ABSTRACT

Where is Socrates Going?
The Philosophy of Conversion in Plato's *Euthydemus*

Richard T. Whittington, Ph.D.

Committee Chairperson: Anne Marie Bowery, Ph.D.

This work examines the aim of Socratic philosophy in Plato's *Euthydemus*. To understand the conflict that occurs in the dialogue between Socrates and his sophistic rivals, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, one must evaluate Socrates' overarching goal and its divergence from sophistry. The author argues, however, that a sound analysis of this dialogue must go further and understand Socrates' quarrel with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus as part of a larger quarrel between philosophy and the competitive values of Greek society. The two sophists in this dialogue hardly merit serious, sustained attention. They make no serious arguments and do not seem clever enough to conceal the speciousness of their method. They practice eristic controversy for only one purpose: to refute their interlocutor and move quickly to the next refutation before anyone has time to scrutinize the soundness of their frequently absurd argument. Indeed, one might wonder why Plato spends his energy trying to discredit this absurdly clownish pair. The author argues that the brothers do not seem terribly threatening or important, but Plato's critique does not stop with them. Rather, he uses them as a caricature of Greek culture and its cult of victory and violence. In opposition to the culture's celebration of competitive

values, he articulates a model of philosophical cooperation or (put differently) protreptic dialogue. Instead of aiming to win a dispute, he uses dialogue to convert his interlocutor to philosophy, a goal that diverges radically from sophistry. In this way, Socrates engages his interlocutor an intimate way, leading him patiently toward philosophy. At the same time, Socrates does not speak only to his interlocutor; he offers protreptic dialogue as a public model of discourse and an implicit critique of the city's obsession with competition and victory. Finally, the author contends that one cannot understand Socrates' philosophical goal (namely, exhorting his interlocutor to love wisdom) without understanding his sense of divine mission. In the *Euthydemus* Socrates begins with the divine sign, which sustains his sense of mission and purpose even when his protreptic dialogues terminate in aporia.

Where is Socrates Going?
The Philosophy of Conversion in Plato's *Euthydemus*

by

Richard T. Whittington, M.A.

A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Philosophy

_____
Michael D. Beaty, Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by the Dissertation Committee

_____
Anne-Marie Bowery, Ph.D., Chairperson

_____
Robert C. Miner, Ph.D.

_____
J. Lenore Wright, Ph.D.

_____
David E. Corey, Ph.D.

_____
Stuart E. Rosenbaum, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
August 2008

_____
J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Page bearing signatures is kept on file in the Graduate School.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

I. Summary of dialogue

The *Euthydemus* remains unfamiliar to many readers, even those familiar with many of Plato's other dialogues. For that reason a brief introduction to the dialogue should seems necessary to clarify the themes I explore in this dissertation and provide a context for its central argument.

The *Euthydemus* belongs to Plato's narrated dialogues. Speaking to Crito, Socrates narrates his encounter with two foreign sophists, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, and occasionally interrupts the narrative to converse directly with Crito. Crito himself initiates the narrative; he had recently observed (without overhearing) an encounter between Socrates and Euthydemus at the Lyceum and would like to know more about him. He has a personal interest in the itinerant teachers because he seeks a qualified educator for his son, Critobulus. Initially he only mentions one sophist (whom Socrates recognizes as Euthydemus), apparently unaware of the other sophist present at the Lyceum. Socrates calls attention to Dionysodorus, Euthydemus' brother and the other half of the sophistic team. After correcting Crito's mistake, Socrates goes on to describe the brothers' current occupation as well as the trajectory of their joint career. They come rather late to the practice of sophistry. Before embracing eristic argumentation (their sophistic specialty), they fought on the battlefield, argued in the courts and imparted their skill to others for a fee (272a). The brothers have not abandoned aggressive activities like warfare and legal debate, which divide the world

into enemies and competitors. Far from retiring to a life of private, leisured conversation, they have extended their skill in pancration—or "all-round fighting"—to a different type of combat. According to Socrates "not a single man can stand up to them, they have become so skilled in fighting in arguments and in refuting whatever may be said, no matter whether it is true or false" (272). Briefly stated, the brothers aim at refuting arguments regardless of their actual merits; as teachers they impart this skill to their students. Practitioners of eristic regard their interlocutors as foes, not people who can shed light on genuine perplexities. They have no interest in critiquing flawed arguments or seeking better alternatives; their method of controversy can make any argument seem false. Conversely, eristic also constructs elaborate arguments to defend patent falsehoods, a habit that becomes increasingly comical and strange as the dialogue progresses. Socrates conveys this information with mock admiration. He even tells Crito that he intends to "hand myself over to these men, since they say that they can make any other person clever at the same things in a short time" (272b). He invites Crito to participate in this odd endeavor, apparently forgetting that Crito does not seek an educator for himself; he seeks someone qualified to educate his son, still young enough to participate in higher education without violating convention.[1] Still, Crito claims to have "no objections…if you really think well of their plan" (272d) but insists on hearing "what we are going to learn (272d) in greater detail. Socrates honors Crito's request with a narrative.

[1]Athenian convention had entered a stage of transition at this time, extending education beyond the traditional span .See C.C.W. Taylor's Introduction to the *Protagoras*: "The demand for success in forensic and political oratory, fostered by the increase in participatory democracy which was a feature of political life, led to the development of specialized techniques of persuasion and argument, associated in particular with the names of Gorgias and Protagoras." C.C.W. Taylor, Introduction (in Plato's *Protagoras*), Oxford University Press, 1996. P. x.]

Socrates' narrative begins with the divine sign. Socrates tells Crito that he was preparing to leave the Lyceum when the sign "put in an appearance" (273a), telling him remain. Socrates obediently resumes his place. Shortly thereafter the brothers enter the building and walk around the cloister a few times before Clinias enters the room and catches their attention. Clinias notices Socrates and sits down at his right; at this point the brothers notice Clinias and also gravitate in Socrates' direction. Given this conjunction of events, the purpose of the sign's command seems obvious, although Socrates does not say so explicitly. The sign prevented Socrates' departure because he needs to intervene between Clinias and the brothers, who have cast their predatory eyes on the young Athenian. "I was keeping a good eye on them" Socrates tells Crito, clearly wary of their interest in Clinias. The narrative thus begins on a serious note; the sign sets a solemn tone for a dialogue that oscillates wildly between gravity and farce. A hint of menace marks the opening of Socrates' narrative. The brothers' interest in Clinias does not seem benign; for that reason, Socrates assumes a protective role, a role the divine sign perhaps intended for him when it forbade him to leave the Lyceum. Since the sign does state its intentions, Socrates must interpret its messages. Here the mission he needs to fulfill seems rather obvious, especially as the encounter with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus unfurls. He must test the brothers to judge whether or not they threaten Clinias.

After mentioning his encounter with the sign, Socrates describes the other people who attended the event. He notices Ctesippus, "a well-bred fellow except for a certain youthful brashness," and a group of Clinias' admirers, who remain on the narrative's margin. Socrates introduces Clinias to the brothers, describing them as warriors and legal

experts, i.e., people who occupy themselves with the serious affairs of the polis. The brothers deride this outdated introduction, apparently indifferent to Socrates' laudatory tone. They have a new expertise, teaching arête, and treat battle and law as "diversions" (273d). Socrates reacts to this typically sophistic pronouncement with disbelief. At the same time, he tempers his skepticism with mock veneration: "Good heavens, I said, what a claim you make…I am addressing you as thought you were gods . . . the magnitude of your claim certainly gives me some cause for disbelief" (273e-274a). In order to banish his disbelief and edify Clinias, Socrates asks the brothers to provide a demonstration of their wisdom. Will they use their skill to exhort Clinias to virtue?

Euthydemus readily agrees; they will engage Clinias or anyone else willing to cooperate. The person in question makes no difference. This agreement opens the first round of the eristic game, which amply justifies Socrates' wariness about the sophists and their impact on Clinias. The brothers quickly lure Clinias into a perplexing series of questions and answers that terminate in a "refutation" of whatever he says. Their questions snare him in a rapid succession of well-sprung verbal traps; his participation is purely mechanical since the brothers always control the outcome. They first of all ask a question that limits the number of answers available to him. After Clinias chooses an answer, they cancel it with a ready-made refutation. He blushes with humiliation and the crowd amplifies his defeat with automatic applause, "just like a chorus at a sign from their director" (276c). Although Socrates repeatedly compares eristic to a game, it also resembles a well-rehearsed play with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus slickly manipulating the action and prompting the crowd's response.

Pleased with the outcome of the first "argument" (276d), Euthydemus tackles Clinias with another question. Another syllogism springs open like a trap. However, the conclusion of the next syllogism directly contravenes Euthydemus' first refutation. This inconsistency should come as no surprise to Socrates. Before round two begins, Dionysodorus leans over and confides a revealing bit of information to Socrates: "All our questions are of this same inescapable sort, Socrates, he said" (276e). This recalls Socrates description of the brothers as people who "refute whatever may be said, whether it be true or false" and it accurately forecasts their behavior throughout the narrative. Certainly the first two eristic arguments vindicate what Dionysodorus claims. Together the brothers assert opposite conclusions at Clinias' expense—and for no other purpose; his defeat and their victory constitute their telos. They do not bother masking their fundamental disregard for truth.

Before the brothers can ambush Clinias a third time, Socrates interrupts and rescues him from further humiliation. In an attempt to console Clinias and turn the encounter in a serious direction, Socrates suggests to Clinias that the brothers probably use these refutations as a prelude to something else, presumably something worthwhile. Perhaps they confuse Clinias with poor arguments to teach him the necessity of using words carefully. Once he has learned that lesson they can introduce him to the "sophistic mysteries" (277d). Socrates therefore understands that the brothers must rely on a crude manipulation of words and phrases to win their arguments. At best, they labor to dispel the confusions that arise from a muddled use of language. As he puts it: "These things are the frivolous part of study . . . and I call these things 'frivolity' because even if a man

were to learn many or even all such things, he would be none the wiser as to how matters stand" (278c).

This last assertion points to the pedagogical model Socrates now demonstrates in an effort to "put an end to the joking" (278d). This protreptic model of teaching seeks to convert the interlocutor to a love of wisdom. From the first line it stands in contrast to the eristic method. Socrates begins with a question for Clinias and provides his own answer before allowing Clinias to speak.

> Do all men wish to do well? Or is this question one of the ridiculous ones I was afraid of just now? I suppose it is stupid even to raise such a question, since there could hardly be a man who would not wish to do well.
> There is no such person, Clinias agreed (278e).

The brothers intimidated Clinias by demanding that he answer a difficult question without allowing him time for deliberation. Socrates poses a question with an intuitive answer and simply elicits Clinias' agreement; he does not require an answer and therefore run the risk embarrassing his interlocutor. The whole demonstration has a conversational and cooperative character. This does not mean that Clinias makes a substantial contribution to the argument – not, at least, in the first part of the demonstration. (The dialogue has two protreptic sections, and in the second half Clinias becomes more actively engaged.) However, Socrates consistently elicits Clinias' agreement before progressing from one stage of the argument to the next.

This cooperative approach underscores the primary distinction between eristic and protreptic. Socrates does not merely articulate better, logically sound arguments to expose the brothers' specious arguments. He does not object to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus because they seem incapable of distinguishing a bad argument from a good one. The brothers do not use bad arguments because they lack skill or intelligence. They

deliberately mangle ordinary language to confuse Clinias, which implies that they could construct better arguments if they wanted; they simply lack any motive for doing so. Socrates, by contrast, wants to exhort Clinias to wisdom, a goal incompatible with confusing Clinias or placing him at a disadvantage. Put differently, Socrates rejects the entire goal of eristic disputation, namely, achieving victory over another person in the eyes of the public. This rejection involves him in a critique of competition or sport—i.e., teaching arête in the agonistic sense—as an appropriate model of education. He implies that love of victory has no place in a pedagogy that tries to orient students toward love of wisdom. Love of wisdom (or philosophy) must replace "excellence," the desire to *excel*, before the student or teacher can achieve progress. A clear model of education therefore emerges from the protreptic demonstration. Socrates presents education as a common quest for wisdom. In contrast, the brothers only seek victory, and the measure of their success lies in the interlocutor's confusion and the crowd's applause. For that reason they only need to win *apparent* victories. They do not seek (and perhaps do not believe in) the attainment of true insight.[2] Their way of arguing contrasts with Socrates' for obvious reasons; their paths diverge toward radically different goals.

The narrative frame interrupts Socrates' description of the second protreptic demonstration, drawing Crito into the events he failed to witness, much less join. The frame also marks the end of the dialogue, where Crito warns Socrates that his

[2]Strauss argues that the brothers, in the first eristic demonstration, implicitly argue that no wisdom exists except eristic wisdom, although they immediately contradict this assertion and therefore point beyond their own cynical program: "We also note that if the fallacy is disregarded, the two refutations [of the first eristic demonstration] prove either that neither the wise nor the unwise learn, i.e., that learning is impossible, hence presumably that wisdom proper is impossible, and hence that the only wisdom possible is eristics; or they prove that both the wise and the unwise learn, i.e., that wisdom is not only possible but even most easy to acquire…The contradiction between the two implicit results leads us to the question as to whether wisdom is possible. The final result leads then beyond the brothers' wisdom." Strauss etc. [find info]

involvement with the brothers and public philosophizing generally could exacerbate the public's negative perception of his activities. Socrates rejects Crito's fearful suggestion that he philosophize privately to avoid trouble. As in the dialogue that bears his name, Crito reveals an anxiety about public opinion that prevents him form participating in Socratic philosophy. His anxiety also clouds his understanding of Socrates' narrative. Socrates has just presented his pedagogical model—eristic—as an alternative to sophistic trickery, but Crito fails to notice the distinction. He also fails to notice that Socrates has revealed himself as the lover of wisdom fit to educate Critias; he could aid Crito's son just as he guided Clinias toward an appreciation for wisdom and philosophical inquiry – and away from eristic. This revelation of Crito's character points back to the dialogue's beginning, where Crito informs Socrates that the crowed at the Lyceum defeated his effort to overhear what happened at the Lyceum. On the other hand, he does overhear the voice of public criticism directed against Socrates and he tries gently, but ineffectually, to save Socrates from himself.

II. The Argument

Why did Plato write the *Euthydemus*?[3] This question does not seek a final answer and will not find one. No reader can exhaust an author's motives (often oblique or concealed) for writing a text. Also, although it may seem trite to say so, great writers usually accomplish more even in a short work than a single motive or theme can comprehend. The *Euthydemus* is not an exception. Nevertheless, the question hints at

[3]While anyone thinking and writing about a platonic dialogue has this question somewhere in mind, it seems to arise especially when discussing the *Euthydemus*. For example, see Hawtrey's *Plato's* Euthydemus pgs. 15-16. He asks this very question and follows it with a question, absent from this work: "Why does Plato write?" P. 16

the problem that every interpreter must confront: What contribution does this dialogue make to our understanding of Plato? Indeed, one can formulate the question more helpfully in the following way: Not why did Plato write the *Euthydemus*, but why should anyone read it? As it happens, few people read this work of Plato's. Compared to the attention given such dialogues as the *Republic*, *Apology*, *Meno* et. al., the *Euthydemus* languishes in obscurity.[4] The literature devoted to this strange and illuminating work hardly covers a single shelf. For that reason, the question "Why read the dialogue" arises quite naturally; people unfamiliar with its name and reputation want to know what claim it has on their attention. (Few educated people would ask a similar question about the *Republic*.)

Perhaps this neglect stems partly from the absurdity of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, the sophists who dominate the narrative.[5] They occupy the lower echelons of the sophistic movement and apparently have nothing interesting to say. They do not even attempt to argue plausibly. In fact, they behave so crudely one might wonder why Plato squanders his talent and energy trying to discredit them. They scarcely merit comparison with someone as keen and interesting as Protagoras. Their arguments rely on transparent absurdities that other writers, including Rosamond Sprague and Thomas Chance, have skillfully anatomized—although even an untrained observer could detect something wildly amiss in their rapid-fire arguments. Much of the controversy surrounding the *Euthydemus* understandably centers on the question of logic. Did

[4]This situation has improved vastly since Rosamond Sprague wrote *The Use of Fallacy in Plato's Dialogues*. Still, the work receives relatively little attention and suffers a dubious reputation due to the ridiculous brand of sophistry it portrays. I address doubts about the seriousness of the dialogue in this introduction and elsewhere.

[5]Frieländer presents them as buffoons and one can hardly contest his judgment.

Socrates properly understand the eristic fallacies or did Plato lift them from a sophistic manual and mock them for some other reason?[6] I think unpersuasive to suggest that Socrates does not understand the logical, rational problems that riddle the eristic presentations. Even so, I do not think Socrates clashes with the brothers because he regards them as sloppy logicians; he objects to the whole purpose of eristic argumentation, which lends itself to a *conscious* abuse of language. Still, it seems hardly credible to say that he only feebly understands (if he understands at all) why the eristic arguments prove nothing. To the contrary, Socrates easily exposes the weaknesses inherent in the brothers' "refutations"; he introduces qualifications and questions that expose the artificiality of their "proofs" and, as a result, nearly undermines the whole routine. At the same time, Socrates does not publicize the brothers' fraudulence or try to humiliate them before their audience. On the contrary, he allows them to suppress his legitimate counter-arguments while ironically praising their "wisdom." His mock admiration notwithstanding, he plainly understands the mechanism that keeps eristic in motion—although, as Hawtrey argues, readers must work out for themselves the exact nature of the eristic fallacies.[7] Socrates also understands that this mechanism does not transcend the slick virtuosity of a card trick. He has no trouble shattering their hollow contrivances, and does so to devastating effect. At the same time, I do not think that logical refutation constitutes the most interesting feature of the *Euthydemus* or that readers should approach the dialogue as a foreshadowing of Aristotle; still less do I view the dialogue as a critique of the metaphysical positions that litter the eristic

[6]See M.A. Stewart's exchange with Sprague, *Plato's Sophistry*. .

[7]Hawtery, R. S. W. *Plato's* Euthydemus, pg. 20.

demonstrations.[8] Since the brothers do not make serious use of Eleatic logic or Socratic recollection, they do not invite a serious critique of those philosophical positions. I also do not regard the dialogue primarily as a critique of sophistry. As I said before, the sheer crudity of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus sets them apart from greater adherents of the sophistic movement. Their performance does not bring disrepute to all sophists, although the violence that seethes beneath eristic competition mirrors a broader radical (though not strictly sophistic) approach to human society.[9] But this fact alone does not prove that Plato has simply torched a straw man. Instead, it should redirect one's attention to the

[8]Both Sprague and Hawtery give these metaphysical allusions—primarily to the Eleatics but also to the Socratic theory of recollection – far more attention than I find justified. Plato may have regarded them as "academic jokes" (21), to mention Hawtery's tentative suggestion, but I see no reason to share Hawtery's bewilderment while trying to determine Plato's reason for allowing the brothers to allude to his own arguments: "Yet it seems to me that the difference [between eristic and Socraticism] is clouded rather than brought out by putting Plato's own teaching into the mouths of the sophists . . . (pg. 20). The difference, however, does not lie in the incompatible teachings of Socrates and the brothers—and not only because the brothers apparently have no "teaching." The difference lies in the brothers' goal in alluding, for example, to Socratic recollection or the Eleatic denial of movement. Socrates does argue at length with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus when they offer their caricatures of various philosophical perspectives. (Hence Hawtery's view that Plato lets readers work out the details.) They do not seriously represent a philosophical camp, and a grave, extended critique of their arguments (if Plato offered it) would degenerate into inadvertent farce. A gaping incongruity would exist between the critique and its object. The situation would resemble a writer using high literary standards to demolish a bestselling pulp novel without noticing that the maligned author did not intend, perhaps, to produce a work of lasting merit. Perhaps the novelist simply craved the money and fame that attend popular writing. In a similar way, the brothers merely use the language of philosophy to win their arguments and build a lucrative career. The same holds true of their mutilated syllogisms. The brothers subordinate everything to their goal, which has nothing to do with the form or content of their arguments.

[9]In other words, one cannot conclude on the basis of this dialogue that most sophists behaved like irresponsible clowns. The critique of competition and the cult of success nevertheless plays an important (but rather implicit) role in the *Protagoras*, where Socrates encounters a far more respectable opponent. It would be worthwhile to question how much the *Euthydemus* points to a broader understanding of the *Protagoras*, a theme I discuss briefly in the Conclusion. For Protagoras, human community does not become possible until human beings master the art of politics. Furthermore, the art of politics cannot sustain a community that does not have recourse to the art of war, which allows human beings to conquer natural predators (*Protagoras* 322b). (He would therefore disagree with Thomas Hobbes, who refers to the "state of nature" as a state of war; the art of war belongs inseparably to politics.) Plato, by contrast, portrays war as a contingent feature of human communities; it arises from human acquisitiveness and greed, becoming necessary when cities outstrip their own resources and must use force to expand their sphere of influence (*Phaedo* 66c; *Republic* 373d). The contrast between agonistic debate (or eristic controversy) and protreptic dialogue mirror a deeper disagreement about the possibilities of human interaction. This disagreement arises between Socrates and the sophists but has a wider significance, for the critique of sophistry also implicates the city and its war-like ethos (on display in Homer and the Milenian Dialogue).

more serious critique that invigorates the dialogue. The critique centers on the agonistic, competitive understanding of aretê that prevails in Greek culture and threatens to subvert higher educational values. The brothers claim to teach aretê and, in a sense, they do. They embody a stridently competitive spirit that makes victory the prevailing goal of human action. Here the spirit of competition and conquest migrates from the battlefield and the courtroom and colonizes the relatively new world of higher education.[10] Rational dialogue and the quest for knowledge and wisdom do not survive the whirl of eristic "refutations" and the crowd's thunderous applause. In short, the Greek model of excellence—or "virtue"—comes under serious scrutiny and extends Plato's critique beyond the sophistic movement to the dangers deeply rooted in the Athenian cult of success.

In this work, therefore, I make the following argument: 1) The *Euthydemus* distinguishes between eristic and protreptic by underscoring their divergent ends; spurious logic serves eristic but does not explain Plato's fundamental objection to it. The next step derives something crucial from the first: 2) Plato does not limit his critique of eristic to the brothers or even sophistic movement, viewed as an isolated phenomenon. Eristic reveals the corrosive effect of Greek culture—or its dominant goals and values—on education and the youth.[11] Love of wisdom and truth become casualties of Greek culture and its obsession with victory and success, not to mention its glorification of

[10]I use this phrase anachronistically, referring to the extension of education into young adulthood—a relatively new phenomenon in Greek culture and limited, usually, to the leisured aristocracy.

[11]Unencumbered by the modern fact-value distinction, Plato does not distinguish between moral and intellectual formation. Speaking metaphorically in the Allegory of the Cave, to see the truth of the cave (and ultimately the light of the Good) a person's whole body must turn around. On the divided line, even math and geometry constitute only the penultimate stage in a highly moral theory of education—one in which the form of the Good becomes the goal of enlightenment and learning.

violence. I therefore argue that Socrates' protreptic goal lends itself to a cooperative, one-on-one model of discourse, but also serves as a public critique and model.[12] The first chapter focuses on Plato's critique of eristic and Greek competitiveness; the second investigates the complex relationship between private discourse and public criticism that emerges from the protreptic sections of the *Euthydemus*. This overall argument, however, requires a third step: 3) one must pay serious attention to the divine sign that gives Socrates the overarching sense of purpose (both public and private) that I discuss in chapters one and two. My focus on Socrates' dual goal raises a troubling question: How does Socrates choose "love of wisdom" as a goal when his protreptic dialogues fail to give "wisdom" a determinate meaning? What motivates him to begin his quest in the first place if he has cannot define the goal of his quest (just as Euthyphro, for example, has difficulty defining "piety," the concept he uses to justify his own actions)? Does he assume the existence of a higher telos without evidence or proof? This possibility seems

[12]By focusing on the fact that Socratic discourse has an entirely different telos, I widen the gap between Socrates and the brothers in a way that David Hitchcock, for example, does not. He writes that "The most probable origin of professional eristic . . . is Socrates himself. This is not to say that the brothers got their repertoire of fallacious tricks from Socrates, but that they practiced the type of refutation in which Socrates engaged, and inserted into it the trickery which subsequently earned the name 'sophistry'." Hitchcock argues that only "trickery" separates eristic disputation from Socratic elenchus, which Plato abandons in the *Euthydemus* in favor of conversational, cooperative inquiry. From this perspective, the *Euthydemus* implicitly criticizes elenchus or judges it "inherently competitive" (James A. Arieti, *Philosophy in the Ancient World: An Introduction*, pg. 9). Protreptic therefore diverges from both eristic and elenchus because of its cooperative character; it thus marks a transition from the early Socratic dialogues to a later phase in which cooperation and dialogue (rather than cross-examination) become the dominant modes of philosophical interaction. I argue that Socrates differs from the brothers in a more significant way, here and elsewhere. He conflicts with the brothers because his protreptic model has a fundamentally different goal. This goal lends itself to cooperation rather than struggle, assuming Socrates does not have a recalcitrant interlocutor; elenchus becomes necessary when an interlocutor claims to understand the truth and stands in need of refutation – a situation not present in the *Euthydemus*, since Clinias does not assert an opinion or idea. Hitchcock's argument resembles Chance's notion that the brothers allow philosophers to recognize, in a humorous way, their own worst tendencies. In contrast, I argue that the brothers exemplify the *city's* worst tendencies. Eristic aims only at refutation and victory. By contrast, even elenchus has a protreptic goal. Although he uses dialectic to refute his interlocutors, Socrates subordinates this negative movement to another goal; he wants to make his interlocutor aware of his own ignorance, the first step on the path to wisdom.

strange, since Socrates harshly criticizes other people, like Euthyphro and the poets, who embrace ideas for which they can give no rational account (*logos*). In the third chapter I argue that this question has damning implications if one does not remember the arche as well as the telos of protreptic dialogue. To make this point I emphasize the importance of the divine sign, which stands at the beginning of Socrates' narrative and his involvement with Clinias. For better or worse, Socrates grounds his action in a trans-rational sense of mission; the mysterious sign serves as the catalyst for rational protreptic dialogue in the *Euthydemus*. I ultimately suggest a parallel between Socrates and his inscrutable sign. The sign speaks privately to Socrates, although he publicly acknowledges its existence. His interaction with Clinias has a similar private-public character. Socrates speaks privately to Clinias, engaging him in one-on-one dialogue. At the same time he becomes a sign not only for Clinias but for the entire city.

To put this argument more succinctly: In this dialogue Socrates exhibits a dual purpose, private and public, that sets him fundamentally apart from the sophists. He becomes private sign for Clinias and a public sign for Athens. His purpose is protreptic; he aims at converting his interlocutor to love of wisdom and, in doing so, gives the city a model of non-competitive discourse. I argue that one must understand the *Euthydemus* as a dialogue about fundamentally conflicting goals. Moreover, Socrates derives his sense of purpose from a trans-rational sense of divine mission. This interpretive approach offers a rich understanding of the dialogue's multiple themes: The Socratic critique of Greek culture and the role of "religious" faith in Socrates' life; it allows me to read the *Euthydemus* as a dialogue about conversion rather than logic or metaphysics. The theme of conversion links the *Euthydemus* to the Allegory of the Cave, where the prisoner must

convert his whole body before making progress toward enlightenment. As Socrates says, learning does not consist of putting sight into blind eyes. Rather, learning requires "one must convert (*periakteon*) the whole soul (*holêi têi psuchêi*) until it is able to gaze at (*thêomenê*)that which is and the brightest thing that is . . ."(518c-519a). Everything begins with radical re-direction. At first glance, the *Euthydemus* looks like a dialogue about two conflicting forms of conversion. The dialogue apparently depicts two young men who undergo a conversion to competing models of education. Clinias becomes increasingly stimulated during his interaction with Socrates, making larger contributions to the conversation in the second part of the protreptic demonstration; he apparently remains inspired even when the protreptic inquiry terminates in aporia. On the flipside, his admirer Ctesippus makes a surprisingly swift transition from hostility to brothers to participation in eristic. In the end he matches Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in his ability to "refute" arguments. Socrates even offers him as an example of how one can learn eristic quickly. One might argue that Ctesippus becomes *their* convert. I take a somewhat different approach. In my view, Ctesippus does not need to "convert" because he already embodies the agonistic spirit that drives eristic controversy. He joins the game without missing a beat because he recognizes something familiar in the brothers' activities. In that sense, he represents Greek culture in microcosm: often hostile to foreign sophists but ultimately united to them in the spirit of competition.[13] The fact that Ctesippus despises Euthydemus and Dionysodorus (and never ceases to mock them) does not alter this essential fact. After all, antagonism lies at the root of eristic, not

[13] I should point out that I do not mean to compare every sophist with the brothers or Protagoras. I speak of a particular type of sophist, one who reduces dialogue to competition. Rhetoricians like Gorgias exhibit a similar tendency.

comradeship. The brothers do not try to recruit partners; such people would deflect attention from their own cleverness. They attract students who also crave self-advancement at any cost. Ctesippus resembles the sophists more purely when he tries to trump them at their own game. He does not become the brothers' convert but reveals his own character and the troubling dynamics of the culture that produced him. To put this somewhat differently, the eristic method not really present a goal that Ctesippus, and many Athenians, do not already aspire to; in itself it has not goal at all but gives people a neutral method for achieving whatever end they already desire. As Terry Penner says, "The sophists and rhetoricians purport to put persuasive *means* in the students' hands to achieve whatever goals 'seem best' to them…without raising any questions about what people take to be their ends."[14] One should stress the phrase "seems best," for the brothers dwell within the realm of appearances, a fact that links them to their audience and people like Crito. Socratic philosophy, more often than not, must turn people away from what seems best to them and offer a different aspiration altogether. It is in that sense that Socratic philosophy qualifies as "protreptic" and eristic does not.

The brothers, for their part, stand revealed as a caricature of the Greek competitive ethos. Meanwhile, Socrates emerges as Athens' divine sign, the philosopher who demonstrates an alternative ideal that could arrest the culture's spiritual decline. Although less sweeping and political than the *Republic*, the protreptic dialogues of the *Euthydemus* also touch the roots of human existence and interaction. However, it does so on a smaller scale. Here Plato does not build a *kallipolis* in speech, but he does show how speech can help unite people in a shared love of wisdom. Socrates and Clinias

[14]Penner, Terry, "Socrates and the Early Dialogues," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, (Cambridge University Press, 1992). 137-138.

escape the competitive demands that permeate their society and find strange expression in Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Although their inquiry ends in aporia, they enjoy a brief moment of transcendence. For a short dialogue, the *Euthydemus* has a scope comparable to a dialogue as long as the *Republic*; it gives a devastating critique of a culture and its defects while demonstrating, however briefly, the divine and transformative possibilities of philosophy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance I received from Dr. Anne-Marie Bowery while working on this project. This work would not exist without her guidance, support, and generosity. I also wish to thank the Department of Philosophy at Baylor University for their moral and financial support over the past five years. Finally, Dr. David Corey offered excellent insight and advice during the early stages of my research, and for that I express my deepest gratitude.

DEDICATION

To my parents, for their love and support throughout the years

CHAPTER ONE

Education, Competition and the City

I. Aretê and Sophistry

In the Introduction and this chapter, I argue that Plato turns Euthydemus and Dionysodorus into symbols of the city and its competitive ethos.[1] This dialogue obviously pits cooperative protreptic against eristic disputation and its invidious methods, but it has a larger critical scope. The *Euthydemus* also critiques the Greek understanding of aretê, using Euthydemus and Dionysodorus as an extreme example of what happens when "excellence–or the desire to excel–pervades a culture and becomes the principal goal of education. A competitive society must train its students in the art of winning. When education becomes a preparation for defeating the competition, a cynical disregard for wisdom and truthful dialogue spreads corruption throughout the culture. The brothers represent a method of discourse (and a model of education) that pitilessly eliminates any goal except winning the argument. They both epitomize and exaggerate the city's cult of victory. In that sense, Plato uses the brothers like a fun-house mirror, holding them up to a society eager to blame its inexorable decay on both sophists and philosophers. The image, though distorted, reflects a disturbing reality about Greek and Athenian life.

[1]In contrast, Thomas C. Chance argues that Plato uses the brothers to satirize "the baseness and ugliness in all philosophy." Chance, Thomas, *Plato's Euthydemus: An Analysis of What is and What is Not Philosophy*. P. 19.

Euthydemus and Dionysodorus offer a darkly comical lesson in the dangers that attend the Greek cult of victory, particularly in the realm of education.[2]

This polemical approach allows Plato to reverse the charge against Socrates and argue that Athenian society corrupts the youth. Going further, he suggests that the roots of the corruption run deep into the culture's past. To be sure, the brothers' eristic method has a corrupting influence, just as Socrates fears. However, that sophistic influence is not entirely alien to Athens–a parasite corrupting the host culture. On the contrary, these foreign sophists successfully attach themselves to Athens because they appeal to the city's native love of conquest. The goal of eristic, achieving victory, has significant appeal for the denizens of a competitive culture. In other words, the danger arises from a competitive disposition that coincides with the city's understanding of aretê. Athens itself harbors a love for success (and a corresponding contempt for failure) that potentially corrupts the youth because it prevents them from loving wisdom without regard for prestige and honor. Indeed, virtue becomes tightly identified with public honor. Athenians identify aretê with one's ability to excel in society, which depends on the approval of one's fellow citizens.

Socrates intervenes to shield Clinias from the influence of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. He engages Clinias in a pedagogical demonstration, a dialogue with a non-competitive goal. The protreptic demonstration does not resemble a game with

[2]See Alasdair MacIntyre's very interesting discussion of the Greek cult of victory and its understanding of *arête* in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* ". . . just as in Homer, to be supremely excellent and to win are treated as so closely linked that no possibility of incompatibility between the pursuit of the prizes of virtue and the pursuit of virtue itself appear to exist. It is by his *arête* that at Athens someone is judged fit for public office, says Pericles (Thucydides, II, 37, 1) . . . But the cultivation of *arête* at home and abroad is not just in the interest of being virtuous; it also serves the pursuit of wealth and power . . . " Pg. 49. The brothers also subordinate arête to victory, which links them to the city and its promotion of excellence (or its equation of arête with victory and its attendant rewards). .

opposing teams. On the contrary, Socrates urges Clinias to join him in mutual inquiry. The effort may or may not successfully resolve the problems under scrutiny. But regardless of the outcome, neither party benefits from the other's failure. Socrates and Clinias succeed or fail together. Socrates repeatedly compares eristic disputation to a game, an activity that divides participants into winners and losers. Protreptic dialogue does not resemble a game or contest; it not only lacks the frivolity of a sport but also fails to produce a winner.[3] Socrates and Clinias search together for a definition of wisdom and they both conspicuously fail. The protreptic dialogues lead to an impasse. In the end, Socrates openly admits his own perplexity.

Even casual readers of Plato will find this aporetic outcome unremarkable and familiar. To grasp the radical nature of Socratic ignorance, one must remember the cultural context. At the Lyceum, Socrates proclaims his own defeat in a ferociously competitive setting. Neither the brothers nor the spectators (who contribute the applause) think highly of losers. For that reason, rhetoricians and debaters do not court ridicule by announcing their own bewilderment. Their training encourages them to conceal their ignorance and do whatever it takes to win applause. If they cannot win honestly, they employ sleight-of-hand to generate the appearance of winning—a trick the brothers often carry to ludicrous extremes. Of course, Socrates does not really "lose," since his aporetic dialogue yields negative insight into the nature of wisdom and human knowledge; he and Clinias at least understand how *not* to define *sophia*. Still, they fail from the warped perspective of a competitive culture, a perspective the crowd at the Lyceum clearly

[3]I do not mean to denigrate a sport when calling it frivolous. Frivolity has a place in human life, but not (so Plato implies) in the search for wisdom.

embodies. At the same time, Socrates succeeds in demonstrating the superiority of honest failure to hollow, meaningless victories.

Socrates apparently succeeds in converting Clinias away from the brothers and toward philosophy. Young Clinias becomes increasingly engaged and animated as he and Socrates approach the argument's impasse. However, the dialogue contains a counterexample to Clinias. Ctesippus, one of Clinias' young lovers, "converts" to eristic argumentation near the end of Socrates' narrative. While trying to impress Clinias, Ctesippus works himself into a state of righteous indignation that slides with remarkable brevity into the practice of eristic controversy—a skill he masters rather quickly. Ctesippus initially presents himself as Clinias' righteous defender, a sturdy embodiment of virtues he associates with "gentlemen and those who speak the truth (*hoi kaloi te kagathoi kai hoi talethe lêgontês*)" (284d).[4] In the end, however, this contentious young man reveals how much he has in common with the brothers and their combative routines. Ctesippus' remarkable transition from hostile critic of eristic sophistry to skillful participant plays a central role in this chapter; it reveals a great deal about Plato's purpose in writing the *Euthydemus*. This incident allows Plato to tighten the connection between eristic and the city. Ctesuppus does not exhibit an interest in Socratic philosophy but enters seamlessly into eristic, which matches his abrasive, competitive personality. Ctesippus emerges as the counter-Clinias, although he does not really convert to eristic since he already shares the brothers' competitive disposition.

[4]Here "gentlemen" or *kaloi te kagathoi* refers, roughly, to someone who embodies the city's notion of moral rectitude and nobility. For Ctesippus the word apparently includes the virtue of loyalty and readiness to attack those who pose a threat to one's own. A gap no doubt exists between Ctesippus (who fights mainly for his own honor, not Clinias') and his words. Nevertheless, his combative and indignant impulses mirror the character of loyal "good" or "beautiful" men. Put differently, in Athens aristocratic values have a military character (Perecles, for example, is an exemplary Athenian "gentleman" or *kalos agathos*). One could say the same about the noble classes of medieval and early modern Europe.

This incident alone does not demonstrate the connection between sophistry and the polis. Plato scatters evidence for this connection throughout the dialogue. For example, Socrates' conversations with Crito also imply that the city and the sophists are joined at the level of appearances. Crito's anxiety about the public's perception of Socrates links him to the brothers, who specialize in the appearance of victory for the entertainment of a faceless audience. In different ways, both the sophists and Crito, a conventional Athenian citizen, demonstrate their preoccupation with appearances. In both cases, this preoccupation distinguishes them from Socratic philosophy. Finally, Socrates also stresses the continuity between eristic and the brothers' earlier activities. Although they seem merely clownish and flip, they have a past that implicates them in the harsher aspects of public life—on the battlefield and in the courtroom. This past alliance associates them with the city and the forces of competition and violence that underlie it. Not only does Ctesippus gravitate naturally to eristic; the brothers also gravitate to the city and thrive in it. In a few strokes, Socrates thus highlights the common features of two human types, the sophist and the Athenian citizen.[5] In short: Philosophy not only stands apart from sophistry as a critic and rival; it also uses sophistry to articulate an alternative to the competitive ethos that dominates the Greek world.

[5]I generally use the phrase "Athenian citizen" rather than "gentleman," since the latter sounds anachronistic and has become associated in the modern mind with English aristocrats or simply men who exhibit polite manners. Most Athenian citizens accept the ideals associated with the phrase *kalos agathos* even if particular citizens fall short. Here I examine their values that inform Athenian society and give its members an affinity for competition and violence.

II. The Contest

Speaking to Crito, Socrates describes the visiting sophists and the arc of their career. Until now, they practiced warfare and legal forensic. Socrates' emphasis on violent struggle links these apparently disparate occupations together:

> They are absolutely all-round fighters (*machêi, hêi pantôn*)[6]. . . These two are first of all completely skilled in body, being highly adept at fighting in armor and able to teach this skill to anyone who pays them a fee; and then they are the ones best able to *fight the battle of the law court* and to teach other people both how to deliver and how to compose the sort of speeches suitable for court" [my emphasis] (271d-272a).

The brothers have now superseded these conventional modes of fighting and mastered another combative skill, one that draws on their past experience but goes far beyond it. In their latest incarnation, they have channeled their energies into argument, achieving nothing less than omniscience (271c). No one can equal their mastery of refutation. As Socrates puts it, "they have become…skilled in fighting in arguments and in refuting an argument as readily if it be true as if it be false (*homiôs eante pseudos eante alêthes êi*)" (272a-b). Socrates thus tells Crito what he needs to know about Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. While "lauding" the brothers' exceptional skill, Socrates informs Crito – with cutting irony – that these charlatans traffic in lies and deception.[7] Before hearing about the brothers in detail, Crito already knows (or should know) of their disregard for

[6]Socrates refers to a combative sport which he earlier mentions by name: pancratiastism (271c). This sport had a particularly ruthless character, and many of the sporting and fighting metaphors Socrates uses to describe the brothers' verbal tactics refer back to this original description of them as all-round (or pancratiastic) fighters: "As befits its name—'complete strength or "total mastery'—*pankration* combined many fighting techniques: boxing . . . kicking, wrestling throws, strangleholds, leg scissors. Only biting and gouging were forbidden; even these restrictions were removed at Sparta and often ignored elsewhere . . . Successful tactics included kicking the genitals . . . tricking and sostratus's trick, bending back the fingers. Matches did not end until one competitor signaled submission . . . or could no longer continue." Mark Golden, *Sport in the Ancient World From A to Z,* (Routledge, London and New York, 2004). P. 127.

[7]In this dialogue, irony refers to Socrates tendency to say laudatory things about the brothers while implying the opposite. Unless one thinks that Socrates admires the ability to refute true statements, one cannot take his cheerful tribute a face value. The entire dialogue also belies this early tribute.

the truth. They behave like all-around fighters insofar as their verbal assaults spare no argument, regardless of its truth or falsity.

Moving from the frame to the narrative, Socrates introduces the brothers to Clinias in a similar way, omitting what he does not yet know of their newest occupation. Repeating the information he gives Crito, he makes an apparently flattering appraisal of their expertise in war and court:

> You know, Clinias," he says, "that the wisdom of these two men. . . has to do with important matters and not mere trivia. They know all about war, that is, the things a man ought to know who means to be a good general, such as the formations of troops and their command and how to fight in armor; and besides this, they can make a man capable of looking out for himself if anyone should do him an injury.

In short, the brothers offer their expertise to individual people seeking retribution; they also offer advice to cities on the art of war (whether offensive or defensive, Socrates does not say; one suspects Euthydemus and Dionysodorus do not scruple on this point). Right away, Socrates places the brothers in a political context fraught with competitive and violent overtones. At the same time, he does not take a dismissive view of the city and its affairs. As I argue in this work, Socratic philosophy diverges from the city or aspires to different goals. Nevertheless, Socrates acknowledges the gravity of the city's activities. He can describe warfare and legal forensic as important, not trivial, for they play a central role in the political realm and place human life at risk; one can regard them as trivial only if one regards the city itself as trivial—to say nothing of the its inhabitants.

However, one must not forget that the brothers do not belong to Athens: they have traveled to that city from elsewhere.[8] Like other sophists, they live a nomadic life, which gives their political involvement an untraditional character. They train people in skills

[8]According to Nails, "Euthydemus and his brother traveled to their home in Chios to Thurii, and thence to Athens. . . " Nails, Debra, *The People of Plato*, (Hackett., Indianapolis, IN, 2002). P. 152.

essential for civic and military life but have no deep-rooted interest in the welfare of Athens or any city that invites (or merely tolerates) their presence. The brothers have a strictly mercenary relationship with cities like Athens. In theory, they could lend their services to enemy cities, dispensing the same advice to both. This coincidence would not impugn the brothers' political loyalty, since they have none. This lack of particular political commitment has a pedagogical analogue. Their commercial relationship with Athens mirrors their attitude towards their interlocutors (275c). As we shall see, the brothers display a corresponding disinterest in the person who agrees to join them in disputation; anyone will do as long he does not deviate from the rules of the game.[9]

As it happens, the brothers no longer specialize in warfare or legal rhetoric. Now *they* regard such skills as trivial.[10] They even mock Socrates' outdated account of their professional activities: "they both laughed and glanced at each other, and Euthydemus said, We are not any longer in earnest about those things, Socrates—we treat them as diversions" (273d). Socrates' surprised response underscores the seriousness of military and the justice system, which the brothers seem prepared to trivialize despite the time and energy they devoted to it: "I was astonished and said, Your serious occupations must certainly be splendid if you have important things like these for your diversions! For heaven's sake, tell me what this splendid occupation is!" (273d). The brothers reply that they now occupy themselves with teaching virtue, and Socrates responds with fresh astonishment: "Good heavens, I said, what a claim you make! . . . now if you really have

[9]The fact that the game really has absolute rules becomes clear as the dialogue progresses. Still, the interlocutor must agree to answer questions according to the brothers' demands, however inconsistent or arbitrary.

[10]It seems safe to say they never took these matters seriously, not in the manner of a loyal citizen or someone passionate about justice.

this other wisdom, be propitious—you see, I am addressing you exactly as though you were gods . . . the magnitude of your claim certainly gives me some cause for disbelief" (273e-274a).

Socrates' incredulity is genuine; it emphasizes the fact that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus have made a truly unbelievable claim. His initial incredulity contrasts sharply with the tributes he heaps lavishly on the brothers *after* they reveal their "wisdom." If the brothers speak truly, the nearly-impossible has occurred: Socrates and his friends have encountered people of divine ability. By comparing them to gods, Socrates sets an intimidating standard for the brothers, implying that only a person of god-like stature can boast the ability to teach wisdom.[11] By the same token, only a god-like thinker can regard the city's affairs as a mere diversion. Socrates implies that the brothers behave like the gods in Homer, occasionally descending from the Olympian heights to meddle in human affairs. The gods' superior rank presumably justifies their somewhat erratic involvement in human affairs. One might also excuse a god-like thinker for such a display of arrogance. Doubtless, human affairs seem rather small from certain philosophical heights. On the other hand, thinkers of a lesser rank betray frivolity, not superiority, when they treat the city as a diversion. Combining this posture of superiority with a claim to teach virtue, the brothers either publicize their god-like nature or expose their unseriousness and presumption.

Having underscored the audacity of their claim, Socrates also emphasizes its moral seriousness. He does so by informing the brothers that their actions could benefit or damage Clinias' soul. In this way, he continues to raise the stakes involved in this

[11]His remark in this section has an echo in the *Sophist*, where he suggest that the Stranger might be a visiting god (216a).

exchange. He tacitly warns the brothers not to treat the soul of their prospective student as a mere diversion:

> The boy's situation is this: both I and all these people want him to become as good as possible…He is young, and we are anxious about him, as one naturally is about a boy of his age, for fear that somebody might get in ahead of us and turn his mind (*trepsas autou tēn dianoian*) to some other interest and ruin him. So you have arrived at the best possible moment" (275a-b).[12]

That last sentence also implies the opposite: If the brothers behave as corrupting teachers, they have arrived at the worst possible moment. At this juncture, they can influence the soul of a young man for good or ill. The brothers respond to this admonitory speech with the same indifference they displayed when speaking of politics. As I mentioned before, their detachment from any city (despite their involvement in politics) also characterizes their attitude toward pupils or people who assume the role of interlocutor. The particular pupil does not matter; any willing person can satisfy the requirements of the role. "It makes no difference to us," Euthydemus says, using the verbal equivalent of a shrug, ". . . so long as the young man is willing to answer" (275c).

As we see in the exchange that follows, the combative spirit of the brothers' previous occupations has survived their recent transition to eristic controversy. They not only express indifference about the particular people involved; they also approach their student as a competitor, someone to conquer like an enemy in battle or a rival at court. Unlike most cities at war, however, they approach their "enemy" or victim with total impersonality; they exhibit none of the spirited anger or harshness that the *Republic*

[12] *Dianoian* here can refer to Clinias' thoughts but also to his *purpose*, a point I emphasize because it complements my thesis – namely, that one should focus on Socrates' purpose rather than various methods (such as logic or rational refutation) that also characterize the *Euthydemus*. His purpose, of course, is to turn Clinias' mind or soul toward something that will not bring him to ruin but, on the contrary, draw him closer to wisdom.

ascribes to its guardian class.[13] They do not care for the well-being of Clinias' soul, but they do not bear him any particular ill will. Their previous interest in the young man (which aroused Socrates' anxiety) now seems arbitrary: they see him merely as someone to refute, although they could have easily chosen someone else. Their treatment of Clinias is vindictive and mean, but they would treat any interlocutor that way. Since they do not know Clinias, they cannot possibly have a personal grudge against him. As Socrates' narrative soon reveals, they desire his defeat insofar as it confirms their supremacy in verbal warfare or rewards the audience with an amusing spectacle. Just as they might dispense advice a city at war (or even fight on its behalf without sharing its patriotism or despising its enemies), they now take aim at Clinias, whom they just met, and attack him without personal vindictiveness. They also do not bother pretending to serve a higher cause.

They begin by asking Clinias a question of great difficulty, one that makes Clinias doubt his ability to answer: "the boy blushed and looked at me in doubt" (275d). As if the difficulty of the question does not give sufficient cause for alarm, we also learn—from Dionysodorus—that Clinias cannot possibly give a correct answer. He informs Socrates of this fact (in a whispered aside) before the questioning even begins: "I may tell you beforehand, Socrates, that whichever way the boy answers the question he will be refuted" (275e). Unfortunately, Clinias answers Euthydemus' question before Socrates can intervene and warn him of the danger. Clinias thus walks unwittingly into the brothers' trap: he answers that the wise learn. Euthydemus quickly challenges him with a series of questions that lead to the opposite conclusion. The public greets this defeat with

[13] *Republic* 410d. I mention this contrast now because Ctesippus does exhibit the *thumos* that Plato mentions in the *Republic*. We see the importance of this difference later on.

applause, "as if at a sign from their director" (276c). Dionysodorus similarly responds to his cue and enters the fray. Confusingly enough, his questions refute Euthydemus' pervious "refutation." After leading Clinias to affirm that the ignorant learn, Clinias turns around and refutes *that* conclusion, proving that "it is the wise who learn, not the ignorant" (276c). He then mocks Clinias again for speaking falsely, although this second refutation logically implies that Clinias spoke correctly the first time. The eristic exchange continues in this vein for some time, generating an apparently pointless series of refutations and counter-refutations; the brothers work together to throw Clinias into a dizzying spiral of confusion, attacking him repeatedly before he can reflect on their questions and offer a thoughtful response.

Without repeating the arguments in detail or examining how they work, one can see that the brothers do not intend to elicit the truth from Clinias. They only seem interested in trapping him and other interlocutors with "inescapable" (276e) questions. Dionysodorus uses precisely this description in another whispered aside: "All of our questions are of this same inescapable sort, Socrates (*Pant'…toiauta hêmeis erôtômen aphukta*)" (276e).[14] Their own behavior corresponds to their method and sheds light on its purpose. They aim at victory and use every weapon in their arsenal to achieve that end. They transform disputation into an elaborate strategy for defeating and humiliating another person, in this case an inexperienced young man on the cusp of adulthood. As soon as Clinias participates in the game (simply answering their questions), he finds

[14]The word *aphuktos*, translated here as "inescapable," could also be translated as "inevitable" or impossible to avoid. The brothers contrive their arguments so that a particular outcome becomes a foregone conclusion. "Inescapable" gives us a sense of Clinias' entrapment; but "inevitable" emphasizes the fact that one cannot change the course of the argument without ruining its purpose. We then see how the purpose (or *telos*) of eristic argument makes it compatible with the brothers' aggressive, even hostile, manner. The argument must be inevitable to ensure the interlocutor's inevitable—or inescapable—defeat.

himself trapped between two opposite but equally "wrong" answers—i.e., answers for which the brothers have prepared a specious refutation. He also finds himself literally trapped between the brothers. These men take turns refuting Clinias and sometimes reversing their pervious refutations. While asking questions that allow no escape, the brothers literally surround Clinias and attack him from both directions, one after the other. This sounds sinister; yet Socrates invokes a playful image to describe the brothers' behavior. At one point he compares Dionysodorus to a sportsman retrieving the argument as if it were a ball (277b). The metaphor draws attention to the competitive nature of eristic but also allows Socrates to interpret it (at least provisionally) as "mere play" (278c). We now think of the brothers as using game strategy rather than war strategy; both activities, however, belong to the same continuum.

However, the contrast between Socrates' metaphors of war and games can easily mislead. Most people take war more seriously than games, and so a comparison with the latter seems less grim. Consequently, depicting the brothers as sportsmen suggests a less serious (and hence morally charged) view of their character. Even so, one must remember what we know of the brothers' perspective. They have already revealed the fact that they regard war as a game or mere "diversion" (273d). They treat eristic disputation as a game, but that does not mean they have abandoned their warrior personae. On the contrary, their whole manner of arguing bears the mark of their military past. In neither war nor eristic do they vow loyalty to either side of the dispute. In war they belong to neither city and can cross borders without violating or revising their principles. In the game of eristic the reader sees them switch sides without hesitation, apparently indifferent to the fact that doing so involves them in self-refutation. This fact

does not matter, for they really have no position on the question of learning. They argue both positions and subscribe to neither of them. As in war, they have no commitment; they only have a skill that brings them profit when it succeeds in defeating someone. The "someone" in question does not matter, and neither does the cause for which they argue or fight. Only success matters, or rather the appearance of success. (The brothers do not distinguish between real and apparent victories.) In this context, moreover, success refers not only to triumph in battle or debate; it also refers to the money the brothers hope to earn as a result of their reputation for skill in disputation.

As narrator (and possibly as a character in his own narrative), Socrates also knows how little he can expect from the brothers. As a participant, he remains somewhat in the dark. At this point in dramatic time he can only judge the absurdity or unseriousness of what they have done so far and, presumably, what he knows of Dionysodorus from other sources.[15] The brothers show no sign of relenting in their attack on Clinias and so Socrates finally intervenes just as "Euthydemus was hastening to throw the young man for the third fall" (277d). Interestingly, Socrates also worries that continued attacks on Clinias will make him "turn coward and disgrace us" (277d). Turning coward presumably means fleeing the conversation or desperately surrendering to the brothers to halt the abuse. In either case, he will disgrace his friends and abandon the quest for virtue and the good that brought them to the sophists in the first place (275a-b). Before the eristic demonstration, Socrates still hopes—despite his skepticism—that the brothers will aid them in this quest. The reader must now judge how the brothers' behavior has modified Socrates' optimism.

[15]Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates*, (Penguin Books, London, 1990), 136-137.

In the speech he now gives, Socrates continues to speak with a skeptical accent. Even so, he offers a remarkably charitable interpretation of the brutal attack he just interrupted. Telling Clinias the brothers' arguments should not cause him to lose heart, he suggests that they have involved him in a rite of initiation similar to dancing and sport that precede the revelation of Corybantic mysteries:

> So you must imagine yourself to be hearing the first part of the sophistic mysteries. In the first place, as Prodicus says, you must learn about the correct use of words (*onomatôn orthotêtos mathein*); and our two visitors are pointing out this very thing, that you did not realize that people use the word 'learn' not only in the situation in which a person who has no knowledge of a thing in the beginning acquires it later, but also when he who has this knowledge already uses it to inspect the same thing, whether this is something spoken or something done . . . Now this, as they are pointing out, had escaped your notice—that the same word is applied to opposite sorts of men, to both the man who knows and the man who does not (277d-278a).

Again, Socrates invokes sport to describe the brothers' eristic demonstration. While using this metaphor to criticize their lack of seriousness, he suggests that the brothers perhaps have a nobler goal in mind, a sophistic revelation that deserves serious attention. Perhaps they want to expose linguistic confusions that already exist in Clinias' mind and inhibit his ability to learn. Socrates knows that the brothers won their arguments with Clinias because they equivocated on the word "learn." Moreover, they tricked Clinias with their equivocation because no one else has taught him how to speak correctly; his education has so far neglected the correct use of words and thus left him vulnerable to linguistic trickery. On Socrates' interpretation, the sophists want to give him a better command of language after demonstrating the confusion that results from its incorrect use. Once they succeed in that goal, they can bring him closer to the sophistic mysteries. Put differently, they must demystify their own abuse of language before bringing their pupil into contact with true mysteries.

Of course, one cannot miss the irony in Socrates' "optimistic" speech. He does not simply cast his skepticism aside after witnessing the brothers' performance. After all, their performance defies any optimism about their serious intentions.[16] The irony arises from the tension between Socrates' avowed faith in the brothers' purpose and his negative appraisal of their performance. One can hardly miss the witty incongruity between Socrates' critical and optimistic reactions. Before the eristic demonstration, he expressed skepticism about the brothers' teaching (274a) while comparing them to gods. Now he professes faith in their noble intentions while implying the opposite.[17] His emphasizes the frivolity of the eristic demonstration *and* the possible seriousness of its goal. The first does not entail the second, and in light of what he has already seen (and also heard privately, from Dionysodorus), he now has fewer reasons to expect a transition to serious pedagogy. Rather than denounce them as fraudulent, he takes a positive tone while making a negative point: If they brothers do not use their game as a prelude to something higher, they clearly have nothing useful or good to offer. Instead, what they offer will stand revealed as a pointless and rather nasty game that perverts the vocation of teaching and makes a mockery of serious matters, e.g., virtue and learning. As Sprauge points out, "Plato's ironic pretense throughout the dialogue that the sophists will

[16]We must remember not only the brothers' behavior in disputation; we must also remember Dionysodorus' comments to Socrates, in which he reveals that all of their questions are designed to entrap the interlocutor.

[17]In both cases, he implies that he will defer to the brothers if they actually fulfill a higher purpose. If they can teach virtue, he must regard them as god-like; if they reveal sophistic mysteries after teaching the proper use of words, he can at least excuse their game-like initiation. In neither case does he seem to expect a shift to pedagogical seriousness, and his low expectations partly account for his irony.

ultimately become serious is intended . . . to indicate how serious the subjects under discussion actually are."[18]

Socrates not only implies a contrast between the brothers' eristic performance and serious teaching. He demonstrates this contrast with his own model of pedagogy. After assuring Clinias that the brothers have more to offer, Socrates engages him in a protreptic exchange. This exchange yields a *protreptic* rather than eristic model of pedagogy. The model qualifies as protreptic because it aims at converting the interlocutor to the philosophical life. The fate of Clinias' soul is at stake in this exchange because it could turn him away from pursuing wisdom; preventing such an outcome motivates Socrates from beginning to end.[19] He does not argue (and refute arguments) for any abstract, impersonal reason—still less to make a display of cleverness. As Socrates and Clinias pass through the stages of an inquiry into wisdom and its relation to good fortune, Socrates' manner emphasizes friendly cooperation between fellow seekers, where they can either find or lose the path to wisdom and happiness. He pauses at each stage to elicit Clinias' agreement, thus ensuring that he follows the argument willingly and because he understands it. In contrast, the brothers deprived Clinias of any chance to understand their deliberately fallacious arguments; they left him no freedom to respond in a way that

[18]Rosamond Kent Sprague, *The* Euthydemus *Revisited* in *Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides*, Sankt Augustin, 2000. 19.

[19]Socrates makes this much clear from the outset (275a). Without commenting on the link Dorion draws between the brothers and the Megarian school, I repeat his description of the scene as a guide to understanding the essential difference between eristic and protreptic models of discourse. (As an aside, I point out that the brothers refute arguments for the sake of money and not only, as Dorian says, for the sheer pleasure of refuting.). "*La dialectique mégarique, telle qu'elle est illustrée dan l'*Euthydème*, est dévoyeé dan la mesure où elle traite l'elenchos comme s'il trouvait sa finalité en lui-meme (réfuter pour le simple plaisir de réfuter), alors que l'elenchos, tel que le conçoivent Socrate et Platon, est avant tout un instrument pédagogique, attentif au répondant, qui doit être mis qu service d'une finalité plus élevée…*" Dorian, Louis-André, *Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides*: *Proceedings of the V Symposium Platonicum*, Sankt Augustin 2000. P. 45.

might jam the eristic machinery. In fact, their performance prohibits such freedom on principle. Inviting the consent or criticism of an interlocutor would introduce an unpredictable element into their well-rehearsed routine. Since the routine must end with the interlocutor's defeat, they have constructed a method that guarantees such an outcome. Allowing time for response (and hence critical reflection) could destroy the success of their scheme.

Again, one can see how the *telos* of the brothers' career lends itself to the eristic method. In their opening arguments, this method efficiently serves their goal: defeat for Clinias and applause for their own efforts. The approval of the crowd inflates their reputation, thereby maximizing their profits; the growth of reputation presumably draws paying students who want to learn disputative skills. Since Socrates' philosophical goal coincides with the good of Clinias' soul, he does not exhibit a model in which Clinias acts as a potential competitor who might usurp the game. He does not ask a question designed to confuse Clinias, as one might trick or mislead an opponent in sports, or use the crowd and its applause to overpower any counterargument. He therefore begins with a question that has an obvious answer, which he immediately supplies: "Do all people wish to do well I suppose it is stupid even to raise such a question, since there could hardly be a man who does not wish to do well?" (278e).

This question has an inescapable character, for no one would seriously argue that people wish to fare badly. People only disagree about what they need to achieve well-being. Even so, the question differs from the brothers' inescapable questions. In settling the question of whether people wish to fare well, Socrates does not bully Clinias into accepting the obvious answer. He does not make Clinias answer at all, an obligation that

might add to the embarrassment and intimidation he suffered previously (275d). Rather, he establishes an axiom from which he and Clinias can begin their inquiry. Like any axiom, it strikes both inquirers (and any other observer) as obvious; it does not leave one person in the dark with vague, ambiguous phrasing. The axiom unites them; it allows the interlocutors to move forward with shared understanding. The brothers' equivocation not only confused Clinias but also set him apart as a competitor, someone destined to lose.[20] By contrast, the protreptic model begins with agreement and transparency, thus drawing the participants together in a spirit of cooperation.[21] As Chance argues, "Here Socrates has submitted an inescapable question in the true sense of the expression, for to respond negatively is ridiculous and senseless. Unlike the question that Euthydemus used to trigger the first eristic, this one neither embarrasses nor confuses Kleinias."[22]

Indeed, Socrates grounds his whole demonstration in cooperation. He does not move forward without making sure Clinias has kept pace with the argument's progression. Such transparency is a mark of sound logical reasoning, which must purge itself of poor reasoning to attain wisdom or truth. The elimination of ambiguity and equivocal speech has a central place in philosophy because confused speech only leads to

[20]Every game requires a loser and thus depends fundamentally on the creation of separation and difference. Mark Gordon discusses the unusual importance of difference for Greek culture—and the role of difference in Greek sports—in his *Sports and Greek Society*.

[21]Rudy Blondell argues that Plato uses the dialogue form itself to encourage the reader's participation: "To simplify considerably, two of the most conspicuous and inarguable functions of this [dialogue] form…are to avoid Platonic dogmatism and to draw in the reader as a participant in the discussion." Rudy Blondell,, *The Play of Characters in Plato's Dialogues*, Cambridge University Press 2002. 39.

[22]Chance, Thomas H., *Plato's Euthydemus: Analysis of What is and What is Not Philosophy*, University of California Press, 1992. 56. I would only add (or repeat) that Socrates also avoids embarrassing Clinias by answering the question himself. Clinias does not need to worry that the question conceals a trap that will humiliate him; if it did, the humiliation would also be Socrates', for he answered his own question first.

more confusion. However, Socrates does not simply correct the brothers' poor reasoning with an exhibition of logical clarity. His model of teaching also exhibits an entirely different spirit, one that corresponds to his goal as educator: to convert Clinias to the philosophical life.

However, the protreptic emphasis on cooperation does not imply that Socrates and Clinias begin from exactly the same point. They begin with the same axiom but depart from different existential positions. As people they approach the argument (and their encounter with the sophists) from vastly different perspectives. Socrates has lived and philosophized much longer than his young interlocutor. He therefore engages Clinias as a cooperator but not an as equal. He gives direction to the investigation while eliciting his young partner's agreement, allowing him to ask occasional questions (279c; 279d); he also allows Clinias to grow braver near the end of the inquiry and assert his own opinions (282c). Indeed, Clinias probably plays a larger role than Socrates reveals in his narrative. At one point Socrates pretends to forget how he and Clinias finally came to an agreement, which suggests a more difficult exchange than the one he describes: "We finally agreed (I don't know quite how) that. . . If the man had wisdom, he had no need of any good fortune in addition. When we had settled this point, I went back and asked him how our former statements might be affected" (280b).[23] Even so, such cooperation and digression does not alter the fact that Socrates continues to assume the dominant role of teacher.

One can see, therefore, how the goal of the protreptic model conditions its methods. Socrates can even make equivocal use of words if they serve the purpose of

[23]Cf. Chance: "In fact, even before Klinias is granted the opportunity to respond to the argument, there is a dramatic break in the narrative where Plato allows us to imagine that the boy resisted Socrates' conclusion on the infallibility of wisdom so that the two had to follow out another line of thought that eventually reached a conclusion acceptable to them both." Chance, P. 63.

exhortation; the protreptic model does not offer one method or set of rules that one can copy or imitate.[24] Rather, "protreptic" denotes an overarching purpose, one that sets Socrates decisively apart from his sophistic rivals; one must ask why (not only how) the brothers would consciously misuse language. For the brothers, too, the goal determines the methods. As it happens, their goal in argument coincides with their professional goals; they aim to defeat the interlocutor and thereby increase their profitability. An aggressive, competitive mode of argument naturally complements this ambition. By contrast, Socrates' philosophical goal corresponds to his non-competitive model of discourse. However, this contrast extends beyond the dispute between Socrates and the sophists. Within this dispute, we also see how Socrates' model of education goes against the cultural expectations of his time and place. His educational goal not only pits him against the sophists; it also places him outside the mainstream of competitive Greek culture and its veneration of heroic conquest and victory. The brothers' demonstration shows continuity with the competitive and ultimately violent values deeply rooted in that culture. Socrates breaks that continuity; whether the other participants in the dialogue realize it or not, they have witnessed the introduction of a radical alternative to the dominant values of their civilization.[25]

For now, I focus on Socrates' challenge to the sophists. At the end of his protreptic demonstration, the brothers return to the scene and continue to argue as before; they behave as if Socrates has made no critique of their frivolity. However, the brothers

[24]See Chance, P. 67.

[25]Because his pedagogical model appears in a culture riddled with competitive values, it must compete with the dominant, conventional mindset. In that sense, protreptic does engage in a competitive struggle. However, this competition is strictly contingent or accidental; it only becomes competitive (or combative) if the culture's aggression requires it.

do not simply replay the themes they introduced in the first demonstration. In this section they alter the tone of the arguments, borrowing the language of Eleatic logic to draw increasingly strange and provocative conclusions. Their arguments have a metaphysical cast that apparently roots them in a venerable philosophical tradition.[26] However, allegiance to a philosophical school does not guide their behavior in this section any more than the first. They use the resonant categories of Parmenides for the usual purpose: To punch out Clinias in another round of arguments and emerge triumphant before the crowd.

Even so, Socrates introduces the scene to Crito in a way that repeats his earlier optimism. Having exhorted Clinias to love wisdom, he now exhorts the brothers to follow his example and "show the boy what follows next: whether he ought to acquire every sort of knowledge (*poteron pasan epistêmên dei auton ktasthai*), or whether there is one sort that he ought to get in order to be both happy and a good man (*eudaimonein te kai agathon andra*), and what sort it is" (282d). Now he hints at a distinction he obscured in his protreptic demonstration: That one might find a different type of knowledge that leads to happiness—a type distinct from the knowledge must acquire as a condition of faring well in the crafts. He suggests that the brothers will move Clinias further in that direction and thus continue making the philosophical ascent he began. Once again, one hears the irony in Socrates' avowal of optimism. As before, he has no reason to think the brothers will dramatically alter their behavior. The irony becomes wickedly sharp when he reverts to the narrative frame and tells Crito that Dionysodorus "began an argument which was certainly wonderful, in a way, Crito, and worth your while to hear, since it

[26]The Eleatic and Megarian schools come readily to mind.

was an incitement to virtue (*logos ên ep' areten*)" (283b). After seeing what Dionysodorus' actually does, one cannot recall this description of his behavior without laughing.

Rather than speak directly to Clinias, Dionysodorus addresses a question to Socrates. His question makes it clear that he has heard and understood Socrates' exhortation to serious dialogue. In the question, however, he asks if Socrates and his friends are speaking seriously when saying they want Clinias to become wise: "Tell me, Socrates, he said, and all you others who say you want this young man to become wise (*sophon genesthai*) – are you saying this as a childish joke (*paizete*) or do you want it truly and in earnest (*alêthôs . . . kai spoudazete*)" (283b). Socrates assures him that they speak in earnest. Dionysodorus responds by seizing the phrase "become wise" and using it to produce an inflammatory, pseudo-metaphysical argument:

> And at the present moment, he said, is Clinias wise or not?
> He says he is not yet at least – he is a very modest person, I said.
> But you people wish him to become wise (*boluesthe genesthai auton sophon)* he said, and not to be ignorant (*amathê de mê einai*)?
> We agreed.
> Therefore, you wish him to become (*boulesthe auton gegsthai*) what he is not, and no longer to be what he is now
> When I heard this I was thrown into confusion, and he broke in upon me while I was in this state and said, Then since you wish him no longer to be what he is now, you apparently wish for nothing but his death. Such friends and lovers must be worth a lot who desire above all things that their beloved should utterly perish! (283c-e)

This outrageous conclusion reveals something serious about Dionysodorus. For his mode of "teaching," aggression (and even annihilation) figures centrally; he simply aims at flattening his opponent before he can recover his wits and respond. Dionysodorus' conclusion, however absurd, matches his own approach to debate and further reveals a violent turn of mind. He does not argue seriously, but even a joke reveals something

significant about the jokester. In his argument, Dionysodorus uses pseudo-logic to suggest that education conceals an intrinsically violent, even murderous intent. Because Clinias' friends want him to become wise, they want Clinias to become what he is not. In other words, they want to destroy Clinias and replace him with someone else – someone who is wise rather than ignorant. Again, Dionysodorus does not believe in the truth of his argument; his aggression stems from his eagerness to defeat a rival, not conviction or fanaticism. Nonetheless, his comments disclose a dark mentality that instinctively connects education with violence. Whatever his belief or intention, his argument mirrors his own pugnacious approach to argument.

Dionysodorus' argument may strike the reader as ridiculous, and rightly so. Nevertheless, he inadvertently puts his finger on a serious question about education and those who practice it. What role does aggression and violence play in education? At what point does the attempt to transform a person's soul segue into aggression? Educators often view it as their task to "build up," to edify the minds and souls of their students. This principle may sound innocuous and trite, but it usually involves another maxim: namely, that one must replace (and therefore destroy) many of the student's false, cherished ideas about herself and the world in order to "build up" from a more solid foundation. Indeed, Socratic philosophy itself has a destructive element. The negative task of philosophy becomes especially prominent in dialogues like the *Euthyphro* and Books I and II of the *Republic*, where Socrates uses elenchus to refute his interlocutors. In the *Republic*'s most iconic scene, the Allegory of the Cave, education does not exclude compulsion or even violence; the prisoner does not leave the cave voluntarily, and he experiences the journey as painful and invasive. Everything he understood as reality

disintegrates and leaves him in a strange, blinding new world. This fact does not point to an invidious distinction between destructive dialectic and edifying protreptic. In the protreptic sections of the *Euthydemus*, Plato downplays the destructive work of education and focuses on Socrates' attempt to edify Clinias. After all, Clinias does not approach Socrates with an argument that needs refuting.. Nevertheless, the *Euthydemus* also has a negative task; it cannot fundamentally criticize the city's heroic ethos (and those who embody it) without mounting a devastating critique, however subtle, on the city of Athens. Persuasion comes to the forefront of the *Euthydemus* because Socrates has an exceptionally diffident conversation partner and he chooses, rightly or wrongly, to critique the brothers indirectly (in contrast with his refutation of Euthyphro or Thrasymachus). Still, people who harbor falsehood must endure the pain of negative analysis for their own good. Socrates therefore speaks half seriously when he invites the brothers to destroy them all if, in doing so, they can make "good men out of bad ones" (285b).[27] For the sake of wisdom one must submit to the harsh daylight of reasoned refutation. The *Euthydemus* does not criticize aggression as such. Rather, Plato critiques arbitrary aggression that aims at nothing but victory and ultimately produces more pointless aggression.

For that reaction, one must turn to Ctesippus. Before Socrates can frame a reply to Dionysodorus' argument, Ctesippus makes his stormy entrance into the dialogue. He does not have anything to say about Dionysodorus' argument (or his manner or reasoning), but he objects vigorously to the conclusion. He does not appreciate the

[27]I say "half seriously" because Socrates has little faith that the brothers can make good men out of bad ones.

suggestion that he wants his lover to die, and he defends his own honor in somewhat threatening tones.

> Thurian stranger, if it were not a rather rude remark, I would say 'perish yourself' for taking it into your head to tell such a lie about me and the rest, which I think is a wicked thing to say – that I could wish this person to die! (283e)

In this outburst, Ctesippus speaks like a loyal, defensive suitor. His heated rebuke recalls the spirited anger of the guardian class in the *Republic*. The guardians in that dialogue have the character of noble dogs, "gentle as can be with their familiars and people they know and the opposite with those they don't know" (375d). They treat strangers with particular harshness if they actually assault the guardians and the people they know and love. Ctesippus begins with an assertion of Dionysodorus' foreignness. He makes a thinly veiled threat against the offending sophist, saying that he would command Dionysodorus to die if politeness did not prohibit such a rude suggestion. Ctesippus' speaks with heavy sarcasm and righteous anger. His sarcastic tone scarcely resembles Socrates' refined irony, which bitingly critiques the brothers' antics without resorting to angry accusations and threats. In this case, irony underscores the truth about eristic while sarcasm simply attempts to insult and injure the people who practice eristic.

One does not imagine Dionysodorus recoiling from Ctesippus' in fear; still, he does withdraw from the argument momentarily, perhaps uncomfortable with the heated and personal nature of Ctesippus' outburst. Euthydemus presently reenters the conversation and trains his attention on Ctesippus. He seizes the charge Ctesippus made against his brother and transforms it into an abstract question about the possibility of truth and falsehood. When Ctesippus accuses Dionysodorus of lying, he speaks of something personal and specific. He draws the conversation into his world of private conflicts and

loyalties. Personal feelings animate his attack, not righteous outrage against the brothers' intellectual fraudulence. For their part, the brothers have no desire to engage Ctesippus on this private terrain. They have no interest in Ctesippus and his friends. Dionysodorus' accusation against them was hardly more than a joke; he does not honestly think that Socrates and the others want Clinias to die. He has not issued a serious moral judgment, as Ctesippus seems to think. Of course, the brothers cannot enlighten Ctesippus on this point without revealing their fraudulence to everyone. Instead, they evade the problem by luring their attacker into another net of questions:

> Why Ctesippus, said Euthydemus, do you think it possible to tell lies?
> Good heavens yes, he said, I should be raving if I didn't.
> When one speaks the thing one is talking about, or when one does not speak it?
> When one speaks it, he said.
> So that if he speaks this thing, he speaks no other one of things that are (*ouk allo legei tôn ontôn*) except the very one he speaks*?*
> Of course, said Ctesippus.
> Then the person speaking that thing speaks what is (*tôn ontôn*), he said.
> Yes.
> But surely the person who speaks what is (*to on*) and the things that are speaks the truth – so that Dionysodorus, if he speaks the things that are, speaks the truth and tells no lies about you.
> Yes, said Ctesippus, but a person who speaks these things, Euthydemus, does not speak things that are.
> And Euthydemus said, But the things that are not surely do not exist, do they?
> No, they do not exist.
> Then there is nowhere that the things that are not are?
> Nowhere.
> Then there is no possibility that any person whatsoever could do anything to the things that are not so to make them be when they are nowhere?
> It seems unlikely to me, said Ctesippus. (283e-284b)

Euthydemus goes on to say that "Speaking . . . is doing and making" (284c). Since speaking want is not would involve making what is not, which they agree to be impossible. He thus concludes that no one can speak falsely.

To prove that his brother has not lied, Euthydemus proves that no one tells lies. He thus leaps from a specific case to a wild generalization. Ctesippus entered the argument to defend his lover. He draws the conversation into the realm of private (and in this case, erotic) relationships. Similarly, Euthydemus enters the argument to defend his brother against Ctesippus' charge of falsehood. In contrast to Ctesippus, though, his defense leads away from anything particular or personal, turning the conversation back to abstract sophistic argument.[28] He also alludes to Parmenides and his injunction not to speak of non-being, or what is not. Euthydemus adds that one cannot speak what does not exist (since one's speech would have no referent), and so one must conclude that no one speaks falsely. Needless to say, this argument proves too much, even a narrowly self-interested perspective. If no one speaks falsely, the art of disputation becomes impossible. How can the brothers refute their rivals without accusing them of speaking falsely? As Socrates told Crito, the brothers can refute any argument regardless of its truth or falsity (272b). Still, one can cynically "refute" true and false arguments without denying the distinction between truth and falsehood. If Euthydemus refutes the possibility of false speaking, however, he also refutes the possibility of refutation, and here he enters an infinite regress: he also "refutes" the refutation of refutation, and so on ad infinitum. The argument naturally leads to incoherence, although neither of the brothers seem concerned about this outcome.

[28]We see later how this contrast in behavior sheds light on both the sophist and the gentleman; we also see how Socrates falls neither on the side of impersonal abstraction or purely personal interests and involvements. To oversimplify for the moment, he charts a middle course between these particular shoals.

Ctesippus makes his own objection, one that carries him slightly beyond the personal grievance that motivated his previous outburst. But he quickly returns to form with more insults and thinly veiled threats:

> Yes indeed, Euthydemus, said Ctesippus, but he speaks things that are only in a certain way and not as is really the case.
> What do you mean Ctesippus? said Dionysodorus. Are there some persons who speak of things as they are?
> There certainly are, he said—gentlemen (*kaloi te kaththoi*) and those who speak the truth (284d-e).

Instead of responding to the insult, Dionysodorus uses it to trap Ctesippus in another argument:

> Now then, he said, are not good things well and bad things ill?
> He agreed.
> And you admit that gentlemen (*kalous te kai agathous*) speak of things as they are?
> Yes, I do.
> Then good men speak ill of bad things, Ctesippus, if they do in fact speak of them as they are.
> They certainly do, he said – at any rate, they speak ill of bad men. If you take my advice you will take care not to be one of them in case the good speak ill of *you*.
> For rest assured that the good speak ill of the bad.
> And do the great speak greatly of the great and hotly of the hot? asked Euthydemus.
> Very much so, said Ctesippus, and what is more, they speak coldly of persons who argue in a frigid fashion. (284d-e)

Still tense with hostility, Ctesippus cannot resist needling Dionysodorus; he also threatens him with the possibility of a ruined reputation ("the good speak ill of the bad"). Before that, he argues that someone who speaks falsely somehow misrepresent things that do exist: "he speaks things that are only in a certain way and not as really is the case" (284c). To embroider his point, he suggests that false statements misrepresent things that actually exist instead of referring to things that absolutely do not exist (e.g., horses and horns both exist; their combination does not). One can deny the existence of a unicorn (a

determinate negation) without referring to absolute non-being.[29] He might have argued the point at greater length. Instead, when Dionysodorus re-enters the argument, Ctesippus' natural brashness (284d) and resentment reassert themselves.

No doubt Ctesippus regards himself as the good man who will speak badly of Dionysodorus; good men or "gentlemen" (*kalos agathos*) speak the truth and speak badly of the bad, and Ctesippus sees himself as doing both in his confrontation with the brothers. Still, his temperament inclines him more toward speaking badly of the bad, i.e. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus—and especially the latter, who so flippantly impugned Ctesippus' honor. When Ctesippus notes that good men speak badly of the bad, he does not simply inform Dionysodorus of a general possibility but threatens personally to damage his reputation. He makes his threat indirectly, but one can hardly misconstrue his message. His next reply (that good men speak coldly of the frigid) insults Dionysodorus and says nothing of interest about his admittedly bizarre argument. Dionysodorus notices the mounting sarcasm in Ctesippus' voice and decides to call foul. He complains that Ctesippus has begun to speak abusively. His accusation is correct; the ill-tempered Ctesippus has obviously resorted to verbal abuse. The complaint has a hollow ring, coming from someone who has turned verbal maltreatment into a late-in-life career. He cannot reprimand Ctesippus without exposing himself to the charge of hypocrisy. However, he must halt the flow of insults and threats if he wants to keep the eristic argument on track. Ctesippus has ceased playing by the rules and threatens to ruin the brothers' demonstration. To save their routine, they must enforce a rule they does not

[29]I do not offer this as a strong argument against those raising the problem of non-being. Still, at a commonsensical level, Ctesippus seems to have something like this in mine.

apply to their own conduct. (They later invent rules even more arbitrarily when Socrates deviates from the eristic script.)

This heated exchange does not show any sign of cooling. Ctesippus continues to speak with bitter and explosive sarcasm while denying that he speaks abusively. Rather, he says (with a threatening undertone) that he "is giving you [Dionysodorus] a piece of friendly advice and endeavoring to persuade you never to say, so rudely and to my face, that I want my most cherished friends to die" (284e-285a). He steers the discussion back to his personal grievance. Socrates recognizes that Ctesippus' personal anger could permanently sidetrack the entire encounter with the brothers, making it impossible for Socrates himself to accomplish his own philosophical goal. If nothing else, the hot-headed young man could reduce the event to a shouting match.

As one can see, Ctesippus responds to the brothers' verbal pancratiastism with his own brand of violence. I said before that the brothers take an impersonal view of the interlocutors they victimize. They have no grudge against Clinias. They punch him out (metaphorically speaking) because he happens to answer their questions; anyone else in the room could have played the role of victim. If desire for vengeance does not motivate their battle of words, loyalty to a cause or personal conviction does not motivate them either. They apparently work for profit and not much else. In contrast, Ctesippus becomes angry and combative when the brothers offend his sense of honor and truthfulness. There is nothing impersonal about his conduct. Still, his fighting spirit does not diverge from the agonistic spirit of eristic. The brothers have spent a career fighting in different arenas. Unlike Ctesippus, they have stripped these involvements of traditional sentiment, both political and moral. They do not claim to fight for a noble

cause or to defend anyone's honor—not even their own. Nevertheless, Ctesippus' readiness to enter combat ultimately links him to eristic disputation; his reaction remains true to the agonistic sprit of the occasion instead of suggesting an alternative model of dialogue and interaction. This fact has important implications; it makes Ctesippus' later "conversion" to eristic seem like a natural evolution of his character. Moreover, his character remains true to the city and its celebration of violent struggle. .

Not wanting the situation to degenerate further, Socrates makes his second intervention:

> Since they seemed to be getting pretty rough with each other, I started to joke with Ctesippus and said, Ctesippus, I think we ought to accept what the strangers tell us, if they are willing to be generous, and not to quarrel over a word. If they really know how to destroy men so as to make good and sensible people out of bad and stupid ones…then let us concede them the point and permit them to destroy the boy for us and make him wise – and do the same for the rest of us as well. (285b)

Socrates echoes the brothers' violent description of education in this passage, although he does not incorporate that violence into his own protreptic model. In any case, he decides not to use Clinias as "bait" (272d) this time around but offers himself instead. Since he has become old and has less to lose, he invites the brothers to demonstrate their destructive skill on him; perhaps he regrets exposing Clinias the brothers' eristic bullying in the first place. He does not enter the conversation right away, for Ctesippus insists on defending his quarrel with Dionysodorus, saying he will also put himself at the brothers' mercy if they can make him virtuous. To amplify his point, Ctesippus uses a rather gruesome metaphor (285c-d, quoted below) also consistent with the violent imagery that now colors the subject of pedagogy in Socrates' narrative. He also repeats his objection to the sophist's conclusion but remains silent about the argument that produced it:

> I give them permission to skin me even more thoroughly than they are doing now so long as my hide will in the end become not a wineskin…but a piece of virtue . . . It's not that I'm cross—I'm simply contradicting the things [Dionysodorus] said which I find objectionable (285c-d).

Dionysodorus therefore turns his attention to Ctesippus, eager to oblige his brash young rival. True to character, he simply involves Clinias in another argument, this one denying the possibility of disagreement. According to Dionysodorus, no one ever contradicts another person, an argument that complements his earlier refutation of false speech. Ctesippus responds reasonably enough: He contradicts Dionysodorus and offers that as evidence that people contradict one another. However, Dionysodorus manages to disorient Ctesippus with another series of questions. At the end of the argument Ctesippus finally falls silent, less capable of responding to Dionysodorus' argument than insulting Dionysodorus. This brash young man, temporarily befuddled, yields grudgingly to the sophist who ignited his wrath.

Now that Dionysodorus has driven Ctesippus against a wall, Socrates intervenes and responds to the argument—just as he intervened to rescue Clinias. He tells Dionysodorus that he has heard the argument against false speaking many times and does not understand how it avoids defeating itself. Apparently, Dionysodorus has done nothing more than borrow an old philosophical paradox:

> The followers of Protagoras made considerable use of it, and so did some still earlier. It always seems to me to have a wonderful way of upsetting not just other arguments, but itself as well (286c).

Socrates does not say whether Protagoras himself ever used the argument. Perhaps the people who use it belong to the bottom of the sophistic heap, remote from someone as intellectually sophisticated as Protagoras. Nonetheless, Socrates says that he looks forward to learning the truth from Dionysodorus, implying the latter occupies a higher

rank than most other people who peddle this shop-worn argument. However, Socrates does not elicit answers from the brothers, and probably does not expect to. He simply involves himself in another round of verbal sparring. But this time the eristic routine has less satisfying results for the brothers. To begin with, Socrates poses the first question, not Euthydemus or Dionysodorus; this allows him to set the tone of the discussion. As a result, the argument runs less smoothly for the brothers' than the ones preceding it. How they respond to the difficulties reveals still more about the nature of disputative method that reduces argument to petty competition.

Socrates asks Dionysodorus whether his latest argument amounts to the assertion that no one speaks falsely. Dionysodorus agrees. Socrates then elicits the further admission that no one even *thinks* falsely. False opinion simply does not exist. As a result, there exist no ignorant people, that is, people who maintain false opinions either openly or in the privacy of their thoughts. Socrates reacts to this conclusion with incredulity and demands to know whether Dionysodorus really believes his own assertion (286d-e). If no one maintains false opinions, and Euthydemus and Dionysodorus want Socrates to refute their assertions, have the not invited him to accomplish an impossible task? (286d-e)

Euthydemus naturally denies that he and his brother have set an impossible task for Socrates (although even this denial implies that Socrates has spoken falsely). His rebuttal does nothing to change the obvious; if no one has false opinions, refutation is impossible by definition. Socrates now brings his argument to a point: The brothers have once again proven too much, even from their narrow, self-interested perspective. If they maintain the impossibility of false speaking, they also talk themselves out of a job. What

have they come to teach if they believe no one lacks knowledge or has anything to learn? What purpose can they possibly serve? "Or didn't you say just now," says Socrates "that if anyone wanted to learn virtue, you would impart it best?" (287b).

Socrates underlines a damning contradiction in the brothers' argument. They need to answer his criticism to retain even a shred of intellectual credibility. The seriousness of his objection seems apparent to Euthydemus, who retreats from the argument and lets his brother act as a referee.[30] Nonetheless, Dionysodorus does not respond with a counter-argument that somehow resolves the contradiction or even treats it seriously. He simply imposes a restriction on what Socrates can mention, resorting to raw force to guarantee his ultimate victory. To prevent disaster, he declares that his previous statements must not impinge on the present discussion:

> Really, Socrates, said Dionysodorus, interrupting, are you such an old Cronus as to bring up now what we said at the beginning? I suppose if I said something last year, you will bring it up and still be helpless in dealing with the present argument" (287b).

Needless to say, this insulting reply does not touch the substance of Socrates' argument. Dionysodorus draws arbitrary boundaries around the present discussion as if he were marking the limits of a playing field. He does not pretend that he and his brother possess an integrity that lends coherence to their various pronouncements. They have no obligation to remain self-consistent. The opportunism that characterizes their whole career also governs their strategies in particular arguments: They appeal to no

[30]I agree with Leo Strauss that Socrates decisively refutes Euthydemus in this passage: "If it is impossible to lie, to say or think a falsehood, all men are wise, and there is no need for teachers like the brothers. While Socrates expounded this argument, Euthydemus took the place of his brother. So it happened that it was Euthydemus, the wisest and cleverest of the brothers, whom Socrates decisively defeated. The decisive character of this event could easily remain unnoticed. Socrates did not put the slightest emphasis on his victory and as for Euthydemus having been reduced to silence we can only infer it from the fact that Dionysodorus took the word again immediately afterward." Leo Strauss, *Interpretation*, Summer 1970. 1-20.

overarching principles, only tactics and rules that can aid them at the moment. They do not need to offer reasons for the rules they choose. They enforce rules without stooping to defend their actions. More accurately, they resort to force because they have no reasons to offer.

The brothers' reliance on brute force becomes more explicit in the next few lines of the dialogue. Here they do not repeat the mistake of answering Socrates' question; doing so gave him an advantage. Having learned their lesson the hard way, they force him now to answer his own question:

> Well you see, I said, these arguments are very difficult (as is natural since they come from wise men) and this last one you mention turns out to be particularly difficult to deal with. Whatever in the world do you mean by the expression "be helpless in dealing with," Dionysodorus? Doesn't it clearly mean that I am unable to refute the argument? Just tell me, what else is the sense of this phrase "I am helpless in dealing with the argument"?
> But at least it is not very difficult to deal with *your* phrase, he said, so go ahead and answer.
> Before you answer me, Dionysodorus? I said.
> You refuse to answer then? he said
> Well, is it fair?
> Perfectly fair, he said.
> On what principle? I said. Or isn't it clearly on this one, that you have come here on the present occasion as a man who is completely skilled in arguments, and you know when an answer should be given and when it should not? So now you decline to give any answer whatsoever because you realize you ought not to?
> You are babbling instead of being concerned about answering, he said. But, my good fellow, follow my instructions and answer, since you admit that I am wise.
> I must obey then, I said, and it seems I am forced to do so, since you are in command, so ask away (287b-d).

Socrates' recalcitrance prolongs this exchange to a considerable extent. He does not submit to Dionysodorus' exertion of force before stressing its irrationality; he stress the fact that he only obeys because the brother has assumed a position of unreasonable command (recalling his experience as a general) and remains indifferent to rational rebuttals. Dionysodorus realizes he must not answer because he cannot afford to lose

control of the argument again. Allowing Socrates to ask the question invites an unknown element into his strictly controlled routine. Socrates might assume the lead and the brothers cannot hope to win the argument if someone else controls its direction.

This time Dionysodorus constructs a brief argument that turns on an ambiguous use of the word "sense" (287d-e). He first uses it to refer to sense organs. Speaking in that way, he asks Socrates whether anything without a soul has sense. Socrates denies that possibility. Now Dionysodorus switches tracks and uses "sense" to refer to the meaning of words. Since words have a sense, does that mean they also have souls? Instead of exposing the crude equivocation involved in this argument, Socrates reverts to the dispute they just abandoned. If Dionysodorus has refuted Socrates with his equivocal use of "sense," how can he hold on to his belief that no one has false opinions? How can he accuse Socrates of making a mistake in his argument?

> Are you saying that I made a mistake or not? Because if I did not make one you will not refute me no matter how wise you are, and you will be 'helpless in dealing with the argument.' And if I did make one, you said the wrong thing when you claimed it was impossible to make mistakes . . . (287e-288a).

Ctesippus cannot restrain himself at this point and tries to renew his confrontation with Dionysodorus. Once again he reminds the brothers of their status as foreigners in Athens, addressing them as "men of Thurii or Chios, or from wherever and however you like to be styled" (288b). Here he refers not only to their foreignness but to their lack of association with any particular city, which mirrors their refusal to argue for a particular, consistent perspective: "it matters nothing to you if you talk complete nonsense" (288b). Telling Crito he wanted to maintain the ceasefire between Ctesippus and Dionysodorus, Socrates intervenes with his usual assurance that the brothers will cease their "conjuring tricks" (288b) and disclose a "serious side" (288c) appropriate to the situation at hand.

Apparently his first protreptic demonstration failed to serve its purpose. He must resume that demonstration where he stopped—not to round off his earlier argument but to try once more to elevate the tone of the encounter: "I shall do my best to go through what comes next so to spur them to action and in hopes that out of pity and commiseration for my earnest exertions they may be earnest themselves" (288d).

As before, Socrates begins with a definition accessible to Clinias: "Now the love of wisdom, or philosophy, is the acquisition of knowledge, isn't that so? I said" (288d). He then asks whether people desire knowledge that benefits them. This question echoes the opening of the first protreptic, which asks whether people wish to fare well. People want to acquire beneficial things because they want to fare well; Clinias can understand that truism easily enough. Socrates thus repeats the same style of argument that has failed—so far—to instruct the brothers. He also repeats his last conclusions, which subordinate *technē* to *sophia*. He reminds Crito that knowledge does not benefit those who acquire it if they do not have the wisdom or knowledge to use it rightly. By the same token, people who make things must also know how to use their creations.[31] Not even knowledge of immortality would benefit someone who does not know how to live rightly.

Socrates concludes that "what we need, my fair friend . . . is a kind of knowledge which combines making and knowing how to use the thing which it makes" (289b). He asks whether speech-writing satisfies this requirement, and Clinias replies in a way that shows how successfully he has followed the logic of Socrates' argument. He says that he

[31]Mythically speaking, the gift of Prometheus confers no benefit if humanity lacks wisdom. Socrates does not use this language in the *Euthydemus*, although he compares himself to Prometheus in the *Protagoras*

has noticed that people who write speeches often have no idea how to use them, just as lyre-makers very often cannot play the instruments they create. His whole response shows how much confidence he has gained while participating in the protreptic exchanges:

> Well, he said, I notice that certain speech writers have no idea of how to use the particular speeches they themselves have written, in the same way that the lyre makers have no idea of how to use their lyres. And in the former case too, there are other people who are capable of using what the speech writers have composed but are themselves unable to write. So it is clear that in regard to speeches too, there is one art of making and another of using (289d).

Socrates congratulates Clinias for this contribution and elaborates the point. Clinias' conclusion does not surprise him, he explains, "since [speech writing] is part of the enchanters' art and but slightly inferior to it" (289e-290a). Like the brothers, who teach rhetoric appropriate for the law courts and practice their deceptions before the crowd, the speech writer's "art consists in charming and persuading members of the juries and assemblies and other sorts of crowds" (290a).

In that way, this critique of speech writing takes aim at the brothers and other sophists who specialize in rhetoric. Subsequently, Socrates mentions the art of generalship as a type of knowledge that combines making and knowing. Once again he alludes to the brothers,[32] a clear reminder that his protreptic demonstration exists for their sake and not just Clinias'. At this point, in fact, the frame interrupts the narrative and draws Crito into the protreptic discussion, a reminder that the narrative as a whole also has an audience. This transition in the dialogue occurs when Socrates attributes an argument to Clinias that seems far more mature than anything one could reasonably expect from young, timid Clinias. Clinias supposedly makes the following analysis of

[32]We remember that the brothers once practiced the art of generalship (273c).

generalship and its inadequacy as a skill that unites knowledge of making and using. After defining generalship as a kind of "man hunting" (290b), he argues that:

> No art of actual hunting . . . extends any further than pursuing and capturing: whenever the hunters catch what they are pursuing and capturing; whenever the hunters catch what they are pursuing they are incapable of using it, but they and the fishermen hand over their prey to the cooks. And again, geometers and astronomers and calculators (who are hunters too, in a way, for none of them make their diagrams; they simply discover those which already exist), since they themselves have no idea how to use their prey but only how to hunt it, hand over the task of using their prey to the dialecticians—at least, those of them do so who are not completely senseless (290b-c)."

After Socrates voices his agreement, Clinias further embroiders his point

> And the same is true of the generals, he said. Whenever they capture some city, or a camp, they hand it over to the statesmen . . . So, he said, we are in need of that art which will itself know how to use what it acquires through making or capturing, and if it is an art of this sort which will make us happy, then, he said, we must look for some other art besides that of generalship" (290d).

This speech barely resembles anything Clinias has said before, at least not in terms of confidence and sophistication. The substance of the argument and assurance of his tone are strikingly inconsistent with his tender age and diffident character. Crito notices this incongruity and expresses disbelief. If Clinias could speak so ably, he would scarcely need an educator (290e). Socrates pretends not to remember the source of the comment and suggests that age has made him somewhat senile: "Dear me, then perhaps it was Ctesippus who said this, and I am getting absent-minded" (290e). This explanation seems equally implausible to Crito, who apparently knows Ctesippus well enough to dismiss that possibility: "Not my idea of Ctesippus!" (291a). Socrates continues puzzling over the origin of the comment, claiming to search his memory without success. "But I'm sure of one thing at least," he says "that is was neither Euthydemus nor Dionysodorus who said it. Do you suppose, my dear Crito, that some superior being was there and

uttered these things…?" (291a). When Socrates first met the brothers he said he would regard them as gods if they could teach virtue. The fact that does not entertain the possibility that either Euthydemus or Dionysodorus spoke like "superior beings" sends a definite message to Crito: He does not have a high regard for the brothers despite everything he says to the contrary. If a superior being appeared at the Lyceum, no one would confuse him, surely, with either of the brothers. Among the people left, who does that leave as a possible candidate? The question remains unanswered.

A few details stand out in this strange and fascinating episode. To begin with, it seems unlikely that Socrates would forget if someone interrupted his exchange with Clinias. He constructs the protreptic model as a one-on-one dialogue; the intervention of a third party would hardly escape his memory, for it would alter the character of his demonstration. (The fact that he remembers what this third party said makes it even less likely he forgot the source.) Why, then, does he pretend to forget? Where does the argument come from? If it does not come from Clinias, how does it fit into the structure of the protreptic dialogue? To resolve these questions, one must understand how he uses his narrative to communicate to Crito. Inserting this passage into the narrative allows Socrates to accomplish two goals. As I have said already, this episode makes it clear that Socrates does not regard the brothers as superior beings. At the same time, Socrates does not know that Crito will interrupt his narrative to question its veracity. In my view, he uses the mysterious passage to test the keenness of Crito's perceptions; he tests Crito to see if he can distinguish between serious philosophizing and sophistic word games. Moreover, he wants to know if Crito understands that a young man does not begin speaking wisely after a few minutes' exposure to Socrates and philosophy. Does Crito

understand that the effort involved in becoming truly wise belies the brothers' claim to teach "virtue" quickly—or, more absurdly, to reveal that everyone (including Clinias) already knows everything anyway?

In a way, Crito passes the test; he readily understands that Clinias cannot speak as wisely and maturely as Socrates claims. No one becomes that insightful and articulate in a matter of minutes or hours. He also regards Ctesippus as incapable of making the mysterious critique of generalship. This critical reference to Ctesippus proves significant, for Ctesippus later masters the eristic method with remarkable facility and Crito does not interrupt the narrative to express skepticism or disbelief. He apparently finds it perfectly plausible that Ctesippus could master eristic in a short period despite the fact that he cannot, in Crito's estimation, speak with maturity and wisdom. To that extent, then, Crito passes Socrates' test. This allows Socrates to imply subtly that the brothers never spoke wisely at the Lyceum and really have no wisdom to offer.

In making this crucial distinction, Crito also takes sides with Socrates (though perhaps not fully realizing it) in his quarrel the brothers. The brothers argued that everyone already knows everything. From that premise Socrates drew the obvious conclusion that no one needs a teacher, which places the brothers in an oddly self-defeating position. Now he subtly demonstrates the absurdity of this conclusion by placing a keen argument in the mouth of a young and inexperienced pupil. Crito knows that Clinias could not produce the kind of speech Socrates attributes to him. Common sense informs Crito that Clinias does not possess great wisdom, much less omniscience. For that reason, he still needs a teacher. Unfortunately, Crito does not take the final step and realize that Socrates could help Critobulus become a wise person. After he and

Socrates agreed that Clinias, Ctesippus, and the brothers did not make the argument in question, one possibility remained. Clinias could have asked if Socrates produced the argument. I think he wants to see if Crito can identify the "superior person" as Socrates himself. The argument did not come from nowhere; only the divine sign speaks to Socrates in that way (272e), and it does not make arguments; it only tells him what *not* to do. It seems safe to think that the argument belongs to Socrates, whether he spoke it at the Lyceum or not. He introduces the passage into his narrative not only to demonstrate the absurdity of claiming that one can become wise or omniscient very quickly; he also uses the argument to show Crito how a truly wise person speaks and what that person can offer his son that the sophists obviously cannot. Crito notices the superiority of the argument but fails to identify its source:

> Yes, by heaven, Socrates, I certainly think it was some superior being, very much so. But after this did you still go on looking for the art? And did you find the one you were looking for or not?" (291a).

One sees how sadly Crito fails at the end of the dialogue, when it becomes clear that he does not distinguish between Socrates from the brothers (250a-b), but that is to anticipate.

To sum up: The second protreptic yields only negative results, although Socrates does not narrate the entirety of his second dialogue with Clinias. Instead he draws Crito into the dialogue, turning him into a participant and not simply an auditor. Crito has something at stake in the question of education, for his son, who seeks an educator, could easily become involved with sophists. I have said that Socrates tailors his dialogue to fit the interlocutor. In the Euthydemus he also tailors his narrative to fit Crito. This strategy accounts for his deviation from straight, factual narration. He ascribes words to Clinias that could not possibly belong to him, making one wonder if he has not altered the events

of the day in subtler ways. This situation produces a special irony since it places Socrates in a position similar to Plato. Obviously Plato's dialogues do not give a literal, historically true account of conversations between Socrates and other Athenians. Plato tailors his dialogues for his audience, a difficult procedure since he must write for anonymous readers instead of speaking to a specific person. In the *Euthydemus* he speaks to a culture ridden with competitive values. Socrates also crafts his story to fit the needs of the listener, making the narrative itself an exercise in protreptic discourse; and he also speaks to the city insofar as he philosophizes with Clinias in public place. At any rate, Socrates involves Crito in the conversation Crito could not hear because of the crowd. Together, Crito and Socrates repeat the philosophical impasse that occurred in the second protreptic demonstration. Returning to his narrative, Socrates declares that he and Clinias cannot track down the kingly art, which would both provide and create happiness (292d), and he turns to the brothers with a cry of desperation.

Once again, Socrates switches rhetorical registers and compares Euthydemus and Dionysodorus to deities: "I began to exclaim at the top of my lungs and to call upon the two strangers as though they were the Heavenly Twins…" (293a). The comparison seems especially ironic after Socrates' dialogue with Crito, in which he speculates that a divine being possibly appeared at the Lyceum while discounting the brothers as possible candidates. Euthydemus responds to Socrates' cry for help and offers to show that Socrates already knows everything. Socrates greets this revelation with mock enthusiasm, and yet another allusion to his age: "The for heaven's sake, demonstrate that I possess it! That will be much easier than learning for a man of my age" (293b). This time Euthydemus generates another "paradox" around the question of knowing and not-

knowing. To put it briefly, he argues that Socrates cannot be both knowing and not-knowing at the same time. Therefore, if Socrates knows anything he must know everything; otherwise, one would have to admit that a thing can be what it is not. To enforce this point, Euthydemus appeals to a version of the principle of non-contradiction:

> Then cone answer me this, he said: Is there anything you know?
> Oh, yes, many things, though trivial ones.
> That will serve the purpose, he said. Now do you suppose it possible for any existing thing not to be what it is?
> Heavens no, not I.
> And do you know something? He said.
> Yes, I do.
> Then you are knowing, if you really know?
> Of course, as far as concerns that particular thing.
> That doesn't matter, because you necessarily know everything, if you are knowing?
> How in heaven's name can that be, said I, when there are may other things I don't know?
> Then if there is anything you don't know, you are not knowing (293c).

In this passage, Euthydemus uses a particularly maddening rhetorical trick: He simply refuses to respond to Socrates' modification of his argument. He continues talking as if his interlocutor, Socrates, has said nothing significant; by dint of repetition he effectively drowns out his opponent. In this way, he imitates the mindless noise of the crowd he relies on for success. Socrates might as well conduct a conversation with a shouting mob. Euthydemus' staunch refusal to acknowledge Socrates' objection constitutes a peculiar kind of aggression. No dialogue can exist with someone who refuses to listen and respond to what another person has said. One's words fall into a void. Short of retreating from the debate (and implicitly admitting defeat), one can only submit to the person who stubbornly dominates the encounter. Socrates finally agrees to submit rather than prolong his futile resistance. His tone, however, sounds both weary and pointed:

> Very good, Euthydemus – according to the proverb, 'whatever you say is well said.' But how do I know that knowledge we were looking for? Since it is impossible both to be and not to be the same thing, if I know one thing I know absolutely everything – because I could not be both knowing and not knowing at the same time—and since I know everything I also have this knowledge. Is this what you mean, and is this your piece of wisdom? (293d).

Euthydemus accepts this conclusion and informs Socrates that "You are refuted out of your own mouth" (293e). Socrates wonders if the brothers do not suffer the same consequence. Surely they must admit ignorance of some particular thing? Since they refuse to allow a distinction between "knowing" in general and "knowing" a particular thing, must they draw the conclusion that they know nothing—the ultimate refutation of their own wisdom? As one might expect, the brothers do not boast of universal ignorance. On the contrary, they tell Socrates that they know everything, just as he knows everything if he knows anything. The brothers are omniscient. From this outrageous claim the dialogue descends steeply into its darkest, strangest section.

The brothers do not argue that they alone know everything. They generously credit everyone in the world with omniscience: "Everyone . . . knows everything if he really knows something" (294a). "By the gods, Dionysodorus," Socrates responds "for I realize that you are both now in earnest, although I have provoked you to it with some difficulty—do you really mean you know everything?" (294b) Socrates knows that the brothers have not become earnest, although he now understands that they have no qualms about defending plainly indefensible claims. He also knows that he cannot expect anything from them but games and tricks. They peddle their games "in earnest," i.e. without shame and for no higher purpose; they seriously want to win. At this point it seems obvious that the brothers have no true wisdom to conceal or dispense. Socrates has no illusions about the situation and resigns himself to the absurdities that now unfold.

He responds to the brothers' claim to know everything by asking them to confirm their knowledge of random facts and skills. When the brothers enter the scene, the tone of conversation quickly becomes arbitrary. Socrates seems to pull his question out of hat: Do the brothers have knowledge of carpentry, shoe making, or leather stitching? Do they know the number of stars in the sky or sands on the earth? The brothers answer in the affirmative. They cannot exclude any knowledge of anything in order to make their claims even more believable, if that were possible.

At this point, Ctesippus can contain himself no longer.[33] Once again he interrupts the dialogue, this time demanding that the brothers give evidence for their outlandish claims: If the brothers really know everything, they should have no trouble demonstrating their knowledge to everyone's satisfaction. For example, Dionysodorus can tell them how many teeth his brother has. The other people can the count Euthydemus' teeth to verify his answer and thus prove (or disprove) his omniscience. The brothers take offense (assuming, probably rightly, that Ctesippus mocks their age) and refuse to cooperate. They also refuse because they cannot answer this question or any of the others that Ctesippus fires at them in rapid succession. They dig their feet into the ground and refuse to dignify his increasingly outrageous questions with answers:

> And there was practically nothing Ctesippus did not ask them about in the end, inquiring shamelessly whether they knew the most disgraceful things. The two of them faced his questions manfully, claiming to know in each case, just like boars when they are driven up to the attack" (294c).

[33]Ctesippus' tendency to interrupt the conversation angrily and sometimes with the threat of violence recalls Thrasymachus' behavior in Book I of the *Republic*. This connection is significant since Ctesippus ultimately ends up behaving like a sophist, using argument as aggressively as Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.

The brothers' simple refusal to cooperate with Ctesippus seems sufficient to discredit their claim to omniscience. After all, if they know everything, why would they decline an opportunity to show off their knowledge? Ctesippus knows (as a matter of common sense) that the brothers do not know everything, and he seizes this opportunity to expose and humiliate them. His desire to refute the brothers clearly stems from his deeply personal grudge, not an earnest determination to expose falsehood and establish the truth. His grudge against Dionysodorus has grown increasingly embittered, and he now he springs on his opponent to deliver, he hopes, a fatal blow to the man who so sorely offended his pride. Socrates vividly describes the aggression in Ctesippus' behavior by describing the brothers' reaction to him. According to Socrates they behaved like boars responding to an attack (294d). The hunters have turned into the hunted. By becoming a hunter, Ctesippus behaves like the brothers and begins to reveal how much he resembles his enemies.

Socrates tries again to defuse the confrontation between Ctesippus and Dionysodorus and once again becomes involved a cycle of arguments. As before, Socrates' attempt to reason with the brothers only forces them to bully him into submission. They begin with the promise to show Socrates that he already knows everything, a promise that Socrates responds to with his now-familiar mock enthusiasm: "what great godsend than this would I be likely to come across my whole life long? (295a). He quickly creates trouble for the brothers, however, and they respond with remarkable intolerance. They resume the question of knowledge, this time asking him how he knows what he knows: "do you know by means of that by which you have knowledge, or by means of something else?" (295b). Sensing a verbal trap, Socrates

gives a qualified reply: “By means of that by which I have knowledge, I suppose you mean the soul, or isn’t this what you have in mind? (295b) Euthydemus’ argument cannot accommodate this addition and he begins attacking Socrates as bitterly as Ctesippus attacked him and his brother. Indeed, his behavior strikingly mirrors Ctesippus’; he even insults Socrates age, calling him “practically senile” (295c). Socrates does not yield easily to Euthydemus’ demands and the sophist’s frustration becomes increasingly intense. First Socrates wants to insist that he knows by means of something specific: the soul. After dropping the word “soul,” he continues modifying Euthydemus’ questions to avoid the foreseeable trap:

> And do you always know by this same means, he said, or is it rather the case that you know sometimes by this means and sometimes by another?
> Always, whenever I know, I said, it is by this means.
> Won’t you stop adding things on again? he said.
> But I’m afraid this word always will trip us up (296b).

His fears are justified. When Socrates withdraws the “whenever” clause, Euthydemus finally rushes to his conclusion: “Then you always know, by this means. And since you are always knowing, the next question is, do you know some things by this means by which you know and others by some other means, or everything by this one?” (296c) Socrates responds with yet another qualification: “Absolutely everything by this one, said I—those that I know, that is” (296c). In this way, he continues to frustrate the rapid movement from over-determined premises to predictable refutation, knowing perfectly well that the brothers often rely on vague, equivocal language to win their disputes. (As one can see, their training in legal forensic does not go to waste.) They just want him to answer their questions without seriously trying to influence the direction of the argument. By inflaming their irritation and making them exert arbitrary force, Socrates has brought

the brothers to a moment of truth. They do not simply resort to aggressive measures in a desperate attempt to shore up their crumbling act. The aggression inherent in eristic argumentation merely becomes more explicit when they face the possibility of disaster. When that happens, they reveal a grim determination to win that does not exclude harshly arbitrary measures. They always made the other person's humiliation and defeat (the flipside of victory) their primary goal. Now they ensure Socrates' defeat by dictating what he can and cannot say, depending on whether it thwarts their trivial but ruthless game plan.

This arbitrary prohibition no longer comes as a surprise; it should now seem obvious to Socrates that the brothers seek victims, not interlocutors. Indeed, the metaphor of sport has revealed its inadequacy to describe their purpose. In a game both sides have recourse to a common set of rules. These rules do not ensure equality; one side may possess greater discipline or skill than the other. This fact notwithstanding, rules guarantee a standard of fairness and judgment—a standard both to which both sides can appeal to adjudicate differences. Even a sport as brutally permissive as pancratiastism allows both sides to deploy the same harsh tactics. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus have no regard for the principle of fair play. To repeat, they strip their aggression of traditional sentiments, leaving it denuded of loftier ideas like honor and fairness. At this point Socrates revealingly drops the metaphor of sport and describes the brothers as hunters, a pursuit that does not include participants who face each other in combat or play. The hunter's prey does not participate with the hunter but merely tries to outflank his tactics. The people who once fought the "battle of the law court" (272a) presently weave a net of words to capture unsuspecting victims: "I realized he [Euthydemus] was

angry with me for making distinctions in his phrases because he wanted to surround me with words and hunt me down" (295d). Euthydemus' anger differs from Ctesippus' indignation; he does not charge Socrates with dishonorable conduct but simply resents his inconvenient unwillingness to obey their commands.

As the encounter at the Lyceum draws to a close, the brothers are not the only interlocutors who come to a moment of truth. Ctesippus has intruded into the conversation several times throughout the dialogue, representing himself as someone with a keen sense of honor and truthfulness. The brothers provoke his indignation, an emotion that clearly dominates his character. However, in his final confrontation with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus he undergoes a surprising transformation that exposes the continuity between his disposition and the brothers'. Here he enters the scene as the brothers draw the conclusion that Socrates does not have a father. Socrates asserts that Chaerdemus, his father, is not the father of his half- brother Patrocles. The brothers correctly infer that Chaerdemus is both a father and not a father. However, since they suppress the crucial distinction between being Socrates' father and being a father in general, Socrates must agree that Chaerdemus is not a father, for one cannot both be and not be a father at the same time. They therefore conclude Socrates has no father. Ctesippus can contain himself no longer and turns the questions back on the brothers, a strategy that leaves them unmoved. As before, he asks a series of questions that expose the consequences of this "philosophical" position. Euthydemus does not hesitate to confirm the truth of every question Ctesippus puts to him; he agrees (for example) that he and Ctesippus share the same father and so does everyone else, for otherwise their father would be a father and non-father simultaneously—leaving them orphaned like Socrates.

In fact, the logic of the argument forces Euthydemus to say that his father is also the father of every animal, and his "mother the mother of sea urchins" (298d). This comically arbitrary remark mirrors the arbitrary nature of eristic itself. The brothers can say or prove anything whatever as long as they dictate the terms of conversation. The rules governing conversation likewise have an arbitrary character that helps buttress the sophists' power. The interlocutor cannot call them to account since they do not acknowledge a coherent set of rules. Like political tyrants, the brothers do not reveal the full scope of their power in the rigid enforcement of law but in their willingness to use force without reason.

The last exchange becomes significantly protracted as Ctesippus elbows Socrates from the conversation. Ctesippus continues to bristle with hostility. The actual content of the arguments also grows more violent, underscoring the recurring interplay between physical violence and verbal abuse. Ctesippus uses a continuation of the argument about fathers and non-fathers to express his desire to assault Dionysodorus. Because Ctesippus has the same father as dogs, he must also admit that since he beats his dog he also beats his father.[34] Ctesippus admits this conclusion with a sarcastic laugh:

> And Ctesippus laughed and said, Heavens yes, since I can't beat you!
> Then do you beat your own father? he asked.

[34]The allusion to *The Clouds* is obvious. In that comedic play, a young man beats his father after his exposure to Socrates and his notorious thinkery. Plato wittily corrects the charge of parent abuse in this dialogue; Ctesippus speaks of beating his father as a result of his growing involvement with the *sophists*, not Socrates. *The Clouds* shows no appreciation for the distinction between Socrates and the sophists. By echoing a scene from that play, Plato subtly draws our attention to a major theme in this dialogue: the public's inability to distinguish meaningfully between sophistry and Socratic philosophy. Many of the spectators will leave with the impression that Socrates and the brothers represent the same way of life. In other words, they will leave the Lyceum and Aristophanes' play with the same set of conclusions. Why Socrates does not use this occasion to exonerate himself poses a challenge for the interpreter. Anyway, from here on, Ctesippus' conversation with the brothers draws him deeper into images of violence and gore, a development that contrasts starkly with the influence Socrates has on Clinias. This contrast does not strike many of the people gathered at the Lyceum, nor does it seem apparent to Crito.

> There would certainly be much more reason for me to beat yours, he said, for taking into his head to beget such clever sons. But I suppose, Euthydemus, that the father of you and the puppies has benefited greatly from this wisdom of yours! (298e).

Despite his continued hostility toward Dionysodorus and his brother, something remarkable occurs to Ctesippus in this section of the dialogue. He undergoes a quick and revealing conversion to sophistry. At the beginning, he mockingly imitates the brothers and their fraudulent mode of argument. But as his imitation grows more convincing, he becomes more and more indistinguishable from the people he wants to ridicule. The traits that supposedly dominate his being (like honor and a sense of truthfulness) fade into the background and reveal not only his weakness of character but the inner unity between himself and the brothers. He becomes less indigent and more enthusiastic about his newfound skill, which he uses to badger the brothers relentlessly.

This revelation has far-ranging implications, for Ctesippus represents more than himself; he expresses the typical values of an Athenian citizen; in other words, he subscribes to the ideals associated with the *kalos agathos* (e.g., when publicizing his sense of truthfulness and loyalty in contrast to the brothers' ignominy (284d)). Like the guardians in the *Republic*, he exhibits a spirited anger and lively sense of indignation that segues into a readiness for combat. For him and for the city, hostility and brutality stand revealed as the flipside of sentimentality. This brutality connects him to the brothers, just as the brothers' participation in military combat connects them to the city, even though they dissociate their actions from specific, sentimental attachments. The Greek reverence for competitive struggle unites the citizen and the foreign sophist; in this case, it unites Ctesippus with the very sophists he loathes. To repeat an earlier observation, the brothers preserve the competitive Greek ethos while stripping it of traditional sentiment. Instead

they cloak their teaching in the promise to teach *arête*. Their activities reveal a conception of *arête* or "virtue" that denotes excellence in competition and combat. They therefore remain true to a popular and time-honored understanding of the concept. To sum up the main point: The sophists' dissociation of sophistry from traditional sentiment sets them apart from loyal citizens; in the *Euthydemus*, however, the distance collapses. This occurs as Ctesippus steadily abandons his righteous rhetoric and assumes the role of sophist—battling the brothers on their own turf. The combativeness of his nature remains, but the specific loyalties and personal relationships for which he fought begin to fade.

Of course, even this view of Athenian sentiment ignores their treatment of enemies and dependent allies; it also ignores the crucial role of self-interest in political life. The calculations of self-interest become apparent when the Athenians speak without the aid of rhetoric, that is, without bothering to sublimate their goals into the language of patriotism. They can use unadorned speech when they need not inspire loyalty because they have the power command obedience. Participants in a game have recourse to a common set of rules; one cannot say the same for enemy cities or weaker allies. In this context the stronger city creates rules to which the others must submit. The Athenians articulate this view in the famous Melian Dialogue. In that exchange, the Athenians openly banish sentiment and "fine phrases" about justice from their conversation with the Melians, exposing, without shame or apology, the brute power relations that govern politics. They show that behind the political rhetoric of someone like Pericles, the city's stark self-interest dictates the rules. Indeed, only amoral considerations are deemed

"practical" by those who strive to acquire and maintain political success. Speaking to the Melians, Athens declares that

> you know as well as we do that, when these matters are discussed by practical people, the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.[35]

As rhetoricians the brothers doubtlessly understand how to make the harsher facts of political life more palatable to citizens and moralists. As experienced military advisors they also understand the less edifying strategies and motives that guarantee political success. Their cynicism does not seem like an aberration or an alien, corrupting influence when one recalls the colder realities of the polis—a realm in which the brothers can boast experience. Self-interest and patriotic sentiment link hands in the city. The brothers take advantage of the self-interested impulses that motivate the city and ultimately lie at the root of patriotism, especially in its aggressive mode. The brothers stand outside the local traditions and loyalties of cities like Athens. For that reason, they also presage the twilight of tradition. They show, in comic form, what the city looks like when its cult of victory and success (*arête*) loses its aura of nobility—when patriotic sentiment slips away and reveals a cold, un-sublimated desire for victory and conquest.

The *Euthydemus* therefore dramatizes a great and tragic irony. It demonstrates the fundamental unity of the Greek citizen and the sophist while pointing to the radical discontinuity between philosophy and sophistry; at the same time, it shows that the general public goes away with the opposite impression, associating sophistry with philosophy and failing to see the unsettling truth about their own values. It is Ctesippus who allies himself with the paradigm of "gentlemen and those who speak the truth"

[35]Thucidides, *History of the Peloponnesion War*, Penguin Books, New York, 1954. P. 402.

(284d), righteously defending the boy he loves. Within the brief arc of the dialogue, however, he undergoes a "conversion" and masters the art of sophistry.[36] And yet the public leaves the Lyceum convinced that Socrates has revealed *his* kinship with sophistry. They apparently miss the revelation that actually occurs—a revelation directly contrary to the one they perceive. The case of Ctesippus demonstrates a troubling fact: The loyal citizen, when stripped of traditional loyalties, bears a distinct resemblance to the sophists. I do not mean to imply that the brothers do nothing significant or radical when they dissolve traditional beliefs (e.g., treating war or politics as a "mere diversion," hardly the attitude of Athenian patriots). I only argue that the traditional beliefs conceal what the sophist and the citizen have in common: A craving for victory that does not quell from the violent—and even amoral—measures sometimes necessary to obtain it. When the loyal citizen abandons the moral sentiments that characterize his type, he reveals his kinship to sophistry.

`The violence that animates Ctesippus' character erupts throughout the dialogue. As he continues engaging the brothers, Socrates draws subtle attention to the spirited violence that underlies and motivates the exchange. The content of the eristic arguments become increasingly gruesome. Ctesippus refers to the Scythian convention of imbibing blood from the gilded skulls of defeated opponents. In addition, Dionysodorus tells Socrates that:

> if someone kills the cook and cuts him up, and then boils him and roasts him, he will be doing the proper business. And if anyone hammers the blacksmith himself, and puts on the wheel, he will also be doing the proper business.

[36]I put conversion in scare quotes because Ctesippus does not undergo a fundamental change of character. He simply finds that his aggressive personality useful for combating the brothers on their own turf.

> By Poisdon, I exclaimed, you are putting the finishing touches on your wisdom! And do you think such skill will ever be mine? (301d-e)

Once again, Socrates presents himself as a slow learner struggling to obtain the brothers' wisdom, which he claims to hold in the highest esteem. In contrast to Socrates' sluggish progress, Ctesippus has made impressive strides in the art of sophistry. In his narrative voice, he says that Ctesippus' rapid progress reflects poorly on his character:

> It is my opinion that Ctesippus, *who is a bit of a rogue*, had picked up these very things by overhearing these very men, because there is no wisdom of a comparable sort among any other person of the present day. (300d) [my emphasis]

In other words, Ctesippus' ability to imitate the brothers successfully reflects poorly on his character. The brothers do not corrupt Ctesippus; he already embodies a way of thinking that predisposes him toward eristic. Conversely, Socrates' inability to engage the eristic method (or his irritating habit of making rational objections) reflects favorably on his character and the soundness of his pedagogical model. Unlike Ctesippus, he does not try to defeat the brothers at their own game. Doing so involves joining the game, as Ctesippus finally proves. His "conversion" does not really involve a profound change in personality and moral orientation. Like the brothers, competitive aggression underlies his actions throughout the dialogue, a fact that gives him a natural affinity for eristic combat. He wants to defeat his opponents and win Clinias' approval. Both he and the brothers perform for the sake of onlookers, not as honest seekers after wisdom. In other words, they behave like the average Athenian at a game or on the battlefield. They compete for a prize (whether honor, money, or sex), and their struggle to win involves them naturally in violence.

III. Back to Crito

If Ctesippus has much in common with the brothers, so does Crito, albeit in a different way. The *Euthydemus* returns to the frame after Socrates completes his narrative. In the brief dialogue between Crito and Socrates that concludes Plato's work, Crito reveals much about his own mentality that remained implicit in other parts of the dialogue, especially the beginning. As I mentioned earlier, at the end of the *Euthydemus* Crito reveals a character flaw that plays a more explicit role in the dialogue that bears his name. His characteristic flaw is his exaggerated concern for reputation and, more specifically, the embarrassment and danger that threaten to ruin Socrates and his friends if he continues to philosophize publicly.

The next chapter takes up the question of public philosophizing in detail. Here I focus on the question of "appearances," a central category for Plato (as he famously explains in Books VI and VII of the *Republic*). Crito, Ctesippus, the brothers, the crowd, and ultimately the polis belong to the realm of appearances: The brothers because they manufacture apparent victories; the crowd because they apparently care more about spectacle than truth; Ctesippus because he argues to impress Clinias, using the eristic method to do so; and finally the whole city, which includes rhetoricians, politicians, fame-seeking athletes and spectacle-loving crowds, always ready to crown another victory. Crito's concern for reputation prevents him from transcending the city and its anti-philosophical bias; he remains tethered to the crowd because he does not overcome his fear and respect for popular opinion (or *doxa*, the category that corresponds directly to appearances: see *Republic* 510a). As in the *Crito* and the *Republic*, Socrates must, in his dialogue with Crito, dissociate himself from what other people think or imagine (*to tois*

allois dokoun, *Republic* 506b). He rejects public opinion at the beginning when he vows to study with the brothers or learn their method. Now he must tell Crito that he intends to philosophize publicly as always, regardless of the public's negative appraisal. Significantly, Crito did not overhear the conversation between Socrates and the sophists due to the noise of the crowd (304d), but he did hear a bit of the criticism directed against Socrates. The criticism came from a speechwriter with whom Crito conversed after the encounter between Socrates and the brothers ended. The speechwriter found the whole event distasteful. He makes a wholesale condemnation of the event that includes Socrates and also makes no distinction between sophistry and Socratic philosophy; the speechwriter simply assumes that Socrates has put himself at the brothers' disposal—probably taking Socrates' praise for the brothers' wisdom and skill at face value. However, the speechwriter does not criticize the brothers for their specific faults; he criticizes both Socrates and the brothers for engaging in pointless chatter "about matters of no consequence" (305e). Crito tries weakly to defend philosophy as a "charming thing" (305a), but this only provokes a harsher response:

> Charming, my innocent friend? he said—why it [philosophy] is of no value whatsoever! And if you had been present, I think you would have been embarrassed on your friend's account, he acted so strangely in his willingness to put himself at the disposal of men who care nothing about what they say, but just snatch at every word (304e-305a).

The speechwriter appeals to Crito's keen awareness of public perceptions: He would have been *embarrassed* to see Socrates, his friend, make a fool of himself in public. Crito does not tell the speechwriter that Socrates differs greatly from "such people" (304e) as Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Instead, he defends all three as practitioners of a "charming" pursuit he calls philosophy. Of course, one could argue that Crito could not

have known better since he did not hear the brothers' arguments. But his speech to Socrates follows the narrative in which Socrates gives him precisely that information. Still it seems obvious that Crito fails to see beyond public perception and grasp the Socratic difference. He repeats the speechwriter's criticism without objection. Instead, Crito defends Socrates against critics like the speechwriter but reproaches Socrates for not pursuing his charming activity in a less conspicuous way: "Now as far as I am concerned, Socrates, the man was wrong to criticize the activity . . . But to be willing to argue with such people in front of a large crowd does seem to me worthy of reproach" (305b). The man criticized an activity that includes, in Crito's mind, both eristic and protreptic. Although Crito mentions the brothers ("such people") with a breath of disdain, he does not clearly define "the activity" he defends when speaking to Socrates. Like the speechwriter, his use of the phrase does not draw a boundary between Socrates' activities at the Lyceum and the brothers'. Even if he cares for Socrates and feels contempt for the brothers, he does not show any sign of understanding what distinguishes Socrates' vocation from their eristic activities.

Crito's fixation on appearances and perception reveals another bound between the sophists and the city. Crito is a well-heeled Athenian, concerned with maintaining the appearance of respectability (as he also makes clear in the *Crito*, when he worries that people will think Crito was unwilling to fund Socrates' escape if he accepts the death penalty). Crito cannot become a philosophical companion for Socrates because he cannot transcend the city and its opinions; he cannot hear the voice of philosophy beyond the din of the crowd. The crowd applauds apparent victories; their love of competitive spectacle overrides their desire for truth, a corrupting tendency that arises from the very depths of

Greek culture. Plato uses the clownish brothers to satirize this cult of victory and its disturbing consequences. Crito does not praise competition or victory but he does embrace appearances at the expense of truth, and this error binds him to the city.

CHAPTER TWO

Philosophy and the Public

I. What is Enlightenment?

This discussion of the *Euthydemus* treads an uncertain boundary between the public and private spheres of the Athenian polis. Socratic philosophy offers a public model of inquiry that implicates both the public and private destinies of the people involved. Philosophy brings an incisive critique to the city and its cultural ethos; those who embrace it cannot avoid altering their relationship to the public world. Sophistry also brings a radical new voice to the polis: a voice of secular disputation. Whether sophistry entails a different relationship with public life and its cultural background seems rather unclear, for sophistry combines a radical openness in disputation with a traditional love of victory. The ambiguous nature of sophistry draws hostility from conservative Athenians (and a complete ban from Sparta) while appealing to the city's love of contests. In any case, neither sophistry nor philosophy can escape involvement with the public world. In this chapter I analyze the exact nature of that involvement as it plays out in the *Euthydemus*.

In the first chapter I argue that eristic has a fundamentally invidious character since it aims solely at victory, a goal that requires that someone play the role of loser. Although sophistry departs sharply from Athens' parochial loyalties and religious beliefs, the goal of sophistry dovetails with the cultural disposition of Athenian life; sophistry strips the cult of victory of its venerable trappings and reveals the underlying unity

between conservative citizen and radical sophist.[1] The sophists and the public meet in the spirit of contest. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus require an audience that responds to their rapid-fire victories. The crowd contributes to their bullying procedure, reducing Clinias to greater confusion and humiliation with their laughter and applause. This meeting of sophistry and the crowd reveals the deep, underlying connection between the sophists and their audience. To borrow Plato's categories, both the brothers and the crowd belong to the realm of appearances. The crowd only requires apparent refutations and the sophists, who specialize in appearances, take advantage of the crowd's relaxed expectations. Eristic refutation therefore belongs necessarily to the public realm. Without an audience, eristic controversy loses its point.

In the first chapter I focused on the conflicting goals of eristic and protreptic; in this chapter I examine how the goal of eristic gives it a public character, forcing it to depend on a responsive audience. In contrast, protreptic dialogue does not presuppose an audience. Instead, Socrates uses dialogue to convert a particular person to love of wisdom, a goal that gives his interaction with Clinias an intimate, private character. At the same time, the private dialogue between Socrates and Clinias occurs in a public context and does not address Clinias alone. Although directed to Clinias, the protreptic dialogues also convey a message to the brothers and the city of Athens. At first glance, the three-fold purpose of protreptic dialogue seems paradoxical. I argue that the paradox vanishes when one realizes that Socrates offers his protreptic dialogue as part of a broader cultural critique. This point coincides with another argument in the first chapter,

[1]One can define some of the sophists (though by no means all) as radical insofar as they disregard traditions beliefs (or treat them with skepticism, e.g. Protagoras), although the purpose of eristic controversy does not really challenge the competitive ethos underlying the Homeric tradition.

namely, that the *Euthydemus* identifies the goal of eristic with the Greek cult of victory – a cultural phenomenon that threatens to undermine philosophy among young people like Clinias. Put differently, Socrates transforms private dialogue into a public model. Unlike eristic, protreptic dialogue can take place in private; it does not *need* a public forum. But Socrates thinks that the public needs protreptic dialogue.

II. What is Philosophy?

Contemporary scholars[2] have rightly drawn parallels between the sophistic movement of ancient Greece and the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. This insight, however, appears much earlier in Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, a work that has fallen into unfortunate neglect among scholars of ancient thought. In the absorbing lecture on sophistry he introduces a nuanced and suggestive view of the sophists:

> Now culture is certainly an indefinite expression. It has, however, this meaning, that what free thought is to attain must come out of itself and be personal conviction; it is then no longer believed but investigated – in short, it is the so-called enlightenment or modern times. Thought seeks general principles by which it criticizes everything which is by us esteemed…A man of culture thus knows how to say something of everything, to find points of view in all. Greece has to thank the Sophists for this culture, because they taught men to exercise thought as to what should have authority for them, and thus their culture was culture in philosophy as much as in eloquence.[3]

Hegel goes further and associates sophistry with preparation for a public career, for sophists trained their students in the arts of persuasion and oratory – skills especially important in a democratic society. At the same time, he wants to credit them with an achievement deeper and more significant than such a description implies. For Hegel, the

[2]I think primarily of Leo Strauss, Stanley Rosen, and Thomas Chance.

[3]Hegel, G.W.F., *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Greek Philosophy to Plato*, (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1995). 356.

sophists blaze a new path because they argue ruthlessly, with few inhibitions; this practice prepares the ground for philosophy and gives the philosophy and sophistry a partial kinship. For Hegel, sophistry creates an atmosphere in which philosophy can acquire a public voice.[4] For that reason, "in our form enlightenment may have the same standpoint as that of the Sophists."[5]

Linking sophistry with "general principles" or rational inquiry places the sophists squarely on the side of public enlightenment. Sophistry participates in enlightenment because it substitutes public rationality for the non-rational sources of traditional belief—e.g. occult powers that seize oracles and rhapsodes and reveal knowledge to poets like Hesiod and Homer. Rational arguments lie open to public scrutiny because they speak in general terms. Traditional cultic figures (like oracles and poets) derive knowledge from an experience to which other people have no direct access. Lacking poetic gifts, the public must accept the poet's revelation second-hand, without the benefit of a reasoned explanation or credible evidence. The muses do not communicate directly to the public (which would render poetry redundant), nor do they offer a discursive account of their teachings. Briefly stated, the poets offer a *mythos* without a *logos*. The same description applies to the oracle and the rhapsode. In the *Protagoras*, by contrast, the great sophist offers both a myth and a discursive account. The latter silently eliminates the deities that

[4]Leo Strauss echoes this view in his essay on the *Euthydemus*. Leo Strauss, "On the Euthydemus" (from *Interpretation*, Summer 1970). Pg. 18.

[5]Ibid. 366.

populate the mythical half of his teaching. The sophist therefore seems like a partisan of public enlightenment, almost indistinguishable from Socratic philosophy.[6]

However, Hegel does not stop with this generally "positive" view of sophistry. He also argues that sophistry does not publicize rational inquiry and method for the sake of attaining knowledge or wisdom. Neither pure curiosity nor love of wisdom motivates the sophist's actions. While the demand for rational argument mirrors the philosophical disposition, Hegel argues that sophistry harnesses untrammeled rationality to narrowly self-interested goals. For that reason, secular rationality opens the possibility not only of philosophy but of something quite different. The sophists help engender a culture in which unfettered questioning becomes subordinate to unabashed self-interest, an insidious subversion of philosophy's true vocation.[7] "To the Sophists," says Hegel, "the satisfaction of the individual himself was now made ultimate, and since they made everything uncertain, the fixed point was in the assertion, 'it is my desire, my pride, glory, and honor, particular subjectivity, which I make my end.'"[8] The gratification of subjectivity undermines the public nature of rational inquiry for the sake of private goals like "honor," "glory," and profit. Of course, these goals depend on an obliging public and paying clientele. As Socrates wryly points out, sophists like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus must operate in a public context even when it threatens their private

[6]Here I think of Socrates' questioning of the poets in the *Apology*; his avowed need to investigate and verify the oracle's message in the same dialogue; his criticisms of Homer in the *Republic*; and his critique of the rapsodes in the *Ion*.

[7]I mean philosophy's true vocation as Socrates presents it in his protreptic model.

[8]Ibid. 371.

interest.[9] At the same time, the supremacy of private interest transforms rational disputation into tricks that only "work" when they deceive both the interlocutor and the public. Although willing to refute the city's venerable beliefs or treat them lightly, practitioners of eristic do not replace them with "enlightenment," as Hegel defines the word.[10] What they offer instead looks, at best, like a bizarre caricature of reason in its destructive or dialectical mode. The brothers distort reason for their own private goals: reputation and profit.

The brothers have nothing to gain from private inquiry. To profit from their skill, they must establish and maintain a reputation for cleverness. The privatization of eristic would undermine this ambition. One can therefore define the brothers' natural environment as public. They operate in the polis even if they help accelerate the decline of traditional polis life. As I have said repeatedly, the brothers have much in common with the city in which they seek profit, otherwise they would seek in vain. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus pursue a career that depends for its success on public attention and support.[11] Even so, their indifference to the traditional underpinnings of the city (both parochial and religious) makes them the object of public ambivalence, as Crito reports (305a). This uneasy relationship with the public gives them a superficial resemblance to Socrates, whose habit of refutation also provokes hostility. Moreover, sophistic activity clears a space in which Socrates can introduce a profoundly different model of rational

[9]Socrates understands that the brothers cannot privatize their career to prevent imitators stealing their act. They do not have an earnest craving for knowledge (like the Pythogerians, for example) that could thrive in secrecy among a few initiates. The fact that they should worry about successful imitations of eristic shows that eristic does not aim at public enlightenment or even knowledge. If they thought eristic really enlightened the public they would welcome widespread imitation.

[10]I.e. as general (hence public) principles that evaluate claims to knowledge.

[11]In the *Apology* Socrates argues that the polis *should* support philosophy with public-funded meals. But they fact that they city refuses such support does not prevent Socrates from philosophizing.

inquiry. Both philosophy and sophistry flourish in an environment of uninhibited questioning. As Strauss points out, Socrates even defends the brothers insofar as their critics exhibit a reactionary, anti-philosophical bias.[12] This chapter pays special attention to passages in which philosophy treads of the private-public division; it ultimately presents Socrates as a public "enlightener" insofar as he criticizes Athenian tradition for the good of Athenians. Socrates has an explicit purpose, to exhort Clinias to love of wisdom. However, his dialogues with Clinias accomplish another goal. He exhorts the whole city to wisdom, not with a speech but with the model of protreptic dialogue.

The public context of Socrates' protreptic model does not contravene his private concern for Clinias; nor does the brothers' reliance on logical fallacy and trickery imply that Socrates identifies his mission with logical rigor and transparent reasoning—at least not to the exclusion of everything non-rational and private. Socrates himself has mysterious motive for remaining at the Lyceum, a decision that guides him to Clinias and the brothers. Like the poets, he has private access to a kind of superhuman (or trans-rational) inspiration, a fact that apparently qualifies his role as public enlightener and champion of reason. Unlike the muses, however, the sign does not reveal knowledge about the gods or cosmos or even issue positive instructions. Because it speaks negatively, Socrates must interpret its message; the sign only serves as a catalyst. When he sees Clinias and the brothers, Socrates concludes that the sign wants him to guide and protect Clinias against spiritual hazard. This part of the dialogue seems almost at odds with the supposedly transparent reasoning that pits Socrates against both the sophists and

[12]In the *Euthydemus* Socrates takes the side of the two brothers against Ktesipos and Kriton…According to Socrates, the greatest mortal enemy of philosophy, the greatest sophist, is the political multitude (*Republic* 492a5-e6), i.e., the enactor of the Athenian laws." Strauss, Leo, "On the Euthydemus," *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* (Sum 70), 1-20.

the poets. While focusing on the "religious" implications of the daemon in the third chapter, I argue in this chapter that Socrates mirrors the divine sign. The daemon speaks privately to Socrates in a public context and alters his orientation. Similarly, Socrates speaks privately to Clinias in a public context while converting his young interlocutor to love of wisdom. The sign, in short, does not figure in the dialogue as a peculiar psychological quirk of no interest or relevance to anyone but Socrates. Instead, Socrates brings the sign into the public by becoming a divine sign for Clinias, Crito, and indeed the whole city.

III. Philosophy and the Public

The beginning of this narrated dialogue brings Crito to the center of the reader's attention. The interaction between Socrates and Crito introduces central themes in the dialogue that appear more explicitly at the end. The themes emerge from Crito's social position: he patronizes philosophy but has the opinions of a conventional Athenian. His concern for popular opinion leads him to advocate philosophy's retreat into the private realm where it does not provoke the negative judgment of the Athenian demos.

The dialogue begins in the private realm: Crito and Socrates speak privately about Socrates' public encounter with the sophists. However, Crito already has the crowd in mind and brings it sharply to Socrates' attention. He noticed Socrates speaking to an unfamiliar sophist but unfortunately he heard little of the exchange because "There was such a crowd around you that I could not get close enough to hear anything distinctly, but I caught sight of him [the sophist] over their heads, and I made out, as I thought, that he was a stranger with whom you were talking: who was he?" (271a) This bald statement of fact points to a central theme in the dialogue and fundamental trait of Crito's, namely, his

preoccupation with public opinion or "the crowd." Crito remained outside the dialogue because his ears could not penetrate the noise of the spectators. At the end of the dialogue the reader learns that Crito knows more about the event than he initially admits, although his information comes second-hand. He remains silent about the fact that he already has already judged Socrates' association with the sophists negatively; the reader only knows that Crito witnessed the encounter between Socrates and the sophists but did not become a participant because the crowd literally thwarted his efforts. In a less literal sense, this statement proves truer than Crito knows. The crowd's opinions block his participation in philosophy, making it nearly impossible for him to judge protreptic dialogue on its own merits. Indeed, Plato uses the narrative frame to show how fear of majority opinion alienates Crito from the inner ring of philosophy, which he understands poorly despite his sincere friendship with Socrates. The frame therefore contributes profoundly to the substance of the dialogue, which strongly critiques a profession and method that relies fundamentally on the crowd's passive participation. Like the crowd, Crito responds to appearances. More to the point, he wants to reshape Socrates' public image to avoid the crowd's hostility. The dialogue between Crito and Socrates reveals how Socrates has constructed the whole narrative so that it speaks directly to Crito and criticizes his overriding concern for public approval, linking that impulse to the democratic city and its mob mentality—a mentality that responds habitually to appearances (whether from politicians, rhetoricians, or sophists) at the expense of truthful dialogue.

Plato reveals the truth about Crito slowly. The opening paragraph only drops the first clues, which seem more obvious in retrospect. (The clues also stand out for readers

familiar with the *Crito*.) Other hints quickly follow. After Crito's announces his inability to outflank the crowd and hear the exchange between Socrates and the sophist, Socrates informs Crito that the crowd also obstructed his vision. He only noticed one sophist and, as Socrates points out, "[t]here were two, Crito; which of them do you mean? (271a)." Crito searches his memory, describing the other people present at the Lyceum. While doing so, he again displays his constant attention to appearances. Already he has mentioned "the crowd," a phrase loaded with significance when linked to Crito. Now he invokes conventional criteria for appearances and breeding. He notes that Clinias, son of Axiochus, "has grown wonderfully, and looked about the age of my own Critobulus, but he is much forwarder and has the beauty of find breeding, whereas the other is too thin" (271b). Of course, Socrates cannot reproach Crito for noticing a young man's physical charms. Socrates himself is hardly immune to carnal appreciation (*Charmides* 155d). Still, one must read this offhand remark in context; even if Crito speaks casually, Plato invests everything he says in the narrative frame with significance. Here Crito reveals an automatic concern with social values and standards.[13] He does not have an erotic interest in Clinias but he does worry that his own son lacks physical beauty. Indeed, his son's physical appeal (or lack thereof) seems to worry him as much, if not more, than his spiritual and intellectual needs. As he observes the scene at the Lyceum these thoughts dominate Crito's mind, always sensitive to public perceptions. Not only did he fail to hear the exchange and notice the crucial fact that Socrates had two interlocutors; he also spent his time evaluating Crito's good looks and comparing them unfavorably to his

[13]This fact alone does not exclude Crito from philosophical discourse. In the dialogues (notably the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*), an erotic response to beauty often stands at the beginning of the philosophical ascent. For our purposes, the problem here does not concern the presence or absence of erotic impulses. The problem concerns the direction of *eros*. Like Strauss (quoted above), I think that Crito ultimately has *eros* for the city, the crowd he can never exclude from his words and thoughts.

son's—a young man also in need of further education. A few lines later, and more decisively at the end, Crito's admits that he also takes a worried interest in Socrates' appearances, i.e. his reputation in Athens.

After pointing out the sophist Crito did not notice, Socrates explains what these two sophists do for a living. They practice a method of controversy known as "pancratiastism," meaning "they can refute any proposition whether true or false…" (272b). Their knowledge covers every conceivable field. Consequently, they win every debate they join, regardless of the subject matter. Ranging like hawks over every field of inquiry, they practice a kind of verbal imperialism congruent with their previous careers in the military. On the battlefield they fought with swords; in court and debate they fashion words into weapons. Pancratiastic art supercedes the "battle or the courts," however, because it allows the brothers to win any debate they encounter, not just those relevant to the legal system. After offering these details with mock enthusiasm, Socrates makes a surprising declaration: he has decided to become the brothers' student. "I am thinking, Crito," he says, "of placing myself in their hands; for they say that in a short time they can impart the same skill to anyone" (272b).

Socrates' irony falls wide of the mark. Alarmed at Socrates' folly, Crito immediately makes a sobering objection, one grounded in his constant awareness of social convention: "Aren't you afraid that, at your age, you might be too old" (272b). Socrates responds that the brothers also began their careers late in life, only a year or two ago. In any case, has already embarked on a musical career rather later than usual, apprenticing himself to a lyre teacher named Connus, son of Metrobius.

> I am only apprehensive that I may bring the two strangers into disrepute, as I have done Connus the son of Metrobius, the harp-player, who is still my music-master;

> for when the boys who go to him see me going with them, they laugh at me and call him grandpapa's master. Now I should not like the strangers to experience similar treatment; the fear of ridicule may make them unwilling to receive me . . . (272b-c)

On the face of it, Crito simply cautions his friend with a practical objection: older people usually find it difficult if not impossible to master new skills. Socrates' response also looks blandly straightforward; he appeals to the elderly sophists as promising precedents and wittily describes his own late-in-life foray into music. However, for Socrates a treacherous undercurrent tugs beneath the surface of this apparently innocuous conversation. Crito's objection quietly raises the question of Socrates' reputation among Athenians. His age not only places him at a significant disadvantage as a pupil but, more importantly for Crito, it also puts Socrates at odds with convention and makes his actions seem eccentric at best.[14] Greek custom limited education to the formative years; even the practice of "higher education" had not existed for long in the Greek world, and this new extension of formal studies created a demand for professional teachers such as the sophists. But even in this new system, the Greeks regarded the study of music and philosophy as appropriate for young people, not their elders. Someone Socrates' age should have abandoned studies long ago and settled into a career as a citizen or artisan, depending on his class.[15] His continued pursuit of philosophy (in the presence of the youth) strikes the average Athenian as jejune and even ridiculous.

---

[14]At worst Socrates could become branded a useless prattling intellectual. The speechwriter Crito encounters at the Lyceum criticizes Socrates in roughly those terms.

[15]Given his level of education and the high birth of his companions, Socrates probably derived from the Athenian nobility, even if a life spent with no paying occupation reduced him (as he says in the *Apology*) to poverty. This failure to become steadily and gainfully employed (in politics, for example) invites contempt from people like the speechwriter, who dismisses philosophy as useless. Painfully aware of Socrates' reputation, Crito cautions his friend against becoming a student in his old age and inviting greater abuse from those who hold conventional opinions.

Socrates does not miss the subtext of Crito's remark. In fact, he wryly exposes Crito's actual meaning. Socrates knows the people of Athens look askance at his unconventional behavior. He even invites Crito to share their ridicule. His self-portraiture strikes an Aristophanic[16] note that mirrors the city's perspective.[17] He repeats the popular Athenian of view, humorously describing himself as a ridiculous old man trying to learn a new skill (and failing dramatically) under the scornful gaze of younger students. Socrates, hardly oblivious to public scorn, also understands that Crito fears the public perspective and does not want Socrates to degrade his reputation in front of the crowd (305a-c).[18] Crito openly expresses this desire explicitly at the end of Socrates' narrative, when the dialogue returns to the frame. For now, Socrates ironically acknowledges his friend's respect for the public and his corresponding concern for Socrates' reputation—and probably his own (cf. *Crito* 45e). Socrates admits that his actions make him look like a clown but he does not blush for shame or retreat from his "decision" (never serious) to apprentice himself to the new sophists.

This exchange with Crito recalls the opening scene of the *Protagoras*. In that dialogue, Hippocrates approaches Socrates and excitedly informs him that Protagoras, a renowned sophist, has arrived in the city. Like other sophists, he offers to dispense his

---

[16]In *The Clouds*, it is Socrates' rampant disregard for "common sense"—the everyday concerns of the city—that makes him laughable from a conventional perspective. In the *Euthydemus*, his unconventional behavior has a similarly comic effect. Plato allows us to see Socrates as faintly contemptible; we understand him as someone who could provoke the city's laughter and ultimately its violence.

[17]Plato returns the favor in the *Euthydemus*; as I have said, the brothers throw back a comically distorted image of the city.

[18]The notion that philosophy should try to avoid public disapproval suggests that philosophy does not offer anything worth risking one's life for. Crito would surely applaud a warrior who faces death rather than surrender. When it comes to philosophy, however, he urges at least a partial surrender – a removal of philosophy from the public square, where hostility can prove fatal. Crito does not appreciate philosophical courage because he does not entirely appreciate the cause for which Socrates risks his life.

wisdom for a fee. Hippocrates does not worry about paying the fee, nor does not request a loan from Socrates. Rather, he needs Socrates to give him a formal introduction to this visiting "celebrity." (311a). With inadvertent humor, Hippocrates declares that if nothing but money prevented him from obtaining an education from Protagoras (one "suitable for a gentleman"(312b)), "I'd bankrupt myself and my friends too" (310e). Socrates tries to deflate Hippocrates' enthusiasm with a strategy that oddly resembles Crito's. He reminds Hippocrates of how the public will judge his decision to become a sophist and thus arouses an immediate feeling of shame in his young friend:

> "Suppose someone notices our enthusiasm and asks us: 'Tell me, Socrates and Hippocrates, what is your idea in paying Protagoras? What is he?' What would we say to him? What other name do we hear in reference to Protagoras? Phidias is called a sculptor and Homer a poet. What do we hear Protagoras called?"
> "A sophist is what they call him anyway, Socrates."
> "Then it is as a sophist that we are going to pay him?"
> "Yes."
> "And if somebody asks you what you expect to become in going to Protagoras?"
> He blushed in response…and said, "If this is at all like the previous cases, then, obviously, to become a sophist."
> "What? You? Wouldn't you be ashamed to present yourself to the Greek world as a sophist?"
> "Yes, I would, Socrates, to be perfectly honest" (311d-e).

Here Socrates appeals blatantly to the Athenian public and its negative view of sophistry. Like many socially conscious people, Hippocrates responds the pressure of public disapproval before it actually occurs. He blushes with shame.

The opening scene of the *Euthydemus* reverses the exchange between Socrates and Hippocrates. In the first dialogue, Crito subtly appeals to public opinion to discourage Socrates from becoming the brothers' pupil. In the second, Socrates also makes an argument *ad populum* to curb his friend's enthusiasm and give him pause. However, he does not worry primarily about Hippocrates' reputation; he worries instead

about Hippocrates' willingness to ingest unfamiliar teachings without knowing whether they will nourish or poison his soul. Crito does worry about reputation. Like Hippocrates, he does not discern the true danger of sophistry, only the threat of public disapproval. Like Hippocrates, he has attuned his mind to public opinion and this prevents him fro noticing that Socrates differs fundamentally from the sophists and could worthily take charge of Critobulus' education. As the end of the dialogue indicates, Crito proves that he can hardly discern a difference between Socrates and the sophists because he has an overdeveloped sensitivity to public opinion. Hippocrates also falters on the rocks of public opinion. The allure of fame draws him to Protagoras. Unlike Socrates, Protagoras enters the dialogue with flourish of ceremony. The allure of celebrity dazzles Hippocrates and blinds his judgment, making him careless about the sophist's actual teaching and oblivious to Socrates, the wise man who accompanies him. Indeed, he treats Socrates as a mere social contact, knocking early on his door to request a formal introduction to a complete stranger.[19]

Crito and Hippocrates therefore have a great deal in common: their reverence for public opinion and a failure to understand what Socrates can offer. Socrates' reaction to Crito's question demonstrates his own lack of kinship (at least to this extent) with Crito and Hippocrates. Unlike Hippocrates, he anticipates the public's disapproval and hears it echo faintly in Crito's comment. When Crito summons the specter of public scorn, Socrates does not blush; nor would he blush if he really intended (an unlikely scenario) to become the sophists' understudy. On the contrary, he points out how foolish he looks

[19]Plato echoes the opening scene of the *Protagoras* in the *Republic*, where he argues that it is natural "for anyone who needs to be ruled to knock at the door of the one who can rule him" (489c). Hippocrates needs Socrates to teach him but unfortunately knocks at his door for an altogether different reason.

already, an old man trying to learn a new musical skill. The fact that he does not abandon this pursuit to avoid ridicule implies that he would not yield to public opinion if he really wanted to learn and practice sophistry. To be sure, anyone who has read the dialogue or has an ear for Socratic irony (or simply knows of Plato's quarrel with the sophists) understands that Socrates has no intention of paying and "learning" from the brothers. Still, if he regards sophistry or eristic as objectionable, he does so for other reasons that emerge in his narrative, reason having nothing to do with popular opinions.

One therefore sees a striking difference between Socrates and Crito, as well as Hippocrates: the latter respond to the negative opinion of the crowd while Socrates treats it with dry detachment. Still, while expressing no concern for himself, he tells Crito he wants to avoid bringing reproach to the sophists, something he failed to do for his harp tutor. For that reason, he persuaded other "old men" (272c) to join his latest venture: "So, Crito, I have persuaded some other old men to go along with me as fellow pupils to the harp lessons, and I shall attempt to persuade some others for this project. Why don't you come along yourself? We will take your sons as bait to catch them—I feel sure that their desire to get the boys will make them give us lessons to" (272c-d). Crito says he has "no objection" (272c) to this offbeat scheme provided Socrates narrates his own encounter with the sophists and so gives him an idea of what someone might gain from a sophistic education.

Socrates obliges Crito and introduces a pair of sophists who embody the worst attributes Crito or anyone else could associate with sophistry. Before giving him a direct view of the brothers, however, he describes the other young men who participated in the event: Ctesippus and Clinias.

> When the pair came in they walked around the cloister, and they had not yet made more than two or three turns when in came Clinias, who, as you rightly say, has grown a lot. Following him were a good many others, lovers of his, and among them Ctesippus, a young man from Paeania—he's a well-bred fellow except for a certain youthful brashness (273a-b).

Socrates recalls Crito's earlier remark about Clinias. He then introduces Ctesippus as someone who exemplifies the character and breeding of a well-born Athenian, although he is also "a bit of a rogue." So far, the participants of the dialogue do not know whether the sophists can offer them anything. Nonetheless, Socrates assures Clinias that they do not deal in trivial matters.

> You know, Clinias," he says "that the wisdom of these two men, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, has to do with important matters and not mere trivia. They know all about war, that is, the things a man ought to know who means to be a good general . . . and besides this, they can make a man capable of looking out for himself in court if anyone should do him an injury (273c).

These skills have real application in the city, and one can understand their pan-Hellenic appeal. Indeed, in a city competent to meet its own needs their presence would seem redundant. However, the sophists quickly inform Socrates (with a touch of light mockery) that they have abandoned those disciplines and now concern themselves with *arête*—something all sophists pledge to teach. In fact, they reduce their interest in war and court to the status of "diversions" (273d). Not only can they teach virtue, they teach it in a way that outshines their competitors. Their new occupation elevates them to a higher plane and somehow justifies their itinerant existence, one that implies they can offer wisdom that people, or citizens, would otherwise lack.[20] They do not monopolize the field—many other sophists wander the land—but they have mastered the art in record

[20]I mean that anyone who enters a city to instruct its citizens implicitly claims knowledge or skills the city itself does not or cannot impart. Otherwise, why would they think their services desirable? Our glance at the *Protagoras* has shown in what low repute the Athenians (despite their tolerance) held the sophists, and one can see how their mere presence—and their claim to teach—might seem insulting to the average citizen.

time and can impart the necessary skills more efficiently than others: "we think we can teach [virtue] better than anyone else and more quickly" (273d). Socrates responds to this elevated claim with astonishment and skepticism.[21] He does not doubt they can teach warfare and legal forensic. When addressing their claim to teach virtue, however, he speaks with an incredulous tone that underlines the moral gravity of their claim. The ability to teach virtue would definitely set them apart from ordinary teachers (or forensic and warfare); they would hardly need to worry about widespread competition or redundancy in a self-sufficient city. Socrates makes it plain he has never encountered anyone with such laudable skill. He implies that if the brothers really justify their boast, they will preside over the rest of humanity like gods.

In fact, the ability to teach virtue would not only give them a place in the city no one has successfully filled;[22] it would give their services an incomparable value. Certainly no political skill or position would equal the teaching of virtue: ". . . I count you much happier in your possession of this wisdom than the Great King in that of his empire!" (274a). Unfortunately, the brother's boast also strains the limits of credibility. "[T]he magnitude of your claim," Socrates says "certainly gives me some cause for disbelief" (274a). They must therefore settle the question of whether they (or anyone else) can teach virtue. If they succeed, Socrates can hardly dispute their importance. He will feel compelled, in fact, to become their student.

[21]Socrates' skepticism about anyone's ability to teach virtue constitutes a pervasive theme in Plato's dialogues. Cf. *Protagoras* 319a-320b.

[22]At least, Socrates does not seem to have encountered anyone who taught virtue. If he had, why would he react with stunned skepticism? We know from other dialogues (*Protagoras*) that Socrates does not regard virtue as teachable, which partly explains his animosity towards the sophists.

Euthydemus assures the doubt-ridden Socrates that he has spoken truly. Socrates then indicates the company gathered for the event and requests a demonstration that will put their doubts to rest. While conceding that the brothers do not have time to make a complete demonstration, he thinks they can resolve a question of central importance to their vocation:

> [B]ut tell me just this: are you able to make that man good who is already persuaded that he ought to take lessons from you, or can you also make the man good who is not yet persuaded on this point, either because he believes that this thing, virtue, cannot be taught at all, or because he thinks that you two are not its teachers? (274d-e)

Predictably enough, Euthydemus assures Socrates that he can resolve this perplexity. Before he launches into the demonstration, however, Socrates once again emphasizes the moral gravity of the undertaking. He does not raise the question of virtue in an impersonal or abstracted way, as if tossing out an intellectual puzzle of no special urgency. He asks a specific question for the sake of a particular person, Clinias, whose fate and well-being are at stake in this encounter. Socrates asks the brothers to engage Clinias while gravely emphasizing the importance of the engagement: "The boy's situation is this: both I and all these people want him to become as good as possible…He is young, and we are anxious about him as one naturally is about a boy of his age, for fear that somebody might get in ahead of us and turn his mind to some other interest and ruin him" (275a-b). In short, Socrates wants the brothers to understand that does not take the responsibilities of pedagogy lightly, nor should they; he believes firmly that a misdirected education results in nothing less than personal ruin because it poisons the soul, not because it diminishes the student's standing in the city or his ability to find great fame and success.

Euthydemus responds in a way that flatly disregards Socrates' warning. He agrees to engage Clinias but makes it clear he has no particular interest in his young interlocutor (a rather odd qualification for someone who claims to teach virtue). He simply wants to demonstrate his method, not benefit Clinias with an edifying exhortation. "It makes not difference to us, Socrates," he says, "so long as the young man is willing to answer" (275c). They do not engage Clinias for his benefit, despite Socrates' unequivocal request. On the contrary, they engage view Clinias because he can benefit *them*. He give them an opportunity to demonstrate their skill, although any other cooperative person could perform the same role. His particular needs do not matter because the eristic demonstration has nothing to do with him. After Socrates assures Euthydemus that Clinias "is pretty brave at answering," (275c), Euthydemus turns to Clinias and poses his first question: "Clinias, which are the men who learn, the wise or the ignorant?" (275d) Recognizing the difficulty of this question, Clinias blushes.[23] He blushes not only because he cannot answer the question. He blushes because his answer, if refuted, will make him look foolish to the spectators judging his performance. Seeing his panic, Socrates urges courage: "Cheer up, Clinias, and choose bravely whichever seems to you to be the right answer—he may be doing you a great service" (275d-e). However, Socrates soon has good reason for pessimism. At this point, Dionysodorus leans over informs him, in a whispered aside, that Euthydemus has prepared a trap for his young interlocutor: "I may tell you beforehand, Socrates, that whichever way the boy answers he will be refuted" (275e).

[23]"Being confronted with this weighty question, the boy blushed and looked at me in doubt" (275d).

In other words, the brothers have no interest in guiding Clinias to the correct answer even if they are capable of lending such assistance. Refutation (or victory in verbal conflict) constitutes the sole purpose of pancratiastic art. Unfortunately, before Socrates can intervene and save Clinias from public humiliation, he offers the brothers an answer: he asserts that the "the wise [are] the learners" (276a), not the ignorant. He has set himself up for defeat in the brothers' system of questions and answers. The devastating procedure does not take long:

> Then Euthydemus said, Are there some whom you call teachers, or not?
> He agreed that there were.
> And the teachers are teachers of those who learn, I suppose, in the same way that the music master and the writing master were teachers of you and the other boys when you were pupils?
> He agreed.
> And when you were learning, you did not yet know the things you were learning, did you?
> No, he said.
> And were you wise when you did not know these things?
> By no means, he said.
> Then if not wise, ignorant?
> Very much so.
> Then in the process of learning what you did not know you learned while you were ignorant?
> The boy nodded.
> Then it is the ignorant who learn, Clinias, and not the wise, as you suppose (276ab).

Of course, this line of reasoning contains an obvious truth: Pupils lack knowledge of a subject (such as music or writing) when they first begin learning it, otherwise they would never need a teacher. However, one can see Euthydemus gaining the rhetorical upper hand by referring vaguely to "the ignorant," a word that glosses over the fact that ignorant people lack knowledge something specific—particular ideas, facts, or skills. No one suffers ignorance in general. Unfortunately, the brothers do not pause long enough for Clinias or anyone else to insert this qualification. Hearing Euthydemus' punch line,

the listeners promptly break into applause as if on cue: “just like a chorus at a sign from their director” (276c). One can begin to see why Clinias entered the discussion with great reluctance. The crowd’s applause comes at his expense.

Clinias has no time to recover his composure before the brothers mount a second attack. Socrates claims that “We . . . were panic-struck and kept quiet” (276d). Euthydemus takes advantage of their silence and tackles Clinias with a similar question: “Do those who learn learn the things they know or the things they do not know?” (276e) Dionysodorus again informs Socrates that this question has no correct answer. In fact, “All our questions are of this same inescapable sort . . .” (276e) Clinias tries again, saying that learners learn what they do not know. In reply, Euthydemus asks Clinias if he knows his letters and Clinias says, of course, that he does. Euthydemus naturally anticipates this reply, which triggers another question: Do people who dictate knowledge use letters? Again Clinias agrees, and his adversary pounces with glee: “Well then, he said, you are not one who learns what someone dictates, are you, but the one who doesn’t know his letters is the one who learns? . . . Then you learn what you know, he said, if you in fact do know all your letters” (277b).

Once more, Euthydemus uses abstract and unqualified words—e.g., “the ignorant,” “learners”—to draw specious conclusions. In the first round of the game, Euthydemus “refuted” the idea that the wise learn rather than the ignorant. Now he defends that answer with the same rhetorical trick. In his first answer, Clinias apparently means that someone entirely ignorant—i.e., someone without capacity for knowledge—cannot possibly become wise. Put differently, someone who lacks wisdom absolutely does not possess the necessary conditions of learning. Defining those conditions as

"wisdom," one can at least make sense of Clinias' second reply.[24] In the next round the same idea returns: Euthydemus refers to a specific type of knowledge, namely knowledge of letters. Knowledge of letters certainly counts a condition of understanding. Obviously, a student must comprehend the teacher's language to understand anything he teaches. [25] However, Euthydemus uses this trite observation to blur obvious distinctions. In this case, he glides over the distinction between understanding a teacher's words and understanding the content of the teacher's lesson prior to instruction. With this sleight of hand, Euthydemus slyly inverts his previous conclusion. He has now argued that the wise learn, not the ignorant. As Dionysodorus warned, he and his brother can argue both sides of an argument and win. They refute "whatever may be said, no matter whether it is true or false" (272b) as Socrates puts it to Crito, barbing his words with irony but also reporting the plain facts.

For my purposes, it is not necessary to deconstruct these obviously flawed arguments in minute detail. Instead, I want to emphasize how they function as part of a performance. In order to succeed the brothers need only create the *appearance* of victory. They must perform their role well enough to deceive the majority of their audience—and nothing more. Since most people could see through the "arguments" if they paused to reflect, the brothers have perfected a mode of argument that leaves no time for reflection or reasoned rebuttal. Like a magic trick, the speed of the procedure conceals the mechanism behind the illusion. Socrates prefers sporting metaphors[26] and

[24]Readers of the *Meno* recognize the deeper significance of this paradox.

[25]To avoid conflating Plato and Kant, one might speak of the *rudiments* rather than the conditions of knowledge. People who understand human speech at least have the rudiments of wisdom.

[26]Although later he accuses the brothers of using nothing but "conjuring tricks" (288b).

uses one to introduce the third stage of this pancratiastic performance. "Euthydemus had barely said this when Dionysodorus picked up the argument as though it were a ball and aimed it at the boy again . . ." (277b). Now that Dionysodorus has entered the arena and further humiliated Clinias, Euthydemus attacks from the other direction. Socrates again uses a sporting metaphor to describe this next attack: "Euthydemus was hastening to throw the young man for the third fall when I, seeing that he was going down and wanting to give him a chance to breathe so that he would not turn coward and disgrace us, encouraged him . . ." (277d). These metaphors, reflecting the central role of games in Greek public life, emphasize the role of speed and stealth in the brothers' method: the ball flies quickly from one brother to the other, giving the opponent no time to regain his composure. The game's high speech intimidates the inexperienced interlocutor and makes him vulnerable to further attacks. Clinias' ordeal has left him breathless, incapable of thinking clearly. Euthydemus takes advantage of the situation, going on the offensive without allowing Clinias time for recovery.

The sporting metaphors also indicate that the brothers have victimized Clinias for not good reason. Like other games, their method succeeds as a crowd-pleaser. Apparently the brothers' audience asks for nothing deeper than a well-oiled spectacle, and the brothers have satisfied that requirement. Socrates finally intervenes after the third demonstration and describes the performance as "mere play" or *paidian* (278c), which can also denote childish pastimes. The brothers promised to assist this young boy but have so far behaved with stunning immaturity one should wonder if they can prepare anyone for maturity. He expresses hope that the brothers play this game as a stepping stone in a higher pursuit; in itself it has no value and certainly does nothing to exhort

Clinias to virtue. Again, Socrates strikes a sobering note: Unless the brothers have an ulterior purpose in mind (and a noble one at that), they have treated a grave duty with wanton frivolity. Socrates does not reproach the brothers or openly accuse them of moral irresponsibility—although he does say he has grown weary of their jokes (278b). Instead, he reminds them indirectly of their pedagogical duties. Speaking to Clinias, Socrates suggests that the brothers are playing a game that presages a more worthwhile activity: revelation of sophistic mysteries, a demonstration of hortatory skill, or simply a preliminary lesson about the proper us of language. Any of these activities would rank higher than a game played at Clinias' expense:

> These things are the frivolous part of study . . . and I call these things "frivolity" because even if a man were to learn many or even all such things, he would be none the wiser as to how matter stand but would only be able to make fun of people, tripping them up and overturning them by means of the distinctions in words, just like the people who pull the chair out from under a man who is going to sit down and then laugh gleefully when they see him sprawling on his back . . . They said they would give you a demonstration of hortatory skill (*protreptikên sophian*), now it seems that they must have thought it necessary to make fun of you before beginning. So, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, put an end to this childish play (*pepaisthô*); I think we have had enough of it (277d-278b).

In this passage, Socrates sends an indirect warning to the brothers. While speaking to Clinias, he implies that if Euthydemus and Dionysodorus cannot justify their present behavior with something worthwhile, he must judge their activity frivolous, immature, and worthy of reproach. So far they have performed something analogous to an initiation rite; now they must grow sober ("put an end to this childish play") and reveal their true teaching. Socrates does not use the word "frivolous" to make the brothers look foolish before their audience; he also compares their activity not only with games but with childish games (*pepaisthô*). This language implies that the brothers, unless they alter their behavior, have no business taking charge of young men like Clinias. They might

ultimately help Clinias revert to childhood with its shallow, self-centered interests. Age again reappears as a major theme. Both Socrates and the brothers have entered old age but it seems clear that the brothers have not grown into maturity. With his speech, Socrates wants to scold the brothers for their silly behavior and give them serious pause. Even so, he does not turn the tables and subject *them* to public humiliation.[27] Instead, he communicates his disapproval without resorting to denunciations. If the brothers have nothing more important to say, they have no business charging their students a fee while promising to instruct them in virtue. In short, Socrates speaks with moral gravity but does not try to expose the brothers with showy accusations. He then further emphasizes the absurdity of their performance with a demonstration of his own, a true display of *protreptikên sophian*.

Socrates' protreptic dialogues mark the philosophical heart of the *Euthydemus*, as one might expect. They demonstrate clearly the radical contrast between his protreptic model and the brothers' eristic routine. The substance of the dialogues has no direct bearing on the present discussion, and I do not analyze it here. On the other hand, the form of his demonstration and a few of its details contribute crucially to this discussion of public and private zones and how philosophy interacts with them. In his exchange with Clinias, Socrates implicitly rebukes not only the brothers' childish antics but also their irresponsible willingness to treat Clinias as the butt of a crude joke. He also points out the role of brevity or speed in their simulation of rationality. His own demonstration takes many times longer than one of theirs; it continues for pages at a leisurely pace, stopping at crucial steps to elicit agreement from Clinias. Guiding Clinias in this way,

[27]The evidence for this assertion becomes clearer as we near the end of the dialogue.

always pausing to make sure he has followed the argument and agrees with its conclusions and sub-conclusions, Socrates leads his young friend to a moment of insight about the question under discussion: "Do men wish to do well?" (278e). They finally reach a conclusion that concerns "the possession of good things and the use of them" (280e). As a result of step-by-step reasoning, they discover that having many possessions at one's disposal does not guarantee well-being if one does not combine such affluence with wisdom, which Socrates defines as "good fortune." In the end, having made this point, the question still remains whether anyone can teach wisdom, as the brothers claim to do. Before returning to the brothers, however, several aspects of the protrptic demonstration deserve comment.

To begin with, although the exchange between Socrates and Clinias has an air of intimacy, Socrates does not forget their public surroundings. He occasionally alludes to the fact that he performs his own demonstration of protreptic skill for the sake of the brothers, to set an example of pedagogy—although his example revolves around his personal concern for Clinias, not the demands of public entertainment. At the beginning he speaks with mock modesty (as he does in the *Apology*) about the improvised character of his demonstration, begging his listeners not to make him a laughingstock: "And if I seem to you to be doing this in an unprofessional and ridiculous way, don't laugh at me—it is out of a desire to hear you wisdom that I have the audacity to improvise in front of you" (278d-e). This "disclaimer" pokes fun at the brothers' over-scripted performance.[28] Far from seriously apologizing for his lack of professionalism, his irony

[28]Socrates' irony may not seem terribly subtle to the reader or the brothers, who are far from stupid. However, it seems likely the crowd does not catch the mocking edge of his self-deprecation and praise of the brothers. We see later how the crowd gathered in the Lyceum does not distinguish Socrates

mocks the sort of arguments that operate like rehearsed entertainment. The brothers cannot engage the person they question because that would derail the performance; and the performance, not the other person, matters ultimately to them. With their shameless sleight of hand, the brothers court the approval of a faceless crowd. Socrates reminds them of what he wants: the enlightenment of a particular person, Clinias, who has also become a faceless cipher in their performance.

Socrates' repeated use of the word *ridiculous* also signals the public context of his personal exchange with Clinias, and recalls the opening conversation with Crito. In his warning that he might appear "unprofessional and ridiculous" (278d) while improvising an example of hortatory skill, he once more invites other people to regard him as clumsy and untutored. He thus acknowledges the judging presence of other people and even presents himself as an unsophisticated simpleton. The dread possibility of appearing ridiculous in front of other people surfaces again during the protreptic demonstration. When he fails to identify wisdom as good fortune immediately, he says to Clinias that "you and I nearly made ourselves ridiculous in front of our visitors" (279d). Socrates does not seriously worry about inviting fresh ridicule from the brothers or anyone else in the room. He wants to underline how the presence of the crowd gives point to eristic disputation and conditions the brothers' behavior. Of course, these perennial reminders of the public and its ability to humiliate suggest more than one interpretation. Perhaps Socrates wants to stress the importance of speaking responsibly before the impressionable public. However, I think he also wants to underscore how the presence of the crowd works in the brothers' favor.

---

and the brothers; they seem unaware of any serious criticism Socrates has made, hearing only his ironic praise for the brothers' wisdom—but missing the irony.

By pretending to care about looking ridiculous before "our visitors" (279d), Socrates calls attention to the people who make it possible for the brothers to earn a reputation for cleverness, even wisdom, at the expense of their interlocutors. The brothers have made Clinias look ridiculous, a feat they could not have accomplished with equal effectiveness without the crowd's presence. Clinias does not deserve humiliation. He stumbled into the brothers' game unawares. The situation differs when Socrates claims that he and Clinias nearly made themselves ridiculous in front of their visitors. He does not seriously apologize for speaking extemporaneously. On the other hand, he takes philosophical error seriously and therefore regards it as good cause for embarrassment, even shame. Of course, he does not think the crowd would have noticed his failure to connect good fortune and wisdom. As their previous behavior proves, they have no interest in discerning poor arguments and mock their deficiencies. Regardless of the crowd's blindness, however, Socrates and Clinias would deserve their criticism for accepting a deficient argument, or failing to test it thoroughly before allowing it to contaminate their souls (again: *Protagoras* 314a-c). If the spectators somehow noticed a genuine error, Socrates could hardly discredit or ignore their contribution. His would feel rightly chastened. Still, it seems idle to discuss such a possibility. Socrates does not expect the crowd (any crowd) to participate fruitfully in philosophical dialogue.[29] Rather, when he says that the visitors would have seized the truth if he had not done so, making him look incompetent and ridiculous, he ironically suggests the unlikelihood of such an occurrence. Socrates' irony corresponds to Plato's dictum that philosophizing does not occur in crowds (*Republic* 492a-c). Moreover, his irony targets not only the crowd but

[29]The same crowd has already applauded some fairly ridiculous arguments; their behavior thus far could hardly raise Socrates' opinion of them, or the reader's.

also people like the brothers who depend upon the crowd's cooperation for professional success.

Briefly stated, Socrates uses irony to critique the brothers and their eristic method. The brothers' habit of humiliating their interlocutors while basking in the crowd's applause becomes a target of Socrates' wit. Even if the interlocutor walks away embarrassed and confused, the brothers have won a sham victory, with no purpose that transcends their professional self-interest. Crito has not reason to feel ashamed, for the brothers have not refuted his answers fairly; they have revealed nothing about Clinias but have merely snagged him in a well-laid trap. They brothers should feel ashamed of their dishonest procedure, although they do not betray a guilty conscience. Still, one can see that Socrates does not hesitate to shame other people into reconsidering their actions. To do so, he has no qualms about invoking the disapproval of others. His allusion to public opinion shames Hippocrates when he expresses his eagerness to study with Protagoras, a man with an equivocal reputation in Athens. Without appealing to the public, he also tries to shame the brothers (without mounting an open attack on them) into a serious frame of mind. He subtly informs Euthydemus and Dionysodorus that he does not share the public's enthusiasm for eristic game-playing; their victories do not impress the one person capable of judging the merit of their arguments. If the brothers' possessed any seriousness or integrity, losing Socrates' good opinion would give them reason for serious pause. After all, people of good judgment value the opinions of a wise person more than the dubious approval of a noisy crowd (cf. *Crito* 47a). If the brothers continue seeking the crowd's approval without regard for Socrates' cogent objections, they reveal a great deal more about their own character and the merits of their teaching than they do

about anything else. As always, the purpose of Socrates' strategy (not the strategy itself) sets him apart from the brothers.

Now that Socrates and Clinias have defined wisdom as good fortune, Socrates returns to the question of sophistry by asking whether anyone can teach wisdom:

> And for a man who thinks he ought to get [wisdom] from his father much more than money, and not only from his father but also from his guardians and friends (especially those of his city *and elsewhere* who claim to be his lovers), and who begs and beseeches them go give him some wisdom, there is nothing shameful, Clinias, nor disgraceful if, for the sake of this, he should become the servant or the slave of a lover or any man, being willing to perform any honorable service in his desire to become wise (282b).

Here Socrates does not exclude the possibility of learning wisdom from people who come from elsewhere; he does not object to the sophists for parochial reasons. To be sure, the brothers claim to teach virtue, not wisdom,[30] but the point remains the same: *If* the brothers make good their claim, Clinias and anyone else can associate with them in good conscience; indeed, they ought to. Only if the brothers fail in their promise do they become objectionable and worthy of a bad reputation in Athens. Again, Socrates quietly conveys his message to the brothers: Show something more serious than the games you have hitherto played, or I must deem you unworthy of serious attention (and certainly unworthy of educating Clinias).

If Socrates harbors any optimism, the brothers waste no time disappointing him.[31] Once they regain control of the event, they proceed as before, behaving as if no interruption has occurred. Their method at this stage does not differ from what the reader

---

[30]The name *sophist* nevertheless implies the possession of wisdom and willingness to teach it.

[31]For the record, I do not think Socrates ever expected the sophists to rectify their behavior. The method of arguing both sides of every question typified the sophistic movement (e.g. Gorgias, fragment six). Xenophanes also says that Socrates had an unfavorable view of Dionysodorus when the latter still specialized (with apparently little competence) in the art of war.

has seen already: They manipulate words and ideas to win fleeting, meaningless arguments. This practice aims at a single goal: to earn a reputation for cleverness by making their interlocutors look inept. At this point they manage to implicate not only Clinias but his friends, who say they want him to become wise. The brothers borrow from Parmenides to accuse Socrates and the others of harboring a death wish against Clinias: "you wish him to become what he is not, and no longer to be what he is now?" (283d) Formulating the point this way allows them to conclude that Clinias' friends want him to perish, for they desire him to become what he presently is not. This argument exploits Parmendian logic, which precludes alteration in an attempt to extricate non-being from language and thought. Change entails the transmutation of being into non-being. If Clinias becomes wise, his present identity slips into nothingness, a state indistinguishable from death. After all, the brothers imply, how can one distinguish one state of non-being from another? Non-wise Clinias ceases to exist; in other words, he perishes. For Parmedies and his followers—including Zeno and Melissus—this slippage of being into non-being imperils the world's intelligibility (not to mention its integrity) for it introduces the literally unthinkable and unspeakable into the structure of being.[32] This argument has serious implications and invites a serious response. In the context of eristic, the argument lends a spurious profundity to a routine with a shifting goal: to win this round of the game and move on, very quickly, the next round.

Ctesippus' reaction to the argument's risible conclusion is more significant than the argument itself. Hearing the brothers' allegation, he becomes loudly indignant and

[32]They regard non-being as unthinkable because thought must have an object. Thought is always thought about *something*. The same is true of speech. Talk about nothing can only be described as unintelligible, strictly impossible.

enters the discussion with a confrontational swagger. He accuses the brothers of telling slanderous lies and speaking wickedly (283e). Shortly thereafter he implies that the brothers, a pair of serial liars, do not belong to the better part of humanity: "gentlemen and those who speak the truth" (284d). As he grows angrier, he also grows deeply and bitterly sarcastic. His tone becomes so sharp, in fact, that Dionysodorus accuses him of speaking abusively. Certainly his heavy-handed sarcasm[33] bears little resemblance to Socratic irony. In contrast with Socrates' use of irony, Ctesippus uses overheated sarcasm to denounce the brothers as charlatans or worse. While trying to check the confrontation between Ctesippus and the brothers, Socrates continues to express optimism about the brothers' real purpose and their willingness to reveal it:

> I was worried in case there might be hard words, and started to pacify Ctesippus once again, saying, Ctesippus, let me say to you the same things I was just saying to Clinias, that you fail to recognize how remarkable the strangers' wisdom is. It's just that the two of them are unwilling to give us a serious demonstration, but are putting on conjuring tricks in imitation of that Egyptian sophist, Proteus. So let us imitate Menelaus and refuse to release the pair until they have shown us their serious side (288b-c).

At this point, Socrates offers another protreptic demonstration, showing once more how a philosophical exchange should proceed. As he probes the question of happiness and the way to attain it, he elicits a response from Clinias at each crucial step. In their exchange, they seek an art that can produce happiness. Along the way they discover that the arts of speechwriting (which "consists in charming and persuading the members of juries and assemblies and other sorts of crowds" (290a)) and generalship ("man hunting" (290b)) do not satisfy their search for an art "that both provided and created happiness" (291b). In other words, they discount the brothers' earlier careers—as warriors and lawyers—and

[33]For a good example of his sarcasm, see his 284d-e

indirectly criticize their present activities: Euthydemus and Dionysodorus do not deliver speeches in the dialogue, but they rely on their ability to charm the crowd with words and win its approval.

After the second protreptic demonstration, the brothers return for their final act. Heedless of the criticism and indignation they have aroused, they plunge now into their most ridiculous arguments. Euthydemus "proves" that his father is a dog and his "mother the mother of sea urchins" (297d). Ctesippus spars with the brothers, sarcastically mimicking their tricks and constructing fallacious arguments of the same kind. The final and most ludicrous act ends to the roar of applause. Even Ctesippus gives them their due: "By Posidon, what marvelous arguments! I give up—the pair are unbeatable" (302e). Despite this general success, however, the brothers also expose their flank in this final section. Their routine falters when Socrates invites Dionysodorus to join the discussion; in fact, it starts to falter even earlier. At an earlier point, Euthydemus argues that Socrates must be omniscient since he knows something, sand "one could not be both knowing and not knowing at the same time" (293d)—an absurd conclusion that conveniently suppresses the fact that people do not "know" in a general, abstract way; they always know something specific. Socrates makes this correction, insisting that he does indeed know this or that. About something else he can plead ignorance without denying his knowledge of another, unrelated matter. Socrates' words reassert commonsense, and also upset the eristic routine. Indeed, Euthydemus becomes visibly annoyed with Socrates for not sticking to his assigned role. Socrates finally yields to the pressure and withdraws the qualification. Euthydemus can now resume his argument, and he does so until Socrates asks Dionysodorus to enter the discussion. Apparently

Dionysodorus has not practiced this routine, for he nearly derails it, thereby drawing his brother's reproach: "You are ruining the argument . . . and Dionysodorus blushed" (297a). As much as anything, this blush reveals the brothers' character: They do not flinch when Socrates charges them with moral frivolity. When they start to falter before their audience, however, they cringe with embarrassment, if not shame. Without an admiring public, their art would count for little. The crowd's applause will come at the brothers' expense if they lose a round of the game; or perhaps the crowd will simply lose its enthusiasm and move on to something else. For the brothers, the crowd's loss of interest means loss of business.

Fortunately for the brothers, they manage to regain their composure; at the end of the dialogue (before it reverts to the narrative frame), the crowd showers them with approval, and none praises louder than Socrates:

> Whereupon, my dear Crito, there was no one there who did not praise to the skies the argument and the two men, laughing and applauding and exulting until they were nearly exhausted . . . Even I myself was so affected by it as to declare that I had never in my life seen such wise men; and I was so absolutely captivated by their wisdom that I began to praise and extol them and said, O happy pair, what miraculous endowment you possess to have brought such a thing to perfection in so short a time! Among the many other fine things which belong to your arguments, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, there is one which is the most magnificent of all, that you care nothing for the many (*pollôn anthrôpôn*), or in fact, for men of consequence or reputation, but only for persons of your own sort. And I am convinced that there are very few men like who would appreciate these arguments, but that the many (*hoi d'alloi*) understand them so little that I feel sure they would be more ashamed to refute (*exelenchomenoi*) others with arguments of this sort than to be refuted by them (303b-d).

While it seems absurd to say that the brothers care nothing for the many—since they depend for their success on an obliging audience—Socrates does have a point. As a matter of fact, the brothers have shown great indifference to the opinions of the many. Like Socrates, they have learned a new skill despite their advanced age. Moreover, their

eristic method spares no argument or accepted belief; it also flouts common sense to an extreme degree. In addition, these foreign professionals emerge as remarkably un-traditional not only in their willingness to overturn universally received opinions,[34] but also in their detachment from traditional polis-life. As itinerant teachers, they only need to profit from the local population before traveling elsewhere. They have nothing at stake in Athens or any other city that tolerates their activities. They view the community as an opportunity for profit, an attitude that undermines cohesive communities when it becomes pervasive (and not the sole province of the intellectual elite).

This detachment from public opinion and custom gives the sophists a partial resemblance to Socrates, who subjects the mores and religion of traditional polis-life to critical scrutiny. In contrast to Socrates, however, they also treat individual interlocutors with detachment, not just the conventions of the city and "the many." In addition, their detachment from public opinion does not make them independent of it. They rely entirely on their ability to please the crowd. This part of their scheme could undermine their career, for they can only impress a crowd unfamiliar with the hidden tactics of eristic refutation. Although "their art is in no way a hindrance to making money," (304c) it suffers a fatal flaw even from a purely tactical perspective: Other people can easily learn the tricks of the trade (as Ctesippus does) and render the brothers irrelevant. Socrates makes this objection[35] even as he extols the brothers for their unprecedented wisdom:

---

[34]Never mind how spuriously they accomplish this revolution. The fact that they make their outlandish claims in public signals a sea-change in the ancient world, one that poses both dangers and opportunities.

[35]The objection can be summarized in the following way the brothers care about profit, not their interlocutor, and their profit comes from duping the crowd; however, this dependence on the crowd actually *threatens* their profit. A genuine concern for the interlocutor would not depend on the crowd for success.

> This ability of your technique to be picked up rapidly is a fine thing, but not something which lends itself well to public performance. If you will take my advice, be careful not to talk in front of a large group; the listeners are likely to master it right away and give you no credit. Better just talk to each other in private, or, if you must have an audience, let no one come unless he gives you money" (304a-b).

In this passage, Socrates' reveals the brothers' primary concern—not enlightening their interlocutors but turning a profit. Their demonstrations will become unprofitable if they inspire too many competitors. At the same time, Socrates knows that withdrawing into the private zone as he recommends would defeat the purpose of pancratiastism. Pancratiastic arguments bewilder the public (as Socrates point out (303d)) and make the brothers look extraordinarily clever. Deception has an essential role in the brothers' routine; limiting the scope of their practice to private conversations would serve little purpose, since everyone involved would understand the emptiness of the exercise. Without a public, the brothers simply have no career. By a dialectical inversion, the presence of the crowd makes eristic possible but also undermines it.[36] Socrates knows that he has suggested no real alternative; even charging admission (which he does not mention) would do little good, since members of a paying public can also master the art of pancratiastism. Far from offering helpful advice, Socrates wants to underscore the fact that the brothers have done nothing more than perform a series of clever tricks. Of

---

However, it would measure its success in terms of insight, not profit, and would therefore diverge entirely from the brothers' method.

[36]This dialectic strikingly resembles Hegel's dialectic of master and slave. In that famous section of the *Phenomenology*, the master seems independent of the slave yet he depends entirely on the his labor. The slave, observing and emulating the master, ultimately threatens to displace him. The slave makes the master's possible and can also make it impossible, by successfully asserting his own independence. The master's life rests entirely on someone he holds in contempt: he cannot continue his life of leisure without the continued labor of the slave, a fact that gives belies the master's independence.

course, one cannot stage a performance without an audience, preferably one that does not care much for truth or discern the trickery behind the performance.[37]

In short, the brothers need an audience that cares little for truth and remains too ignorant to pose a treat. They may disregard the city's venerable traditions and beliefs. However, they have no interest in public "enlightenment," to use Hegel's terminology. On the contrary, they deliberately deceive the public and have nothing to gain from public scrutiny. Socrates has a more complex relationship with the public. He does not hesitate to philosophize with Clinias in front of the many; nor does he agree to philosophize privately, as Crito recommends. Crito makes this recommendation after the narrative ends and the dialogue returns to the frame. He tells Socrates of a conversation he had with a speechwriter who witnessed the encounter between Socrates and the sophists. He gives Crito a scornful appraisal of the event, making no distinction between the absurdities of eristic disputation and the dialogue between Socrates and Clinias. He exhibits an anti-philosophical attitude that lumps all intellectual conversation into the same category of useless chatter.[38] The speechwriter arouses Crito's anxiety about public opinion when he says that Crito would have felt ashamed if he had heard Socrates conversing with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus.

> And if you had been present, I think you would have been embarrassed on your friend's account, he acted so strangely in his willingness to put himself at the disposal of men who care nothing about what they say, but just snatch at every

[37]Cf. The *Sophist*: "How the sophists can ever make young people believe they're wiser than everyone else about everything about everything. It's obvious that they didn't make correct objections against anyone, or didn't appear so to young people. Or if they did appear to make correct objections, but their controversies didn't make them look any the wiser for it, then . . . just as you say—people would hardly be willing to pay them money to become their students" (233b).

[38]One could compare the speechwriter with the doorkeeper in the *Protagoras*, who overhears the intellectual conversation between Socrates and Hippocrates and immediately identifies them as sophists—as if anyone concerned with philosophical topics belongs to the sophistic movements (*Protagoras* 314d).

> word. And these men, as I was just saying, are among the most influential people of the present day. But the fact is, Crito, he said, that both the activity itself and the men who engage in it are worthless and ridiculous. Now as far as I am concerned, Socrates, the man is wrong to criticize the activity and so is anyone who does so. But to be willing to argue with such people in front of a large crowd does seem to me worth of reproach (304e-305b).

This conversation occurred, of course, before Socrates encountered Crito at the beginning of the dialogue. Crito's quiet allusions to public judgment stem from his conversation with one of Socrates' critics. Having absorbed the speechwriter's views, Crito must have received an unpleasant jolt when Socrates announced his decision to study with the brothers. Now, at the end of the narrative, his anxiety becomes explicit, and he urges Socrates to privatize his philosophical conversations to avoid the danger of public disgrace.

Socrates does not accept this advice. Instead, he offers a dismissive analysis of speechwriters, whom he describes as "occupying the no-man's land between the philosopher and the statesman" (305c). Why does Socrates have little sympathy for Crito's suggestion? Unlike the sophists, Socrates does not require an audience. His advice to the brothers would undermine their career, but Crito's advice to Socrates would not endanger protreptic dialogue; his interaction with Clinias could occur in private without sacrificing anything essential. After all, the protreptic model focuses on the well-being of a particular interlocutor; it speaks to a specific person rather than a faceless crowd. Why, then, does Socrates resist the idea of private philosophizing? In the *Euthydemus*, the answer lies in the fact that Socrates accomplishes three related goals simultaneously. He does not merely engage in protreptic dialogue. He gives a protreptic *demonstration*. He does more than display a skill, as he puts it near the beginning; he uses his hortatory skill to exhort both the brothers and Clinias to a higher purpose. He

seeks to turn them away from their present state of being, meaning that his demonstration has a transformative goal. He aims his demonstration explicitly at the brothers, attempting to correct their frivolity with a model of serious inquiry. However, he also presents the protreptic model to the city as a whole and therefore uses his private conversation with Clinias to make a general critique of the city and its ethos. This argument hinges on the idea that the *Euthydemus* exposes the inner unity of sophistry and the city and criticizes both. By articulating an alternative to eristic competition, Socrates also offers an alternative to the agonistic culture that dominates Greek tradition.

Socrates makes this public critique without compromising the personal nature of his dialogue with Clinias. His philosophical alternative to sophistry and the Greek heroic tradition would make little sense if he merely used Clinias as a convenient prop. His concern for Clinias' soul gives point to his demonstration and stands in contrast with competitive purpose of eristic. Socrates elevates cooperative dialogue (and its pursuit of wisdom) above competitive games, something he also does in the *Apology* (36d). He does not argue that competition has no place in society, or should disappear altogether; he does not call for the abolition of sport or even warfare. Still, he does imply that Athens has dangerously exaggerated the merits of competition, even to the point of corrupting the youth. To counteract this tendency, he must provide the public with an alternative model of human interaction. In short, Socrates must preserve the private character of protreptic philosophy while setting a public example, a complicated maneuver that places him on the boundary of public and private speech.

This specific concern for Clinias marks the difference between philosophy and sophistry, but another distinction emerges from Socrates' interaction with the public. I

argued in the first chapter that Plato draws a parallel between the brothers' attitude toward the city-state and their relationship with their interlocutors. They treat cities and people as interchangeable opportunities for profit. Socrates does not share this detached relationship with the city. His personal concern for Clinias also mirrors his role a gadfly. He speaks to a specific city because he cares seriously about its welfare. This concern for Athens—and its particular residents, especially the young—makes it impossible for him to philosophize privately or drift from city to city like a sophist. He remains rooted in his native soil and also roots his philosophy in personal, intimate dialogue without turning philosophy into a private pursuit for a narrow band of initiates.

IV. The Divine Sign

The goal of protreptic gives it a private character but also serves the purpose of public instruction. Socrates therefore seeks to enlighten both his interlocutor and the city simultaneously. Still, one might question how Socrates sets the goal of inquiry or enters it in the first place. In the *Phaedo* he tells his friends that he always practiced philosophy in obedience to an instruction he received in a dream – an instruction to which he gives a rather counterintuitive interpretation: " 'Socrates,' it said, "make and cultivate music" (*mousikên poiei kai ergazou* (60e)). He assumed the daimoneon wanted him to continue practicing philosophy, a vocation that he attributes elsewhere to a message from the oracle at Delphi (*Apology* 21a-23b). In the *Phaedo,* Socrates decides to take the dream voice more literally and write poetry. In the *Euthydemus*, by comparison, he tells Crito that he is learning to play the lyre, an even more literal adherence to the mysterious command. In any case, Socrates invokes an occult or divine power several times when explaining his decision to philosophize, or travel the path to wisdom. In the *Euthydemus*

he enters the dialogue with Clinias (and confronts the brothers) because he hears his divine sign while preparing to leave the Lyceum. The voice tells him to remain in his place, and he does; a few minutes later he interprets this command in a way that recalls the *Phaedo*: he sees Clinias and the brothers and concludes that the voice wants him to exhort Clinias to philosophy.

This sense of divine or mysterious mission apparently modifies Socrates' role as a voice of rational scrutiny, instructing his interlocutors and the public while combating sophistic obfuscation. Socrates' philosophical mission seems rooted in something pre-rational and private: A voice, dream, or oracular message to which no one else has access. How does this feature of Socratic philosophy impact his role as public philosopher and gadfly? In the next chapter I argue that one cannot fully appreciate the telos of his philosophy—which guides his whole conduct—without remembering where he begins. In the *Euthydemus*, this beginning recalls the fact that Socrates begins, here and elsewhere, with a sense of divine obligation that he does not subject to rational scrutiny. (In the *Apology* he does test the words of the oracle with his actions; he then discovers that the oracle has put him on a philosophical path he continues to follow even when he understands why she declared him as the wisest man in Athens.) Rather, this abiding sense of obligation serves as a catalyst for his examination of Athenian citizens—their opinions and values.

The origin of Socrates' mission therefore seems cloaked in mystery, a troubling fact for anyone who thinks philosophy should entirely commit itself unequivocally to transparent reasoning – in other words, reason that dispenses with occult references that require further explanation. For this perspective, philosophy should have a strictly public

character, founded on principles available to anyone capable of sound reasoning. Obscure references like the divine sign would fall away with a stroke of Ockham's razor. The obscure cannot by explained by the more obscure. A tendency exists, therefore, to ignore or dismiss the presence of the sign. I do not think the divine sign has only a marginal importance for students of the *Euthydemus*. On the contrary, it helps answer problems that surround the goal of protreptic philosophy and further illuminates Socrates' role in the city. In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates does not only hear the divine sign. He becomes a divine sign for Clinias and for the city; his private sense of obligation (I prefer to say vocation) leads him to embrace his public role as the Athenian gadfly and symbol of higher purpose in a culture obsessed with the glory and honor of victory—glories and honors that depend, like eristic, on the public's enthusiasm. Socratic philosophy does not depend on public support. Instead, Socrates practices philosophy for the public good, to make it aware of the insights and values that outlast the victories that receive so many honors in public life.

CHAPTER THREE

Protreptic and the Divine Sign

I. Enlightenment and the Divine Sign

In the second chapter the mysterious nature of the divine sign raises questions about philosophy's distinctively public nature. In a dialogue that brims with examples of logical trickery and deliberate obfuscation, Socratic reasoning apparently represents the voice of "general principles" (Hegel) or transparent reasoning. Socrates uses an axiomatic sentence to open his dialogue with Clinias. This sentence, couched as a question, stands as a model of clarity in contrast to the deliberate ambiguity and cunning that characterize the brothers' syllogisms. Clarity evidently has no place eristic controversy. Practitioners of eristic must disorient both the interlocutor and the audience; to succeed in deception requires that they conceal the linguistic machinery that generates the confusion. The arguments must apparently "make sense" or refute the opposing argument—at least long enough for the brothers to declare their own victory and win the crowd's applause before proceeding to the next round of refutations. They maintain their momentum to prevent a serious assessment of their argument, which can hardly support the weight of careful scrutiny. Like slick rhetoricians, they specialize in the production of appearances and therefore require an audience: a group of people to observe the shadow-play of images on the cave wall. Rhetoric and eristic presuppose the existence of other people, an easily exploitable *ignoscenti*. By contrast, protreptic recalls the demand for rational inquiry Socrates upholds in the *Apology*. So I have argued in the previous

chapters. However, even a closer look at the *Apology* adds complexity to this neat, symmetrical picture.

In the *Apology* Socrates denies having the rhetorical skill of his oily prosecutors, suggesting a link (hardly original) between verbal dexterity and calculating deceptiveness. He also criticizes the poets for communicating thoughts for which they can give no rational account. From these details a partial image emerges, familiar to the student of secular hagiography. Socrates enters the cave-like polis as a revolutionary of thought brandishing the torch of reason in a benighted world of religious and political obscurationism.[1] This description meshes with the popular image of Socrates as a hero of enlightenment and its first martyr (a view found, for example, Martha Nussbaum in *Cultivating Humanity*).[2] This view of Socrates has strong merits. After all, Socrates died at the hands of a religious city, that is, a city in which sacrilege remained a capital offence. However, a closer look at the *Apology* reveals that Socrates does not criticize the poets for communicating with the muses. He criticizes their inability to explain the messages they supposedly receive. Socrates himself receives messages from divine sources, specifically the oracle at Delphi and his own divine sign, and they motivate him to act at crucial junctures. His criticism of poetry therefore differs from the straightforward attacks on superstition found in thinkers like Democritus and Lucretius, thinkers who also figure importantly in the history of secular enlightenment.[3]

---

[1]I speak of Prometheus not because Socrates brings technae to the polis but because, in this view of Socrates, his activity represents an opening skirmish in a larger revolt against the gods.

[2] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, (Harvard University Press, 1997). Pg. 15-49.

[3]I think especially of Martha Nussbaum when speaking of people who include Socrates among the heroes of enlightenment rationalism (in the non-technical sense of the world; not "rationalism" as opposed to "empiricism"). In *Cultivating Humanity*, she presents Socrates as a paradigmatic enlightenment figure in conflict with a religious society. Straussians like Allan Bloom take a similar but rhetorically different

Socrates does not dismiss the claims of non-rational experience as if they were intrinsically incompatible with the demands of rational clarity. He also adheres to a sense of divine mission. Unlike poetry, however, the Socratic mission entails rational clarification. In the *Apology* the message from the Oracle serves as a catalyst for philosophical inquiry. In the *Euthydemus* the divine sign plays that role. This chapter argues for the centrality of the divine sign, an apparently marginal feature of the *Euthydemus*. In order to make that argument, I must show that the sign has a strong connection with the philosophical and pedagogical goals of protreptic discourse. This argument must first question the apparently obvious distinction between protreptic and eristic. A fuller understanding of Socrates' conflict with sophistry points to a greater appreciation of the spiritual background of Socratic rationalism.

At first glance, one can distinguish the two models with reassuring simplicity. Eristic controversy aims solely at victory; it resembles legal forensic and debate in its unrelenting determination to win the argument, truth notwithstanding. In opposition to this eristic method (or art of controversy), Socrates elaborates a protreptic model: cooperative reasoning that aims not solely at victory but at stimulating the interlocutor to philosophy. The dialogue that constitutes the model orients itself toward wisdom and a clearer understanding of how to achieve truth and happiness; in doing so it also seeks to reorient the interlocutor toward wisdom, converting the whole person (to borrow Plato's image from the Allegory of the Cave). This interest in the whole person demands

---

approach. They also embrace an atheistic Socrates, although not the Socrates of enlightenment (or rather the Enlightenment). For Bloom as for Strauss, Socrates prudently mixes dangerous insights with exoteric rhetoric when communicating with the polis. The rhetoric placates the polis and keeps it at arm's length. In this way, the philosopher derives material support from non-philosophers while maintaining his intellectual independence. Socrates must don a cautious attitude in public to prevent the destructive consequences of radical philosophizing. After all, unsettling the public order also endangers the social and political context in which philosophy maintains its perilous existence.

knowledge of that person.[4] Such knowledge allows Socrates to adjust protreptic dialogue to a person's particular needs. However, the clarity of this distinction belies the complexity and problems that underlie Socratic pedagogy. Disturbing the surface of the distinction, however, reveals a more puzzling reality. Perplexities arise when one focuses more steadily on the goal that gives direction to Socrates' dialogical methods. The question arises: Does Socrates really have a determinate goal? After all, the inquiry into wisdom and the happy life ends in aporia; the question remains unresolved when Socrates and Clinias part company. Socrates assumes that philosophy seeks knowledge (288d). He and Clinias agree after two protreptic sessions that such knowledge must come from a "kingly art" that both provides and creates happiness (291b) and conveys "a knowledge which is none other than itself" (292d), although they cannot define an art that would satisfy this requirement. They also agree that this art would make those who practice it good but also remain puzzled about "in what respect" (292d) they will exhibit goodness.

Does protreptic dialogue satisfy the requirements of the kingly art? Does this form of interaction aim at nothing other than itself? Clinias becomes stimulated in his quest for wisdom after conversing with Socrates. One could imagine him becoming better as a result of continuous exposure to Socrates and philosophy. Indeed, in the *Apology* Socrates argues that "it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day" (38a), as if discussing virtue supersedes its actual practice. Perhaps Plato wants his readers to see that the source of happiness already lies within the reach of Socrates and Clinias; exhorting Clinias to love of virtue or wisdom emerges as the ultimate good for both Clinias and Socrates. In this way, the Socratic model would mirror eristic in a

[4] Here my view converges with Martha C. Nussbaum's. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, (Harvard University Press, 1997). Pg. 32.

positive way: it would recommend cooperative discourse (and not refutation) for its own sake. Even so, it seems strange to think that philosophical dialogue should search and find only itself, or that protreptic should terminate in its own activity. Surely the "kingly art" teaches something more than a companionable discussion of "wisdom." Such a definition recalls Aristotle's definition of God. Instead of thought thinking itself, however, "wisdom" becomes dialogue discussing itself. But cooperation has value in the context of the *Euthydemus* and Greek culture because it assists two people in the search for wisdom—not because Plato identifies cooperative dialogue as their ultimate goal. Protreptic dialogue makes Clinias crave knowledge of wisdom; to say that this "wisdom" consists of nothing but the continuation of dialogue seems deeply unsatisfactory and incongruent with other dialogues (including the *Republic* and *Symposium*) in which philosophy serves as a path linking philosophers to a transcendent realm of knowledge.

How, then, can one distinguish decisively between Socrates and the brothers? A simple emphasis on their conflicting goals raises a question about Socrates' goal, and he seems unable to define his goal except in negative terms (he refuses to identify the kingly art with statesmanship, for example). So why does he still assume that an art exists that can guide its practitioners to wisdom and happiness? What explains his undaunted confidence in the face of apparent failure? In this chapter I contend that one cannot understand Socrates' enterprise by focusing exclusively on the diverging goals of eristic and protreptic; one must also recall where Socrates begins, namely with the divine sign. This solution has its own problems, beyond the range of the present discussion. For example, if Socratic rational inquiry begins with a non-rational source, does this fact merely duplicate the original problem? Does the interpreter appeal to another

indeterminate arche to underwrite an indeterminate goal—i.e. "wisdom" and the happiness it brings? Socrates apparently fails the test of rational parsimony. This objection goes beyond hermeneutics, however, and questions (in my view) the credibility of the Socratic enterprise altogether. I agree that Socrates' sense of divine mission and his crucial attentiveness to the divine sign makes him a problematic figure in the history of philosophical enlightenment. Does this conclusion turn Socrates into a problem or simply enlarge the scope of philosophy? If this chapter helps spark conversation about that question, it will accomplish its goal.

II. Where is Socrates Going?

Tradition figures large in this discussion of the *Euthydemus*. This emphasis arises inevitably because sophistry radically challenges the integrity of the polis and the traditions that bind it together. Like other sophists, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus not only sever ties with particular city-states; they also make a career of debunking arguments for no purpose other than victory. Their readiness for verbal combat has no basis in philosophical conviction. They have no principled perspective, only a method of disputation; they teach their students to argue both sides of every question with equal persuasiveness, a habit scarcely compatible with moral integrity. After all, nothing emerges from the clash of arguments except victory for the sophists and humiliation for their opponents. The brothers affirm everything and nothing. Indeed, their mercenary method actually mirrors their political rootlessness; they can potentially defend any argument, just as they dispense military advice to any city willing and able to pay. Indeed, Socrates' association with sophistry (in popular opinion) carries the charge not only of sacrilege but of political disloyalty. The fact that Alcibiades dispenses Athenian

military secrets to enemy cities *and* commits sacrilege against the Hermes statues reflects poorly on Socrates, his "lover," and helps forge the link (in the public imagination) between Socratic philosophy and sophistry. Socrates' most prominent student behaves like a sophist as well as someone with a diminished regard for religious taboo, twin byproducts of philosophical/sophistic influence. As for the polis, it tolerates the sophists because their expertise corresponds to its institutional needs: The courts require skilled disputants and politicians need experts who can train them in oratory. At the same time, the city holds the sophists responsible for corrupting the city's moral fiber.

> By the last quarter of the fifth century B.C., the term "Sophist" had become one of reproach for many Athenians. From the outset, the attitude toward the Sophists had been ambivalent. While many wealthy young Athenians learned rhetorical techniques essential for success in democratic politics, the ethical relativism and religious skepticism taught by the Sophists aroused the fear and resentment of conservative Athenians . . . As the Sophists continued instruct young men in the art of rhetoric, especially how to argue fully both sides of any question, Athenians protested that the Sophists endangered truth and justice.[5]

The conservative Athenians have a point. They rightly fear the brothers' unabashed assault on "whatever may be said, no matter whether it is true of false" (272b), for it signals a crisis at the heart of Greek culture. The popularity radical doubt suggests that Athenian tradition has begun to slip, leaving young minds exposed to the untrammeled skepticism of foreign sophists and their domestic allies.

This assessment of sophistry recalls the charge against Socrates—that he corrupts the youth. As I have mentioned several times, this parallel underscores a central problem in the *Euthydemus*. Various people in the dialogue have trouble distinguishing Socrates from the sophists, and from a certain angle their confusion makes sense. After all,

---

[5]Colaiaco, James A., *Socrates Against Athens: Philosophy on Trial*, Routledge, New York and London, 2001. 18-19.

Socrates also demolishes arguments without offering determinate alternatives; he likewise subjects fundamental ideas and beliefs to relentless questioning and humiliates interlocutors who maintain inadequate views. One can hardly blame victims and bystanders for associating him with the sophists and their scornful disregard of accepted beliefs. But this suspicion does not stop with conservative Athenians; it also arises for less biased readers of the *Euthydemus* (or readers who, if anything, have a bias in favor of Socrates). No final answers emerge from the protreptic exchanges; doubt lingers in the air as it often does when Socrates discredits an interlocutor. Of course, Socrates distinguishes himself from the brothers with his plea for seriousness, but this contrast seems rather weak. Does a sober disposition prove the fundamental difference between Socrates and the brothers? A serious tone could mask an ulterior purpose. At one point Socrates suggests that the brothers conceal a serious agenda behind their verbal trickery (278a-b). Can one know for sure that Socrates does not practice the reverse strategy, introducing corrosive skepticism while ostensibly searching soberly for wisdom and happiness? If Socrates cannot give a discursive account of "wisdom" (or the kingly art), how does he justify his earnestness in seeking wisdom along with Clinias?

In short, the absence of patent absurdity does not release Socrates from the charge of sophistry. One can restate the charge briefly: If both Socrates and the sophists leave their interlocutors without positive knowledge of virtue or wisdom, how does Socrates differ from substantially from his sophistic opponents? Does his activity do less harm if it also leaves interlocutor stranded in a void? Socrates' lofty tone does not exonerate him; it does not demonstrate, in other words, a fundamental divergence between protreptic and eristic discourse. The difference of tone (perhaps rhetorical) could

demonstrate nothing but Socrates' superior stealth in corrupting the youth. The idea that he practices a subtler brand of sophistry raises a special challenge to my argument. I argue that the goal of protreptic discourse conditions its methods and sets it decisively apart from sophistry. As for the goal, Socrates states it with admiral clarity: He wants to exhort young Clinias to love wisdom and, at the same time, instruct the brothers with a model of protreptic discourse. One must therefore read his arguments as an extended exhortation directed specifically at Clinias,[6] not a general attempt to formalize a method of inquiry. Yet how can Socrates direct his interaction with Clinias toward love of wisdom while ultimately professing ignorance about what "wisdom" signifies?

This conundrum makes raises the question of how Socrates derives the telos of protreptic discourse. He does not give a positive account of wisdom, yet wisdom constitutes the goal of the protreptic model.[7] What gives him confidence in wisdom and the possibility of attaining it despite the absence of a positive, discursive account? In this chapter I argue that to understand the end of protreptic discourse one must ask where Socrates *begins*. One must inquire into the arche as well as the telos of his protreptic discourse. What is the arche of Socrates' mission in the *Euthydemus*? The answer lies at the beginning of the dialogue, where he alludes to his sense of divine mission. Socrates enters the dialogue with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus because he receives an order from his divine sign (272e). Like the aporetic dialogues (including the *Euthydemus*), the divine sign does not yield positive knowledge; it issues a command devoid of systematic

[6]And, as I argue in Chapter Two, a model directed at the brothers and the city.

[7]This is true by definition, since philosophy seeks friendship with wisdom (a word, *sophia*, that silently replaces *arête* in the *Euthydemus*). Here Socrates and Clinias seek a an "art" that conveys knowledge of itself; since Socrates identifies wisdom with knowledge, this "art" – if one can call it that – is the wisdom Socrates and Clinias seek.

content. Yet for Socrates it guarantees the worthiness of his protreptic mission, converting Clinias to philosophy. Far from joining the sophists on their path of negation, he enters the scene with divine support. He begins with a positive determination to exhort Clinias in the form of cooperative inquiry without guaranteeing that that inquiry will yield final answers. To understand why he does not surrender to failure or skepticism, one must remember why he began.

In marked contrast with the rationalism that dominates Socratic dialogue, the beginning seems distinctively non-rational. However, instead of binding Socrates to the city and its religious traditions, the divine sign further alienates him from his fellow citizens, who regard his private sign with suspicion (cf. *Euthyphro* 3b). His critique of sophistry does not stem from religious or political conservatism, in contrast to the reactionary hostility sometimes found in the city. He criticizes the sophists because their arguments have no philosophical purpose. Put differently, they introduce a type of disputation that degrades argument into an un-philosophical source of private enrichment. Argument and debate become the cheapened currency of calculating professionals; instead of aspiring to philosophy (or love of wisdom), arguments underwrite the private aspirations of public debaters. The sophists attract a following because they promise tangible advantages to their students. They teach other people to bend arguments and language for their own purposes without regard for wisdom. While drawing attention to the un-philosophical goals of sophistry, Socrates therefore emphasizes a point of continuity between sophistry and the city. He draws attention to the sophists *and* their clients, suggesting that they differ only by the extent of their attachment to (and detachment from) political and religious tradition. The sophists would not profit from

their activities if they did not render a useful service to people who specialize in oratory, i.e., speech that aims chiefly at verbal victory and the appearance of truth. Such people include politicians and lawyers, not to exclude military leaders like Pericles, who must rally the troops and flatter the demos into supporting the city's military adventures.[8] In that sense, Athens literally invites the destructive influence of sophistry. Its vaunted cosmopolitanism alone does not account for its toleration of sophistry.[9] The city opens it doors to sophistry just as it welcomes the influx of foreign trade at the Piraeus. Like any successful merchant, native or foreign, the sophist appeals to the city's perennial needs. The city and the sophists have convergent goals that allow them to benefit richly from each other.[10]

---

[8]Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Penguin Books, 1972. 143-151. One might compare Perecles' praise of Athenian to Protagoras' pro-democratic myth in the *Protagoras*, where he argues that Zeus parceled out the art of politics equally (222d) although Protagoras also charges students for helping them become *better* in politics—a privilege readily available to the rich (319a; 326d-e). His affirmation of Athenian democracy therefore seems purely rhetorical, perhaps offered for in the interest of self-preservation.

[9]Again, see Pericles speech in *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

[10]Cf. James A. Colaiaco's gloss on the *Apology*: "For Socrates was not, by Athenian standards, a 'rhetorical man' . . . When Socrates praises the prosecution's speeches as persuasive, but not true, he is associating his accusers with sophistic rhetoric . . . he is adverting to their attempt to exploit the negative public view of the Sophists by confounding him with them." Colaiaco, James A., *Socrates Against Athens: Philosophy on Trial*, Routledge, New York and London, 2001. 28-29.

See also Alasdair MacIntyre: "Plutarch in his life of Theseus speaks of the cultivation at Athens of the *deinotes politike* (cleverness in politics) which includes the ability to speak effectively. And the assembly and the law courts had of course nourished a practice of debate, of making rival speeches, a practice which is then reflected in the great rival debates within tragic dramas from Aeschylus onward." MacIntyre, Alasdair, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* University of Notre Dame Press, South Bend, Indiana. Pg. 55.

As in the *Apology* (17a-c), Socrates turns the accusation against his accusers in the *Euthydemus* great subtlety. (In the *Apology*, Socrates attributes the ability to speak eloquently to his accusers, while denying his own verbal abilities; in other words he implies that his accusers possess the sophistic ability to "make the weaker argument the stronger" (19c) and teach that ability to the city's youth.) Socrates In previous chapters I make this argument in the following terms: Both the loyal citizen and the sophist maintain the same concept of *arête*, one that makes competition or excellence—i.e. the desire to *excel*—primary. Ctesippus therefore gravitates to eristic argument because he recognizes something familiar there: A combative or agonistic disposition is deeply ingrained in Greek culture. Socrates departs from both Ctesippus and the sophists because his pursuit of *sophia* has a different telos. Unfortunately, this telos

The sophists advertise a product as essential to Athenian life as food. The fact that the sophists come from elsewhere (like merchants hawking exotic delicacies) does not diminish the fact that Athens' native democratic institutions have sophistical elements. The sophists do not import something entirely new. They cater, for a price, to something entirely familiar (e.g. to practitioners of legal forensic as well as warriors and the citizens who valorize them). In contrast the sophists, Socrates does not promise material benefits that correspond to the sophistic model of human interaction, a model that usefully coincides with the city's way of conducting business. His model thus diverges from the twin goals of the city and sophistry—and from politics generally.[11] At the origin of this departure one finds the divine sign, orientating Socrates toward radically different (albeit indeterminate) destination. This divine voice is a notoriously elusive but crucial feature of the Socratic enterprise. Nevertheless, in my view, we should see it as our key to a richer, more complete understanding of the *Euthydemus*.

II. Reason and Divine Sanction

Recent scholarship demonstrates a growing appreciation for the religious dimension of Socrates' character and mission. If Martha C. Nussbaum assimilates him to traditional Enlightenment rationalism, several critics have questioned that status as a forerunner of secular rationalism Michael Beaty and Anne Marie Bowery have argued (in a collaborative essay) that Nussbaum ignores the religious references in a few of the platonic dialogues. While conceding that "many aspects of the Platonic portrayal of Socrates seem to support Nussbaum's emphasis of the rational dimensions of Socrates'

---

seems either vacant or arbitrary if we do not remember the arche of his career. This brings us to the question of divine mission and religious belief, which I address in the present chapter.

[11] *Apology* 33 a-b

behavior," they go on to say that "the Platonic texts are rife with suggestions about the divine nature of Socrates' final allegiances…We would add that the religious dimension of Socrates' philosophy continues embarrass many philosophers today."[12] This embarrassment sometimes leads to familiar varieties of anti-Platonism, where any hint of a religious or metaphysical background prompts a rejection of Socrates and Plato in favor of a more thorough-going rationalism or secularism. Richard Rorty is an especially prominent example of someone in the secular (though not rationalist) anti-Platonist tradition. Even so, other writers have begun to grapple with this rather shadowy side of Plato. Gregory Vlastos ascribes a revolutionary piety to Socrates, one that diverges from the magical-pagan tradition (which approaches the gods for favors in exchange for sacrifices) and has a certain affinity with the Judeo-Christian understand of piety: "Socrates has it on a new conception of piety, as revolutionary in the religious domain, as is his non-retaliatory conception of justice in the moral one . . . As practiced all around Socrates, religion was saturated with . . . magic. In the practice of Socratic piety man would not pray to god, "My will be don by thee," but "They will be done by me."[13]

In his essay *On the Euthydemus*, Leo Strauss stresses the peculiar fact that Socrates remains at the Lyceum in obedience to the divine sign. This fact sets a serious tone for a dialogue that alternates between gravity and farce. "By forbidding him to leave," says Strauss, "the *daimonion* permitted, nay, sanctioned the conversation that followed. No other dialogue presented by Plato has so high an origin. The high origin

[12]Michael Beaty and Anne Marie Bowery, "Cultivating Christian Citizenship: Martha Nussbaum's Socrates, Augustine's Confessions, and the Modern University," Christian Scholars Review XXXI (2003): 21-52.

[13]Vlastos, Gregory, "Socratic Piety" (in *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*), Oxford University Press, 2000. 64-65.

could explain why the *Euthydemus* is so extraordinarily rich in Socratic oaths."[14] The reason Socrates' *daimonion* appears at this place and time remains characteristically obscure; it does not reveal its intentions either now or later. However, its appearance gives divine sanction to his encounter with the sophistic brothers and even makes it possible; it assures Socrates that he has a purpose to fulfill here and now. Two essential points therefore emerge from this opening: the purpose that informs the beginning of the dialogue and the specificity of that purpose. A sense of mission—or what Strauss calls "divine sanction"—guides Socrates into the discussion. His mission leads him to a particular person, Clinias, who becomes his educational charge in a dialogue fraught with spiritual danger. Right away, one sees that Socrates' involvement is neither arbitrary nor capricious (nor, for that matter, the result of human compulsion[15]).

After the voice appears and Socrates resumes his place, the people who occasion the dialogue enter the room. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus appear first, followed shortly by Clinias and his lovers, "among them Ctesippus" (273a). In other words, the divine signal precedes the beginning of a conversation in which Socrates discharges his duty, the one that governs his actions throughout the dialogue. It appears at the beginning and gives Socrates his reason for beginning.[16] Without providing Socrates a determinate goal, the voice removes any sense of randomness from his decision to engage the brothers and guide Clinias away from potential danger. He does not encounter the group and converse with by pure chance or because they compel his participation; nor

[14]Strauss, Leo, *On the Euthydemus* from *Interpretation*, Summer 1970. 3.

[15]See Allan Bloom's analysis of *Republic*, Book I.

[16]To repeat, why begin searching earnestly for something that, so far, seems void of determinate meaning? Only an external prompt would justify the urgency of such a quest, and Socrates' sense of divine mission, somehow linked to his divine sign, answers that question in the *Euthydemus*.

does he exploit the situation to heighten his public profile (which would have failed anyway, since his inquiry with Clinias does not "succeed"). He begins with a purpose to fulfill at this specific occasion. Rather than leave the Lyceum and allow the sophists to peddle their wares unchallenged, Socrates stays behind to demonstrate his alternative to eristic discourse and mitigate its harmful influence on Clinias. Socrates intuits the danger involved when he sees Clinias and the sophists together. He thus interprets the sign's purpose in retrospect; he seems to regard it as responsible for bringing him into contact with Clinias at an especially precarious moment of his life, when dangerous influences could do his soul considerable damage. As Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith point out, "The daimonion offers Socrates no rules of conduct, no general principles, no moral definitions . . . Socrates may not know the first thing about why he has been stopped, but he seems completely and unshakably certain that he must not do what he was about to do.."[17].

Socrates does not stop in his tracks because reason forbids him from engaging in an apparently neutral activity (e.g. leaving the Lyceum at a particular time, an action that does not seem remotely irrational or morally dubious). As Brickhouse and Smith point out, one cannot identify the sign with reason, for the sign often appears when reason also makes no objection to a particular action: "If his *daimonion* had not signaled…Socrates would neither stop nor say he had to *reason* to stop"[18] [my emphasis]. Moreover, reason does not point Socrates to an unambiguous interpretation the sign's purpose, even if it does lend assistance: "Reason certainly assists Socrates in assessing the significance of,

[17]Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, "Socrates Gods and His *Daimonion* in *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, (Oxford University Press, 2000). 86.

[18]Ibid. 86

or reason for, his *daimonion's* alarms; but reason does not exhaust or fully explain the *daimonion's* significance. The experience itself must tell part of the story."[19] In the *Euthydemus* Socrates relies on experience to make sense of the sign's prohibition (after all, leaving the Lyceum does not, by itself, have any moral implications that would require a prohibition). He encounters Clinias and the brothers and this experience points to a mission which the divine sign has sanctioned—assuming he has interpreted its gnomic message correctly.

Before they introduce Clinias to their teaching, he issues a warning about the moral delicacy of the situation. After informing the brothers that everyone present wants them "to persuade this young man here that he ought to love wisdom and have a care for virtue" (275a), he goes on to say:

> The boy's situation is this: both I and all these people want him to become as good as possible…He is young, and we are anxious about him, as one naturally is about a boy of his age, for fear that somebody might get in ahead of us and turn his mind to some other interest and ruin him" (275a-b).

This passage conveys a rather blatant suspicion about the brothers, perhaps based on knowledge Socrates had prior to this occasion.[20] Someone *has* gotten to Clinias "ahead of us" (275a), the very thing Socrates fears. They have met Clinias at a time when anyone can take advantage of his vulnerability and inexperience. Their influence could divert Clinias from pursuing wisdom and thus ruin his chance of attaining happiness.

In any case, Socrates voices his concern before the brothers confirm it with evidence. The purpose that motivates Socrates' involvement has a counterpart in the first

---

[19]Ibid 86

[20]According to Xenaphon, Socrates criticized Dionysodorus' expertise in warfare, a craft he pursued before becoming a teacher or eristic. Xenaphon, *Conversations of Socrates*, (Penguin Books, London, 1990). P. 137.

eristic scene, which opens on an abrupt, arbitrary note. The divine sign orders Socrates to remain at this particular place so that he can converse with Clinias and the brothers. In contrast, the brothers agree with airy indifference to indulge Socrates' request for a demonstration. They do not seem concerned about the specific features of this encounter, the place or the people involved. They do not care who answers their questions (275c) as long as their interlocutor plays by the rules. Clinias will serve as well as anyone else. If they accept their interlocutor arbitrarily, their presence in this particular place also seems purely accidental. As the rest of the dialogue shows, they reproduce the same routine everywhere, making it easy for others to acquire and perpetuate. They have obviously practiced their eristic arguments in many locales before coming to Athens or the Lyceum. They will continue to do so when they leave. Of course, philosophical dialogue can occur under accidental conditions (Socrates does not go to the Piraeus to meet Polemarchus, for example; the meeting occurs by chance). Still, Plato contrasts the brothers' accidental presence at the Lyceum with Socrates' decision to stay because it parallels a deeper contrast between Socrates and the brothers.

In short, the air of randomness that marks the brothers' behavior contrasts sharply with Socrates' adherence to his divine sign. This interpretation does not imply that the brothers engage Clinias for no reason at all, because they can think of nothing else to do. The brothers' decision to engage Socrates and Clinias is both random and opportunistic, having nothing to do with the people who participate and everything to do with their self-interest. Clinias merely provides the brothers an occasion for showcasing their eristic skills; one seeks in vain for a purpose transcending the frivolous play of arguments, "the sporting leaps" that does not lead, as Socrates suggests, to a revelation of sophistic

mysteries. The brothers try to mystify with the whirling "dance" of language, oscillating between arguments with a speed that preempts reflection. Together they assault Clinias and leave him sprawling on the ground. This unconcern for individual people mirrors their goal, which seeks to humiliate interlocutors publicly or armor them with the skills and strategies necessary for verbal combat. (They pursue the latter goal because it garners profit.) The interlocutors exist as ciphers in a game of cat-and-mouse, a mouthpiece for views that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus already know how to "refute."

Although the brothers work as a team they also cancel each other in this first demonstration. "Euthydemus is completely deceiving you" (277b) Dionysodorus tell Clinias after his defeat in the first round. This comment gives Dionysodorus an air of disarming honesty. To use the current idiom, Clinias probably expects him to play "good cop" to the Euthydemus' "bad cop," but the joint nature of eristic soon becomes obvious. Dionysodorus finds another way to confuse Clinias and thus continue the work of his brother and eristic dance partner. Dionysodorus already reveals the common purpose that unites him to his brother when he speaks of "our questions" (276e), and his own argument supplies irrefutable evidence of that unity, even if his conclusion contravenes the outcome of his brother's argument. The fact that they work together while producing incompatible arguments signals a dispiriting fact: They have no goal beyond refuting Clinias. Socrates no doubt assesses the situation quickly, even though he speculates "optimistically" about the brothers' ulterior purposes. I put that word in scare quotes because even if the brothers do possess esoteric teachings, these positive doctrines could just as likely have a toxic influence on Clinias' soul. Even so, a serious teaching would at least open the door to serious dialogue, an unlikely event under present circumstances.

Socrates' language in this passage (277d-278a) rings with irony, since he probably recognizes a sophistic pattern at work in brothers' linguistic contortions. Learning to argue both sides of an argument with equal persuasiveness belongs to a certain strain of intellectual life in Greece. A fragment of Gorgias gives an especially verbose example of the genre (*Encomium of Helen*, 82B11). In this passage, Gorgias elaborates metaphysical paradoxes with droning monotony, but his effort feels pointless and rather cynical. Unlike Zeno, for example, Gorgias' production of paradox does not make a metaphysical point; it only "proves" that language can serve both sides of any argument. In later arguments, the brothers also loot the tradition of metaphysical speculation. Their use of Eleatic categories seems to fulfill Socrates' prediction that they will abandon their games and disclose sophistic mysteries. They deploy categories such as non-being to draw conclusions offensive to common sense, just as Parmenides and Zeno must deny movement and change (and hence the testimony of experience) to eliminate non-being consistently from speech and thought. Like Gorgias, however, the brothers do not have a teaching to reveal, one that entails sweeping paradox. Nevertheless, their portentous language dispatches a red herring that has distracted some commentators, most notably Sprague and Hawtrey. Unlike Sprague in particular (in *Plato's Use of Fallacy*), I do not think that Plato uses of the *Euthydemus* to satirize or discredit Parmenides.[21] Since the brothers wholly subordinate their metaphysical talk to a non-metaphysical purpose, it would seem unfair for Plato to suggest that he has refuted Parmenides (a serious thinker) when he has refuted them—or at least proven their

[21]"The Eleatic logic which is at the bottom of the majority of the fallacies in this present scene[282d-288d] is inextricably tied to a metaphysics which denies becoming; as a result it is necessary for Plato to expose these arguments, since in so doing he discredits the metaphysics as well." Sprague, Rosamond Kent, *Plato's Use of Fallacy: A Study of the* Euthydemus *And Some Other Dialogues*, (Barnes & Noble, Inc., New York, 1962), 13-14.

absurdity. To refute Parmenides, he needs to converse with someone who argues persuasively for the Eleatic perspective—as he does in the *Parmenides*. The *Euthydemus* has more immediately pressing goals.[22]

In truth, the brothers' appeal to Parmenides is as arbitrary and opportunistic as their involvement with Clinias. Their eristic method reflects both their beginning and their end. Put differently, the opportunistic telos of eristic controversy does not give it a purposeful arche, since opportunity can arise anywhere at anytime. For Socrates, by contrast, Clinias has reached a crucial point in his life; a bad influence at this juncture could permanently damage his soul. Such a sensitive moment does *not* occur anywhere at anytime. If Socrates does not act now, the moment could pass and leave him with a smaller chance of converting Clinias to philosophy. Socrates chooses neither the timing nor the person at random; the person, time, and place converge in a way that demands his involvement, flooding the occasion with urgent purpose. To be sure, Socrates' presence at the Lyceum at this particular time is accidental and contingent. On the other hand, his decision to engage Clinias gives purpose to the chance encounter; for although Socrates does not choose when or where this event occurs, he understands that *timing* plays a critical role due to Clinias' vulnerable youth. The divine sign does not reveal Socrates' purpose directly. Rather, Socrates interprets the sign's message while observing the unfolding scene. Without the sign's appearance, Socrates would have left and Clinias would have remained at the mercy of the brothers and their own self-serving purposes. Fortunately for Clinias, events took a different turn. This fortunate turn of events did not

[22]For Plato's serious engagement with Eleatic logic one must turn to the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides*.

occur accidentally but for two reasons: The divine sign spoke and Socrates gave its message a particular interpretation.

If purpose marks the two protreptic dialogues from the beginning, the eristic demonstrations consistently display randomness. The brothers also willingly engage Socrates and Ctesippus. They really do not care about the identity of their interlocutor as long as he abides by the rules. However, not even the rules have a permanent, consistent character. They change depending on the circumstances. In fact, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus invent rules on the spot to prevent Socrates from undermining their demonstration. The brothers behave like capricious autocrats, demanding conformity when they can no longer persuade their subjects or maintain the appearance of rationality. They originally accepted Clinias as an interlocutor on the condition that he play by the rules. Socrates deviates and threatens to expose the artificiality of their method. In one round of eristic argument (with Ctesippus as interlocutor), Euthydemus and Dionysodorus argue that no one speaks or thinks falsely because to do so would involve speaking about what does not exist. Using their quasi-Eleatic logic, they conclude that people cannot contradict one another, for a false speaker would speak nothing; in other words, the speaker would remain silent. "And how," Dionysodorus concludes "could a person who does not speak contradict one who does?" (286b). The argument cleverly identifies speaking falsely with not speaking at all. Unable to refute this refutation of refutation, Ctesippus momentarily falls silent (a nicely ironic touch, since the brothers have just identified speaking falsely with silence). I call the argument quasi-Eleatic because Parmenides forbade speech about what-is-not, whereas the brothers argue that no one could possibly fall into that error—an argument that makes Parmenides' prohibition

entirely unnecessary. Philosophers cannot warn followers against the path of falsehood if it does not exist.

Socrates takes advantage of Ctesippus' silence and points out the inconveniently obvious. Do not the brothers claim to refute a false statement? According to their argument, Ctesippus' claim that people falsely (and contradict those who speak truly) is false. Their demonstration depends on the assumption that Ctesippus speaks falsely.

> Are you making this statement just for the sake of argument, Dionysodorus—to say something startling—or do you honestly believe that there is no such thing as an ignorant man?
> Your business is to refute me, he said.
> Well, but is there such a thing as refutation if one accepts your thesis that no one speaks falsely? (286d).

Dionysodorus agrees that no one refutes anyone, undermining not only the demand he just uttered but, as Socrates points out, the stated purpose of his career. Originally he and Euthydemus promised to teach Clinias, but why does Clinias (or anyone, for that matter) need a teacher if no one ever speaks or thinks falsely? Dionysodorus answers this question with an insult: "are you such an old Cronus to bring up what we said at the beginning? I suppose if I said something last year you will bring that up now and still be helpless in dealing with he present argument" (287b). He thus forbids referring back to previous statements and arguments without offering any reason for imposing this restriction. Dionysodorus wants to segue smoothly to another series of ready-made questions, but Socrates threatens to arrest his momentum. He reiterates his question, seizing Dionysodorus' last sentence: How can Dionysodorus describe Socrates as helpless to deal with his argument without also implying that he, Dionysodorus, has refuted his luckless interlocutor? Dionysodorus simply refuses to answer. Instead, he demands that Socrates answer his next question. Socrates surrenders with a sigh,

underscoring the fact that Dionysodorus acts on force rather than "principle" (287c). "I must obey then," he says "and it seems that I am forced to do so, since you are in command, so ask away" (287d).

This tense exchange occurs before Socrates launches his second protreptic dialogue with Clinias. A similar scene occurs after that demonstration. Here Euthydemus constructs an argument that "proves" his own omniscience—and, for that matter, the omniscience of everyone who knows anything, no matter how narrow and trivial. To reach this conclusion he appeals to a distorted version of (what Aristotle would later call) the principle of non-contradiction, arguing that one cannot be both knowing and not knowing at the same time. Hence anyone who knows anything knows everything (293a-294b). Socrates asks if the brothers profess universal ignorance. They reject this suggestion, arguing instead that they possess knowledge of everything.[23] Socrates responds with a series of questions: Do they know how to make shoes, cobble, or construct buildings; can they practice astrology or number the stars in the heavens? Dionysodorus replies without hesitation: "Of course, he said "Do you think we would fail to agree to that too?" (294c). At this point Ctesippus can restrain himself no longer and renews his confrontation with Dionysodorus, demanding evidence of his omniscience. Dionysodorus seems accommodating at first, simply asking Ctesippus what he wants to know. Still bristling with hostility, Ctesippus asks Dionysodorus to say how many teeth

[23]Notice that if the brothers had professed universal ignorance they would have produced a caricature of Socratic agnosticism, just as they practice a caricatured version of elenchus and make crude use of Parmenides and even the theory of recollection (277b-c) when it serves their purposes. Of course, Socrates never claims to know nothing at all, but the brothers' mode of arguing only seems capable of generating (literally) laughable versions of serious arguments (the exact opposite of Socrates' early suggestion that their frivolity presaged a serious revelation of sophistic mysteries). The dialogue's oscillation between seriousness and farce matches the character of eristic, at least as the brothers practice it. In their hands, eristic unfailingly transforms serious thought into absurdity. This reinforces the popular association of philosophy with sophistry.

Euthydemus has – almost certainly a mocking reference to the brothers' advanced age. Instead of inventing a number (and running the risk of empirical refutation), Dionysodorus asks Ctesippus why he insists on obtaining evidence for their claim: "Aren't you satisfied with being told that we know everything?" (294c). Ctesippus does not relent. When he receives no information about Euthydemus' teeth he assaults both brothers with an arsenal of questions meant to expose them as frauds. He inquires into their knowledge of virtually everything, including "the most disgraceful things. The two of them faced his questions very manfully," says Socrates "claiming to know in each case, just like boars when they are driven up to the attack" (294d). Ctesippus' indignation does not stem from a fervent attachment to truth; he simply dislikes Dionysodorus for suggesting, in an earlier argument, that he (as well as Socrates) wants Clinias to die. Like the brothers, Ctesippus uses argument as well as mockery and sarcasm to humiliate his opponents, but his heated opposition draws no nearer to philosophy than eristic; it gives voice to common sense—he knows the brothers are not omniscient—but also exhibits a common indifference both to philosophical inquiry and the particular fate of Clinias' soul. He has an erotic, self-interested motive for trying to impress Clinias, not a Socratic interest in his friend's mental or spiritual future.

After watching this episode run its course, Socrates again intervenes "out of sheer disbelief" (294e) and asks Dionysodorus whether he knows how to dance. Like Ctesippus, he also makes reference to Dionysodorus' age: "I don't suppose…that at your advanced age you are so far advanced in wisdom as to somersault over swords or be turned about on a wheel" (294e). Dionysodorus answers "yes" to all of these questions. "There is nothing I can't do," he proudly asserts (294e). The questions that both

Ctesippus and Socrates ask have an arbitrary air (why ask about their knowledge of cobbling rather than blacksmithing, or dancing rather than Olympic racing?). This arbitrariness mimics the randomness of eristic itself. No real knowledge will result from these inquiries, for the argument that led to the question of omniscience did not seriously aim at proving anything. The brothers only want to add another refutation to their long string of victories. They do not even claim to have a special monopoly on universal knowledge. Only the contrary, they generously insist that Socrates also knows everything, assuming he knows anything. At the beginning of the dialogue Socrates declares that if the brothers can truly teach virtue he will revere them as gods. He would surely display a similar reverence if they could demonstrate omniscience. However, their purpose remains the same: to win the argument, not awe their audience with an unbelievable boast. They do not hesitate to attribute god-like powers to Socrates or anyone else as long as it brings their argument to a successful conclusion.

The arbitrariness of eristic becomes less accommodating when genuinely threatened. As Socrates continues to pursue his argument with the brothers, they become more belligerent as their act starts to come unraveled. After it becomes obvious they will not and cannot demonstrate empirical knowledge of everything, they return to their preferred method of eristic demonstration, with Socrates as their skeptical interlocutor. They intend to show him that he also possess omniscience, an especially humorous claim when applied to Socrates. After all, his protreptic exchange with Clinias proved his inability to resolve the question of wisdom and knowledge. The famous Socratic ignorance has figured prominently in this encounter between Socrates and the brothers.

To prove Socrates in fact knows everything, Euthydemus invites him to answer a series of short questions—a familiar procedure at this point:

> Well, Socrates, he said, when you have knowledge, do you have it of something, or not?
> I have it of something.
> And do you know by means of that by which you have knowledge, or by means of something else?
> By means of that by which I have knowledge, I suppose you mean the soul, or isn't that what you have in mind?
> Aren't you ashamed, Socrates, to be asking a question of your own when you ought to be answering?
> Very well, said I, but how am I to act? I will do just what you tell me.

Nevertheless, the same scene repeats itself a few passages later:

> And you answer again from the beginning, he said. Do you know by means of something or not?
> I know by means of the soul, I said.
> There he is again, he said, adding something on to the question! I didn't ask you what you know, but whether you know by means of something.

Socrates fails to utter the prescribed answer, a disastrous turn of events for the brothers' rigidly scripted performance. (They respond as stage actors would if one of their colleagues decided to improvise her lines mid-performance.) When Socrates deviates, treating the routine as a serious exchange of thought, the brothers have no choice but to create and impose a perfectly arbitrary restriction on what he can and cannot say. This tyrannical veto differs drastically from Socrates' relationship with Clinias in the second protreptic. There he allows Clinias to make increasingly bold contributions (e.g. 289d), moving beyond the simple "yes" and "no" responses he gently invites at the beginning of the first protreptic (to avoid intimidating Clinias, not to lure him into a trap). Briefly stated, Socrates quietly exposes eristic by pretending to believe that the brothers argue seriously. Their refusal to engage his questions and qualifications proves that they do not act in the spirit of inquiry; otherwise they would invite questions that shed further light

on the matter at hand. However, the "matter at hand" (meaning the question of knowledge) belongs to a series of arguments as interchangeable as the interlocutors they recruit, provided they stick to their role: i.e. answering the brothers' questions exactly as they demand. Since they do not use argument to pursue a particular insight, or aid a particular person, they careen from one set-piece to another and do not worry about the pointlessness of the whole procedure.

One can see how the brothers' lack of purpose (beyond refuting an interlocutor) gives their behavior and arbitrary and pointless character that leads naturally to unreasonable coercion. This lack of direction also gives them no definitive place to start, as I have said already. By the same token, they also have no place to end. Protreptic comes to a stop when Socrates and Clinias reach an impasse; aporia marks the boundary of their inquiry, making it impossible to move forward. Since protreptic has no overarching goal, it has no non-arbitrary place to stop. Either the brothers exhaust their supply of demonstrations or the participants grow weary of the exercise and disperse. The event simply drifts to a meaningless conclusion. To be sure, the brothers must aim at having the last word. They cannot tolerate the possibility of someone else ruining one of their arguments and thus ending their program with a humiliating exposure. Under those circumstances, the crowd would simply leave because the brothers no longer impress them. They would resemble magicians who lose their audience because someone reveals the artificial mechanism behind their tricks. The act would end on a note of embarrassment and failure. To avoid such a humiliating denouement, the brothers resort to coercion to mask their utter lack of rationality. This reliance of force sets eristic decisively apart not only from protreptic (somewhat narrowly defined) but also from

elenchus.[24] Eristic crudely resembles elenchus. Unlike elenchus, however, it does not allow the interlocutor to make a contribution, much less cross-examine the other person's views. Forcing Socrates to give a particular answer (which he does not accept) flatly contradicts the whole point of elenchus and shows that practicing cross-examination does not, by itself, make anyone a philosopher. The examination must have a point *and* seriously engage the other person's actual perspective. Ascribing a flawed view to someone else and then refuting it may impress an undiscerning crowd, but it accomplishes nothing else.

IV. The Socratic Beginning

I have argued that the brothers have no definitive beginning and no goal beyond winning an argument (which they prepare in advance) and moving quickly to another argument. This lack of purpose pervades all of the demonstrations, making them as arbitrary and capricious as one would expect from arguments that do not seriously intend to prove anything. The Socratic difference therefore lies in his definitive beginning and his determinate, philosophical goal—to exhort Clinias to wisdom. The protreptic demonstration comes to a definite impasse because Socrates has a goal which he fails to reach (at least for now). Still, does his goal remain credible if he cannot define the kingly art that would make those who possess it wise and happy? Put differently, does his failure to give "wisdom" positive content reveal the impossibility of his philosophical

[24]I say "somewhat narrowly defined" because elenchus also has a protreptic goal. One should not think of protreptic as a kinder, gentler alternative to elenchus. Elenchus refutes an interlocutor's views (sometimes harshly), but it ultimately has a positive goal. Socrates wants to change Euthyphro's mind; and he if he does not hope to alter Thrasymachus' views, he can at least limit his toxic influence. Socrates does not need to practice elenchus with Clinias because he does not need to refute any of Clinias' views. Clinias does not express a viewpoint, and so cross-examining him only becomes possible when the brothers trick him into accepting position they already know how to refute.

enterprise? If so, protreptic does not leave Clinias in a better position than eristic. He still lacks s*ophia* and his ability to acquire it looks more doubtful than ever. Why, then, does Socrates have such confidence in his ability to educate Clinias and Critobulus (the message he wants Crito to derive from his narrative)? I have argued that one cannot define protreptic discourse itself as the kingly art; it must have a goal external to itself. I argue that the source of Socrates' confidence does lie in his possession of determinate knowledge—or even his superior rationality—but in the mysterious message he receives from the divine sign. Like the protreptic dialogues, the sign does not give positive information. Even so, the sign imbues Socrates with a sense of purpose. He must interpret the sign, which puts him in a position similar to the reader of Plato's dialogues. The discipline of interpretation (in a word, hermeneutics) lies at the beginning of Socrates' activities. Socrates cannot be certain he has interpreted the message accurately (cf. *Phaedo* 60d-61a), but the absence of absolute certainty does not prevent him from acting.[25]

At first glance, the *Euthydemus* suggests a simple contrast between rational discourse and irrational controversy. The dialogue apparently dramatizes the conflict between sound reasoning and egregious illogic. In fact, Socrates does not emerge from this dialogue as a strict rationalist, rejecting anything that does not have indubitable rational support. His actions actually begin with an ambiguous voice whose existence remains unproven. A strict rationalist (using the word broadly) would argue that one

[25]The passage from the *Phaedo* does not refer to the divine sign but to another mysterious voice that speaks to Socrates in his dreams. Still, the point for this chapter remains the same: Socrates' confident pursuit of rational inquiry is not rooted in rationality. He receives direction from a non-human command, although he must interpret the command for himself. In the *Phaedo* the command gives positive (albeit vague) instructions; the divine sign in the *Euthydemus* and elsewhere merely tells him what *not* to do, a negativity that mirrors the negative insights of aporia.

cannot explain the obscure by referring to the more obscure; as an explanatory principle, the sign violates the principle of parsimony. If the goal of protreptic seems indeterminate and problematic, appealing to private divine sign does not improve matters. If anything, this strategy makes matters worse. At least the failed arguments have a public character; anyone can hear and understand how Socrates reaches his negative conclusion. No one but Socrates can hear the divine sign. Even if he has faith in a divine sign, he should not expect other people to share his idiosyncratic conviction.

The rationalist critic has a point. Socrates would not survive the application of Ockham's razor. Even if Socrates can credibly interpret the sign's intervention as a command to become involved with Clinias and the brothers, how does this voice give him confidence to pursue wisdom in particular? The divine message lacks content, and surely here (as elsewhere) *ex nihilo nihil fit*. I do not have a pat answer to this question. My purpose is to interpret (and not necessarily exonerate) Socrates' behavior. Still, a few tentative suggestions strike me as plausible. To begin, one cannot speak of Socrates as someone living in a cultural vacuum. Like everyone, he inherits a culture's moral language, and it includes ideals such as "wisdom"—a personal achievement that seems desirable by definition. Socrates lives in a city devoted to the goddess of wisdom, and in his public pursuit of philosophy he seems determined to make Athens worthy of its name. Socrates does not need to receive the ideal of wisdom directly from a divine sign, although the sign can (perhaps) pit him against Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, whose activities systematically trample the pursuit of wisdom. A larger point emerges from this discussion, related to Stanley Rosen's discussion of pre-discursive intuition in Plato's

dialogues and philosophy in general.[26] Socrates does not deduce the ideal of wisdom from an argument or receive it directly from a god. This ideal belongs to his pre-rational experience of the world. Put differently, the idea of wisdom comes to him in the context of everyday life, where everyone first encounters moral ideals and language (however undisciplined by rigorous inquiry). The role of pre-rational conviction therefore extends beyond the divine sign; everyone begins rational inquiry with words and ideas that precede inquiry and give it a general direction. For Kant or G.E. Moore (no less than Plato and Socrates), words like "duty" and "good" (or for that matter, "rational") appear at the beginning of philosophical activity, not the end. Philosophy may diverge from everyday understandings of "wisdom" or "good," and it may terminate in perplexity. Still, rational inquiry does not begin with rational inquiry, even for those who repudiate the notion of divine inspiration or sanction.

One could argue, then, that Socrates does not rely wholly on the sign for direction. The voice of the divine sign converges with a pre-rational intuition of wisdom, a trait people naturally desire even if they behave foolishly and do not appreciate the dignity of the philosophical life. Socrates naturally wants to help Clinias avoid living a foolish life, but he would not have encountered Clinias without the intervention of his sign. Socrates' interpretation of the sign's message leaves room for doubt but does not seem terribly implausible, either. If he and Clinias fail to define wisdom and the kingly art, they need not conclude, surely, that wisdom has no meaning after all and one might as well abandon all efforts to life wisely. Anyway, speaking of the complex forces at work in Socrates' life points to another, related explanation. Throughout the Platonic

[26]See especially *The Limits of Analysis*, St. Augustine's Press, 2000.

dialogues, Socrates refers to other encounters with the supernatural. In the *Apology* he refers to a message he received from an agent of the gods, the Oracle at Delphi. This spiritual mediator informs Chaerephon, Socrates' friend, that no one in Athens is wiser than Socrates. According to Socrates, this message served as the catalyst of his philosophical quest. He clearly had some notion of wisdom to begin with, otherwise the message would have had little impact. As he says, "When I heard this reply I asked myself: 'Whatever does the god mean? What is his riddle? I am very conscious that I am not wise at all . . ." (21b). In an attempt to resolve the riddle, Socrates begins testing his fellow citizens, especially those with a reputation for wisdom. As almost everyone knows, he ultimately came to the conclusion that his superior wisdom had nothing to do with possessing a greater quantity of knowledge than everyone else. He could count himself wiser because he understood the limits of his knowledge; he knew what he did not know. The connection between Socrates' sense of divine mission and his preoccupation with wisdom therefore reaches back (according to his account, or Plato's) to the oracle's message. When the *daimonion* appears at the beginning of the *Euthydemus*, it points to an overarching sense of divine mission that involves more than the divine sign. When trying to understand the source of Socrates' philosophical confidence, one must read this dialogue against the larger background of Socrates' life, in which a vague but pervasive sense of the divine plays a profound, defining role. Socrates must always interpret the oracle's message with the aid of experience, and he must do the same with the divine sign. This hazy influence in Socrates' life no doubt makes many philosophers uneasy, but one cannot ignore this facet of his life without gravely misconstruing the spirit of the dialogues.

In short, Socrates does not oppose the brothers' illogic with a simple demand for public reasoning (or general principles, to use Hegel's phrase). A kind of faith informs his activities even though he does not transmit positive doctrines from a divine source. At the same time, the divine sign does not have a merely private significance for Socrates. On the contrary, Socrates publicly imitates the sign. He *becomes* a sign for both Clinias and the city. This final point ties the themes of these three chapters together: Socrates becomes a sign of cooperative, protreptic dialogue in an agonistic city (while linking the violence of eristic to the competitive underpinnings of the city itself); the dialogue with Clinias remains private but conveys a public message; and finally, Socrates not only obeys the divine sign—he embodies it for both his interlocutor and the public. The negativity of the sign mirrors the negativity of aporia, but the parallel does not stop there. Like the sign, Socrates must intervene at a crucial moment to alter someone's direction. The sign prevents Socrates from leaving the Lyceum, and Socrates must also take advantage of a sensitive moment; he must intervene on Clinias' behalf and turn him away from eristic. In so acting, he also becomes a model for the city; the private dialogue with Clinias conveys a public message just as the private sign becomes a catalyst for public action. Although rooted in private conviction, Socrates' actions differ from the poets' precisely because he insists on speaking rationally. Socrates does not simply tell people what he heard from a divine voice (or the muses), but expects himself and others to provide reasons for believing what they believe. Indeed, Plato ultimately links the irrationality of eristic to coercion (recalling the first chapter's preoccupation with violence); the brothers use force when they cannot offer persuasive reasons. Rationality engages other minds in a spirit of mutual understanding and does not impose

an external view on the public without bothering to give reasons. Both the poets and the sophists impose their views (or "arguments") and make a mockery of understanding. Socratic discourse does not preclude trans-rational inspiration (just the opposite), but the divine sign inspires dialogue rather than force. In fact, it seems nearly impossible to explain his actions in the *Euthydemus* while ignoring his obscure beginnings. This fact creates tension between Socrates and philosophers who wield Ockham's razor, but I think it moves us closer to a fuller understanding of Socratic dialogue in general and the *Euthydemus* in particular.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

I. The Larger Context

The *Euthydemus* mirrors the larger conflict between Socrates and other radical thinkers, including sophists like Protagoras and cynical critics like Thrasymachus. This conflict concerns the origins and possibilities of human community. The possibilities in question revolve around the question of competition and violence: Does an agonistic mode of interaction have an essential place in the city or does it occur as a result of contingent, avoidable choices? Protagoras gives an enduring answer to this question in the dialogue that bears his name. He argues that human beings establish political communities to ensure the survival of the race. Community arises because of a natural deficiency; unlike other animals, people lack the ability to defend themselves adequately in nature and therefore require the cultivation of both practical and political arts to avoid extinction. In his mythical version of this teaching, Epimetheus exhausts his supply of natural defenses on the other animals and leaves humanity defenseless, exposed to the elements and a vulnerable target for predators (321c). When he notices this calamitous lack of foresight, Prometheus steals the practical arts from Hephaestus and Athena, giving humanity the ability to combine foresight with ingenuity in a way that compensates for their lack of natural defense mechanisms (231b-e). However, the practical arts prove insufficient for survival, for "although their technology was adequate to obtain food, it was deficient when it came to fighting wild animals" (322b). As a

result, they attempt to form communities and defend their survival collectively. Unfortunately, they lack the political art that makes community possible; they continue to behave like beasts, preying on one another and thereby worsening the threat of annihilation (322b).

Protagoras argues that only the political art can ensure human survival; without it human beings cannot live together without inflicting wrongs on one another. The art of living together therefore belongs to the art of politics, which he associates with a sense of "shame and justice" (322c). Fearing human extinction, Zeus distributes a share of the political art to human beings, allowing them to maintain law-abiding communities (322c). However, the art of politics not only ensures peaceful relations within a community. With the art of politics comes the art of war, which allows the political organization to combat its predators. Protagoras argues that the art of war belongs intrinsically to political communities, which use force to defend their individual and collective interests. War distinguishes the interests of the community from the enemies that naturally threaten those interests; in this way, the inhabitants of a community can live peacefully together while successfully waging war on their enemies. War and politics belong inseparably together (322b). Both arise from harsh necessity.

Plato's view of human community departs radically from this narrative. He treats war as a contingent feature of human communities, a consequence of avoidable human choices. As he puts it in the *Phaedo*: "Only the body and its desires cause war, civil discords and battles, for all wars are due to the desire to acquire wealth . . . " (66c). In the *Republic* he traces the origins of war to the city's desire for luxury (373 d-e). For Plato, war enters the city as a result of greed. Human appetite overreaches its limits,

outstripping the city's finite resources. This experience of human-made scarcity makes it necessary for the city to colonize territory belonging to other communities. Resource-wars become an extension of politics; this particular type of city—the fevered city—expands in wealth and influence on the basis of violent acquisition. At least in theory, the city could practice the political art without recourse to the art of war. The city does not, and with the art of war comes the necessity of distinguishing fellow citizens from hostile strangers (*Republic* 376a-b). After all, cities that use force to acquire resources naturally make enemies. For Plato, enemies do not come blindly from nature. Enemies come as a result of human violence, which in turn arises from a competition for scarce resources. This scarcity, to repeat, also does not occur naturally. Human communities create scarcity and must practice the art of war to compensate for the deficiency. To use Protagoras' terminology, lack of foresight occurs as a result of the community's actions, not prior to the community's foundation. The city itself (not the meanness of nature, which Protagoras disguises as an absent-minded god) creates the conditions of war.

The difference between eristic and protreptic therefore occurs within a large and fascinating disagreement about the nature of the city and the necessity of competition and war. Stripped of its mythical elements (which Protagoras, an agnostic, identifies as such), Protagoras' speech traces the foundation of the city to the necessity of war, defined as a compensation for humanity's lack of predatory mechanisms. This explanation has strikingly amoral implications: The city emerges from a violent struggle for survival and domination. Of course, Protagoras need not conclude that the city can never transcend its origins and develop an ethical culture. However, such transcendence would depend on the original triumph of humanity against its predators. War and competition therefore

remain present at the city's origins. One could argue about whether or not Protagoras views the triumphant city as merely a continuation of the struggle for domination, but with Thrasymachus the answer is clear enough.

Thrasymachus lacks the subtlety and sophistication of Protagoras; nevertheless, he cuts to the heart of the debate between Plato and his various rivals. Thrasymachus describes the city baldly as an arena of amoral struggle (399a); people desire domination and seek it ruthlessly using whatever means they can get away with. Protagoras argues that everyone claims to practice justice, if only to protect their reputation in the city; after all, people would regard a self-proclaimed unjust man as a madman, for such honesty invites hostility and undercuts the pursuit of injustice. Thrasymachus partly agrees, for he argues that people must acquire their ill-gotten gains "by stealth" when they do not use open force (344a). However, he also claims that people only preach justice for self-interested reasons: they would like to practice injustice but want to avoid becoming its victims (344c). No one wants to practice justice; everyone wants to acquire power and advantage. In fact, Thrasymachus equates justice with "the advantage of the stronger" (338b). The strong define actions that advance their interests as "just." Thrasymachus thus presents a brutally disenchanted view of the city while denying that civilized humanity can ever overcome the barbarism that lurks behind the mask of morality and justice.

In the *Republic*, Plato does not re-enchant the city or defend its honor. In a way, Plato actually agrees with Thrasymachus. In his critique of Homer he also reveals the reality of amoral violence and competitive struggle deeply rooted in the venerable Greek tradition (e.g. 391e). People like Thrasymachus do not import an alien nihilism to

Athens. The young have already absorbed powerful images of amoral violence and struggle from their Homeric education. Thrasymachus conveys a quasi-Homeric message without the trappings of the religious and heroic tradition. Plato differs from Thrasymachus because he does not preclude other civic possibilities, not because he wants to rescue the tradition from cynics like Thrasymachus; he therefore adopts a spirit of radical criticism rather than corrosive cynicism. Human beings have chosen goals that produce violence and division rather than community. However, other goals and other consequences remain possible. Making luxury the goal of a city leads to scarcity and war. Making honor and success the goal of political life terminates in power-seeking and a disregard for the good of the whole. To alter the character of human community one must reset the goals of human interaction. On a relatively small scale, the *Euthydemus* does precisely that.

Plato's critique of Greek culture has at least one precedent. Xenophanes criticizes Homer's attribution of immoral conduct to the gods and also elevates wisdom above competitive struggle as a goal more worthy of respect and aspiration.[1] In fragment 19 He mentions "the severe contest called pancration" (echoed in the *Euthydemus*) along with boxing and wrestling as typical ways of achieving glory among fellow citizens and winning a place at "the public table." "This is indeed a very wrong custom" he says, "nor is it right to prefer strength to excellent wisdom." Plato echoes this sentiment in the *Apology*, where Socrates argues that the philosopher belongs at the public table (or the Praetorium, where those who achieve glory in sports receive free meals). In other words,

[1]See fragment 3: "Homer and Hesiod have ascribed to the gods all deeds which among men are a reproach and a disgrace: thieving, adultery, and deceiving one another" (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 9.193 = 21B11).

the city would treat the philosopher as a hero if they embraced the correct values: a love for wisdom rather than a love for victory and success. In Euthydemus and Dionysodorus the complementary view of the sophists and the city merge in a pair of strange buffoons. These former warriors practice verbal pancration and help reduce dialogue to a struggle for victory, just as the sophists and the city (in its fevered state) reduce political life to an arena of competition and violence.

At the same time, the *Euthydemus* does not recommend censoring either the poets (as in the *Republic*) or the sophists to curtail their dangerous influence on the youth; on the contrary, he even defends the brothers' freedom to practice their routine, distancing himself from critics like the speechwriter. He also proposes a model of change far more modest (and I think compelling) than what one finds in the *Republic*. He does not construct a theoretical civic model as an alternative to the present reality. Instead, he provides a living model of cooperative dialogue, showing how human beings can engage one another in a spirit of fellowship rather than competitive struggle.[2] However, the smallness of the model does not prevent Socrates from making a broad public critique. As I have argued, he transforms his private dialogue with Clinias into a public example, one that could have a broad, significant impact on how people in the city view the possibilities of human relationships. Although protreptic dialogue must occur on a small scale (since one cannot philosophize with a faceless crowd), its public appearance could help undercut the competitive ideals that dominate the culture. This does not mean that cooperation itself has become Plato's goal. As with Xenophanes, wisdom remains the goal. The spirit of competition, however, discourages a clear-eyed love of wisdom

[2]I do not mean to imply that this idea has no place in the *Republic*, but in the *Euthydemus* it comes to the forefront in a unique way.

because it encourages interlocutors to win the argument. People like the brothers employ any argument that reduces their opponent to silence; no other criteria exist for them. Indeed, a competitive disposition destroys dialogue precisely because it always leaves someone else speechless (using force when necessary); the applause of the crowd fills the silence with meaningless noise, which matches the meaninglessness of eristic victory. The fact that Clinias becomes increasingly outspoken in his interaction with Socrates marks the bright line between protreptic and eristic. If silence encroaches on protreptic dialogue, it only does so when the participants reach aporia. In any case, eristic stands revealed as anti-dialogue: an attempt to undermine meaningful discourse in favor of popular but meaningless triumphs.

II. Tradition and Sophistry

I said before that Thrasymachus shares his ruthless outlook with the Homeric tradition, although he does not retain the tradition's parochial and religious trappings. Like other foreign sophists, Thrasymachus does not have a sentimental attachment to Athens, nor does he express interest in the city's religious beliefs. I do not argue that this crucial difference makes the sophists better or worse than their conservative critics. I emphasize the difference only because it makes the correlation between sophistry and the city seem counterintuitive. Did not Athens execute Socrates partly because they identified him with sophistry ("making the weaker argument the stronger") and also banish Protagoras from their borders? The speechwriter in the *Euthydemus* also speaks with the voice of conservative Athens when he condemns the brothers' nonsense, dismissing it as a waste of time. At first glance Euthydemus and Dionysodorus seem alien to traditional Athenian life. They appear as foreigners who treat war and politics as

mere diversions and seem utterly indifferent to the sacred beliefs that bind the city together. In fact, the brothers use their eristic method to discredit everything; their work has an overwhelmingly destructive purpose, and nothing limits what they will attack or "refute." The city fears Socratic questioning and scientific inquiry (of which they found Socrates guilty, however wrongly). For that reason, it seems plausible to think that philosophy and sophistry both stand outside traditional polis life. The brothers' disregard for the interests and values of the many also give them an undeniable resemblance to Socrates, who in the *Crito* (48a) dismisses the relevance of popular opinion. In fact the city does not embrace sophistry but treats them with ambivalence.[3] However, the fact that conservative elements in the city regard sophistry with hostility (and associate it with philosophy) does not change the fact that traditional polis life has sophistic traits. The Athenians do not recognize the similarity between sophistry and their own Homeric values; if they did, Plato would hardly need to draw out the similarities, as he does in the *Euthydemus*. In the *Euthydemus* Plato holds up a distorted mirror to Athenian readers, using a caricature to link sophistry (even in its more sophisticated forms) to the city. I say more about this strategy at the end of the Conclusion. First, I return to a question that runs throughout this work: Although Plato slyly associates the city with sophistry, can he also maintain the firm distinction between Socrates and the sophists? Does he even imply that this distinction also has problems?

This question arises naturally when reading the dialogues in which Socrates cross-examines his interlocutors. On the face of it, eristic strikingly resembles elenchus in its destructive bent. Eristic also makes arguments move around to the dismay of the

[3]The fact that Protagoras educated the wealthy Athenian youth did not prevent the city from expelling him.

befuddled interlocutor. If Socrates' use of elenchus goaded the city into executing him, one can imagine a similar animus against eristic eventually gathering strength; the speechwriter probably does not, as Crito suspects, represent an isolated voice of dissent, nor is he the only person who notices a similarity between Socrates and the eristic practitioners. Many have witnessed Socrates behaving in a similar way. He has also garnered an appreciative crowd of followers who enjoy watching him refute other people's arguments and also imitate the practice. His conversations apparently have (like eristic itself) the appeal of a competitive game; an intense crossfire of arguments and refutations terminates in the defeat of Socrates' interlocutor, who walks away in defeat. Some scholars link elenchus with Greek competitiveness, mirroring my argument about eristic. As James A. Arieti puts it in his introductory text, *Philosophy and the Ancient World: An Introduction*, "The practice of Socratic dialectic—a struggle to discover truth by producing a consistent argument without contradictions—is inherently competitive."[4] Hawtrey takes a similar view in his analysis of the *Euthydemus*, comparing dialectic with eristic, and T.H. Irwin rightly argues that cross-examination alone does not set Socrates apart from sophistry (which is quite an understatement; the practice of refutation actually strengthens the connection between Socrates and the sophists).[5]

Indeed, one must concede that Socrates' use of elenchus gives him a superficial kinship with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Not only does he pose questions about the deepest matters with little regard for conventional belief and parochial loyalties.[6] In his

[4]Arieti, James, A. Philosophy in the Ancient World: An Introduction, 2005. 9.

[5]Irwin, T.H. "Plato: The Intellectual Background" in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 66.

[6]To name only two examples: His criticism of the poets who utter inspired profundities but cannot explain them. Their appeal to the muses does not inhibit Socrates' critical examination of what they

dialectical mode his questioning has destructive results. However, this resemblance does not cut beyond the surface. Even at his most abrasive and destructive, Socrates does not argue for the sake of arguing. He does not use arguments to defeat a randomly-chosen interlocutor and impress the crowd of onlookers. The fact that the crowd treats elenchus as a competitive sport surely says more about the crowd than Socrates. They come to observe a contest but Socrates has other goals in mind. I do not mean that Socrates never competes at all. He does compete with rival perspectives and practices in the *Euthydemus* and elsewhere. I only mean that he does not, like the brothers, turn competition into the point of argument and therefore suppress the possibility of dialogue. He competes with eristic disputation (and Homeric ideals) but does so for the sake of philosophy. Competition remains a circumstantial feature of Socratic philosophy, even its dialectical mode.

Socrates does not have the same goal in every dialogue,[7] and the sheer heterogeneity of the dialogues defies summary. Still, I think it correct to argue that when Socrates uses elenchus—notably in the *Euthyphro*, *Crito*, *Protagoras*, and Book One of the *Republic*—he does not refute his interlocutors to augment his reputation for cleverness. Even when he playfully participates in a contest, as in the *Symposium*, he clearly has a purpose other than trumping his sophisticated dinner companions. Briefly stated, the fact that Socrates habitually refutes other people ties him superficially to eristic; the fact that he does so for a wholly different reason sets him decisively apart.

---

actually say. In the *Republic* Plato presents Socrates as a critic of Greek religion, like many of the philosophers who precede him and arouse the city's suspicion.

[7]His goals differ according to the person he speaks to. However, I do agree with Anne Marie Bowery's view that Socrates probes other people to see if they can become his equal in philosophizing, and that the tragedy of the dialogues lies in his failure to find such a companion.

This difference brings the *Euthydemus* into sharp focus. The dialogue does not argue for a difference of method (e.g. sound reasoning vs. logical fallacy) but for a wholly different orientation. Moreover, Socrates does not seek primarily to change the goal of "dialogue"; he seeks first and foremost to alter the direction of his interlocutor, an overarching ambition that naturally directs his interaction with that person. (Dialogue with Thrasymachus can scarcely resemble dialogue with Clinias or even Crito.) As I have argued, this goal requires intimate knowledge of the interlocutor, but the intimacy of protreptic dialogue does not prevent Socrates from using it for public purposes.

I say that Socrates cannot use a single method with every interlocutor, regardless of his personal disposition. The primacy of method in modernity should not color one's perception of Plato. The question of method has a subordinate place in the *Euthydemus*; the brothers use poor logic to achieve a purpose that has nothing to do with the construction of arguments.[8] Hence, Socrates does not respond an attempt to formalize the rules of rational discourse. The brothers do not fail because they lack the proper tools for arguing correctly; they deliberately distort language for a specific, competitive purpose. Simply criticizing the brothers for logical incompetence misses the point, like diagnosing a symptom and ignoring the disease. As I said earlier, the environment of a contest encourages people to use whatever tricks they can conjure. In the same way, a good rhetorician hides the tricks of rhetoric when making a public display. (*Ars est celare artem,* as the Romans later put it.) The crowd thinks wrongly that Socrates

[8]The following passage from T. H. Irwin, for example, does not apply to the *Euthydemus*: "Socrates seems to Plato to promise a method and a line of argument that might explain and justify morality . . . Socrates wants to distinguish Socratic method from the methods of sophistic, eristic, and rhetoric; and in some transitional dialogues Plato examines these claims and tries to develop a theory of Socratic argument that will justify its claims to arrive at objective truth." Irwin, T.H. "Plato: The Intellectual Background" in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 69.

withholds answers, preferring to badger his opponent instead of sharing his wisdom. This suspicion comes closer to the truth when speaking of the brothers and people (like rhetoricians) who resemble them. They cunningly employ verbal techniques that give them a tactical advantage; revealing their techniques to an opponent would level the playing field and contravene their purpose, like a military general confiding crucial war strategies to the enemy. Unfortunately, as Socrates discovers, the brothers have nothing but techniques, quite easy to imitate and serving no purpose beyond immediate victory. They win a series of local skirmishes, entertain the crowd, earn money, and seem content to stop there. Their students can learn their techniques and use them (one imagines) for a contest with higher stakes.

This limitation apparently antecedes their career as verbal pancratiasts. According to Xenophon,[9] Dionysodorus' expertise in war also had a very limited scope. He possessed a jumble of military techniques but lacked the good judgment necessary for arranging troops into a well-ordered whole. As Socrates points out (in Xenophon's account), a good general has knowledge of something other than particular strategies, no matter how useful; he must know, for example, how to place the best warriors on the front and rear and worst in between. To do so he must know how to distinguish between the good and the bad. But Dionysodorus lacks *phronesis*, the practical knowledge indispensable in politics and war; his techniques therefore prove useless when trying to organize a military venture. To quote Socrates: "I mean, if he told you how to arrange

[9]Xenophon, *Conversations of Socrates*, Penguin Books 1990. P. 137.

the finest coinage in front and back, and the worst in between, without explaining to you how to tell good money from counterfeit, that would be of no use to you either."[10]

The brothers therefore belong to an inferior rank in both their military and sophistic careers; it seems unlikely they will ascend high in the social hierarchy. Their mediocrity may explain their decision to change careers late in life (a decision in keeping with their past career shifts). Perhaps their limitation as military advisors led to a shortage of clients. For that reason, Socrates probably does not worry much about the brothers' impact on Athens. People like Protagoras and Gorgias who tutor the aristocratic youth have a greater chance of impacting the city's moral and political character; consequently he treats them—in the dialogues that bear their names—with due gravity. The brothers seem too clownish to arouse great anxiety except for their ability to harm Clinias. A question I raise in the Preface therefore returns: Why does Plato spend his talent and energy discrediting such a baldly incompetent pair?

I have argued that Plato uses a caricature of sophistry to stress a greater danger to Athens' future. He does not mean to warn about people like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus who, after all, practice a self-defeating method. However, the brothers' sheer crudity points to the dialogue's deeper theme: The encroachment of competition on every aspect of life even as the traditional political and religious apparatus of Athenian life begins to decay. One thing outlasts the ravages of cultural decay, namely, the public's veneration for victory. The brothers show, albeit comically, the form Athens might assume when nothing survives but its cult of "excellence." On the other hand, Aristophanes' play warns of Athens' catastrophic decline if the youth abandon tradition

[10]Ibid. pg. 137.

in favor of prattling philosophy, scientific curiosity, or cunning sophistry. Atheism and the loss of cultural taboos (e.g. reverence for one's parents) flow directly from Socrates' notorious Thinkery. Aristophanes knows that he presents a gross caricature of Socrates in *The Clouds*. Still, he sends a comically grim warning about Athens' future. His play contains a deeply conservative message about the need to defend tradition against the erosive tides of sophistry and philosophy.

The *Euthydemus* is Plato's version of *The Clouds*.[11] Plato's comedy uses caricature to warn of a general cultural drift. Unlike *The Clouds*, however, the *Euthydemus* does not call for a return to tradition. On the contrary, the trouble lies in the Greek reverence for competition, reaching back into the archaic past. To be sure, conservatives have good reason for anxiety. They live in a time of radical transition, a time when Protagonas, a well-known agonistic about the gods, tutors the well-born sons of Athens; a time when the polis increasingly threatens to transform itself into a cosmopolis, compromising the city-state's political- religious integrity.[12] From a conservative perspective, Socrates' activity also signals a cultural sea-change. He is symptomatic of the general breakdown; indeed, Socrates' critics see him as a root cause of cultural decline. This suspicion has a measure of reason on its side. As I said before,

---

[11]Cf. "Plato understands the comic side of his dialogues, the unlikely hero deflating the pretensions of people whose reputation exceeds their understanding. Aristophanes enables us to understand the comic aspects of the dialogues better, not merely because the dialogues are sometimes funny, but because a particular type of comic situation that occurs in Aristophanes provides one of the most important elements—comic and serious at the same time—of the dialogues." Irwin, T.H. "Plato: The Intellectual Background" in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 75.

[12]The fact that foreign sophists like Protagoras wander the city and collect fees from young aristocrats shows how porous the city and its culture have become. Also, the fact that people like Aristophanes must defend tradition, not take its survival for granted, also shows its slipping control. Plato highlights this cultural background when he sets the *Republic* in the Piraeus, Athens' port and a place where cultures met and sometimes interpenetrate (Socrates goes there to witness a new religious rite). Cf. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*. (the University of Chicago Press, 1964). P. 65.

Euthydemus and Dionysodorus share with Socrates a willingness to question received belief, a practice disturbing to people like Aristophanes and the speechwriter because of its ability to accelerate the decline of traditional beliefs. For that reason, he does not target the brothers for their "critical" attitude toward Athenian tradition; he reacts negatively because their attitude lacks a serious purpose. Indeed, describing their attitude as "critical" seems rather too charitable. Criticism implies a level of serious engagement that the brothers sorely lack. They have a merely flippant (or cynical) attitude toward Athens and its institutions. One could go further and describe their position as mercenary. As soldiers and military advisors they work for anyone willing to pay, like "guns for hire" in a spy novel. As for their disputative method, it exhibits a similar attitude—both flippant and opportunist—towards questions of the highest importance. Eristic degrades philosophical discourse to the status of a tawdry, sometimes sinister competition. When Socrates compares eristic to sport he has this criticism in mind; the sport begins on the level of frivolity and becomes increasingly morbid. Like a game, eristic simply produces ephemeral victories and defeats, superficially uniting the spectators in their collective enjoyment. Later in the dialogue, however, Socrates invokes a more sinister metaphor. He compares eristic with hunting—a form of sport in which the opponent exists only as prey, without recourse to a common set of rules.

The spirit of competition corrupts higher education; it therefore corrupts the Athenian youth. However, as I have argued, the cult of competition does not represent a new, decadent trend in Athenian life but arises from the heart of the tradition itself and survives the decline of that tradition. The brothers forecast a disturbingly probable future, one in which pure competitiveness, bereft of higher values, blatantly dominates

the culture and its pedagogy.[13] With the brothers, a pair of wandering exiles, the noble face of tradition slips and reveals the bare face of Athenian success-worship.[14] In other words, Socrates differs from traditionalists because he does not invoke the past to judge the present. On the contrary, he shows how a powerful strain of Greek tradition actually empowers sophistry and finally culminates in the contemporary crisis.[15] In eristic, love of competition overcomes the desire for truth and will probably survive the cult of Zeus (which, in the Homeric tradition, helps produce the cult of victory and success that culminates in eristic and the nihilism of Thrasymachus and the brothers). A central part of the Greek heritage becomes the subject of Plato's comedy, just as Aristophanes turns philosophy and sophistry into a subject of broad comedy in *The Clouds*.[16]

---

[13]Perhaps Socrates would have agreed with Augustine's critique of the Roman educational system, which seems to fulfill the dark prophesy of the *Euthydemus*. According to Augustine's critique of his school training, his teachers subordinated higher learning to competitive goals and so perverted the moral orientation that rightly belongs to education. Rather than teach students to use knowledge rightly, they transform learning into a way of outpacing other people and making a favorable impression. Augustine describes his teachers' attempts to outwit each other in conversation, remarking that their use of language (however free of mistakes or barbarisms) differs not at all from the games that distracted him from his studies. Both amount to nothing; indeed the teachers could scarcely discipline Augustine for his slothful waste of study time when they themselves reduced education to petty competitions and taught their students to do the same.

[14]A comparison with Thrasymachus should clarify this point. Thrasymachus apparently advocates a radical new teaching that peels the face of justice off the political machinery, exposing the greed for power and personal success behind the city's respectable façade. In his critique of Homer, however, Socrates traces locates this origin of Thrasymachus' skepticism about just in venerable poet himself, whose account of the gods gives religious support for Thrasymachus' amoral disposition and explains how it derives from the venerable tradition itself. With a teacher like Homer, Socrates implies, no wonder Athenians like Thrasymachus have become cynical about the possibility of justice obtaining in the world.

[15]Cf."The old order is deficient, for it is the origin of the present disorder . . . " Strauss, Leo, *The City and Man,* 1964. 65.

[16]Plato of course understood that Aristophanes did not make Socratic philosophy his sole target when satirizing Athens' intellectual elite. In the *Symposium*, for example, he gives the comic playwright another target. The latter's speech in that dialogue parodies Anaximander's cosmic theory, in which love draws the separate elements into a single sphere, abolishing the cosmos and the living beings—human, animal, and vegetable—that populate it. In fact all objects disappear into an indistinguishable mass. Humanity, too, would not remain recognizably human if love succeeded in uniting what Zeus separated. The humorously un-erotic, spherical creatures that roll around spilling their seed do not even seem animal, much less human, and one finds it difficult to believe that Aristophanes regards that state as a desirable, something the loss of which people would seriously mourn. Aristophanes enjoyed needling Anaxamander;

The divine element of the Socratic enterprise also sets him apart from traditional thinkers like Aristophanes. In the *Euthydemus,* Socrates receives his initial direction from the divine sign, which does not belong to the pantheon of Greek gods and muses. The Athenians hold Socrates *daimonion* in suspicion, as Euthyphro points out (*Euthyphro* 3b). It belongs to the new gods Socrates wants to introduce to the city. In the *Euthydemus,* the divine sign gives Socrates a definitive beginning and allows him to pursue the elusive goal of wisdom with confidence. At the same time, the sign reinforces the innovative and radical nature of protreptic. The *daimonion* not only gives Socrates purpose and direction; it turns him away from the security of tradition. In his search for wisdom, Socrates ventures into uncharted territory and often rides into an impasse. This negative outcome suspends him in ignorance, although the sense of divine mission that inspired his search also gives him the confidence he needs to continue. The novelty of the sign and the negative outcome of Socratic inquiry disturb the traditional mindset, which does not distinguish between sophistic cynicism and Socratic aporia.[17] Socrates implies that Athenians should worry more about the corrosive cynicism that underlies their own cultural traditions, beginning with Homer. This cynicism arises from a love of victory that ultimately erodes the culture's sense of truthfulness and decency. The culture's decadence reveals the truth about the culture, which always contained the seeds of its own decay.

---

this was his way not only of satirizing philosophy but also indirectly needling Anaximander's student and one of Aristophanes' professional rivals—Euripides. In my opinion Aristophanes' comedy has a good-natured quality unlike the antiphilosophical vehemence that put Socrates on trial and drove Protagoras from the city, but the satire nevertheless gives insight into the traditionalist mindset and its attitude toward "philosophy"—a catch-all phrase for the intellectual ferment of his time.

[17]When speaking of Protagoras, I would say agnosticism rather than cynicism.

In conclusion, I argue that the first protreptic movement in the *Euthydemus* does not occur when Socrates speaks to Clinias; it occurs when the *daimonion* speaks to Socrates, turning him toward Clinias and away from Greek culture and its maladies—which the brothers comically symbolize. Of course, the sign had become customary to Socrates long before, but its appearance at the Lyceum allows him to continue his mission in a specific context, with a specific person. He becomes a sign for both Clinias and the city, giving philosophy a public role that does not compromise its commitment to private transformation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arieti, James, A. *Philosophy in the Ancient World: An Introduction*, (Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham, MD, 2005). 9

Beaty, Michael and Bowery, A.M., "Cultivating Christian Citizenship: Martha Nussbaum's Socrates, Augustine's Confessions, and the Modern University," in Christian Scholars Review XXXI (2003): 21-52.

Blondell, Rudy, The Play of Characters in Plato's Dialogues, (Cambridge University Press 2002). 39.

Bloom, Alan, The Closing of the American Mind, (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1987). 243-284.

Brickhouse, Thomas C. and Smith, Nicholas D., "Socrates Gods and His Daimonion (in Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy, Oxford University Press, 2000. 86.

Chance, T., Plato's Euthydemus: An Analysis of What Is and What Is Not Philosophy, (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 1992). 19-63.

Colaiaco, James A., Socrates Against Athens: Philosophy on Trial, (Routledge, New York and London, 2001). 18-29.

Dorian, Louis-André, Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides: Proceedings of the V Symposium Platonicum, Sankt Augustin 2000. 45.

Golden, Mark, Sport in the Ancient World From A-Z, (Routledge, London and New York, 2004). 127.

Havelock, Eric A., Preface to Plato, (The Belknap Press of Cambridge, MT, Cambridge, MT, 1963). 303-305.

Hawtrey, Ralph, Commentary on Plato's Euthydemus (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981); "Plato, Socrates and the Mysterious: A Note," Antichthon 10 (1976). 15-16.

Hegel, G.W.F., Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Greek Philosophy to Plato, (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, 1995). 356.

Howland, Jacob, The Republic: An Odyssey of Philosophy, (Twayne Publishers, New York, 1993). 3-9.

Irwin, T.H. “Plato: The Intellectual Background” in The Cambridge Companion to Plato, (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 66.

McIntyre, Alasdair, Whose Justice? Which Rationality?, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989). 49-55.

Nails, Debra, The People of Plato, (Hackett Publishing Co., 2002). 152.

Nussbaum, Martha, Cultivating Humanity, (Harvard University Press October 1, 1998), 15-50 and 254-293

Penner, Terry, “Socrates and the Early Dialogues” in The Cambridge Companion to Plato, (Cambridge University Press, 1992. 137-138.

Rosen, Stanley, The Limits of Analysys, (St. Augustine Press, South Bend IN, 1980). 149-175.

Sprague, Rosamond Kent, The Euthydemus Revisited in Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides, (Sankt Augustin, 2000). 19.

Strauss, Leo, “On the Euthydemus,” in Interpretation, Summer 1970. 1-20.

–Strauss, Leo, The City and Man, (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1964). 63.

Taylor, C.C.W., “Introduction,” in Protagoras, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1996). x.

Thucidides, History of the Peloponnesion War, (Penguin Books, New York, 1954). Pg. 143-151 and 402.

Vlastos, Gregory, “Socratic Piety” in Religion and Religion in Socratic Philosophy, (Oxford University Press, 2000). 55-73.

Vlastos, Gregory, Brickhouse, Thomas C., McPherran, Mark L., Smith, Nicholas D. “Socrates and His Daimonion: Correspondence among the Authors,” in Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy, (Oxford University Press, 2000). 180.

Woodruff, Paul, “Socrates and the Irrational,” in Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy, (Oxford University Press, 2000). 130-150.

Xenaphon, Conversations of Socrates, (Penguin Books, London, 1990). 13