can.

In Chapter 4, I return to the question of why erōs, the desire for an object qua constitutive of happiness, would interfere with Socrates’ project of conversion. The answer, I argue, is that erōs causes people to engage in motivated reasoning whenever they encounter claims that conflict with it—that is, claims to the effect that the object they desire is not constitutive of happiness. We see this happening with Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus. Moreover, Plato theorizes about this effect via a metaphor of ‘bodyguard words and beliefs’ that protect the ruling desire (i.e., erōs) of one’s soul in *Republic* 8 and 9. One of the consequences is that any argument that opposes a person’s erōs will be met with heated, and likely insurmountable, resistance. This result poses a problem for Socrates’ project of conversion. Transforming the values of his interlocutors amounts to changing the object of their erōs, that is, changing the object to which they devote their life. But if Socrates tries to do that directly, e.g., by advancing arguments about why the object they desire is not as valuable as they suppose, it seems bound to fail.

In Chapter 5, I turn to the second method that Socrates mentions at *Apology* 29d: exhortation. Few scholars discuss Socrates’ practice of exhorting people. Those who do seem to understand exhortation to be either a special form of refutation or flat-
footed harangue. I argue, however, that Socratic exhortation is a sophisticated method, wholly independent of refutation, and unified by formal features. It works by exploiting an interlocutor’s *erōs* to motivate doing philosophy as a means of satisfying that desire. We find a forerunner to it in the *Euthydemus*, and Socrates displays it fully in the *Alcibiades, Lysis*, and *Phaedrus*. Importantly, the same problem that arises with refutation arises with exhortation: it is effective at motivating interlocutors to do philosophy, but merely as a means. We can now see why both refutation and exhortation limit their aims to just this: because anything more ambitious would invite motivated reasoning that, as Plato depicts it, has the upper hand on Socrates’ arguments. Thus, Socrates exploits instead of opposes their commitments to motivate them to undertake philosophy merely as a means. This strategy is effective, however, only if doing philosophy merely instrumentally can be transformative. Otherwise, interlocutors will stop doing philosophy as soon as its instrumental value is exhausted.

In Chapter 6, I discuss two ways in which doing philosophy, even as a mere means, can be transformative. The first way is by means of repeated arguments. Plato thinks that repeated arguments succeed where isolated argument fail; thus, being exposed to repeated arguments while continuing to do philosophy, arguments that contest one’s fundamental values, can eventually lead one to accept the conclusion that wisdom is constitutive of happiness and adopt the life of philosophy. The second way that this transformation can be caused is by the felt experience of philosophizing, in particular the experience of intellectual pleasure. Plato thinks that we operate with the psychological tendency of, whenever an object causes us pleasure, believing that object to be good. Moreover, he thinks that doing philosophy can cause us the most pleasure.

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28 Scott 2000 makes a similar point. He, too, recognizes that Socrates’ strategy is to convince Alcibiades and Lysis that philosophy is useful as a means to advance their ambitions, all in the hopes that this instrumental pursuit will bring about a radical change. “[Socrates] surely hoped that the process he initiated with them would change them, reorienting them toward different goals than the ones they brought into the conversation; but he did not make it obvious to them that such a reorientation of their lives would be the likely outcome of sincere adherence to his prescriptions for them. Plato leaves it to his audience to apprehend these subtleties and to adduce their implications” (160). Scott does not consider, though, how following Socrates’ prescriptions might eventually bring about this reorientation.
Thus, by continuing to do philosophy, one will increasingly experience its pleasures, and these pleasures will cause the desired shift in one’s evaluative standpoint, such that one will adopt the life of philosophy.

A sophisticated strategy

Thus, on my account, Socrates’ project of conversion has two stages. In the first stage, Socrates uses refutation or exhortation to motivate his interlocutor to do philosophy, albeit merely as a means. In the second stage, this instrumental pursuit exposes the interlocutor to repeated arguments concerning fundamental values or to the pleasure of philosophy, or some combination of both, and thereby leads him to adopt the life of philosophy.

Admittedly, this is a more complicated story than one, for instance, where Socrates simply tries to argue his interlocutors out of their current, mistaken values and into new and better values. So we might be skeptical that it captures Socrates’ project of conversion as Plato meant to convey it. It only adds to that skepticism to note that Plato never depicts the second stage in the dialogues. He never depicts an interlocutor doing philosophy for the sake of his self-esteem, social standing, or career ambitions, and then, because of some argument or the experience of pleasure, undergoing a reorientation of his values. Why, then, should we think that Socrates’ project of conversion is meant to take this form?

There are several reasons. To start, Socrates’ two primary persuasive methods motivate interlocutors to do philosophy merely as a means. Nevertheless, Socrates wants more from them. All the worse for Socrates, we might suppose—and we ought to suppose that, if there were not a satisfying explanation for why Socrates would purposefully seek, at first, to motivate his interlocutors to do philosophy just as a means. But there is a satisfying explanation. As I argue in Chapters 3 and 4, it is required by Plato’s moral psychology, and, as I argue in Chapter 6, the mere instrumental undertaking of philosophy can be transformative.
That is an explanation internal to the dialogues—an explanation that uses information from the dialogues to explain why Socrates would adopt such a cunning strategy. But there is an explanation external to the dialogues, too. One of the few historical facts we know about Plato is that he established a philosophical school, the Academy, and so it is likely that he had an interest in attracting students. Plausibly, his dialogues served that purpose, among others. To attract students to the Academy, though, Plato would not need to convince them that philosophy is intrinsically valuable. He would need to convince them only that it is instrumentally valuable. Indeed, they would be receptive to that lesson, since its effect would be to promote their current ambitions. Of course, once he had attracted them, he could then expose them gradually to arguments that suggested their current ambitions are off-course.

That helps to explain why Plato depicts Socrates giving arguments for the instrumental value of philosophy. A similar explanation can be given for why he depicts Socrates giving few arguments that philosophy is of the highest intrinsic value. Arguments that philosophy is of the highest intrinsic value would oppose the core commitments of many of Plato’s contemporaries, people whose highest ambitions are to maximize their wealth, fame, and influence. They would thus not be effective at attracting many students.

Finally, a similar, two-stage strategy of conversion may be operative in Aristotle’s *Protrepticus*. Aristotle gives some arguments for the intrinsic value of philosophy, but he gives arguments also for its instrumental value. Of course, philosophy can be both intrinsically and instrumentally valuable, so nothing is confusing about that. But his arguments for the instrumental value of philosophy would attract some people whom his arguments for its intrinsic value would not—people who, once they start to

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do philosophy for its instrumental benefit, would likely become more receptive to its intrinsic value.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} The starting point for further consideration of Aristotle’s Protrepticus, and especially its reconstruction from works by other authors, is Hutchinson and Johnson 2005.
Socrates’ Project of Conversion

In the *Apology*, Socrates says that his goal is to transform his interlocutors’ values.

(1) For I go around doing nothing other than persuading both young and old among you not to care about \(\text{ἐπιμελεῖσθαι}\) your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as the best possible state of your soul... (*Ap. 30a-b*).

Socrates is emphatic: he goes around “doing nothing other than” (*οὐδὲν ἄλλο πράττων*) attempting to persuade people to change what they care about (*epimeleisthai*). He returns to this point repeatedly. In describing his “customary way” (*οἷάπερ εἴωθα*) of refuting his interlocutors, Socrates makes clear that he focuses on what they care about (*epimeleisthai*):

(2) ‘Good Sir, when you are an Athenian... aren’t you ashamed to be caring about [οὐχ ἀισχύνη ἔπιμελομένος] how to get as much money, reputation, and honor as you can, while as for getting as much wisdom and truth as you can, and getting your soul into the best condition, that you don’t care about, and don’t give any thought to [οὐχ ἔπιμελη ὁ οὐδὲ φροντίζεις]?’ Then, if one of you disputes this and says he does care about these things [ἔπιμελεῖσθαι], I shall not let him go at once or leave him, but I shall question him, examine him, and test him, and if he doesn’t seem to me to have acquired excellence, though he says that he has, I shall reproach him because he attaches little importance to the most important things and greater importance to inferior things (*Ap. 29d-30a*).

He repeats later that his goal is to change what people care about (*epimeleisthai*):

(3) That I am the kind of person to be a gift of the god to the city you might realize from the fact that it does not seem like human nature to have neglected [ὑπελομένων] all my own affairs... while I was always concerned with you, approaching each one of you like a father or an elder brother to persuade you to care about [ἔπιμελεῖσθαι] virtue (*Ap. 31b*).
(4) I went to each of you privately and conferred upon him what I say is the greatest benefit, by trying to persuade him not to care about [ἐπιμελεῖσθαι] any of his belongings before caring [τροφήν... ἐπιμεληθεῖτ] that he himself should be as good and as wise as possible, nor the city’s possessions before the city itself, and to care about [ἐπιμελεῖσθαι] other things in the same way (Ap. 36c).

(5) When my sons grow up, avenge yourselves by hassling them as I hassled you, if you think they care about money or anything else more than [πρότερον] they care about [ἐπιμελεῖσθαι] virtue... (Ap. 41e).

The concept of ‘caring about’ (epimeleisthai), then, is central to Socrates’ project of conversion. It is the concept that Socrates puts front and center in his explanation of what he is trying to accomplish with his interlocutors. It is not clear, however, exactly what it means to care about things as Socrates thinks one ought. This is unclear in part because Socrates does not specify how the things he wants people to care about relate. He insists that people ought to care more about virtue, truth, wisdom, the excellence of their souls, and the city itself, but he does not clarify whether these are

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1 See also Phaedo 115b, where, when asked for his last instructions to his friends, Socrates replies, “Nothing new... but what I am always saying, that you will please me and mine and yourselves by taking care of yourselves (ὑμῶν σωτῶν ἐπιμελοῦμενοι)..." The importance of caring for oneself appears also in the Laches, where the dialogue takes off from the question of how young men ought to take care of themselves (ἐπιμελήσονται, 179d) so that they will succeed in life, as well as in Alcibiades 1, where Socrates primary advice to Alcibiades is that he needs self-cultivation (ἐπιμελείας)—indeed, everyone (τάντας ἀνδρώσατο) needs self-cultivation, but especially Alcibiades and Socrates (124d). At first, this advice to ‘take care of yourself’ rings banal (cf. Burnet 1916: “Such language has become stale by repetition, and it takes an effort to appreciate it,” 12). In fact, there is reason to think that Plato’s contemporaries would have heard it as banal, too, since at the time the advice to take care of yourself had become something of a commonplace. In Herodotus, Themistocles urges his victorious troops: “let us abide now in Hellas and take care of ourselves [ἡμέων τε σωτῶν ἐπιμεληθήγα] and our households... Let us build our houses again and be diligent in sowing...” (Histories 8.109.20-22). Isocrates counsels the Cypriot king Nicoles to “take care of yourself and train your mind” (ἐπιμελεῖσθαι καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀσκεῖν, Evagoras 80.4-6) so that he will become worthy of his ancestors. Xenophon reports that Socrates frequently advised young men to take care of (epimeleisthai) themselves so that they will become good and noble (Mem. 1.2.2). And in the Laches, it is the unremarkable Lysimachus who reports that he and his friend often tell their sons that if they do not take care of themselves (ἀμελήσουσιν), they will amount to nothing, but if they do take care of themselves (ἐπιμελήσονται), they might become worthy of their ancestors (179d). One upshot of this chapter, however, is that, understood how Plato’s Socrates intends it, the advice to take care of oneself is rich and profound.
distinct, such that one must care about each of them separately, or whether they are unified in some way, such that, in caring about one of them, one cares about all of them. An even bigger question is what it means to care about something in the first place. Socrates is consistent in specifying that he is concerned with what people epimeleisthai, and, though I have translated it so far as ‘care about,’ epimeleisthai could just as well be translated as ‘take care of,’ ‘cultivate,’ ‘be concerned with,’ or ‘pay attention to.’ Thus, epimeleisthai could just as well indicate behavior (take care of, pay attention to) as an evaluative attitude (care about). What does Socrates have in mind? Without a detailed investigation of epimeleisthai, we cannot be sure. Surprisingly, given the vast scholarly literature on Socrates and his methods, almost no attention has been given to epimeleisthai.\(^2\) It is, however, the key concept of Socrates’ project as outlined in the Apology, and, as such, worthy of careful consideration.\(^3\) Moreover, as we will see, it is a philosophically rich concept. In this chapter, then, I aim to secure a firm foundation for work that requires an understanding of epimeleisthai, including the work of the rest of my thesis, namely

\(^2\) Foucault is the main exception. In his wide-ranging and insightful Hermeneutics of the Self, he focuses on the development of the injunction to care for oneself (epimeleisthai heautou) throughout ancient philosophy. He notes, as I have, that within the notion of epimeleisthai there is “a general standpoint, a certain way of considering things... an attitude,” as well as “a certain form of attention, of looking” and “actions... a series of practices, exercises” (11). These correspond roughly to what I will call valuing, taking an interest in, and taking care of, but it is not clear whether Foucault thinks of these as forming a complex unity of epimeleisthai, as I do, or whether he thinks that, in some places, epimeleisthai indicates one to the exclusion of the others (the issue is further complicated by his focus on epimeleisthai heautou as it was philosophically understood, as contrasted with my focus here at the start on epimeleisthai as it was commonly understood). Moreover, Foucault does not discuss what I consider to be one of the most philosophically rich points about epimeleisthai, and, further, a point that, as we will see, is of extreme importance to Socrates’ project of conversion, namely that there is a logic to epimeleisthai: if one does not exhibit the required habits of attention and action, then, in most cases, that refutes one’s claim to value some object. Nor does he discuss the various complications that arise when trying to become more precise about what exactly is required to epimeleisthai something. But this is not at all to disparage the work; it is highly illuminating, especially regarding the relation between the injunctions to care for oneself and to know oneself.

\(^3\) A similar view is stated by Crooks (2009): “It seems to me... that a productive reading of Plato might well begin with a phenomenology of care [his translation of ἐπιμελέσθαι]” (112). Crooks ends his article on this note; he does not try to give that phenomenology or any readings based on it.
understanding how, if at all, Socrates can succeed in persuading his interlocutors to *epimeleisthai* the right things in the right way.

Now, the *Apology* gives little help on the issue of which sense of *epimeleisthai* Socrates has in mind. Socrates does seem concerned with his interlocutors’ evaluative beliefs: he accuses them of mistaking what is important (*Ap.* 30a). He also focuses on their mental behavior: he laments that most Athenians wrongly think they know what they do not know (*Ap.* 21b-23b). Further, he praises certain sorts of physical behavior, including staying at one’s post, if one believes it best, even if doing so threatens one’s life (*Ap.* 28d-e; cf. 28b-c). It seems to be, then, that Socrates is concerned to change his interlocutors’ patterns of physical and mental behavior, as well as their evaluative beliefs. But it would be too quick to conclude that here. What we need is to better understand what it means to *epimeleisthai* an object, and, to do that, we must go outside the *Apology*.

I begin by surveying how *epimeleisthai* is used before Plato and in his own time. At first pass, it seems that *epimeleisthai* is used to indicate different things in different places. But, I argue, that impression is deceptive. To care about something requires valuing it and, because of that, taking an interest in it and acting on behalf of it. This shows that Socrates is concerned to reform his interlocutors’ whole way of living. It also shows that there is a logic to caring about something, one that, as we will see in Chapter 2, is crucial to Socrates’ practice of refutation.

1.1 The uses of *epimeleisthai*

1.1.1 Taking care

The most common use of *epimeleisthai* is to indicate the behavior of taking care of an object.

(6) ... each person must take care of his own horse [*τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ ἵππου ἐπιμελεῖσθαι*].

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4 Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.3.3.
(7) [Cyrus ensured that his servants were well-nourished]; and so they called him ‘father,’ just as the nobles did, because he took care of them [ὅτι ἐπιμελέσατο χῶρων].

(8) ... for it is right to first take care of the young men [τῶν νέων... ἐπιμεληθῆναι], that they become as good as possible [ὅπως ἔσονται ὁτι ἄριστοι], just as it is likely that a good farmer takes care of the young plants first, and of the others later (Eu. 2d).

There are two points to emphasize. The first is that epimeleisthai refers to ongoing, as opposed to isolated, behavior. It specifies a standing relationship between its subject and object, e.g., a standing relationship between an owner and a horse: the owner takes care of the horse on an ongoing basis. We will see more evidence for this point later.

The second point is that the sort of beneficial behavior indicated by epimeleisthai is ambiguous. In taking care of an object, a person can act on behalf of its welfare or its improvement. This is left unspecified in (6), while, in (7), it is clear that Cyrus takes care of his servants insofar as he acts on behalf of their welfare (he keeps them fed). In contrast, in (8), Socrates’ point is not (just) that we ought to act on behalf of the welfare of the youth, but that we ought to act on behalf of their improvement, “that they become as good as possible.”

1.1.2 Taking an interest

In other cases, epimeleisthai is used in a way that does not, in the first instance, indicate taking care of an object. In some of these cases, it indicates taking an interest in it.

(9) I think that [Alcibiades] is a worthless statesman, who pays attention to the present time [τοῦ παρόντος χρόνου ἐπιμελεῖται] without also giving thought to

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5 Xenophon, Cyropaedia 8.1.44.
the future [τοῦ μέλλοντος προνοεῖται], who advocates the policies which give
the most pleasure while neglecting those that are best.6

(10) SYRACUSAN: ‘Socrates, are you the one nicknamed ‘The Thinker’ [ὁ
φροντιστής]?... you are thought to be a thinker [φροντιστής] on celestial
subjects.’
SOCRATES: ‘Do you know,’ Socrates said, ‘anything more celestial than the
gods?’
SYRACUSAN: ‘Zeus no, but it’s not them people say you pay attention to [οὐ
tούτων... ἐπιμελείσθαι], but rather the most unbeneficial things [τῶν
ἀνωφελεστάτων].’
SOCRATES: ‘Even granting the expression, I would still be paying attention to
the gods [ἡπόν ἐπιμελοίμην...].’7

In (9), the phrase “epimeleisthai the present” is parallel to “giving thought to
[προνοεῖται] the future” and should thus have a similar meaning. Likewise, in (10),
epimeleisthai is used to describe the characteristic activity of a “thinker” (φροντιστής),
a fact that shows here too it is meant to indicate some sort of activity of paying
attention.

Exactly what sort of mental behavior is this? It is not mere awareness; it is not
that Alcibiades is at fault merely for being aware of the present time, nor that Socrates
is a “thinker” about celestial things insofar as he is merely aware of the gods. It is
rather that Alcibiades takes an active, focused interest in the present and, moreover,
does so in a way that motivates his actions: he advocates policies that give the most
immediate pleasure. This point encourages us to see the sort of ‘paying attention’
relevant to epimeleisthai as essentially practical and for the sake of acting. Thus, in
(10), we should understand Socrates’ paying attention to the gods not as an activity
of disinterested inquiry, but rather as motivated, at least in part, by practical
consequences. So much is suggested by the implication that, if Socrates did pay
attention to the gods, then that would be beneficial for him.8

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6 Andocides, Against Alcibiades, 12.
7 Xenophon, Symposium, 6.6-7
8 For another clear-cut use of epimeleisthai to indicate taking an active, focused interest in
something, see Herodotus’ Historiae 2.2.20.
1.1.3 Valuing

In still other cases, *epimeleisthai* is used in a way that goes beyond both of the above senses.

(11) Now they have more coverings upon their horses than upon their beds, because they do not value knighthood as much as a soft seat.¹

The way we interpret *epimeleisthai* here is constrained by the fact that the clause in which it occurs is meant to explain the Persians' putting more coverings upon their horses than upon their beds (notice the γὰρ). But if we read *epimeleisthai* as indicating mere behavior, the clause would not function as an explanation. At most, it would function merely as a redescription (e.g., the Persians cover their horses because they act on behalf of a soft seat, the Persians cover their horses because they pay attention to a soft seat). We need, then, a reading of *epimeleisthai* that goes beyond mere behavior.

The correct reading is straightforward. If we read *epimeleisthai* as indicating an evaluative attitude, then the clause functions to explain the Persians' behavior. Why do the Persians cushion their horses so much? Because they value having a soft seat, i.e., they believe having a soft seat is important.

1.1.4 Complex unity

We might be tempted to conclude, then, that *epimeleisthai* has three different meanings, such that, in any instance, *epimeleisthai* indicates one to the exclusion of the others. But that would be a mistake. While in some instances one meaning of *epimeleisthai* may stand sharply in the foreground, the other two meanings always stand close in the background.

Recall, for instance, the claim that “each person must take care of his own horse.” In the foreground is the behavior of acting on behalf of one’s horse.

But, to do so, one must also pay attention to one’s horse, noticing, for instance, when its hooves need tending.\textsuperscript{10} Further, if one did not value one’s horse (or value something that requires looking after it), then there would be nothing to explain why one takes care of it. Thus, in this case, what \textit{epimeleisthai} fully indicates is the behavioral and evaluative complex of caring about one’s horse.

So too in the other examples. Alcibiades pays attention to the present, in part so that he can act on behalf of pleasure, and he would not do so unless he valued pleasure.\textsuperscript{11} Likewise, the Persians value having soft seats on their horses, and that’s why they pay attention to the softness of their seats and act on behalf of increasing their comfort.

Now, these are all cases where one meaning of \textit{epimeleisthai} stands sharply in the foreground. But such cases are rare. Most often, \textit{epimeleisthai} indicates the ongoing process of valuing, taking care of, and paying attention to something, with none of these emphasized more than the others. Here is a typical use.

\begin{quote}
(12) [Cyrus] saw that the advantages gained in war by prompt attention to duty were most important. It was for this reason, therefore, that he especially cared about this sort of orderliness [ἐπεμέλετο ταύτης τῇς εὐθυμοσύνης].\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

What Xenophon means is not just that Cyrus thought about orderliness, nor just that he acted on behalf of it or believed it was important, but that, on account of believing it important, he worked to increase orderliness in the military, where the relevant ‘work’ includes paying attention to whatever is necessary to be able to act on behalf of increasing orderliness in his troops. Thus, \textit{epimeleisthai} functions as a complex unity

\textsuperscript{10} We find a structurally similar claim at \textit{Memorabilia} 3.6.3-6, where Xenophon depicts Socrates emphasizing to Glaucon that, if he does not know about revenue and expenditure, then it is not possible for him to take care of [ἐπιμεληθῆναι] the city’s revenue and expenditure. Generalized, this implies that, for a person to take care of an object, he must pay attention to it enough to know about it.

\textsuperscript{11} Notice that in this example the same object is not valued, paid attention to, and acted on behalf of. I return to such cases later.

\textsuperscript{12} Xenophon, \textit{Cyropaedia}, 8.5.7.
of three parts: the ongoing process of valuing an object, acting on behalf of it, and taking an interest in it.\footnote{13}

Interestingly, this appears to be less a result of the Greek and more the result of a notion that is somehow fundamental to human experience, one that we would reasonably expect to find across cultures. It would take us too far astray to develop this point fully, but compare, for instance, Harry Frankfurt’s comment that “[t]he fact that someone cares about a certain thing is constituted by a complex set of cognitive, affective, and volitional dispositions and states” (1998; 83, 85). Similarly, Bennett Helm argues that caring about something is constituted by ‘considering it worthy of attention and action on its behalf’ (2001, 71-86). These comments show that the notion of caring about is still understood today as a complex unity, one that involves the dispositions to value an object (‘consider it worthy’), take an interest in it, and act on its behalf.

Now, it is not that the three parts of \textit{epimeleisthai} just happen to coincide. It is rather that they are causally connected: the behavior is explained by the evaluative attitude. You value an object, and, on account of that, take an interest in it and act on behalf of it. This point imparts certain rational requirements to care about an object, requirements that make it natural to frame problems about commitment and hypocrisy in terms of \textit{epimeleisthai}.

Consider a claim from the \textit{Theaetetus}.

\begin{quotation}

\footnotesize

(13) It is the height of unreasonableness [\textit{ἀλογία}] that a person who professes to care about virtue [\textit{ἀρετῆς ψάσχοντα ἐπιμελεῖσθαι}] should be consistently unjust in discussions (167e).

\end{quotation}

\footnotetext[13]{For similar uses, see, for instance, Thucydides’ \textit{History of the Peloponnesian War} 3.25.2.1, 6.91.5.2, and 8.68.1.4; Herodotus’ \textit{Histories} 5.29.12; Isocrates’ \textit{Panegyricus} 57.7, \textit{Evagoras} 80.5, \textit{Areopagiticus} 26.5, \textit{Nicocles} 32.2, \textit{To Demonicus} 9.7; Isaenus’ \textit{Meneles} 12.6, \textit{Pyrrhus} 69.8, and \textit{De Cleonymo} 12.7 and 28.5; Andocides’ \textit{Against Alcibiades} 40.2; Xenophon’s \textit{Oeconomicus} 20.8.3 ff. and \textit{Constitution of the Laedaimonians} 10.4.3; and Plato’s \textit{Euthyphro} 2d, \textit{Crito} 51a, \textit{Charmides} 156e, \textit{Laches} 179b-d, \textit{Republic} 365e, \textit{Timaeus} 18b, \textit{Statesman} 271d, et al.}
The point here is a familiar one. Caring about an object requires certain behavior. So, if a person claims to care about virtue, then she ought to act virtuously, and not doing so undermines the idea that she cares about it. Of course, an isolated lapse will not mean that her claim to care about virtue is false, though even an isolated lapse can be grounds for criticism. The serious fault is in acting unjustly "consistently," despite claiming to care about virtue. Acting unjustly consistently would make her a hypocrite, someone who falsely claims to have values to which her behavior does not conform. This point follows from the fact that caring about an object is an ongoing process. Thus, consistent failure to align one’s actions with what one professes to care about shows that, in fact, one does not actually care about those things.

It is not only actions that are required to count as caring about an object, but also certain patterns of attention. In the Apology, for instance, Socrates suspects that, despite accusing him of corrupting the youth, Meletus really does not care about which sort of activities benefit and harm the youth. To prove this suspicion, he tests to see whether Meletus knows who improves the youth. This procedure relies upon the thought that, if Meletus cares about the education of the youth, then he should know who improves them. Socrates makes this explicit:

(14) You must know, given your concern [δὴ λον γὰρ ὅτι οἶσθα, μέλον γέ σοι] (Ap. 24d).

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14 At Crito 45d, we find a claim identical in structure to the claim from the Theaetetus. Crito tells Socrates, “You seem to me to choose the easiest path, whereas one should choose the path a good and courageous man would choose, particularly when one professes throughout one’s life to care about virtue [φάσκοντα γε δὴ ἀρετῆς… ἐπιμελεῖσθαι].”

15 Similarly, Helm 2001 emphasizes that it is the consistent absence of the required action or attention that refutes a person’s claim to care about something: “... it is hard (though perhaps not impossible) to credit someone with caring about, say, having a clean house even though he never or rarely notices when it gets dirty, or never or rarely does anything about it even when he does notice. Of course, this is not to deny that someone who genuinely cares may in some cases be distracted by other things that are more important, and so occasionally may not notice that his house is getting dirty or act so as to clean it up. What is required is a consistent pattern of attending to and acting on behalf of the object in question” (71-72).

16 The relevant Greek here is from melō instead of epimeleisthai, but that should not give us pause: melō and epimeleisthai are closely etymologically connected, with each built on the same mel-root. As such, they have very similar meanings, though, as far as I have found, melō is not used
Thus Socrates can infer, as he does, that since Meletus lacks such knowledge, he does not care about the education of the youth.

This point needs qualification. It would be wrong to think that caring requires knowledge

It requires rather that you have sufficiently paid attention to something so that you either know enough about how to take care of it or realize that you do not have this knowledge and so can adjust your actions accordingly.

for two reasons. The first is that we find elsewhere the same point made with *epimeleisthai*, as at *Memorabilia* 3.5.24, where Socrates emphasizes to Pericles that, to care about (*epimeleisthai*) his duties as a general, he must be vigilant about checking to see whether he knows what he must to perform his duties well, and, if he finds he lacks any such knowledge, he must remedy that. The second is that

Caring about an object, then, requires knowing certain things about it, knowledge that one will have acquired by paying sufficient attention to it. This can include knowing that one lacks some piece of knowledge concerning it. In the *Memorabilia*, Socrates emphasizes to Pericles that, to care about (*epimeleisthai*) his duties as a general, he must be vigilant about checking to see whether he knows what he must to perform his duties well, and, if he finds he lacks any such knowledge, he must remedy that. It is not as if, were Pericles to realize he lacks some relevant knowledge here, that would entail he in fact does not care about his duties. If, however, Pericles realizes this and does not make an effort to remedy it, that is a different matter.

Which things exactly must a person know to count as caring about an object? Often this will be context-sensitive. In the first place, though, she must know whatever is required to act on behalf of it or take care of it. If I am clueless as to how long my dog sleeps during the day, the absence of that knowledge does not cast doubt on my claim to care about him. If, however, I do not know that his pacing by the door is a

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frequently to speak of *acting* on behalf of an object. It is more frequently used to speak of taking an interest in an object.
sign that he needs to go outside, or if I do not regularly notice when he paces by the door, then perhaps my claim should be doubted.

Here is one last passage on this point. The passage shows that caring about an object requires both acting on behalf of it and paying attention to it (as well as having certain emotional responses\textsuperscript{17}). In the *Memorabilia*, Socrates gathers evidence that most people do not care about (ἐπιμελομένοις) friendship.\textsuperscript{18} He lists the facts that they take no thought (οὐτε... φροντὶζοντας) about how to make new friends or maintain existing friendships, they do not tend to their friends in sickness, they do not grieve if a friend dies, they do not respond if their friends need to be taken care of, and they do not know how many friends they have (*Mem*. 2.4.2-4). Thus, he concludes, despite what they profess, they do not care about friendship after all.\textsuperscript{19}

These passages provide further evidence for understanding *epimeleisthai* to be a complex unity. On this understanding, it makes sense why, if one of the parts of *epimeleisthai* is absent, then, other things being equal, the person does not count as caring about the candidate object.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} For more on emotional responses as rationally required by caring about an object, see Helm 2009.

\textsuperscript{18} It is worth noting that *epimeleomai* and *epimelomai* are two accepted variants of the same word.

\textsuperscript{19} As with my previous citations of Xenophon, I use this passage just as evidence for the sense of *epimeleisthai*. However, Xenophon’s Socrates, like Plato’s, is interested in showing that people do not in fact care about what they claim to care about. I return to this point in the context of Plato in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{20} Other examples of inferences according to this pattern include the following: the Persians no longer ἐπιμελεῖσθαι health because they no longer exercise or eat properly (*Cyr*. 8.8.8-9); drunkards and lovers do not ἐπιμελεῖσθαι right conduct because, after spending their money on drink or favors, they resort to disgraceful means to make more (*Mem*. 1.2.22); and if a lover pays attention only to his beloved’s looks, he does not ἐπιμελεῖσθαι making his beloved better so much as extracting as much gain from his beloved as he can (*Xenophon*, *Smp*. 8.25). It is worth nothing that also our notion of caring about imparts certain requirements. See Helm 2001: “Intuitively, at least part of what it is to have import is to be a worthy object of attention and action: insofar as something has import for one, one ought to pay attention to what happens to it and so be prepared to act on its behalf when otherwise appropriate. Consequently, that something is worthy of attention and action means not merely that it is permissible or a good thing to pay attention to it and act on its behalf; rather, it means that attention and action are, by and large, required on pain of giving up or at least undermining the idea that it really has import to one [i.e., that one really cares about it]” (71).
1.1.5 Complications

A few complications need to be mentioned. The first is that, in caring about a certain object, one may be required not only to act on behalf of and pay attention to that object, but also to act on behalf of and pay attention to certain other things; and, in some cases, the most visible behavior will be directed at those other things. For example, I may tend to your plants while you are away, and not at all because I care about your plants, but rather because I care about you. A related point is that the behavior required by caring about an object can take many different forms, depending on which sort of behavior one thinks is most beneficial to the object. Thus, even though a father may not comfort his daughter after a bicycle fall, and thus, in this direct and specific way, not be taking care of his daughter’s scraped knee, that choice may be made precisely because the father does care about his daughter and wants to promote a certain resilience and self-reliance in her.

A more difficult complication is what to say about a case where a person displays all the behavior that we would normally take as evidence that she cares about the object, but she values the object merely instrumentally. Does she care about it? To make this more immediate, imagine a case where a person engages in a romantic relationship solely for its material benefits. It seems to me that we would say of such a case that he doesn’t really care about his partner—he really cares about her money. So too in the case where I take care of your plants because I care about you. I don’t really care about your plants—I care about your happiness. Why is it, though, that we are inclined to rule out such cases from being legitimate instances of caring? Why must the valuing that is a constitutive part of caring be intrinsically valuing?

It helps to note that, in a case where a person values an object merely as a means, the connection to the object is contingent, and thus there is not an ongoing commitment to act on behalf of the object and to be vigilant to what affects its well-being. These cases thus depart from the paradigm case, where caring about an object consists in the ongoing process of ‘considering it worthy of attention and action on its behalf.’ What matters here is not simply the length of time that you behave in the
relevant ways. You can value an object intrinsically, all the while having an ongoing commitment to it, but only for a short time; likewise, you can value an object merely instrumentally for a long time.\footnote{It is tempting to say that, in a case of intrinsically valuing an object, the event of no longer intrinsically valuing it causes a significant shift in one’s values, whereas, in a case of merely instrumentally valuing, this does not happen. But such a shift would happen only in cases where what is intrinsically valued plays a major role in one’s life. After all, I could intrinsically value playing basketball for a time without experiencing any major restructuring of my evaluative framework when that time passes.} ‘Instrumental caring,’ then, is necessarily contingent, and it lacks an ongoing commitment. It is thus defective, and so not a legitimate instance of caring.

Thus, caring (\textit{epimeleisthai}) is a complex unity consisting of three parts: valuing an object, taking an interest in it, and acting on behalf of it, where these are viewed from the first-person perspective as ongoing commitments. The consistent absence of the relevant behavior disqualifies a person from actually caring about an object, and not just because two out of three (or one out of three) is a failing grade, but rather because the three parts are causally integrated: the evaluative attitude causes the behavior, and so, if the behavior is consistently absent, that is sufficient to conclude the valuing is absent, too.

1.2 \textit{Epimeleisthai} in the \textit{Apology}

In the \textit{Apology}, as noted, Socrates repeatedly insists that his ultimate goal is to change what people care about (\textit{epimeleisthai}). We now have a sense of what it means to care about something. It is still unclear, however, what it means to care about the things Socrates mentions, and how exactly he wants people to care about them. Socrates mentions that people ought to care about virtue, wisdom, truth, the best possible state of their souls, and the city itself. Are these distinct, such that we must care about them separately? Or are they unified in some way, such that, in caring about one of them, we care about all of them? Further, how much caring is enough to count? Is it enough simply to take more of an interest in such things (as his comparative language
in the *Apology* passages suggests), or must a person devote her life to them? And would he count instrumental caring as enough? Supposedly, virtue makes wealth good (*Ap. 30b*). Would it be enough to care about virtue just for the sake of its relation to money?

The first step is to note that Socrates identifies virtue (*aretē*) and the best state of one’s soul at *Apology* 30b. After insisting that his focus is to persuade people to care more about the best state of their souls, Socrates comments briefly on how he does that, namely by “saying that [ὁ λέγων ὅτι], ‘It’s not virtue [*ἀρετή*] that comes from money, but from virtue money and the other things, all of them, become good for human beings, both in the private and in the public sphere.’”

Thus the sort of virtue, or excellence, that Socrates has in mind is, in particular, the excellence of one’s soul.

This tidies our list: Socrates wants people to care about truth, wisdom, the city itself, and the excellence (*aretē*) of their souls. The next step is to ask what, when it is present in one’s soul, makes one’s soul excellent. And the Platonic dialogues give a consistent sort of answer to this question, though Plato specifies it differently at different places. What makes a soul excellent is knowledge and wisdom.

(15) HIPPOCRATES: ‘But what is the soul nourished by, Socrates?’
SOCRATES: ‘Knowledge, of course [*μαθήμασιν δήπου*],’ I said. (*Prt. 313d*)

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22 This passage is notoriously ambiguous between several translations (this one is from Rowe 2007); Socrates’ point may be (as translated above) that from virtue wealth (among other things) becomes good, or that from virtue wealth (among other things) comes to be. I side with Rowe 2007: 67-68, 72, 79-80 in favoring the first reading (cf. Burnyeat 2003), and also in thinking the second reading is left open to tease the jurors, who might well be interested in not condemning someone who promises to be able to teach them how to gain wealth (though Socrates’ poverty may weaken his credibility on this score). Note that Socrates not infrequently teases his interlocutors, too; Socrates promises that he can make them more successful at attaining some worldly object, such as wealth, despite not actually intending to act as their business coach or financial advisor. I return to this point in Chapter 5.

23 Cf. *Laches* 190b, where Socrates thinks of virtue as the thing that, when it is added to one’s soul, makes one’s soul better.

24 I will be translating *aretē* most often as ‘virtue,’ though, as commonly recognized, it would be a mistake to interpret this in all cases as moral virtue. Sometimes, as here, I will translate it as ‘excellence,’ especially when what is mentioned is the *aretē* of something. For a brief, useful clarification of the word and its connotations, see Nehamas 1999a: 4-5.
(16) And what about the condition of the soul? Isn’t it by learning and practice
[μαθήσεως μὲν καὶ μελέτης]... that the soul gains knowledge [μαθήματα]... and
becomes better? (Thit. 153b)

(17) Then if the soul, Alcibiades, is to know itself, it must look at a soul, and
especially at that region in which what makes a soul excellent [ἀρετή], wisdom
[σοφία], occurs... (Alc. 133b)

This type of answer is not as explicit in the Apology, but it is suggested at three places.
Socrates claims that money and all other things “become good” for humans “from
excellence” (i.e., the excellence of one’s soul). The most natural way to read this remark
is that money, among other things, needs to be used rightly to be beneficial for humans.
And if that reading is correct, then it suggests that what it means for one’s soul to be
excellent is for it to be knowledgeable. It strengthens this interpretation to note that,
in the Euthydemus, Socrates makes the same point that money and other things need
to be used rightly to be beneficial, and there he is explicit that what guarantees this
right use is wisdom (sophia, Euthd. 280b-282d).\footnote{See also Meno 87-89, where Socrates argues that virtue is a kind of knowledge (epistēmē; also
called phronesis at 88b4 and c1). Socrates concludes, “If then virtue [ἀρετή] is something in the soul
and it must be beneficial, it must be wisdom [φρόνησιν]” (88c). Socrates and Meno later reject the
claim that virtue is knowledge, on the grounds that, if it were knowledge, it could be taught, but
there are no teachers of it, so it must not be able to be taught (95a-98c)—clearly specious reasoning,
and thus, I think, we ought not to reject the thesis that at least some virtue is a kind of knowledge
because of it.}

That Socrates identifies excellence with knowledge and wisdom is suggested also
by his description of his customary way of refuting people. If an interlocutor insists
that he cares about his soul, then Socrates examines him, and “if he doesn’t seem to
me to have acquired excellence, but to say that he has, I will reproach him” (Ap. 29e5-
30a1). Socrates says that he tests for whether his interlocutor has acquired excellence
by examining him, that is (as we know not only from elsewhere in the corpus, but
from Socrates’ examination of Meletus earlier in the Apology), by testing to see
whether he has knowledge. Since Socrates tests for excellence by testing for knowledge,
Socrates must conceive of excellence as knowledge (or as involving knowledge, at least).
Further, he must think that the care of the soul involves the process of acquiring
knowledge, since he tests for whether his interlocutors care about their souls by testing for whether they have knowledge.

These points suggest that we should read the kai at Apology 29e1 as epexegetic: “... while as for getting as much wisdom and truth as you can, that is [καὶ], for getting your soul into the best condition...” Moreover, they clarify that later, when Socrates emphasizes that people ought to take care to become “as good and wise as possible” (ὡς βέλτιστος καὶ φρονιμώτατος, Ap. 36c8), he is not specifying two different goals, but just one: becoming wise, that is, good, which is, in the first place, a condition of one’s soul, namely the excellent condition of it.26

My main point, then, is that we ought to understand the excellence of one’s soul as consisting in cognitive excellence. At different places in the corpus, Socrates describes it as sophia, phronesis, and epistêmê, and the achievement of it as grasping alêtheia and acquiring mathêmata. There are difficult questions about whether, at bottom, these are all the same, or, if not, how exactly they relate. But we will be skirting those questions here. Our interest is in how Socrates can persuade his interlocutors to reform their lives in a certain way, and, to think carefully about how that can happen, we need only to know that the relevant way of life consists in a certain devotion to such cognitive excellences, however those might ultimately be understood.

1.2.1 Radical change

At this point, we can see that Socrates wants to persuade his interlocutors to care more about knowledge and wisdom (i.e., the excellence of their souls).27 Left just as that, however, the desired change is not so extreme: interlocutors could satisfy this condition, for instance, simply by having an extra philosophical conversation a week. Is this all Socrates wants?

26 Cf. Vlastos 1971: Socrates has “an evangel to proclaim, a great truth to teach. Our soul is the only thing in us worth saving, and there is only one way to save it: to acquire knowledge” (7).
27 For the moment I am setting aside that the “city itself” is among the things Socrates says he wants people to care about. I return to it below.
It would not seem so. Consider how he concludes his description of his customary way of refuting people: “... if I do not think he has acquired virtue but he says he has, I shall reproach him because he attaches little importance to the most important things [τὰ πλείστου ἄξια] and greater importance to inferior things” (Ap. 29d-30a). Socrates refers to wisdom, truth, and the excellence of one’s soul (which are mentioned earlier in the passage) as “the most important things.” That is significant when combined with the thought that, other things equal, one ought to care about things in proportion to their importance (see below). If that is so, then people ought to care the most about wisdom, truth, and the excellence of their souls—the most important things. And caring the most about such things requires more than a simple addition to one’s current way of life; it requires adopting a new way of life, for it involves caring less about the less important objects around which people do organize their lives.

But is it true that one ought to care about things in proportion to how important they are? We tend to act as if it were: we criticize people for not caring about what is important (their health, the safety of others), as well as for not adequately caring about what is important (e.g., caring only a tiny bit about the safety of others). We find such criticism surrounding uses of epimeleisthai, too. Xenophon criticizes the Persians for caring more about having a soft seat than about knighthood, implicitly because the Persians are in violation of the general principle that one ought to care about things in proportion to their importance: knighthood is more important than a comfortable ride, and so they ought to care about it more. That same principle is implicit, too, in the ridicule of Socrates that the Syracusan reports in Xenophon’s Symposium: what is ridiculous is that, as people allege, Socrates cares about “the most unbeneﬁcial things.” It is implicit as well in Xenophon’s praise of Cyrus for caring “the most” (μάλιστα) about what is “most important” (πλείστου ἄξια); Cyrus is commendable because he cares about things in proportion to their importance. We find it also implicit in Plato. In the Laches, for instance, Lysimachus criticizes parents

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28 See (11) above.
29 See (10) above.
30 See (12) above.
who care little about the education of their sons, a matter that he considers to be of
great importance, which is why he has decided now to care about it more (179a-c). In
the *Euthyphro*, Socrates says that it is right to prioritize “taking care of” (ἐπιμεληθῶν) the
education of the young, which is “such an important matter” (τοσοῦτον πρᾶγμα). Thus, while the term *epimeleisthai* as such does not immediately imply that some
things ought to be cared about more than others, that assumption was frequently
made.

Now, for most things, it may be only a pro tanto norm that one ought to care
about things in proportion to their importance. For example, if a rich social life is
somewhat more important than athletic excellence, but I care more about athletic
excellence, then I would not seem to be at fault. What this shows is that, among things
roughly equal in importance, it is permitted to prioritize them as you wish. But,
crucially, the things Socrates wants people to care about less, and the things he wants
them to care about more, are not roughly equal in importance: one group includes “the
most important things” (τὰ πλείστου ἄξια), the other “inferior things” (τὰ φαυλότερα). Thus this complication does not arise in our case.

My main point is that, in labeling wisdom, truth, and the excellence of one’s soul
as most important, we can infer that Socrates wants his interlocutors to care about
them the most—more simply, to care about wisdom the most (i.e., the *aretē* of one’s
soul, the state of having learned the truth about “the matters of most importance, τὰ
μέγιστα, Ap. 29d). I want to record two further, independent arguments for the same
conclusion. First, Socrates is explicit that he wants his sons to care the most about
virtue; he asks the jurors to pester them if they “care about money or anything else
more than [πρῶτερον] they care about virtue” (Ap. 41e). Plausibly, Socrates wants this

31 Note that φαυλότερα, unlike the English ‘inferior,’ implies a negative connotation of cheap,
common, or insignificant. It is not possible, then, that the things Socrates characterizes as φαυλότερα
than the “most important things” are only *slightly* less important.

32 On the connection between wisdom (*sophia*) and truth (*alētheia*), see especially *Republic* 485c,
where Socrates claims that nothing “belongs more to wisdom than truth does” and that philosophers
must “strive for every kind of truth [understood from context: about the things that always are] from
childhood on” (485d).
not because of anything particular to his sons, but rather just because he thinks that everyone ought to care the most about virtue (that is, wisdom, the aretē of one’s soul). The point concerning his sons is just one instance of that general principle.\textsuperscript{33}

Second, Socrates’ explicit claims concerning epimeleisthai are most often comparative (see (1), (4), and (5) above). Strictly speaking, what he stresses is not that we should care about wisdom to some undefined extent, nor that we should care about it the most, but rather that we should care about it more than money and reputation. At the very least, that suggests that wisdom ought to be a high priority for us—further, that making it so would amount to adopting a new way of life, since money and reputation are the things that most people do organize their lives around, including many of Socrates’ interlocutors. It is a small step to add that money and reputation are the things that, typically, people care about the most. Thus, in urging people to care about wisdom more than money and reputation, Socrates should be understood to be urging them to care about it the most.

What these two arguments show is that, even without appealing to the principle that one ought to care about things in proportion to their importance, we can secure the conclusion that Socrates wants to change what people care about the most.

I want to use this point to reach a conclusion that will be relevant for us later. If one cares the most about an object, then one cannot care about that object merely as a means (setting aside for the moment the earlier point that ‘caring about an object merely as a means’ is defective). For, if one cares about an object merely as a means, then you would care more about that thing for the sake of which you care about the object as a means; but, if you care about the object the most, then it is impossible to care about something else more than it. We can conclude, then, that, in wanting people to care the most about wisdom, Socrates wants them to care about wisdom for itself. He wants people to value wisdom intrinsically—indeed, as of the highest intrinsic value, according with its status as being the most important thing.

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\textsuperscript{33} This argument relies on understanding proteron at \textit{Apology} 41e as indicating non-temporal priority. I argue for that interpretation in the main text below.
1.2.2 Lasting change

So far, it is still possible that, though Socrates wants people to care the most about wisdom, he means for this change not to be lasting but merely temporary, just as, for example, a doctor might prescribe an intense but merely temporary regimen, one that you are free to discard after receiving the intended benefit. In fact, this interpretation is suggested by (4) above, where Socrates claims that he tries to persuade his interlocutors not to care about certain things before [πρὶν] caring about other things—not to care about their belongings before their becoming good and wise, nor the city’s possessions before the city itself, “and to care about other things in the same way” (Ap. 36c). One reading of this passage is that Socrates wants people first to focus on what is most important, but then, once that is done satisfactorily, they can revert to caring more about other things (e.g., their own wealth or the wealth of the city) without fault. This is a possible reading of (1) and (5), too. In passage (1), Socrates claims that he tries to persuade people not to care about their bodies or wealth “before or as strongly as” (πρότερον μηδὲ σῶτω σφόδρα ὡς, Ap. 30b) the excellence of their souls; in passage (5), he implies that he hassles people if they care about anything else “before” (πρότερον, Ap. 41e) virtue. However, in both passages the word that I have translated here as “before”—πρότερον—is ambiguous between temporal priority and lexical priority.34 Accordingly, Socrates’ point may be that people ought to care about certain

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34 For cases where proteron indicates non-temporal priority, see, for instance, Laches 183b (“... many people are superior to them in the arts of war [πολλοίς σφόδρα προτέρους εἶναι πρός τὰ τοῦ πολέμου”), Isaeus’ Cleonymus 17 (“... greater in affection [προτέρους ὄντας τῇ φιλίᾳ] to the deceased...”), and Demosthenes’ Olynthiac 3 (“For acting is temporally subsequent to speaking and voting, but as regards its importance it is greater and better [το γὰρ πρέπειν τοῦ λέγειν καὶ χειροτονεῖν ὕστερον ὅν τῇ τάξις, πρότερον τῇ δυνάμει καὶ κρείττον ἔστιν].” In contrast, prin, which is used in passage (4), seems always to have a temporal meaning. But this does not settle the matter, nor does it mean we should read the instances of proteron as indicating (solely) temporal priority. It may be that Socrates’ use of prin, and his use of an ambiguous word like proteron, is calculated to make his claims sound sensible to his audience (after all, it is sensible that one should get an education before starting a career), while all the while he wants people to change what they care about in a lasting manner. Further, caring about certain things temporally before caring about other things does not rule out caring about the former things in a lasting manner, too. The advice to ‘take care of your health first’ can be heard as indicating both of these things.
things *temporally* before other things, with the implication that, after doing so, they can stop without fault; or that people ought to care about certain things *in preference to*, or *more than*, other things, with the implication that doing so ought to be a lifelong commitment.\textsuperscript{35}

At this point, we might suspect the correct reading is obvious. *Of course* Socrates wants to change his interlocutors’ lives, and not, that is, to motivate them to care about wisdom merely temporarily. And while I think that interpretation is correct, I think, too, that scholars frequently overlook that many of Socrates’ activities in the dialogues not only *can* be interpreted as designed to motivate his interlocutors to do philosophy merely temporarily, but in fact *encourage* that interpretation. Consider, for instance, Socrates’ goal of convincing Phaedrus that “unless he pursues philosophy properly he will never be able to make a proper speech on any subject either” (*Phdr.* 261a). A straightforward reading of Socrates’ claim is that he wants to convince Phaedrus that philosophy is valuable as a means to acquiring rhetorical expertise—and, indeed, *merely* as a means, so far as the claim goes. If, however, philosophy is valuable merely as a means to Phaedrus, then he would have reason to pursue it only temporarily; once he has acquired the end for which it is useful, it would no longer be valuable to him.

This is just one of many instances where Socrates aims to convince his interlocutor that philosophy is valuable as a means. In the *Euthydemus*, he counsels Clinias to do philosophy for the sake of learning how to use things rightly. In the *Lysis*, he advises Lysis to do philosophy for the sake of convincing people to let him do whatever he pleases. In the *Alcibiades*, Socrates convinces Alcibiades that doing philosophy is the

\textsuperscript{35} Note that this ‘temporary’ reading will not be ruled out just by the fact that *epimeleisthai* indicates an ongoing process. For one can be ongoing in caring about an object but only care about it for a short time (e.g., a plant that dies suddenly). Nor will it be ruled out just by the fact that caring about an object requires valuing it intrinsically. A person can value an object intrinsically but only for a short time. These two arguments are separate: Socrates wants his interlocutors to value wisdom intrinsically (this follows from his wanting them to value wisdom the most), and he wants them to adopt a lifelong commitment to valuing it, not a temporary one.
best route to political power. Also, as we have seen, Socrates says that he routinely tells people that virtue is useful for the sake of making wealth good (Ap. 30b), and he thinks that virtue, at least in this context, consists in cognitive excellence of the sort that doing philosophy would promote.

In these and related passages, Socrates is emphasizing that, as a mode of education, philosophy is useful preparation for a successful career in business and politics. This is not an unfamiliar or controversial point—even one of Socrates’ fiercest critics, Callicles, agrees that it’s “admirable” to “partake of philosophy for the sake of education [παιδείας χάριν]” (G. 485a). Likewise, philosophy is often recommended to aspiring lawyers today on the grounds that it will build the skills necessary for their careers.

Is, then, Socrates concerned merely that his contemporaries receive adequate preprofessional training? Is his goal to motivate his interlocutors just to care about virtue and wisdom temporarily?

No. Socrates claims that “it is the greatest good [μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν] to discuss virtue every day” (Ap. 38a) and that, in trying to change what his interlocutors care about, he is attempting to do them “the greatest benefit” (τὴν μεγίστην εὔεργεσίαν; cf. Ap. 36e: “I make you be happy”). Together, these two claims suggest that, in trying to change what his interlocutors care about, Socrates wants to convince them that they ought to discuss virtue every day. This point is supported by Socrates’ emphasis that “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Ap. 38a). Socrates’ focus is on a person’s life; he ultimately wants to reform his interlocutors’ ways of life. In fact, Socrates hints at this with Phaedrus; after convincing Phaedrus that philosophy is merely instrumentally valuable, Socrates changes tack: he tells Phaedrus that, actually, “only what is said for the sake of understanding and learning” is “worth serious attention,” thus implying that Phaedrus should do philosophy not merely as a means but rather

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36 I return to these remarks about the Euthydemus, Lysis, Alcibiades, and Phaedrus in Chapter 5. Also, as I argue in Chapter 2, there is even more evidence for Socrates’ trying to persuade his interlocutors that doing philosophy is instrumentally valuable; as we will see, this is precisely the goal of Socratic refutation.
for itself, and since nothing else is worth serious attention, to do philosophy as a lifelong commitment.

Why does Socrates bother to present philosophy as merely instrumentally valuable, if, as I am arguing, he wants his interlocutors to dedicate their lives to it? Why not cut to the chase? Answering these questions requires examining Plato’s moral psychology, and, in particular, the influence of strong, misplaced desires on a person’s evaluative beliefs. I return to this topic in chapters 3, 4, and 5. For now, notice that a similar question applies to the *Apology*. Why does Socrates leave ambiguous exactly how he tries to change his interlocutors (due to his uses of πρὶν and πρότερον)? Why not make absolutely clear that his goal is to reform their lives, and not, that is, to persuade them just that a temporary amount of time devoted to wisdom is beneficial?37

This line of questioning assumes that a *deliberate ambiguity* is at work in passages (1), (4), and (5)—that Socrates intends for πρὶν and πρότερον to suggest both senses of “before,” despite meaning them ultimately in the sense of lexical priority. Indeed, I think that point is correct, and that a satisfying explanation for it is on offer. Socrates’ task in the *Apology* is to defend his life’s activities to the Athenian jurors, most of whom would find it outlandish that a person ought to care about wisdom and his soul more than money, reputation, and his body. But the alternative point—that a person ought to care about wisdom *temporally* before caring about those things—is less provocative; it is implicit, in fact, in any recommendation to gain an education before starting one’s career. The ambiguity, then, works to increase the juror’s sympathy for Socrates’ project.38

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37 After all, Socrates could have unambiguously indicated the ‘more than’ reading by using *mallon* instead of *prin* and *proteron*.

38 It is relevant here that Socrates emphasizes that the unexamined *life* is not worth living only *after* the jury finds him guilty. Also, I do not want to make too strong the point that Socrates is deliberately ambiguous about his intentions. Certainly at other places in the *Apology* he is less subtle, e.g. in calling wisdom, truth, and the excellence of one’s soul the “most important” things, and wealth, reputation, and one’s body “inferior” things (*Ap. 29d-30a*).
1.3 Life of philosophy

I have argued that Socrates aims to reform his interlocutors’ ways of life—specifically, to convince them to care the most about wisdom. What would such a life look like? What would it require?

The first point to make is that, as Doyle 2012: 55-58 has convincingly argued, it would not require living just like Socrates. The reason is that Socrates takes himself to be commanded by god to live as he does, and, importantly, he thinks that, without that divine command, his way of life would not make sense; more specifically, it would do more harm than benefit to him overall.

(18) As a result of this investigation, gentlemen of the jury, there arose a great deal of hatred against me, and of a kind which is most difficult to bear, since it gave rise to all sorts of slander… Even now I continue this investigation in obedience to the god… Because of this occupation, I don’t have time to deal with any public affairs worthy of the name or even with my person concerns, and I live in great poverty because of my service to the god (Ap. 22e7-23a3, 23b4-5, 23b7-c1).

(19) I am just the sort of person that the god would give to the city, as you might realize from the following: it doesn’t look like human nature, for me to have neglected all my affairs, and to put up with the neglect of my personal interests for so many years now, always acting in your interest instead, going to each of you in private like a father or an elder brother, to persuade you to care about virtue. Now, if I were deriving some benefit from doing these things by taking payment for these exhortations, there would be some sense in it; but now you can see for yourselves that my accusers, for all the shamefulness of their accusations, could not be quite so brazen as to produce a witness to say that I ever made any money, or asked for any. But I believe I can produce sufficient witness for the truth of what I’m saying: namely, my poverty (Ap. 31a8-c3).39

Socrates’ argument in (18) and (19) is that he must have been commanded by the god, because otherwise his behavior would not make sense.40 His interlocutors, however,

39 This translation, and the translation in (18), are from Doyle 2012.

40 The point that his way of life is inexplicable unless he were commanded by the god is useful for Socrates to defend against the charge of impiety.
have not received a divine command. Thus, when Socrates claims that, in trying to persuade his interlocutors to care the most about wisdom, he is trying to make them happy (Ap. 36e), he cannot mean that he wants them to live just as he lives; for, without the divine command, Socrates’ way of life would not make them happy: it would cause them to incur the hatred of others and live in great poverty. Scholars thus go astray in insisting that “according to Socrates, all of us should do what Socrates does” (Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 10; the same mistake is found in Benson 2000: 37 and Beversluis 2000: 34-35).41

Now, what is relevant about Socrates’ way of life is that it is devoted to refuting and exhorting people in an effort to persuade them to care the most about wisdom. That proselytizing activity, as commanded by the god, is the sort that makes sense only for Socrates. It must be possible, then, to care the most about wisdom without having to spend one’s days trying to convert people.42

As it happens, exactly what sort of behavior is required to count as caring the most about wisdom is left fairly underdetermined by our analysis of caring about (epimeleisthai). All that we know so far is that one must value wisdom the most, and, on account of that, act on behalf of and pay attention to certain things. But that leaves open several different ways of behaving, including, of course, acting so as to acquire wisdom oneself, but also, for instance, acting so as to establish wise laws, where this behavior need not involve trying to increase one’s own wisdom. Plausibly, the guardians in the Republic care the most about wisdom, even while they devote most of their time not to philosophical investigations but rather to governing. Thus, while the presumption is that, if you care the most about $x$, you’ll try to get $x$ yourself (or

41 As Doyle 2012 notes, one might object that Socrates does not think wealth and reputation are goods, and so he cannot think that being deprived of them is harmful; but, if that were so, then Socrates’ argument in (18) and (19)—that without the god’s command his way of life would not make sense—would not be truthful, and, moreover, there is reason to think that, in the Apology, Socrates considers wealth and reputation (and the like) as conditional goods, as argued in Burnyeat 2003.

42 Republic 9.581e is relevant here; Socrates says that “philosophers” partake in the pleasures of making money and being honored insofar as they are “necessary.” This necessity must go beyond what is necessary for mere survival, since being honored is not necessary to survive. It thus invites a view where philosophers can partake significantly in the typical political activities of the city without fault.
you’ll be doing $x$ yourself), you can also care the most about $x$ just, for instance, by promoting $x$. A dedicated arts administrator cares no less about artistic insight just because she is not trying to achieve it herself.

These considerations raise a puzzle for us. Is Socrates trying to convert people to a life of acquiring wisdom for themselves, or is he trying to convert them merely to having a profound respect for it—one that could lead, for instance, to their promoting the increase and acquisition of virtue and wisdom in their societies, without necessarily acting to acquire virtue and wisdom for themselves?

We are helped here by recalling the *Apology* as a starting point. Socrates is emphatic: “the greatest good” is to “discuss virtue every day” (ἐκάστης ἡμέρας περὶ ἄφετης τούς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι), and the “unexamined life is not worth living” (ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὔ βιωτός ἀνθρώπω, *Ap.* 38a). It would not do, then, merely to promote the increase and acquisition of virtue and wisdom in one’s society. Rather, what these remarks suggest is that, in trying to convert his interlocutors to valuing wisdom the most, Socrates is trying to convert them to a life of trying to acquire it for themselves, and, moreover, by doing philosophy. This is an additional point; we can imagine someone trying to acquire wisdom for herself but not by doing philosophy: a religious mystic, for instance, who seeks wisdom via divine inspiration. But such a person is ruled out by Socrates’ emphasis on ‘discussing’ (τούς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι) virtue and ‘examining’ (ἐξετάζειν) one’s life. These verbs point to the activity of doing philosophy and thus again make clear that his goal is to persuade his interlocutors to adopt the philosophical life.

Now, exactly what the life of philosophy entails is a difficult question. In the *Apology*, as mentioned, it requires discussing virtue regularly, which involves examining one’s life (*Ap.* 38a). In the *Phaedo*, it consists partly in avoiding (or at least being indifferent to) bodily desires and the conviction that wisdom is attained not via one’s sense faculties but via reason used by itself—none of which are mentioned in the *Apology*. In the *Theaetetus*, it requires studying astronomy (173e), a field that, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates expresses disappointment with (99b-100a). In the *Republic*, like the *Phaedo*, it involves an insatiable desire for learning, specifically about the Forms, and
leads to acquiring a virtuous disposition (5.475b-6.487a). Unlike in the *Phaedo*, however, knowledge of the Forms can be attained even while embodied, and one does not count as a philosopher until one has attained that knowledge—a point that implies Socrates, who avows lacking it (6.505a), is no philosopher.\(^{43}\)

Thus, at least on first glance, Plato seems to conceive of the life of philosophy differently across the dialogues. ‘The life of philosophy’ seems to be a moving target for Plato; he seems to take himself to have accurately identified it at one spot, only to find that, later, it seems to have different features. Important for our purposes, however, are not the varying details of Plato’s presentations of the life of philosophy, but rather what they all have in common, namely that the activity of philosophy is motivated by intrinsically valuing wisdom. One must love wisdom (*philosophē*), and, on account of that, do philosophy (*philosophē*).

I thus think that the things that Socrates wants his interlocutors to care about are unified, such that, in caring about one of them as one ought, one cares about all of them. The core is to care about wisdom the most—that is, the *aretē* of one’s soul, the state of having learned the truth about “the matters of most importance” (τὰ μέγιστα, *Ap.* 29d).\(^{44}\) So far, though, I have said nothing concerning how caring about wisdom the most covers caring about “the city itself” (*Ap.* 36c). I give an answer to this question in Chapter 2. Roughly, the answer is that Socrates conceives of caring about the city itself as requiring a person to perform his social role well, and if he cares about wisdom the most, then he will take steps to ensure that he has the knowledge required

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\(^{43}\) For more on the differences between the conceptions of the philosopher presented in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, see Vasiliou 2011.

\(^{44}\) I take this remark to delimit the knowledge (in a non-loaded sense) that counts as the *aretē* of one’s soul. It does not include all things that we might call knowledge, e.g. knowledge of how to arrive at some physical location. Instead, it primarily consists of knowledge of ethical concepts, as can be gleaned from Socrates’ consistent focus on those concepts and his insistence on their importance (see, for example, *Eu.* 15c-e, *Chrm.* 174b-c, *La.* 200d-201b, *Euthd.* 282a, *G.* 459c-461b, and *Alc.* 117a-124c). I say ‘primarily’ because it may also include knowledge that goes beyond knowledge of ethical concepts, and in particular knowledge necessary to execute certain tasks. In the *Phaedrus*, for example, Socrates urges Phaedrus, as someone who wants to persuade people, to acquire knowledge of the types of souls and which sort of speeches suit which types of souls (271d-272b).
to do so; or, at the least, he will be aware of lacking that knowledge and thus able to modify his behavior accordingly.

One last point is needed. In asking how Socrates can convert his interlocutors to the life of philosophy, I am not assuming that everyone can be converted to that life, nor even that that life would be suitable for everyone. It is true that, in the *Apology*, Socrates says that he tries to persuade anyone whom he happens to meet to care the most about wisdom (*Ap.* 29d). But, in doing so, Socrates need not be making those assumptions, either. It could be that the interaction is necessary to see whether the life of philosophy is suitable for the interlocutor, and thus that it functions as a sort of test or opportunity for self-selection. (Indeed, this seems plausible to me; how else besides engaging in philosophy could you tell whether you were cut out for it?) This is more plausible given that Plato evidently thinks that not everyone is suited for the life of philosophy. The most important point for my purposes, though, is that, even if some people are unsuited for the philosophical life, Socrates’ interlocutors in Plato’s dialogues are not these sorts of people. They are, rather, highly talented and ambitious, the sort of people whose natural competence would make them candidates for the guardian class of the *Republic*. My focus is on how Socrates can convert these sorts of people—the sorts of people depicted in the dialogues—and thus, for our purposes, it is mostly irrelevant that Plato thinks not everyone is capable of living the philosophical life.

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45 For a related passage, see the *Euthyphro*: “Perhaps you [Euthyphro] seem to make yourself but rarely available, and not be willing to teach your own wisdom, but I’m afraid that my liking for people makes them think that I pour out to anybody anything I have to say...” (3d). It is relevant, too, that Socrates converses with a slave in the *Meno* and criticizes sophists who converse only with the rich at *Protagoras* 313d. These details support thinking that Socrates “is the gadfly of the city, not the rich” (Harvey 1966, 589, fn. 7). For a deflationary reading of *Apology* 29d, see Nehamas 1999c, who thinks Socrates’ comment that he examines anyone he happens upon may not refer “to everyone indiscriminately” but rather, given the context, “only to those for whom Socrates considers the elenchus appropriate” (75). It may be a mistake, however, to think that Socrates can determine for whom examination is appropriate without first examining the person.

46 Cf. *Republic* 6.491a: “I suppose that everyone would agree that only a few natures possess all the qualities that we just now said were essential to becoming a complete philosopher and that seldom occur naturally among human beings.”
In the next chapter, I consider how Socrates uses refutation to convert his interlocutors to that way of life.
Socratic Refutation

In the *Apology*, Socrates identifies refutation as a tactic that he uses in trying to transform his interlocutors’ values. This point appears most explicitly when Socrates imagines himself refuting a hypothetical Athenian interlocutor:

I will obey the god... I shall not cease... to exhort you [ὑμῖν παρακελεύωμενός] and [to refute you, i.e.] in my customary way [οἵτινες εἴσοδός] to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: 'My good man, when you’re an Athenian, belonging to the greatest city with the highest reputation for wisdom [σοφίαν] and strength [ἰσχύν], are you not ashamed [οὐχ ἀσχύνῃ] to care about [ἐπιμελούμενος] getting as much money, reputation [δόξης], and honor [τιμῆς] as you can, while as for getting as much wisdom [γραμμήσως] and truth as you can, and getting your soul into the best condition, that you don’t care about, and don’t give any thought to [οὐχ ἐπιμελῇ οὐδὲ φροντίζεις]?' Then, if one of you disputes this and says he does care about these things, I shall not let him go at once or leave him, but I shall question him, examine him, and test him [ἐρήσομαι αὐτὸν καὶ ἔξετάσω καὶ ἐλέγξομαι], and if I do not think he has acquired excellence [ἀρετήν], though he says he has, I shall reproach him [ονειδῶ] because he attaches little importance to the most important things and greater importance to inferior things... Be sure that this is what the god orders me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing for the city than my service to the god. For what I’m doing as I go about is nothing other than [οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄλλο πράττων ἐγὼ περιέρχωμαι] trying to persuade both the younger and the older not to care about [ἐπιμελεύσθαι] bodies or money in preference to, or as strongly as, getting your soul into the best possible condition... (Ap. 29d-30b).

Socrates describes his “customary way” of refuting people, and he specifies that its goal is to change what his interlocutors care about. My aim in this chapter is to answer how, if at all, it can accomplish that goal.
2.1 Background

At first, refutation seems unlikely to be the sort of tactic that could reform a person’s life. It seems just to be a matter of proving people wrong, and that is often not effective at changing their core commitments.\(^1\) In light of this, it is not surprising that Socrates seems to have so little success in using refutation to improve his interlocutors. We never find an interlocutor responding to a Socratic refutation with gratitude and a wholehearted pledge to reform his way of life. Rather, Socrates’ interlocutors most often respond to being refuted by experiencing shame or anger. It is tempting to infer from these negative reactions that Socratic refutation is a flawed method for transforming a person’s values.

However, I will be arguing that shame and anger are exactly the sort of reactions that would motivate Socrates’ interlocutors to begin reforming their ways of life. Moreover, Socrates is explicit about wanting to cause these experiences in his interlocutors, a point that should encourage us to view them not as signs of failure but as signs of success.

Many scholars have recognized that shame plays an important role in Socratic refutation. However, they have focused on the way that shame functions to cause an interlocutor to be refuted (as happens, for instance, when Socrates shames Gorgias into asserting inconsistent claims).\(^2\) My focus is not on this phenomenon of refuting by shaming, but rather on the phenomenon of shaming by refuting. My focus, that is, is on the experience of shame that occurs as a result of being refuted (in contrast to the experience of shame that causes an interlocutor to be refuted). This topic has received far less attention from scholars.\(^3\) As a result, certain fundamental questions about

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\(^1\) Cf. Nietzsche, along similar lines: “One knows that one arouses mistrust with [dialectic], that it is not very persuasive. Nothing is easier to erase than a dialectical effect...” (The Twilight of the Idols, tr. Kaufmann, 1968: 476).


\(^3\) It has, however, received some attention. Robinson 1953 describes “the purpose” of the elenchus as “to shame people into putting first things first... to put men to shame for living wrongly” (13).
shame and refutation are still unanswered. What exactly is shameful about being refuted? What about being refuted would cause Socrates’ interlocutors to feel ashamed? Why would that experience of shame be beneficial? It is only by answering these questions that we can develop a compelling account of how Socratic refutation can be effective at contributing to Socrates’ goal of transforming his interlocutors’ values. It thus makes sense that, in the absence of satisfying answers to them, many scholars hold that Socratic refutation is not effective at accomplishing this task.\(^4\)

One disclaimer is needed. My main question about refutation does not intersect with the question more commonly asked about it, the question of how, if at all, Socrates can prove theses false merely by exposing inconsistencies. This question is often referred to as the ‘Vlastos problem.’ It concerns the logical side of refutation; it asks how refutation can prove certain things. In contrast, my concern is with the psychological side of refutation; I am asking how it can persuade people to make certain changes in their lives, and proof and persuasion can come apart.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) There are, of course, other questions we can ask about refutation, or elenchus, such as how it can result in any positive learning (cf. Nehamas 1999a: 12-13), where that can go beyond both proof and persuasion. Also, it would be a mistake to think that any given elenchus is concerned either with discovering the truth or with improving an interlocutor. Rather, the elenchus is a “two-in-one operation” (Vlastos 1994: 10).
2.1.1 Ignorance and motivation

Part of my argument is that Socrates uses refutation to motivate his interlocutors to undertake further philosophical inquiry. This point will not be news to many, and so it is worth emphasizing at the start that I differ from the standard account on exactly what provides this motivation. On the standard account, which I oppose, what provides it is merely the interlocutor’s realizing that he is ignorant about what he thought he knew.\footnote{The view begins with Robinson 1953: “... the recognition that we do not know at once arouses the desire to know, and thus supplies the motive that was lacking before” (11). Benson 1995 echoes this thought: “Perplexity leads to the awareness of ignorance which leads to the desire to know” (89). So too does Politis 2006: “... the recognition of one’s ignorance will motivate one to search for the particular answer that one is ignorant of” (104). Similarly, Scott 2006 thinks that awareness of ignorance motivates further inquiry: “in ridding the boy of his pretension to know and reducing him to aporia the stingray has done him no harm... The ‘stingray’ implants the motivation to inquire, and so is of clear benefit” (72). See Slings 1999 for a similar point concerning aporia: “Aporia is a necessary and sufficient condition for ‘attempting to search and learn’ ([Meno] 84c4-5); in other words, one who is ‘thrown into aporia’ will automatically ‘feel a desire to know’ (cf. 84c5-6)” (140-141). Mackenzie 1988 seems to agree that aporia is sufficient to motivate further inquiry: “Puzzlement... constitutes both an awareness of [one’s] own ignorance, and the desire to inquire further” (20).}

Scholars base this account on \textit{Meno} 84b-c, where Socrates, after refuting the slave boy, describes why being refuted is beneficial:

\begin{quote}
Socrates: ... now he [i.e., the slave boy] does think himself at a loss, and as he does not know, neither does he think he knows.

Meno: That is true.

Socrates: Have we done him any harm by making him perplexed and numb as the torpedo fish does?

Meno: I do not think so.

Socrates: (1) Indeed, we have probably achieved something relevant to finding out how matters stand, for now he would gladly inquire\footnote{This phrase (ζητήσειεν ἂν ἡδέως) is mistranslated by Grube as “he would be glad to find out.” Socrates’ point is not about whether, when the boy finds out, he would be glad or not. It is rather about when the boy would gladly inquire at all.}, because he does not know [οὐξ εἰδώλ], whereas before he thought he could easily make many fine speeches to large audiences about the square of double size and said that it must have been a base twice as long.

Meno: So it seems.
\end{quote}
SOCRATES: Do you think that before [πρότερον], when he did not know it [οὐκ εἰδός], he would have tried to find out that which he thought he knew, before [πρὶν] he fell into perplexity and realized he did not know and longed to know?
MENO: I do not think so, Socrates.
SOCRATES: Has he then benefitted from being numbed?
MENO: I think so.

It is tempting to read the claim at (1) as identifying a sufficient cause for an interlocutor’s wanting to inquire further, namely his realizing that he is ignorant: “for now he would gladly inquire, because he does not know.” If read that way, the passage would support the standard account. But claims that a person acts a certain way (or would do so) because of something else only very rarely indicate a sufficient cause. I might gladly drink a coffee because I am tired, but that does not at all entail that my being tired is a sufficient cause of my wanting coffee, neither in this case nor in general.

Nevertheless, it is true that, even though unlikely, it is possible that the claim at (1) is meant to indicate a sufficient cause. Now, even if so, it applies in the first place only to the slave boy: becoming aware of his ignorance would be a sufficient cause of wanting to inquire further for him. It is a further step to say that in general this awareness acts as such. As a matter of fact, though, Socrates here seems to want to explain why refutation is beneficial not only for the slave boy but for everyone.8 It is, however, highly implausible that realizing one is ignorant would be sufficient to motivate further inquiry in general. You may bring me to realize I am ignorant about the nature of courage without this at all motivating me to inquire further about it. More importantly, there are prominent examples in Plato’s corpus of interlocutors’ being refuted, realizing they are ignorant about what they thought they knew, and not being motivated to keep inquiring.

Such is the case with Socrates’ earliest accusers. In the Apology, Socrates describes making his earliest accusers aware that “they have been proved to lay claim to knowledge when they know nothing” (Ap. 23d), but, far from this motivating them to

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8 He is responding to Meno’s accusation that the refutation has left him “numb” and therefore has harmed him (just as a torpedo fish harms its victims). Socrates’ point is that the experience of being refuted is not harmful and is actually beneficial, for the reasons stated at Meno 84b-c.
inquire further, it motivated them to take measures to ensure that Socrates would never pressure them to think philosophically again.

Another such instance occurs in the *Alcibiades*. Socrates refutes Alcibiades, thereby making Alcibiades aware of his ignorance concerning the just, admirable, good, and advantageous. However, Alcibiades is explicit that nonetheless he feels no motivation to inquire about what these things are. His reason is that he thinks he can achieve what he wants—political power—without learning about these, since his political opponents are just as ignorant about them as he is (*Alc.* 114a-119c).

A related instance occurs with Cephalus, who, in the beginning of the *Republic*, shows no curiosity or animosity after Socrates contests his beliefs about justice. Instead, he hands off the argument to Polemarchus and jovially walks away (330d-331d).

These examples make clear that many of Socrates’ interlocutors need more incentive to keep inquiring than just that further inquiry is required to cure their ignorance. This further incentive will be required especially for interlocutors whose priorities are askew. In contrast, the mere awareness of ignorance or experience of *aporia* often will be sufficient to motivate those already converted to philosophical values to keep inquiring (indeed, it may be a mark of such people that these experiences do motivate them in that way). For those not already converted, however, more is needed. My account of Socratic refutation explains why it would give more incentive to Socrates’ typical, wayward interlocutors. Socratic refutation shows them to have neglected their social roles, and, in doing so, harms their self-esteem, reputation, honor, and livelihood. This causes the experience of negative emotions that motivate them to

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9 This passage is well noted by Belfiore 2012: 70 as showing that “*aporia* is not a sufficient condition for desiring to obtain wisdom.”

10 See, for example, *Euthydemus* 294a, *Phaedo* 84d, and *Theaetetus* 151a, where *aporia* is sufficient to motivate further inquiry in Socrates, Simmias and Cebes, and Socrates’ “followers and comrades” (οἱ ἔμοι συγγιγνόμενοι, *Theaet.* 151a).
start fulfilling their social roles—and, as we will see, the way to do that is to do philosophy.\textsuperscript{11}

Our first step, then, is to see that Socratic refutation aims to do much more than merely prove a person wrong—to see that it engages with the interlocutor’s existing motivational make-up. To do that, we need to revisit what Socratic refutation is. As I show, exactly how it works has not been fully understood, and thus we have been unable to see it as an effective persuasion tactic. The key point is that refutation concerns an interlocutor’s social role, as Socrates demonstrates in the \textit{Apology}.

\section*{2.2 Template of refutation in the \textit{Apology}}

Recall that, in the \textit{Apology} passage above, Socrates describes his “customary way” of refuting people: “... and pointing out to any one of you whom I happen to meet, saying in my customary way \textit{[οἷάπερ εἴωθε]} that...” (29d). This remark suggests that Socrates is giving the template of his practice of refutation, that is, describing it in such a way as to accentuate its essential features. So, what are its essential features?

Three stand out. The first is that Socrates specifies a norm that, if not met, ought to make the interlocutor feel ashamed; roughly, that norm is that the interlocutor

\footnote{I mean for ‘social role’ to be a fairly intuitive concept, one that can include a person’s profession, citizenship, relationships, held offices, memberships in political groups, and other roles that one undertakes. Those relevant for us are the social roles of Socrates’ refuted interlocutors: teacher, prosecutor, guardian, politician, student, rhapsode, Athenian citizen, public speechmaker, and educational advisor. Some of these are \textit{technai}, while others, like Athenian citizen and student, are not. All of them, though, are goal-oriented, and, as such, require knowing certain things that contribute to accomplishing the relevant goal. Another way of putting this point is to note that each social role requires a person to act on behalf of an object—that is to \textit{epimeleisthai} it, where that requires also knowing certain things about it, as per the logic of \textit{epimeleisthai} argued for in Chapter 1. The notion of a social role roughly corresponds to Christine Korsgaard’s notion of a practical identity, though she is more permissive regarding what counts as a practical identity than I want to be regarding what counts as a social role. I would not count one’s gender or status as a human as a social role in the Athenian context, but Korsgaard wants to consider those as practical identities. As we will see, it is not that Socrates shames his interlocutor \textit{qua} fellow human being or man, but rather \textit{qua} someone who, in virtue of performing some role, is committed to caring about something. For more on Korsgaard’s notion of practical identity, see especially the chapter “The authority of reflection” in \textit{Sources of Normativity} and section 1.4 in \textit{Agency and Identity}.}
ought to care about certain things more than others. The second is that Socrates tests to see whether the interlocutor meets this norm by trying to refute him. The third feature is that, if the interlocutor is refuted, and thus shown not to meet the norm, Socrates “reproaches” (ὁνείδιο) him, presumably in an effort to make him feel ashamed.

What we find, then, is that a certain norm plays a key role in Socrates’ “customary way” of refuting people. What sort of norm is this?

At first, the answer seems to be straightforward. It appears to be a universal norm: ‘everyone ought to care about truth, wisdom, and their souls more than reputation, honor, and their bodies.’ Socrates thus seems to be using refutation to test for whether the interlocutor meets a norm that, just in virtue of being human, he ought to meet.

But the text tells against that picture. Recall Socrates’ opening address. Socrates asks, “Good sir, when you’re an Athenian [Ἀθηναῖος ὤν], a citizen of the greatest city for both wisdom and power, are you not ashamed [to not properly care about certain things]?” (Ap. 29d). It is tempting to view these opening lines as merely rhetorical, but that would be a mistake. For notice that they do philosophical work: they link the fact that the interlocutor is an Athenian with the fact that, if he does not meet a certain norm, he ought to be ashamed. Socrates’ point, then, is not that everyone ought to meet a certain norm, but rather that an Athenian ought to meet it; likewise, not everyone ought to be ashamed for not meeting it, but rather an Athenian ought to be ashamed for not meeting it. Thus, the sort of norm important to Socratic

12 The clause could also be translated as “even though you’re an Athenian,” but that translation would not make sense. In that case, the phrase would be giving a prima facie reason for why it would not be shameful for the interlocutor not to care about certain things (just as in the question ‘Even though you can dunk, aren’t you embarrassed not to be able to make a free throw?’ the initial clause provides a prima facie reason for why the inability to make a free throw would not be embarrassing: the ability to dunk could make up for it). But the interlocutor’s Athenian status does not provide a prima facie reason for why he would not need to be ashamed; it is not as if being an Athenian means that you are excused from caring about truth, wisdom, and the excellence of one’s soul. Rather, as I say in the main text above, being an Athenian means that you ought to care about these things.
refutation is not a universal norm but rather a local norm, a norm that applies to a person in virtue of her social role (in contrast to being any person at all).\(^\text{13}\)

Now, this local norm, in the text, is that an Athenian ought to care about (epimeleisthai) certain things more than others. But we can infer that this requirement implies also a requirement to know certain things, for two reasons.

The first concerns the Greek word epimeleisthai. As I argued in Chapter 1, epimeleisthai is a complex unity: one values an object and, because of that, takes care of and pays attention to certain things. One mark of valuing an object, then, will be having knowledge pertaining to it, both because that is required to take care of it, and because the ongoing process of paying attention to it will result in such knowledge. So, when Socrates insists that an Athenian ought to care about (epimeleisthai) certain things, we can infer that he ought also to know certain things. In fact, Socrates frequently assumes, and interlocutors frequently agree, that to count as caring about an object, one must also know certain things about it. In the Apology, Socrates infers that Meletus must know who improves the youth given his concern for their education: “You must know [οἶσθα], given your concern [μέλον]” (24d).\(^\text{14}\) In Xenophon’s Memorabilia, Socrates infers that people do not “care about” (ἐπιμελομένους) friendship because they “do not know” (ἀγνοοῦντας) how many friends they have or who they are (2.4.2-4, cf. 3.5.24). This inference is valid only if the principle Socrates uses against Meletus is true: that, to care about an object, one must know certain things about it.\(^\text{15}\)

The second reason that the requirement to care about an object imparts the requirement to know certain things is that, in our key Apology passage, Socrates tests

\(^\text{13}\) For a similar distinction in a different context, see Foucault’s 2003: 112 comment that, for the Stoics, certain things are required on account of one’s being a rational being, while for Isocrates, certain things are required because of one’s social role.

\(^\text{14}\) Note that melō and epimeleisthai are closely etymologically connected, with each built on the same mel- root, and thus, for my purposes here, I treat them as identical.

\(^\text{15}\) As mentioned in Chapter 1, this can include the knowledge that one lacks knowledge. Otherwise, Socrates’ ignorance regarding virtue would imply that he does not care about it. Also, since we find Socrates using this principle in both Plato and Xenophon, it may be that the historical Socrates frequently used it. Nevertheless, my argument concerns Plato’s Socrates, and I mean to use this parallel in Xenophon just as further evidence for the point that caring requires knowing.
to see whether the interlocutor cares about what he alleges to care about by trying to refute him. If, though, the interlocutor’s claim to care about certain things did not also imply a claim to know certain things, then Socrates would have nothing to refute.

In light of these points, we can further specify the norm important to Socratic refutation as a role-based epistemic duty—“role based,” because it derives from a person’s social role; “epistemic,” because it requires her to know certain things; “duty,” because she cannot opt out of it without forfeiting her social role.16

2.2.1 Ephebic oath

It is worth asking what justifies the role-based epistemic duty to which Socrates appeals with his hypothetical Athenian interlocutor. Why ought an Athenian, qua Athenian, care about certain things more than other things?

One answer is because doing so is a form of Athenian patriotism. In virtue of swearing the ephebic oath, for instance, Athenians acquired certain obligations that required certain habits of care. Starting in the 5th century, taking this oath was necessary for an Athenian male youth to gain citizenship and political rights.17 An inscription of it reads as follows:

I will not disgrace [οὐχίσεχνω] these sacred arms, nor will I desert the comrade at whose side I shall be stationed. I will defend our altars and hearths, and will not leave the country worse [οὗχιλέσσω], but greater and better [καὶ ἀρείω], so far as I am able by myself and with the help of all. I will obey those who always rule wisely [ἐμφρόνω], the established ordinances, and those which will in the future be wisely established. If anyone seeks to destroy [ἀναιρεῖ] (them), I will not give way [ἐπιτρέψω], so far as I am able by myself and with

16 Note that by ‘epistemic duty’ I do not mean anything like a duty about how to form our beliefs, e.g. a duty to apportion one’s beliefs to the evidence. Rather, I mean a duty to know certain things. Also, talk of role-based epistemic duties is common in applied ethics. See, for instance, Brennan 2011 and Beerbohm 2012, both of whom argue that being a voter entails certain role-based epistemic duties. Role-based epistemic duties are a species of more general role-based duties. For a classic treatment of role-based duties as pertaining to lawyers, see Luban 1988.

17 Extant inscriptions of the ephebic oath go back only to the late 4th century, but see Siewert 1977 and Mitchel 1964 for evidence that it dates to the 5th century.
the help of all. I will honor [τιμήσω] the cults of my fathers. Witnesses of these shall be the gods...

Most relevant for us is the line that the oath-taker “will not leave the country worse, but greater and better.” This imparts a twofold duty to Athenian citizens: to see to it that no harm is done to Athens, and to see to it that Athens is improved. How, though, can Athenians ensure that they meet this duty? It will not suffice merely to have good intentions, for these might nevertheless result in harm. One thing that is required, then, is to know which actions benefit Athens and which actions harm it. This is all the more important given that Athenians were expected to play influential roles in the Assembly, partly by voting but also by making speeches for and against courses of action. Their evaluative beliefs, then, have direct consequences for the welfare of their city.

This is not to say that every Athenian citizen would have realized that the ephebic oath required him to investigate what is beneficial and harmful. Importantly, however, taking the oath was not a mere formality in Athenian culture. It was rather something that citizens reminded each other of and held each other to, as we can tell from the numerous points at which it resonates (often word-for-word) in contemporary texts, including Pericles’ Funeral Oration, Sophocles’ *Antigone*, and Aeschylus’ *Persians.*

We can thus read *Apology* 29d-30b as falling in line with these; Socrates is reminding his Athenian interlocutor of his patriotic obligations, some of which come from swearing the ephebic oath, and he is making clear that, to fulfill these, a certain habit of care is required.

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18 For analysis, see Siewert 1977.
19 It strengthens this interpretation to note the strong verbal resonances between the ephebic oath and *Apology* 29d-30b. The oath requires young Athenian men not to be a disgrace (οὐκ ἀσχολεύοντα) and to obey people who rule wisely (ἐμφρόνως) and laws that are established wisely (ἐμφρόνως). Socrates, seemingly echoing these lines, implies that his Athenian interlocutor is in a shameful condition (οὐκ ἄσχολη), in part because he has neglected to cultivate wisdom, a fault that would render him unable to identify which people rule wisely and which laws are wisely established. Likewise, the oath requires young Athenian men to make Athens greater and better (πλείω δὲ καὶ ἀρετῶ), a commitment that requires them to improve themselves to be able to improve Athens. Socrates charges his Athenian interlocutor with neglecting the excellence of his soul (τῆς ψυχῆς ὡς βελτίστη), and thus
2.2.2 Initial advantages

I will be arguing that role-based epistemic duties play a crucial role in Socratic refutation even outside the Apology. Socrates appeals to role-based epistemic duties to put his interlocutors on the hook for knowing what their social roles require them to know, tests to see if they have that knowledge, then reproaches them if they do not. Two initial advantages of such an account are as follows.

The first advantage is that it provides a more satisfying answer than is currently on offer to the question of what it is that Socrates refutes (or tests, elenchein). A standard answer is that Socrates refutes people’s convictions. But, in most cases, the claims that Socrates refutes are not expressions of his interlocutors’ deeply held beliefs. They are claims put forward on the spot, claims made in many cases just to have something to say in response to Socrates. That is why interlocutors typically make

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20 I am not the first to note that Socrates examines people concerning their social roles. Rowe 2007 notes that Socrates frequently examines people about whether they have the knowledge they ought to have “in virtue of their profession” (92). However, Rowe does not use this point to explain how Socratic refutation can motivate Socrates’ interlocutors, but rather to explain why Socrates would think that he can learn something by examining his interlocutors (the presumption is that, because of their professions, they have the relevant knowledge).

21 See, for example, Vlastos 1991: “elenctic argument is the very process on which [Socrates] depends to test the truth of his own convictions about the right way to live, no less than those of his interlocutor” (134).

22 Indeed, in the Charmides, Socrates reveals that he recognizes his interlocutors’ claims as such (as noted in Rowe 2007: 126): “But, I said, ‘Critias, you bear down on me as if I claimed knowledge of the things I’m asking about, and as if I’d agree with you if only I wanted to; but it isn’t like that. Rather, I investigate with you on each occasion what is put forward καθ’ ἄνελτο τὸ προτείθημένον just because I don’t know the answer myself” (Chrm. 165b5-c1).
no fuss about Socrates’ refuting their initial answers to his questions—why they almost breezily either come up with a second answer on their own or accept one of Socrates’ suggestions. This is not the behavior we would expect from someone whose convictions are being disputed. Indeed, in the exceptional cases where Socrates disputes his interlocutors’ convictions, it is not the behavior we do find. His interlocutors rather cling to their initial answers throughout the conversation; they do not, as in the more common case, toss their initial answer and try out a second one. But this stubbornness is found only with Polus and Callicles in the Gorgias and Thrasyvichus in the Republic.

A second standard answer is that Socrates refutes claims to knowledge. Unlike with convictions, it would not be remarkable if a person claimed to know an answer to a question and then, once she realized she was in error, retreated from her initial answer without fuss and tried out a new one. However, it would be disappointing if Socrates’ protocol were to go about refuting just any claims to knowledge. That would provide us with a Socrates whose ears are always on alert for any knowledge claims, no matter the context, no matter the content, who, when he hears such a claim, eagerly rushes up to ask whether the person really knows that. Such behavior is juvenile. We might, then, want to say that what Socrates refutes are claims to knowledge about important matters. In a sense, this answer is correct. What is problematic about it for now is that, if Socrates’ protocol were to examine any such claims to knowledge, it would be too easy to escape his examination—just be careful not to say the word ‘know,’ and you will be safe! It would be unsatisfying if adopting such a policy were enough to appease Socrates.

A third standard answer is that Socrates refutes people’s lives. This answer has strong textual support. In the Laches, Nicias reports that Socrates’ habit is to make his interlocutor answer “questions about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto” (188a; cf. Ap. 39c7: ἔλεγχον τοῦ βίου). It is unclear, however, what it means to say that Socrates refutes his interlocutors’ lives. On a prominent interpretation, it means to refute “propositions” that “express the values according to which they live” (Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 13). But that
interpretation is unsatisfying, because the propositions that Socrates’ interlocutors put forward often do not express the values according to which they live. Rather, they advance certain claims just because they are trying to look sophisticated or avoid being refuted.23

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which it is correct to say that Socrates refutes people’s lives. He shows that their lives are not internally consistent: they avow caring about things, and they may even think that they do care about things, that in fact they do not care about. Moreover, as we will see, Socrates’ interlocutors avow certain commitments just by undertaking their social roles, commitments that include possessing the knowledge required to perform those roles well. Thus, they cannot escape examination merely by not using the word “know.” So long as they perform some social role, they are on the hook for possessing knowledge. In the first place, then, what Socrates refutes are his interlocutors’ claims to know what their social roles require them to know—and if they lack that knowledge, then it is a sign that their lives have gone astray. Either they are unaware of their incompetence at their social roles, and thus are negligent, or they are aware of this but perform those roles regardless, and thus are reckless or even malicious.

The second advantage of basing Socratic refutation on role-based epistemic duties is that it provides a satisfying answer to a second question, one that, in the literature, tends to go unanswered: the question of why exactly being refuted by Socrates is shameful, in particular being refuted by him in his “customary way” (Ap. 29d). It is clear that Socrates does regard being refuted in this way as shameful: he remarks that, once he refutes his interlocutor, he “reproaches” him for being in a shameful condition.

See, for example, the way that Nicias butters up to Socrates (and makes himself look sophisticated) by submitting a definition of courage that is based on an “excellent observation” (Lach. 194c) that he has heard Socrates make before; the way that Gorgias and Polus admit certain points because they are ashamed to say otherwise (G. 461b-c, 482c-e); and the way that Callicles asserts pleasure and the good are the same just because, as he thinks, that is required to keep his argument from being inconsistent (G. 495a). It is plausible, too, that Critias’ definition of temperance as “minding one’s own business” is not so much his sincere belief about what temperance is, as a self-serving definition that he told the mischievous Charmides once to get him not to meddle in his guardian Critias’ important affairs.
But refutation cannot be shameful just because it exposes a person’s ignorance: mere ignorance is not shameful. Nor can it be because it exposes a person’s ignorance about the most important matters, for even Socrates is ignorant about these, and there is no reason to think that he considers himself to be in a continually shameful condition. Moreover, it does not seem that being refuted as such is shameful; Socrates would be “pleased” (ἡδέως, G. 458a) to be refuted if he says anything false. If, however, a refutation shows that an interlocutor has neglected his role-based epistemic duty, and thus does not in fact care about what he ought, then we have a straightforward, compelling explanation for why being refutated is shameful: it shows a person to have failed at his social role.

24 I thus disagree with Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 25 that “Socrates fully expects those who claim to know the most important of things to feel great shame as a result of his elenctic proofs that some of their beliefs about such things must be confused.” There is no reason to think that merely having confused beliefs about such things is shameful, for Socrates’ own beliefs about them are confused (insofar as he frequently wavers about them and lacks knowledge concerning them), and, while he certainly considers that condition a regrettable one, there is no indication that he considers it shameful. This line of argument requires taking Socrates’ professions of ignorance at face value, however, and so might be opposed by those who view them as ironic—who view Socrates as possessing “the truth” that he “held back” (Vlastos 1991: 32). The issue of Socratic irony is difficult and complicated, and I will not say anything new about it here. In general, though, I am not inclined to interpret Socrates as ironic in Vlastos’ sense, that is, as both meaning and not meaning what he says, an interpretation that Nehamas 1992d rightly notes “robs” Socrates of “much of his strangeness” (102). I rather take Socrates’ disavowals of knowledge and teaching as sincere. However, this does not bar me from agreeing with Vlastos that Socrates is a teacher in one sense (he morally improves his interlocutors) and not in another sense (he does not simply transmit knowledge to them). That is a matter of fact, whereas the dispute over irony concerns what Socrates means to be communicating. For an insightful and, to my mind, largely correct critique of Vlastos’ view of Socratic irony, see Nehamas 1999d: 100-104. For discussions that bring out the richness of Socrates’ ways of interacting with his interlocutors, while casting doubt on the view that he operates with anything like systematic irony, see Santas 1979: 68-72 and Lane 2011.

25 I am assuming that failing at one’s social role just is shameful, so long as the social role is one worth fulfilling (otherwise it would only be ridiculous; see my comments on Ion below). This is in line with the conventional point that shame (ἀιδώς, aischunē) and failure go hand in hand for the Greeks. See, for instance, Adkins 1960: it is “aischron for the vanquished to have been defeated, whatever the circumstances of… defeat… To fail shames, aischunēi…” (157). This is not to say that failure is the only thing that is shameful, but rather that at the core of what is shameful for the Greeks is failure, especially in public. Note, too, that it is not as if an interlocutor must hold sophisticated ethical views to feel ashamed at being revealed to be a failure at his social role. Rather, he would need only to share the widespread cultural tendency to feel ashamed because of failure. Further, as Cairns 1994
None of these advantages matter, however, if the refutations in the dialogues turn out not to concern role-based epistemic duties. In the next section, I show that they are.

2.3 Role-based epistemic duties

So far, we have seen that role-based epistemic duties play a central role in Socrates “customary way” of refuting people (Ap. 29d). It would be a mistake, however, to conclude just from this description that they play the same role, or any role, in Socrates’ refutations elsewhere in the corpus. To confirm that, we need to examine Socrates’ other refutations.

2.3.1 Apology

Let’s start with Socrates’ refutation of Meletus earlier in the Apology. Meletus is prosecuting Socrates in part for corrupting the youth. Socrates first specifies the role-based epistemic duty that applies to Meletus qua prosecutor. Socrates asks Meletus, “Come, then, tell these men who improves the youth. You obviously know, in view of your concern [δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι οἴσθατε, μέλον γέσοι]” (24d). Notice how this claim works: it attributes Meletus with the knowledge of who improves the youth, on the grounds of his “concern” (μέλον)—that is, on the grounds that he is prosecuting Socrates for...
corrupting the youth. The claim is that Meletus must have this knowledge, since he is prosecuting Socrates. But, of course, that claim is false: Meletus is prosecuting Socrates despite lacking this knowledge. This alerts us to the fact that Socrates’ point is not descriptive but normative: it is not that, because he is prosecuting Socrates, Meletus must have this knowledge, but rather that, because he is prosecuting Socrates, Meletus ought to have this knowledge. We will see this pattern again: Socrates will make a descriptive claim of the form that, because of his social role, an interlocutor must know something, as a way of making the normative claim that, because of his social role, he ought to know something. This behavior is not uncommon, even today. It is often tinged with sarcasm. A person, peeved at receiving a speeding ticket, says, ‘You know what’s best, officer.’ The point is not that the officer does in fact know what it is best. Rather, it is that, qua officer, she ought to know what is best, with the implication that administering a speeding ticket is not what is best just then.

Socrates, then, makes clear Meletus’ role-based epistemic duty: qua prosecutor, Meletus ought to know the basis of the charges he is bringing to court (we will see another instance of this role-based epistemic duty with Euthyphro). Socrates then tests to see whether Meletus possesses that knowledge. Meletus fails the test, and the result is that he ought to be ashamed of himself: “You have made it sufficiently obvious, Meletus, that you have never had any concern for our youth; you show your indifference clearly; that you have given no thought to the subjects about which you bring me to trial” (25c). Meletus is thus found guilty of the charges Socrates makes against him just before refuting him, guilty, that is, of “dealing frivolously with serious matters, of irresponsibility bringing people into court, and of professing to be seriously concerned with things about none of which he has ever cared” (24c). Notice that Socrates’ focus is on Meletus’ failing as a prosecutor: his prosecution of Socrates is a ‘serious matter,’ yet, because he lacks the requisite knowledge to responsibly bring

\[26\] While the reasoning behind this point is not explicit, it is straightforward to supply: to know if Socrates corrupts the youth, Meletus must know what makes the youth worse; and if he knows that, then he ought to know what makes them better, since, plausibly, what makes them better is just the opposite of what makes them worse; and if he knows that, then he ought to know who improves them.
charges against Socrates, he is “dealing frivolously” with it; he is ‘irresponsibly bringing people to court,’ an action that implies a serious concern with the basis of his accusations, though, in fact, since he is clueless as to who improves the youth, he has really ‘never cared’ about it.

Socrates’ refutation of Meletus, then, displays the three features of his “customary way” of refuting people. Socrates appeals to a role-based epistemic duty to put Meletus on the hook for possessing certain knowledge (Ap. 24d). He then tests to see whether Meletus fulfills his role-based epistemic duty by testing to see whether he possesses the requisite knowledge (Ap. 24d-25c)—whether, qua prosecutor, Meletus knows the basis of the charges he is bringing to court—and he emphasizes that Meletus ought to feel ashamed for not fulfilling his role-based epistemic duty (Ap. 25c, cf. Ap. 24c).

These three features are present also in Socrates’ refutations in the Euthyphro, Laches, Charmides, Hippias Major, Euthydemus, and Protagoras.

2.3.2 Euthyphro

In the Euthyphro, Euthyphro intends to prosecute his father for murder. Socrates claims that, in virtue of doing so, he ought to know certain things. Here the normative language is explicit: “I think it is not just anyone who can do this rightly ὀρθῶς, but one who is far advanced in wisdom” (4b) someone who has “knowledge of the divine, of piety and impiety” (4e). We can thus specify the role-based epistemic duty that applies to Euthyphro: qua prosecutor of his father, he ought to have knowledge of piety and impiety. This is one instance of the epistemic duty that applies to prosecutors as such: as a prosecutor regarding x, you should have knowledge about x.

27 Two other role-based duties are found in the Apology: Socrates tells his jurors that the “excellence of a judge” lies in focusing on whether what is said is just and excusing how it is said, and “that of a speaker” lies in telling the truth (18a). Note that I do not consider Socrates’ initial examinations of politicians, poets, and craftsmen (described at 21b-22e) to be in the service of transforming their values, but rather in the service of deciphering the oracle’s meaning (cf. Doyle 2004), and thus the “customary way” of refuting people that Socrates describes at Apology 29d-30b need not apply to them.
Socrates tests to see whether Euthyphro fulfills his role-based epistemic duty. Once Socrates detects that he has neglected it, he emphasizes that Euthyphro ought to be ashamed: “If you had no clear knowledge of piety and impiety you would never have ventured to prosecute your old father on behalf of a servant. For fear of the gods you would have been afraid to take the risk lest you should not be acting rightly, and would have been ashamed before men...” (15d).28

2.3.3 Charmides

In the Charmides, Critias is a distinguished Athenian citizen and the guardian of the young boy Charmides. Socrates claims that, “in virtue of his age and concern29 (ἡ λικίας ἕνεκα καὶ ἐπιμελεῖαις), it is “likely” (εἰκὸς) that Critias “knows” (εἰδέναι) what temperance is (Chrm. 162e). Here again Socrates’ claim is descriptive, but we have good reason to take it as code for the normative claim that, in virtue of those things, Critias ought to know what temperance is. For, as we will see, Critias is ashamed when he is shown to lack this knowledge, and there is a straightforward reason for why he ought to have it, namely that, as Charmides’ guardian, Critias is responsible for his development, and, if Critias’ evaluative beliefs are off, the instruction he gives to Charmides risks causing more harm than benefit. Moreover, as an Athenian citizen, Critias is subject to the duties of the ephebic oath, and thus it would not be unreasonable to hold him accountable for knowing about what benefits Athens, such as temperance.30 We can thus specify the role-based epistemic duty that applies to

28 Strictly read, Socrates’ claim is that, if Euthyphro lacked this knowledge, he would have been ashamed to prosecute his father. This falls short of saying that Euthyphro ought to be ashamed right now. But by this point it is clear that Euthyphro does lack this knowledge (and is still prosecuting his father). Thus, Socrates’ claim implies that Euthyphro ought to be ashamed by his current condition.

29 His concern (ἐπιμελείαις): that is to say, his being the guardian of Charmides. A very common use of epimeleisthai is to indicate the sort of care that a teacher or guardian takes over his pupil or dependent. Moreover, Critias’ status as the guardian of Charmides is emphasized throughout the dialogue (see especially 154b-155b, 157c-d, 162c-e, and 175a-d). It thus should influence how we interpret both Critias’ behavior and Socrates’ comments toward Critias, including this one at 162e2.

30 If that is correct, then Critias’ obligation to have knowledge of temperance is overdetermined. If it is not correct, it still holds that, qua guardian, Critias ought to have knowledge of temperance.
Critias: *qua* guardian of Charmides and Athenian citizen, he ought to know what temperance is.

Now, Socrates tests to see whether Critias has this knowledge, and, once Critias realizes he fails the test, Socrates notices that he feels “ashamed” (*ἥσχυνετο*) because of it (*Chrm*. 169c). This explains why Socrates does not emphasize that, on account of not knowing what he ought to know, Critias should be ashamed: Critias already feels it, and Socrates knows it.

### 2.3.4 Hippias Major

In the *Hippias Major*, Hippias purports to be a teacher of virtue. He gives speeches about which activities are *kalon* for young people to pursue (*HpMa*. 286a-b). Socrates makes it obvious that, in virtue of recommending certain activities as *kalon*, Hippias ought to know what the *kalon* is. Socrates makes this obvious by a clever rhetorical move: he describes an unnamed figure criticizing him (Socrates) for praising things as *kalon* without knowing what the *kalon* is.31 Once Socrates realized he was in that condition, he considered himself “worthless” (*φαυλότητα*, 286d2) and “was angry” (*ὠργίζομην*, 286d4) and “blamed” (*ὠνείδιζον*, 286d4; cf. *ὀνείδι*, *Ap*. 30a) himself. This rhetorical move serves both to make Hippias aware of his role-based epistemic duty—that, *qua* adviser of activities as *kalon*, he ought to know what the *kalon* is—and to emphasize that, if Hippias has neglected it, then he too ought to blame himself and consider himself worthless.

Socrates then tests to see if Hippias has knowledge of the *kalon*, and, when Hippias comes up wanting, Socrates emphasizes that he ought to be ashamed: “When you’re in a state like that, do you think it’s any better for you to live than die?” (304e).32

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31 Socrates relates the following story to Hippias: “Just now someone got me badly stuck when I was finding fault with parts of some speeches for being foul, and praising other parts as *kalon*. He questioned me this way, really insultingly: ‘Socrates, how do you know what sorts of things are *kalon* and foul? Look, would you be able to say what the *kalon* is?’” (286c-d).

32 Again, this is implied by a similar rhetorical move: Socrates imagines his accoster asking him if, in such a condition, he considers it better to live than to die. But, as before, the main point is that
2.3.5 Laches

At the beginning of the *Laches*, Laches and Nicias give advice on which activities are beneficial for the sons of Lysimachus and Melesias. Socrates claims that, in virtue of doing so, they ought to have knowledge of how to educate people: “... they seem to me to be capable of educating a man, because they would never have given their opinions so fearlessly on the subject of pursuits which are beneficial or harmful for the young if they were not confident they had the requisite knowledge \[\varepsilon\iota \mu\eta\alpha\upsilon\theta\iota\omicron\upsilon\zeta\ \varepsilon\pi\iota\sigma\tau\varepsilon\tau\omicron\nu\omicron\ \iota\kappa\alpha\nu\omicron\omega\zeta\ \varepsilon\iota\delta\vare\nu\alpha\iota\]” (186d). Consider the structure of Socrates’ claim: if Laches and Nicias were not confident that they knew how to educate people, they would not have given their advice. This implies that, since Laches and Nicias did give their advice, they must be confident about possessing that knowledge. But, as in the case of Meletus, this descriptive claim is mere code for a more important normative claim, namely that Laches and Nicias, *qua* educational advisers, *ought* to know how to educate people.\(^{33}\) That is the role-based epistemic duty that applies to Laches and Nicias.\(^{34}\)

Socrates then tests to see whether they do have this knowledge. He focuses on knowledge of virtue,\(^{35}\) but he finds that, setting aside virtue as a whole, Laches and

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\(^{33}\) It is clear that Socrates’ descriptive claim is mere code for this normative claim both because of his exaggerated language at 186d, and, more straightforwardly, because of his emphasis at 187b that if Laches and Nicias ought to be ashamed if they have given educational advice without knowing how to educate people. The reason they ought to be ashamed is because someone who gives educational advice ought to know how to educate people, else that advice risks causing more harm than benefit.

\(^{34}\) It’s important to note that Laches and Nicias are *sought out* to give their educational advice. Indeed, not only are they sought out—a whole day was planned, such that they’d first be taken to see a demonstration of fighting in armor, and then, afterward, be engaged in discussion about which activities young men should pursue to become successful. It is important to observe, too, how Lysimachus addresses them as a supplicant; see his long preamble that begins the dialogue (178a-180a). It is not, then, that Laches and Nicias have a role-based epistemic duty just because they happened to give advice. It is rather because they have been entrusted with the role of educational adviser, a role that they both agree to undertake (180a-b).

\(^{35}\) Socrates focuses on knowledge of virtue because virtue is the thing that, when added to a person, makes the person better (190b-c). Socrates can thus test to see if Laches and Nicias know how to educate people by testing them for knowledge of what virtue is (since, to know how to educate
Nicias do not even have knowledge of the relevant part of virtue (190b-200a). They are thus found to have neglected their role-based epistemic duty, and so to be in a condition that Socrates makes clear is shameful: “... if you are about to begin educating people now for the first time [and thus if you are not certain you know how to educate people], you ought to watch out in case the risk is being run, not by a guinea-pig, but by your own sons and the children of your friends, and you should keep from doing just what the proverb says not to do—to begin pottery on a wine jar” (187b). Admittedly, Socrates is not explicit that running such a risk should make Laches and Nicias feel ashamed; but that thought is implicit from the fact that, in doing so, they are endangering people they care about, their own sons and the sons of their friends.

2.3.6 Protagoras

In the Protagoras, Socrates refutes both Hippocrates and Protagoras concerning their role-based epistemic duties. Hippocrates intends to become a student of Protagoras. Socrates stresses that, in virtue of that, Hippocrates ought to “know” (οἶσθα, 312c1) whether Protagoras’ teachings will be beneficial for him, for otherwise he risks incurring harm. This point specifies the role-based epistemic duty that applies to Hippocrates: qua student, he ought to know whether what he will learn will be beneficial. Socrates questions Hippocrates to see whether he has this knowledge, and, once Hippocrates realizes he lacks it, Socrates chastens him:

... I don’t see you getting together with your father or brother or a single one of your friends to consider whether or not to entrust your soul to this recently arrived foreigner... [in contrast, you are] ready to spend your own money and your friends’ as well, as if you had thought it all through already and, no matter what, you had to be with Protagoras, a man whom you admit you don’t know and have never conversed with, and whom you call a sophist although you

people—that is, to make people better by education—one must know what virtue is, i.e., the thing that when added to a person makes the person better).
obviously have no idea what this sophist is to whom you are about to entrust yourself (Prt. 313a-c).\footnote{It is common, especially in the literature on the Vlastos problem, to think of refutation as exposing inconsistencies in his interlocutor’s beliefs. Here, however, Socrates refutes Hippocrates without exposing any inconsistencies; Socrates simply questions Hippocrates until he realizes that he does not know what he ought to know. It would be a mistake, then, to think that Socratic refutation requires exposing inconsistencies, at least for the reason that Socrates’ interaction with Hippocrates conforms to the template of refutation that Socrates gives at Apology 29d5-30a3 (so too his interaction of Meletus at Apology 24c-25c which, as here, does not involve exposing inconsistencies). See Carpenter and Polansky 2002 for an illuminating discussion of the various forms of refutation found in Plato’s dialogues.}

Protagoras purports to be a teacher of virtue. Socrates infers from this that Protagoras must know how virtue can be taught (319a-320b). Unlike in previous cases, this descriptive claim is not mere code for the normative claim that Protagoras ought to have this knowledge: Socrates seems sincere in thinking that, because of his experience and intelligence, Protagoras has this knowledge.\footnote{Whereas the descriptive claims that Socrates makes to Meletus, Laches, and Nicias are tinged with sarcasm—“You obviously know” (δῆλον γὰρ οὗτος ὀνόματι), Socrates says to Meletus (Ap. 24d3-4); They “fearlessly” (ἀδελφος) gave their opinions, so they must be “confident they have the requisite knowledge” (ἐπιστευον ἰδιότητος εἰδεναι), he says of Laches and Nicias (186d)—Socrates’ claim to Protagoras is honest and unaffected: “... I just don’t think that virtue can be taught. But when I hear what you have to say, I waver; I think there must be something in what you are talking about. I consider you to be a person of much experience who has learned many things from others and thought through many things for himself. So if you can clarify for us how virtue is teachable, please don’t begrudge us your explanation” (320b).}

Nevertheless, it is clear that, as someone who purports to teach virtue, Protagoras indeed ought to have it, too. This normative claim is true for many reasons, including the reason that only with this knowledge can he reliably teach what he claims to teach—only with it is he not a sham. Thus the role-based epistemic duty that applies to Protagoras: \textit{qua} teacher of virtue, he ought to know how virtue is teachable.

Socrates tests to see whether Protagoras possesses this knowledge, and, once he is shown to fall short, Protagoras grows irritated with Socrates. He becomes reluctant to answer more questions, assenting to it only under pressure from his colleagues (335a-338e), and, at one point, he accuses Socrates of trying to win the argument instead of trying to figure out the truth (360e). These negative reactions make sense in light of
the fact that many of Protagoras’ colleagues and students are bystanders to the conversation (315a-b), and thus would view him as being in the shameful condition of purporting to teach virtue when he cannot even explain how virtue is teachable or what virtue is. They also explain why Socrates does not reproach him; as with Critias, Socrates can tell that he is already experiencing negative emotions: “It looked to me that Protagoras felt ashamed [αἰσχυνθείς] at Alcibiades’ words, not to mention the insistence of Callias and practically the whole company” (348c).

Thus, in a number of core dialogues, Socrates appeals to role-based epistemic duties to put his interlocutors on the hook for knowing certain things; he tests to see whether they fulfill those duties; and, if they do not, he reproaches them for it. This will be significant when in section 2.4 we turn to considering how refutation is used as a tool of moral reform.

In the Hippias Minor and Euthydemus, things look slightly different. Role-based epistemic duties still play a central role in Socrates’ refutations; however, they are left more implicit than in the above dialogues.

2.3.7 Hippias Minor

The Hippias Minor begins just after Hippias has finished giving an epideictic speech on Homer. Socrates is invited to ask Hippias a question, and he asks whether Hippias thinks Achilles or Odysseus is better. The fact that Socrates is invited to ask Hippias a question makes explicit that in his role as sophist, Hippias is already on the hook. Qua speechmaker and teacher, Hippias ought to know what he is talking about. This is implicit in the fact that, once Hippias is shown not to know whether Achilles or Odysseus is better, Socrates hints that Hippias ought to feel badly about it: “It’s not surprising that I or any other ordinary person should waver [about such matters]. But

38 Note that Socrates consistently emphasizes that an interlocutor’s neglecting his role-based epistemic duty is shameful when the interaction is private, i.e., when it is just between Socrates and the interlocutor, and there are no onlookers. When it is public, as in the cases of Critias and Protagoras, the interlocutor is already aware of the fact that his behavior is shameful, and thus is disposed to experience that shame without Socrates’ prompting.
if you wise men are going to do it, too—that means something terrible for us, if we can't stop our wavering even after we’ve put ourselves in your company” (376c). Socrates implies that Hippias is a sham, a purported teacher who is unable to improve his students because he lacks knowledge about what it is that makes people better.

2.3.8 Euthydemus

The Euthydemus is not a typical dialogue of Socratic refutation, at least for the reason that Socrates is not the person guiding the conversation for most of the time. It is rather the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus who ask questions of Socrates and the other interlocutors. Nevertheless, at the one point when Socrates does examine Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, he exposes them as neglecting a role-based epistemic duty. They purport to teach virtue, but Socrates reveals them as believing that, in fact, everyone is already virtuous, insofar as no one ever makes mistakes. Socrates emphasizes that this condition is ridiculous: “If no one of us makes mistakes either in action or in speech or in thought—if this really is the case—what in heaven’s name do you two come here to teach?” (287a-b). What is implied, then, is that, qua teachers, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus ought to know that what they purport to teach is teachable. Socrates shows them to have neglected this role-based epistemic duty insofar as, by their own beliefs, it would not be possible for them to teach what they claim to teach.39

2.3.9 Gorgias

39 A second role-based duty occurs in the Euthydemus, though it is unconnected with refutation. At 295b, Euthydemus asks Socrates if he is not ashamed to ask questions after agreeing to play the role of the answerer, thus implying the role-based duty that, qua answerer (in a bout of dialectic), one ought not to ask questions. Note that, as with role-based epistemic duties in the context of Socratic refutation, the proper emotional response to transgressing this role-based duty is to feel ashamed (οὐκ αἰσχύνῃ, Euthd. 294b; cf. Ap. 29d). We can infer, then, that role-based duties apply no matter how small and local the role is.
The last dialogue to mention is the *Gorgias*, and the first thing to say is that, in writing it, Plato departs from the sort of interactions he depicts in the other early dialogues. Most notably, Socrates explicitly states that he wants to persuade Polus and Callicles to adopt certain beliefs. This task falls outside the description of refutation that Socrates gives at *Apology* 29b4-30d4. That description casts Socrates as using refutation to test for whether an interlocutor fulfills his role-based epistemic duty, and, if the interlocutor fails the test, as reproaching him. Deliberately trying to persuade the interlocutor to adopt certain beliefs does not enter into it. I do not mean to deny that, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates continues his project, as outlined in the *Apology*, of trying to convert people to the life of philosophy. I mean only to point out that we should not expect the *Gorgias* to exhibit Socrates’ “customary way” of refuting people.

Nevertheless, there are important uses of role-based epistemic duties in the *Gorgias*. The dialogue begins with Socrates’ questioning Gorgias about rhetoric. As Socrates’ questions reveal, Gorgias teaches his students how to persuade people of anything, but he neglects to ensure that his students use this ability to benefit people instead of harming them. Gorgias knows that this negligence is shameful; that is why he eventually claims that he *does* teach his students virtue, or would if necessary. But, as Polus notes, Gorgias is lying; he claimed to teach virtue only to avoid looking shameful (*G.* 460e-461b; cf. 482c-d).

There are two things to note. The first is that implicit in this interaction is not, as elsewhere, a role-based epistemic duty but rather just a role-based duty: *qua* teacher of rhetoric, Gorgias ought to ensure his students use rhetoric properly. We can imagine that, having secured this role-based duty, Socrates would use it to motivate a role-

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40 The *Gorgias* is commonly thought to break with the pattern of Plato’s other early dialogues (see, for instance, Irwin 1977, Cooper 1982, McKim 1988, Scott 1999 and Woolf 2000). Two ways in which it does are not often noted, however: in the *Gorgias*, Socrates explicitly tries to convince Polus and Callicles to adopt certain beliefs, whereas this task is not explicit in any other dialogue typically considered early; and, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates explicitly focuses his interlocutors’ attention on what constitutes happiness, whereas, again, this topic is not explicit in the other early dialogues. I return to these points in Chapter 4.

41 We might doubt that Polus is correct in saying that Gorgias does not teach his students virtue. However, it should give us confidence in his claim that the same point is made at *Meno* 95b-c.
based *epistemic* duty, namely that, *qua* teacher of rhetoric, Gorgias ought to know what virtue is, so that he can teach his students how to use rhetoric properly. But Polus interrupts the conversation before this can take place.

The second is that, while the shame Gorgias experiences is not caused by his being refuted, it is felt due to its coming to light that he has neglected his role-based duty, at least if we can trust Polus on this matter. He is ashamed because Socrates has shown that he empowers his students without ensuring that they use that power beneficially.

With Polus and Callicles, Socrates is explicit that he is trying to change their beliefs about what makes for a happy life (472c-d, 494a, 500c-d). This task falls outside of the description of Socrates’ “customary way” of refutation at *Apology* 29d4-30b4. Moreover, there is no reason why Socrates would need to invoke role-based epistemic duties to accomplish it—and, indeed, he does not invoke them in his conversations with Polus and Callicles. What we do find, however, is Socrates focusing Callicles at one point on a role-based duty, just as with Gorgias. Socrates emphasizes to Callicles that, *qua* public politician, he ought first to have gained experience improving individual citizens:

... wouldn’t it be truly ridiculous that people should advance to such a height of folly that, before producing many mediocre as well as many successful results in private practice... they should attempt to ‘learn pottery on the big jar,’ as the saying goes, and attempt to take up public practice themselves... Tell me, Callicles... whom will you say you have made a better person through your association with him—if there even *is* anything you produced while still in private practice before attempting a public career? (514e)

What motivates Socrates’ claim that politicians ought to have experience improving citizens in private practice is a further belief about the proper role of politicians, namely that they should work to improve the citizens under their care, rather than to increase their own power and reputation. But Callicles disagrees with Socrates on this point, and thus the role-based duty has no bite with him. As such, Socrates never
attempts to use it to motivate a role-based *epistemic* duty, e.g., that, *qua* politician, Callicles ought to know how to improve the citizens.

From the start of the dialogue, Polus is presented as a practitioner of rhetoric. While Socrates does not appeal to an explicit role-based epistemic duty that applies to Polus *qua* rhetorician, he does show that Polus does not know what he is talking about. Interestingly, Socrates shows that Polus is ignorant about precisely the three main topics that rhetoricians should know how to talk about well: honor and dishonor, justice and injustice, and the expedient and inexpedient. He shows that Polus is wrong to think that the tyrant is to be praised and honored, that doing injustice is better than suffering it, and that an expedient use of rhetoric is to help people escape their just punishment. He thus demonstrates that, *qua* rhetorician, Polus does not know what he ought to know, namely the topics required to make good epideictic, forensic, and deliberative speeches.

Socrates remarks that he has read Polus’ treatise on the art of rhetoric at 462b.

These topics correspond to the three types of rhetorical speeches—epideictic, forensic, and deliberative—as outlined, for instance, in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*: “Rhetoric has three distinct ends in view, one for each of its three kinds. The deliberative orator aims at establishing the expediency or the harmfulness of a proposed course of action... Parties in a law-case aim at establishing the justice or injustice of some action... Those who praise or attack a man aim at proving him worthy of honour or the reverse” (1358b21-28).

Three other dialogues are worth mentioning. The *Meno*, like the *Gorgias*, merely hints at role-based epistemic duties. Socrates never mentions one, but Meno brings up himself that he has “made many speeches about virtue before large audiences on a thousand occasions,” but now he “cannot even say what it is” (80b). Socrates could use this admission to motivate a role-based epistemic duty similar to the one that applies to Hippias in the *Hippias Major*—that, *qua* speechmaker about virtue, Meno ought to know what virtue is. But he never does; indeed, he lets Meno’s admission pass without remark, choosing instead to make a joke about how Meno is a “rascal” (80b). This peculiarity may be explained by the fact that Meno is already aware that this role-based epistemic duty applies to him, a thought that is supported by his admission at 80b. Alternatively, it may be that Meno, unlike Hippias, is merely a young man who has not yet embarked on a career or settled himself into a social role. Or it may be, as Nehamas 1999d: 90 notes, that in the *Meno* as well as the *Gorgias* Plato is less concerned to present Socrates at work than to explain his practice. In any case, note that speechmaker here is *not* just someone who says something. It’s rather a role with a conventional point to it, namely to make speeches that do in fact contribute towards certain ends, depending on the sort of speech given (e.g., if a deliberative speech, to contribute towards the end of acting expediently; cf. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* 1358b21-28). As for *Republic* 1, there is no hint of a role-based epistemic duty that applies to Thrasyymachus, though, at one point, Socrates encapsulates the thought common to most role-based epistemic duties (specifically, those that stem from a craft-based social role): “anyone...
2.4 Motivational benefit of negative emotions

We started by noting that Socrates’ interlocutors frequently react to being refuted with negative emotions, and that, at first, these reactions seem to suggest that refutation is not having the effect that Socrates intends. We can now see, though, that Socrates uses it to cause these emotions: he consistently reproaches his interlocutors for neglecting their role-based epistemic duties. Thus, it may be that a negative emotion reaction is not so much a sign of failure as of success. We ought, then, to consider the potential benefit of negative emotions—in particular, what sort of behavior the experience of them would motivate in Socrates’ interlocutors.

2.4.1 Shame and anger

The place to start is to consider why being refuted would cause them to have negative emotions in the first place. Part of the answer is that, in many cases, Socrates’ interlocutors take pride in their social roles. Protagoras brags about his ability to make his students successful. Critias brags about Charmides, saying that he excels everyone his age in everything appropriate to it, and thereby implicitly brags of his own abilities as Charmides’ guardian. Euthyphro admires his own moral clarity as a daring prosecutor, Laches and Nicias are flattered to be asked to give advice to their friends’ sons, and so on. We can put the point by saying that Socrates’ interlocutors value who intends to practice his craft well... [does] what is best for his subject” (347a). In contrast, Socrates explicitly appeals to a role-based epistemic duty in the Ion: “A rhapsode must come to present the poet’s thought to his audience; and he can’t do that well unless he knows what the poet means” (530c). Qua rhapsode, Ion ought to know what the poets whom he recites mean. Socrates tests to see whether Ion fulfills this role-based epistemic duty, but Ion falls short. So far, then, everything proceeds as we would expect from a Socratic refutation structured by a role-based epistemic duty. Where the Ion differs, however, is that Socrates does not try to make Ion feel ashamed for not knowing what he ought to know, qua rhapsode. Socrates implies only that Ion’s condition is ridiculous: he is merely a “representative of a representative” (534e-535a), and the people he represents, the poets, have had their minds taken away by the gods (534d). This difference may be accountable to the fact that rhapsode is not a social role worth fulfilling in the first place. Thus, while it is ridiculous to fail at being a rhapsode, it is not shameful.
themselves in their social roles; they voluntarily undertake those roles, and the roles are important to them.

Since being refuted by Socrates shows that an interlocutor has failed at his social role, a role in which he takes pride, it is emotionally painful. Exactly which negative emotions it causes is difficult to tell; Plato does not always tell us. When he does tell us, however, the emotion is often shame. Both Critias and Protagoras feel ashamed when Socrates shows that they have neglected their role-based epistemic duties (Chrm. 169c, Prot. 348c). Other refuted interlocutors behave in ways typically associated with feeling ashamed; they clam up or try to vanish. Moreover, Socrates clearly intends for refutation to shame his interlocutors. We saw this in the Apology (‘are you not ashamed…? Then I reproach him…,’) and Euthyphro (‘for fear of men you would’ve been ashamed…’ ). Further, the word Socrates uses to indicate refutation, elenchein, has strong connotations of shaming.45 Plus, it makes sense that shame is the emotion that would be felt by refuted interlocutors: refutation exposes them as failures in their civic and professional roles. Worse, it does this in public, often in front of people they consider their peers. It thus discredits them in their own eyes and the eyes of other people whose esteem they desire. Considering all that, it would be abnormal for someone not to feel ashamed when refuted in this way. It is one thing to lose an argument in public; it is another thing to lose an argument concerning things you have a special obligation to know.

On the picture we are considering, then, the interlocutor’s concern is to perform his social role well, and that concern explains why, when Socrates refutes him, he feels ashamed. Now, how would that experience of shame motivate him? Like most negative emotions, shame motivates behavior that gets rid of it. We can infer, then, that Socratic refutation, in causing an interlocutor to feel ashamed, motivates him to act so as to get rid of it. How can he do that? The answer is straightforward. Since he feels ashamed for failing at his social role—more specifically, for not fulfilling his role-

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45 Especially in its earliest uses, elenchein and cognates convey the idea of shame and disgrace. See Lesher 1984: 1-10 for a succinct summary of the various meanings of elenchein, starting with Hesiod and Homer and continuing to Plato.
based epistemic duty—the obvious way to remove that shame is to start fulfilling his role-based epistemic duty, that is, to gain the knowledge required by his social role.

It might be objected, however, that some of Socrates’ interlocutors do not really take pride in their social roles. They do not value performing their roles well; they value merely the appearance of doing so, because their primary concern is with their social standing. In that case, being refuted by Socrates would seem to cause them to feel not so much ashamed as angry. Nevertheless, in most cases that experience of anger would still motivate the interlocutor to gain the knowledge that Socrates showed he lacked, since doing so is the way to repair his damaged social standing—the way to reassure his peers that, in fact, he does know what he must to perform his social role well. But cases may vary. Some of those who care only for their social standing may find it more convenient to kill Socrates than to go about learning what their social roles require them to know.\footnote{Noteworthy here is Anytus’ reaction in the \textit{Meno} to Socrates’ showing his beliefs about virtue are confused and criticizing his fellow upright citizens: he becomes “angry” (χαλεπαίνειν, 95a). Like Anytus, some refuted interlocutors who experience anger instead of shame—who are primarily concerned with their social status than with their social role—may seek out revenge on Socrates (interestingly, Callicles deftly hints at Socrates’ trial and execution, \textit{G}. 486a). Cf. \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} 1378a: “Anger may be defined as the desire accompanied by pain, for a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight...” It is relevant here that the young men who imitated Socrates and began refuting adults caused those adults to become “angry” (ὀργίζονται, \textit{Ap}. 23c) with Socrates and start to slander him.}

It is not unreasonable, though, for Socrates to presume that his interlocutor does in fact care about performing his social role well. Most people do. Moreover, it is not as if some other strategy would work better on those who really do care only about their social standing. Some people are unreachable, and if Socrates’ strategy can sift them out, then that is all the better.\footnote{For several reasons, we might think. One is that it would expose a person as completely untrustworthy as a practitioner of some role. Another is that it would save Socrates from spending time on a hopeless case.}

So, no matter whether an interlocutor’s concern is primarily with his social role or social standing, Socratic refutation would cause him to experience negative emotions.
that, in most cases, would motivate trying to gain the knowledge required by his social role.\textsuperscript{48} That is, Socratic refutation would motivate doing philosophy.

Of course, it is conceivable that a refuted interlocutor would try to acquire the requisite knowledge not by doing philosophy but by some other means. But that would be unlikely, given that the experience of being refuted by Socrates involves not being able to defend one’s answers adequately. It thus impresses you with the need to test claims for yourself. Otherwise, you will not learn how to defend some claim so that, next time, Socrates will not get the better of you.

Socratic refutation, then, aims to motivate philosophical inquiry as a remedy for the negative emotions that it causes.\textsuperscript{49} It thus makes sense that Socrates consistently insists, after refuting an interlocutor, that the interlocutor should keep inquiring.\textsuperscript{50} In

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\textsuperscript{48} Or, at the very least, and only in the case of someone who cares only for his social standing, to gain the appearance of having that knowledge. But even in this case, the way to gain that knowledge is to do philosophy—to learn how to analyze concepts and make distinctions such that even to an educated audience you will appear to know what you are talking about. Of course, limiting yourself to acquiring merely the appearance of having the requisite knowledge would be risky, as you would remain vulnerable to future Socratic refutations. So, even while this is a possibility, it may not be very likely.

\textsuperscript{49} Again, I am concerned with the negative emotions that result from being refuted. Some negative emotions before the refutation may hinder further inquiry. See, for instance, the shame that momentarily prevents Critias from continuing the inquiry in the Charmides: “But since his consistently high reputation made him feel ashamed in the eyes of the company and he did not wish to admit to me that he was incapable of dealing with the question I had asked him, he said nothing clear but concealed his predicament” (169c-d). Critias tries to exit the inquiry because he fears that continuing it will further worsen his social standing. But this is not a counterexample to my argument that the experience of shame provides a strong incentive to further inquiry. My focus is on inquiry after being refuted, and, moreover, of the sort that would remove one’s shame; here, however, the inquiry that Critias tries to avoid would lead to his refutation, and thus increase his shame. See Sophist 247b-c and Philebus 58b for two similar examples.

\textsuperscript{50} Typically, this encouragement comes immediately after he reproaches them for not fulfilling their role-based epistemic duties. In the Euthyphro, Socrates concludes from Euthyphro’s failed attempts to define piety that “we must investigate from the beginning what piety is...” (15c). In the Charmides, once Socrates detects that Critias does not actually know what temperance is, he suggests that they grant a point “in order that our argument should go forward” (169d). At the very end of the Protagoras, notwithstanding that, by this point, Socrates and Protagoras have been conversing for a very long time, Socrates, having revealed that Protagoras has inconsistent opinions about whether virtue can be taught, urges still more inquiry: “... seeing that we’ve got all topsy-turvy, I am most eager to clear it all up, and I would like us to continue until we come through to what virtue in itself is, and then to return to inquire about whether it can be taught... if you are willing, I would be
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this way, Socrates’ encouragement to do more philosophy is effectively a prescription to alleviate the negative emotions and restore the interlocutor’s self-esteem and reputation.

We can go a step further. Socrates’ ability to refute an interlocutor often gives the impression that he knows whatever he revealed the interlocutor not to know. Socrates complains about this tendency in the *Apology*—he credits it with causing people to slander him (23a)—but there is an upside to it, too, namely that it provides the refuted interlocutor with a reason to do philosophy in the company of Socrates, so that he can learn what his social role requires him to know. In this way, Socratic refutation can be effective not only at motivating interlocutors to do philosophy, but to do philosophy with Socrates.51

### 2.5 A finely-tuned method

Recall where we started. In the *Apology*, Socrates describes his “customary way” of refuting people, and he implies that he uses it on people who care inordinately about

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51 Cf. Socrates’ mention of his “comrades” (οἱ δὲ ἐμοὶ συγγιγνόμενοι) in the *Theatetus*, who make philosophical progress as a result of his questioning (150d-e). Of course, Socrates’ gaining a philosophical interlocutor benefits him, too; cf. the many instances where Socrates desires to learn from his interlocutor or have his own soul be put to the test, e.g., *G.* 487a.
reputation, honor, and wealth. One effective way to motivate such people is to appeal to their concern for such things—and, as I have been arguing, that is what Socratic refutation does, all in an effort to cause them to keep doing philosophy. Thus, Socratic refutation is a method finely tuned to motivate the sort of interlocutors whom Socrates says he is trying to benefit.

One thing, however, is odd. Socrates insists in the *Apology* that he wants his interlocutors to care less about such things as reputation, honor, and wealth. But if my account is correct, then Socrates, in exploiting his interlocutors’ concerns for these things, seems to risk causing his interlocutors to care more about them. Is Socrates’ tactic misguided? Is he, in the end, working against himself?

These questions relate to another odd feature of my account. On my account, Socratic refutation aims to motivate interlocutors to do philosophy, but *just as a means*. It presents knowledge and wisdom as valuable merely as a means to restoring one’s self-esteem and social standing. But, as I argued in Chapter 1, Socrates wants more than for his interlocutors to value knowledge and wisdom as a means. He wants them to value wisdom more than anything else and to live the life of philosophy. It follows that Socratic refutation on its own is not sufficient to reform the lives of Socrates’ interlocutors in the way he intends. What, then, is supposed to achieve this, if one of Socrates’ primary methods, refutation, falls short of it?

Answering these questions requires examining two main topics. The first is what obstacles interfere with changing a person’s core values by means of argument, especially their beliefs about the right way to live. For it may be that Socrates adopts a tactic of *exploiting* instead of *opposing* his interlocutors’ misplaced concerns because, for reasons related to Plato’s moral psychology, that is the only tactic that can be effective, at least at first. The second topic is how, if at all, doing philosophy merely as a means could lead interlocutors to do philosophy for itself, that is, out of the conviction that wisdom is more valuable than anything else.

I return to this second topic in Chapter 6. In the next chapter, I turn to analyzing the main obstacle that interferes with Socrates’ project of conversion: *erōs*. 
Erotic Psychology

As we have seen, Socrates uses refutation to motivate his interlocutors to do philosophy as a means to repairing their self-esteem and social standing. This is initially surprising. Ultimately, Socrates wants more than for his interlocutors to view philosophy as a temporary resource. He wants them to dedicate their lives to it. Why, then, does his customary way of refuting people aim for less? Why does he not use it instead as a way of directly persuading his interlocutors to adopt the life of philosophy?

One possible answer is that Socrates makes a tactical mistake. His goal is to reform people’s lives, but he chooses the wrong method, refutation, in trying to achieve it. If that were the case, though, why would Plato spend so much time depicting Socrates using a flawed method? One or two failures would be sufficient to make the point.

A second possible answer is more complicated. It may be that Socrates’ indirect strategy for converting his interlocutors is the only viable one, due to certain facts about human psychology. If, for instance, we become defensive and stubborn when faced with arguments that oppose our preferred ways of life, then it would make sense for Socrates to avoid such direct confrontation and initially motivate doing philosophy just by making it seem like a useful activity.

In the next two chapters, I argue for the second answer. My starting point is Socrates’ remark in the Gorgias that the reason why Callicles is unpersuaded to reform his way of life is because of his erōs. As we will see, erōs provides major obstacles to

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Socrates’ project of conversion, and recognizing them helps us to understand why Socrates’ two primary persuasive tactics, refutation and exhortation, function as they do.

In this chapter, I analyze what *erōs* is for Plato. Plato inherits the notion of *erōs* as a charged, intense, and often episodic desire, but his primary interest is in ongoing instances of *erōs* that organize people’s lives, e.g. an ongoing *erōs* for wealth. My main point in this chapter is that what explains instances of ongoing *erōs* is that the relevant object is desired *qua* constitutive of happiness, and that, once we recognize that, we are able to see that *erōs* is far more prevalent in the dialogues than has been thought. In the next chapter, I return to considering how this type of *erōs* disrupts Socrates’ attempts to convert his interlocutors.

### 3.1 *Erōs* as obstacle

Socrates notoriously fails to convert many of his interlocutors to the life of philosophy. He is not unaware of this. In the *Apology*, he acknowledges that he is unpopular and often the target of slander (24a). In the *Gorgias*, he suspects that people think of him as malevolent (522b). In the *Theaetetus*, he laments that many promising interlocutors leave him before they can be substantially benefitted by doing philosophy (150e).¹

Socrates’ failures were not just a part of Plato’s presentation of him; in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, the disillusioned student Strepsiades takes revenge on Socrates for leading him astray. What explains the failures of Socrates’ conversion project? What are the main obstacles that stand in his way?

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¹ Some scholars might be inclined to cite the negative emotional responses of Socrates’ refuted interlocutors in Plato as evidence that Socrates’ arguments fail with them, but Socrates is explicit about wanting to cause such responses (cf. Chapter 2).
As concerns Plato’s Socrates, the direct answer to this question is in the *Gorgias.* Socrates attempts to persuade Callicles to stop pursuing a life of politics and to begin pursuing the philosophical life. At one point, Callicles admits that he is not persuaded, and Socrates diagnoses the cause:

**CALLICLES:** I don’t know, Socrates—in a way you seem to me to be right, but the thing that has happened to most people has happened to me: I’m not really persuaded by you.

**SOCRATES:** It’s your *erōs* (*ὁ ἔρως*) for the people, Callicles, existing in your soul, that stands against me (513c).

Socrates identifies *erōs* as responsible for Callicles’ intransigence. Moreover, there is some indication that *erōs* is responsible for why Socrates’ arguments in general fail to persuade his interlocutors: Callicles says that his response is common, and Socrates chalks that response up to *erōs*. We have, then, a leading candidate for the obstacle that causes difficulties for Socrates’ conversion project.

Importantly, however, Socrates’ interaction with Callicles is exceptional. He directly ties to persuade Callicles to reform his life, and his arguments oppose Callicles’ fundamental values. Most often, Socrates is not so ambitious or direct with his interlocutors in the dialogues. It may be, then, that *erōs* is the reason why this sort of direct, confrontational strategy fails in particular. And it *does* fail. Socrates adopts it

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2 A second answer is in *Republic* 6. Adeimantus says that Socrates’ arguments typically fail to convince people because they do not consider their failure to defend a thesis as relevant to whether the thesis is true (478a-d). We see this behavior in the dialogues: Laches says explicitly that, despite being refuted, he still thinks he knows what courage is (*La.* 194a-b); Meno concludes from being refuted not that he is ignorant about what virtue is but rather that he is simply unable to say what it is right now (*M.* 80a-b); and Euthyphro seems to think that he still knows what piety is even after refuted, as the last definition he offers is the same as one previously refuted (*Eu.* 14b-c). Adeimantus’ point in the *Republic* is not in competition with my account of the effects of *erōs*. As we will see in the next chapter, the belief that argumentative failure is irrelevant to the truth of a claim is a ‘bodyguard belief,’ and bodyguard beliefs are conscripted by and protect ruling desires, such as *erōs.*

3 Alternative translation: “I’m not at all persuaded by you” (*οὐ πάνυ σοι πείθομαι*).
only with two other interlocutors, Polus and Thrasymachus, and neither are convinced by Socrates’ arguments.

Why exactly does erōs foil Socrates’ attempts to directly convince his interlocutors to reform their lives? To make progress on that question, we first need to understand what sort of desire erōs is for Plato.

3.1.1 Inherited notion of erōs

Ask most people what sort of desire eros is, and the answer is easy: it’s the desire for sex. So, too, erōs is used for sexual desire by the ancient Greeks. However, it is not the case that desiring sex is either necessary or sufficient to experience erōs. In Homer, the most common objects of erōs are food and drink. Aeschylus talks of erōs for the fatherland, Euripides for getting gold, Herodotus for tyranny, Hippocrates for playing dice, Aristophanes for the people (demos), Thucydides for the city (polis), and Isocrates for rhetorical ability and friendship and alliance with Sparta. Nor is

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4 See, for instance, Homer’s Iliad 3.441-7, Gorgias’ Encomium to Helen Sections 18-19, and Plato’s Symposium 181b. Some scholars, such as Dover 1978, have tended to see erōs as always connected to sexual desire, but this has recently been corrected in two thorough studies of erōs in ancient Greek culture, Wohl 2002 and Ludwig 2002.

5 Homer mentions ‘putting off the erōs for food and drink’ at Iliad 1.469, 2.432, 7.323, 9.92, 9.222, 23.57, and 24.628; and Odyssey 1.150, 3.67, 3.473, 4.68, 8.72, 8.485, 12.308, 14.454, 15.143, 15.303, 15.501, 16.55, 16.480, and 17.9.

6 Agamemnon 540: a herald, long away from his home, is asked if he has “erōs for the fatherland” (ἔρως πατρόφας τήροις γῆς).

7 Hecuba 775: “He erotically desired to get gold” (χρυσὸν ἔρασθη λαβεῖν; cf. Theognides 1155.

8 Heracles 66: “… possessed of tyranny, for which long spears are flung at the bodies of the fortunate through erōs of it.”

9 Humors 9: “Among symptoms of the soul are intemperance in drink and food, in sleep, and in wakefulness, the endurance of toil [καρτερίη πόνων] either for the sake of certain cases of erōs [ἀν’ ἔρωτας τινας], such as for playing dice [οἵον χύζων], or for the sake of one’s craft or through necessity…”

10 Knights 1341-2: “Demos, I’m your lover and your friend, / and I care for you and I’m your only counselor” (ὁ Δήμιος ἐραστὴς εἰμί σοι φίλος τέ σε / καὶ κήδομαι σου καὶ προβουλεύω μόνος).

11 Erōs for rhetorical ability, Antidosis 15.275.4: “if they become erotically desirous of the ability to persuade their listeners” (καὶ τοῦ πείθειν δύνασθαι τοὺς ἄκοινον τας ἔρασθεῖν, cf. 245.5). Erōs for
the desire for sex sufficient to experience erōs. The best evidence for this is in the
Phaedrus, where Plato describes a suitor who desires sex from a boy but does not have
any erōs for him (μὴ ἐρῶντι, 227c; οὐκ ἐραστῇς ὄν σου τυγχάνω, 231a). It is also the
case that the Greeks had words that more specifically picked out sexual desire and
arousal, such as philotēs in Homer and aphrodisia and cognates in later authors.

The remarkably wide semantic field of erōs might suggest that its instances have
little in common. But that would be a mistake. From the start, erōs is used for desire
that is demanding and intense. In Homer, erōs for food is not the slight twinge of
hunger that you feel in the afternoon. It is the hunger that overwhelms you after long
journeys and exhausting battles, or that is aroused in you by the sight of a sumptuous
feast. In later authors, the basic meaning of erōs remains intense desire: erōs for dice
playing is an addiction to it, for tyranny an obsession with it. In the Memorabilia,

friendship and alliance, Antidosis 318.8: “they have erotically desired friendship and alliance with
Sparta” (τῆς δὲ Λακεδαιμονίων ἐρασθῆναι φιλίας καὶ συμμαχίας).

12 However, this point is not uncontroversial. Ludwig 2015 thinks there is a “generic use” of erōs
that is synonymous with mere desire. His main evidence is the use of erōs in Homer (“Homeric eros
seems to mean mere desire of any kind, for any object or aim, no matter how mundane, no matter
how intense or lacking in intensity,” 126); and Symposium 205, where Diotima mentions that, though
erōs is typically used for sexual desire, in fact any desire “for good things or for being happy” counts
as erōs. Ludwig interprets that as meaning that all desire counts as erōs. I find Ludwig’s evidence
unconvincing. As we will see in Section 2, Diotima does not mean that erōs is just any desire; she
means that a special relation holds between erōs and happiness, a relation that explains why some
people have persisting desires that are intense and compelling. The evidence from Homer is a bit
trickier, but his examples of erōs are all for objects that people typically desire with intensity,
especially people in the circumstances that Homer describes. With only one exception, for instance,
the erōs for food and drink that Homer mentions occurs either after a battle or long journey or at the
sight of a feast full of meat (a treat that was not often had, especially when at war or sea). (The
exception, at Odyssey 15.303, should not bother us. Today, we think of the default case of loving as
occurring with intensity, but we also say things like, ‘I love photography,’ which can lack intensity).
Homer also talks of erōs for sleep, sex, singing, dancing, and weeping. Again, these are all objects that
people typically do desire with intensity, especially, again, people at war. Menelaus mentions erōs for
sleep, sex, singing, and dancing while still on the battlefield, immediately after killing Peisandros and
while reminiscing about his wife, Helen (Iliad 13.636-638). Priam speaks of his erōs for weeping while
imagining finally retrieving the mutilated corpse of his son, Hector (Iliad 24.227). All these are
situations where intense desire is exactly what we would expect.
Xenophon builds intensity into his definition of *erōs*: “one calls strong desire ‘*erōs*’” (3.9.7), as does Plato in Socrates’ first speech in the *Phaedrus*: “this desire, all-conquering in its forceful drive, takes its name from the word for force (*rhōmē*) and is called *erōs* (238c). This all-conquering power of *erōs* is sometimes emphasized by pairing it with necessity (*anankē*). Gorgias considers the “necessities of *erōs*” (*ἐρωτος ἀνάγκαις*) as a possible cause of Helen’s sailing to Troy, and Euripides describes *erōs* as “compelling” (*ἡνάγκασεν*) Medea to save Jason’s life. Incidentally, this characteristic of *erōs* to captivate and overwhelm explains why, in the *Phaedrus*, the suitor’s sexual desire does not count as *erōs*. It is not irresistibile for him.

Now, in Homer, *erōs* is used exclusively for intense desire that is *temporary* or *episodic*. This point is evident from Homer’s consistent repetition of the phrase ‘put off *erōs*’ (*ἐξ ἐρον ἵημι*), for something, whether it is food and drink, sleeping, or sexual desire. The desire arises, perhaps in response to a long absence from some object, then it is satisfied (‘put off’) and ceases. As we will see, this episodic, Homeric *erōs* is not the type most important to Plato.

### 3.1.2 Plato’s use of *erōs*

Unsurprisingly, Plato continues to use *erōs* for intense, compelling desire that a person will do whatever it takes to satisfy. In the *Symposium*, lovers (*erastai*) are “anxious...
to provide services [to their beloved] that even a slave would have refused” (183a) In the *Phaedo*, those with *erōs* for wisdom are “always especially eager” to gain wisdom and are willing even to die for the sake of it (67d-68a). In the *Republic*, the tyrant’s *erōs* makes him “dare anything that will provide sustenance for itself” (9.575a).\(^\text{18}\)

What is notable about Plato’s use of *erōs*, however, is that he tends to use it for ongoing desires that, in large part, determine one’s way of life. Take, for instance, the philosophers of the *Phaedo*, whose *erōs* for wisdom (66e, cf. 68a1 and 68a5) leads them to adopt a “practice” (τὸ μελέτημα, 67d) of behaving however they must to acquire wisdom. It also determines their evaluative beliefs: they “believe nothing should be done contrary to philosophy” (ἡ γούμενοι οὐ δεῖν ἑναντία τῇ φιλοσοφίᾳ πράττειν) and they “follow wherever it leads” (ἐκείνη ἔπόμενοι, ἣ ἐκείνη ύφηγεῖται; 82d). Similar instances of *erōs* organizing people’s lives include the *erōs* of those fixated on honor in the *Symposium*, who are “ready to brave any danger... and perform any kind of task” for the sake of acquiring it (Smp. 208c-e); and Socrates’ *erōs* for the acquisition of friends, which, in the *Lysis*, he reports having “since he was a child” (ἐκπαιδὲς, 211d) and as being so powerful that he would rather possess a friend than all the king’s gold.

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\(^{18}\) It is worth noting one difference between cases where one’s beloved is a person and cases where one’s beloved is a conventional good like wisdom. In the former case, the relevant actions will often be targeted towards winning the beloved’s favor. As Socrates says in the *Phaedrus*, a lover “stands ready to please his beloveds in word and deed” (ἐτοιμοὶ εἰσὶ καὶ ἐκ τῶν λόγων καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐργῶν... τοῖς ἐρωμένοις χαρίζεσθαι, Phdr. 231c). Twice, in fact, we see this happening with lovers of Socrates. Alcibiades says he is willing to give Socrates “anything he wants,” including Alcibiades’ body and belongings, if Socrates will only help Alcibiades to improve himself (Smp. 218d). Alcibiades’ words here echo the words of a second lover of Socrates’ from earlier in the *Symposium*. Aristodemus, identified as an *erastēs* of Socrates at 173b, responds to Socrates’ invitation to Agathon’s dinner with the obsequious, “I’ll do whatever you say” (ὁστιῶσ ὅπως ἂν σὺ κελεύῃς, 174b). In cases where one’s beloved is a conventional good, however, the relevant actions are not targeted towards winning the beloved’s affection (it would make no sense ‘to win honor’s affection’) but rather are targeted in general towards improving one’s chances of acquiring the beloved.
These instances of *erōs* do not fit the Homeric model. They are not temporary or episodic; they are persisting and continual. It is not, though, that the use of *erōs* to indicate lasting obsessions is Plato’s innovation. We have seen such cases already: when Pericles urges the Athenians to become “lovers” (*erastai*) of the city in the Funeral Oration, he does not mean that they should develop a merely temporary *erōs* for the city, but rather to develop a persisting attachment to it.19

One distinguishing mark of lasting *erōs* is that it is never really satisfied, nor is it obvious what would satisfy it. Socrates has friends; nevertheless, he intensely desires more friends (*Lys. 211d*). Likewise, those obsessed with honor in the *Symposium* want not just a respectable amount of honor but rather the maximum amount of honor possible; they desire to “to lay up glory immortal forever” (208c). This maximizing characteristic of *erōs* is most explicit in *Republic* 5. The man who is erotically attracted (*erōtikōs*) to youthful boys is attracted to “all boys in the bloom of youth” (*πάντες ὁι ἐν ὄρᾳ, 474d*). On the same model, lovers-of-wine (*hoi philoinoi*) take delight in “every kind of wine and find any excuse to enjoy it” (475a), and lovers-of-honor (*hoi philotimoi*) desire honor “in its entirety” (*ὅλως, 475b*). Plato uses these examples to illustrate the general principle that, when we say that someone is “lusting after something” (*τινος ἐπιθυμητικὸν*), we mean that he “desires everything of that kind” (*παντὸς τοῦ εἴδους τούτου... ἐπιθυμεῖν, 475b*). In Homer, the person with *erōs* for food is simply ravenous. In Plato, he is the glutton—the person who seeks out and makes opportunities to enjoy food as much as he can.

None of this is to deny that Plato occasionally uses *erōs* for intense, temporary desires. Plato mentions *erōs* for sex at *Symposium* 181b and *Republic* 3.396d, where it

19 Ludwig sums up *erōs* in the classical period as follows: “Eros occurs in cases in which the desire, whether sexual or not, becomes obsessional and the subject of desire becomes willing to devote nearly all his or her life, time, or resources to achieving the goal” (13).
is grouped with sickness and drunkenness as an event that temporarily “trips up” (ἐσφαλμένον) people. But his primary interest is in erōs as a ruling desire, an ongoing, intense desire that makes a person the sort of person that she is (e.g., a person fixated on honor). His uses of erōs by far indicate that sort of desire, and, as we will see, it is the sort that Diotima seeks to explain in the Symposium.

3.1.3 philo-x and erōs

Scholars rightly distinguish the concept of erōs from the concept of philia, often translated as ‘love’ or ‘affection,’ and paradigmatically the sort of relationship that holds between family and friends. Unlike erōs, philia brings with it no connotations of intensity, demandingness, or compulsion, nor is philia something that seeks to be quenched. It initially seems odd, then, that Plato so often mixes his uses of erōs and of the compound adjective philo-x, e.g. philotimia. In the Phaedo, lovers-of-wisdom (hoi philosophoi) erotically desire (eran) wisdom (66e, 68a1, 68a5). In the Phaedrus, Socrates calls himself an erotic lover of speeches (erastēs tōn logōn, 228c) and then later a lover-of-speeches (ho philologos, 236e). In the Lysis, Socrates refers to himself as a lover-of-friends (ho philetairos) who is erotically disposed (erōtikōs) towards

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20 One might be skeptical that in cases of ongoing erōs the desire occurs with a felt intensity, as if one is continually phenomenologically in its grip. We think that people can have lifelong desires for objects that they believe are most important even when those desires are not always intensely felt. There are two things to say in response. The first is to emphasize that Plato typically describes even ongoing erōs in ways that suggest it does occur with a felt intensity. As noted, in the Phaedo, those with an ongoing erōs for wisdom are “always especially zealous” (προθυμοῦνται ἀεὶ μᾶλλοντα, 67d) to act on behalf of acquiring it. The second thing to say is that, with ongoing erōs, the intensity may manifest most often not so much in what one feels but rather in the enormous influence that erōs has on one’s behavior and evaluative beliefs.

21 It is just one mark that erōs and philia are distinct concepts that Plato treats them in separate dialogues, the Symposium and Lysis. They are connected, however. In the Lysis, Socrates claims that it is impossible to “erotically desire” (ἐρωτίζει) something without it being philon to you (221b). In contrast, it is possible for an object to be philon to you even though you do not erotically desire it; one’s children and parents are given as examples at Phaedrus 233c-d.
acquiring friends (211d-e). In the Republic, Socrates refers to a lover-of-boys (ho philopais) who is erōtikos towards them. (474d). And in the Symposium, Plato’s most thorough and direct treatment of erōs, erōs is said to manifest among humans in the form of love-of-athletics (philogumnastia) and love-of-wisdom (philosophia, 205d); a paradigmatic erotic pursuit is explained by way of love-of-honor (philotimia, 208c-e); and, at the height of the ascent of erōs, the young man produces ideas in the love-of-wisdom (en philosophia, 210d).

These passages imply, rather counterintuitively, that what it means to be a philo-x-er is not to be someone who has philia for x or who philein x. If a philo-x-er were someone with philia for x, we would expect Plato to specify the desire of the lover-of-wisdom (ho philosophos) in the Phaedo as philia instead of erōs. More importantly, the behavior that Plato consistently attributes to those who count as philo-x-ers of some sort goes beyond the behavior that we would expect from someone who merely has philia for x. I mentioned two cases already. In Republic 5, lovers-of-wine (hoi philoinoi) and lovers-of-honor (hoi philotimoi) desire the maximum amount of wine and honor that they can get. Similarly, in the Phaedrus, Socrates describes himself as a lover-of-learning (ho philomathês) who is thus compelled to go wherever he must to have an opportunity to learn (230d-e). This is precisely the sort of behavior that erōs causes. What these examples suggest, then, is that what it means to be a philo-x-er is to be someone who has erōs for x.

Notably, Plato is not the only person to use the compound adjective philo-x and cognates to indicate intense, demanding desire. When Euripides criticizes Odysseus for being seized by “love-of-honor [φιλοτιμία], a great evil,” he does not mean to indicate a

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22 Plato is not the only author to mingle philo-x compounds and cognates of erōs. In Acharnians, Aristophanes has an Athenian ambassador describe a Thracian king as follows: “Really he was an extraordinary lover-of-Athens [φιλαθήναιος] / and he was such a true lover [ἔραστής... ἀληθής] of you all, that / he kept scratching ‘Athenians are beautiful’ on the walls” (142-4).
mere fondness for honor—everyone has that, and it is no great evil.\textsuperscript{23} He means, rather, to indicate Odysseus’ all-consuming desire for honor. So, too, when he depicts Jocasta lamenting her son’s “love-of-honor [Φιλοτιμίας], that obstinate deity,”\textsuperscript{24} and when Sophocles describes false prophecy as motivated by the “love-of-money” (φιλάργυρον)—the sort of desire criticized is an obsession.\textsuperscript{25} It is evident that philo-x words indicate an exceptionally strong desire also when they are used to identify what is characteristic about a place, as, for example, in Euripides’ characterization of Thrace as “horse-loving Thrace” (φιλίπποις Θρηιξ ἢ).\textsuperscript{26}

Plato, then, inherited the compound philo-x as an idiom that indicates charged, intense desire. Importantly, he did not inherit anywhere near the same number of x-erastēs compounds. There are no x-erastēs compounds available (neither before, during, or after Plato’s time) for erōs of wisdom, honor, victory, money, wealth, learning, listening, hunting, work, or the Muses—whereas, for all of these, we find philo-x compounds in Plato and his predecessors or contemporaries.\textsuperscript{27}

So, Plato frequently mixes his use of philo-x compounds and erōs; he describes philo-x-ers as behaving in exactly the ways typically caused by erōs; he inherited philo-x compounds as idioms meaning exceptionally intense desire for a particular object; and he has no similar erōs-based idiom at his disposal for a large number of objects, including objects like money, honor, and wisdom, which Plato thinks most people are fixated on. These points strongly support thinking that the compound adjective philo-

\begin{flushright}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Iphigenia in Aulis 527.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} The Phoenician Women 532
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Antigone 1055
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Hecuba 428.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} The only x-erastēs compounds we find in Plato are παιδεραστ- (\textit{Smp.} 181c7, 184c8, 192b1-6, 211b5; \textit{Phdr.} 249a2), φιλεραστ- (\textit{Smp.} 192b4, 213d6), and δημεραστ- (\textit{Alc.} 132a3).
\end{itemize}
\end{flushright}
x and its derivatives are Plato’s preferred expressions for indicating 
*erōs* for a particular object in just one word.

In fact, a passage in the *Symposium* comes close to saying exactly that. Diotima
says that “every desire for good things and for being happy” is *erōs*. Nevertheless, she
explains, normal linguistic convention is such that people typically reserve *erōs* for
sexual desire.\(^{28}\) She then gives two common instances of *erōs* by using *philo*-x
compounds, the love-of-sports (*φιλογυμναστίκη*) and the love-of-wisdom (*φιλοσοφία*).

This passage provides clear evidence that *philo*-x compounds all on their own can
indicate *erōs* for *x*. Further, it offers an explanation for why Plato would have adopted
the habit of using *philo*-x compounds to indicate *erōs* for a particular object. The
explanation is that it is customary to reserve *erōs* for sexual desire, so, if Plato
extended it beyond that customary use, he would be misrepresenting how people talk.\(^{29}\)
Interestingly, the only speaker in Plato’s dialogues who ever uses *erōs* to indicate non-
sexual desire is Socrates.

A last point to note is that *philo*-x compounds barely show up in the *Lysis*, Plato’s
most thorough treatment of *philia*.\(^{30}\) In contrast, as mentioned, they occur throughout
the *Symposium*.

This lexical oddity—that *erōs* typically gets replaced by *philo*- in compound
words—has led to important evidence for Plato’s conception of *erōs* being ignored.

\(^{28}\) Cf. Sheffield 2006: “Socrates is locating sexual desire within a larger context which explains
what this desire is a desire for. Sexual *erōs*, apparently, is just one manifestation of a definitive
longing for happiness” (78).

\(^{29}\) We might be confused by Diotima’s claim that *erōs* is typically reserved for cases of sexual
desire in light of the many instances of non-sexual *erōs* noted above (instances, too, that Plato
would have known). As Ludwig 2015: 146 notes, however, it is best to take her point as restricted to general
trends in everyday speech and prose (in contrast to poetry).

\(^{30}\) They show up just twice: Socrates calls himself a lover-of-friends (211d-e); and he uses
examples of lovers-of-things as counterexamples to defeat the thesis that “nothing is *philon* to the one
loving [*τὸ φιλον*] unless it loves him in return [*ἀντιφιλον*]” (212d).
The most important evidence is *Republic* 8 and 9, where Plato analyzes each type of soul in terms of a *philo*-x compound. We will examine those passages in the next chapter. First, we need to revisit the point that Plato is most interested in persisting and continual instances of *erōs* that, in large part, make a person the sort of person she is (e.g., a lover-of-honor). What is it that explains a person’s having such an intense, ongoing desire—a *ruling desire*, as I will call it? It is easy to explain most Homeric instances of *erōs*; he is ravenous because he has not eaten for days. It is more difficult to understand why a person would *continually* desire an object with so great an intensity that most of her typical behavior and evaluative beliefs can be explained by referencing it.

### 3.2 Formal object of *erōs*

A natural starting point is to consider what object, if any, is common to all and only cases of ruling desires. What we might do, then, is gather up all the instances of ruling desires in the corpus and consider whether they have some common denominator. A quicker route, however, is to turn to Plato’s analysis of *erōs*. Moreover, this is promising because Plato frequently distinguishes mental attitudes by their objects. In the *Charmides*, *epithumia* is of pleasant things, *boulēsis* is of good things, and fear is of frightful things. In the *Republic*, the three parts of soul are characterized by their desires for certain objects; the appetitive part, for instance, desires food, drink, sex, and money (580d-581b). Also in the *Republic*, thirst is defined as the desire for drink and hunger the desire for food (4.437d-e), and, later, *dunameis* are distinguished by

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He adds that *erōs* is of beautiful things. But this should not be taken to settle our present question: Socrates appeals to these claims in the *Charmides* to refute Critias, and not, that is, to make firm statements about these psychological attitudes. My point regarding the *Charmides* is just that it gives precedent for Plato thinking of psychological attitudes as distinguished by their objects.
their objects: “what is set over the same things and does the same I call the same power; what is set over something different and does something different I call a different one” (487d).

What we want to know is which object, if any, is distinctive of ruling desires. Of course, not all ruling desires will be for the same particular object, e.g. wealth. But it may be the case that the particular objects of all and only ruling desires are desired under the same description. Thrift, for instance, is a desire that can lead to mending your own clothes and making your own food, but these activities will be desired under the description of money-saving, and anything that is desired under that description will count as an instance of thrift. Is there an analogue for ruling desires?

This question asks whether there is a formal object of ruling desires. By the ‘formal object’ of a desire, I mean that property that is attributed by the desiring subject to all and only the particular objects of that desire, and in virtue of which the desire counts as the type of desire that it is. So, ‘money-saving’ would be the formal object of thrift; in all and only cases of thrift, the desired object is desired qua money-saving, and desiring an object qua money-saving is what makes that desire a case of thrift.

Four key points about formal objects need to be made. First, the attribution of the relevant evaluative property can be implicit. It is not the case that to experience an instance of thrift I must think to myself that I am desiring some activity in virtue of

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32 Formal object’ talk is mostly at home in the philosophy of emotions, ever since Kenny used the phrase in his 1963 Action, Emotion, and Will. Taylor 1976 attempted to find the formal object of love (what she called its “determinable quality”) but concluded there was none. Carone 2007 uses Taylor’s paper to motivate her search for the “determinable quality” (read: formal object) of erōs in Plato; she thinks it is beauty, but Plato is explicit: erōs is not of beauty (ἔστιν γάρ... ὁ ἔρως, ἀλλ’ ἔστιν γὰρ ἄλλο πρός τις ὑπάρχειν, ἔτερας Smp. 206e). It is worth noting that Aristotle individuates desires according to their formal objects: epithumia is the desire for objects qua pleasant (as e.g. at NE III.1 1111a31 and DA II.3 414b5-6), and boulēsis for objects qua good (as e.g. at NE III.4 1113a15-25). See also the discussion of different emotions in the Rhetoric: “In [individuating emotions by their formal objects the medieval philosophers] were following Aristotle, who gives, in his Rhetoric, but without the terminology, a list of the formal objects of the emotions...” (Kenny 1963, 135).
its money-saving potential. It is possible that I simply perceive some activity as money-saving and desire it on that basis, without entertaining any conceptual content.\textsuperscript{33} Second, formal objects allow us to evaluate desires as rightly or wrongly directed. If, for instance, an instance of thrift does not save money (I desire to make my own bread \textit{qua} money-saving but it turns out to be more expensive than store-bought), then the desire is misdirected. And we \textit{do} judge instances of desire in this way. When I thirst for what looks to be a glass of water but is actually a glass of vinegar, I recognize that my thirst has gone astray; I desired the object \textit{qua} thirst-quenching, and the vinegar will not quench my thirst.\textsuperscript{34} Third, most true claims of the form ‘\textit{x} desires \textit{y}’ will not pick out the formal object of the relevant desire; when I am thirsty for water, it is not that water is the formal object of thirst. Rather, the formal object of a desire is the description under which an object is desired: \textit{x} desires \textit{y} under the description of the relevant desire’s formal object, or \textit{qua} its formal object. Fourth, formal objects are what individuate types of desires. Thirst is the desire of something \textit{qua} thirst-quenching, thrift is the desire of something \textit{qua} money-saving, and so on.\textsuperscript{35} Part of what this means is that we can catalog a desire as of some type by identifying in virtue of what the desired object is desired. If it is desired \textit{qua} money-saving, then the desire is an instance of thrift.

\textsuperscript{33} This point is explicit in the context of emotions (to experience an emotion, it is sufficient to implicitly ascribe the relevant evaluative property to some object; one needn’t form a conscious belief that it has that property) in Tappolet 2016: 15-24, et al.

\textsuperscript{34} This point assumes that activities (e.g., making one’s own bread) and objects (e.g., water) possess certain properties. In the context of Plato’s dialogues, that assumption is not problematic, especially when considering which objects are constitutive of happiness (as will be our main focus). Everyone in the dialogues agrees that some objects are constitutive of happiness and others are not. The disagreement turns on which are which.

\textsuperscript{35} Again, the analogue of this point in the philosophy of emotions (that formal objects individuate types of emotions) is standard. See, for instance, de Sousa 1987: 123.
Now, it is more common in the literature on erōs in Plato to talk of its proper object. But this phrasing is confusing, because it is ambiguous between a particular object that instantiates the formal object of erōs (and thus would be proper, in the sense of appropriate or correct, to desire) and the formal object of erōs itself (its proper object in the sense of distinctive, idion, or oikeion). Moreover, it implies that there is an improper object of erōs, that is, an object that could be erotically desired but wrongly so, and this implication suggests that its first meaning above is correct. However, unless we begin by identifying the formal object of erōs, we will have no grounds on which to identify some particular object of erōs as improper. In its first sense, then, the proper object of erōs is the wrong starting point for a definition of erōs. To avoid all this confusion, I will speak instead of the formal object of erōs.

At only one spot in the corpus do we find anything like an attempt to specify the formal object of erōs, namely at the beginning of Socrates’ speech in the Symposium.

3.2.1 Symposium 204d-205d

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36 As in Ludwig 2002 (“... the Form of beauty still acts as trigger or catalyst to engender... ‘the good’ that is supposed to be the proper object of erōs,” 38n24); Wohl 2002 (“[Alcibiades] embodies the beauty that on the abstract plane is the proper object of the lover’s desire,” 165); Sheffield 2006 (“... wisdom is one of the most beautiful things... and, we learn later, the proper object of erōs’ pursuit,” 203); Sheffield 2011a (“it is... a deeply misguided idea to think that a person or persons... are the proper objects of erōs,” 7), Sheffield 2011b (“... the proper object of the lover’s erōs is not the boy, but Beauty itself, reflected in the boy...,” 230), and Obdrzalek 2010 (“Diotima reveals... that the proper object of erōs was beauty all along, 439).

37 It is true that Socrates gives a definition of erōs in the Phaedrus: “The unreasoning desire that overpowers a person’s considered impulse to do right and is driven to take pleasure in beauty, its force reinforced by its kindred desires for beauty in human bodies—this desire, all-conquering in its forceful drive, takes its name from the word for force (rhōμē) and is called erōs” (238b-c). However, it comes in his first speech, which he recants as wrongly offensive to erōs (ημαρτανέτην περὶ τῶν ἔρωτα, 242c-e), presumably because he defined it as he did.
In the *Symposium*, Socrates relates a conversation that he had with the priestess Diotima. In that conversation, Socrates tells of Diotima giving an account of why people erotically desire the particular objects that they do.

According to you, Socrates, *Eros* is love of beautiful things. But what if someone asked us, ‘What does it mean, Socrates and Diotima, to say that *Eros* is *erōs* of beautiful things?’ Or to put it more clearly: what does the lover of beautiful things erotically desire? (ἐρᾷ ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν καλῶν: τί ἐρᾷ?)

To possess them, I replied.

But your answer raises yet another question: what will he gain by possessing beautiful things?

I said I certainly could not give a ready answer to that question.

Well, she said, suppose one changed the question and asked about the good instead of the beautiful: ‘Come now, Socrates, what does the lover of good things erotically desire?’ (ἐρᾷ ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν ἀγαθῶν: τί ἐρᾷ?)

To possess the good things, I replied.

And what will he gain if he possesses them?

Ah, that is an easier question to answer: he will be happy.

Yes, she replied. The happy are happy through the possession of good things, and there is no need to ask further why anyone wishes to be happy (τί δὲ βουλέται εὐδοκίμων εἶναι ὁ βουλόμενος). That answer seems to have brought the matter to a conclusion (204d-205a).³⁸

I want to call attention to the main question that this exchange tries to answer. It is initially phrased as follows: What does the lover of beautiful things erotically desire? Later, Diotima swaps out beautiful things for good things, and the question is repeated: What does the lover of good things erotically desire?³⁹ Both forms of this question ask

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³⁸ As based on the Howatson and Sheffield 2008 translation.

³⁹ Scholars question what, if anything, is indicated by Diotima’s substitution of “good things” for “beautiful things.” Price 1989: 16 and Wedgwood 2009: 300 think that Diotima’s switch is evidence that for Plato the beautiful and the good are distinct but coextensive concepts. Kahn 1996 reads the passage as equating the beautiful with the good as the object of desire, “thus establishing the fundamental identity between *erōs* as desire for the beautiful and the more general human desire for happiness and the good” (267). Obdrzalek 2010: 431 ff. argues that Diotima changes the question to eventually lead Socrates to see that “the case of beauty is parallel to the case of the good,” in that we do not wish to possess the beautiful or the good for the sake of some other end but rather as ends themselves. The account I give presents a new interpretative option: Diotima readily replaces “good
about some object of erōs (what is desired?). It cannot be, however, that they want to know about its particular object, because the questions on their own specify the particular objects: beautiful things and good things. If the questions were meant to be understood that way, then Socrates would not initially be confused when Diotima asks him what is erotically desired when someone desires beautiful things. He would simply answer, ‘Beautiful things.’

This point supports thinking that the questions are asking about the formal object of erōs. Diotima wants to know, when people erotically desire beautiful things or good things, under what description do they desire them. It is a little surprising that Socrates does not initially answer that those who erotically desire beautiful things and good things desire them qua their beauty or goodness. But, in any case, those answers would be incorrect: Diotima is explicit later that “erōs is not of beauty” (οὐ τοῦ καλοῦ ὁ ἔρως, 206e); and it cannot be the case that erōs is simply the desire of an object qua good, else every desire would count as erōs, and that is false.

Now, Socrates’ initial answer is unsatisfying. He tells Diotima that people erotically desire whatever they do for the sake of possessing the relevant objects, but she wants to know more. What will they gain if they come to possess the objects that they erotically desire? Socrates answers that they will be happy, and Diotima is satisfied: “there is no need to ask further why anyone wishes to be happy.”

40 Thus, the alternative translation of her main question makes her point better: “Why do lovers of beautiful [or good] things erotically desire them?”

41 Importantly, the phrasing here—τί δὲ βουλέτω οὐδὲν εἶναι ὁ βουλόμενος—mirrors the phrasing in Diotima’s main question: ἐρωτεύεται ὁ ἔρως τῶν καλῶν. This is evidence that, throughout the exchange, her focus is on answering that question.

things” with “beautiful things” because, for the point she is driving at, the particular object of erōs does not matter. Accordingly, she is ready to rephrase things as she must to lead Socrates to see why people erotically desire whatever they do.
The basic claim here is that happiness results from coming to possess objects that you erotically desire. But that claim needs further interpretation, for two reasons. The first is that Plato obviously does not think it is true. If it were, the tyrant in the Republic would become happy by satisfying his erōs for lawless pleasures, but Plato considers him to be absolutely miserable (9.578b). The second is that, as stated, it does not answer Diotima’s main question of why people erotically desire whatever they do. An answer to that question must refer to a person’s mental attitudes, and speaking only of what results from satisfying one’s erōs does not do so.

The fix is to modify the basic claim. Why do people erotically desire whatever they do? Not because happiness results from satisfying their desires (it doesn’t, and that doesn’t answer the question)—but because they see the desired object as productive of happiness. They desire it in such a way that they think possessing it will make them happy. Moreover, this point is meant to apply to erōs as such (201d-e, cf. 204d). Thus, it seems that in all instances of erōs the desired object is desired under the description of its being productive of happiness.42

A moment later, Diotima emphasizes the link between erōs and happiness: “In general, the truth is that, for everyone, all desire for good things and for being happy is ‘guileful and most mighty erōs’” (205d).43 She then gives examples of such desires, citing money-making, the love-of-athletics, and the love-of-wisdom.

Here it is explicit that happiness figures in the content of erōs. It would be wrong, however, to think that erōs is desire for happiness as such. Diotima’s examples tell against that. The love-of-wisdom is not the desire for happiness as such (nor for ‘being happy’ as such); it is rather the desire for wisdom qua productive of happiness.

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42 These claims will get revised once we see that Diotima is interested only in ruling desires—ongoing cases of erōs in contrast to episodic ones.

43 One way to read “most mighty erōs” is as indicating what I have called a ruling desire; episodic erōs will not be as ‘mighty’ as persisting erōs.
We can reach this same point by asking why Diotima’s examples count as desires “for good things and for being happy.” It is obvious why they count as desires for good things: money, playing sports, and wisdom are good things (or at least are considered to be so by the people who desire them). But they are not happiness or being happy, whatever that would mean. There is no non-metaphorical reading on which ‘money is happiness’ makes sense. It must be that happiness modifies the aspect under which the objects are erotically desired: they are desired qua productive of happiness. It is not, then, that the phrase ‘desire for good things and for being happy’ is redundant. It is rather that the desiring subject erotically desires things she considers to be good (as in all cases of desire) and productive of happiness. But what is unique about erōs is not its link with good things but rather with happiness. For, according to Plato, all human desire is for the good, but not all human desire is erōs (see below). We can thus simplify Diotima’s point to be that every desire for an object qua productive of happiness is erōs, because all desires, including desires other than erōs, are for objects qua good.

We are now at a point where we can give a preliminary specification of the formal object of erōs. According to Diotima, all instances of erōs are desires for objects qua productive of happiness (204d-205a), and only instances of erōs are such desires (since “every desire” for an object qua productive of happiness is erōs, 205d). Moreover, it is not that erōs just happens to be for objects qua productive of happiness (as if this were a coincidental or inessential feature of it), but rather that the desire for objects qua productive of happiness is simply what erōs is (cf. τίς ἐστιν ὁ Ἔρως, 201e). A desire counts as erōs, then, insofar as it is for an object qua productive of happiness. In light of these points, it seems that ‘productive of happiness’ is the formal object of erōs.
3.2.2 Ruling desires, episodic erōs, and desire for the good

This may come as a surprise. Initially, it seemed that intensity, or being compelling, is the hallmark of erōs—not some relation to happiness. So, where does the intensity of erōs fit into this analysis?

The answer is that, in the cases of erōs on which Diotima focuses, the compellingness is explained by the special relation of erōs to happiness. One erotically desires some object qua productive of happiness, and in virtue of seeing that object as of such importance, the desire for it is charged and intense, and one feels compelled to satisfy it.

Notice the qualification, however. This explanation applies only to some cases of erōs, namely the ones relevant to Diotima’s account. I will clarify that point in a moment. First, we need to deal with a second objection.

I have argued that erōs is the desire for an object qua productive of happiness. You might think, then, that all desire counts as erōs, because to possess good things is to be happy, and all desire is for the good. Plato, however, does not think that all desire counts as erōs, for at least the reason that not all desire occurs with the characteristic intensity of erōs; nor does he mean for the analysis in the Symposium to apply to all desire. It looks, then, as if something has gone astray.

The first thing to say concerns the point that possessing good things results in happiness. This is perfectly compatible with how Plato occasionally talks. In the Euthydemus, for instance, Socrates takes it as obvious in his discussion with Clinias that “if we had many good things, we should be happy and do well” (280b, cf. 278e).

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44 Not all desire will motivate behavior that occurs with “eagerness” (ἡ σπουδὴ) and “zeal” (ἡ σύντασις, 260b), as is characteristic of behavior motivated by erōs; nor is Diotima’s story of giving birth in beauty meant to apply to all desire.
What this suggests is a maximizing, additive picture, on which one’s happiness corresponds to the number of conventional goods that one possesses.

However, this picture cannot be correct: for one thing, Plato does not think most conventional goods are unqualifiedly good, nor does he think that many small goods can compensate for the loss of one big good, e.g. virtue. What he seems to think, rather, is that if one’s major projects or goals are not achieved, then a life is unhappy, and if they are achieved, then it is happy. Accordingly, Socrates revises his claim in the *Euthydemus* that possessing many good things results in happiness; it is rather that using things rightly does that, and, to use things rightly, one must possess wisdom (282a). Also, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates claims that happiness consists entirely in “education and justice”: “I say that the admirable and good person, man or woman, is happy, but that the one who’s unjust and wicked is miserable” (470e). Interestingly, it is not only Socrates whom Plato depicts fixated on one big, central good. This is the norm for characters in Plato: Phaedrus is fixated on rhetorical expertise, Alcibiades on fame, Polus and Thrasymachus on power, and Callicles on a life of satisfying extravagant appetites. Hippias is obsessed with money (“If you knew how much money I’ve made, you’d be amazed,” *Hi.Ma.* 282e) and his social standing (“... I have never met anyone superior to me in anything,” *Hi.Mi.* 364a). Moreover, each type of person whom Plato analyzes in the *Republic* is characterized by an overpowering desire for one central good; the timocrat, for instance, is just the person with an ongoing, compelling desire for honor. Evidently, then, Plato thinks that people pursue happiness not by trying to accumulate as many conventional goods as possible but rather by fixating on large, central goods that they consider to be necessary and sufficient for happiness.

How should this affect our view of *erōs* in Plato? As we saw, Plato thinks of *erōs* as essentially linked to happiness. He considers its orientation towards happiness to
explain what *erōs* is. Moreover, he thinks that we go about pursuing happiness by trying to acquire specific, all-important objects. This point clarifies the exact link between *erōs* and happiness. Strictly speaking, it is not that we erotically desire objects *qua* productive of happiness; any small good is at least marginally productive of happiness, but *erōs* is not for things like a drink of water or a stroll in the park. It is rather that we erotically desire objects *qua* necessary and sufficient for happiness, or, as I will prefer to say, *qua* constitutive of happiness, where ‘constitutive’ is meant to indicate a necessary and sufficient constituent part. Thus, it will not be the case that all desires count as *erōs*, for while all desires are for objects *qua* productive of happiness, not all desires are for objects *qua* constitutive of happiness.

It might be objected, however, that I have now failed to capture several uses of *erōs* in Plato’s corpus. As mentioned, Plato occasionally uses *erōs* to indicate desires for things that seem only somewhat productive of happiness, e.g. having sex or participating in a philosophical discussion. In these cases, the object is not desired as constitutive of happiness; it is not as if, when Socrates says that “a powerful *erōs*” for argumentative exercise “has come upon” (ἐνδέδυκε) him (*Th. 169b-c*), he means to say that he will consider himself happy (*eudaimon*) so long as he can have a discussion right now. Likewise, when *erōs* for sex “trips up” (ἐσφαλμένον) people (*Rep. 3.396d*), it is not as if they consider satisfying that occurrent desire enough to make them happy. So, it looks as if the link between *erōs* and happiness is severed in these cases.

But that is all as it should be. Importantly, Diotima’s account in the *Symposium* is not meant to explain episodic, Homeric *erōs* (such as a person might have for food, drink, or sex). It is meant to explain cases of ongoing *erōs*—cases of ruling desires for

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45 My use of ‘constitutive,’ then, is technical. Even small, not sufficient parts can be constitutive of a larger whole, but I mean to reserve ‘constitutive’ for a large, central, necessary, and sufficient part.
objects to which people devote their lives. We can see this from her choice of examples. She exclusively considers cases of lifelong fixations on large, central goods: wisdom, honor, making money, and athletic excellence. She thinks that *erōs* causes people to want “to possess the good forever” (206a), thus indicating an ongoing obsession. Moreover, she tells a story of how we are all pregnant in body and soul, seemingly from birth, and this is meant to explain why some of us develop lifelong attachments to honor and others to wisdom. These lifelong attachments, caused by *erōs*, are the data that she seeks to explain, and the core of her explanation is that *erōs* is linked with happiness. Thus, it is no problem that this link does not exist in all instances of *erōs*, for Diotima seeks to explain only the type of *erōs* that I have called a ruling desire. What makes a desire so intense and compelling on a lasting, life-shaping basis? That its object is considered to have a special relation to happiness as a necessary, central constituent. This special relation explains also why ruling desires overpower conflicting desires and determine a person’s characteristic behavior and evaluative beliefs. Everyone desires happiness most all, so one’s desire for an object *qua* constitutive of happiness is one’s strongest desire. Strictly speaking, then, it is not correct to say, as I did above, that all cases of *erōs* have this special relation to happiness (merely temporary, Homeric *erōs* does not).  

A second objection concerns Diotima’s later emphasis on immortality, seemingly to the exclusion of all else. Some scholars think that Diotima thereby intends to reject her earlier comments on *erōs*. She claims that *erōs* is “for the sake of immortality”

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46 I thus disagree with Rowe 1998: 243 and Sheffield 2006: 78 that Diotima means also to explain ordinary cases of sexual desire. Sheffield considers “*s*exual *erōs*” as “one manifestation of a definitive longing for happiness” (78). It may be that *some cases* of *erōs* for sex count as desires for sex *qua* constitutive of happiness, e.g., the sexual desires of a Casanova, whose life is dedicated to them, but not all sexual desires will rise to such a level of importance in a person’s psychology.

47 For example, Obdrzalek 2010.
and that we all “erotically desire immortality” (207a). She explains that our erotic pursuits, whether for honor or wisdom, aim at achieving immortality (208e-209e). Happiness is no longer mentioned. We might think, then, that her considered view is that erōs (as a ruling desire) is the desire for immortality, not for happiness.

But that would be a mistake. Immediately after Diotima brings up immortality, she specifies how it relates to the desire for happiness, which is glossed as “the desire to have good things forever and ever” (205a). Her point is not that erōs is the desire for immortality instead of happiness, but rather that the desire for immortality is a component of the desire for happiness.

It is necessary from what we already agreed that immortality together with the good is desired, if indeed erōs is for the good to be one’s own forever. It necessarily follows from this account that erōs is also of immortality.

ἀθανασίας δὲ ἁναγκαίον ἑπιθυμεῖν μετὰ ἁγαθοῦ ἐκ τῶν ὁμολογημένων, εἶπερ τοῦ ἁγαθοῦ ἑαυτῷ εἶναι ἂεί ἔρως ἑστίν. ἁναγκαίον δὴ ἐκ τούτου τοῦ λόγου καὶ τῆς ἀθανασίας τὸν ἑρωτα ἐῖναι. (Smp. 206d-e)

Because erōs is for happiness, conceived as possessing the good forever, it is also for immortality. This is plausible enough: one cannot possess anything forever unless one lives forever, and thus, in desiring to possess the good forever, one desires immortality. So, Diotima’s emphasis on immortality is not at tension with her earlier point concerning the role of happiness in our erotic pursuits. It is rather a complement to it.

48 Thus, as Sheffield 2006 notes, “Socrates is not positing immortality as a separate goal of erōs” (82).

49 It is still an open question, however, why Plato emphasizes desiring things “forever” in his account of erōs. It may be that immortality is somehow wrapped up in Plato’s conception of happiness; it is reasonable to say that “everyone would prefer to live a happy life that lasts $n + 1$ years, rather than a life that is exactly similar except that it lasts only $n$ instead of $n + 1$ years,” and it follows from this that “we would prefer most of all to live a happy life forever, and in that sense would prefer to live forever” (Wedgwood 2009: 306-307). I suspect immortality is also wrapped up in
None of this is to say that satisfying one’s erōs makes one immortal, or that Diotima intended to make that claim. Her concern is not to explain how we can achieve immortality but rather how we go about pursuing it. It is thus misplaced to worry that her account is flawed because she has not given reliable instructions on how to live forever. Her point is psychological, not metaphysical.

We started by asking what the formal object of ruling desire is. We can now specify it exactly: being constitutive of happiness. In all and only instances of ruling desires, the desiring subject ascribes being constitutive of happiness to the desired object, and in virtue of that ascription the desire counts as a ruling desire.

Plato’s conception of erōs. Consider Aristophanes’ claim earlier in the Symposium that erōs tries to “heal the wound of human nature” (191d). That wound has a comical touch in Aristophanes’ speech—it is a physical wound incurred when the gods decided to squash human rebellion by cutting their originally spherical bodies into two—but its point is one Plato apparently takes seriously: humans, through some fault of their own, have lost touch with the gods. In the Phaedrus, souls who lag behind the divine procession are cast to earth (248c-d); and in the Phaedo, souls who indulge in bodily pleasures are prevented from grasping the divine forms (83d). If erōs indeed tries to heal the wound of human nature, then that job will require making humans resemble the gods as much as possible, and immortality is the divine trademark.

Obdrzalek 2010, for instance, sees Diotima’s failure to explain how erotic pursuits guarantee the immortality as so problematic that she thinks Diotima intends for Socrates to see it as devastatingly problematic, too, and thus to be rejected. But Obdrzalek is mistaken to think that Diotima means to explain how humans can become immortal.

Cf. Roochnik 1990: “… the statement ‘You desire immortality’ tells us only about you and not whether there actually exists any immortal object” (124).

It is worth noting that two plausible candidates for the formal object of erōs in Plato, pleasure and beauty, cannot meet the criteria of a formal object. In the Phaedrus, a case of desire for pleasure is signaled as said not to count as erōs (231b); thus, not all desires for pleasure count as erōs, and so pleasure cannot be the formal object of erōs. As for beauty, Diotima is explicit in the Symposium that it is not the object of erōs: “erōs is not of beauty” (206e). Moreover, in the Phaedrus, the desire for beauty and erōs explicitly come apart: “Now, as everyone plainly knows, erōs is some kind of desire; and we also know that even those not erotically loving [μη ἔρωτας] have a desire for what is beautiful” (237d). Not all desires for beauty count as erōs, then, and so beauty cannot be the formal object of erōs, either.
3.2.3 Cognitive desire

It is worth specifying the relation of ruling desires to cognition. I have been arguing that in cases of ruling desires the object is desired *qua* constitutive of happiness. Thus, a ruling desire is not a brute desire, divorced from cognitive input. It rather arises from seeing an object in a certain way, which is causally prior to desiring it.

In this way, ruling desires conform to Plato’s model of desire in general. Plato thinks that all desire is for the good, and, while there are difficult and complicated questions about just how to understand that thesis, I want to mention just one uncontroversial point, which comes out best at *Meno* 77c-78b. Believing an object to be good and desiring it are presented as distinct psychological operations, and the belief is presented as causally prior to the desire. It is not that we cannot believe objects to be good without first desiring them; it is rather that we cannot desire objects without first believing them to be good. In the same way, we cannot acquire a ruling desire for an object without first believing it to be constitutive of happiness.

Importantly, ‘belief’ for Plato covers a wide range of cognitive activity, ranging from an object’s appearing to be a certain way and one’s simultaneously taking it to be that way, to the outcome of deliberative or calculative thought. It is not the case, then, that to desire an object, or to acquire a ruling desire for it, one must first have deliberated about its value and decided that it is good or constitutive of happiness. It can happen without entertaining any propositional thoughts, just because an object appears in the requisite way.

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53 The thesis that desire is for the good appears in various forms throughout the corpus, including *Protagoras* 358b-d, *Meno* 77a-78c, and *Gorgias* 466a-468e. For detailed discussions of these passages, see Segvic 2000, Kamtekar 2006, and Barney 2010.

54 For a defense of the claim that, for Plato, even appearances (*phantasia, phainomena*) involve beliefs and judgments (*doxa*), and thus are cognitive to that extent, see Barney 1992 and Moss 2008.
I have argued that Plato is primarily interested in ruling desires, cases of ongoing *erōs* that determine the sort of person a person is, in contrast to episodic *erōs*, which is a merely temporary fixation on some object and thus not significant in shaping a person. What explains such a lifelong, overpowering attachment to some object is that the desiring subject believes it is constitutive of happiness.

In the next chapter, I investigate the power of ruling desires to influence us in such a way that we stubbornly resist accepting certain arguments, in particular those opposed to our preferred ways of life. While it is conceivable that an instance of episodic *erōs* could interfere with Socrates’ conversion project (one’s hunger may be so intense that it becomes impossible to pay attention to the arguments), it is persisting, continual *erōs* that Plato depicts causing major problems for it.
Motivated Reasoning

No one would accuse Callicles of being dumb. He puts forward a plausible, cutting-edge theory about the origin of conventional virtue. He is well versed in matters of business and politics. He can follow complicated arguments, correctly identifying the claims that led to the refutations of Gorgias and Polus (G. 482c-482e) and correctly noting what is consistent and inconsistent with his own claims (495a, 504b). What’s more, he clearly cares about the truth. He insists that Socrates’ views are mistaken, that his own views are correct, and that Socrates would see the truth of things if he stopped his squabbling over words. In fact, Callicles chides Socrates for not pursuing the truth adequately; he thinks Socrates is just playing to the crowd (482e). And yet when Socrates provides arguments that the way one ought to live is other than Callicles’ preferred way of life, arguments that Callicles cannot refute, he is nevertheless unconvinced. Why? It is tempting to explain his intransigence by a wholesale distrust of philosophical argument, but actually he thinks philosophy “delightful” (χαρίεν, 484c) and a proper education in it “admirable” (καλὸν, 485a). So, why is Callicles unconvinced by Socrates’ arguments?

The answer has to do with his erōs. Socrates says, “It’s your erōs for the people, Callicles, existing in your soul, that stands against me” (513c).

Socrates identifies Callicles’ erōs as responsible for his intransigence. Moreover, there is some indication that erōs is responsible when Socrates’ arguments fail to persuade other interlocutors. Callicles says that his response is common—“the thing that happens to most people has happened to me: I’m not really persuaded by you”
(οὗ πάνυ σοι πείθομαι, 513c)—and, again, Socrates chalks that response up to erōs. We have, then, a leading candidate for the obstacle that causes difficulties for Socrates’ project of conversion.

In what follows, I aim to clarify exactly what role Plato thinks erōs plays in making us resistant to certain arguments, especially those that conflict with our preferred ways of life. This task concerns the topic of motivated reasoning—roughly, the phenomenon of adopting a belief, or refusing to adopt a belief, because of the influence of one of your desires. From the start, we can identify two main ways that the erōs-driven reasoner might operate. She might believe what she wants to believe just because she wants to believe it. Alternatively, she might believe what she wants to believe on the basis of some evidence that her desire causes her to construe or appraise in ways favorable to it. I will be arguing that this second way is how Plato thinks erōs-driven reasoning operates.

I begin by noting that the material relevant to erōs-driven reasoning in the dialogues is greater than we initially might have thought. I then examine it in Socrates’ discussion with Callicles, Polus, and Thrasymachus before turning to the place where

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1 Motivated reasoning is of increasing interest to philosophers and psychologists, who distinguish several types of it, including self-deception, wishful thinking, and rationalization. Intentionalists about self-deception, for example, argue that self-deception involves forming the intention to deceive yourself (Davidson 1985 et al.); non-intentionalists disagree (Lazar 1999, Mele 2000 et al.). Intentionalists think that wishful thinking is distinguished from self-deception by its being non-intentional (see, e.g., Bermudez 2000); non-intentionalists think that what distinguishes them is that wishful thinkers do not recognize evidence against their self-deceptive belief whereas self-deceivers do (see, e.g., Bach 1981 and Johnston 1988), or that self-deceivers possess but do not recognize greater counter-evidence than wishful thinkers (Mele 2001). See D’Cruz 2014b for an attempt to characterize rationalization as a distinct phenomenon and to clarify its normative implications. There is also debate about how widespread motivated reasoning is, especially in moral reasoning. See Haidt 2001 and Greene 2007 for arguments that most of our moral reasoning is post-hoc self-justification. My aim is not to argue that erōs-based reasoning fits any one of these types, but just to point out that it is a type of motivated reasoning. It may turn out that it directly maps onto one of these other types or that it includes some combination of them, but I do not consider that here.
Plato most develops his views on it, the discussion of 'bodyguard beliefs' in Republic 8 and 9.

4.1 Ruling desires at large

In the last chapter, I argued for two points that show erōs is more prevalent in the corpus than often supposed. The first is that Plato typically uses philo-x compounds not to indicate philia for x but rather to indicate erōs for x. This is significant, because philo-x compounds are far more common in the corpus than erōs and cognates. The second is that ongoing erōs—which I have called a ruling desire—is the desire for an object qua constitutive of happiness. We can thus infer from someone’s desiring an object in this way that she has erōs for that object. These points allow us to see that, though not generally recognized in these terms, the concept of a ruling desire does important work in many key texts of Platonic ethics.

For instance, each personality type of Republic 8 and 9 is characterized by a ruling desire. The timocrat is called a “lover-of-honor” (φιλότιμος; 548c, 549a, 551a, 553d) and a “lover-of-victory” (φιλόνικος, 548c, 550b, 551a). The point is not just that he has an occasional urge for honor and victory, but rather that he continually desires them more than anything else (548c). Likewise, the oligarch is a “lover-of-money” (φιλοχρήματος, 553d; cf. 551a) who thinks money is “most valuable” (μάλιστα ἄντιμα, 554b) and “attaches the greatest importance” (περὶ πλείστου ποιεῖσθαι, 554a) to it.

While Plato does not use philo-x compounds to describe the democrat, we can infer that he, too, is defined by a ruling desire from how Plato describes the corresponding

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2 He is also characterized as a “lover-of-music” (φιλόμουσον), “lover-of-listening” (φιλήκον), “lover-of-ruling” (φιλαρχος), “lover-of-sports” (φιλογυμναστής), and “lover-of-hunting” (φιλόθηρος). His love-of-honor and love-of-victory, however, are his “most manifest” (διαφανέστατον) desires (548c), and they are the two that define him (551a; cf. 550b: φιλότιμος ἄνήρ).
democratic city. It has an “insatiable desire” (ἀπληστία) for freedom, which it “defines as the good” (ὅρίζεται ἀγαθόν, 562b). Accordingly, it gives its citizens license to do whatever they want, and each of them lives in whatever manner pleases him (557b). This is exactly how the democratic man lives: he gives himself “to whichever desire comes along... yielding day by day to the desire at hand” and he resents anyone who tries to impose order and necessity on him (561b-c). In virtue of his permissive stance, he is “just like the democratic city” (561e). Thus, we should see the democratic man as ruled, in the first place, by his desire for freedom.

As for the tyrant, Plato attributes to him “erōs” (ἔρως, 572e; cf. 573a, 573e, 574d-e) for lawlessness—for satisfying desires unconstrained by shame or reason—and it is erōs that guides his way of life. Thus, against Scott 2007, there is little to no significance in Plato’s using the word ‘erōs’ to describe only the tyrant and philosopher (490a-b, cf. 501d) in the Republic. Each personality type is defined either by a philo-x compound or by an ‘insatiable desire’ for an object considered to be necessary and sufficient for happiness, and thus each is defined by ongoing erōs, i.e. a ruling desire.

Other notable instances of ruling desires in Plato’s corpus are those of Socrates’ earliest accusers, “lovers-of-honor” (φιλότιμοι, Apology 23d) whose preoccupation with their social standing motivated silencing Socrates; and the “lovers-of-wisdom” (φιλόσοφοι) in Republic 5, whose desire for learning is “insatiable” (ἀπληστως, 475c), as well as the “lovers-of-sights” (φιλοθεάμονες) and “lovers-of-sound” (φιλήκοοι), who

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3 Importantly, insatiability is a defining mark of erōs. It is emphasized in Diotima’s description of lovers-of-honor in the Symposium, who want not just some honor but “glory immortal forever” (208c). It is thematized in Republic 5, where Plato notes that lovers-of-boys, lovers-of-wine, lovers-of-honor, lovers-of-sights, lovers-of-sounds, and finally lovers-of-wisdom desire all of the relevant class of objects (474d-475d). The word appears there, too. Lovers-of-wisdom are “insatiable (ἀπληστως, 475c) for learning.

4 And, in the second place, by whatever desires happen to strike him. It is his ruling desire for freedom that prompts him to follow his spontaneous desires. If he did not, he would not be free as he conceives it. For discussion of rule in the democrat’s soul, see Johnstone 2013.
attend all festivals, “omitting none... as if their ears were under contract to listen to every chorus,” 475d). In the Phaedrus, Socrates calls himself a “lover of speeches” (τῶν λόγων ἔραστον, 228c), insists that Phaedrus recite a speech to him, recites two of his own, and is evidently obsessed with speeches from his analysis of what makes for a good one in the last half of the dialogue. I mentioned other instances of ruling desires in the last chapter: those of the “lovers-of-wisdom” (φιλοσόφοι) in the Phaedo, “lovers-of-honor” (φιλότιμοι) in the Symposium and Republic 5, and the “lovers-of-wine” (φιλονυμοι) of Republic 5; Socrates’ “love-of-learning” (φιλομάθεια) in the Phaedrus and his “love-of-friends” (φιλέταιρός) in the Lysis; and the “love-of-athletics” (φιλογυμναστία) and “love-of-wisdom” (φιλοσοφία) given by Diotima as examples of desires for happiness in the Symposium. In the next chapter, we will see still more: Phaedrus’ obsession with rhetorical expertise and Alcibiades’ fixation on fame and influence.

4.2 Lovers follow beloveds

Ruling desires, then, appear throughout Plato’s corpus. In what follows, I will be arguing that they have a certain influence on processes of reasoning. I want to present this as an extension of a general principle that we find throughout Plato’s corpus: lovers follow their beloveds. In its everyday sense, what the principle means is that lovers physically follow their beloveds. When Clinias enters the gymnasium in the Euthydemus, for instance, he is followed by a train of “lovers” (ἐρασταὶ, 273a). Another example is Socrates’ own physically following around Alcibiades, a tendency that, by the time of the Symposium, Alcibiades finds annoying (213c).⁵

⁵ Both of these examples concern cases where one’s beloved is a person, but this sense of the principle can also apply to cases where the desired object is not a person. One such case we have seen
We find Plato extending the principle beyond its everyday sense possibly as early as the *Euthyphro*, where Plato uses it to describe a lover’s mentally following a beloved. Socrates justifies his continued questioning of Euthyphro by citing the principle that “the lover must follow his beloved [ἀνάγκη γὰρ τὸν ἐρωτα τῷ ἐρωτόμενω ἀκολουθεῖν] wherever it may lead him” (14c). Socrates, it is implied, is a lover-of-wisdom, and as such he must stay hot on the trail of knowledge; he must continue to pay attention to the inquiry at hand.

In the *Gorgias*, Plato extends the principle once more: not only do lovers physically and mentally follow their beloveds, they also follow their beloveds in what they say. Both Socrates and Callicles share a “common experience,” the experience of erōs, that puts a constraint on the sort of things they say. Socrates, as a lover of philosophy, must say whatever philosophy says, and is unable to speak contrary to anything philosophy says. Callicles, as a lover of the people of Athens, must say whatever they say and is unable contradict them (481c-482c).

In this chapter, I will be arguing for a further sense in which lovers follow their beloveds: they follow their beloveds in what they believe. Our first stop is to consider Callicles, Polus, and Thrasyvachus. In the next section, I argue that each of these characters has a ruling desire, that Socrates’ arguments conflict with their ruling desires: in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates, a self-described lover-of-learning, physically follows around the opportunity to learn.

6 It is disputed whether erōs occurs at *Euthyphro* 14c. Duke 1995 reads ἐρωτῶντα... ἐρωτώμενα for the alternative translation ‘the questioner must follow the answerer whatever he leads’; Burnet 1924 defends ἐρωτᾶ... ἐρωτέμενος for the translation here.

7 A similar case of a lover mentally following his beloved occurs with Laches, who explains his desire to keep conversing with Socrates as motivated by a love-of-victory (philonikia) that holds him captive (εἰληφέν). As a lover-of-victory, Laches must devote his attention to the effort of winning, i.e. to succeeding in defining courage (and to perform better in that effort than his competition, Nicias). See also the case of Critias at *Charmides* 162c. Note that in both cases the lover is motivated by his desire to acquire the beloved, in whatever sense is relevant. Socrates is motivated by the desire to acquire wisdom, and Laches is motivated by the desire to gain a victory.
desires, and that they reject those arguments. This will get us in the position to consider how exactly their ruling desires influence their reasoning.

4.3 Ruling desires and intransigence

4.3.1 Callicles

At *Gorgias* 481d, Socrates comments on how *erōs* affects Callicles and him. Here is the first mention of Callicles’ *erōs* for the people.

... I realize that you and I are both now actually sharing a common experience: each of the two of us erotically loves [ἐρωτεύεσθαι] two objects, I Alcibiades, Clinias’ son, and philosophy, and you the *demos* [people] of Athens, and the Demos who’s the son of Pyrilampes. I notice that in each case you’re unable to contradict your beloved [παιδικὰ], clever though you are, no matter what he says or what he claims is so. You keep shifting back and forth. If you say anything in the Assembly and the Athenian *demos* denies it, you shift your ground and say what it wants to hear.

In what sense does Callicles count as having *erōs* for the people? The first thing to note is that it does not seem as if this is merely a temporary or episodic case of *erōs*. It has been around for long enough that Socrates has noticed it motivating Callicles’ habitual behavior in the Assembly. But it also does not seem like a ruling desire, insofar as Callicles does not appear to desire the Athenian people *qua* constitutive of happiness. It is confusing what that would even mean, but, on any interpretation of it, Callicles would at least have to value the Athenian people intrinsically; however, all signs in the *Gorgias* point to him valuing them (more specifically, their favor and support) merely for the sake of increasing his own power. Moreover, he is forthcoming about his contempt for them (483b, 489c).

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8 This is why Callicles is not willing to dedicate his political career to improving the people, as Socrates urges him to do (521a-b). He does not value them for their own sake; their welfare and
Nevertheless, Callicles does behave towards the people like a lover (erastēs). He flatters them and tries to gratify their desires because he wants to be liked by them. We can make sense of all this by noting that, at the time, the phrase ‘lover of the people’ was used in comedy to identify someone who did not at all care about the welfare of the people but only about exploiting their support for personal gain. In Aristophanes’ *Knights*, for instance, a sausage-seller explains that speakers in the Assembly deceived “Demos” (the people) by saying, “Demos, I’m your lover (erastēs) and your friend, / and I care for you and I’m your only counselor” (1341-2). Likewise, in the *Acharnians*, an Athenian ambassador dupes the Assembly by reporting that the Thracian king is an “extraordinary lover-of-Athens [φιλαθήναιος]” and “such a true lover [ἐραστὴς… ἀλήθης] of you all” (142-4). It would seem, then, as if Plato’s use of the phrase is picking up on these uses, and thus meant to identify Callicles as someone who pretends to care about the people solely to advance his own ends. Strictly speaking, he is not a lover (erastēs) of the people. He is merely a seducer of them.

What is it, then, that Callicles has erōs for—that he desires qua constitutive of happiness? And is this at all connected to Socrates’ mention of his supposed erōs for the people?

Callicles believes that “the one who will live correctly” (τὸν ὁφθὸς βιωσόμενον) should “allow his own appetites to get as large as possible and not restrain them” and

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9 See *Gorgias* 481e: “If you say anything in the Assembly and the Athenian people deny it, you shift your ground and say what they want to hear...”

10 See *Gorgias* 521a-b, where Callicles affirms that he is calling Socrates to join him in the practice of “serving” (διακονήσοντα) the people and associating with them “for their gratification” (πρὸς χάριν).

11 This is implied at *Gorgias* 513b-c, where Socrates says that, to gain power, Callicles must win the “affection” (φιλίαν) of the Athenian people. Callicles, of course, wants to gain power, and his flattering habits suggest that he is pursuing it in the way Socrates describes here.
“when they are as large as possible... to fill them with whatever he may have an appetite for at the time... wantonness, lack of discipline, and freedom, if available in good supply, are excellence and happiness” (491e-492c). Moreover, it is not as if these convictions are merely theoretical matters for Callicles, divorced from what he wants for his own life. Callicles intensely desires to live the life that he describes. That is why he has dedicated himself to a political career bent on increasing his own power; only with significant power can he sustain such a life. We can infer, then, that Callicles desires the life of satisfying extravagant appetites qua constitutive of happiness; his erōs is for it. Notably, Callicles’ relation to the people is a crucial part of his erotic pursuit of this life. He needs to win their favor to gain power (513a-b). So, when Socrates talks of Callicles’ erōs for the people, he is identifying a desire that plays some role in Callicles’ erotic pursuits. Callicles desires the people’s favor as a means to satisfying his erōs for the life of satisfying extravagant appetites.\footnote{This is not the only place in the corpus where we find Socrates saying that a person has erōs for some object that the person desires as a means. I argue for a similar reading of his claim that Phaedrus is an erastēs of Lysias (257a-b).}

Now, as argued in the previous chapter, erōs is a qua-desire: a desire for an object qua some property. One feature of qua-desires is that the desiring subject must believe the object possesses the relevant property. If she believes it does not possess the relevant property, she can no longer desire it qua that property. If, for instance, I believe that baking my own bread will not actually save me money, then I cannot desire it qua money-saving. Thus, any claim that alleges a desired object does not actually have the property in virtue of which it is desired can be said to conflict with that desire. If that claim were believed, the desire would be extinguished.

We can now see that the arguments that fail to convince Callicles conflict with his erōs. That desire involves the belief that a life of satisfying extravagant appetites is
constitutive of happiness, and it is this belief that Socrates wants to change. He is explicit about this: he wants to persuade Callicles to “choose the orderly life (493c) and emphasizes that their disagreement concerns “the way we’re supposed to live” (500c).

Socrates first argues that the life of self-discipline is happier than the undisciplined life, which is “most miserable” (ἀθλιώτατοι, 493b). This conclusion directly conflicts with Callicles’ erōs, and he rejects it (494a-b). Socrates later argues that having power is not as worthwhile as Callicles supposes, as well as that politicians shouldn’t prioritize, as Callicles does, flattering the people (508b-521c). These claims only indirectly conflict with Callicles’ erōs. Since he needs great power to consistently satisfy his extravagant appetites, and since he must flatter the people to increase his power, he cannot (and does not) accept that either of these are of so little worth that he should abandon them; due to the circumstances, they are necessary means to his preferred way of life.¹³

None of this is yet to explain how Callicles’ erōs causes him to reject Socrates’ arguments. It is to show only that Socrates’ arguments conflict with it. In the next two sections, I make the same point regarding Polus and Thrasymachus.

### 4.3.2 Polus

It may seem odd to talk about the erōs of Polus and Thrasymachus; the word appears nowhere in Socrates’ interactions with them. However, as I argued above, we can locate

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¹³ Further evidence that Socrates fails to convince Callicles comes when, at the end of the dialogue, Socrates urges Callicles once more to reform his views on how best to live: “Let us follow this [argument], then, and all on others to do so, too, and let’s not follow the one that you believe in and call on me to follow” (527e). As Scott 1999: 21-22 nicely notes, Socrates’ use of the present tense for the italicized lines (ὦ σὺ πιστεύων ἐμὲ παρακαλεῖς) indicates that Callicles has not moved from his original position, and that Socrates knows it.
erōs as a ruling desire even where the word ‘erōs’ and its extensions in philo-x compounds do not appear. We can identify it in all cases where a person desires an object qua constitutive of happiness, and both Polus and Thrasymachus do have such ruling desires.

Polus believes that “many people who behave unjustly are happy” and that the happiest person is the tyrant with enough power to do whatever unjust action he pleases (470d-471d, 474c). He mocks Socrates for thinking otherwise: “... how marvelously ‘miserable’ he [the tyrant Archelaus] has turned out to be... because he’s committed the most terrible crimes of any in Macedonia, he’s the most ‘miserable’ of all Macedonians instead of the happiest...” (471a-c). Polus, then, believes that happiness consists in having the power to act unjustly with impunity; the tyrant has this power more than anyone else, and thus is the happiest.

As before, this is not merely a theoretical matter for Polus. He strongly desires as much power as he can get. He has chosen, after all, a career as a rhetorician, the appeal of which, for him, is that rhetoricians have “the greatest power in their cities” (466b). From Polus’ belief that power is constitutive of happiness and his desire for it, we can infer that Polus desires power, especially to act unjustly, qua constitutive of happiness; his erōs is for it.

Now, as with Callicles, Socrates tries to persuade Polus of claims that conflict with his erōs. Indeed, as with Callicles, Socrates specifies that the topic in dispute is the right way to live: “... the heart of the matter is that of recognizing or failing to recognize who is happy and who is not” (472c-d). Polus insists that the tyrant is happy, and Socrates advances two arguments to the contrary. He first tries to convince Polus that doing injustice is worse than suffering it (474b-476a) and, second, that not being punished for committing an injustice is worse than being punished for it (476a-480d). It is easy to see that each of these conclusions conflict with Polus’ erōs. If the power
to act unjustly is constitutive of happiness, then acting unjustly is desirable, and thus not worse than suffering it, which is obviously undesirable; likewise, escaping punishment is better than facing it, which would limit one’s power.

When Socrates sums up his arguments, he asks, “If what we have agreed on is true, Polus, are you aware of what follows from the argument? [εἰ δὲ ἡμεῖς ἀληθῆ ὀμολογήκαμεν, ὦ Πολύς, ἢ ἀσιθάνη τὰ συμβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ λόγου;] Or do you want us to set them out?” Polus asks Socrates to set out what follows, and Socrates does so by a series of questions, each of which should be understood as subsidiary to the initial question of whether, if what we have agreed on is true, does it follow that...? Socrates’ first question makes this explicit: “Does it follow that [ἀρʹ οὖν συμβαίνει] injustice, and doing what is unjust, is the worst thing there is?” My point here is that, while Polus does agree to this question (φαίνεται γε) and others like it, he is agreeing only to the claim that, if what they agreed on earlier is true, then these claims follow. He is agreeing in each case just to a conditional, and agreeing to a conditional does not commit a person to believing that the consequent is true.14

One might object, however, that Polus must be committed to Socrates’ conclusions even so, because he agreed both to the premises and that the conclusion follows from

14 There is one possible exception to the claim that, in each case, Polus is agreeing just to a conditional. At 479e, after reminding Polus of the things he (Socrates) said, Socrates asks “Hasn’t it been proved that what was said is true?” (οὐχοὖν ἀποδέδεικται ὅτι ἀληθῆ ἐλέγετο, 479e). Polus reluctantly agrees (φαίνεται). By “what was said” Socrates refers to his claims that doing injustice is worse than suffering it, and that the one who avoids paying his due for wrongdoing is worse off than the one who does pay it. Now, the main question here is whether this is conclusive evidence that Polus has been persuaded by Socrates about these matters. I do not think so, for two reasons. The first is that the majority of emphasis in the context is on the conditional claims (indeed, immediately after Polus agrees here, Socrates reverts back to conditional phrasing: “If these things are true...” and “on the basis of what we’re agreed on now,” 480a). As such, it is plausible that when Socrates asks Polus whether “what was said is true,” Polus hears that as no different from Socrates’ previous question (just before at 479c) about what follows from the things they previously agreed on. The second reason is that when Socrates goes on to derive further conclusions from these two points, Polus unequivocally denies them: he calls them “absurd” (ἄτοπα, 480ε), as noted in the main text.
them. But that would be a mistake. It is possible to give *provisional* assent to a premise, i.e. assent contingent on finding the resulting conclusion acceptable. This is common behavior, often expressed by a remark like, ‘Okay, go on.’ Moreover, Polus behaves in exactly the way that we often behave when, after a string of provisional assents, we reach some outrageous conclusion. He dismisses the conclusion outright: “I think these statements are absurd [ἀτοπαῖς], Socrates, though perhaps you think they agree with those made earlier” (480e). Thus, Polus is not persuaded by Socrates. The best way to make sense of that *and* his previous assents to Socrates’ premises is to understand those assents as provisional.

Like Callicles, then, Polus refuses to believe Socrates’ arguments that conflict with his *erōs*. In fact, we find Polus making explicit just how staunch he is in his beliefs about happiness. Early on, Socrates claims that the tyrant is miserable (473d-e). Polus responds, “Don’t you think you’ve already been utterly refuted [ἐξεληλέγχθαι], Socrates, when you’re saying things the likes of which no human being would maintain?” (473e). Polus thinks it is obvious and universally agreed that the tyrant is

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15 *Provisional* assent should not be confused with *hypothetical* assent (as considered, e.g., in Vlastos 1983). As noted below, when provisional assent is given, one says what one really believes, e.g., that the premise is plausible so far. When hypothetical assent is given, in contrast, one does not express any belief at all, but rather assumes something for the sake of argument.

16 Woolf 2000 thinks Polus at 480e concedes that, given what they have previously agreed, “this conclusion must follow” (22). Woolf thus thinks that, contrary to what I have argued here, Polus is persuaded by Socrates. But Polus does not concede that the conclusion “must follow.” He rather says that “perhaps” (ἴσως) Socrates thinks it follows, and asserts that, as things seem to him, it is absurd.

17 Alternatively, we might think that Polus does not ‘say what he believes’ when he assents to Socrates’ premises. I find this unconvincing. It follows only if the only way to sincerely assent to a premise is to give one’s irrevocable assent to it and whatever follows from it. In that case, Polus will not be assenting to Socrates’ premises, and so, when he seems to be doing so, he must not be saying what he really believes. It is false, however, that this is the only way to sincerely assent to a premise. One can also give provisional assent, where this counts as saying what one really believes (e.g., that the claim is unobjectionable so far) and is compatible with rejecting the eventual conclusion. See *Gorgias* 503d-505c and 508b-511a for instances of provisional assent with Callicles.
happy. This sort of conviction poses serious problems for Socrates’ attempts to convince his interlocutors to change their ways of life.

4.3.3 Thrasymachus

As with Polus, there is no mention of erōs in Socrates’ interaction with Thrasymachus. Nevertheless, Thrasymachus desires a certain object *qua* constitutive of happiness, and thus we can sensibly talk of Thrasymachus’ erōs.

Thrasymachus believes that the happiest life is the tyrant’s life: “the most complete injustice, the one that makes the doer of injustice happiest... is tyranny” (344a). What Thrasymachus values about the tyrant is that his “great power outdoes everyone else,” insofar as it allows him to appropriate any property he wishes, “not little by little, but all at once,” as well as to kidnap people and enslave them (344b). Thrasymachus, then, believes that power and wealth are constitutive of happiness. Again, this is not an idle belief, unconnected with his desires. Thrasymachus is portrayed as fixated on acquiring money at Republic 1.337d, and, in the Phaedrus, he is said to treat well anyone who “brings gifts” to him and treats him “as a king” (ὡς βασίλευσιν, 266c). Further, like Polus, he has dedicated himself to a rhetorical career, a career notorious for advancing the power and wealth of its practitioners. We can infer, then, that Thrasymachus has erōs for power and wealth *qua* constitutive of happiness.

As with Callicles and Polus, Socrates tries to persuade Thrasymachus of claims that conflict with his erōs. Indeed, just as with those two, Socrates emphasizes that the topic in dispute is how one ought to live: “which whole way of life would make living the most worthwhile for each of us” (344e). These two categories of claims—claims that concern one’s erōs, and claims about how to live—go together; claims that
concern one’s *erōs* are those, in the first place, about what brings about happiness, and one’s beliefs about that determine how one should live.\(^\text{18}\)

Socrates first tries to persuade Thrasymachus that the just person is clever and good, while the unjust person is ignorant and bad. Thrasymachus is unconvinced; despite assenting to Socrates’ premises, Thrasymachus rejects the conclusion: “I’m not satisfied with what you’re now saying” (350d). Socrates later argues that the just person is happy and the unjust person miserable, but to the same result; Thrasymachus assents to the premises, but, once the conclusion comes, he dismisses the argument as nothing more than a “banquet” of words (*Rep*. 1.354a). Both these arguments conflict with Thrasymachus’ *erōs* for money and power. They oppose his belief that money and power are constitutive of happiness, since, if that is so, the unjust person is better off than the just person, on account of being wealthier and more powerful.

So, like Callicles and Polus, Thrasymachus refuses to accept arguments that conflict with his *erōs*. In fact, just like Polus (cf. *G*. 473e), Thrasymachus makes explicit the sort of epistemic policy that underwrites his rejection of Socrates’ arguments. He claims, “Anyone who reasons correctly will conclude that the just is the same everywhere, namely, the advantage of the stronger” (339a). Notably, this belief about justice derives from his erotically desiring money and power *qua* constitutive of happiness. If happiness consists in money and power, then just behavior, insofar as it makes the people in charge wealthier and more powerful, ‘advantages the stronger.’\(^\text{19}\)

\(^\text{18}\) At least given eudaemonism. Otherwise, a person might believe that happiness consists in daily sunbathing but also that he should do something else with his life.

\(^\text{19}\) Note that Thrasymachus explains what he means by ‘justice advantages the stronger’ in exactly this way at *Rep*. 1.343c-344c. He observes the effects of just behavior (it increases the power and wealth of those in charge), assumes that power and wealth give advantage, and so concludes that just behavior advantages the stronger.
Thrasymachus thus seems to believe that anyone who reasons correctly will share his belief about happiness.

4.3.4 Special cases

It is worth emphasizing that, among all his interlocutors, Socrates is explicit that his goal is to change his interlocutor’s fundamental beliefs about how to live only with Callicles, Polus, and Thrasymachus.²⁰ He tells Callicles, “... what I want to persuade you to change your mind about [πείσαι μεταθέσθαι]... [is whether to choose] the orderly life” (493c). He tells Polus that his goal is to produce Polus “as a single witness to agree with what I’m saying,” where the topic concerns “who is happy and who is not” (472b-d). He tells Thrasymachus that their dispute concerns “which whole way of life would make living the most worthwhile for each of us” (344e), then specifies that his goal is to persuade Thrasymachus that “what he says is not true” (Rep. 1.348a). With these interlocutors, Socrates adopts an ambitious, direct approach of attempting to argue them into a new way of life. He does not attempt to exploit what they value; he rather openly contests their values, arguing that their beliefs about what brings about happiness are false. The result? Staunch opposition, stubbornness, defensiveness, and unequivocal failure to convince. This point is important to the overall argument of my thesis, for it indicates that, if Socrates is to do better, he must adopt a restrained, indirect approach, one that, instead of contesting what his interlocutors value, exploits those values to start them on a transformative process. As we saw in Chapter 2, that is exactly what he does in cases of refutation. To complete the picture, I will show in

²⁰ The Philebus may seem like an exception; Socrates tries to prove Philebus’ view about the good false and his own view true. But nowhere is Socrates explicit that he is trying to change what Philebus believes. The conversation is more of an intellectual exercise than an attempt at persuading Philebus (or Protarchus) to adopt new beliefs about how to live.
Chapter 5 that his second primary persuasive method, exhortation, does the same thing.

What causes Callicles, Polus, and Thrasymachus to stubbornly resist Socrates’ arguments? We know the answer in the case of Callicles: erōs.\footnote{Or, we know what Socrates thinks about it. For the moment, we should consider it a defeasible assumption that Socrates’ diagnosis is correct. I will be giving an argument for it in sections 4 and 5. However, we can note point now in favor of trusting Socrates’ diagnosis, namely that he is well acquainted with how Callicles’ erōs affects him (see 481c-482a, where Socrates describes the effect of Callicles’ erōs on the claims he is willing to assert and deny). That familiarity adds credence to his diagnosis. See Kamtekar 2005 for an analysis that also takes Socrates’ remarks about Callicles’ erōs seriously, though her aim is to explain in what sense Callicles has erōs for the demos (in contrast to my aim of explaining how Callicles’ erōs prevents him from being persuaded).} That answer, I will argue, applies also in the cases of Polus and Thrasymachus. We have already seen some evidence for this: they, like Callicles, refuse to believe claims that conflict with their erōs. What we have not seen, though, is exactly how erōs influences these interlocutors, such that they reject Socrates’ arguments. I turn to that in the next section.

4.4 Eros-driven reasoning

I want to resist what might seem like the obvious answer to the question of how Callicles’ erōs prevents his being persuaded, namely by disposing him to accept or deny claims without needing any reasons to do so, or indeed in defiance of the reasons available to him. This sort of answer will seem right to us if we view Callicles as someone whose “commitment to his individual beliefs” exceeds his “commitment to logical rules.”\footnote{Woolf 2000, 26-27.} In that case, he would be someone who believes what he wants to
believe just because he wants to believe it, and we would expect him to dismiss Socrates’ arguments without bothering to remark on why they are flawed. But that is not what we find. Socrates starts by arguing that the life of self-discipline is better than the undisciplined life, which Callicles prefers. But Callicles makes an easy rebuttal: self-discipline limits the amount of pleasure that you experience, and, since happiness consists in satisfying maximized appetites, it works against your happiness (494a-b). Socrates’ argument thus begs the question: self-discipline is worthwhile only if happiness does not consist in satisfying extravagant appetites, but the argument says nothing about that. Later, Socrates tries another argument for the value of self-discipline. As it happens, Callicles agrees to all the premises that entail being disciplined is better for you than lacking discipline. But he rejects that conclusion once it comes. Importantly, though, Callicles justifies this rejection; he says that he assented to Socrates’ premises “just for Gorgias’ sake” (505c). This is a psychologically powerful move for Callicles. It allows him to believe that, had he been paying more attention, he would have detected some flaw in Socrates’ reasoning.

Socrates next argues that Callicles has overestimated the value of power and of flattering the people. But Callicles will not have any of it. He protests that without power and the people’s support, one risks having his property confiscated and even being put to death (511a, 521a-b). These events are especially bad to Callicles because of his conviction that happiness consists in satisfying extravagant appetites; if so, then

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23 There is a question whether that is even possible—whether one can adopt a belief apart from considerations that appear relevant to its truth. Roughly, if truth is the aim of belief, then it seems that whether to believe a claim is just a matter of considering whether it is true. See, for instance, Shah 2003 for a defense of this view. See D’Cruz 2014a for how it can be compatible with motivated reasoning.
both events would work against your happiness: you need property to live extravagantly, and you can’t live extravagantly if you’re dead.

What we find, then, is that Callicles consistently seeks justificaton for his rejection of Socrates’ arguments. In fact, he gives reasons for why it would make sense to be suspicious of any arguments given by Socrates, no matter their conclusions. Socrates, he claims, merely “alleges to pursue the truth” (φάσκων τὴν ἀλήθειαν διώκειν, 482e), while actually he is just trying to please the crowd (482c-e) and to win the argument at all costs (φίλονικος εἶ, ὦ Σώκρατες, 515b). Socrates’ arguments are not truth-oriented, so those interested in the truth should not be tricked into believing them.

None of this is to say that Callicles’ justifications are good. Some are specious (even if Socrates were just playing to the crowd, his arguments could still be sound). My point, rather, is that Callicles does not just hunker down and insist that he is right and Socrates is wrong. He rather rejects Socrates’ arguments on the basis of reasons that warrant mistrust in those arguments. Some of these reasons are ad hoc, such as his claiming to have assented to Socrates’ questions only for Gorgias’ sake, as well as his claiming that Socrates is not aiming at the truth. Nevertheless, they are psychologically powerful enough to relieve Callicles of feeling argumentative pressure to accept Socrates’ conclusions. What seems to be happening, then, is that Callicles’ erōs causes him somehow to both summon these reasons and evaluate them as sufficient evidence against Socrates.

I will show now that Polus and Thrasymachus justify their rejections of Socrates’ arguments in a similar way.

As mentioned, Socrates tries to persuade Polus that doing injustice and avoiding punishment make people unhappy. But Socrates makes little headway, in part because Polus confidently relies on empirical claims that are not easily disproved. He insists, for instance, that everyone agrees with his estimation of the tyrant (473e, 474b)—even
Socrates (468e, 471e). He claims that “current events” (τὰ γὰρ ἐχθές καὶ πρώην γεγονότα) are sufficient to show that the unjust are happy (470d). Now, these claims may be dubious, but the epistemological assumption behind them is respectable. According a claim higher epistemic status if the majority believe it may be anathema to Plato, but it is not to Aristotle nor to some philosophers today. More importantly, though, Polus’ belief in these empirical claims acts as a psychologically compelling reason for him to reject Socrates’ arguments. If, for instance, not even Socrates believes his own conclusions, then, Polus may well think, he must have a good reason for that; and even if Polus cannot identify that reason for himself, suspecting there is such a reason out there would allow him to justify to himself his rejection of Socrates’ argument.

Like Callicles, Thrasymachus suspects Socrates’ motives. He thinks Socrates’ arguments are motivated by a love-of-honor (φιλοτιμοῦ, 336c) and that, instead of trying to figure out the truth, Socrates is merely arguing to win (338d). As such, Thrasymachus alleges, Socrates acts as a “false witness” by willfully misinterpreting Thrasymachus’ meaning (341a), and he “uses trickery” (κακουργῶν) to overcome people in argument (341b). Again, none of this behavior, even if it were true, is incompatible with Socrates’ arguments being sound. But that is of little importance to Thrasymachus. He needs only to satisfy himself that Socrates’ arguments deserve mistrust, and these suspicions do that.

Thus, Callicles, Polus, and Thrasymachus react similarly to arguments that oppose their erōs. They summon ad hoc reasons to warrant distrust in them. Many of these reasons are specious; others could be the foundation of a sophisticated position against

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24 This tendency is most apparent in recent work in experimental philosophy (e.g., in Knobe and Nichols 2008 and 2013).
Socrates’ views, but none of these interlocutors develop such a position. They merely state the reason and reject Socrates’ conclusions.

We have seen that Socrates identifies erōs as the culprit for Callicles’ intransigence. We have also seen that Polus and Thrasy心中的 reacting just as Callicles reacts to Socrates’ arguments, and, indeed, Socrates’ arguments against them are of the same sort as the arguments he uses against Callicles: they are arguments that conflict with their erōs. These similarities support thinking that erōs is also responsible for the intransigence of Polus and Thrasy心中的.

What exactly, though, is erōs doing? What influence is it exerting, such that it is responsible for the fact that none of these interlocutors are persuaded by Socrates? I argue that it works in two primary ways.

In the first place, erōs makes these interlocutors want to reject Socrates’ arguments against their preferred ways of life. They desire to live those lives, and, if Socrates’ arguments were correct, they would face strong pressure to give up that desire. This would cause a painful upheaval in their lives. They would have to admit to themselves that they have wasted significant time in pursuits of little value. 25 That is a difficult thing to admit. And admitting it is just the first step; changing one’s life accordingly is even more difficult. Consider Alcibiades in the Symposium. He has admitted to Socrates that his political career is a waste of time and that he should change his way of life, but he consistently does nothing about it, and, as a result, “feels ashamed” (αἰσχύνομαι, 216b-c). This is not an enviable position. It thus makes sense why interlocutors would want to avoid it. 26

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25 Or worse. In the Symposium, Apollodorus remarks that his turn to philosophy made him realize that, before, he was “the most worthless man on earth” (173a). He adds that, from his new vantage point, business and politics are “totally trivial” and that people engaged in them are “failures” (173d).

26 Relevant here is that Plato thinks of erōs as expressive of the sort of person one is. In the Phaedrus, Socrates describes the experience of a lover losing his erōs for his beloved as one of a new
In the second place, erōs makes Callicles, Polus, and Thrasymachus operate with skewed evidential standards when evaluating Socrates’ arguments. They are highly permissive when deciding which reasons are sufficient to warrant mistrust in arguments that conflict with their preferred ways of life; even the mere suspicion that something might have gone astray is psychologically powerful enough for them to reject Socrates’ conclusions. This is because the question they have in mind is not, ‘Is Socrates correct?’ but rather, ‘Must I believe Socrates?’ And the reason that is the question in their minds is just that Socrates’ conclusions are so unpalatable to them. As such, Socrates must meet an extremely high standard to convince them, shutting off all possibilities that his arguments might be wrong. But he is not able to do so.

I have been arguing that erōs causes the intransigence of Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus insofar as it motivates them to hunt for reasons against Socrates’ arguments and disposes them to operate with skewed evidential standards in evaluating them. There is, however, an important objection to this argument. Their behavior can be interpreted in entirely cognitive, non-motivational terms, and thus it is not certain that erōs really is to blame. Perhaps, for instance, it is just Callicles’ prior belief in the value of satisfying extravagant appetites that causes him to reject Socrates’ conclusions as wholly implausible. Yes, he also desires to live a life full of

“ruler and leader” (ἄρχων ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ προστάτην) taking charge of his soul; he talks of the lover “having become someone else” (ἄλλος γεγονός, Phdr. 241a). The implication is that one’s identity is shaped by one’s erōs for a particular object. Thus, one might also be motivated to avoid losing one’s erōs by considerations of maintaining one’s identity.

This phenomenon is well documented in psychological research, as discussed in D’Cruz 2014a.

Interestingly, however, he is confident that repeated arguments would convince Callicles (513c). Some scholars take this line as evidence of a Socratic optimism that contrasts with a Platonic pessimism concerning the ability of arguments to persuade people to reform their ways of life (see, for instance, Scott 1999 and Woolf 2000). But I think we ought to take Socrates seriously. One thing that repeated arguments would do is make Callicles less able to reasonably suspect Socrates’ motives, since he would become more intimately acquainted with Socrates’ character. He would thus have fewer ways to escape feeling pressure to accept Socrates’ conclusions. I return to this point in Chapter 6.
that activity, but when it comes to evaluating Socrates’ arguments, it is his belief that
does all the work; the desire plays no part. Likewise for Polus and Thrasymachus.\footnote{At this point, we might insist that at least Callicles’ erōs must be responsible for his intransigence, since Socrates diagnoses it as the cause. But it is possible that Socrates’ diagnosis is incorrect, and, in any case, we should want more evidence than just it.}

One point in question here is whether erōs, as a ruling desire, is powerful enough
to determine our evaluative beliefs. It is clear that, on the Platonic picture, evaluative
beliefs can determine our desires.\footnote{As argued for in the discussion of Meno 77b-78b in Chapter 3.} But does the causality also work the other way around? And if so, is that what is happening in cases where Socrates fails to change the fundamental evaluative beliefs of his interlocutors—are their ruling desires in control?

We will not make headway on these questions using only the Gorgias or Republic 1. But we will by turning to Republic 8 and 9. As I show in the next section, its analysis confirms that, especially when one’s preferred way of life is opposed, one’s ruling desire determine one’s evaluative beliefs.

4.5 Ruling desires and bodyguard beliefs

So far, we have seen how Callicles, Polus, and Thrasymachus appeal to certain beliefs
that do the work of protecting their erōs. This relationship of beliefs protecting a desire
is one that Plato develops in Republic 8 and 9 through a highly rich metaphor of
bodyguard beliefs that protect the ruling desire of one’s soul. What I want to do, then,
is to clarify this metaphor to arrive at further conclusions about erōs-based reasoning.
4.5.1 Tyrant

Let’s start with the tyrant, who has certain “beliefs” (δόξαι) that “act as the bodyguard of erōs and hold sway along with it” (δορυφοροῦσαι τὸν ἔρωτα, κρατῆσομεῖς μετ᾽ ἑκείνου, Rep. 9.574d). We are not told which beliefs are bodyguards or how they protect the tyrant’s erōs, but we can make progress by considering the lone detail we are given.

The tyrant burglarizes houses and loots temples, and, “in all these actions” (ἐν τούτοις δὴ πᾶσιν), the bodyguard beliefs overcome the tyrant’s conventional beliefs about “what is fine and shameful” (περὶ καλῶν τε καὶ αἰσχρῶν, 574d). Now, the tyrant’s conventional beliefs would need to be overcome only if he desires not to act shamefully; otherwise, it would not matter to him that burglarizing houses or looting temples is shameful, and so his bodyguard beliefs would have nothing to do. We can thus imagine the tyrant’s psychology as follows:

Conventional belief: Looting temples is shameful.
Desire: I want not to act shamefully.
Desire: I want to loot that temple.

Both desires cannot be satisfied so long as the tyrant holds the conventional belief that looting temples is shameful. The work of the bodyguard belief, then, is to overcome that belief, such that the tyrant no longer sees looting temples as shameful.

Bodyguard belief: Looting temples is not shameful.

Importantly, this work of the bodyguard belief contributes to protecting the tyrant’s erōs. The initial clash of desires is a volatile situation for the tyrant. If his desire to
loot the temple were overcome, then his *erōs* for lawless pleasures would weaken, causing other desires to contend to be the ruling desire of his soul.\(^{31}\)

This picture is supported by Plato’s analysis of the democrat.

### 4.5.2 Democrat

As with the tyrant, bodyguard beliefs also protect the ruling desires of the democrat’s soul. These bodyguard beliefs are recruited as soon as he experiences new ruling desires:

> And, seeing the citadel of the young man’s soul empty of knowledge [μαθημάτων], fine ways of living, and *logoi* of truth [λόγων ἀληθῶν], which are the best guards [φρουροί] and protectors [φύλακες] in the minds of men dear to the gods, they [= new desires] finally occupy that citadel themselves... And in the absence of these guardians, false and boastful *logoi* and beliefs [ψευδεὶς ὁδηγεῖται καὶ ἀλαζόνες... λόγοι τε καὶ δόξαι] rush up and occupy this part of him (*Rep.* 8.560b-c).

Initially, knowledge, fine ways of living, and *logoi* of truth are identified as the “guards” and “protectors” in the young man’s soul. Our interest, however, is in the false *logoi* and beliefs that replace them. Plato sets these in parallel to the previous “guards” and “protectors,” and so we can infer that they take over these jobs. What we have, then, is another instance of bodyguard beliefs.\(^{32}\)

What exactly do they do? I want to focus on their work of recalibrating the young man’s evaluative concepts, described as follows:

\(^{31}\) It is precisely the clash of desires that Plato thinks leads to upheaval and a regime change in one’s soul: “And just as the city changed when one party received help from like-minded people outside, doesn’t the young man change when one party of his desires receives help from external desires that are akin to them and of the same form?” (*Rep.* 8.559e).

\(^{32}\) I consider there to be no significant difference between (as it were) bodyguard *logoi* and bodyguard beliefs. It is not as if the bodyguard *logoi* are not believed by the democrat (indeed, as discussed below, they do the work of recalibrating his evaluative beliefs), nor is there any evidence to think that the bodyguard beliefs are not sophisticated enough to include *logoi* (e.g., accounts, arguments, definitions, ideas).
Doing battle and controlling things themselves, won’t they [= bodyguard *logoi*] call [καλοῦντες] reverence foolishness and moderation cowardice... won’t they persuade [πείθοντες] the young man that measured and orderly expenditure is boorish and mean, and, joining with many useless desires, won’t they expel it across the border?... [they then] return insolence, anarchy, extravagance, and shamelessness from exile... They praise the returning exiles and give them fine names, calling [καλοῦντες] insolence good breeding, anarchy freedom, extravagance magnificence, and shamelessness courage... *(Rep. 8.560c-e)*.

It is not obvious how to interpret exactly what is happening here, but I think the general idea is clear enough. In calling, “shamelessness courage,” the young man applies the *concept* ‘courage’ to shameless behavior. He becomes persuaded, for instance, that “saying and doing whatever comes into his mind” *(Rep. 8.561d)*, behavior that normally would be considered shameless, is in fact courageous behavior. This relabeling, then, is the work of housing types of behavior under new evaluative concepts.33

If this interpretation is correct, then the democrat’s relabeling works to positively evaluate behavior that promotes the satisfaction of his ruling desire and to negatively evaluate behavior that hinders its satisfaction. As a democrat, his ruling desire is to do whatever he pleases (561b-d, 562b-c). If he considers some behavior shameless, then that will pressure him not to do it. So, to be sure he can do whatever he pleases without any cognitive dissonance, he relabels shameless behavior as courageous. What sets the agenda is his ruling desire, and his bodyguard beliefs evaluate behavior in light of its agenda.34

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33 This point—that what some entity now calls *y* it once called *x*—is a motif in rhetoric at the time. See, e.g., Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* 3.82.4 and Isocrates’ *Areopagiticus* 20 and *Panathenaicus* 131.

34 This point—that one’s ruling desire determines one’s evaluative beliefs—appears also in *Republic* 9, where Socrates notes that different people use a different “instrument to make judgments” (*διαμετροῦν*; *χρίσεις*; *Rep. 9.582d*), specifically evaluative judgments about what is worthwhile (*ξιός*, 581d-e) and what is to be praised and blamed (*ἐπανεῖν* and *ψέγειν*, 582d-e). This ‘instrument’ is just
Why bother to do this relabeling? Evidently, the democrat must desire not to act shamelessly, otherwise whether his actions are shameless would not matter to him. So, we can imagine the democrat’s psychology before the relabeling as follows:

Conventional belief: Saying whatever comes to mind is shameless.
Desire: I want not to act shamelessly.
Desire: I want to say whatever comes to mind.

As before, both desires cannot be satisfied so long as the democrat holds the conventional belief. To resolve this clash of desires, the bodyguard beliefs ‘call shamelessness courage’—that is, they persuade the democrat that behavior normally considered shameless, such as saying whatever comes to mind, is actually courageous.

Bodyguard belief: Saying whatever comes to mind is courageous.

Again, this work contributes to protecting the democrat’s ruling desire. If he chose not to do something that he wanted to do, then his ruling desire to do whatever he wants would weaken, causing new desires to contend to be the ruling desire of his soul (cf. Rep. 8.559e). His bodyguard beliefs prevent this situation from arising by removing the initial clash of desires.

The democrat’s bodyguard beliefs also do less sophisticated work. They “close the gates of the royal wall within him” (κλῆσαντες... τὰς τοῦ βασιλικοῦ τείχους ἐν αὐτῷ πύλας) whenever opposition arises to his ruling desire, and they “refuse admission” (οὔτε... εἰσδέχονται) to the logoi of opposing parties (560c). It is not clear how to

the object of their ruling desire. The lover-of-money, for instance, uses the instruments of wealth and profit to decide what to praise and blame, while the lover-of-honor uses the instruments of honor, victory, and courage. Socrates does not spell out exactly how these instruments are used to make such judgments, but the point seems clear enough: they act as standards for making evaluative judgments, in the sense that if an action promotes them (e.g., promotes profit or honor), then it is judged to be praiseworthy, while if it hinders them it is judged to be blameworthy.
interpret this. Are we to imagine the democrat stopping up his ears? I do not think so. What immediately follows these remarks is the description of the democrat’s recalibrating his evaluative concepts, as discussed above. One way of ‘refusing admission’ to an argument is to evaluate it in light of your biases, and that is exactly the behavior that recalibrating would enable and encourage. It is also similar to the behavior described later:

... if someone tells him that some pleasures belong to fine and good desires and others to evil ones and that he must pursue and value the former and restrain and enslave the latter, he throws his head back in denial at all this and affirms that all pleasures are equal and must be valued equally.

The difference here is that the relevant evaluative belief—that all pleasures are of equal value—is the belief that gives rise to the democrat’s ruling desire to satisfy whatever appetites he happens to have. But that desire may still be playing a part. The more it comes to be the desire that shapes the democrat’s life, the more it will influence him to hold on to the belief that supports it.

4.6 Complementary pictures

We have come a long way from Callicles. He, like Polus and Thrasyrmachus, resisted opposition to his ruling desire by calling upon mostly ad hoc reasons to warrant mistrust in Socrates’ arguments. That behavior is similar, but not identical to, what we find in Republic 8 and 9. There, too, certain bodyguard beliefs protect ruling desires. But the main way that they do so is by recalibrating evaluative concepts, such that behavior is evaluated as positively

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35 By ‘recalibrate,’ I mean calibrate anew and not calibrate back to some previous standard. Nor do I mean that the democrat and tyrant adjust their evaluative concepts such that they become more accurate by some objective standard, but rather by their own standard, as determined by their ruling desire.
or negatively in virtue of whether it promotes or hinders the satisfaction of
one’s ruling desire.\textsuperscript{36}

Importantly, these pictures are not in competition. Their similarities, in fact,
are striking. On both pictures, cognitive work is done to protect one’s erōs from
opposition that, if not overcome, would pressure one to forfeit it. Moreover, on
both pictures, this cognitive work is not purely cognitive; it is, rather, motivated
by one’s ruling desire. Callicles’ ruling desire causes him to operate with skewed
evidential standards, and the ruling desires of the tyrant and democrat lead
them to adopt evaluative beliefs that are favorable to those desires. One thing
that we can conclude, then, is that Socrates’ identification of erōs in the Gorgias
as an obstacle to his project of conversion is no throwaway remark. We have
seen reason to think that a ruling desire like erōs is exactly what would interfere
with Socrates’ arguments against his interlocutors’ preferred ways of life.

4.6.1 Is erōs-driven reasoning defensible?

I have examined erōs-driven reasoning in three of Socrates’ most intransigent
interlocutors, as well as in two of the Republic’s corrupt personality types. One
question is whether we find it also in characters living more virtuous lives. Does the
philosopher exhibit erōs-driven reasoning, for instance? A related question is whether
Plato thinks it is always a fault.

These questions are difficult to answer. Here I want to show only that things are
not as straightforward as they might initially seem, because we find even Socrates

\textsuperscript{36} Callicles and Thrasymachus both display this behavior; see G. 483d and Rep. 1.348d-e.
Callicles, in fact, accuses the many of displaying it, too; they “assign praise and blame with
temselves and their own advantage in mind... they say that getting more than one’s share is
’shameful’ and ‘unjust’...” (483b-c).
behaving in a way typical of erōs-driven reasoning: despite not being able to identify a flaw in an argument, he rejects the conclusion. In the Charmides, Socrates makes an argument that turns up the conclusion that temperance is not beneficial. He rejects it: “I really do not believe [πάνυ... οὐχ ὄμοι] this to be the case” (175e). Remarkably, he does not bother to identify where, if anywhere, the argument went astray. Instead, he appeals to a reason why it might have gone astray: “I don’t suppose that the thing we have agreed to be the finest of all would have turned out to be of no benefit if I had been of any use in making a good search... I think that I am a worthless inquirer” (175b-176a).

Now, there is no evidence in the Charmides for thinking that one of Socrates’ desires is responsible for his rejecting this argument. However, its conclusion does conflict with his erōs for wisdom and the way that he thinks it can be satisfied. In the Phaedo, Socrates defines philosophers such as himself as people with erōs for wisdom (Phd. 66e, 68a1, 68a5) and says that acting temperately promotes acquiring wisdom (66b-67b). Thus, temperance is beneficial: it promotes acquiring wisdom, which Socrates strongly desires. By these lights, then, the conclusion in the Charmides cannot be correct. So, it may be that Socrates is motivated to reject that conclusion because it conflicts with his erōs, just as, say, Callicles is motivated to reject the claim that flattering the people is not worthwhile because of his. In both cases, the relevant action (being temperate, flattering the people) is worthwhile as a means to satisfying a ruling desire.

A similar instance occurs in the Hippias Minor. Socrates and Hippias investigate whether those who involuntarily do wrong or those who voluntarily do wrong are better (373c-376c). They arrive at the conclusion that those who voluntarily do wrong are better: “So the one who voluntarily misses the mark and does what is shameful and unjust, Hippias—that is, if there is such a person—would be no other than the
good man” (376b). Nevertheless, Socrates denies the conclusion out of hand, even though he is unable to detect a flaw in the argument. He admits that, “given the argument, we can’t help having it look that way [οὐτω φαίνεσθαι], to us, now, at any rate.” Nevertheless, he does not agree with it (οὐδὲ συγχωρεῖν, Hi.Mi. 376b-c).

This is the same behavior as before: the out of hand rejection of an unwelcome evaluative claim. Moreover, there is some reason to think that this claim conflicts with Socrates’ erōs for wisdom. In Republic 4, justice is described as the ability that makes wisdom grow and preserves it (433b-c). It is plausible, then, that acting unjustly would hinder one’s ability to gain wisdom. Now, Socrates’ erōs for wisdom commits him to believing that wisdom is constitutive of happiness, and thus that the person who lives the best life is wise, or at least strives for wisdom. In that case, it cannot be that the ‘good man’ is someone who voluntarily acts unjustly, if doing so works against acquiring wisdom.

Even if these lines of interpretation work, however, it would be an additional step to say that Socrates’ erōs is responsible for his rejecting the arguments. But we should be open to that conclusion. After all, he has a ruling desire for wisdom, and it may be a general feature of ruling desires that they bring along bodyguard beliefs.

One thing, though, that Socrates’ behavior definitively shows is that rejecting an argument even after assenting to its premises does not mean that one is irrational. Thinking otherwise is the mistake of the otherwise illuminating Woolf 2000. Woolf claims that an interlocutor is not “committed to logical principles” if he does not “accept what he believes to be entailed by propositions he assents to, and rejects what is inconsistent with this” (23). If that were correct, though, not even Socrates would be committed to logical principles. Moreover, if it were correct, it would rule out

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37 This mistake is particularly damaging for one of Woolf’s overall theses, namely that Callicles’ intransigence is explained by his lacking a commitment to logical principles. It is wrong to say that
reductio ad absurdum as a viable form of argument. We would be forced to believe the absurdity instead of rejecting one of the premises.

4.7 Direct vs. indirect approaches

We have seen how erōs motivates people to resist adopting beliefs that oppose it, even in the face of strong argumentative pressure. This feature of erōs has serious implications for Socrates’ goal of changing what his interlocutors care about the most. In the first place, it implies that a direct approach to achieving that goal will meet with heated, and likely insurmountable, resistance. A direct approach would require arguing against the fundamental evaluative beliefs that guide an interlocutor’s life. It would thus require opposing the interlocutor’s erōs. But, as Socrates’ interactions with Callicles, Polus, and Thrasymachus show, and as Republic 8 and 9 explain, erōs has the upper hand on arguments that oppose it.

This point suggests that, if Socrates is to succeed at improving his interlocutors, he needs to adopt an indirect approach with them, one that, for instance, exploits their values instead of opposing them. This is why, as I argued in Chapter 2, Socratic refutation is designed to exploit the refuted interlocutor’s concern with his self-esteem and social standing. In refuting his interlocutors, Socrates is not arguing that their concern for such things is misplaced; he is rather using that concern to motivate them.

Callicles lacks this commitment because he does not believe the conclusions of premises to which he assents (again, unless we ought to say that Socrates, too, is not committed to logical principles). Further, as noted earlier, Callicles employs several reasons to justify his rejection of Socrates’ arguments, and thus is engaging in a logical enterprise. That behavior would be unexpected if he did not believe logic should govern one’s beliefs. Finally, it is noteworthy that, in the Republic, corrupt souls do not completely ignore their faculty of reason; they rather use it to justify the pursuit of their corrupt ends.

There is no reason to think that erōs would motivate any resistance to adopting beliefs about how best to satisfy it, nor to adopting beliefs without any relevance to the value of the desired object.
to do philosophy. In this way, Socratic refutation is an indirect approach. It exploits instead of opposes his interlocutors’ fundamental values.

In the next chapter, I introduce a second method that Socrates uses to do the same.
Socratic Exhortation

In Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates mentions three activities he will continue as long as he lives:

> Men of Athens, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey the god rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you [ὑμῖν παρακελευόμενός], and [to refute you, i.e.] in my customary way to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet... (*Ap.* 29d1-6; see Introduction for full citation).

The *Apology* does some work in explaining Socrates’ method of refutation: it provides a template of the way Socrates conducts refutations (*Ap.* 29d6-30a2), and it depicts Socrates’ refutation of Meletus (*Ap.* 24c4-28a2). It does little, however, to explain Socrates’ method of exhortation. It does so little that we may suspect Socrates has no actual *method* of exhortation at all.

Most scholars draw no sharp distinction between Socrates’ practices of exhortation and refutation. Weiss 2006, for example, argues that “Socrates engages in just one activity: refutation... Through refutation Socrates exhorts his interlocutors” (249).¹

¹ Similarly, Reeve 1989 thinks Socrates’ “positive mission of exhorting” just is “elenctic philosophizing” (122). Brickhouse and Smith 1994 argue that exhortation is merely a special use of the “elenchos,” one distinguished by its goal of getting people “to do the right thing” (in contrast to the goal of making people aware of their own ignorance, 25). Doyle 2012: 44-45, too, seems to think that exhortation and refutation are the same activity: he reads *Apology* 29d6-30a2 as a description of exhortation, then talks about it as a paradigmatic case of refutation. These interpretations are representative of a larger trend of seeing refutation, or elenchus, as the Socratic method (cf. Scott 2002: “the widespread assumption after Vlastos has been that... ‘the Socratic elenchus’ furnishes the name for the unique procedure or aim of Socratic interrogation and argument,” 6). As we will see, however, Socratic exhortation is an independent method, with no essential ties to Socratic refutation (though it can include a refutation; see the case of Alcibiades below). The main evidence for this claim will be borne out by close attention to the *Euthydemus*, *Alcibiades* and *Phaedrus*. I read, then, the three activities Socrates mentions at *Apology* 29d—practicing philosophy, exhorting people, and refuting them—as independent but potentially intertwined.
Other scholars think of exhortation as mere harangue, e.g. Woodruff 1987, who compares it to “the bite of the gadfly” (83).\(^1\) And, indeed, we might suspect that Socrates’ claim in the *Apology* that he “exhorts” his interlocutors means just that he bluntly urges them to start living as he thinks they ought—that, as their gadfly, he goes around hectoring them to care about their souls and do philosophy. In any case, nothing more sophisticated is implied by the Greek: παρακελεύεσθαι is an ordinary word used for a request or command that advises a person to perform or not perform some action.\(^2\) A characteristic use occurs in the *Phaedo*: Socrates’ dream “exhorts” him just by telling him, “Socrates, practice and cultivate the arts!” (60e-6-8). We might think, then, that Socrates routinely exhorts people in a similar way: ‘Alcibiades, stop wasting your time in politics! Phaedrus, ditch rhetoric and take up philosophy!’

Occasionally we do see such flat-footed exhortations from Socrates.\(^3\) It would be a mistake, however, to think that Socrates’ use of exhortation is *limited* to such a form or even primarily takes it. As I will argue, Socratic exhortation is not explicitly *moralizing* at all; it is not the practice of urging interlocutors to reform their lives because their current pursuits are somehow base, inappropriate, or dishonorable. On the contrary, it takes its starting point from an interlocutor’s desire for a certain object, a desire it leaves uncontested, and it focuses on convincing the interlocutor that philosophy is the best way to acquire that object and thus satisfy the desire. In the first place, then, Socratic exhortation aims to help an interlocutor be successful, using the given conception of success the interlocutor happens to have. In this respect, when practicing exhortation, Socrates undertakes an activity that is startlingly Protagorean: his interlocutors learn ‘how to realize their maximum potential’ in their favorite pursuits; they learn ‘only what they have come for’ (*Prt*. 318e-391a). Unlike

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\(^1\) Cf. Weiss 2006: “exhortation is just a harangue” (247).

\(^2\) It is, however, less specific than the English word ‘exhort.’ παρακελεύεσθαι translates literally as ‘to urge towards,’ and it can be translated just as well as ‘to give advice.’

\(^3\) As, for example, when Socrates admonishes future defendants to not disgrace themselves with pitiful courtroom dramatics (*Ap*. 35b-9), or when, at the end of the *Euthydemus*, Socrates urges Crito to dedicate himself to philosophy if he thinks it best (307b-c). I thus do not agree with Weiss 2006: 247 that “there are no instances of direct [‘flat-footed’] exhortation in any of Plato’s dialogues outside the *Apology.*”
Protagoras, however, the training Socrates recommends to each interlocutor for success at the relevant pursuit is always to practice philosophy.

On my account, then, Socratic exhortation is foremost an exercise in a particular form of practical reasoning. It starts from an interlocutor’s desire, and it asks, ‘What ought the interlocutor do to satisfy that desire?’ More specifically, it starts from an interlocutor’s desire for an object \textit{qua} constitutive of happiness—that is, the interlocutor’s \textit{erōs}.\footnote{In Chapter 3, I defend the claim that, for Plato, \textit{erōs} is desire for an object \textit{qua} constitutive of happiness.} It would not be inaccurate, then, though perhaps it would be misleading, to think of Socrates’ practice of exhortation as the practice of procuring: Socrates procures for an interlocutor the means to satisfy his \textit{erōs}. In fact, we find Socrates boasting in Xenophon’s \textit{Symposium} of just this ability: Socrates is asked what he is proud of, and he replies, “The trade of procurer” (ἐπὶ μαστροπεία, 3.10). No doubt this answer in part is meant to be humorous;\footnote{Xenophon describes Socrates “furrowing his brows solemnly” before he replies, an effect that would make his unexpected answer all the more amusing.} but, I think, there is also truth to it. Later in Xenophon’s \textit{Symposium}, Socrates explains that the goal of a procurer is to make a person attractive for the sake of satisfying some client’s \textit{erōs}. That same structure, I am claiming, applies to Plato’s Socrates as a procurer of philosophy: his goal is to present \textit{philosophy} as attractive enough that it will appear desirable for the sake of satisfying an interlocutor’s \textit{erōs}, no matter if the interlocutor’s \textit{erōs} is of fame (as in the case of Alcibiades) or of a cute boy (as in the case of Hippothales’ \textit{erōs} for Lysis).

Thus I mean to contrast \textit{Socratic} exhortation with what we might call \textit{flat-footed} exhortation. Flat-footed exhortation is any straightforward request or command to perform or not perform some action (e.g., ‘practice and cultivate the arts!’). In contrast, Socratic exhortation is a type of protreptic argument, in particular one focused on motivating an interlocutor to pursue philosophy as a means to acquiring the object of his \textit{erōs}.\footnote{By ‘type of protreptic argument,’ I mean that it falls within the genre of argument that emerged in the fourth century BCE as a way to advertise philosophy to potential students. Most of these} As we will see, Socratic exhortation is unified by three formal
features: (i) eliciting of an interlocutor’s erōs (ii) an apotreptic stage (a stage of ‘turning away’), where Socrates turns the interlocutor away from his current plan of action for satisfying his erōs (iii) a protreptic stage (a stage of ‘turning towards’), where Socrates turns the interlocutor towards doing philosophy as a means to satisfy that desire.\(^7\)

To see how Socratic exhortation works will require extended, close readings of the dialogues in which it is on display, where the detail of Socrates’ strategies has tended to go unrecognized. What will emerge is a sophisticated, distinct type of Socratic argument—moreover, one that promises to give content to Socrates’ remark in the *Apology* that he not only practices philosophy and refutes people but also exhort\(s\) them (29d). This remark is meant to identify the activities that he considers so important that he would not stop doing them even if that were required to save his life. It thus should make us suspicious of the tendency to dismiss exhortation as peripheral to Socrates’ project. Instead, it should encourage us to view exhortation as a substantial, characteristic Socratic method, and that is exactly how it will appear once we see it in action.

arguments worked by contrasting the benefits a student could expect to receive from one’s own philosophical instruction with the inferior benefits that he would receive from a rival teacher. So, for instance, in Aristole’s *Protrepticus*, the character Aristotle argues for the superiority of his style of philosophy to the teachings of Isocrates and Heraclides of Pontus (Hutchinson and Johnson 2005). A similar feature is present in two instances of Socratic exhortation. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates dissuades Phaedrus from further study with the rhetorician Lysias and advocates philosophical study instead. Likewise, in the *Alcibiades*, Socrates convinces Alcibiades that he will not benefit from Pericles’ instruction as much as from joining Socrates in doing philosophy. What sets Socratic exhortation apart from other forms of protreptic discourse is its focus on the interlocutor’s erōs.

\(^7\) It is common in the literature on protreptic in ancient philosophy to speak of it as a genre of argument and, more specifically, as a certain move in an argument, a move designed to persuade someone to take up some activity. Accordingly, we can say that Socratic exhortation is a type of argument that falls within the protreptic genre, and that within it there is a distinct protreptic stage. There is also a distinct apotreptic stage, and this is to be expected: “apotrepetic is a predictable and fundamental part of every instance of protreptic discourse in the fourth century” (Collins 2015: 83). What is unique about Socratic exhortation as a type of protreptic argument, then, is not that it has these two distinct stages of turning someone away from something and towards something. Rather, it is that it focuses on an interlocutor’s erotic pursuits; it works by convincing the interlocutor to adopt new and better means to satisfying his erōs.
I begin by introducing a prominent recent view that my analysis of Socratic exhortation opposes.

5.1 A “crisis” for Socratic method?

It is common to think that, at some point in his career, Plato became pessimistic about the ability of philosophical argument to reform people’s lives. Most recently, Dominic Scott 1999 and Raphael Woolf 2000 argue that, in the Gorgias and Republic, Plato advocates a view of moral psychology that implies philosophical argument will be ineffective at improving a certain type of person, namely someone with strong, misplaced desires. The reason is that because, in these dialogues, Plato makes clear that certain desires can determine which beliefs we hold. In the Gorgias, for instance, Socrates identifies Callicles’ erōs as the reason why his arguments were unable to convince Callicles to adopt a new way of life. Now, it may be true that, in these dialogues, Plato thinks certain desires can determine which beliefs we hold, but still not think that this fact condemns philosophical argument, in particular of the form practiced by Socrates, to be ineffective against such desires. But both Scott and Woolf think this fact presents “a crisis for Socratic method,” a conclusion they can reach only by adding the thought that Socrates lacks a form of argument that can be effective against strong, misplaced desires.

Is it true that these desires and in particular misplaced erōs, cause insurmountable obstacles for Socrates’ arguments?

There are two prima facie reasons to think they do not. The first is that, immediately after Socrates diagnoses erōs as the reason for Callicles’ intransigence, Socrates insists that Callicles would be persuaded if they examined the same matters.

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9 This line of argument is common to both of their papers, but within that broad outline their approaches have several differences.

10 The phrasing is from Woolf 2000: 1, fn. 1.
“often and in a better way” (πολλάκις ἴσως καὶ βέλτιον, 513c8). This remark suggests that Plato did not mean to reject the possibility of improvement by means of argument, but rather to acknowledge that, to overcome the influence of erōs, a different sort of argument than the one Socrates here and now employs on Callicles is needed.  

The timing of Socrates’ interaction with Alcibiades in Alcibiades presents a second prima facie reason for thinking that misplaced erōs does not present insurmountable obstacles for Socrates’ arguments to improve his interlocutors. Socrates says that previously “the god” prevented him from starting a conversation with Alcibiades, but now Alcibiades is ready to listen. Remarkably, what has made Alcibiades ready to listen is that he has become full of ambition for fame and influence (105e). Socrates later describes that ambition as erōs for fame (124b4-6). Altogether, then, Socrates’ claim is that, before Alcibiades developed an erotic attachment, his conversation with Alcibiades would have been “pointless” (μάτην, 105e7); but now that Alcibiades has developed an erotic attachment, he is ready to listen to Socrates.

Now, if erōs poses insurmountable obstacles for Socrates’ arguments to improve people, then his claim that erōs has disposed Alcibiades favorably to the conversation would make little, if any, sense. For Socrates’ purpose in the dialogue is explicitly to convert Alcibiades to the pursuit of virtue and the cultivation of himself through philosophical conversation. At bottom, then, Socrates’ claim is that an erotic attachment is a prerequisite for being improved by means of argument—the opposite claim, as it were, of the claim that erōs poses insurmountable obstacles to this project.

11 Scott and Woolf both downplay Socrates’ comment at 513c8. Woolf calls it an “act of faith” (31), and Scott thinks it underscores the difference between Socrates and Plato: the remark shows that Socrates is still confident in the power of argument, but Plato clearly is not, since he depicts Callicles as unmoved (25).

12 I address worries about the inauthenticity of Alcibiades in fn. 17.

13 Socrates is explicit: νῦν γὰρ ἂν μον ἀκούσας (106a1).

14 Woolf, too, thinks an erotic attachment is a prerequisite for Socratic argument to improve a person, but, crucially, he thinks that erotic attachment must be to consistency, philosophy, or reason. My claim, in contrast, is that the erotic attachments that can fulfill this prerequisite are much more
Note that each of these prima facie reasons raises an important question. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates claims that conducting the argument “in a better way” would have succeeded at persuading Callicles to devote himself to philosophy. But what exactly is this better way—better, presumably, because it would be more persuasive to someone who, like Callicles, is ruled by a misplaced *erōs*? In *Alcibiades*, Socrates claims that erotic attachment—even misplaced erotic attachment, e.g., an *erōs* for fame—is a prerequisite for being improved by means of argument. But why would it be? How does *erōs* dispose one favorably to Socrates’ arguments?

Answering these questions requires an analysis of Socratic exhortation, that is, Socrates’ form of non-refutative argument. By the end of that analysis, we will see that Socratic exhortation is the better form of argument for persuading an interlocutor to devote himself to philosophy despite the influence of a misplaced *erōs*. Further, Socratic exhortation relies on exploiting an interlocutor’s *erōs*, and thus, for it to be effective, the interlocutor must first have developed some erotic attachment. The success of Socratic exhortation implies that Scott and Woolf are mistaken to see the moral psychology of the *Gorgias* and *Republic* as presenting a “crisis” for Socratic method.

In the next section, I present the prototype of Socratic exhortation, which is found in the *Euthydemus*.

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I will be suggesting that the better sort of argument is Socratic exhortation. However, the text at *Gorgias* 513c8 underdetermines the relationship between examining the same matters “often” and “in a better way”; another possible reading is that the better way of conducting the argument is just to examine the same topics often (using, as it were, the same sort of argument).
5.2 The prototype of Socratic exhortation: 
*Euthydemus* 278d-282d

A central task of Plato’s *Euthydemus* is to “persuade” (πείσατον) the young boy Clinias “that he ought to philosophize and care about virtue” (275a6). At one point, Socrates demonstrates how he thinks such a persuasion should go.

We will look at that demonstration in a moment. First I want to note how Socrates characterizes it: as a “model” (παράδειγμα) of “the sort of thing” (οἵων) he desires “protreptic arguments” (τῶν προτρεπτικῶν λόγων) to be, and “amateurish” (ἰδιωτικόν) at that (282d4-6). These qualifications support interpreting it as an unpolished version of such an argument, one that presents its essential features but little else. So, what are its essential features?

There are two, I think, and they work in sequence. First, Socrates elicits his interlocutor’s desire for happiness, as he does in his initial question to Clinias: “Do all people wish to do well?” (βουλόμεθα ἐὖ πράττειν, 278e3). Clinias agrees: all people wish to do well, or, as the two later rephrase it, all people wish to “be happy” (εὐδαιμονεῖν, 280b5). Second, Socrates persuades his interlocutor that he will not become happy unless he acquires knowledge and wisdom, and thus that it is necessary to philosophize.

After Socrates elicits Clinias’s desire for happiness, he introduces the question that will guide the rest of the argument: “... since we wish to do well, how are we to do so?” (279a1-2). Note the form of this question, as we will see it structuring Socrates’ exhortations of Alcibiades and Phaedrus. Most generally, the question is about how to satisfy a desire. The starting point is the existence of some desire, and what needs to be found out is what to do to satisfy it. After some false starts, Socrates and Clinias eventually agree that being happy requires us to use things rightly, and that knowledge is the source of right use. Thus, Socrates concludes, since we desire to be happy, and happiness requires us to gain knowledge, it is necessary to philosophize.

Recall that Socrates considers this interaction an ‘amateurish model of the sort of thing’ an argument designed to urge people to philosophy should be. That label fits because little else is present aside from the essential features: the eliciting of a
desire for happiness, and the presentation of philosophy as the best means to satisfy that desire. As we turn to cases of Socratic exhortation, which is based on this prototype, we find two new features.

The first is that the relevant desire is not (as here) of happiness *as such* but rather the desire for an object *qua* constitutive of happiness—that is, the relevant desire is *erōs*.

The second new feature is that, before Socrates convinces the interlocutor to pursue philosophy as a means, an extra stage appears. In this stage, Socrates persuades the interlocutor that his present plan for satisfying his *erōs* will not work. The result for the interlocutor is *aporia* of a very practical kind: he realizes that he is without the resources to acquire the object he most desires, and he experiences perplexity about what new plan of action to pursue. Call this stage of exhortation the *apotreptic*: Socrates *turns* the interlocutor *away from* (*apotrepein*) pursuing certain means for the satisfaction of his *erōs*. Call the stage that follows, then, the *protreptic*: Socrates *turns* the interlocutor *towards* (*protrepein*) doing philosophy as a means to satisfy that desire.

In what follows I consider four cases of Socratic exhortation based on the *Euthydemus* prototype, starting with Socrates’ exhortation of Alcibiades in the *Alcibiades*. These cases support thinking that Socratic exhortation is a unified method.

### 5.3 Socrates’ exhortation of Alcibiades

At the beginning of the *Alcibiades*, Socrates sets himself the task of identifying Alcibiades’ life plans. “What *is* your real ambition in life?,” Socrates asks him, but

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16 Note that I am not claiming that the *Euthydemus* should guide our interpretation of the other dialogues. My point is just, in those dialogues (the *Alcibiades*, *Phaedrus*, and *Lysis*), the arguments that Socrates uses to turn his interlocutors towards philosophy exhibit the same basic structure as the template of such an argument that he gives in the *Euthydemus*.

17 There is no consensus on the authenticity of *Alcibiades*, though the tide seems to be turning towards authenticity (see Jirsa 2009 for the best rebuttal to skepticism about its authorship). I will not recapitulate the moves of the debate here. More important for my purposes is a point about
before he can answer Socrates continues: “I’ll tell you” (105a6-7). What Alcibiades most desires is worldwide “fame and influence” (τοῦ ὀνόματος καὶ τῆς σῆς δυνάμεως, 105c3). Later Socrates makes explicit that Alcibiades’ ambition is a case of erōs: “[becoming famous] is what I think you erotically desire, Alcibiades, more than anyone else ever erotically desired anything” (τοῦ ὀνομαστὸς γενέσθαι ... οὐ μοι δοκεῖς ἐρᾶν ὡς οὖδεὶς ἄλλος ἄλλου, 124b4-6).

Socrates’ first move in the dialogue, then, is to identify the object of Alcibiades’ erōs.18 This completes the first stage of exhortation. Next Socrates states what he hopes to persuade Alcibiades of:

I hope to exert great influence over you by showing you... that nobody is capable of providing you with the influence you desire [ἴσον τὰς παραδούσιν τὴν δύναμιν ὡς ἐπιθυμεῖς], neither your guardian nor your relatives, nor anybody else except me (105e2-5).

Note that Socrates positions himself in relation to Alcibiades as an enabler—Socrates aims to enable Alcibiades to win the influence he craves. This is the exact opposite of how Socrates positions himself in relation to Polus, Callicles, and Thrasy Charmus. With these interlocutors, Socrates plays the role of the reformer, one who attempts to persuade them to stop desiring what they currently do and to start desiring other things. In contrast, Socrates leaves Alcibiades’ central desire uncontested, and, as we

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which there is consensus—that, authentic Plato or not, the dialogue reads like a handbook to Plato’s ethics. This view began in antiquity: Albinus and Iamblichus, in different periods of Platonism, held that it was the first work of Plato’s that a student should read, with Iamblichus claiming that it contained all philosophy “as if in a seed” (fr. 1 Dillon 1973). For my purposes, the “handbook-like quality” of the Alcibiades is a welcome feature (the phrasing is from Griffin 2014: 18). It means that Socratic exhortation—its starting point, its key moves, and its aim—is displayed in a more perspicuous fashion than we find in dialogues whose focus is not as narrow or explicit. Moreover, even if future evidence proves the Alcibiades to be spurious, that result will not significantly affect my arguments in what follows, for here we are mainly concerned to find confirmation of the structure of Socratic exhortation.

18 In doing so, Socrates appears to be exercising his “god-given ability” to detect when someone is in erotic love, and whom or what they erotically love, as mentioned at Lysis 204c1-2. This ability is a crucial part of Socrates’ method of exhortation, which relies on Socrates’ accurately identifying the object of an interlocutor’s erōs.
will see, he focuses on persuading Alcibiades that certain means are better than others at satisfying that desire.\footnote{The \textit{enabling} and \textit{reforming} approaches differ in their response to what an interlocutor currently desires, and in the focus of their persuasive efforts. The one \textit{contests} an interlocutor’s desire and focuses on persuading him that certain objects are \textit{more worthy of desire} than what he currently desires (where the standard for what is ‘more worthy of desire’ is whether an object will actually make one happy; cf. Socrates’ emphasis at \textit{Gorgias} 472c6-d4 and 500c1-d4 that his fundamental disagreement with Polus and Callicles is about what makes a person happy, and at \textit{Republic} 1.348a4-5 that he wants to convince Thrasymachus to change his views about how to live). The other leaves the interlocutor’s desire \textit{uncontested} and focuses on persuading him that certain means are \textit{more worth pursuing} for the satisfaction of that desire than the means he is currently pursuing (where the standard for ‘more worth pursuing’ is whether certain means are effective at satisfying the desire).}

This project involves two tasks. First, in the apotreptic stage, Socrates convinces Alcibiades that he has made a failure of instrumental reasoning: the means he thinks will lead to the acquisition of fame and influence in fact will not (106c4-124b6). Next, in the protreptic stage, Socrates turns Alcibiades toward a new plan of action: he convinces Alcibiades that he must pursue philosophy as a means to acquire fame and influence (124b7-135e8). Let’s take these in turn.

### 5.3.1 Apotreptic of Alcibiades

Alcibiades wants to win fame and influence. He plans to do so by making impressive speeches in the Assembly (105a-b, 106c) and by distinguishing himself with a noble action (χαλόν τι ἔργον ἀποδείξασθαι, 119e). At the start of the dialogue, he thinks he is already capable of doing both. Socrates emphasizes Alcibiades’ supposed self-sufficiency early on: “You say you don’t need anybody for anything, since your own qualities, from your body right up to your soul, are so great there’s nothing you lack” (104a1-4). Socrates’ first task, then, is to convince Alcibiades that his estimation of himself is mistaken: that his own qualities are insufficient to secure fame and influence.

Socrates starts by targeting Alcibiades’ belief that he knows enough already to make impressive speeches in the Assembly. The crucial word here is \textit{impressive}.\footnote{That the speeches Alcibiades desires to make are, in the first place, \textit{impressive} speeches is most explicit at 105b, where Socrates says of Alcibiades, “You think that as soon as you present yourself...”} Even
if Socrates were to convince Alcibiades that he does not understand the topic he intends to speak about, that would not be sufficient to dissuade Alcibiades from thinking that he knows enough already to make impressive speeches. For it may be that a speaker does not need to understand a topic to make impressive speeches about it.\textsuperscript{21} Socrates’ goal, then, is to convince Alcibiades that the desired effect of his speeches—to impress, and thus contribute to his fame and influence—will not be achieved with his current epistemic state.

Alcibiades takes himself to “know better” (οἶδα βέλτιον, 106d1) than the Athenians the topic he intends to advise them on. When pressed to specify exactly what that topic is, however, Alcibiades stumbles. He knows the general domain: “war, peace, or anything else which is the business of the city” (107d3-4). It turns out, however, that he cannot name what makes certain actions in this domain better or worse (108d4-e4). Socrates concludes in a way that makes obvious to Alcibiades why this shortcoming matters, given his priorities:

\[\text{… in a case where you pretend to understand and are going to stand up and give advice as though you knew, if you aren’t able... to answer the question in this case [i.e. what ‘the better’ means as regards war and peace], will you not be ashamed [οὐκ ἀἰσχύνῃ]? Will this not appear shameful [ἢ οὐκ ἀἰσχρὸν φανεῖται;]? (108e9-109a3).}\]

“Yes, certainly,” Alcibiades responds.

Notice that Socrates’ focus here is not on convincing Alcibiades that a certain action \textit{is} shameful, but rather on convincing him that a certain action \textit{will appear} shameful (ἀἰσχρὸν φανεῖται, 109a3). Socrates is not making a moral point; he is making a point about the insufficiency of Alcibiades’ chosen means to achieve the end of winning fame and influence. Alcibiades plans to come forward to advise the Athenians “within the next few days” (μάλα ὀλίγων ἡμερῶν, 105b1), and, unless he knows what

\[\text{before the Athenian people... you’ll show them that you deserve to be honored more than Pericles or anyone else who ever was.}’’\]

\textsuperscript{21} Indeed, the ability of the rhetorician to impress and persuade despite lacking knowledge is a major theme of the \textit{Gorgias} (see esp. 456a7-c7) and comes up in the \textit{Meno}, when Meno claims to have made many fine speeches about virtue despite not knowing what it is (80b).
he is talking about, as Socrates points out, he is at risk not only of failing to win fame and influence but of harming his chances to do so in the future. He is at risk of public shame.22

Later Socrates makes more explicit that Alcibiades’ plan jeopardizes what he values the most: “So if someone who believed that he knew what is just and unjust were to stand up to advise the Athenians... and said that sometimes just things are bad,23 what could you do but jeer at him [καταξελώης ἄν αὔτού]?” (116d7-10). The point is clear for Alcibiades: if he were to enter politics now, when he does not understand the topics he intends to speak about, he would put himself at risk of mockery—and thus risk harming his chances to win fame and influence.

At this point, Alcibiades is flummoxed: “I must be in some absolutely bizarre condition!” (116e3). Socrates diagnoses this condition as “stupidity” (ἀμαθία, 118b6). He tells Alcibiades, “You are wedded to stupidity... This is why [διό] you’re rushing into politics before you’ve got an education [πρὶν παιδευθῆναι]” (118b6-8).

Interestingly, Socrates does not conclude that Alcibiades’ “stupidity” is responsible for making Alcibiades rush into politics at all. He could well have, of course. Socrates has just convinced Alcibiades that he does not know “what is just and unjust, admirable and contemptible, good and bad, and advantageous and disadvantageous” (117a8-9). In effect, he has primed Alcibiades to see that his life ambitions are misplaced. We can imagine a follow-up question: ‘Alcibiades, if you do not know what is advantageous, then how do you know that winning fame and influence will be advantageous for you?’ That move is certainly available to Socrates, and it is significant he does not opt for it. For note what it would invite: the sort of stubborn,

22 Interestingly, the empirical claim that speaking about a subject you do not understand leads to public shame is likely a claim Socrates thinks false; see Gorgias 459b6-c1 and 518c2-d7, where Socrates seems to admit that orators without knowledge have great success in winning the admiration of the Athenian people. So, why does Socrates lean on that dubious empirical claim here? The answer is that he is using exhortation to try to persuade Alcibiades that it is necessary to do philosophy, and thus he must work within Alcibiades’s priorities. At the top of those priorities is the desire to win fame and influence, and if Alcibiades thought he could win those without doing philosophy, then he would lack motivation to do philosophy.

23 A claim implied by Alcibiades’ views, but one that Socrates shows to be false (116c4-d3).
rationalizing behavior that results when *erōs* meets argumentative opposition, the sort of behavior displayed by Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus. In contrast to his approach with those interlocutors, Socrates opts here to leave Alcibiades’ desire for political success uncontested.

The upshot of the apotreptic, then, is that Alcibiades should first seek an education and only later enter politics. For the moment Socrates leaves unclear exactly what sort of education Alcibiades needs, but Socrates at least forecloses the option that would be most intuitive to him: that he could get all the education he needs from his guardian, Pericles. He leads Alcibiades to recognize that, so far as they know, no one has “become wiser” by keeping company with Pericles (*σοφωτέρος γεγονέναι*, 119a). Worse, the people whose education one would expect Pericles to care about the most—his own sons and dependents—turn out to be foolish (*ηλιθίω*, 118e), madmen (*μανώμενον ἄνθρωπον*, 118e), or, in the case of Alcibiades (as Socrates has shown), “wedded to stupidity.” The implication is that Alcibiades would be foolhardy to continue trusting Pericles with his education.

Now, Alcibiades concedes he does not understand the topics he would speak about in the Assembly, but, he believes, neither does anyone else. He and his competition, then, stand on equal footing on that score. As regards their *natural abilities*, however, Alcibiades reason that he has a leg up, and so he will be able to get the better of them without “training and going to the trouble of learning” (*ἀσκήσας καὶ μανθάνοντα πράγματα ἔχειν*, 119b).

This move requires Socrates to shift the target of his persuasion. Whereas before he focused on convincing Alcibiades that his current state of knowledge was insufficient to win fame and influence, now he must convince Alcibiades that relying on his good looks, pedigree, and wealth will not win those for him, either.

To accomplish that task, Socrates transitions from considering what Alcibiades needs to make impressive speeches in the Assembly to considering what he needs to “distinguish himself with a magnificent deed” (*καλὸν τι ἐργὸν ἀποδείξασθα*, 119e), in
particular a military victory against Sparta and Persia.\textsuperscript{24} To do that, his natural abilities would need to outstrip the natural abilities of the Spartan and Persian kings, but, as Socrates emphasizes, they do not.\textsuperscript{25} Again, the lesson for Alcibiades is that he has made a mistake in practical reasoning: his intended means, relying on his natural advantages in military battle, will not in fact suffice to attain the fame and influence he desires. Accordingly, what Socrates emphasizes is not that Alcibiades should change his ambitions, but rather that Alcibiades should adopt different means to fulfill his current ambitions. Socrates tells Alcibiades that “it is necessary first to study and cultivate himself and train so that he can compete with the king” (χρή πρῶτον μαθόντα καὶ ἐπιμεληθέντα αὐτῷ καὶ ἀσκήσαντα οὕτως ἴνα διαγωνιούμενον βασιλεῖ, 123e; my emphasis). Competing with the kings of Sparta and Persia using only his natural advantages is “mad” (μαίνεσθαι, 123e; cf. μανικὸν at 113c).

The upshot of the apotreptic, then, is that Alcibiades has made a mistake in practical reasoning: his intended means could just as well lead to the sabotage of his ends as the achievement of them. The goal of the protreptic is to persuade Alcibiades to adopt a new plan of action.

5.3.2 Protreptic of Alcibiades

From the start, that new plan of action is framed in terms of what Alcibiades must do to satisfy his erōs. Socrates proposes “self-cultivation and skill [ἐπιμελείς γε ἄν καὶ τέχνη]” as the preparation that, in light of Alcibiades’ erōs, is necessary for Alcibiades to pursue: “If you fall short in these [i.e., self-cultivation and skill] then you will fall

\textsuperscript{24} In effect, this transition returns Alcibiades to considering what he needs to “fill the whole world” with his fame and influence (105b-c). Impressive speeches in the Assembly would limit his success to Athens, but victory against Sparta or Persia would spread his name abroad.

\textsuperscript{25} If compared with their pedigree, Alcibiades’ own would “invite ridicule” (γέλωτα ἀφλείν, 121b). If compared with their wealth, Alcibiades’ own finances would make him “ashamed” (ἀσχυνθείης ἄν ἐπὶ σεαυτῷ, 122c). Compared with the excellence of their character, Alcibiades is a “child” (παιδὲ, 122c).
short of achieving fame [τὸ ὅνομα στός γενέσθαι] in Greece as well as abroad; and that is what I think you erotically desire [ἐρωτάν]...” (124b3-5).

By this point, Alcibiades is all ears: “Well, Socrates, what kind of self-cultivation do I need to practice? Can you show me the way?” (124b7-9). Note that the focus is thoroughly practical: what Alcibiades wants to know is how to cultivate himself, and that is of interest, at least for Alcibiades, because it is the preparation he needs to acquire the fame he desires.

Socrates leads Alcibiades to see that, to know how to cultivate himself, he must first know his own soul—that is, he must first gain knowledge of what he knows and does not know. As it happens, a certain activity is twice shown in the dialogue to give Alcibiades precisely this knowledge. That activity is question-and-answer inquiry with Socrates. The upshot for Alcibiades, then, is that, to acquire the fame and influence he erotically desires, he must continue doing philosophy.

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26 Socrates’ initial statement suggests that Alcibiades needs to pursue two things—self-cultivation and skill—but it becomes clear later that, in fact, these are one thing: the skill of self-cultivation. So much is implied by 128a2-d11, where Socrates asks Alcibiades to specify the “skill” (τέχνη) that makes us better, i.e. that we can use to cultivate ourselves.

27 See Moore 2015: 101-135 for a thorough defense of the claim that the form of self-knowledge Socrates recommends to Alcibiades is knowledge of what he knows and does not know. Representatives of the opposing view, that the relevant form of self-knowledge is knowledge of the sort of thing one is (or knowledge of what one is ‘essentially’), are Annas 1985: 130-3, Brunschwig 1996: 72-80, Johnson 1999: 9, and Gill 2006: 357 and 2007. This view is also found at Magna Moralia 1213a10-26. Roughly, where these interpretations go astray is in their misreading the eye-soul analogy at Alcibiades32c-133c. Its main point is that we gain self-knowledge by our souls being reflected, thus implying that the content of the self-knowledge pertains uniquely to oneself (just as one’s reflection is uniquely of oneself). Knowledge of the sort of thing one is, however, fails to meet this constraint. I have found helpful on this point Dan Ferguson’s “In Defense of Reflective Surfaces: A Reading of the Eye-Soul Analogy in the Alcibiades” (unpublished). Additionally, it is not at all clear why knowledge of the sort of thing he is would benefit Alcibiades’s political career, whereas it is straightforward why knowledge of what he knows and does not know would (indeed, Socrates emphasizes this point throughout the dialogue).

28 The first time occurs after Alcibiades’ claim to know the just and the advantageous has been refuted. Alcibiades confesses that he does not know what he is saying anymore, and he reports that he is in an “absolutely bizarre condition” (ἐτέχνην ἐφώκα ἄνω τοις ἔχοντι, 116e3). Socrates identifies this as the condition of thinking you know what you do not know (118a15-b2). Alcibiades later finds himself in the same condition, once Socrates has shown that Alcibiades does not know what makes a city well-governed. Again, Alcibiades reports that he does not know what he means anymore, and adds that he “must have been in an appalling state for a long time, without being aware of it” (127d6-8).
Recall that Socrates aims to convince Alcibiades that only he is capable of providing Alcibiades with the fame and influence he erotically desires (105e2-5). We can now see what Socrates had in mind. To succeed in his political ambitions, Alcibiades must acquire self-knowledge (i.e., knowledge of what he knows and does not know), and the activity that effectively brings that about, Alcibiades learns, is doing philosophy with Socrates. Socrates is indispensable to Alcibiades as a fellow-inquirer, as a soul at which Alcibiades can look and thereby gain knowledge of his own soul (cf. 133b). Thus, Socrates has procured for Alcibiades new means to satisfy his erōs, means that crucially involve doing philosophy. 29

5.4 Socratic exhortation in the *Lysis*

The *Lysis* begins with Socrates happening upon a group of young men (*neaniskoi*), one of whom, Hippothales, attempts to entice Socrates to join the group and spend time at a new wrestling-school. Socrates is hesitant, but Hippothales promises him that it will be “worthwhile” (ἄξιον), and then gives a hint as to why: many beautiful boys will be there. Socrates is intrigued; he wants to be told the name of the most beautiful boy. An unidentified member of the crew reports that they disagree about that, so Socrates directs his question to Hippothales: “Tell me, Hippothales, who do

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29 Thus, on my account, Socrates leaves Alcibiades’ erōs for fame and influence uncontested. One might object that the end of the dialogue suggests otherwise: Socrates leads Alcibiades to agree that what he needs to “provide” (παρασκευαστέον) for himself is “not power or the authority to do whatever you like, but rather justice and self-control” (134c9-11). Is this not evidence that Socrates has persuaded Alcibiades to give up his ambition for fame and influence and dedicate himself to the virtuous life? No, it is not; for Socrates’ point is that Alcibiades must “first” (πρῶτον, 134c5) acquire virtue to rule the city well—acquiring virtue is necessary preparation (cf. 118b7-8, 123d8-31, 132b1-3)—and ruling the city well is attractive to Alcibiades just because he believes it is a vehicle to fame and influence. Thus, when Socrates later urges Alcibiades to pursue virtue “to be happy” (135b), we should keep in mind that Alcibiades would hear “to be happy” in light of his own conception of happiness as consisting in fame and influence. For these reasons, I do not agree with Belfiore 2012 that Socrates persuades Alcibiades that “the real object” of his desire is “the power to rule correctly in the city, by imparting excellence to the citizens” (51; cf. Lutz 1998: 114-19). This interpretation overlooks that Alcibiades’ motivation for acquiring that power is his desire to become famous and influential.
you think it is?” (204b). But there is no time for an answer: Hippothales blushes, and Socrates takes it as a cue:

Aha! You don’t have to answer that, Hippothales, for me to tell whether you erotically love [ἐρωτούμ] any of these boys or not—I can see that you are not only in erotic love [ἐρωτούμ], but you’re pretty far gone, too. I may not be much good at anything else, but I have this god-given ability to tell pretty quickly when someone is in erotic love, and whom he erotically loves [ταχὺ οἷος γνώσαι ἐρωτώντα τε καὶ ἐρωμένον] (204b-c).

As it happens, Socrates is not given a chance to use this ability on Hippothales; one of Hippothales’ friends, Ctesippus, blurts out that Hippothales erotically loves a boy named Lysis.30 Hippothales, we learn from Ctesippus, is completely love-struck: he talks about Lysis constantly, composes poetry and prose about him, and even sings to him (204c-d). Socrates wants more details. He tells Hippothales, “Come on and perform for me what you’ve performed for your friends here, so that I can see if you know what a lover ought to say about his boyfriend to his face, or to others ἵνα εἰδῶ εἰ ἐπίστασαι ἅ ἔρωτι ἐρωτήν περὶ παιδικῶν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἃ πρὸς ἄλλους λέγειν” (205a).

We find at the start of the Lysis, then, a familiar structure: Socrates’ first order of business is to identify the object of his interlocutor’s erōs, and, after doing so, he focuses on considering the means his interlocutor should take to satisfy that desire. Whereas Alcibiades erotically desired a successful career, however, Hippothales erotically desires a beautiful boy. But that makes no difference to Socrates’ method. As with Alcibiades, Socrates will leave Hippothales’ erōs uncontested, and he will focus on convincing Hippothales to pursue different means to satisfy it. This project again involves two tasks. First, Socrates turns Hippothales away (apotrepēnein) from his current plan of action (205a-206b): he convinces Hippothales that poetry and songs

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30 Lysis is described as both a “boy” (παιδός, 204e) and a “young man” (τὸν νεανίσκον, 205b1). It is clear from Lysis’s behavior in the dialogue, however, that he is considerably younger than Hippothales: for just one example, Lysis nervously hesitates to approach Socrates by himself, whereas Hippothales boisterously calls Socrates over and entices Socrates into join his group.
will not win Lysis’ affection. Next, Socrates turns Hippothales towards \textit{(protrepein)} philosophy as a means to win Lysis over (206c-211a).

Socrates conducts his protreptic of Hippothales by giving a demonstration of how Hippothales ought to talk to Lysis. Importantly, this demonstration also constitutes a Socratic exhortation of Lysis. That is to say, Socrates’ exhortation of Lysis is nested within his protreptic of Hippothales:

204b-205a: eliciting of Hippothales’ \textit{erōs}  
205a-206d: apotreptic of Hippothales  
207d-210e: protreptic of Hippothales

Socrates’ exhortation of Lysis, then, is of interest to us for two reasons: both as an independent, complete three-stage exhortation; and because, in demonstrating for Hippothales the new means he should adopt to woo Lysis, it acts as the protreptic of Socrates’ exhortation of Hippothales.

Let’s start with Socrates’ apotreptic of Hippothales.

5.4.1 Apotreptic of Hippothales

Hippothales wants to make himself “cherished” by Lysis (\textit{προσφιλής}, 206c), and he thinks he can do so by “serenading” Lysis and composing “poetry and prose” about him (204d). At first we do not learn the content of these songs and compositions, but once Socrates presses for more details about them, Ctesippus is happy to divulge: Hippothales merely parrots “the things the whole city sings” (\textit{ἃ δὲ ἡ πόλις ὅλη ἁδεί}, 205c); he praises the wealth and conquests of Lysis’ ancestors.

These details emerge after Socrates asks to see if Hippothales knows “what a lover \textit{[ἐραστὴν]} ought to say about his boyfriend \textit{[περὶ παιδικῶν]} to his face, or to others” (205a), and they allow Socrates to conclude that Hippothales does not. Hippothales’ strategy of \textit{praising} Lysis is mistaken, for two reasons: if Hippothales fails to win Lysis
over, then he will appear all the more “ridiculous” (καταγέλαστός, 206a) for losing such a prized beloved,\(^{31}\) and praising Lysis makes it harder for Hippothales to catch him. This is an embarrassing and distressing upshot for Hippothales. It indicates that the strategy he undertook to help his chances of starting a relationship with Lysis in fact turns out to hurt those chances.

The upshot of the apotreptic, then, is that Hippothales’ current strategy for wooing Lysis is mistaken. Like Alcibiades, Hippothales has made a mistake of instrumental reasoning: the means he chose to satisfy his erōs will be ineffective at doing so. Like Alcibiades, too, Hippothales’ realization of this prompts him to seek Socrates’ advice. He asks Socrates, “What different advice can you give me about what one should say or do so his prospective boyfriend will like him?” (206c).\(^{32}\) Socrates responds:

... if you [Hippothales] are willing to have him talk with me, I might be able to give you a demonstration [σοι ἐπιδείξα] of how to carry on a conversation with him instead of talking and singing the way your friends here say you’ve been doing (206c).

The demonstration Socrates gives to Hippothales, then, acts as the protreptic that convinces Hippothales to take up philosophy in his erotic pursuit of Lysis. But it will also constitute an independent, complete three-stage exhortation of Lysis. I will first explain the demonstration as an exhortation of Lysis, and then I will show that it also acts as the protreptic of Hippothales.

\(^{31}\) Interestingly, Socrates uses the same word when telling Alcibiades that his initial plan for satisfying his erōs is ridiculous (χαταχελαστος, 116d-e).

\(^{32}\) Compare Alcibiades’ question: “Well, Socrates, what kind of self-cultivation do I need to practice? Can you show me the way? (124b). Both the questions of Hippothales and Alcibiades come at the exact same point in their conversations with Socrates (at the very end of the apotreptic) and serve the exact same role (to ask Socrates for advice on what else they can do to satisfy their erōs). We will see an analogous question from Phaedrus later: “But how, from what source, could one acquire the art of the truly expert and persuasive speaker?” (269c7-d1).
5.4.2 Exhortation of Lysis

Lysis is just a boy (παιδός, 204e); as such, he is not yet dedicated to a career path, nor is he in erotic pursuit of anyone. He thus lacks a starting erōs that Socrates can identify and exploit to turn him towards philosophy. To be able to exhort Lysis, then, Socrates must awaken in Lysis a desire for something that Lysis could plausibly see as constitutive of happiness. Socrates cleverly chooses the thing that children still under their parents’ watch tend to desire most of all: to do whatever they please. Socrates first convinces Lysis that what he thinks he must do to acquire that ability is mistaken. Socrates then persuades Lysis him that, to acquire it, he must pursue philosophy.

5.4.3 Apotreptic of Lysis

Socrates begins his conversation with Lysis by introducing a puzzle. The puzzle is about how to resolve three seemingly inconsistent claims, all of which Lysis thinks are true: (i) Lysis’s parents love him and thus want him to be “as happy as possible” (ὡς εὐδαιμόνεστατον, 207d); (ii) a person cannot be happy “if he’s a slave and is not permitted to do whatever he likes” (δουλεύων τε καὶ ὃ μηδὲν ἔξει δεῖ ποιεῖν ὠν ἐπιθυμοῖ, 207e);33 (iii) Lysis’s parents do not permit him to do whatever he likes (207e). It seems that, if in fact Lysis’s parents want him to be happy, and being able to do whatever one likes is required for happiness, then Lysis’s parents should permit him to do whatever he likes—but they do not. Thus, to resolve the puzzle, (i), (ii), or (iii) must be jettisoned, or an explanation must be found that makes them consistent.

We might expect Socrates to convince Lysis to jettison (ii)—that is, to convince Lysis that the ability to do whatever he likes is not necessary for happiness, or at least not without a certain qualification on the relevant actions (e.g., that they be just, done

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33 Notably, Lysis’s agreement to this claim is emphatic. Socrates asks if a person can be happy without the ability to do whatever they want. Lysis responds: “No, by Zeus, I certainly don’t think so” (μὴ Δι᾽ ὁμός ἐμοίγε, ἐμφῇ; 207e). This confirms that Lysis is fully on board with the thought that such freedom is required to be happy (cf. Plato’s analysis of the democrat in Republic 8).
with knowledge, beneficial). Such arguments are at Socrates’ disposal; he uses them in the *Gorgias* to try to convince Polus that power is not central to happiness (*G.* 466d-473e). What we find, however, is that Socrates grants (ii),\(^{34}\) despite the fact that, as we can presume from his arguments in the *Gorgias*, he finds it objectionable. His cooperation here mirrors his behavior in the *Alcibiades*, where he leaves uncontested Alcibiades’ *erōs* for fame and influence as constitutive of happiness, despite the fact that, as we can presume from the *Apology* and elsewhere, Socrates finds that desire misplaced. What explains Socrates’ cooperative behavior is that, with Lysis and Alcibiades (but not with Polus, Callicles, or Thrasymachus), Socrates is engaged in exhortation, and that method involves accepting the interlocutor’s desire as a given and then focusing on how to satisfy it.\(^{35}\)

Socrates pressures Lysis to find an explanation that makes (i), (ii), and (iii) consistent: “Why in the world do they [i.e. Lysis’ parents] so strangely prevent you from being happy and doing what you like? And why are they raising you in a perpetual condition of servitude... Why do you hardly ever get to do what you want to do?” (208e).\(^{36}\) Note that an answer here would indicate not only why Lysis is not permitted to do whatever he pleases, but also how he could become able to do whatever he pleases; Lysis would need only to fix the condition that prevents him from having this freedom.

Why, then, do Lysis’s parents not permit him to do whatever he wants? Lysis has a ready answer: he is not yet “of age” (*ἡ λικίαν*). What would fix this condition, and thus satisfy Lysis’ desire to do whatever he wants, is becoming older. But that plan of action would not require Lysis to do philosophy (nor indeed to bother improving himself in any way; all he would need to do is wait around). To motivate Lysis to do

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\(^{34}\) More than just grants it, in fact: he harps on it. See 209c-210c.

\(^{35}\) Penner and Rowe 2005: 21 call it “extraordinary” that Socrates “never calls attention” to the fact that Lysis’s conception of happiness is “childish,” but they offer no explanation of why it makes sense for Socrates to neglect that. But, in the context of an exhortation, leaving the interlocutor’s *erōs* uncontested is perfectly ordinary (and necessary, given the arguments in Chapters 3 and 4).

\(^{36}\) Lysis *could* resolve the tension by abandoning (i)—by changing his mind about his parents’ love for him—but since he firmly believes his parents do love him (*πάνυ γέ*, 207d), the default move at this point would be to explain how (i), (ii), and (iii) can be consistent.
philosophy, then, Socrates first needs to convince him that becoming older is not sufficient to be able to do whatever he wants. And that is what we find. Socrates objects to Lysis’s answer: “This is not what prevents you, son of Democrats...” (μὴ ὁυ τοῦτο σε, ὦ παῖ Δημοκράτους, κωλύῃ, 209a). Socrates’ argument is that Lysis’s parents do trust him to do whatever he wants in some domains (e.g., lyre-playing), and thus it is not true that Lysis’s mere age prevents him, for then his parents would not trust him in any domain. Lysis is convinced. This concludes the apotreptic of Lysis: merely becoming older will not suffice to attain the ability to do whatever he wants. The goal of the protreptic is to turn Lysis towards new means.

5.4.4 Protreptic of Lysis

Socrates presses Lysis for a new answer to why his parents limit his freedom: “Then what’s going on? What’s the reason they [i.e. Lysis’s parents] let you have your way here, but not in all the cases we’ve been talking about?” (209c). This time Lysis gives a more satisfying answer: “I suppose it’s because I understand [ἐπίσταμαι] these things but not those” (209c). As before, this answer implies a plan of action that Lysis should adopt to fix his condition of not being permitted to do whatever he wants: he should acquire understanding.

Socrates gives an example to illustrate what sort of understanding Lysis should acquire: if the king’s son had an eye ailment, and if the king thought Lysis possessed “medical skill” and “correct thinking” (ὀρθῶς φρονεῖν), then the king would trust him to do as he wished (210a). What Lysis must know here is how to benefit the son’s eyes—and indeed, the thought that knowing how to benefit is what will grant Lysis the ability to do whatever he wants is picked up a moment later. Socrates tells Lysis they will be able to do whatever they want regarding the “things about which we

37 Note that it is open to Lysis to insist that age is the relevant factor, because different activities simply have different age requirements to be able to do whatever you want (in the United States, there is nothing but becoming older that will permit a 17-year-old to do whatever she wants in the domain of voting). But Lysis does not make that move.
become good thinkers... because we will benefit from them [ἐνσώμεθα γὰρ ἀπ’ ἀυτῶν]” (210a-b).

It is worth noting that Plato thinks acquiring knowledge of how to use things beneficially requires acquiring knowledge of good and bad. This view comes out most clearly at the end of the *Charmides*. Socrates claims that, even without a certain knowledge present, the crafts will still be able to accomplish their typical ends (e.g. helmsmanship will still prevent people from dying at sea)—but without that knowledge, “that each of these things should happen well and beneficially [τὸ εὖ γε τούτων ἔξαστα γίγνεσθαι καὶ ὠφελέμως] will have deserted us” (174c-d). This knowledge—the knowledge “whose work is to benefit us [ἡ ἔργον ἐστὶν τὸ ὠφελέμιν Ἴμάζει]”—is identified as the knowledge of good and bad (174d).

Thus, by his method of exhortation, Socrates turns Lysis towards philosophy as a means of acquiring what he erotically desires. To do whatever he pleases, Lysis must gain knowledge of how to benefit, which, in the end, will require him to gain knowledge of good and bad—and to do that, he will need to do philosophy.

5.4.5 Protreptic of Hippothales

Recall that the exhortation of Lysis also acts as the protreptic of Hippothales, insofar as it constitutes Socrates’ “demonstration” (ἐπιδείξα, 206c) of how one ought to talk

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38 Note that Socrates switches from considering what’s beneficial for others to what’s beneficial to the one acting; the point of the eye ailment example was that the king would trust Lysis to do as he wishes if Lysis knew how to benefit the son, while here Socrates’ point is that Lysis will be trusted if he knows how to benefit himself. But that switch should not worry us: knowing either one would require Lysis to understand what’s beneficial as such (to know what’s beneficial for you, just as to know what’s beneficial for me, I first must know what’s beneficial in general). Moreover, there is a good explanation for the switch: Socrates’ main focus is on Lysis’s particular case, and the people whom Lysis must first convince to let him do whatever he wants are his parents, and, plausibly, their primary concern is with Lysis’s welfare (recall (i) above). Thus what they must be convinced of is that Lysis knows enough to benefit himself.

39 One way to interpret this claim is that no benefit will ever result from a craft’s accomplishing its typical goal. But, in light of the helmsman passage at *Gorgias* 511e-512a, a better interpretation is that the accomplishing of a craft’s typical goal will not reliably benefit people if the knowledge of good and bad is absent.
to a potential boyfriend. While Socrates talks to Lysis, Hippothales is listening in the wings, attentive to what he can imitate in Socrates’ demonstration and thus improve his chances with Lysis. By the end of the demonstration, Hippothales has good reason to believe its methods are effective: as a result of their conversation, Lysis becomes “disposed like a darling and friend” (παιδικός καὶ φιλικός, 211a) towards Socrates. The demonstration, then, has delivered on Hippothales’ request. But which parts of it ought Hippothales imitate? What lessons ought he take away from it?

The lesson Socrates urges is that Hippothales ought to “humble and belittle” a prospective boyfriend instead of “puffing up and spoiling” him (ταπεινὸντα καὶ συστέλλοντα... χρυσοίντα καὶ διαθρύπτοντα, 210e). We might think, then, that the strategy Hippothales ought to adopt is one of regularly insulting Lysis—but, even though Lysis does respond amiably to Socrates’ put-downs, merely insulting Lysis would surely not work to win Lysis over. Could something else be going on?

Socrates belittles Lysis by calling him “mindless” (ἄφρων, 210d). In context, what that remark amounts to is that Lysis lacks what he must possess to satisfy his desire to do whatever he wants (to do whatever he wants, Lysis must be “mindful” (φρόνιμοι, 210b)). What the insult reveals, then, is that when it comes to achieving happiness, Lysis’s current qualities will not suffice. And since we can safely surmise that Lysis will be unable on his own to remedy this lack, the insult further reveals that, when it comes to achieving happiness, Lysis is not self-sufficient: as Socrates emphasizes, Lysis needs a teacher (σὺ διδασκάλου δέῃ, 210d).

The point here is that insults of a certain kind are an effective first step at making a prospective boyfriend like you: those that reveal him as unable on his own to satisfy one of his desires. But, since that will do nothing for you if what your prospective

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40 That is, disposed towards Socrates in exactly the way Hippothales wishes Lysis were disposed towards him. Hippothales asks Socrates how one ought to speak or behave to “become cherished by a boyfriend” (προσφιλὴς παῖδικὸς γένοιτο, 206c).

41 As it is, Socrates never urges this aloud to Hippothales, but Plato alerts the reader that this is what Socrates would have urged, if Hippothales were not so concerned to go unnoticed by Lysis.

42 Recall that at the beginning of the Alcibiades Socrates diagnoses why Alcibiades is in the habit of spurning his numerous suitors. “You say you’ve no need [οὐδὲνέχε... ἐνδέχετε] of anybody for anything,” Socrates begins (104a). The implication is that, if Alcibiades did think himself in need of
boyfriend realizes he needs to satisfy his desire is not something you can give him, a second step is needed: convincing him that you can give him what’s missing.

Socrates accomplishes the first step for Hippothales: he leads Lysis to realize that, to acquire the ability to do whatever he wants, he needs a teacher (210d). What Hippothales must do now is prepare himself to be the teacher that Lysis needs. As it happens, we find Socrates advising Hippothales to do so at the end of his conversation with Lysis. Of course, the advice is not explicit: Socrates cannot blow the cover of Hippothales, who strategically positions himself so that Lysis will not notice him. What Socrates must do, then, is encode the advice so that Hippothales will pick up on it but Lysis will be none the wiser.

Here is how he does it. Socrates tells Lysis that, insofar as we are “useless” (ἀχρηστος), no one “feels affection” (φιλει) for us; but if we become “wise” (σοφος), then the situation is reversed: everyone will feel affection for us, because we will be “useful and good” (χρήσιμος γὰρ καὶ ἀγαθὸς). The point is clear for someone who, like Hippothales, wants to win a person’s affection: become wise. If Hippothales becomes wise, then he will be equipped to help Lysis acquire the ability to do whatever he wants. He will then be able to position himself to Lysis as Socrates positions himself to Alcibiades in the Alcibiades: as the middleman between Lysis and what Lysis thinks he must acquire to be happy.

Socrates thus encourages Hippothales to gain wisdom for the sake of making himself “cherished” by Lysis, and thereby Socrates turns Hippothales towards the instrumental pursuit of philosophy. As in other cases of Socratic exhortation, the familiar steps are present. Socrates first elicits Hippothales’ erōs for Lysis. In the apotreptic, Socrates convinces Hippothales that flattery will be ineffective at seducing Lysis. This prompts Hippothales to request Socrates’ advice about what he should do instead. In the something, then he would accept that suitor who promised him it. Of course, that is exactly what we see play out in the dialogue. Socrates convinces Alcibiades that it is “impossible” without Socrates’ assistance to acquire the fame and influence Alcibiades desires (105d-e), and he thereby endears Alcibiades to him: “... from this day forward,” Alcibiades says, “I will never fail to take you as a mentor [παιδαγωγήσω σε], and you will always have me as your mentee [σὺ δ’ ἵπτε ἐμοὶ παῖδαγωγήσῃ]” (135d). Seduction complete.
protreptic, Socrates shows Hippothales that he needs to gain wisdom. Hippothales is thus motivated to pursue philosophy as a means to satisfying his *erōs*.

The last case of exhortation to examine is Socrates’ exhortation of Phaedrus.

## 5.5 Socrates’ exhortation of Phaedrus

Midway through the *Phaedrus*, Socrates makes explicit in the form of a prayer to *Erōs* his desire to convert Phaedrus to the life of philosophy. ⁴³

So now, dear *Erōs* ... if Phaedrus and I said anything that shocked you in our earlier speech, blame it on Lysias, who was its father, and put a stop to his making speeches of this sort; turn him to philosophy |ἐπί φιλοσοφίαν δέ... τρέψον|... so that his lover here [i.e. Phaedrus] may no longer play both sides as he does now, but simply devote his life to *erōs* through philosophical words [ίνα καὶ ὁ ἑραστὴς δὲς αὐτοῦ μηκέτι ἐπαμφοτερίζῃ καθάπερ νῦν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀπλῶς πρὸς ἑρωτα μετὰ φιλοσόφων λόγων τὸν βίον ποιήται| (257a3-b6).

Notice that Socrates’ prayer reveals both the **content** of the desired conversion and its **means**. Ultimately, Socrates wants Phaedrus to stop “playing both sides” and to start “devoting his life to *erōs* through philosophical words.” But Socrates does not entreat *Erōs* simply to change Phaedrus; he entreats *Erōs* to convert Phaedrus’s beloved, Lysias, on the grounds that if Lysias were converted to philosophy, then Phaedrus too would convert. Socrates prays that Lysias change so Phaedrus will change. ⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ On the surface, the intended means of Phaedrus’ conversion appear not to fit our model of Socratic exhortation. What Socrates intends to motivate Phaedrus to do philosophy is a certain change in the object of his *erōs* (namely, that it ‘turn to’ philosophy itself), whereas, in cases of Socratic exhortation, what motivates interlocutors to do philosophy is their realizing it is the best means to satisfy their *erōs*. It thus initially appears that Socrates’ interaction with Phaedrus is not a promising candidate for a case of Socratic exhortation. We will see, however, that this initial appearance is misleading.
Most interpreters overlook how odd it is that Socrates prays for Phaedrus’s conversion in this roundabout way.\textsuperscript{45} This is unfortunate, because not only is the passage crucial to interpreting how Socrates intends to convert Phaedrus—it is also key evidence that Plato thinks exploiting a person’s erōs is a viable way to go about conversion. If Phaedrus’s beloved goes the philosophical route, then Phaedrus will follow right along.\textsuperscript{46} This is one instance of a principle we find throughout the Platonic corpus: lovers follow their beloveds.\textsuperscript{47}

What, then, is the object of Phaedrus’ erōs? Socrates’ prayer implies that Phaedrus erotically desires the rhetorician Lysias (257b4, cf. 236b5), but Phaedrus is not a lover (ἐραστὴς) of Lysias in the conventional sense.\textsuperscript{48} It is rather that Phaedrus erotically

\textsuperscript{45} Belfiore 2012 is representative of the trend of most interpreters to recognize the passage as important but to ignore its details. She starts her book by quoting the passage in full, but notes later just that it is “a prayer that Phaedrus may devote his life entirely to erōs combined with philosophical words” (245). Moss 2012 glosses the passage similarly—“Socrates wants to wrest Phaedrus away from his attachment to contemporary rhetoric and lead him towards philosophy instead” (9)—as does Asmis 1986: “Phaedrus joins enthusiastically in Socrates’ prayer… that he, Phaedrus, should devote himself entirely to the love that is accompanied by philosophy” (165). Hackforth 1952 is more restrained: “For the reference to Phaedrus at the end of the section implies, I suspect, a hope in due time fulfilled: a period of hesitation between the ideals of Socrates and of Lysias… was terminated by a right decision” (111-112). What all these scholars overlook is how strange the details of Socrates’ prayer are: Socrates prays that Lysias be converted so that Phaedrus will be converted. Yunis 2011 does well to note this relationship: “The main purpose in praying for Lysias to turn to philosophy is to set the stage for Ph., ‘his lover,’ to do so” (169). As I will argue, Socrates’ attempt to reach Phaedrus through his erōs is crucial to the success of his turning Phaedrus towards philosophy.

\textsuperscript{46} Moreover, since Socrates could well have prayed for more straightforward means, there is a hint that exploiting Phaedrus’s erōs is somehow necessary to spur him towards the philosophical way of life. Any other means, the prayer suggests, would not do.

\textsuperscript{47} See, for instance, Laches 194a-b, Euthydemus 273a, Gorgias 481d-a, and Symposium 213c. I discuss this principle in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{48} Conventionally, a lover (erastēs) seeks to establish with his beloved (erōmenos) a relationship of mutual benefit, wherein the younger beloved physically gratifies the older lover and, in return, receives the education necessary for a successful public career. But Phaedrus and Lysias do not fit this pattern. Phaedrus reveres Lysias as a talented, successful rhetorician—as “the most skillful writer of this generation” (δεινότατος ὄν τῶν νῦν γράφειν, 228a1-2)—while he sees himself as a “layman” and “dilettante” (ἰδιώτης, 228a2). Phaedrus is thus in no position to play the role of the lover to Lysias, whose position in the world is considerably superior to his own. Further, Phaedrus was almost certainly younger than Lysias, and thus not suitable to be Lysias’ lover (see Nails 2002: 190 and 232). This point is reflected by Plato’s portrayal of Phaedrus as aspiring and eager and Lysias as
desires something he thinks Lysias has, namely rhetorical expertise, and he thinks Lysias is the person who can best help him to satisfy that desire.49 Let’s take each of these claims in turn.

When Socrates encounters Phaedrus, Phaedrus is en route to the countryside, in search of a quiet spot “so that he can practice” (ινα μελετητωη, 228b6) delivering a speech of Lysias’s that he has been “examining” (ἐπεσκόπει, 228b2) that morning. He intends to use Socrates to “train” (ἐμμελετᾶν, 228e2) his ability to recite the speech from memory, but Socrates insists that he simply read it aloud. Phaedrus is annoyed: “Enough. You’ve dashed the hope I had of practicing on you [ἐν σοι ὡς ἐγγυμνασόμενος]” (228e3-4). Later, he presses the question that is of utmost importance to him: “But how, from what source, could one acquire the art of the truly expert and persuasive speaker?” (269c7-d1). All these signs point to a Phaedrus who is smitten with the idea of acquiring rhetorical expertise.50 That, as he confides to Socrates, he would rather acquire than “a large fortune” (πολυ χρυσίον, 228a3-4).51

established and proud. (However, there are occasionally role reversals, such as with Socrates and Alcibiades, but these are surprising and exceptional).

49 See Moss 2012: 20 for a similar point. Moss also sees Socrates motivating Phaedrus to do philosophy by exploiting his erōs, but she thinks the object of Phaedrus’ erōs is pleasure in the beauty of speeches, and that Socrates exploits this by providing Phaedrus with beautiful speeches. I provide reasons against this interpretation below.

50 I emphasize the point that Phaedrus values mastering rhetoric to combat the tendency to see him as a “passionate sensualist” who has “irrational desire for sensual pleasure in the beauty of speeches,” who is “lacking self-control, sick with passion, and seeking pleasure above all” (quotes from Moss 2012: 13, 14, and 20). Ferrari 1987 sees Phaedrus similarly: Phaedrus is an “intellectual ‘impresario’… literary journalist, publisher, and ubiquitous salon presence rolled together” (5). What both Moss and Ferrari miss is that Phaedrus’ main drive is not simply to enjoy speeches but to master the art of giving speeches (recall the emphasis on training in the opening scene: μελετητωη, 228b6; ἐμμελετᾶν and ἐγγυμνασόμενος, 228e2-4).

51 Yunis 2011 reads this line as indicating that Phaedrus prefers “beauty in preference to wealth,” but that is a misreading: what Phaedrus so badly wants to acquire is not more beautiful speeches but the ability to give speeches. Note, too, that it is no chance phrasing on Plato’s part to describe Phaedrus as desiring rhetorical expertise more than “a large fortune”: that a person would rather acquire x than wealth is frequently used throughout the corpus when a person erotically desires x. In the Lysis, Socrates describes himself as “completely erotically disposed towards the acquisition of friends” (πρὸς δὲ τὴν τῶν φίλων κτήσιν πάνυ ἐρωτικῶς) insofar as he would “rather possess a friend than all Darius’ gold” (211e6). In the Symposium, part of what it means to be a lover-of-honor, one who is “disposed with erōs for becoming famous” (διάκεινται ἔρωτι τοῦ ὀνόματοι γενέσθαι, 208c4-5), is
Phaedrus, then, erotically desires to master rhetoric. As in the other cases of exhortation, Socrates leaves Phaedrus' *erōs* uncontested, and he persuades Phaedrus to take up different means to satisfying it.

Let’s start with the apotreptic.

### 5.5.1 Apotreptic of Phaedrus

Initially, Phaedrus plans to acquire rhetorical expertise by imitating Lysias—“the most skillful writer of this generation” (228a2), according to Phaedrus. But Socrates dissuades Phaedrus from this plan by convincing him that the aim of rhetoric, persuasion, is best accomplished by knowing not merely what the crowd believes but also the truth of the matter. Notably, the main thought here is not that the rhetorician should speak the truth, but rather that the rhetorician who knows the truth is more successful at persuading an audience. Socrates’ argument starts by conceding a point popular with contemporary rhetoricians: that, on the whole, persuasion comes about by focusing on “similarities” (ὁμοιότήτων, 262b4) or “what is likely” (τὸ εἰκόν, 272e1)—and *not* by focusing on the truth. All well and good, Socrates admits—but knowing the truth about “each thing as it really is” (ἕκαστον τῶν ἄνθρωπος...) is required to detect similarities and determine what is likely, and thus one who wants to master the art of rhetoric must acquire this knowledge. The upshot for Phaedrus is clear: he must devote himself to learning the truth of things. And here Lysias will be of little help; as

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being willing to “use up money” (χρήματα ἀναλίσκειν, 208d1) for the sake of winning honor. In the *Phaedrus*, “the experience that humans call *erōs* (τὸ τὸ πάθος... ἀνθρώποι μὲν ἐρωτα ὀνομάζομαι, 252b1-3) is described as causing one to “lose wealth through neglect and regard it as nothing” (οὐσίας δὲ ἀμετακτοὶ ἀπολλυμένη τῷ ὑδάτι τίθεται, 252a3-4). What explains Plato’s emphasizing this tendency so often, I imagine, is simply that money is the good that most people value the most, so saying that a character values an object more than money is an intuitive way to indicate how important the object is to that character.

52 For the most part: see section 5.4.

53 Phaedrus characterizes this point—that persuasion proceeds from what is likely instead of what is true—as what he has “heard” (259c) and “what people who profess to be experts in speeches” say (273a).
a contemporary rhetorician, he wrongly thinks that persuasion proceeds from what the crowd believes, and not from the truth (273a).

Additionally, Socrates leads Phaedrus to see that mastering the art of rhetoric requires more than the use of standard rhetorical techniques. Phaedrus’s initial view is that the bulk of rhetoric consists in these techniques, but Socrates convinces Phaedrus that the real skill consists in knowing when to use them—and further, that that skill is not taught by contemporary rhetoricians (269b4-c7). Again, the upshot for Phaedrus is clear: to master the art of rhetoric, he must go beyond the curriculum of Lysias and company.

We find Phaedrus, then, at a familiar point—the point of aporia in relation to the practical question of how he can satisfy his erōs. So we see Phaedrus ask Socrates: “But how, from what source, could one acquire the art of the truly expert and persuasive speaker?” (269c7-d1).

5.5.2 Protreptic of Phaedrus

Recall that Socrates begins the protreptic of Alcibiades by stating explicitly what Alcibiades must acquire to satisfy his erōs: “If you fall short in these [i.e. self-cultivation and skill] you will fall short of achieving fame... and that is what I think you erotically desire [ἐρᾶν]...” (124b4-6). We find an analogous claim at the beginning of the protreptic of Phaedrus. To become a “reputable rhetorician” (ῥήτωρ ἐλλόγιμος, 269d4-5), Socrates explains, Phaedrus must acquire “knowledge and training” (ἐπιστήμην τε καὶ μελέτην, 269d5); and insofar as he lacks one of these, he will be “unaccomplished” (ἀτελής, 269d6).55

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54 When Socrates initially neglects to mention them, Phaedrus judges that the topic of rhetoric “still eludes us” (266d1). Phaedrus points out that instruction in rhetorical techniques is what one finds in books written about the art of speeches. This detail further reveals how Phaedrus thinks he should train to acquire expertise in rhetoric: by familiarizing himself with these techniques, which, he tells Socrates, have “very great power, especially in front of a crowd” (268a3).

55 It is tempting to read Socrates at Phdr. 269d4-7 as distinguishing between what one must do to become a reputable rhetorician and what one must to do become an expert rhetorician. But that reading is incorrect. Socrates is rather laying out one plan of action: the way to become a “reputable
Socrates starts by impressing on Phaedrus the importance of acquiring knowledge of the nature of the soul for mastering rhetoric. The argument works by analogy: just as a doctor must know the nature of the body to be able to impart to it health and strength, so too the rhetorician must know the nature of the soul to be able to impart to it “whatever persuasion and excellence you wish” (πειθὼ ἡν ᾧ βούλη καὶ ἀρετήν, 270b3-7).

Notice the oddity of that qualification: whatever persuasion and excellence you wish. We might have expected Socrates to emphasize here, as in the Gorgias, that what a rhetorician must do is improve souls, even more so because the analogy, with its focus on what improves the body, prepares Socrates to make that exact point. But Socrates backs off, and that is telling. It reminds us that Socrates’ main objective here is to exhort Phaedrus to the pursuit of philosophy; and to accomplish that, Socrates must work within the boundaries of Phaedrus’s erōs. Phaedrus’s primary ambition is not to acquire the ability to improve his fellow citizens—it is rather to acquire the ability to persuade them, where the content of that persuasion is left open for him to decide. Here, then, is an instance where we see Socrates nearly going out of his way to leave that ambition uncontested, and that is just as we would expect to see in a case of exhortation.

To master rhetoric, Phaedrus’s must first acquire knowledge of the nature of the soul, and then, as Socrates next stresses, “how the soul acts and is acted upon” (ὅτῳ τί ποιεῖν ἢ πάθεῖν, 271a). As it happens, Phaedrus has heard these points stressed before; Socrates uses them to structure his Great Speech: “Now we must first understand the truth about the nature of the soul... observing what it experiences as well as what it does” (πάθη τε καὶ ἔργα, 245c2-4). The parallel here is no coincidence:

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rhetorician” is by having natural ability, knowledge, and training. He then focuses Phaedrus on the two requirements that are acquired by “art” (τέχνη), the requirements of gaining “knowledge and training” (as opposed to the requirement of “natural ability,” which is not acquired by art).

56 See Gorgias 513d-522e, where Socrates insists that rhetoricians and politicians ought to focus on making citizens as good as possible.

57 Yunis 2005 notes well that Socrates is concerned with persuasion as such: “Plato has Socrates pursue the question of rhetoric’s status as an art without considering any ends other than those derived from rhetoric itself—namely, what it is that makes discourse persuasive” (104).
Socrates wants Phaedrus to turn to philosophy in his pursuit of rhetoric, and demonstrating to Phaedrus that a philosopher (i.e. Socrates) is well-versed in the material he must know to master rhetoric would work towards that end. Phaedrus thus learns that he ought to spend less time with the likes of Lysias and more time with the likes of Socrates—a point that Socrates reinforces by pointing out that Pericles, “the most accomplished of all rhetoricians” (270a), cut his teeth with the philosopher Anaxagoras.

Lastly, Socrates emphasizes to Phaedrus the importance of tailoring his words to match his audience. Only with this individualized approach will the rhetorician be able to “reliably” succeed at persuading (271b3). Executing it, however, requires knowing the types of soul and of speech, which type of speech persuades which type of soul about which type of issue, and the ability to perceive which types of soul are present in one’s audience (271c9-b4). Executing it, then, requires Phaedrus to undertake philosophy in earnest.58

Socrates thus convinces Phaedrus that, to master rhetoric, he must acquire knowledge, and so must do philosophy. Socrates works within Phaedrus’ motivations, and he conspicuously avoids trying to reduce rhetoric to a merely instrumental status. Socrates’ case is not that Phaedrus must pursue philosophy because knowing the truth is necessary to improve audiences, but rather that knowing the truth is necessary to reliably impart to an audience whatever convictions Phaedrus wishes.

5.5.3 Socrates’ prayer revisited

Recall that Socrates prays for Phaedrus to convert to philosophy in a roundabout way. Socrates prays that Phaedrus’s beloved Lysias turn towards philosophy, on the

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58 Phaedrus’s need to pursue philosophy is overdetermined, in fact. It would have been enough to start Phaedrus on the philosophical life if Socrates had rested with the point that persuasion is best accomplished by one who knows “each thing as it really is” (262b8), a point that already commits Phaedrus to lengthy practice of the method of collection and division that Socrates outlines at 265d4-266b2. In addition to that, however, he must dedicate himself to acquiring knowledge of the nature of the soul.
grounds that if Lysias did, then that would cause his “lover” (ὁ ἐραστής, 257b4) Phaedrus to do so, too.

Note that what the prayer emphasizes is Phaedrus’ erotic relationship; Phaedrus will turn towards philosophy if the object of Phaedrus’ erōs does. The prayer identifies Lysias as the object of Phaedrus’ erōs, but, as noted above, what Phaedrus ultimately erotically desires is rhetorical expertise, and Socrates can playfully refer to Lysias as Phaedrus’s beloved just insofar as Phaedrus erotically desires the rhetorical expertise that he thinks Lysias has. This point invites a new interpretation of the prayer’s main claim: what it means to pray that the object of Phaedrus’ erōs turn towards philosophy is, properly understood, to pray that rhetoric turn towards philosophy.

But what exactly would it mean for rhetoric to “turn towards” (τρέψον, 257b4) philosophy? It helps to note that a moment after the initial prayer Socrates offers a second one, and this time in more prosaic language. Socrates prays that his arguments “convince Phaedrus... that unless he pursues philosophy properly [ἰκανός φιλοσοφήσῃ], he will never be able to make a proper speech [ἰκανός... λέγειν] on any subject either” (261a3-5). This phrasing clarifies the sense in which, if rhetoric turned towards philosophy, so too would Phaedrus. If rhetoric were understood to be such that mastering it required philosophical training—if rhetoric were to ‘turn towards’ philosophy in that sense—then Phaedrus, as an aspiring rhetorician, would turn towards philosophy himself.

We are now in a position to see a further fascinating feature of Socrates’ prayer—that it is, in effect, a prayer to Erōs for a successful use of the method that (as I have been arguing) crucially depends on erōs. For Socrates’ prayer amounts to the wish that his method of exhortation will suffice to turn Phaedrus towards philosophy—the wish that Phaedrus will be motivated to pursue philosophy as a means to satisfying his erōs for rhetorical expertise. With this in mind, Socrates’ request earlier in the prayer that Erōs “neither take away nor disable” his “erotic art” (τὴν ἐρωτικὴν μοι τέχνην, 257a7-8) takes on a fuller meaning. We have seen throughout the chapter that
a primary use of Socrates’ erotic art is his method of exhortation.\footnote{Two remarks that often puzzle scholars are Socrates’ claims to have an “erotic art” (τὴν ἐρωτικήν μοι τέχνην, Phdr. 257a7-8) and that the only things he “knows” (ἐπιστήμων) are “the things of ἐρώς” (ἐρωτικά, Smp. 177d7-8; cf. Smp. 198d1-2, Theaet. 149a-151d). It is unclear exactly what Socrates means in these passages, and it is tempting to write them off as not serious (as, e.g., in Rosen 1968: 206). One upshot of my argument is clarity about the role of ἐρώς in Socrates’ methods: Socrates exploits his interlocutors’ ἐρώς to turn them towards philosophy, a skill that requires the ability to know what they erotically desire (cf. Lysis 204b8-c2), and one that, in virtue of its being unified by formal features and reliably successful, can sensibly be called an “art.” Two recent attempts to take these passages seriously are Belfiore 2012 and Gordon 2012, whose accounts may be usefully compared with my own. Gordon thinks Socrates’ knowledge of “the things of ἐρώς” consists in his “unrivaled capabilities in philosophical questioning... Every time Socrates engages in question and answer... he is displaying his erotic know-how and engaging in erotic activity” (66). But this is overstated (there is nothing erotic, for instance, about Socrates’ questioning of Euthyphro), and the link with ἐρώς is tenuous. (See Griswold 1986: 116, Roochnik 1987: 128, and Reeve 2006: 135 for similar accounts that face similar problems). The view of Belfiore 2012 is closer to my own. She argues that Socrates’ erotic art consists mostly in searching for wisdom, but at least partly in motivating people “to become skilled both in seeking to attain as much of [wisdom and other goods things] as they are able, and in helping others to acquire the erotic art” (6). I agree that Socrates uses his erotic art to motivate his interlocutors to desire wisdom, but I see no evidence for thinking that Socrates tried to motivate his interlocutors to persuade other people to start desiring wisdom. More importantly, Belfiore fails to notice that, in using his erotic art, Socrates presents philosophy as merely instrumentally valuable for the sake of satisfying his interlocutor’s ἐρώς. As a result, Socrates’ use of it is more unified and focused on ἐρώς than she suggests. In general, these interpretations go astray in assigning too much importance to the etymological connections between ἐρωτάω (to erotically desire) and ἐρωτάω (to question), and too little to the way Socrates tailors his arguments to the ἐρώς of his interlocutors.} What is happening here, then, is that Plato is reflecting on the method of Socratic exhortation itself. Socrates requests that this method not be inhibited, right before praying that it will be successful at turning Phaedrus towards philosophy.

5.5.4 Complete success?

On my account, then, Socrates convinces Phaedrus to do philosophy as a means to satisfying his ἐρώς for rhetorical expertise. He does not convince Phaedrus to forfeit his rhetorical ambitions. But he comes close. Near the end of the dialogue, Socrates hints that mastering rhetoric is not worth it just for the persuasive power; the great effort required is one that a “sensible man will make not in order to speak and act
among human beings, but so as to be able to speak and act in a way that pleases the gods as much as possible” (273e4-6). Socrates becomes more explicit a moment later. He insists that only what is said “for the sake of understanding” (μαθήσεως χάριν, 278a2) is “worth serious attention” (ἄξιον σπουδῆς, 278a4); what is said “for the sake of persuasion” (πειθοῦς ἔνεκα, 277e9) is not. Surprisingly, Phaedrus agrees: “By all means [παντάπασι] I wish and pray for what you say” (278b4). A moment later Socrates indicates that such a person is properly called a philosopher (278d4-6). It may seem, then, that Socrates has succeeded in persuading Phaedrus to forfeit his rhetorical ambitions and adopt the life of philosophy.

But we should be wary of concluding that. To start, it is psychologically implausible that, in the span of one afternoon, Phaedrus would so dramatically change course. Moreover, Phaedrus is persuaded by Socrates at the end not because of any philosophical argument but rather because of Socrates’ skilled rhetoric. As such, it is too quick to interpret this passage as evidence that Phaedrus has seriously committed himself to the intrinsic value of philosophy. Perhaps the best way to feel this point is to imagine how Phaedrus would respond were Socrates to strip his speech of rhetorical flourishes and, getting down to business, go slowly and carefully through a philosophical argument about why rhetorical skill is not so enviable after all. It seems likely that, at that point, Phaedrus would find the sun to be a bit too hot, the floral fragrance to be making him woozy, the cicadas’ singing too loud now to continue the conversation.

These sounds of caution suggest that Plato is aware, and wants the reader to be aware, that a radical change in the priorities of one’s life does not happen so easily. Time needs to pass for an insight to be fortified—for the seed sowed by discourse to bear the fruit of a new way of seeing the world (cf. 276b-277a). An interlocutor must

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60 This comment seems intended to unsettle Phaedrus’s priority of earning a place among the city’s literati. See Ch. 1 of Ferrari 1987 for an excellent description of Phaedrus’s snobbish side.

61 It is not impossible, however. Perhaps with some shallow people, erōs is easier to redirect than in others; perhaps their bodyguard beliefs are weak and half-hearted, so that a bit of rhetoric might be enough to persuade them to adopt a new way of life. Nevertheless, I think there is reason to be suspicious that this is what is happening with Phaedrus, as noted in the main text.
do more than simply like the sound of the philosophical life. There must be a coming to terms with one’s misguided past, the sort of painful self-indictment that Apollodorus and Alcibiades voice in the Symposium. “I used to think that what I was doing was important, but in fact I was the most worthless man on earth,” Apollodorus says (Smp. 173a). “… my very own soul started protesting that my life—my life!—was no better than the most miserable slave’s,” Alcibiades later echoes (Smp. 215e). These are the feelings that accompany an upheaval in one’s values; without them, as in the case of Phaedrus, we may well suspect that there is no real conversion.

5.6 Again, a finely-tuned method

Recall Socrates’ claim in Xenophon’s Memorabilia that he is proud of his abilities as a procurer. A procurer does not try to change the object of his client’s erōs; a procurer rather tries to help the client satisfy whatever desire he happens to have. So too, we have seen, with Socratic exhortation. As a procurer of philosophy, Socrates does not try to change the object that Alcibiades, Hippothales, Lysis, or Phaedrus erotically desire. He tries to convince them only that philosophy is the best means to satisfy their desires.

But this is surprising, especially in the cases of Alcibiades, Lysis, and Phaedrus. These interlocutors are fixated on pursuits that Socrates thinks are misguided; Alcibiades is wrong to value fame and influence so highly, Lysis to value power so highly, and Phaedrus rhetorical expertise. Why, then, does Socrates not present them with arguments that the objects they desire are not as valuable as they suppose? Why does he limit himself to presenting philosophy as a mere means to satisfying those desires?

The answer, I believe, is because of the power of erōs. As I argued in the last chapter, erōs has the upper hand on arguments that conflict with it. Defended by its

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62 Moss 2012: 21 is similarly wary of concluding that Socrates succeeds in converting Phaedrus, noting that Plato does not depict him engaging in philosophy in the two other dialogues in which he appears (in the Symposium, he is giddy to hear speeches, and in the Protagoras, he is an admirer of the sophists).
bodyguard beliefs, it defeats rational opposition. So, were Socrates to try to convince Alcibiades, Lysis, and Phaedrus that the objects they desire are not constitutive of happiness, we should expect his arguments not to succeed. Socrates thus opts for an indirect first step: convincing them, and Hippothales, that philosophy is instrumentally valuable for the sake of satisfying their erōs. He wields the power of their erōs to get them started doing philosophy. Lysis and Hippothales are motivated to acquire knowledge of what is beneficial, Alcibiades to acquire knowledge of the “just and admirable and good and advantageous” (Alc. 118a-b), and Phaedrus “each thing as it truly is” (Phdr. 260a-262c). Of course, they could attempt to acquire this knowledge by means other than doing philosophy. But that would be unlikely. They see Socrates as their guide in acquiring that knowledge. Alcibiades makes this explicit—“from this day forward I will never fail to attend on you” (Alc. 135d)—and it is implicit in the way the others trust Socrates’ advice on what they need to do to fulfill their erotic ambitions. They would thus be likely to imitate Socrates’ manner of searching for knowledge and even to visit him to inquire with them.

I noted that, in the Apology, Socrates presents exhortation alongside refutation as an activity that he would rather die than forego. We have now seen that exhortation is as central to his project of conversion as refutation—and, indeed, that both strategies aim for the same immediate result: motivating an interlocutor to do philosophy as a means, whether to repairing his self-esteem and social standing, as in the case of refutation, or to satisfying his erōs, as in the case of exhortation. This tactic is worthwhile in the end only if the instrumental pursuit of philosophy can be transformative. In the next chapter, I consider how it can be.
6

Transformative philosophy

On my account, Socrates uses his two main persuasive methods, refutation and exhortation, to motivate interlocutors to do philosophy as a means. That result, however, falls short of Socrates’ goal of persuading his interlocutors to adopt the life of philosophy, as outlined in the *Apology*. It looks, then, as if Socrates’ project of conversion fails: the methods he chooses to accomplish it are inadequate to the task. But that is true only if doing philosophy merely as a means cannot be transformative. In this chapter, I argue that it can be.

6.1 Setup

Socrates wants to persuade his interlocutors to adopt the life of philosophy. Now, as discussed in Chapter 1, the ‘life of philosophy’ is a moving target for Plato; he describes it differently in different places. But key to it, no matter the fine details, is that wisdom is valued more than anything else. Philosophers desire wisdom *qua* constitutive of happiness, and they act on behalf of satisfying that desire and evaluate courses of actions as beneficial or harmful depending on whether the action promotes or hinders their ability to acquire wisdom. Moreover, the way they think wisdom is acquired is by philosophizing. One cannot live the life of philosophy, then, if one does philosophy merely as a means to repairing one’s self-esteem or social standing, nor if one does it merely as a means to satisfying one’s *erōs* for fame, power, a romantic crush, or rhetorical expertise. One must rather do philosophy for itself.¹

¹ That is, spelled out more fully, for the sake of its constituent aim, wisdom.
What we need, then, is an account of how doing philosophy merely as a means can cause a person to come to believe that wisdom is constitutive of happiness and start doing philosophy for itself. Only if doing philosophy instrumentally can be transformative in this way will Socrates’ project of conversion not be fundamentally doomed. Indeed, only if that is the case will Socrates not be guilty of promoting his interlocutors’ misguided ambitions, as he was accused of doing. Otherwise, in motivating his interlocutors to do just a little philosophy, he will be equipping them with a dangerous thing. His refuted interlocutors will learn just enough to avoid being exposed as shams, his exhorted interlocutors just enough to achieve conventional success, but neither group will be led to change their way of life for the better.

Notice that the transformation we want to explain is how doing the right thing for the wrong reasons can lead to doing it for the right reasons. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates remarks that such a transformation is difficult: “it is not at all an easy matter... to persuade men that it is not for the reasons commonly alleged [οὐχ ὡν ἔνεκας ὁ πολλοίς φασί] that one should try to escape from wickedness and pursue virtue. It is not in order to avoid a bad reputation and obtain a good one that virtue should be practiced and not vice...” (176b). The problem Socrates describes is identical to our problem. It is the problem of convincing people who are motivated to act rightly only for its instrumental benefit that acting rightly is its own reward. More generally, it is the problem of how the means can become the end.

Now, in our case, what is meant to cause the transformation is the activity of doing philosophy. Socrates is able to motivate interlocutors to do philosophy as a means, but, to convert them, something about this activity needs to change what they fundamentally value. How would this happen, if at all? One problem for it looms at the start: that interlocutors will lose their attraction to philosophy before it can have a transformative effect on them. On his own admission, this was a common problem

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1 See *Apology* 19b-c, where one of the charges against Socrates is that he teaches others how to make the worse argument the stronger.

2 Interestingly, the *Republic* is concerned with a similar problem—not with how acting justly as a means can lead to acting justly as an end, but with explaining why just action, which most people regard as instrumentally valuable, is valuable also for itself.
for Socrates. He laments in the *Theaetetus* that “many people,” after receiving some initial benefit from his company, leave him “sooner than they should, either of their own accord or through the harmful influence of others.” They end up neglecting the lessons and insights they learned alongside him, “because they set more value upon lies and phantoms than upon the truth [ψευδή καὶ εἴδωλα περὶ πλείονος ποιησάμενοι τοῦ ἀληθοῦς], so that, in the end, it was evident they were ignorant fools, both to themselves and everybody else” (*Tht.* 150e).

Though my interest is in Plato’s Socrates, it is worth noting that Xenophon highlights two people who left Socrates ‘sooner than they should’ in the *Memorabilia.* Xenophon describes how Critias and Alcibiades used Socrates’ philosophical instruction to promote their own career ambitions, and then, once they got what they wanted, abandoned Socrates and philosophy.

Ambition was the very life-blood of both [Critias and Alcibiades]: no Athenian was ever like them. They were eager to get control of everything and to outstrip every rival in notoriety. They knew that Socrates was living on very little, and yet was wholly independent; that he was strictly moderate in all his pleasures; and that in argument he could do what he liked with any disputant... is it to be supposed that these two men wanted to adopt the simple life of Socrates, and with this object in view sought his society? *Did they not rather think that by associating with him they would attain the utmost proficiency in speech and action?* [Ἠ νομίσαντε, εἰ ὀμολογήσατιν ἐκείνῳ, γενέσθαι ἂν ἰσινοτάτῳ λέγειν τε καὶ πράττειν;] For my part I believe that, had heaven granted them the choice between the life they saw Socrates leading and death, they would have chosen rather to die. Their conduct betrayed their purpose; *for as soon as they thought themselves superior to their fellow-disciples they sprang away from Socrates and took to politics; it was for political ends that they had wanted Socrates* [τὰ πολιτικά, ὀνπερ ἐνεκα Σωκράτους ὥρεχθητιν] (*Memorabilia* 1.2.13-16, tr. Marchant).

As Xenophon describes it here, doing philosophy merely as a means had no transformative effect on Critias or Alcibiades.³ They treated philosophy just as people

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³ Interestingly, Xenophon later sounds a different note: “‘I know further that even those two were prudent so long as they were with Socrates, not from fear of fine or blow, *but because at that time*...
usually treat things they value merely instrumentally: once the end is reached, the means are discarded.

Socrates thus faces the problem of his interlocutors leaving philosophy \textit{too soon}, i.e. before the activity of philosophizing can be transformative. They might leave too soon for several reasons. One reason we saw with Critias and Alcibiades; if Socrates’ interlocutor gets what he wants out of philosophy, then, since he valued it only instrumentally, he would have no reason to continue with it. A second reason is related: the interlocutor may come to suspect that Socrates duped him into thinking philosophy is instrumentally valuable; he may come to suspect that philosophizing is not necessary to get what he wants. A third reason is that the interlocutor may become discouraged by extensive philosophical study, and, though he still thinks philosophy is necessary to get what he wants, he realizes he isn’t willing to go through with it.

The problem of interlocutors’ leaving Socrates too soon suggests that a satisfying answer to our main question (the question of how doing philosophy merely instrumentally can be transformative) must meet the following constraint: whatever it is that causes the transformation, that thing must happen fairly soon after one begins to do philosophy.

With this constraint in mind, we can rule out what at first might have seemed like a compelling candidate for how philosophy could correctly orient one’s values, namely by its leading you to see the Form of the Good. No doubt that would do the trick, but it is reached only after “toil and pain” ($\mu\omicron\omicron\gamma\omicron\iota\varsigma$, 517b)—twenty years of toil and pain, by

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\textit{they really believed in prudent conduct”} (Memorabilia 19). Here Xenophon suggests that doing philosophy \textit{did} affect the values of Critias and Alcibiades, but only for a short time.

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4 This second reason would especially tempt those interlocutors whom Socrates exhorts to the instrumental pursuit of philosophy. For example, Hippothales may find that letting Lysis drive one of his family’s chariots is a shorter way to Lysis’s heart than extensive philosophical study. Likewise, Phaedrus may realize that, since Lysias was able to become a “reputable rhetorician” (269d) without philosophical training, that option is available to him, too. See Scott 2000: 163-164 for a similar point; once Socrates’ interlocutors—he mentions Alcibiades, Charmides, and Phaedrus—realize that associating with him “is more likely to sour them on their original aspirations than to assist them in the attainment of these aims,” they are likely to quit Socrates rather than their desires.
Plato’s best estimate. It is unrealistic to expect a person attracted to philosophy merely for its instrumental value to stick with it that long.

What we need, then, is to identify a catalyst that doing philosophy as a means could make happen within a reasonable amount of time, a catalyst that, when it did happen, would cause a radical shift in one’s fundamental values, such that one starts to value wisdom more than anything else and begins doing philosophy for itself. Now, I want to be permissive here; I think many mechanisms could do the trick. But Plato’s dialogues suggest two catalysts in particular: the content of arguments, and the pleasure of doing philosophy.

6.2 Content as catalyst

A natural first thought is that the content of doing philosophy as a means could cause the relevant shift in one’s evaluative beliefs. Perhaps arguments about what is and is not constitutive of happiness could compel people to change their beliefs by persuading them to accept the relevant conclusions.

A precondition for this possibility is of course that even instrumental philosophers take the conclusions of their arguments seriously. Importantly, even if one were not inclined to take arguments seriously before becoming motivated by Socratic refutation or exhortation to do philosophy as a means, the activity would entail just that. It would entail thinking that argument is an effective means of reaching the truth. The reason why concerns the motivation for doing philosophy instrumentally in the first place. The motivation is to discover the truth about \( x \), where \( x \) is either what one’s social role requires one to know (as in cases of refutation) or what one must know to satisfy one’s erōs (as in cases of exhortation). Further, what it would mean to pursue

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\(^5\) Five years of exercise in arguments, fifteen years of gaining experience in war and political office, and “then, at the age of fifty, those who’ve survived the tests and been successful... must be led to the goal [i.e. the Form of the Good] and compelled to lift up the radiant light of their souls to what itself provides light for everything” (540a). My point is just that seeing the Forms would rightly orient one’s values. See Vasilou 2015 for an illuminating discussion of what behavior seeing the Forms would motivate.
the truth by doing philosophy is to weigh arguments for and against a certain view, i.e. to test them for validity and soundness, and to be ready to change one’s beliefs when presented with a compelling argument. This, then, is why the instrumental pursuit of philosophy requires taking arguments seriously: it aims at the truth by way of arguments, and thus it requires caring about validity and soundness and a readiness to change one’s beliefs accordingly.

There is one exception. Some of Socrates’ refuted interlocutors may be motivated not to learn the truth about what their social role requires them to know, but only to gain the appearance of having learnt the truth. These interlocutors will be those who care inordinately about their social standing but little about their social roles as such. To repair their social standing, which Socratic refutation damages, they would need only to convince others that they know what their social role requires them to know, and they can do this even while lacking the relevant knowledge. Are these interlocutors lost causes? For the moment, they are; on this first path, a person must take arguments seriously to be vulnerable to the transformative power of doing philosophy. Later, though, I will suggest that, on a second path, doing philosophy merely instrumentally can be transformative even for interlocutors who are unconcerned to learn the truth.

So, Socrates can be effective in motivating some of his interlocutors to take arguments seriously. Now, if these interlocutors were confronted with arguments that pressured them to reorient their values, it seems they would take those arguments seriously. How likely is it, then, that they would be confronted with such arguments?

Quite likely, I think. There are two reasons for this. The first concerns the content that Socrates’ exhorted interlocutors must learn to satisfy their erōs. Learning this content requires investigating the nature of the good. Lysis and Hippothales, for example, must acquire knowledge of what’s beneficial—Lysis to win the ability to do whatever he wants, and Hippothales to seduce Lysis. But acquiring knowledge of that would require them to acquire knowledge of the good: to benefit someone is just to ‘add good’ to that person, and thus, to know what is beneficial, they must know what
is good.⁶ Alcibiades and Phaedrus are in the same camp: the “education” (παιδεία) that Alcibiades needs to prepare for a successful career in politics is knowledge of the “just and admirable and good and advantageous” (118a-b); and, to master rhetoric, Phaedrus must acquire knowledge of “each thing as it truly is,” including knowledge of the just, admirable, and good (260a-262c). So, Socrates’ exhorted interlocutors, to gain the knowledge they need to satisfy their erōs, would be required to grapple with arguments concerning fundamental values.

The second reason is more straightforward, and it applies also to Socrates’ refuted interlocutors. Both Socrates’ refuted and exhorted interlocutors would have incentive to conduct the relevant philosophical inquiries in the company of Socrates. His refuted interlocutors often believe that he knows what he has shown they do not know. Socrates bemoans this tendency in the Apology—he credits it with causing people to slander him (23a)—but there is an upside to it, too, namely that it provides the interlocutor with a reason to return to Socrates for further inquiry. Of course, interlocutors may not always act on that reason; it may fail to motivate them to actually seek Socrates out. But occasionally it could succeed. Laches and Nicias, for instance, both want to send their sons to train with Socrates; Critias wants to do the same with Charmides; and Lysimachus is excited by the prospect of further inquiry with Socrates: “come to my house tomorrow—don’t refuse” (La. 201c). In cases of Socratic exhortation, interlocutors have even stronger reason to seek out Socrates, for Socrates has convinced them that he knows what they need to do to fulfill their ambitions. It would make sense, then, for them to return to Socrates’ for further guidance. We read Alcibiades pledging to do just that: “from this day forward I will never fail to attend on you” (135d), he tells Socrates.⁷ So, Socrates’ refuted and

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⁶ A related line of thought comes out explicitly at Charmides 174c-d, where the knowledge of what is good and bad is required to know how to act beneficially.

⁷ Socrates mentions at Theaetetus 150d that “those who associate with him” (οἱ δὲ ἡμοῖ συγγιγνόμενοι) make philosophical progress as time goes on, but he does not specify exactly whom he has in mind. One thought here is that interlocutors motivated by Socratic refutation or exhortation to pursue philosophy instrumentally would be included among these associates.
exhorted interlocutors would have an incentive to inquire further with him. That matters because Socrates’ goal, in the end, is to convert them to the life of philosophy, and so we should expect that Socrates would eventually put pressure on their fundamental values (indeed, we see a hint of this already at the end of the *Phaedrus*).

On this first path, then, the relevant transformation occurs by means of accepting arguments that conclude wisdom is constitutive of happiness and that philosophy is valuable for itself. Interlocutors would be primed to take such arguments seriously, because the instrumental pursuit of philosophy would motivate them to think of arguments as effective ways of reaching the truth.

### 6.2.1 Resistance

However, there is reason to suspect that things might not work so smoothly. As discussed in Chapter 4, Socrates’ interlocutors are extremely resistant to believing the conclusions of arguments that advocate for a new way of life.

Recall the cases of Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus. In each case, Socrates uses arguments to try to convince the interlocutor that what he desires *qua* constitutive of happiness is not as valuable as he supposes, and he fails to do so. In each case, the interlocutor engages in motivated reasoning to protect his desire. Polus suspects that not even Socrates believes his own conclusions (*G.* 471e), and Callicles and Thrasymachus suspect that Socrates has ulterior motives behind his arguments, e.g. pleasing the crowd (*G.* 482c, 482e, 494d), winning the eristic battle (*G.* 515b), or gaining honor (*Rep.* 336c). In practice, any of these suspicions serves as a defensible pretext for them to reject Socrates’ arguments, especially given that they do not *want* to accept those arguments. They thus operate with skewed evidential standards, such that the mere suspicion that Socrates’ reasoning might have gone astray is

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8 Cf. Nehamas 1999a: Socrates “certainly wanted” students and “had no less than any of the distinguished sophists” (23).

9 On which see section 5.4 of Chapter 5.
psychologically powerful enough for them to resist believing his conclusions. These suspicions act as ‘bodyguard beliefs’ that protect each interlocutor’s ruling desire. The prospect of Socrates’ arguments convincing his interlocutors to change their fundamental values looks even bleaker due to the following fact. They tend to think that his conclusions are so outrageous that they cannot be believed by a rational, reasonably aware person. Polus, for instance, thinks that the mere fact that Socrates concludes a tyrant is miserable is enough to “utterly refute” (ἐξεληλέγχθαι, 473e) him. Similarly, Thrasymanus claims that “anyone who reasons correctly will conclude that justice is the advantage of the stronger” (339a). Compare also Philebus’s claim that no argument can ever convince him that pleasure is not the good: “I think, and I will think, that pleasure wins in every way (ἐμοί μὲν πάντως νικᾶν ἡδονὴ δοκεῖ καὶ δόξει, Phil. 12a). This intransigence regarding one’s fundamental values poses serious problems for Socrates’ prospects of convincing his interlocutors by means of arguments to change their conceptions of happiness. These arguments would have to oppose an interlocutor’s current, mistaken conception of happiness—but, at least for these interlocutors, that conception is one that they consider to be obviously correct. This reinforces their suspicion of Socrates. He must be trying to fool them, since his conclusions are beyond belief.

It thus seems as if the content of arguments would not be effective at changing the fundamental values of someone motivated to pursue philosophy merely instrumentally. In virtue of that pursuit, she may take arguments seriously, but only up to a certain point, a point that stops short of arguments that challenge her fundamental values.

That is bad enough. But worse is the fact that doing philosophy can increase the abilities of Socrates’ interlocutors to resist accepting arguments that they ought to adopt new ways of life. As Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymanus demonstrate, remaining intransigent in the face of such arguments involves finding reasons to reject them. Doing philosophy, though, trains this ability: it requires thinking up reasons for and

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10 For more on bodyguard beliefs, see Chapter 4.
against certain views, and the better one becomes at that, the easier it is to think up compelling reasons that support one’s preferred views and oppose conflicting views.\footnote{The \textit{Phaedo} provides additional reason to think that, in some cases, philosophical studies can contribute to intransigence: “You know how those in particular who spend their time studying contradiction in the end believe themselves to have become very wise and that they alone have understood that there is no soundness or reliability in any object or in any argument... in the end he gladly shifts the blame away from himself to the arguments, and spend the rest of his life hating and reviling reasonable discussion and so be deprived of truth and knowledge of reality” (90b-d). This is evidence that merely studying arguments will not suffice to make you willing to believe their conclusions, as well as that such studies can do more harm than good. Cf. \textit{Republic} 7.538d-539c, which comes to a similar conclusion.}

The proposal, then, looks to be defeated. Any argument that tries for the desired change will be staunchly opposed, and the more philosophy one does, the stronger the opposition, on account of the philosophical training leading to the development of more sophisticated bodyguards for one’s \textit{erōs} and corresponding conception of happiness.

\textbf{6.2.2 Repetition}

Perhaps, however, this response moves too quickly. As a matter of fact, Plato’s dialogues only ever show us \textit{isolated} or \textit{one-off} arguments against an interlocutor’s preferred way of life. As such, we should be cautious of overestimating the significance of how Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus react to arguments that oppose their conceptions of happiness; it may be that Plato thinks these reactions typical only of interlocutors who meet with such arguments for the first time.

In fact, Plato seems to think that \textit{repeated} arguments are better able to persuade than \textit{isolated} arguments—more specifically, that in cases where an isolated argument for a certain conclusion fails to persuade, repeated arguments for that same conclusion, or repeated consideration of a particular line of argumentation, eventually can bring about persuasion. In the \textit{Apology}, Socrates claims that he fails to convince the jury “because [\textit{γάρ}] we have talked together but a short time.” He continues: “If... a trial for life should not last one but many days, you would have been persuaded [\textit{ἐπείσθητε ἄν}]” (\textit{Apol.} 37a-b). Compare the similarity of Socrates’ words to Callicles: “If we closely
examined these same matters often and in a better way, you would be persuaded [πεισθήσῃ]” (G. 513c). In both places, Socrates is confident that repeated arguments would bring about persuasion on exactly the same point that his isolated argument failed to make persuasive. Moreover, in the Gorgias, that point is one about how best to live and what is constitutive of the happy life. This provides strong evidence for thinking that repeated arguments can succeed at the task relevant for us here: persuading interlocutors to change their conceptions of happiness.

Further evidence for that claim comes in the Theaetetus. Socrates describes the response of a “man who practices injustice” to arguments that oppose his way of life. His initial response is typical: he dismisses the arguments, saying that “this is the way that fools talk to a clever rascal like me” (177a). His response changes, however, if he is made to engage with an extended argument:

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

Crucially, the dispute here concerns the unjust man’s way of life: the arguments are meant to persuade him that injustice does not benefit him. The “things he says” that eventually “do not satisfy even himself,” then, are words summoned to defend the value of injustice. They act as bodyguards that try to protect his preferred way of life. Thus, this Theaetetus passage is strong evidence that, in the face of an extended argument, one’s psychological bodyguards eventually will be overpowered—one’s defense of a preferred but mistaken way of life will eventually “not satisfy” even oneself.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} This phrasing encourages us to think that even corrupt people rely on evidence to maintain their evaluative beliefs. It is not that they disregard all evidence and cling to those beliefs no matter what. Rather, there is something internal to them that must be satisfied to be able to maintain them, and they appeal to evidence to satisfy it. This supports thinking that argument has a role to play in accomplishing value transformation, since arguments can convince a person to discount the evidence she needs to maintain her values and thereby shake her conviction in them.
A last point to note here is that Alcibiades describes a similar reaction to Socrates’ arguments: initial dismissal, followed by persuasion.

If you were to listen to his arguments, at first they’d strike you as totally ridiculous... But if you see them when they open up like statues, if you go behind their surface, you’ll realize that no other arguments make any sense... They’re of great—no, of the greatest—importance for anyone who wants to become a truly good man (Smp. 221e-222a).

All of these passages point towards a common phenomenon: repeated arguments succeed where isolated arguments fail.\textsuperscript{13} What the passages do not make clear, however, is exactly what it is that makes repeated arguments so effective, in particular, as the Gorgias and Theaetetus passages describe, at persuading people to reform their ways of life.\textsuperscript{14}

But we can make progress on this question ourselves. Recall that what prevents Socrates’ isolated arguments from persuading Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus is that each interlocutor summons whatever beliefs he needs to resist accepting Socrates’ conclusions. It is not that they are blindly attached to their ways of life. It is rather that they believe those ways of life most worthwhile, and, when faced with an argument that concludes otherwise, they rely on reasons, however spurious, to reject the argument.

\textsuperscript{13} Compare with Nietzsche’s thought that a conception (Vorstellung), once refuted, “soon produces new seeds... conceptions are very tenacious of life.” Thus, he concludes, “we must act according to the maxim: ‘One refutation is no refutation’” (\textit{Human All Too Human}, ‘The Wanderer and his Shadow,’ Section 211).

\textsuperscript{14} It is worth noting that Plato thinks repeated arguments more effective than isolated arguments also at other tasks, such as at \textit{Meno} 85c-d: “These opinions have been stirred up like a dream, but if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone’s.” While here the point is that repeated examination would transform true belief into knowledge, the passage still serves as evidence that Plato thinks reconsidering the same problem or principle, perhaps from different angles, achieves new results. See also the comment in the (likely spurious) \textit{Second Letter} that, to understand lessons on the principles, “one must talk about them and hear them expounded again and again, perhaps for many years” (314a).
The way to convince these interlocutors, then, is to refute those reasons. But doing so takes time, especially if, as in the cases of Polus, Callicles, and Thrasymachus, the reasons for rejecting Socrates’ arguments include his alleged insincerity or ulterior motivations. These are not the sorts of allegations Socrates could quickly disprove, since any attempt to do so could itself be suspected of insincerity or ulterior motivations. What would be so effective about repeated arguments, then, is that they allow Socrates the necessary extra time to refute such claims, perhaps by enabling an interlocutor to become better acquainted with Socrates’ character. Other interlocutors, in contrast, might retain their preferred views not so much because they suspect Socrates’ motivations but because they are holding tight to a reason that, in an isolated argument, there would not be enough time to deal with properly. Here too repeated arguments would enable the necessary extra time to refute such reasons. Still other interlocutors might simply need to think more carefully about one of Socrates’ arguments against their preferred ways of life (after all, the consequences for them of accepting such an argument could be a radically new way of seeing the world). Here too repeated arguments would enable the necessary extra time.

The main point, then, is that repeated arguments can persuade people to change what they believe to be constitutive of happiness because repeated arguments, unlike isolated arguments, allow the necessary time for dealing properly with whatever reasons people summon to defend their current conception of happiness (where ‘dealing properly’ is determined by the case at hand). The *Theaetetus* gives us reason to think that, eventually, such rationalizations stop being convincing; in the end, the things people say do not satisfy even themselves. What is needed, then, is for a person to be motivated to persist in considering arguments that oppose their conceptions of happiness—persist, that is, beyond the initial encounter with such arguments, when the typical response (as we have seen) is dismissal and failure to be convinced. That persistence, of course, is exactly what the instrumental pursuit of philosophy would motivate. We have already seen why: the instrumental pursuit of philosophy, as prompted by Socratic refutation or exhortation, motivates people for their own personal ends to acquire knowledge of what the good is. It thus motivates people to
persist in considering arguments that would put pressure on their (mistaken) beliefs about what is constitutive of happiness.

One last detail is worth noting. I have alluded to the ‘bodyguard beliefs’ that enable Socrates’ interlocutors to reject his arguments. As discussed in Chapter 4, Plato develops the metaphor of bodyguard words and beliefs that protect the ruling desire of one’s soul in his analyses of the democrat and tyrant in Republic 8 and 9. One way they do so is by preventing opposition to the soul’s ruling desire from making contact with it. They “close the gates of the royal wall” to such opposition; they refuse to “admit any word of truth into the citadel” where the ruling desire resides. This concern implies that, if the opposition were to breach this defense, it could be effective at changing the soul’s ruling desire. What is needed, then, is to defeat the bodyguard words and beliefs—and on the account just sketched, that is exactly what the repetition of arguments would enable.

Thus one way that doing philosophy as a means could change people’s conceptions of happiness is by exposing them repeatedly to arguments for the relevant conclusions. As it happens, these are exactly the sort of arguments they must consider to gain instrumental value from doing philosophy, for these arguments concern the topics relevant for restoring their social status or fulfilling their erotic ambitions. At first, their reactions to such arguments would be typical: they would summon whatever reasons they need to continue believing that what is constitutive of happiness is as they think. Eventually, however, these reasons would “fail to satisfy” even themselves, and, without the defense those reasons provide, the ruling desires of their souls would be vulnerable to redirection by Socrates’ arguments.

6.3 Pleasure as Catalyst

A second explanation for how doing philosophy merely as a means could change people’s fundamental values focuses not on the content of arguments but rather on the felt experience of the activity of philosophizing. On this account, what does the work of causing a person to stop believing that, e.g., money or power is constitutive of
happiness and to start believing that wisdom is constitutive of happiness is not that they accept the conclusion of an argument, but rather that, as a result of doing philosophy instrumentally, they have a felt experience that impacts their relevant beliefs.

Consider how Alcibiades describes the effect that doing philosophy had on him:

... something much more painful than snakebite has bitten me in my most sensitive part—I mean my heart, or my soul, or whatever you want to call it, which has been struck and bitten by philosophy, whose grip on young and eager souls is much more vicious than a viper’s and makes them do the most amazing things (Smp. 218a).

What Alcibiades emphasizes is not the content of any claims that philosophy exposed him to, but rather the felt experience—the ‘snakebite,’ as he calls it—of doing philosophy. That is what made him do “the most amazing things” in pursuit of wisdom, including a failed attempt to seduce Socrates. Interestingly, Alcibiades alleges that this ‘snakebite’ is also what attracted the others present to philosophy, too. After noting that victims of snakebite will talk about it only with fellow victims, he explains that, because present company has been bitten by the snakebite of philosophy as well, he will share his experience with them:

Now, all you people here, Phaedrus, Agathon, Eryximachus, Aristodemus, Aristophanes—I need not mention Socrates—have all shared in the madness, the Bacchic frenzy of philosophy. And that’s why you will hear the rest of my story; you will understand and forgive both what I did then and what I say now (Smp. 218b).

Now, the felt experience that Alcibiades describes philosophy causing in him is pain: “something much more painful than snakebite has bitten me,” he says. But we should be wary of thinking that the mere pain of philosophy is what attracted Alcibiades to it, at least for the reason that pain is normally repulsive.15 Perhaps what is painful for

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15 Cf. Republic 6.498c, where Socrates remarks that it is impossible to love an activity if it pains you to do it.
Alcibiades is the longing that philosophy causes: the realization that he is ignorant and the desire for knowledge. In any case, the notion of pain enters Alcibiades’s description only on analogy with snakebite, and what is important about that analogy is not that the experience of philosophy, like that of snakebite, is painful, but rather that people talk about the experience of philosophy and of snakebite “only with fellow victims” (217e), because only those who have shared the experience can understand what it is like.

What we should conclude from Alcibiades’s testimony, then, is not that philosophy attracts people to it by the felt experience of pain, but rather that philosophy attracts people to it by some felt experience, in particular a felt experience that cannot be understood unless a person has experienced it, too. We should ask, then, just what this felt experience might be.

6.3.1 Pleasure of philosophy

Here it is notable that the felt experience Plato usually describes accompanying philosophy is pleasure. At the beginning of the Symposium, for instance, Apollodorus claims, “Apart from the benefit I think they do for me, I take immense pleasure [ὑπερφυῶς ὡς χάρω] in philosophical arguments, both as speaker and listener” (Smp. 173c). Similarly, in the Theaetetus, Socrates is giddy with the prospect just of doing philosophy: “I hope I am not being rude on account of my love-of-argument [ὑπὸ φιλολογίας]—just because I’m so eager to start a philosophical discussion [προθυμούμενος ἡμᾶς ποιήσαι διαλέγεσθαι] and get us all friendly and talkative together” (Th. 146a).

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16 It is also relevant to note that Plato thinks of pleasure and pain as going together (cf. Phaedo 60b-c). Perhaps Alcibiades longing for knowledge is painful, and when that longing is satisfied, if only just partially, pleasure follows, and it is the combination of pleasure and pain that keeps him coming back to philosophy, just as the same combination often keeps one scratching at an itch.

17 Interestingly, this is exactly how Paul 2014 describes epistemically transformative experiences—as experiences that can be understood only by those who have also experienced them: “you must have had the right kind of experience [e.g. the snakebite of philosophy] to know a subjective value [e.g. the worth of philosophy], because you must know what an experience of that type is like to know its value” (14).
What is pleasurable in both of these passages is the *mere activity* of philosophizing. We also find cases where what is pleasurable is the experience of philosophical *achievement*. The most ecstatic descriptions here are cases of seeing the Forms, such as seeing the Form of Beauty at the top of the *Symposium* ascent: “If ever you see that Beauty,” Diotima tells Socrates, “it will not seem to you to be comparable with gold or dress or those beautiful boys and young men who now strike you with amazement [ἐκπέπληξαι] when you see them” (211d).\(^{18}\) The implication is that the experience of seeing the Form of Beauty would ‘strike you with amazement’ even *more* than seeing the person you love, the person at whom, as Diotima goes on to note, you would be happy to do nothing but gaze forever. This implication suggests that the experience of seeing the Form of Beauty is extremely pleasurable. Similarly, those who ascend from the cave in *Republic* 7 and see the Form of the Good are “unwilling to occupy themselves with human affairs and their souls are always pressing upward, eager to spend their time above” (517c). The thought here is that communion with the Forms is so desirable in itself that it is preferred by those who have experienced it more than anything else, a point reinforced by the extreme reluctance of those who ascend to return back to the cave.\(^{19}\)

However, it is not only the experience of the *highest* achievements of philosophy that Plato thinks of as pleasurable (not only, that is, experiences of gaining knowledge or communing with the Forms). Plato also thinks of the experience of philosophical achievements that fall short of these as pleasurable, including cases of everyday learning and what we might call insights. In the *Theaetetus*, for instance, Socrates describes those who inquire along with him as experiencing such pleasures: “as time goes on and our association continues, all whom God permits are seen to make progress—a progress which is amazing [θαυμαστὸν] both to other people and to themselves... they discover within themselves a multitude of beautiful things, which they bring forth into the light” (150d).

\(^{18}\) This translation is based on Howatson and Sheffield 2008.

\(^{19}\) This point holds regardless of what one thinks about why those who ascend ought to return to the cave and what induces them to do so.
Plato, then, thinks of both the activity of philosophizing and the achievements of philosophy as causing pleasure. In fact, and somewhat incredibly, he thinks that philosophy causes the *most* pleasure. In book 9 of the *Republic*, Socrates distinguishes three kinds of people, each of whom thinks that his life is the most pleasant on the grounds that his characteristic activity is most pleasant. The philosopher thinks the pleasure of learning and acquiring knowledge is most pleasant, the honor-lover that being honored is most pleasant, and the money-lover that gaining money is most pleasant. One way to settle the dispute here is to trust the opinion of the person who is “most experienced” (ἐμπειρότατος, 582a) in these different pleasures (582a). That person is the philosopher, since the philosopher, Socrates claims, has more experience of the pleasures of making a profit and being honored than the lover-of-profit and lover-of-honor have of the pleasure “of learning the nature of things that are,” if indeed they have had that experience at all (582b-d). Thus, the opinion of the philosopher is most trustworthy: he thinks the pleasure of learning is most pleasant, because he has experienced the pleasures of making money and being honored, and, in comparison with those, the pleasure of learning wins out. Socrates concludes that “of the three pleasures, the most pleasant is that of the part of the soul with which we learn, and the one in whom that part rules has the most pleasant life” (582e-583a).

Now, on its own, the fact that philosophy causes more pleasure than any other activity is not enough to explain how doing philosophy merely as a means could lead to pursuing philosophy as an end. But it is a large step forward. For doing philosophy even as a means would increase one’s chances of experiencing intellectual pleasure, and this experience would make one motivated to do philosophy now for the sake of an internal good (i.e., the pleasure of philosophy) instead of an external good, a good only contingently attached to the practice of philosophy (e.g., fame). That might not be enough, however. It is possible for one’s motivation to change in that way and that

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20 See MacIntyre 2007: 188-191 for discussion of internal and external goods. External goods are only contingently attached to a practice, and they can be achieved by alternative routes. Internal goods can be specified only in terms of the practice, and they can be evaluated only by people who have achieved them before.
not at all affect what one cares about (just consider: even Callicles thinks philosophy “delightful,” χαρίεν, G. 484c). What we need, then, is to see how intellectual pleasure from doing philosophy can reshape our fundamental evaluative beliefs.

Now, Plato seems to think that pleasurable experiences do influence our beliefs about the good. Consider Socrates’ claim in the Gorgias that many people would judge a pastry chef to know better than a doctor which foods are “beneficial” (χρηστός, 464d7). What explains that fact is that many people operate with a certain psychological tendency, namely the tendency, if an object causes them pleasure, to believe that it is good.21 Thus, they wrongly conclude that the pastry chef knows which foods are beneficial just from the fact that he can bake pleasurable pastries.22

This psychological tendency reappears in the Phaedo. Socrates claims that, when we experience “strong pleasure or pain,” we are “compelled to believe [ἀναγχάζεται… ἥγεισθαι] at the same time that what causes such feelings must be very clear and very true [ἐναργέστατόν τε εἶναι καὶ ἠληθέστατον]” (Phd. 83c5-8). Now, the belief that the object is also good is not mentioned, but that is unsurprising; Socrates’ point is about what is common to experiences of pleasure and pain. In the case of pleasure, however, it seems highly plausible that the experience would also instill the belief that the object causing it is good. After all, Socrates’ concern is with the evaluative beliefs that influence our “habits and ways of life” (ὁμότροπος τε καὶ ὁμότροφος, 83d8-9)—that is, with beliefs about the good. This detail clarifies Socrates’ point regarding pleasure:

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21 What exactly the connection is between pleasure and apparent goodness for Plato is a big and difficult question, and here I do not mean to address it in any general way. My concern is just to secure the point that, when people experience pleasure, they believe the object that caused that pleasure to be good. This point can be seen as a weaker version of one of the main claims argued for in the excellent Moss 2006, that pleasure is an apparent good. It can also be seen as explained by that stronger claim: if pleasure is an apparent good, then it makes sense that people will confuse the experience of pleasure with the experience of benefit, and thus, when an object causes them pleasure, believe that object is good. See Moss 2007 for a detailed and illuminating discussion of that line of argument in the Gorgias.

22 Gorgias 522b provides more evidence in support of thinking that many people operate with this psychological tendency. Socrates mentions “pleasures” (ἡδονᾶς) that people “regard as benefits” (ὡφελίας νομίζουσιν).
when a person experiences strong pleasure, that experience instills in her the belief that what causes the pleasure is very clear, very true, and very good.

Now, Socrates laments this psychological tendency in both the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedo*. But it is just as capable of turning people in the right direction as leading them astray.\(^{23}\) Moreover, it completes our account of how the felt experience of philosophy merely as a means could lead to acquiring the belief that wisdom is constitutive of happiness and philosophy is intrinsically valuable, so long as one further claim is true. That claim is that, if, when people experience an object causing them pleasure, they believe that the object is good (and they believe this just in virtue of its causing them pleasure), then they also believe that the object is good *in proportion to* how pleasurable it is.\(^{24}\) This claim is highly plausible. Further, we seem to need it to explain why the pastry chef would win against the doctor, for we can imagine that the doctor’s medicine provides the *slightest* pleasure (even the worst cough syrups are the slightest bit sweet), but Socrates’ point is that the pastry chef would easily and definitively win. Moreover, the claim is implied by the *Phaedo* passage: it links intensity of pleasure to how clear and true—and, I would add, good—one believes the object that causes that pleasure to be.

We have good reason to accept, then, that, people believe an object to be good in proportion to how much pleasure it causes them. And if that is so, then, in its causing people to experience the *most* pleasure, the activity of philosophy would instill the belief that it is *best* for them—that is, that it is more valuable than anything else, and thus that it is valuable for the sake of itself.

\(^{23}\) Cf. *Crito* 44d, where Socrates states an instance of the general principle that if a thing is able to do much harm, then it is able to do much good, too: “Would that the majority could inflict the greatest evils, for they would then be capable of the greatest good…”

\(^{24}\) To be sure, the content of the belief is not “objects are good in proportion to how pleasurable they are.” The content of the belief, as before, is just that the object is good, but *how* good it is believed to be is dependent on how pleasurable it is.
6.3.2 Widely applicable

Recall that, on the first path, being vulnerable to the transformative effect of doing philosophy merely as a means requires taking arguments seriously. Some of Socrates’ refuted interlocutors, however, will not be motivated to do that, namely those concerned to acquire only the appearance of knowing. These interlocutors are likely to be those who inordinately value their social standing; refutation damages their social standing, thus motivating them to repair it, but to repair it, they need only to seem to know what refutation showed they do not know. They thus would lack motivation to take arguments seriously, i.e. to do philosophy as a way of learning the truth. Rather, they would be motivated just to acquire enough argumentative, or even sophistical, skill so that those who listen to them receive the impression that they are knowledgeable.

Is there any hope for these interlocutors? Not by way of the first path, since they lack motivation to take arguments seriously. But there may be hope for them on the second path. To acquire argumentative skill, they must improve their reasoning abilities and train in making distinctions, especially regarding abstract concepts. But these activities are recognizably philosophical activities, and conducting them would lead to some learning, even if learning were not desired for itself. Thus, in conducting these activities, interlocutors would be exposed to the pleasurable felt experience of philosophizing, and so they would be vulnerable to their evaluative beliefs shifting because of that experience.

This line of thought may explain why Socrates occasionally sends prospective students to study with the sophists (cf. Tht. 151b, Thg. 127e-128b). Even the intellectual experience they provide is enough to cause intellectual pleasure, and thus enough potentially to reorient a person’s values.
6.3.3 A complication

Now, I have argued that the pleasure of doing philosophy can instill in people the belief that philosophy is the best thing there is—that’s to say, that doing philosophy is constitutive of happiness. What we want, though, is to see how doing philosophy can instill in people the belief that wisdom is constitutive of happiness. It is tempting to think that, because wisdom is the constitutive aim of philosophy, anyone who values doing philosophy will thereby value wisdom. But it is possible to value an activity without valuing its constitutive aim. I might value playing chess and not value winning at it (even if to count as playing chess I must aim at winning). I might be disappointed when I win, because that means the match is completed. Likewise, a person might value doing philosophy but not value wisdom—or, in any case, not value wisdom as highly as she values the mere activity of doing philosophy.

Nevertheless, this sort of person would be the exception. It is more likely that, if a person values a goal-oriented activity, she values also the goal. It is more likely, then, that if a person believes philosophy is constitutive of happiness, she believes that wisdom is, too. But even if she did not—even if she were one of the exceptions—it may be that her \textit{continuing} to do the philosophy that she now finds so pleasurable and valuable will expose her to arguments about why wisdom is so valuable, too, and thus, by way of the content of arguments, lead her to believe that wisdom is constitutive of happiness. A similar mechanism is found in \textit{Republic} 3: once a person takes pleasure in good things, she will welcome “the reason” (τὸ ὑλόν) when it comes, that is, she will be receptive to arguments about why those things are good (402a).

The last note to sound is that none of this is to endorse the view that pleasure is what makes the life of philosophy the best life. It is only to identify pleasure as a mechanism that can motivate a person to adopt the belief that wisdom is constitutive of happiness, and thus to dedicate herself to the life of philosophy. Plausibly, once a person is committed to that life, she will eventually develop a more sophisticated view about what makes it so worthwhile (perhaps after grasping the Form of the Good, for
instance, or after considering arguments about the nature of humans and which activities are appropriate in light of that nature).\textsuperscript{25}

### 6.4 Conclusion

We have seen two ways that doing philosophy as a means can be transformative, such that a person comes to believe wisdom is constitutive of happiness and adopt the life of philosophy. On the first way, the \textit{repetition} of arguments would eventually overpower the beliefs that act as the ‘bodyguards’ of a person’s mistaken values, and, as a result, they would be disposed to respond favorably to an argument that wisdom is constitutive of happiness. Further, they would encounter such an argument eventually, since, to acquire the knowledge they need instrumentally, they must grapple with arguments concerning fundamental values. On the second way, the \textit{pleasure} of doing philosophy would cause people to believe that philosophy—and, in most cases, also wisdom—is constitutive of happiness. These explanations are not in competition. They are meant rather as complements—as two viable ways that doing philosophy as a means could lead a person to adopt the life of philosophy. One way may work better for certain types of people, and both ways can work in tandem: the pleasure of philosophy can cause a person to continue doing it, the more she continues doing it the more she will take it seriously, and, if she takes it seriously, she will be receptive to arguments concerning fundamental values; so, too, the more she takes arguments seriously, the more pleasure she will be able to get from considering them.

These two explanations justify Socrates’ use of refutation and exhortation as tools to convert his interlocutors to the life of philosophy. As we have seen, those methods aim to motivate interlocutors to do philosophy as a means—in cases of refutation, as a means to repairing their self-esteem or social standing; in cases of exhortation, as a means to satisfying their \textit{erōs}. What justifies these as methods of conversion is that doing philosophy as a means can be transformative in the way that Socrates desires.

\textsuperscript{25} Plausibly, too, the role of pleasure in the good life is something you can only figure out by doing philosophy.
Thus, Socrates’ strategy for conversion is, at bottom, a strategy of motivating the pursuit of the right things for the wrong reasons, in the hopes that, in pursuing those things, one will discover the right reasons and start acting on them. This is a familiar strategy: Pascal recommends that people believe in God based on considerations of self-interest, in the hopes that, once they start acting as if they believed, they will eventually acquire genuine belief. Similarly, MacIntyre 2007 writes of motivating a child to play chess by promising her the reward of candy, in the hopes that “there will come a time when the child will find in those goods specific to chess... a new set of reasons” (188).

What justifies such strategies is the thought that, in some important contexts, including the choice of a way of life, the right reasons can come into view only after taking up some practice, and, therefore, that the practice cannot be motivated by the right reasons until it is taken up on some other basis. So much, as we have seen, is how Plato thinks of the case of philosophy: doing it for the right reasons requires the belief that wisdom is constitutive of happiness, but one’s defenses against adopting that belief are simply too strong to overcome without doing philosophy for an extensive period of time—and that is what both Socratic refutation and exhortation aim to motivate.26

26 It is worth noting, too, that, even independent of Plato’s thoughts here, philosophy is an especially compelling candidate for the sort of practice the right reasons for which would become available only after taking it up, since philosophy trains its practitioners in correctly identifying and evaluating reasons.
Bibliography


