What We Do when We Talk to Each Other
Conversation and Virtue in Plato's Dialogues

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Abstract

My thesis focuses on the connection between conversation and virtue in Plato's dialogues. It is often argued that conversation is an instrumental good - that it is conducted in order to obtain knowledge, and more precisely, knowledge of virtue. And once one obtains this knowledge, one can go about one's life and act virtuously. I am proposing that conversation is a final good. My starting point is the analysis of the *Apology,* and by taking seriously Socrates' claim at 38a that *'it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day'* I establish that conversation is something to be done for its own sake and I take this to mean that it is a place for interlocutors to display virtue. Moreover, I use the *Apology* to argue that Socrates has not always been aware of conversation being an end in itself. I then focus on three dialogues - the *Laches*, the *Euthyphro* and the *Charmides* to show us, both through their content and their drama, that virtues can and indeed should be exhibited in conversation.

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Introduction

Socrates clearly cares about virtue. We see him discuss piety in the *Euthyphro*, courage in the *Laches*, temperance in the *Charmides* and a number of virtues together in the *Protagoras* or in the *Republic*. Socrates also cares very much about living well, as he tells us in the *Apology*:

> For I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul (σφόδρα ὡς τῆς ψυχῆς ὅπως ὡς ἀρίστη ἔσται), as I say to you: Wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence makes wealth and everything else good for men, both individually and collectively (ἀλλ' ἐξ ἀρετῆς χρήματα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἀγαθὰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαντα καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ.[1]) (*Ap*. 30b)

The fact that Socrates talks about *aretē* in this passage is hardly surprising, after all, one's interest in virtue often stems from one's interest in living well. Socrates makes virtue central to living well[2] and he expresses this most clearly in the Crito:

> S: Examine the following statement in turn as to whether it stays the same or not, that the most important thing is not life, but good life (εὖ ζῆν). C: It stays the same. S: And that the good life, the beautiful life, and the just life are the same (τὸ δὲ εὖ καὶ καλῶς καὶ δικαίως ὅτι ταὐτόν ἐστιν); does that still hold, or not: C: It does hold. (*Cr*. 48b)

However, Socrates also cares about knowledge. He famously proclaims that he lacks any worthwhile knowledge (*Ap.* 23a *ff*), he adds that there is a great danger in being unaware of one's ignorance and his life-long mission consists in examining himself and others. His interest

[1] On the different ways to read this sentence, see Burnyeat 2003.

[2] On the connection between happiness and virtue, and whether virtue is identical or only sufficient to happiness, see Vlastos 1991, 200-232.

in knowledge can also be seen in dialogues themselves as a number of these are focused on answering the '*ti esti*' (what it is) question.[3] This search for definitions of virtues is hardly surprising given that Socrates is interested in virtues themselves and in living well. It is certainly not hard to imagine that obtaining knowledge about virtue plays an important role in determining how to live well.[4]

The most striking feature of Socrates' search for virtue, knowledge, and living well is that Plato decided to capture this through dialogues. So, we see Socrates talking to a variety of people: from famous generals, sophists, rhetoricians and poets, young men and even slaves. Some of these are Socrates' friends while others do not particularly enjoy his company. Socrates also discusses different issues with different people, although there is of course some overlap in the topics discussed. So, the key question is this: Why did Plato choose to write in dialogues?

One approach to making sense of the use of the dialogical form is to claim that Plato used this literary form to embellish the philosophical content. However, it has been established in both recent and less recent scholarship that the use of dialogue has a philosophical value as well.[5] One thought might be that the use of dialogue, or conversation shows us how to do philosophy and Plato wants to tell us something about the philosophical method that should be used for answering any questions about virtue, and living well. The idea is that we talk to each other in order to gain understanding of virtue, the possession of which will make our lives worth living. This understanding of conversation attaches instrumental value to it - one converses with others[6] in order to achieve something - either to realise that one is ignorant or to

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[3] Although, Politis 2015 is correct to claim that the *ti esti* questions often start as 'whether or not' questions. So, for example in the *Laches*, the what is courage question is preceded by asking whether it's beneficial to learn how to fight in armour (or not). Politis' position is that Socrates' elenchus has a certain practical starting point and it's not an altogether theoretical endeavour.

[4] I am deliberately cautious here as the exact relationship between definitions, knowledge and well being has been widely contested. Firstly, there is a question whether one can know X without knowing the definition of X. On this, see Geach 1966 and then Beversluis 1974, Benson 1990, Wolfsdorf 2003 and Ferejohn 2009. Secondly, one can query the relation between knowing X and being X, that is knowing what virtue is and being virtuous. On this, see Gould 1987, Tsouna 1997, Segvic 2000 and Brickhouse & Smith 2010.

[5] On the philosophical use of the dialogical form, see Guthrie 1975, Kahn 1996, Prior 1997, and McCabe 2015. It is important to add that while interpreters accept the philosophical importance of dialogues in general, they might be less accepting of this in relation to the beginnings of dialogues, and so Grote (1875, 484) writes about the beginning of the *Charmides* that *'There is a good deal of playful vivacity in the dialogue [...]This is the dramatic art and variety of Plato, charming to read, but not bearing on him as a philosopher.'* On the importance of frames in Plato, see McCabe 2015.

[6] Although the dialogues focus on conversations with others, it is certainly possible for conversation to be as construed as an internal dialogue or self-questioning. For more on this, see Long 2013.

make an attempt at understanding a particular virtue. But, there is a sense in which once we achieve what we've originally wanted the conversation to do, we can move on with our lives. For example, once I learn through conversation what courage is, I can then be a courageous person throughout the rest of my life.

In this dissertation, I would like to suggest a different way of thinking about conversation and treat it as having a final value. This means that it is not something done just for the sake of something else. My purpose is not to question its instrumental value, quite the contrary, however, I would like to propose that conversation is a place which enables interlocutors to display virtue. So, rather than conversing in order to gain understanding of virtue, one exercises virtue through conversation.

Summary of Chapters

In Chapter 1 - Socrates' journey, I start by arguing that the *Apology* has a special place in the Platonic Corpus and that it should be read as an interpretative framework for other dialogues and this is so for two reasons: first, it itself is not a dialogue and more importantly, it provides an overview of Socrates' philosophical mission. I then move on to argue that Socrates presents three distinct stages of his philosophical mission: the first stage will present Socrates as approaching others attempting to make sense of the prophecy. The second will present Socrates as realising that those who claim to be wise are not wise at all, and this leads him to a god given mission of revealing the ignorance of the interlocutors and attempting to gain wisdom himself. The third stage will present Socrates as claiming that the greatest good for a person is to converse with others. I will interpret this as meaning that conversation is a final good that enables interlocutors to display virtue through conversation.

In Chapter 2 - Courage, my primary focus will be on the *Laches* as it is a dialogue concerned with the search for the definition of courage. I will start by acknowledging that it is an *aporetic* dialogue, however, I will argue that it has something to say about courage nevertheless. I will show that the *Laches* raises two themes concerning the nature of courage: first, that courage seems to be an endurance in the face of danger and second, that thinking about courage requires thinking about the success criteria of a courageous action and the role of skill and knowledge in courageous behaviour. I will then show that these two themes can be

applied to the practice of conversation as well, so we can think about conversation in the same way as we think about courageous actions. In the second half of the chapter, I will show that Socratic *elenchus* requires endurance of the soul in the face of danger as it is the nature of the *elenchus* to examine one's life in a great detail. I will then argue that the questions that the *Laches* raises about the success criteria for courageous action can be also raised about conversation - is it the case that some conversations are too 'foolish' to endure? I will conclude that while Socrates in the *Laches* uses conversation as a vehicle to enquire into courage, the content and the drama of the dialogue show that conversation is a place for interlocutors to exhibit virtue.

In Chapter 3- Piety, I will first focus on two texts - the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology* as both of these are read in tandem when discussing the virtue of piety. I will show that in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates will think about piety as a service to the gods and he will describe his own mission as presented in the *Apology* as a service to the gods. While this will enable us to understand the activity of conversation is a pious activity, I will argue that a fuller and more exact account of piety can be reached by introducing the *Phaedo* into the picture. I will show that the *Phaedo* describes the soul as akin to the divine and talks about philosophy as an utilisation of our soul to grasp the most divine things - the forms. I will then show that when Socrates talks about philosophy in the Phaedo, he is talking about the *elenchus.* I will use this to argue that the account in the *Phaedo* enables us to determine more precisely why the gods would care about us and what sort of service to the gods we are performing. The claim will be that the gods care about us because we are able to use our reason - the most divine element in us, and this is desirable to the gods precisely because we have a share in their nature.

In Chapter 4, Temperance, my focus will be on the *Charmides*, a dialogue concerned with the virtue of temperance. I will argue that for Socrates, temperance is to be understood as a sort of commitment to knowledge. This commitment will involve two things - first, an ownership of one's beliefs and second, a commitment to seeking knowledge. In order to show this, I will look at the drama of the dialogue and focus on the way that Chardmides and Critias react to Socrates' questioning. We will see that Socrates will place great stress on the idea of reflection and introspection which is something that Critias will lack, therefore revealing a shallow commitment to his beliefs. In this chapter, I will also focus on the second half of the

Charmides and on Socrates' criticism of temperance understood as knowledge of itself. I will argue that rather than denying the impossibility of self-knowledge, Socrates is asking Critias to reflect on the arguments that he presents. I will argue that Critias' failure to do so will mean that he also lacks commitment to seeking knowledge.

In Chapter 5, Norms of Conversation, I will explicitly raise the question whether virtues should be exhibited in conversation. I will claim that in order to determine whether something should be a norm, we should first consider the purpose of the action and so I will first determine different types of purpose that conversation plays for Socrates. I will then introduce sincerity as a conversational norm that is often discussed in relation to Socratic *elenchus*, however, I will argue that it doesn't sufficiently capture the drama of certain dialogues. I will then conclude that the virtues of piety, courage, and temperance should be understood as norms of conversation.

Finally, there are a couple of things worth noting. First, my choice of dialogues to discuss is based on the fact that they discuss the virtue in question in great detail. While I will occasionally use other dialogues to reinforce certain points, I believe that the *Laches*, the *Charmides*, and the *Euthyphro* present us with the richest accounts of courage, temperance and piety.

Second, I will be using the words conversation and *elenchus* interchangeably. I will show in Chapter 1 that Socrates uses conversation for different things at different times and so I do not share the opinion that there is only one specific type of *elenchus* that we should think of when approaching Plato.

Third thing to note is the distinction between instrumental and final and between extrinsic and intrinsic. My aim is to show that conversation is a final good and to contrast this with its use as an instrumental good. However, I am not interested in the question of source of value that the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction captures. It might as well be the case that conversation is an extrinsic good as the source of its value stems from its ability to be a vehicle for displaying virtue.

1 Socrates' Journey

1.1 The *Apology* as the starting point

In this Chapter, my goal is to use the *Apology* to introduce the thought that for Socrates, conversation is a final good. Moreover, I will argue that the *Apology* presents us with a narrative in which Socrates describes the development of his philosophical journey from hearing the Delphic prophecy to realising that the conversation is indeed an end in itself. A consequence of this will be that Socrates has not always understood conversation as a final good and this reading of the *Apology* will be used as the framework for understanding the dialogues discussed in Chapters 2 - 5.

One might, however, raise a methodological worry about using the *Apology* as an interpretative framework for these dialogues. It is not entirely clear why the *Apology* should be preferred over any other Platonic text. Moreover, it is not clear why it would even be desirable to use one particular text to shed light on other texts. What are, then, the reasons for using one text as an interpretative framework and for preferring the *Apology* over other dialogues?

This issue seems to arise from the episodic nature of Plato's dialogues. The dialogues represent specific episodes from Socrates' life - meeting and talking to Euthyphro before his trial, being asked by Nicias to help in determining whether fighting in armour is beneficial, or

being woken up by Hippocrates to see Protagoras. One could then raise a question: why should one episode in Socrates' life be more important than another and why should that one specific episode be used to interpret other episodes from his life?

One answer to this worry is to say that we as readers shouldn't be primarily interested in the episodic aspect of the dialogues, but instead, focus mainly on their philosophical content. With this move, we are moving away from the focus on Socrates' life to instead focusing on his philosophy. It is unclear, however, whether this resolves anything. It still might be the case that even the philosophical content is episodic. Socrates is after all talking to specific people in specific situations and one cannot simply divorce the episodic and very specific nature of the dialogues from their philosophical content. This in turn introduces traditional worries about Socrates' development of his thought and about the possible use of *ad hoc* arguments. So why would we even be motivated to try to find one text which would serve as an interpretative framework for other dialogues? Worse still, many of these dialogues are not concerned with the same issues. For example, the main theme of the *Charmides* is temperance, whereas the *Laches* focuses mainly on courage. Why should one be used to interpret the other? Is there then something that the *Apology* can do to help us understand, for example the debate concerning temperance in the *Charmides*?

I would like to suggest that the *Apology* has a special place among the dialogues for two reasons. First is a certain directness of the *Apology* and second is the fact that Socrates is giving account of his life. The directness of the *Apology* stems from the fact that, unlike other texts written by Plato,[7] the *Apology* itself is not a dialogue and instead offers Socrates' speech defending his life-long mission. Now, it would be incorrect to claim that the *Apology* includes no dialogue-like features. First, Socrates manages to have a brief exchange with Meletus in an attempt to show that it is not the case that he doesn't believe in gods. Moreover, Socrates is trying to conduct a conversation with the members of the jury during his speech - he is constantly posing questions that the members might ask, and he is even asking them to examine

[7] With the expectation of Plato's *Letters*; although it's far from clear that these have been written by Plato - *cf.* Cooper 1997, 1634. For a discussion of the *Seventh letter*, perhaps the least unlikely letter to be authored by Plato, see Scott 2015.

and reflect on what has been said.[8] So it might seem that after all, the *Apology* isn't too dissimilar to other dialogues as Socrates is having a conversation with his jurors.

However, one cannot help but notice the differences between other dialogues and the *Apology*. First, the exchange with Meletus, which is closest to other dialogues in terms of form, is only very brief. More importantly, one of the most crucial aspects of dialogues is missing in the *Apology* - reactions and responses from the interlocutors. The silence of the jury is evident throughout the *Apology* and the jury only makes two statements - when they decide that Socrates is guilty and later when they sentence him to death.[9] Apart from these occasions, there is a distance between the members of the jury and Socrates who also seems to be well aware of it. Notice the uncertainty of his question: at 37e2, he says *'Perhaps someone might say*[10]*[...] (ἴσως οὖν ἄν τις εἴποι).'* Moreover, notice the opening line of the *Apology* at 17a1: '*I do not know, men of Athens, how my accusers affected you'* (ὅτι μὲν ὑμεῖς, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πεπόνθατε ὑπὸ τῶν ἐμῶν κατηγόρων, οὐκ οἶδα.) While in other dialogues, Socrates demands interlocutors to state what they think often mentioning the reactions of the interlocutors, who are often puzzled over what they think, excited to be part of the conversation, or even angry at him, in the *Apology*, Socrates starts his speech by claiming that he doesn't know how they have been affected and they remain silent for most of his speech.

Returning to my original question about motivation to use the *Apology* as a framework for the other dialogues, the fact that is the only text written primarily in a non-dialogical form, keeping a certain distance between Socrates and the interlocutors should make us inquire into Plato's intention with the *Apology*. This on its own, of course, doesn't mean that the *Apology* has a special place in the corpus however it should nevertheless make the reader think about its role and purpose.

The claim that there is a distance between Socrates and the jury also plays an important role in showing that the *Apology* has this special place. Even though Socrates' goal is to refute the

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[8] The best example of this can be found at 27b1 where Socrates says: '*Examine with me* (συνεπισκέψασθε), *gentlemen, how he appears to contradict himself and you, Meletus, answer us.*' Similarly at 40c3, Socrates says: *'Let us reflect* (ἐννοήσωμεν) *in this way too'.*

[9] Now, the jury makes some noise and asks the jurymen not to interrupt him: 'μὴ θορυβεῖτε, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, ἀλλ' ἐμμείνατέ μοι οἷς ἐδεήθην ὑμῶν, μὴ θορυβεῖν ἐφ' οἷς ἂν λέγω ἀλλ' ἀκούειν: καὶ γάρ, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ὀνήσεσθε ἀκούοντες.' (30bc). It is worth noting that it's presumably an unintelligible noise that the jury is making and not *logos* and so Socrates cannot respond to it. That might be why he is telling the jury not to interrupt him.

[10] Unless stated otherwise, I am following Grube's translation revised by Cooper.

charges brought up against him, we have seen that he is not able to see what the members of the jury truly think about him and the charges against him. This should also help us to dismiss the *ad hoc* charge that I mentioned earlier. If Socrates doesn't know his jurors, then the worry that he is only working with interlocutors' views and not expressing his own doesn't seem particularly convincing.

We have seen that the *Apology* is different from other works of Plato as it's not a dialogue and although Socates is talking to others, trying to persuade them about his innocence, these jurors do not speak. What this means, I suggest, is that we have reason to believe that Socrates' own views are being presented, and we should, therefore, pay close attention to it.

The second reason why we should take the *Apology* as an interpretative framework for early Socratic dialogues is that Socrates is giving an account of this life. As I mentioned earlier, Plato's dialogues are episodic and this applies to the *Apology* as well since it presents an episode from Socrates' life. However, the content of his speech is holistic- Socrates is giving an account of his life; he is reflecting on his motivations behind some of his past decisions.

While it is certainly true that in the *Apology* Socrates makes statements about courage, piety, and other topics that are discussed in other dialogues, and these can suffer from the episodic objection which I raised earlier, my focus in this Chapter will not be on what Socrates says about these particular issues, but rather on his description of his philosophical mission.

Socrates, in his defence, starts by telling a story about Chaerophon's visit to the Delphic oracle (20e *ff*), he talks about his *'journeyings'* (πλάνην) (22b) and even talking about his *'occupation'* (ἀσχολίας) (23b) suggests that he is indeed giving us a narrative. What we are presented with in the *Apology* is a narrative concerning his philosophical mission in which he explains why he approached strangers and started conversations with them. While Platonic dialogues show us these conversations, the *Apology* shows us a way how to approach them.

It is true that the *Apology* does not provide the list of dialogues that we should think about when reading it; however, there is certainly no reason why we shouldn't be thinking about the *Apology* when reading Plato's dialogues. Simply put, it would be a very strange strategy for Plato to write the *Apology* containing a description of Socates' mission and decide

not to write any dialogues representing this mission.[11] Now, it doesn't necessarily need to be the case that everything that Plato wrote is an example of what he describes in the *Apology*, however, there certainly are at least some dialogues which seem to fit well with the way that Socrates describes his quest and mission in the *Apology*.[12] For example, in the *Apology*, Socrates talks about conversing with poets and in Plato's Ion, Socrates is indeed talking to a rhapsode. Or, Socrates tells the jury that he is interested in revealing other people's ignorance and at the same time, there are a number of dialogues where the interlocutors get to realise with Socrates' help that they mistakenly thought that they knew something.

Based on these considerations, we can conclude that both the content and the form of the *Apology* invites us to use it as a framework for interpreting certain of Plato's dialogues. This doesn't mean that one shouldn't attempt to read the dialogues on their own, that there is no value in looking at the arguments and the text without wider context. Quite the contrary. However, I would like to suggest that reading these dialogues with the *Apology* in mind might offer us some rather interesting insight into them.

1.2 Three Stages in the *Apology*

As I mentioned in Section 1.1, I would like to defend two theses. First, that for Socrates, conversation is something to be valued for its own sake and second, that Socrates has not always been aware of this value of conversation and it is something that he realised during his philosophical mission. I will argue for the view that Socrates' understanding of dialogue changed throughout his life and it is the *Apology* that presents this narrative. We will see that the *Apology* contains three distinct stages of Socrates' understanding of the role of the dialogue. First stage will present Socrates as approaching others attempting to make sense of the prophecy. The second will present Socrates as realising that those who claim to be wise are not wise at all, and this leads him to a god given mission of revealing the ignorance of the interlocutors and attempting to gain wisdom himself. The third stage will present Socrates as claiming that the greatest good for a person is to converse with others.

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[11] This is not to say that the *Apology* must necessarily present Socrates as having just one mission. In fact, my goal in this Chapter is to show that the *Apology* presents us with a development of Socrates' mission.

[12] Similarly, I am not ruling out that other dialogues might contain descriptions of his mission. However, the account presented in the *Apology* is by far the fullest.

My wider goal will then be to track this development in Socratic dialogues. If it is indeed the case that at least some of Plato's dialogues represent Socrates' philosophical mission, and if this mission underwent development, it would naturally make sense to ask which stage, or stages do these dialogues represent. Moreover, if my claim is that by having conversations, Socrates realised the final value of dialogue, it would also make sense to look at the features of these conversations that enabled him to reach this conclusion. In the current Chapter, my aim is to focus on the *Apology* and to see what sort of narrative it offers when it comes to Socrates' understanding of the role of conversation.

1.3 Socrates before the prophecy

Socrates' account of his mission starts by oracle's cryptic reply to Chaerephon's question whether there is anyone wiser than Socrates. The Delphic oracle famously responded that no one was indeed wiser than him (21a). Socrates, after hearing it, became puzzled and decided to make sense of the prophecy by approaching various individuals. And while we do get a detailed description of Socrates' actions taken to make sense of the prophecy, it's not clear what Socrates has been doing prior to that - was he already engaging in a philosophical activity and talked to others about ethical issues or was he instead not interested in conversing about these topics at all? This question is important because it helps us to understand Socrates' attitude towards conversation and philosophy in general. It also presents a potential worry - if the aim of this Chapter is to show that Socrates' mission and attitude towards conversation has developed throughout his life, with each stage being significantly different from the previous one, it would be unfortunate if it turned out to be the case that Socrates has been fully committed to his philosophical mission even before the prophecy.

There are indeed interpreters who claim that Socrates has been engaging in *elenchus* prior to the prophecy.[13] The discussion revolves around two aspects of the prophecy: Chaerephon's motivation to seek the oracle, and Socrates' response that he knows that he isn't wise. The thought is that the best explanation behind Chaerephon's decision to ask the oracle about whether there was anyone wiser than Socrates was that Socrates must have already been engaged in an *elenctic* atvicity.[14] And, in relation to Socrates' awareness of not knowing anything worthwhile, the claim is that this could also be best explained by his elenchus since, as Reeve claims, '*elenctic examination is always self-examination*' (Reeve 1989, 32). Now, the fact that Socrates participated in an *elenctic* activity doesn't necessarily mean that the pre-prophecy version of that activity was the same as the post-prophecy one. Reeve (1989, 31) for example argues that Socrates' elenchus became more systematic only after the prophecy by deciding to approach those with a reputation for wisdom (*Ap.* 21b). This would be favourable for my interpretation as it would enable me to maintain the position that Socrates' attitude towards elenchus and his philosophical mission has evolved quite dramatically.

However, not all interpreters think that there is a difference between pre-prophecy and post-prophecy elenchus. Francisco Gonzalez notably argues contra Reeve that the prophecy didn't have an effect on Socrates' understanding of *elenchus*. He agrees with Reeve's position that the best explanation for Socrates' awareness of knowing that he doesn't know anything is indeed that he was engaging in an elenctic activity prior to the prophecy. However, he argues that there wasn't a difference between pre-prophecy and post-prophecy *elenchus*:

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[13] The other famous passage describing Socrates' *elenchus* can be found in the *Laches*: *"It is quite clear to me, Lysimachus, that your knowledge of Socrates is limited to your acquaintance with his father and that you have had no contact with the man himself, except when he was a child—I suppose he may have mingled with you and your fellow demesmen, following along with his father at the temple or at some other public gathering. But you are obviously still unacquainted with the man as he is now he has grown up.[...] You don't appear to me to know that whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and associates with him in conversation must necessarily, even if he began by conversing about something quite different in the first place, keep on being led about by the man's arguments until he submits to answering questions about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto."* (*Lach.* 187d6-188a1). However, nothing in this passage doesn't suggest that Socrates has been examining others prior to the prophecy. In fact, Nicias seems to suggest that Socrates underwent a change from when he was a child to when he has grown up and this is supposed to explain the fact that Lysimachus doesn't know what Socrates does.

[14] Cf. Reeve (1989, 32): *"Chaerephon, his 'friend from youth; (20e8-21a1), must often have seen Socrates use [elenchus] on people he thought wise and, perhaps, have been a victim of it himself. As a result, he could have come to believe, as so many of his fellow Athenians did (23a1-5), that Socrates was a very wise man indeed. Then, in his enthusiasm, he went to Delphi to ask whether anyone was wiser than Socrates and received the response, typically Delphian in its power to mislead the overconfident, that no one is wiser."*

> Are we to believe that Socrates prior to the oracle found himself to lack knowledge of the most important issues, believed that there were people who possessed this knowledge, and yet made no thorough effort to find and examine these people? In short, Socrates' discovery of his own ignorance through self-examination was itself sufficient motive to examine others who claimed the knowledge he lacked, to discover that their professed knowledge was in fact ignorant conceit, and to arrive at the conclusion that his state was better than theirs. (Gonzalez 2009, 132)

Gonzalez makes here a very simple point - if Socrates came to realisation that he didn't know anything by using the *elenchus* then it wouldn't have made much sense for him to stop there and not to attempt to learn something from those who are supposed to be wise - be it politicians, poets, or craftsmen. And doing this, he would have realised fairly quickly that their claim to knowledge was unfounded.[15]

This argument is a part of Gonzalez's wider claim about the *Apology* as he argues that for Socrates, conversation was inherently valuable and that this was evident to him from the start. Gonzalez then does not think that there are any stages of Socrates' mission and *elenchus* and his understanding of it that has its origins prior to the events of the prophecy.

Now, Gonzalez does seem to raise a valid point in his argument against Reeve as it's not entirely clear why Socrates wouldn't continue approaching others in order to obtain wisdom once he realised that he didn't know anything worthwhile. After all, knowing that one doesn't know anything isn't a final step of one's learning, it's the beginning of it. So it seems that if we allow for a pre-prophecy elenctic activity, we will end up with a reading of the *Apology* with Socrates being a fully fledged philosopher from the beginning.[16]

I would like to suggest, against both Reeve and Gonzalez, that Socrates has only minimally participated in philosophical activities prior to the prophecy. This will enable us to maintain that Socrates' understanding of his mission and elenchus has transformed during his life.

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[15] Gonzalez's conclusion is that the prophecy shouldn't be understood as a necessary condition for Socrates' mission - Cf. Gonzalez 2009, 132*ff.*

[16] One might raise an objection against Gonzalez by focusing on Socrates' puzzlement when he heard the prophecy and his surprise when he realised that those who claimed to be wise were actually ignorant about their lack of knowledge. If he managed to conclude on his own that a lot of people mistakenly think that they possessed knowledge, why would he be so surprised and puzzled by the prophecy and the outcome? Gonzalez, however, does seem to suggest at times that the prophecy didn't happen or was at least heavily embellished.

Let me firstly address the claim that the best way to explain Socrates' awareness that he isn't wise is that he has been engaging with some kind of elenctic activity. Now, Reeve might be right to say that *'elenctic examination is always a self-examination'* but that doesn't mean that self-examination can only be an *elenctic* examination. It's certainly possible to see Socrates as someone who came to the conclusion about his lack of knowledge by means other than examination of others. At 22d Socrates admits that when he decided to approach the craftsmen, he was already aware that they knew many fine things. But one doesn't need to examine the internal consistency of craftsmen's statements to conclude that they know many fine things - one can do that just by marvelling at their brilliant work. This means that one can become aware of one's lack of knowledge by means other than through *elenctic* examination.

The other claim used by Reeve to argue in favour of pre-prophecy elenchus was that Chaerephon wouldn't have gone to see the oracle if he hadn't seen Socrates engaging in *elenchus*. The fact that he asked particularly about Socrates and didn't raise a generic question instead, attempting to find out who is the wisest person, suggests that he must have had a particular reason for mentioning Socrates. However, wisdom can be displayed in different ways and not just by examining others. So while *elenchus* is certainly *an* explanation of why Chaerephon approached the oracle, it's certainly not the only explanation available to us.

Moreover, it's worth looking at what Socrates himself says about Chaerephon - at 21a, he claims that Chaerephon was *'impulsive in any course of action'* (ὡς σφοδρὸς ἐφ' ὅτι ὁρμήσειεν). Why would Socrates care to mention this as part of his defence? Socratates, by saying that someone is of impulsive nature, might be suggesting that their actions might often lack rational basis and so Chaerophon's decision to approach the oracle couldn't have been traced back to anything systematic that Socrates was doing before the prophecy.

My aim is not to suggest that Socrates was not interested in philosophy, truth, or good life at all before the Oracle, I am solely proposing that Socrates' awareness that he doesn't know anything worthwhile and Chaerephon's impulsive decision to pay a visit to the oracle can be based on pursuits other than *elenctic* examination.[17] However, it is still unclear whether this

[17] Brickhouse and Smith also seem to propose a weaker reading in relation to Socrates' pre-prophecy activity: *'[I]t is reasonable to infer that Socrates must have already been engaged in philosophical activity of some sort with a circle of friends before Chaerephon's journey. Otherwise, Chaerephon would never have gotten the idea that Socrates really was extraordinarily wise'* (Brickhouse and Smith 2004, 98)

position is sufficient when it comes to addressing Gonzalez' objection against Reeve. His objection was that if Socrates had indeed been engaging in an elenctic activity, after realising that he didn't know anything, he would have continued with the examination in order to gain wisdom, eventually realising that those who deemed themselves wise were in fact ignorant about their lack of knowledge . This argument was supposed to show that any pre-prophecy elenchus would and actually did lead Socrates into examining others in order either to obtain wisdom or to show that his interlocutors mistakenly thought that they had knowledge. In other words, Socrates' original self-examination naturally led him into examination of others, even without the prophecy. This picture helped Gonzalez with his take on Socrates as someone whose understanding of his mission didn't undergo any development.

Now, I believe that claiming that it's not necessary to connect Socrates' self-examination with an *elenctic* activity enables us to dismiss Gonzalez' argument. If we accept that Socrates was able to realise that he didn't know anything by means other than elenctic examination - either by marvelling at the fine words of the poets or listening to great rhetoricians[18] - then even if he was interested in acquiring knowledge, why should we automatically suppose that *elenctic* examination would have been a natural step for him? If one realises based on listening to great speeches that one lacks knowledge, surely, the most natural step is to continue listening to these in order to gain this knowledge. This means that we shouldn't too readily accept Gonzalez's claim that Socrates was examining others prior to the prophecy as we can argue that while awareness of one's lack of knowledge leads to desire to learn, elenctic activity is not necessary for fulfilling this desire and one can certainly attempt to learn by other means.

We can now see that one can maintain a fairly minimal account in terms of Socrates' activity prior to the prophecy: To be aware that he doesn't know anything, Socrates didn't need to be examining others. Likewise, the reason behind Chaerephon's decision to pay a visit to the oracle doesn't need to be based on the fact that Socrates has been engaged in *elenchus*.

[18] Reeve could respond by arguing that listening to speeches or poems isn't sufficient for Socrates' self-examination. However, in response, the same point could be raised about elenctic examination - Socrates examining others doesn't automatically imply that he is examining himself (*cf.* Woolf 2008).

However, there is another, more direct reason why we should favour a reading of the *Apology* which displays Socrates as not engaging in conversations in any major way prior to the prophecy. This is related to his reluctance to start his investigation:

> When I heard of 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; what then does he mean by saying that I am the wisest? For surely he does not lie; it is not legitimate for him to do so." For a long time I was at a loss as to his meaning; then I very reluctantly turned to some such investigation as this; (ἔπειτα μόγις πάνυ ἐπὶ ζήτησιν αὐτοῦ τοιαύτην τινὰ ἐτραπόμην) I went to one of those reputed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I could refute the oracle and say to it: "This man is wiser than I, but you said I was." (21b)

Most commentators focus on Socrates' decision to try to refute the oracle when discussing this passage - and rightly so as the passage is connected to a wider discussion about religious origins of Socrates' mission. Some, for example Hackforth (1933, 94) claim that *'his procedure of testing the oracle is incompatible with a serious acceptance of its authority*' however, this position has been rejected recently[19] with the suggestion that the refutation of the oracle is interpretative only - refutation should be understood as a genuine device of revealing the hidden meaning, rather than an ironical remark revealing Socrates' indifference towards the gods. Hence, Socrates' claim: '*For surely [god] does not lie; it is not legitimate for him to do so*' should be taken at its face value and not as an example of his impiety.

If we think about Socrates' wider mission as presented in the *Apology*, then it's not clear why he would start his defence by undermining the god in this way. Later on in the *Apology*, Socrates will talk about being stationed in Athens by the god being obliged by him to do philosophy and to examine himself and others. (28e). Socrates will portray himself as someone who is doing service to the god, to himself and to Athens and I believe that we can say with confidence that because of this service, it is in his interest to stay alive and not be sentenced to death or exile. After all, he also stresses that he is ready to obey the god's order[20] and running away would be considered an act of cowardice. And so if his goal is to stay alive so that he can

[19] Cf Reeve 1989, Brickhouse & Smith 2004, Stokes 2006.

[20] Reeve (1989, 24) uses these passages as well in support of the view that Socrates' initial refutation of the oracle is interpretative only. However, on their own, these passages cannot provide sufficient support as it is not clear whether Socrates' attitude towards the gods was the same right after the prophecy and later on, once he realised what was his divine mission. In theory, just as his attitude towards elenchus has evolved, so could have his attitude towards the divine.

continue with his divine mission, then starting his defence with a provocation wouldn't make a lot of sense for him.

Moreover, there is independent evidence found in Herodotus showing that inquiry into the meaning of prophecies is expected in order to ensure that they are properly understood. Herodotus blames Croseus for failing to inquire into the prophecy, resulting in his defeat:

> As to the oracle, Croesus had no right to find fault with it: the god had declared that if he attacked the Perians he would bring down a mighty empire. After an answer like that, the wise thing would have been to send again to inquire which empire was meant, Cyrus' or his own. But as he misinterpreted what was said and made no second inquiry, he must admit the fault to have been his own (Herodotus 1.91-92).

Here we can see Herodotus blaming Croesus for not inquiring into the meaning of the prophecy. Moreover, the prophecy was open to interpretation and seemed to be deliberately ambiguous, very much like the prophecy given to Chaerephon.

Where does this leave us? First, we established that Socrates had no real motivation to annoy the jurors by mocking the oracle and secondly, there is indeed an expectation to inquire into the more cryptic prophecies. Now, if this is so then the meaning of Socrates' claim: '*I very reluctantly turned to some such investigation as this'* is not entirely clear. If he was aware that inquiry into the prophecy is something expected, then what was it that he was doing reluctantly? I would like to suggest that Socrates' reluctance is connected to his method of investigation. In other words, he was reluctant to converse with other people as a means of making sense of the prophecy. I am by no means suggesting that Socrates has never conversed with anyone prior to the prophecy, however he seems to be sceptical about the benefits of using conversation as a device to unlock the meaning of the prophecy. And if this is so, then we can indeed assume that Socrates, prior to the prophecy, certainly did not take conversation to be the ultimate learning device because otherwise, he would have been certainly more enthusiastic about the opportunity to converse with others to make sense of the prophecy.[21]

[21] Similarly, the reluctance can't be traced to Socrates being worried that he will create enemies by approaching them, as he only realised later that the individuals he questioned were ignorant.

1.4 First Stage - Making Sense of the Prophecy

In the previous Section we saw that it would be a mistake to think that Socrates prior to the prophecy deemed conversation to be of particularly great value. He nevertheless decided to use conversation to decipher the prophecy. In this section, I will set out what I call the first stage of his philosophical journey which entails Socrates using conversation in order to disprove the prophecy by finding someone wiser than himself.[22]

Let me start by quoting again Socrates' original response to the oracle:

> When I heard of 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; what then does he mean by saying that I am the wisest? For surely he does not lie; it is not legitimate for him to do so." For a long time I was at a loss as to his meaning; then I very reluctantly turned to some such investigation as this; (ἔπειτα μόγις πάνυ ἐπὶ ζήτησιν αὐτοῦ τοιαύτην τινὰ ἐτραπόμην) I went to one of those reputed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I could refute the oracle and say to it: "This man is wiser than I, but you said I was." (21b)

We can see from this passage that conversation will be used in an instrumental way as a means to reveal the true sense of the prophecy. Moreover, while the decision to interpret the prophecy seems to have some normative force, meaning that one should always attempt to make sense of the prophecy in order to correctly understand it, it is not entirely clear whether the use of conversation in order to achieve this has the same normative force. I suggested in the previous section that when we look at Socrates' reluctance to approach others, it seems that he wasn't convinced that conversation is the best method for interpreting the oracle. Hence, the normative aspect of using conversation seems to be missing from the first stage - it is simply *a* method which might or might not help Socrates in deciphering the prophecy.[23]

Socrates first decided to approach those with reputation to wisdom and to his surprise, realised that they are mistaken about their claims to knowledge:

> I thought that he appeared wise to many people and especially to himself, but he was not. I then tried to show him that he thought himself wise, but that he was not. As a result he came to dislike me, and so did many of the bystanders. So I withdrew and thought to

[22] As we have seen in the previous section, the refutation is interpretative and Socrates' plan is not to prove the oracle wrong.

[23] We will see that in the second stage of Socrates' journey, the instrumental aspect will remain (although with a different goal), however conversation will acquire a certain normative value.

> myself: "I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know." After this I approached another man, one of those thought to be wiser than he, and I thought the same thing, and so I came to be disliked both by him and by many others. (21d-e)

Socrates then decides to proceed in a more systematic manner by approaching politicians, poets and craftsmen with outcomes very similar to his initial findings that these people were mistaken about their claims to knowledge. His encounters with politicians led him to conclude that *'those who had the highest reputation were nearly the most deficient, while those who were thought to be inferior were more knowledgeable'* (22a). This situation will repeat when Socrates moves on to poets:

> Almost all the bystanders might have explained the poems better than their authors could. I soon realized that poets do not compose their poems with knowledge, but by some inborn talent and by inspiration, like seers and prophets who also say many fine things without any understanding of what they say. The poets seemed to me to have had a similar experience. At the same time I saw that, because of their poetry, they thought themselves very wise men in other respects, which they were not. (27b-c)

Here, the situation is very similar to politicians, however, with one further observation made by Socrates. Poets do have some sort of talent which enables them to write poetry. What Socrates finds troubling is that they mistake this talent for knowledge, and thinking that they are wise they apply their wisdom to other aspects of human life. We can see a similar story with craftsmen. These, according to Socrates, possess a certain kind of knowledge - they are skilled in their crafts and because of that, they mistakenly think that they are wise on other important pursuits.[24]

Socrates concludes the investigation into the prophecy by claiming:

> What is probable, gentlemen, is that in fact the god is wise and that his oracular response meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and that when he says this man,

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[24] *Ap.* 22d-e: *'In this I was not mistaken; they knew things I did not know, and to that extent they were wiser than I. But, men of Athens, the good craftsmen seemed to me to have the same fault as the poets: each of them, because of his success at his craft, thought himself very wise in other most important pursuits, and this error of theirs overshadowed the wisdom they had.'*

> Socrates, he is using my name as an example, as if he said: "This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless." (23a-b)

Following his investigation, Socrates concludes that he has a certain epistemic superiority over the interlocutors since he doesn't mistakenly think that he possesses worthwhile knowledge.[25] However, in terms of Socrates' use of conversation, the instrumental aspect remained the same as Socrates took conversation to be a means to interpreting the oracle throughout his initial encounters.[26] One thing that might have changed is Socrates' attitude towards the usefulness of conversation as a means to deciphering the oracle. As we have seen, Socrates wasn't particularly keen to use conversation in order to decipher the prophecy and this was evident by Socrates' reluctance to approach the others. However, it is more than reasonable to think that in the process of the investigation, Socrates came to realise that conversation is indeed a good way to make sense of the prophecy. This might be so because the prophecy is partly about Socrates and his claim to (lack of) knowledge and partly about others, and conversation seems like a very good way of discovering that some people are mistaken about their claim to knowledge. Moreover, we will be able to see in the next section that Socrates will continue using conversation to reveal the ignorance of his interlocutors and we can suspect that the reason why he has decided to continue using conversation was based on his experience with it during his attempt to decipher the prophecy.

1.5 Second Stage - Socrates' Service to the God

We have seen in the previous section that the passage 21b - 22e represents the first stage of Socrates' journey and he used conversation to make sense of the prophecy. However, once Socrates realised the meaning of the prophecy, his mission changed its purpose, and so did the way in which he used conversation. In this section, my focus will be on this second stage in which Socrates uses conversation for two main reasons: first, to reveal the ignorance of the

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[25] I will unpack the implications of this statement in the next Section.

[26] Reeve (1989, 46) also argues that there are different stages presented in the Apology. He does not focus on the instrumentality of conversation, however he correctly claims that Socrates' use of conversation to make sense of the prophecy is *'partly negative (Socrates shows each reputedly wise person 'that though he supposed himself wise, he was not'), but also partly positive (Socrates uncovered the meaning of the oracle and realized that he possessed human wisdom.)'*

interlocutors and to get them to care about truth, and second, to attempt to gain knowledge himself.

We can see the shift from the first to second stage by comparing two passages in the Apology: the one in which he decides to start the investigation into the prophecy and the one in which he summarises the findings of his investigation into the meaning of the prophecy:

> For a long time I was at a loss as to his meaning; then I very reluctantly turned to some such investigation as this; I went to one of those reputed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I could refute the oracle and say to it: "This man is wiser than I, but you said I was." (21b)

vs

> What is probable, gentlemen, is that in fact the god is wise and that his oracular response meant that *human wisdom is worth little or nothing*, and that when he says this man, Socrates, he is using my name as an example, as if he said: "This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, *like Socrates, understands that* he is in fact worthless with regard to wisdom." So even now I continue this investigation as the god bade me—and I go around seeking out anyone, citizen or stranger, whom I think wise. Then if I do not think he is, I come to the assistance of the god and show him that he is not wise. (23a-b)

It is not hard to see that these passages present the role of conversation in quite a different way: using conversation to disprove gods by finding wiser interlocutors[27] (20b) is quite different to using conversation to see whether the interlocutors are wise and to reveal their ignorance in case they are not.

Now, Socrates does claim in the second passage (23a-b) that he is *continuing* in the investigation and this might mean, contrary to what I am suggesting, that there was no real shift between the first and second stage in terms of Socrates' goal. However, in the description of the first stage (21b-22e), when Socrates is attempting to decipher the prophecy, he gives no indication that he also tried to show the interlocutors that they are mistaken about their claim to knowledge. Moreover, if we look again at what Socrates says in the latter passage, he is indeed making a slightly weaker claim as the continued activity refers only to him going around seeking out anyone whom he thinks to be wise. And *this* activity is indeed common to the first and second stage. In the first stage, Socrates decided to approach those he deemed wise to decipher

[27] We have seen in the previous chapter that Socrates' attitude is slightly more complex as the decision to refute the oracle is interpretative only.

the prophecy, and in the second stage, he approached them to ensure they don't mistakenly think that they are wise.

It is not entirely clear from 23a-b why it is so dangerous to be mistaken about one's claim to knowledge. Luckily, Socrates does provide a fuller explanation later on in his speech:

> 'Good Sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?' Then, if one of you disputes this and says he does care, I shall not let him go at once or leave him, but I shall question him, examine him and test him, and if I do not think he has attained the goodness that he says he has (καὶ ἐάν μοι μὴ δοκῇ κεκτῆσθαι ἀρετήν), I shall reproach him because he attaches little importance to the most important things and greater importance to inferior things. I shall treat in this way anyone I happen to meet, young and old, citizen and stranger, and more so the citizens because you are more kindred to me. Be sure that this is what the god orders me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing for the city than my service to the god. For I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul, as I say to you: Wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence makes wealth and everything else good for men, both individually and collectively." (29d-30a).

Based on this passage, conversation is used by Socrates first, to check whether the interlocutors attach importance to the correct things; second, if they do not, then to attempt to make them realise that they attach importance to incorrect things and third, to get them to care about their souls, wisdom and truth. Socrates also connects caring about wisdom, truth and one's soul to living a virtuous life and the passage does seem to suggest that this sort of life is connected to living well.[28] If this is what Socrates is trying to achieve, then it's not hard to see his unwillingness stop doing so - as he claims on several occasions in the *Apology* (28e, 38e).

However, it's important to note that the role of conversation is still instrumental - the goal is to get the interlocutors to care about the correct things and conversation is used by Socrates as an instrument to achieve this. I also suggested in the previous section when

[28] There is considerable disagreement amongst scholars whether Socrates equates life of virtue to happiness. *Cf.* Reeve 1989, 124*ff*, Vlastos 1991,200-232, Brickhouse & Smith 2004, 134. Even if one accepts that there is a difference between these two, ensuring that one is virtuous seems like an important endeavour on its own.

discussing the first stage that while the decision to decipher the prophecy seemed to have some normative force, it was not clear whether the use of conversation in order to achieve this had the same normative force. Now, given Socrates' overall aim in the second stage of his mission - to get people to care about wisdom and truth - the normativity of the mission itself seems clear as one should obey the god's command and one should indeed try to get people to care about the right things.

The situation with conversation as a method of achieving this seems to have changed slightly from the first stage and conversation seems to have gained a certain normative value. In the first stage, I argued, Socrates used conversation as *a* method, and this was evidenced by his reluctance to approach others. In the second stage, Socrates continues using conversation and we might rightly think that he does so precisely because he finds conversation a useful tool to reach his goal.

Indeed, we might think that precisely by approaching those whom Socrates thought to be wise, he realised the value of conversation as examination of the interlocutors and that made him to continue with the same activity, albeit with an adjusted end - to reveal the interlocutors' lack of knowledge and to get them to care about wisdom and truth. In other words, it was through participating in that activity that Socrates was able to realise what was the true purpose of his mission and the purpose of conversation.[29] This then means that conversation gained certain normative value as it was a very good way, at least according to Socrates, to get others to care about virtue. However, we must note that this value existed only in relation to the actual goal of the conversation, that is we value it insofar as it enables Socrates to get the interlocutors to care about virtue.

1.6 Second stage - Socrates and the attainability of wisdom

In the initial overview of the second stage of Socrates' journey presented in the previous section, we have seen that Socrates continued with the examination of the interlocutors, however with a different end - to show interlocutors that they lack knowledge and to get them

[29] I will argue that the same will be the case in the shift from second to third stage. What this will mean is that although the role of conversation has changed throughout his life, the activity itself remained the same. Moreover, it's reasonable to ask whether it is the activity itself which enabled Socrates to reflect on its nature and its use, or whether this was instead possible due to Socrates' ability to reflect on what he was doing irrespective of the activity.

to care about wisdom and truth. In this section, I would like to focus on the second main aspect of second-stage elenchus - Socrates using it as a search for knowledge. The basic idea is that Socrates, after all, mentions on multiple occasions that he does not teach anything as he doesn't know very much (19e, 33a), and, as we have seen in the previous section, he believes that caring about truth and wisdom is of utmost importance. This means that it might not be far-fetched for him to attempt to obtain this wisdom by the means of conversation - especially if he's already approaching those whom he believes wise in order to examine their claim to knowledge. It's important to stress that the type of knowledge that Socrates is searching for is knowledge of virtue and not knowledge of, for example one's own lack of knowledge as that is something that he already possesses. What I am suggesting, then, is that Socrates, being aware that his lack of knowledge is of the worthwhile things, uses *elenchus* to try to acquire it.

Not all scholars, however, agree that *elenchus* or conversation was used by Socrates to search for knowledge. As an example, we can take Reeve's summary of the elenchus:

> The goal of third-stage[30] elenctic examining was one part negative (to show people who think otherwise that they do not possess expert craft-knowledge of virtue) and two parts positive (to cure them of their hubris and to get them to care about wisdom, truth, and the best possible state of their psyche more than about money and honour) Reeve (1989, 46)

As we can see, Reeve's summary contains no mention of the possibility of using *elenchus* to acquire wisdom.[31] The basis for his view is his distinction between human[32] and expert

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[30] Reeve (1989) also divides the *Apology* into three stages. The first stage is Socrates before the prophecy, the second is Socrates attempting to decipher the oracle, and the third stage is Socrates after he realised the meaning of the prophecy. This means that Reeve's third stage is coextensive with my second stage.

[31] There are of course scholars who do assign this feature to elenchus. Vlastos (1991, 4)) says: *'First and foremost elenchus is search. [...] What is he [Socrates] searching for? For truth, certainly, but not for every sort of truth - only for truth in the moral domain.'* Similarly, Benson (2011, 198) claims *'Further, it [elenchos] is the method by which he seeks to examine the robust knowledge claims of those reputed to be wise. He [Socrates] does this for two reasons. First, he aims to encourage these individuals to seek the robust knowledge they lack, if indeed they are found to lack it. Second, he aims to acquire the knowledge he lacks from them, if they are found to have it.'*

[32] Reeve (1989, 53) defines human wisdom, that is wisdom that Socrates possesses as: *'Someone has human wisdom only if he recognizes that he has no explanatory, teachable, luck-independent, elenchus proof, certain knowledge of virtue but that he does have some knowledge , of the sort (implicitly) possessed by all human beings, which, though elenchus-resistant, is nonexplanatory, unteachable, luck dependent, and uncertain.'*

knowledge and his claim that since expert knowledge in the moral realm is unattainable for humans, Socrates cannot be using elenchus to attempt to acquire it.[33]

In response to Reeve's claims, I will be arguing that second-stage Socrates does indeed believe that worthwhile knowledge is attainable and he thinks some people have a limited claim to it. And given that he attaches so much importance to wisdom and truth, he is using elenchus to acquire it. Before looking into those sections of the *Apology* which talks about human wisdom and its worth, I would like to stress that I will only be focusing on the *Apology* in my attempt to show that second-stage Socrates used conversation to acquire knowledge. Even though it is the actual dialogues which show Socrates talking and examining the interlocutors, I am interested in whether the *Apology* has anything to say about this topic.[34] This goes back again to the idea of using the *Apology* as the interpretative framework for the other dialogues and I would like to see whether this work, with its special status, puts any interpretative limits on the dialogues, or whether it can provide some important insights when attempting to understand them.

Going back to Reeve, his claim, as I've mentioned earlier, is that expert knowledge in the moral realm is unattainable for humans, and that is why Socrates cannot be using elenchus to attempt to acquire it. I would like to suggest that this view is based on a false dichotomy that *elenchus* can only be used to search for expert knowledge or cannot be used for any positive search at all. Surely, even if one recognises that expert knowledge in the moral realm is not accessible, one can still search for some worthwhile knowledge.

Moreover, even if Socrates eventually realises that expert knowledge in the moral realm is unattainable, if we accept that Socrates' understanding of his mission and elenchus evolved during his life, which is a claim that Reeve shares, it would be a mistake to say that as soon a Socrates deciphered the meaning of the prophecy, he at the same time gained insight into the

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[33] Reeve (1989, 38) introduces expert knowledge in the following way: *'[E]xpert knowledge of virtue seems to be the sort of knowledge it is reasonable to suppose a god, and perhaps only a god, really possesses. Socrates refers to it as 'a wisdom that is more than human' (20e), never finds anyone who possess it, even after years of searching, and claims that part of the message of the oracle is that 'it is really the god who is wise and that in his oracle he is staying that human wisdom is worth little or nothing' (23a5-7).'*

[34] The dialogues themselves provide reasonable evidence that Socrates is interested in search for knowledge. Benson (2011, 183) is right when he states: *'[I]n nearly every case, Socrates appears to be prepared to learn from the interlocutor should his wisdom be confirmed, and attempts to persuade the interlocutor of his ignorance once Socrates recognizes it.'*. In note 17 he helpfully adds: *'Of the twenty-one interlocutors whose wisdom is examined, Socrates explicitly announces his desire to learn from them in twelve cases'*

limits of human understanding and he knew early on that searching for knowledge was pointless. Socrates did realise the meaning of the prophecy after a systematic investigation (21e), however systemic investigation should not be mistaken for a definitive investigation into the limits of human knowledge.

In order to show that Socrates was using conversation as a search for wisdom, I will first look at the debate concerning the scope of human wisdom and argue that second-stage Socrates thought that some people did possess worthwhile wisdom , and in next section, I will show that Socrates was using elenchus or conversation to attempt to acquire it.

Most of the debate around the positive nature of *elenchus* revolves around 23a-b, where Socrates tells us the meaning of the prophecy:

> What is probable, gentlemen, is that in fact the god is wise and that his oracular response meant that human wisdom is worth little or nothing, and that when he says this man, Socrates, he is using my name as an example, as if he said: "This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that he is in fact worthless with regard to wisdom." (23a-b)

The primary question that we need to ask is what is the force of the statement that human wisdom is worth little or nothing. It might seem to some that what the oracle meant and what Socrates gathered from his investigation is that all knowledge available to humans is worth little or nothing.[35] However, if we look at the context and Socrates' experience with his various interlocutors, we will be able to see that this statement shouldn't be understood as a proclamation regarding the limits of human knowledge. What Socrates found dangerous when talking to others was that they possessed some knowledge (craftsmen of their craft (22d)), or ability (poets' ability to compose tragedies (22b)) and because they possessed these, they mistakenly thought that they possessed worthwhile wisdom (22c, 22d). And if these are Socrates' findings, then it seems reasonable to claim that the statement 'human wisdom is worth little or nothing' relates to these experiences. Brickhouse and Smith summarise this point well:

[35] Confusingly, Socrates earlier refers to his awareness of lack of knowledge as human wisdom (20d). However, he can't be thinking of this human wisdom in 23a-b as the claim would be that his awareness of lack of knowledge is worth little or nothing as the outcome of the investigation seems to be the exact opposite - that his human wisdom is more valuable than wrongly thinking that one is knowledgeable.

> Someone who is truly ignorant of the most important things, someone who thinks he possesses that knowledge and does not, may well have knowledge of some sort; but the knowledge he possesses is not going to benefit him at all if he is pursuing the wrong idea of what is most important. Such a person's knowledge, as Socrates says, is only a form of mere human knowledge and is worth 'little or nothing' (Brickhouse & Smith 2004, 102)

So the human wisdom in this particular case is the kind of knowledge that the craftsmen or politicians have, or the kind of ability to compose tragedies that the poets possess. As a result of this, it would be a mistake to understand the claim that human wisdom is worth little or nothing as a wide-ranging claim about the limits of human knowledge. If this is so, then there is no reason for Socrates not to search for it as all that he discovered is that a certain type of wisdom that humans possess is worthless, and not that humans cannot possess worthwhile wisdom.

So far, we have seen that Socrates' explanation of the prophecy didn't suggest that worthwhile wisdom is impossible for humans. And, there is more evidence to suggest that worthwhile human wisdom is something that some people might actually possess. Again, this is not to say that these interlocutors possess expert knowledge of the whole moral realm, however when we look at the way that Socrates talks about his mission, he does seem to suggest that some people possess some worthwhile wisdom. And if Socrates thinks that this is the case, then why wouldn't he suspect that some interlocutors have a more complete claim to it.

Socrates summarised this mission in the following way:

> So even now I continue this investigation as the god bade me—and I go around seeking out anyone, citizen or stranger, whom I think wise. Then whenever I do not think he is, I come to the assistance of the god and show him that he is not wise.[36] (23b)

The use of ἐπειδάν in this passage is important as Socrates seems to be suggesting that it is possible to find interlocutors who are indeed wise even after he realised the meaning of the prophecy; ἐπειδάν, after all, is best translated as 'whenever', and 'whenever', unlike 'when' allows for the possibility of finding someone wise. If Socrates didn't think this, the conditional force of this clause would be redundant and we would expect a claim more similar to the following: *I go around seeking out anyone, citizen or stranger, whom I think is wise, and when he isn't , I come*

[36] ταῦτ' οὖν ἐγὼ μὲν ἔτι καὶ νῦν περιιὼν ζητῶ καὶ ἐρευνῶ κατὰ τὸνθεὸν καὶ τῶν ἀστῶν καὶ ξένων ἄν τινα οἴωμαι σοφὸν εἶναι: καὶ ἐπειδάν μοι μὴ δοκῇ, τῷθεῷ βοηθῶν ἐνδείκνυμαι ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι σοφός.

to the assistance of gods and show him that he is not wise. Now, this sort of claim would be much more sceptical towards possible wisdom of the interlocutors, however, because he used the if-clause, Socrates seems to be saying something rather different and admitting the possibility that some interlocutors have a legitimate claim to knowledge.

Similar situation arises in the passage which I have discussed previously:

> 'Good Sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?' Then, if one of you disputes this and says he does care, I shall not let him go at once or leave him, but I shall question him, examine him and test him, and if (*ἄν*) I do not think he has attained the goodness that he says he has, I shall reproach him because he attaches little importance to the most important things and greater importance to inferior things. (23a)

As in the previous passage, Socrates seems to allow for the possibility that some people do indeed have some limited claim to worthwhile wisdom as he is only to test and examine those who have not attained goodness.

We would need to look at the dialogues themselves which statements, in any, of the interlocutors would fall into the category of worthwhile wisdom. However, these two passages do offer a clear picture that Socrates does allow for the possibility that some possess worthwhile knowledge.

1.7 Second-stage Socrates and the search for knowledge

In the previous Section I argued that some interlocutors might possess certain worthwhile knowledge. However, whether or not Socrates used conversation to acquire this knowledge is a separate question and one might very well agree that some people possess worthwhile wisdom without subscribing to the view that Socrates used conversation to search for this wisdom. The thought goes like this: Socrates' mission to reveal to the interlocutors that they are mistaken about their claim to knowledge is more important than his desire to acquire wisdom himself. To be incorrectly thinking that one is wise is a much worse state compared to Socrates', who is aware of his lack of knowledge. And because knowledge is closely connected to

virtue and happiness, the others are in much greater danger compared to Socrates. Hence, he should be focusing solely on the interlocutors who are mistaken about their claim to knowledge.

To respond to this worry, and to show that Socrates is interested in acquiring wisdom, let me start with his description of the life of a philosopher at 29e - *to examine myself and others.* Apart from examining and testing interlocutors, the life of a philosopher consists in testing and examining oneself as well. This of course implies that Socrates, while talking to others, also examines and tests himself. When it comes to the examination of the interlocutors, he wants to show them their ignorance and get them to care about wisdom and truth. However, this examination does not seem to be applicable to Socrates, since he is already aware of the importance of these things and him being aware of their importance is precisely the reason why he is approaching others. So if Socrates already knows that one should prioritise truth and wisdom over body and wealth, it would make sense to say that his examination is connected to a search for wisdom.

Separately, one might object that even though Socrates mentioned that he was testing and examining himself as well, he only proclaimed this on too few occasions in the *Apology*, and so we shouldn't take it too seriously. As a result, Socrates would be still focused on interlocutors and their relation towards their souls There might be certain plausibility in this since Socrates mentions that he is testing himself only one other time (38a) and doesn't expand on it even there. However, we have to understand that since Socrates is presenting his defence in front of the jury, it would make sense for him to stress certain reasons for the dialogue rather than others. And so it seems reasonable for him to focus on the fact that he was attempting to show his interlocutors the importance of caring about their soul. Not only is it hard to object to this kind of aim, it certainly sounds better than stressing the fact that Socrates was examining himself as emphasising one's care for others as opposed to oneself would have more appeal for the jury.

1.8 Third Stage - Conversation as a final end

In sections 1.5-1.7, I attempted to unpack the role of conversation in the second stage of Socrates' journey. We have seen that conversation was used for rather admirable reasons - to test interlocutors' claim to knowledge, to reveal to them their ignorance, to get them to care about

the correct things, and finally, Socrates used it to try to acquire wisdom. However, we also saw that conversation was valued as a means to an end, and while no one would deny the importance of these ends, conversation was instrumental to them.[37] We can imagine a situation in which Socreates manages to examine every Athenian, gets each one of them to care about virtue and himself manages to acquire worthwhile wisdom. In this case, Socrates would have no reason to continue conversing with others. Athenians would, after all, care about the correct things and Socrates, equipped with knowledge of virtues and the good, would live a virtuous life.

This is not to say that we shouldn't take seriously the instrumental value of conversation; however, I would like to defend a stronger thesis when it comes to the value of conversation, namely that it should be understood as a final good. I will do so by reevaluating the relationship between virtue and conversation so that conversation will not be just a device to attain knowledge of virtue but instead a place where the interlocutors and Socrates may exercise virtue. Socrates' realisation of this final value of conversation will represent the third stage of Socrates' journey.

The final value of conversation is introduced by Socrates at 38a:

> If I say that it is impossible for me to keep quiet because that means disobeying the god, you will not believe me and will think I am being ironical. On the other hand, if I say that it is the greatest good[38] for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for men, you will believe me even less (38a).[39]

This passage can be easily overlooked as Socrates just seems to be stressing the importance of his mission of examining others. However, upon closer examination, Socrates' claim that to discuss virtue every day is the greatest good for humans does indeed suggest that conversation might have more than just an instrumental value for Socrates.

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[37] Irwin (1997, 97) summarises this point very well: *'Since Socrates is no moral expert, the Socratic dialogues never threaten the elenchos with obsolescence; but if moral inquiry and knowledge are valued for their results, the value of the elenchos must be strictly limited.'*

[38] Gonzalez (2009) rightly argues against translating μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν as 'a very great good' by referring to other passages with the same type of superlative claim (30a6, 41b5, 41c4).

[39] ἐάντ' αὖ λέγω ὅτι καὶ τυγχάνει μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν ὂν ἀνθρώπῳ τοῦτο, ἑκάστης ἡμέρας περὶ ἀρετῆς τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων περὶ ὧν ὑμεῖς ἐμοῦ ἀκούετε διαλεγομένου καὶ ἐμαυτὸν καὶ ἄλλους ἐξετάζοντος, ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ, ταῦτα δ' ἔτι ἧττον πείσεσθέ μοι λέγοντι.

Would it be possible to retain an instrumental role for conversation in this passage? This would indeed be very hard as Socrates is not stating that conversation is the greatest way to examine others, or to search for wisdom; it is the greatest good simpliciter. Moreover,if conversation is to be understood only as an instrumental good, in that case, the greatest good would be what it's aiming at, and not itself.[40]

The fact that the instrumental reading cannot be retained unfortunately doesn't mean that the alternative view suddenly becomes clear - so how should we understand the claim that conversation is a final good?

Gonzalez (2009, 141), for example, explains the claim that conversation is the greatest good in the following way : *'[H]uman goodness consists of caring for one's goodness, where this 'care' involves continual examination and discussion of the good. [...] [W]hat makes a human being good is not the final possession of virtue, but caring about virtue. [...] This care [...] is inherently and positively good, so much so indeed that it can by itself make us happy.'* He also shares Reeve's view that expert knowledge of virtues isn't attainable for humans and that forms the basis of his claim that it is caring about virtue that makes us happy. However, it is not clear why caring about virtue and goodness, knowing that we can't possess it, should bring us happiness instead of, say, existential dread.

What I would like to suggest instead is that there is a closer connection between virtue and conversation, namely that interlocutors can display virtue while being in a conversation.

I would like to start with two qualifications that Socrates makes at 38a. When he says that conversation is the greatest good, he adds one, that it is the greatest good for every human being[41], and two, that it's something that should be done every day.

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[40] Reeve (1989, 179) does manage to pick up on the strangeness of this passage and suggests that: 'Repeated examination, living the examined life, helps save him from the hubris of thinking that any of his ethical convictions amount to expert craft-knowledge.' This then enables Socrates to achieve human virtue:
'By means of the elenchus, by living the examined life, we can avoid blameworthy vice by avoiding culpable ignorance and thereby come as close to being virtuous as is humanly possible. We can achieve human wisdom and with it what we might call human virtue.' (Reeve 1989, 150). However his description doesn't sufficiently explain the claim that conversation is the greatest good, as the greatest good under his account is the life of some kind of intellectual modesty. (*Cf.* Gonzalez 2009, 140). Moreover, as Gonzalez (2009, 140) suggests, it is not clear why Socrates would need to be constantly reminded about the limits of human wisdom.

[41] The Greek doesn't state it as clearly as this with Socrates saying 'μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν ὂν ἀνθρώπῳ.' But this seems to imply that it applies to everyone, not just to a or some people.

In the second stage, Socrates' mission seemed to be limited to him - he did mention that others imitated him, but he has never explicitly stated others should be following in his footsteps. The situation seems to be quite different at 38a as Socrates doesn't say that conversation is the greatest good for him, he rather claims that it is the greatest good for a human being. Similarly, he uses this general language when he speaks about unexamined life - the unexamined life is not worth living for humans (38a).

Moreover, Socrates is claiming that conversation is an activity that should be done every day, rather than it being some kind of hobby that one does from time to time, so he seems to be thinking of conversation as a way of life.

Rather than trying to explain away these statements, I would like to explore what the implications would be if we took these statements at their face value. This however doesn't mean that we need to abandon everything that Socrates has said about virtue and goodness and try to find a way of understanding conversation as the greatest good independently of the life of virtue.[42] What we can do is to think about the nature of this activity and to understand it as a very good way, and indeed the best way to employ virtue. This will not make conversation a final good, however it will nevertheless introduce a major departure from the instrumental understanding of conversation in stage two - conversation will not be just a device to obtain knowledge of virtues so that one can then go on and live their virtuous life, it will *be* a virtuous life.

1.9 Conclusion

The most fascinating issue, one that is certainly worth examining, is Socrates' gradual realisation of the value of dialogue. The *Apology* starts with a puzzled Socrates, not understanding the oracle's prophecy and reluctantly deciding to approach different people to find out the meaning of the prophecy. At the end of the *Apology*, we are presented with a very different Socrates, one who claims that discussing virtue is the greatest good for every human being. And even if his view on the role of conversation has evolved between stage two and three,

[42] The debate whether the life of virtue is sufficient for happiness cannot be decided solely by focusing on the *Apology*. However, Socrates does make an intriguing remark at 36d: *'The Olypmian victor makes you think yourself happy; I make you be happy.'* Conversation and happiness seem to be linked.

his actual practice did not. In 38a, Socrates doesn't invite us to rethink his practice and come up with some brand new version of testing others, he instead says that it's what he's been doing all along that should be considered as the greatest good for every man to do every day.

In this Chapter, my aim was to show a transition of Socrates' understanding of the role of conversation. In the rest of my thesis, I would like to address two questions: Firstly, how well do the dialogues fit with this developmental picture presented in the *Apology*, and secondly, can these dialogues give us an indication why did Socrates think that discussing virtue is the greatest good for a human being?

2 COURAGE

2.1 Approaching the *Laches*

We have seen in the previous chapter that the *Apology* presents us with a nuanced account of Socrates' philosophical journey. I argued that Socrates' use of conversation has developed throughout his life. In the first stage, Socrates used conversation to make sense of the prophecy; in the second stage he used it to test others and himself to ensure that no one wrongly thinks that they have knowledge if they in fact lack it and he also used it to gain knowledge himself; in the third stage, Socrates realised the final value of conversation.

In the final section of Chapter I, I suggested that if it's really the case that Socrates underwent a development in relation to his understanding of *elenchus* and realised that conversation is the greatest good, then we need to carefully examine whether we can find any hints that could show us why Socrates would take conversation to be the greatest good. I suggested that a natural way to think about conversation as the greatest good would be to understand conversation as a place where virtues are exhibited by the interlocutors. The goal of this chapter is to do precisely this - to examine what is being said about the nature of courage and to see whether it's possible to connect courage to conversation so that courage is exercised by the interlocutors in it.

The easiest way to proceed would be to look at the definition of courage as presented in the dialogue and apply it to conversation in order to see whether interlocutors could exercise

virtue in a conversation.[43] However, this option isn't available to us as the *Laches* is an aporetic dialogue so no definition of courage is reached. To avoid this, one could say that the aporetic ending only reveals that Laches and Nicias do not possess the knowledge of courage; however, that doesn't mean that Socrates doesn't have his own ideas about the nature of courage. The goal of interpreting the *Laches* would then be to unpack what Socrates *really* thinks, even if he is not willing to share his thoughts with the interlocutors. This option, although resolving the previous worry about the aporetic nature of the *Laches*, also has certain limitations. In Chapter I, I argued that there are good reasons to take the *Apology* as a framework in relation to interpreting Socratic dialogues and we have seen that the *Apology* offers a nuanced understanding of the elenchus and Socrates' philosophical mission. I argued that Socrates isn't doing just one thing throughout his life; he is indeed using *elenchus* for very different purposes at different times. Moreover, if we are to take seriously Socrates' disavowals of knowledge as presented in the *Apology* and, as I argued, his search for wisdom through conversation, then to approach the dialogue to simply obtain Socrates' definition of courage would be misguided as, rather than hiding his knowledge of virtues, Socrates might be genuinely searching for it.

Of course, this doesn't mean that we should automatically treat the *Laches* as a dialogue in which Socrates searches for the knowledge of courage. What it means however is that we must be open-minded when it comes to interpreting this dialogue precisely because Socrates was doing different things at different times. Since the *Laches* will present Socrates as, among other things, searching for wisdom, it will not be possible to simply check what Socrates really thinks about courage and then apply it to conversation. The goal will be to instead look at the clues in Socrates' arguments that might offer us some indication on how he thought about courage.[44]

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the *Laches* represents Socrates' second stage of his philosophical journey and this has implications for the main aim of this chapter - to see in what ways can we think of interlocutors exhibiting courage in a conversation. I argued in Chapter I that it is only in the third stage of his journey that Socrates realises the final value of conversation. This unfortunately means that we will not be able to find an explicit confirmation

[43] Socrates does ask Laches about courage displayed outside of battlefields (191d) suggesting that courage can be exercised in a variety of circumstances.

[44] The language of 'clues' instead of definitions is used by other interpreters (cf. Yonezawa, 2012).

of this value in the *Laches*. However, as I have shown in Chapter I, it is through the activity of conversation that Socrates' realised its special value so we can presume that the *Laches* could be one of these conversations. Moreover, it is important to add that the dialogues are written by Plato and not by Socrates, and so even if Socrates the character might not be explicit about the final value of conversation in the *Laches* (or in fact other dialogues), Plato the author might have left us clues, enabling us to see what made Socrates alter his position on the role of dialogue.

2.2 Laches' understanding of courage

The purpose of the next two sections is to look at the way that Laches and Nicias think about courage and I will then look at what Socrates says about their arguments to locate the kinds of concerns that he has when it comes to thinking about courage. Focusing on what the interlocutors believe, instead of solely looking at what Socrates thinks, stems from my claim introduced in Chapter 1 where I argued that Socrates' disavowals of knowledge are genuine and he uses elenchus to obtain knowledge. What this means is that Socrates is genuinely interested in what the interlocutors think and this in turn informs Socrates' own thinking about virtues. He might, in the end, disagree with their particular claims, or indeed reject their positions altogether, but it seems more than reasonable to think of the interlocutors as providing a frame for discussions of particular virtues. In this section, the aim will be to look at what Laches has to say about courage and to show that for Socrates, courage seems to be some kind of endurance in the face of danger.

The idea that courage is some kind of endurance in the face of danger is introduced by Laches who eventually defines courage as '*a sort of endurance of the soul*'[45] (καρτερία τις τῆς ψυχῆς) (192b).[46] Socrates then asks whether Laches considers any endurance courageous, or only endurance accompanied by wisdom. The thought is that courage is a fine thing and foolish endurance is not fine because foolishness is not a fine thing. This is why Laches then alters his

[45] Unless stated otherwise, I am following Sprague's translation.

[46] This is not Laches' fist definition as his earlier attempts do not satisfy Socrates. His first definition *'if a man is willing to remain at his post and to defend himself against the enemy without running away, then you ma rest assured that he is a man of courage'* (190e) is too narrow according to Socrates, although he doesn't deny that this isn't an instance of courageous behaviour (191a).

definition of courage to wise endurance (192d). However, when he is given concrete examples of courageous behaviour, he will end up favouring the 'foolish' people:

> S: Well, suppose a man endures in battle, and his willingness to fight is based on wise calculation because he knows that others are coming to his aid and that he will be fighting men who are fewer than those on his side, and inferior to them, and in addition his position is stronger: would you say that this man, with his kind of wisdom and preparation, endures more courageously or a man in the opposite camp who is willing to remain and hold out?
> L: The one in the opposite camp, Socrates, I should say. (193a-b)

We can see based on this example that even though Laches earlier accepted that wise endurance is courage, he still believes that the person who doesn't know what's coming is the more courageous one of the two. Socrates then goes through other examples and Laches will consistently confirm his belief that those without skill, when encountering a dangerous situation, are more courageous than the skilled ones. Laches will agree that, in a cavalry attack, those with knowledge of horsemanship are less courageous than those without it and he will agree that those diving down into wells without being skilled are more courageous than those diving with the skill. (193b-c). Socrates will then use these examples to claim that these kinds of endurance are risky, harmful and foolish. He will also get Laches to admit that foolish things aren't fine, while all virtuous things must be fine. And so he will conclude that foolish endurance cannot be courageous. And as we have seen earlier, for Socrates, foolish endurance cannot be virtuous, as virtue is a fine thing.

As a result of this exchange, Laches ends up in the state of aporia: *'I am really getting annoyed at being unable to express what I think in this fashion. I still think I know what courage is, but I can't understand how it has escaped me just now so that I can't pin it down in words and say what it is.'* (194b) as he wants to maintain that those less skilled, not knowing what's coming for them are the more courageous ones, but he at the same time agreed that this sort of behaviour would be foolish, and courage, being a fine thing, cannot be based on foolishness.

For Laches, it then seems that the more one is in danger and decides to endure this danger, the more courageous one is.[47] When it comes to Socrates, he doesn't seem to agree to this suggestion precisely because this would lead to virtuous behaviour that would be considered foolish. However, Socrates never questions the idea that courage has to do with dangerous and risky situations. He might disagree with Laches about what the correct course of action is in some particular cases but all the examples that he provides are clearly connected to dangerous situations.

It is also worth stressing that the idea of courage as endurance in the face of danger is never abandoned by Socrates during the exchange with Laches. Firstly all the examples of courageous situations that Socrates offers to Laches are connected to danger - be it a soldier on a battlefield or a well-diver and what Socrates seems to be interested in is the question of what is the correct course of action in these dangerous situations. Secondly, in relation to endurance, what is being discussed between Socrates and Laches is whether it is *wise* endurance or *foolish* endurance that is courage; the idea of courage being some sort of endurance is never abandoned.[48] Moreover, Socrates' response to Laches' aporia is also very telling: *If you are willing, let us hold our ground in the search and let us endure, so that courage itself won't make fun of us for not searching for it courageously - if endurance should perhaps be courage after all*[49] (194a) and Devereux (1992, 776) correctly points out that *'this is surely a strange thing to say for someone who believes that endurance has no part in a definition of courage'*.

I started this section by claiming that the interlocutors offer a framework for thinking about the issues that Socrates is interested in. And we were able to see that this was the case with Laches who introduced the idea of courage as endurance in the face of danger and Socrates didn't question the thought of courage being concerned with dangerous situations and the thought that it was some kind of endurance. And in the next section we will see that Nicias'

[47] Interestingly, it is not clear whether Laches thinks that fear plays a role in courageous behaviour. He talks about dangerous and risky situations, but he never explicitly talks about fear accompanying these situations. Moreover, when Nicias defends his understanding of courage, he presents the opposing view by using examples in which the individuals do not experience fear as he talks about children and animals '*partaking in boldness and audacity and rashness*.' (197b). This might suggest that Laches thinks about courage along similar lines, as a state or rashness not accompanied by fear.

[48] Devereux (1992, 776) makes the same point: *'Somewhere along the way a mistake has been made, but nothing Socrates says implies that it was a mistake to include endurance in the definition.'*

[49] This passage will play an important role in connecting courage and conversation as conversation is depicted by Socrates as an act of endurance.

understanding of courage will also revolve around the idea of courage being connected to dangerous situations although, we will see that for courageous behaviour, Nicias will require an individual to possess skills relevant to mitigate the risks that accompany situations that individuals find themselves in.

2.3 Nicias' understanding of courage

After Laches fails to define courage, Nicias is asked to help, and we will see that the framework set up by Laches will be used by Nicias as well and the question of what is the best course of action in a dangerous situation will be the central focus for the rest of the dialogue. We will see, however, that Nicias has a more nuanced view compared to Laches as he will argue that there are cases where a situation is too dangerous to be worth enduring.

Nicias defines courage as *'some kind of wisdom'* (σοφίαν τινὰ) (194d) and the majority of his exchange with Socrates (and with Laches) will be an attempt to explain what he means by wisdom. Nicias specifies his definition with the claim that courage is knowledge of fear and hope (τὴν ἀνδρείαν ἐπιστήμην φῂς δεινῶν τε καὶ θαρραλέων εἶναι) (196d). Socrates then unpacks this definition and argues that if courage is knowledge of fear and hope, then it cannot understand *'simply future goods and evils, but those of the present and the past and all times, just as is the case with other kinds of knowledge. [...] [courage] would be the knowledge of practically all goods and evils put together.'* (199c-d) Socrates will conclude that if this is so, then courage would be the whole of virtue, rather than, as previously agreed, a part of virtue. And precisely because they originally agreed that courage is a part of virtue, Nicias' definition seems to fail, at least according to Socrates, as one of its consequences is that it would be the whole of virtue.

As readers, we can clearly see that Nicias's account of courage should be taken as an alternative to Laches's failed definition. Laches, after being pressed by Socrates, admits that he takes those without knowledge to be more courageous than those with it. Nicias, contra Laches, starts his conversation with Socrates by defining courage as wisdom. But even if these two accounts seem to be in opposition to each other, it is not clear what precisely is the alternative picture that Nicias introduces. When it comes to Laches, it is clear that for him, the soldier whose *'willingness to fight is based on wise calculation because he knows that others are coming to his aid and that he will be fighting men who are fewer than those on his side, and inferior to*

them, and in addition his position is stronger' (193a-b) is less courageous that the one in the opposite camp. But it is not clear at all what Nicias thinks about this example when he defines courage as knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful.[50]

On one hand, he might be agreeing with Laches that it is the soldier who doesn't know *'that others are coming to his aid and that he will be fighting men who are fewer than those on his side, and inferior to them, and in addition his position is stronger'* (193b), is more courageous. And by defining courage as the knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful, he can claim that those inferior soldiers could still be enduring with wisdom precisely because they possessed the knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful. On the other hand, Nicias could be disagreeing with Laches altogether and by defining courage as the knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful, he could be claiming that it is those soldiers with the tactical advantage who are more courageous.

Gerasimos Santas (1971) famously claims that Nicias' arguments introduced a distinction between technical knowledge, or skill and moral knowledge. This distinction enables him to look at the earlier example in a new light:

> The cases that Socrates described for Laches contain information only on the first sort of knowledge, the agent's estimate of what the situation is and what are his chances of success; we are told nothing about how the agents conceived the values of that for the sake of which they were enduring and the values of alternatives to enduring. But clearly information on these points will make a difference to our judgement whether the agent's endurance is wise or foolish. (Santas 1971, 194)[51]

As a consequence, this would enable Nicias to argue that either of those two soldiers may be courageous, as we shouldn't be looking at whether they are skilled to determine their courage, but we should look instead at the values for which they are fighting. Nicias' view would then be different from Laches' precisely because it focuses on a different type of knowledge when

[50] Even if Nicias' position is refuted, it is nevertheless worth looking at his claim that courage is knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful in a greater detail as it will play a crucial role in the next section where I will compare courage and conversation.

[51] Devereux (1992, n19) helpfully summarises this type of position: *'a courageous person must know when a risk is worth taking or when it is worthwhile enduring, and this presupposes a deep understanding of what is of value in human life - that is knowledge of good and evil.'*

determining whether an individual is courageous, essentially redefining the meaning of wise endurance.[52]

What I would like to suggest is that this picture doesn't seem to be an accurate representation of Nicias' position. I will show that he still puts a great amount of value on the knowledge of the relevant skills and he would argue that it is the soldier with the strategic advantage who is more courageous. We will be able to see that for Nicias, the success condition for courageous behaviour is not limited to doing something for the right reason, but also managing to complete the action in question.

When it comes to the discussion of Nicias' conception of courage, the first half of the *Laches* is often overlooked. There, Nicias and Laches each give a speech focusing on the usefulness of the skill of fighting in armour. Nicias argues that it is indeed an important skill for Lysimachus' and Melesias' sons to acquire and he provides a number of reasons in support of his position. First, it improves their bodies[53] (182a), second, it is advantageous when it comes to fighting in line with others (182a), third, it's greatly beneficial in one-on-one combat (182b), fourth, it arouses a desire to learn the science of tactics, and finally, it's a pathway to acquiring *'the whole art of the general'* (182b).

Towards the end of his speech, Nicias will also claim that *'this knowledge will make every man much bolder and braver in ward than he was before'* (182c) and it is safe to assume that by 'this knowledge', Nicias is referring to fighting in armour that he mentioned in the previous sentence. The claim then seems to be that because these men are skilled in this type of fight, they will become better at fighting on a battlefield, and so possessing this skill makes one more courageous. Now, Nicias is not claiming that the possession of this skill is a necessary and sufficient condition of courage, however, even the weaker claim that its possession makes one more courageous is crucial for our understanding of Nicias' overall position.

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[52] Vlastos (1994) correctly points out that the language of moral vs technical knowledge wasn't available for Plato. However, he does offer a solution to this in an attempt to defend Santas' overall picture (1994: 111*ff*). He does so by introducing Plato's own distinction between great and small things in life. He will go on to argue that, among other things, military success doesn't count as a great thing and so shouldn't be a part of the equation when trying to determine whether an individual is courageous.

[53] Nicias also adds that '*this art will give a man a finer looking appearance*' and he will '*appear more frightening to the enemy*' (182d)

Earlier, I suggested that one way to understand Nicias' position on courage as knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful is to take this knowledge to be of the moral kind. This then meant that one's skills wouldn't be relevant when determining whether one is courageous or not as the central focus would be on whether one is acting for the right set of (moral) reasons. However, Nicias' speech concerning fighting in armour does suggest that this picture is too simplistic as he clearly thinks about skill as being relevant for courageous behaviour.

Another passage worth investigating is Nicias' description of Socrates' elenchus. I will use this passage in the next section to show that the language used in it should invite us to think about the possibility of conversation being an act of courage. However, even without that argument in front of us, we will be able to see in what way Nicias thinks about the success conditions of any actions.

In his speech, Nicias explains that he is familiar with what Socrates does and stresses that whenever a conversation starts about a certain topic, it will always end up being a conversation about interlocutors' lives and Socrates' real goal is actually to examine these (187d). However, Nicias expresses willingness to undergo this as he knows that it will be beneficial for him instrumentally because he will obtain wisdom (188b). What we can see here is that Nicias' willingness to continue the discussion is based on the fact that he knows that it will be beneficial for him. However, he also mentions the fact that it is Socrates' specific method that facilitates this benefit. So, Nicias recognises the importance of Socrates' method in this endeavour as well as recognising the benefit of the outcome of the conversation, and crucially, he seems to base his willingness to participate in the discussion on these two aspects.

This passage then presents Nicias as someone who is very much interested in the outcome of an activity and the skill accompanying it. And when we apply this kind of thinking to the earlier example of two soldiers on a battlefield, one with the skill of fighting and the knowledge that others are coming to aid, and another without this knowledge and skill, it indeed seems that it's not just the fact that the soldiers are fighting for the right cause that is part of the equation when considering whether their action is courageous, but also whether they have the skill required to succeed and whether they do indeed succeed on the battlefield.

We do get a very similar story in the final section of the dialogue where Nicias' position on courage is being discussed. Here, Nicias introduces the notion that skill on its own isn't sufficient to make one courageous:

> Do you suppose that when a man's recovery is more to be feared than his illness, the doctors know this? Or don't you think there are many cases in which it would be better not to get up from an illness? Tell me this: do you maintain that in all cases to live is preferable? In many cases, is it not better to die? (195c-d)

The argument seems to be that the skill must be accompanied by another type of knowledge - the knowledge of fearful and hopeful - for an action to be courageous.[54] Without it, Nicias tells us, the doctor isn't in a position to determine whether someone's recovery is to be feared or hoped for. However, it is important to stress that Nicias never questions the usefulness of skills. If his argument is that skills must be accompanied with another type of knowledge for an action to be courageous, it doesn't follow that skills are of little or no use. Moreover, the following passage seems to place a closer connection between skill and this other type of knowledge:

> Socrates: [I]n the case of the affairs of war, the art of generalship is that which best foresees the future and the other times. [...] as being better acquainted with both present and future in the affairs of war. (198e)

This passage is a part of the argument in which Socrates tries to show that if courage is knowledge of present goods and evils, it will necessarily have to be knowledge of past and future goods and evils. In this particular quote, Socrates claims that a general is acquainted with the present and future in the affairs of war and therefore can best foresee the future. In other words, the general's expertise and experience enables him to determine the outcome of any situation relating to war and presumably, this general will be able to alter the military strategy to ensure that a positive outcome is reached.

It is however important to stress that Nicias never claims that the general automatically possesses the type of knowledge of good and evil that is required for courage.[55] Socrates uses the

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[54] This is also supported by Socrates' response: *'Then this knowledge is something possessed by very few indeed if, as you say, neither doctor nor the seer will have it and won't be courageous without acquiring this particular knowledge'* (196c-d).

[55] That being said, we can assume that the art of generalship has its own particular goods and evils that generals must seek, namely good and successful and evil or poor military strategies.

example of the general to show that the skill of generalship uses the knowledge of past and present to predict the future and applies the same principle to knowledge of good and evil - namely that this knowledge must encompass past, present and future goods and evils. Nevertheless, the use of this example and the fact that it is introduced as a useful skill complements passages that I discussed earlier - Nicias' speech claiming that certain skills make one more courageous, or Nicias' description of elenchus where he acknowledges Socrates' method as a particularly good way of ensuring a beneficial outcome.[56]

What should we then make of Nicias' claim that certain skills make one more courageous? What is his conception of courage? Based on the passages we have discussed, it seems that for one to be courageous, one must possess the knowledge of good and evil. However, this knowledge must be accompanied by a certain skill to ensure that a courageous action is achieved. So, according to Nicias, knowing how to fight does not make us more courageous because through it, we can obtain knowledge of good and evil, but because it helps us achieve that courageous action.

And if we return to Socrates' example of two soldiers, one knowing that he is in an advantageous situation, and the other one, fighting against the odds, it seems that for Nicias, it is the soldier with the knowledge that he is stronger and in a strategically superior situation, who is more courageous, provided that he is fighting for the right reasons, as this knowledge of his advantage gives him a greater chance of actually performing the action.

I have already mentioned the fact that Socrates found a contradiction in Nicias' account of courage as he originally took it to be a part of virtue but it turned out to be the whole of virtue. However, there is another line of attack that Socrates raises. His worry, in light of what Nicias says, is that his conception of courage is incredibly rare to possess:

> Then this knowledge is something possessed by very few indeed if, as you say, neither doctor nor the seer will have it and won't be courageous without acquiring this particular knowledge. (196c-d)

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[56] Interestingly, at 197, Nicias seems to be talking about knowledge of the fearful and the accompanying skill separately: *'I think that rashness and courage are not the same thing. My view is that very few have a share of courage and foresight, but that a great many, men and women and children and wild animals, partake in boldness and audacity and rashness and lack of foresight.'*

The same point is repeated by Socrates a bit later as well:

> SOCRATES: Then it is obvious, Nicias, that you do not regard the Crommyon sow as having been courageous. I say this not as a joke, but because I think that anyone taking this position must necessarily deny courage to any wild beast or else admit that some wild beast, a lion or a leopard or some sort of wild boar, is wise enough to know what is so difficult that very few men understand it.[57] (196e)

We are now in position to understand why Socrates would be worried about this. We have seen that for Nicias, to be courageous, one must have knowledge of past, present and future goods and evils *and* have the necessary skill that ensures that one's actions are achieved. The soldier in a battle must know that his action will contribute to a future good, he must know that he is fighting for the right cause, and on top of that, he needs to know that he will prevail because of his skills.

Now, the fact that something is very demanding shouldn't automatically discredit its validity. Indeed, I have suggested in the previous Chapter that Socrates realised that expert knowledge of virtue might not be achievable by humans and the best that one can hope for is obtaining, what Reeves calls, human knowledge.[58] So rather than rejecting Nicias' account, Socrates might be probing to what extent humans are able to achieve that level of knowledge.

Moreover, this push against perfect, god-like courage does seem to reveal another worry that can be raised against Nicias' account. Even though Laches' account of courage was proved unsatisfactory, one of its redeeming features is that it seems to pick up on our intuition that there is danger in courage, that we are risking something. If we compare to what Nicias seems to be suggesting, namely that courage is only reserved for the gods, as it requires knowledge of all the past, present, and future goods, and evils, then it's not clear whether there is any place left for risk and danger. Imagine a superhero figure with an incredible strength and with a great

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[57] This is something that Laches picks up as well by saying that this wisdom is only reserved to the gods (196a). Socrates doesn't challenge Laches on this point and he might have a good reason for not doing so.

[58] Yonezawa (2012, 652) also makes this point very clearly: *'In the Apology, dying Socrates says, of himself and of the Athenians who will continue living, that 'which of us goes to the better is known to no one, except the gods' (42a3-5). With this remark, Socates states that the knowledge of future good and evil belongs to the gods, not men. Again, the knowledge of all good and evil would be the whole of virtue. In the Apology (23a-b), Socrates denies that he the other humans know 'something fine and good' (21d4) or the most important things (22d7) while sarcastically referring to the sophists who claims to have 'a wisdom more than human' (20e1). Thus again, Socrates seems to believe that the knowledge of virtue belongs to the gods, not men.'*

amount of knowledge - could we meaningfully say that they participated in courage as there was no real danger or risk involved? To be fair to Nicias, it is not clear whether he would attribute courage to these types of people; after all, when he is arguing in favour of learning to fight in armour, his main point is that it will be advantageous in battles, not that one will become invincible. On the other hand, if we look at Nicias from a historical perspective, especially his reliance on seers in the Athenian expedition to Sicily, we might think that he was the sort of person who was willing to delay the attack until he was given assurances about his win from the seers. Regardless of what Nicias' true position was, the worry that if there is nothing at stake for an individual, that they are not facing any dangers, then it would make little sense to call their action courageous seems to still hold. We will see that this idea will become more prominent in Section 2.5 where I will argue that the reason why interlocutors can exhibit courage in conversation is precisely because there is something at stake for those involved in it.

2.4 Courage and conversation

The central claim of this chapter is to show that interlocutors can exhibit courage in conversation. This, as I mentioned in the introduction of this Chapter, is a part of my wider thesis that conversation is to be understood as a final good. In the *Apology*, Socrates claimed that conversation is the greatest good and I suggested that the best way to understand this claim is to see conversation as a place for exhibiting virtuous behaviour. The role of this Chapter is to look at the way that Socrates thinks about courage, about the types of arguments and claims that he is considering when thinking about courage and then to see whether these types of considerations can be applied to conversation in any meaningful sense.

We will be able to see that just as courage was understood as an endurance of the soul in the face of danger, conversation itself will be able to be described in the same manner. We will see that Socratic questioning will require endurance from the interlocutors and due to its nature it is something which puts lives at stake. And we will see that just as the question of the role of skill and knowledge in relation to courage was raised by Nicias, we will be able to ask the same question in relation to conversation. We will be able to see that, on multiple occasions, Socrates will change his argumentative strategy to ensure that the conversation reaches a successful outcome - similarly to what one would expect from a good general on a battlefield.

Before we explore these ideas in greater depth, it is important to add that this connection between courage and conversation isn't hidden in the *Laches* such that one would need a great deal of detective skills to locate the connections that I introduced in the previous paragraph. In fact, Socrates himself talks about enduring in the conversation with Laches, and Nicias' speech on the nature of elenchus uses the same kind of language as is used to describe courage. This means that any attempt to connect courage and conversation is not an artificial one, one that simply isn't present in the text. At the same time, it is not the case that courage in conversation is a central theme of the dialogue, Socrates doesn't claim at the end of the dialogue that they have been exhibiting courage throughout their conversation. This however, shouldn't worry us either since, as I have argued in the previous Chapter, it's not the case that Socrates has always been aware of the final value of conversation and the close connection between virtues and conversation. Instead, I argued, it is through the practice of conversation that Socrates realised the final value of conversation. What this means for the Laches is that we shouldn't expect the *Laches* to have the value of conversation and its connection to virtues as a central topic of the dialogue, instead we should expect to find hints that eventually led Socrates to the realisation concerning the final value of the dialogue - and that is precisely what we can find in the *Laches*.

2.5 Conversation as endurance in the face of danger

I argued in Section 2.3 that for Laches, endurance in the face of danger is a central feature of courage and this is indeed something that Socrates or Nicias never attempted to refute. The question that I would like to address now is whether we can talk about conversation being some kind of endurance in the face of danger in any meaningful sense and whether the *Laches* itself has something to say about that.

The best place to start is Nicias' description of Socratic elenchus and in this passage we will be able to see that the language that he uses to describe elenchus is remarkably similar to the endurance language used to describe courage by Laches:

> You don't appear to me to know that whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and associates with him in conversation must necessarily, even if he began by conversing about something quite different in the first place, keep on being led about by the man's

> arguments until he submits to answering questions about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto. And when he does submit to this questioning, you don't realize that Socrates will not let him go before he has well and truly tested every last detail. I personally am accustomed to the man and know that one has to put up with this kind of treatment from him, and further, I know perfectly well that I myself will have to submit to it. I take pleasure in the man's company, Lysimachus, and don't regard it as at all a bad thing to have it brought to our attention that we have done or are doing wrong. Rather I think that a man who does not run away (μὴ φεύγοντα) from such treatment but is willing, according to the saying of Solon, to value learning as long as he lives, not supposing that old age brings him wisdom of itself, will necessarily pay more attention to the rest of his life. For me there is nothing unusual or unpleasant in being examined by Socrates, but I realized some time ago that the conversation would not be about the boys but about ourselves, if Socrates were present. As I say, I don't myself mind talking with Socrates in whatever way he likes—but find out how Laches here feels about such things. (187d-188c)

Regardless of whether this is an accurate depiction of Socratic *elenchus*, the language of putting up with Socrates' questioning and not running away is strikingly similar to the way that courage is described later in the dialogue. Just two Stephanus pages later, Laches offers a definition using a remarkably similar language: *'if a man is willing to remain at his post and to defend himself against the enemy without running away* (μὴ φεύγοι)." (190e)[59]

The language of endurance is also used by Socrates when he is asking Laches to endure with him in their search of the definition of courage:

> SOCRATES: But are you willing that we should agree with our statement to a certain extent? LACHES: To what extent and with what statement? SOCRATES: With the one that commands us to endure (καρτερεῖν). If you are willing, let us hold our ground in the search and let us endure (καρτερήσωμεν), so that courage itself won't make fun of us for not searching for it courageously—if endurance (καρτέρησίς) should perhaps be courage after all. (194a)[60]

[59] It is worth noting that even though Socrates thinks that this isn't a satisfactory definition of courage, he does so because he thinks that it's too narrow (191a). In other words, he never questions the idea that remaining at one's posts without running away isn't an example of courageous behaviour.

[60] An interesting aspect of this passage and what immediately follows is Socrates' use of hunting language - Socrates will be inviting Nicias to join the hunt so that they all can catch whatever they are searching for. Compare this to the final section of the *Laches* where the conversation seems more akin to a combat between Laches and Nicias.

The language in this passage is remarkably similar to Laches' definition of courage as willingness to remain at one's post and to Nicias' language that he used to describe the *elenchus*.[61] Here, Socrates tells Laches to hold their ground and endure in their search for courage.[62]

We have seen from these passages that in the *Laches*, the language of endurance is used to describe conversation. However, it is not yet clear why we should understand conversation as endurance in the face of danger.[63] Furthermore, Nicias, in his description of the elenchus, instead of using the language of risk and fear, instead uses the language of pleasure to describe his experience with Socrates:

> I take pleasure in the man's company, Lysimachus, and don't regard it as at all a bad thing to have it brought to our attention that we have done or are doing wrong. [...] For me there is nothing unusual or unpleasant in being examined by Socrates. (187e-188b)

This is a rather unusual comment to make given that only a couple of lines earlier, Nicias was describing the elenchus as something that must be endured and one shouldn't run away from it. So, is it the case that Nicias is contradicting himself by saying that *elenchus* is both something to be feared and pleasant? And, more generally, is there any meaningful way to think about conversation as a dangerous and risky action?

To address the worry about Nicias' inconsistency, it is worth going back to his views on the role of knowledge in courageous behaviour. I have argued that for Nicias, the relevant skills and the knowledge of good and evil are used to mitigate risk in dangerous situations and applied to his exchange with Socrates, he finds it pleasurable precisely because he is familiar with

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[61] Socrates uses the language of courage in this way in several other places in the dialogues: In the *Theaetetus*, he says: 'So have the pluck to stand by your agreement' (ἀλλὰ θαρρῶν ἔμμενε τῇ ὁμολογίᾳ) 145c4. Similarly, in the *Charmides*: *"Then start over again, Charmides," I said, "and look into yourself with greater concentration, and when you have decided what effect the presence of temperance has upon you and what sort of thing it must be to have this effect, then put all this together and tell me clearly and bravely, what does it appear to you to be? "He paused and, looking into himself very manfully, said, "Well, temperance seems to me to make people ashamed and bashful, and so I think modesty must be what temperance really is"* 160d-e.

[62] We can even read the ending of the dialogue as an invitation to endure even further as the *Laches* ends with Lysimachus telling Socrates to come to his house the next day to continue their discussion (201b).

[63] Gonzalez (2014, 55) claims that *'Socratic dialogue is courage in the sense of confronting the constant danger of proving ignorant.'* While he is on the right track, proving that one is ignorant doesn't seem to be a sufficient reason for dialogue being courage. I can certainly think about many cases where my being proven ignorant wouldn't spark any fear, for example if someone showed me that I was ignorant about the nuances of the off-side rule in football. We will see that the danger seems to arise only in cases where the potential ignorance is connected to one's life - it takes courage for Nicias and Laches to discuss whether learning how to fight in armour is beneficial precisely because, as generals, proving ignorant about this topic could have unwelcome consequences.

Socrates' method and he thinks that undergoing this examination is worthwhile. However, the fact that Nicias is aware of the benefits of the elenchus doesn't mean that others won't find it a fearful experience. Therefore, what Nicias seems to be saying is that while the *elenchus* might seem like a fearful experience for some, this is not the case for him personally as he is aware of Socrates' skill of examination and he knows that the outcome of this examination will be beneficial for him.

Compared to Nicias however, Socrates seems to be much more careful when it comes to conversation and its connection to risk and fear. At 186d, he tells Laches and Nicias:

> They would never have given their opinions so fearlessly on the subjects of pursuits which are beneficial and harmful for the young if they had not believed themselves to be sufficiently informed on the subject. (186d)

This passage comes after the initial discussion concerning learning to fight in armour [refs] and Socrates rightly says that both generals were very keen to offer their point of view, however as we know, they ended up defending the opposite sides - while Nicias was very much in favour of learning this skill, Laches was sceptical about the benefits of learning it. So, given that they argued for opposite positions, one of the two generals was most likely incorrect, however, both of them were very keen to offer their advice. It seems then, that Socrates is warning against this overly keen approach since offering wrong advice might have harmful consequences for others. Socrates then seems to present their conversation as something where there is a lot at stake, namely the future of Melesias' and Lysimachus' sons. When we compare this idea of conversation having consequences for other people to Nicias' attitude towards conversation, his summary doesn't seem to be concerned with anyone else apart from himself - he does mention that *he* will benefit from it but he doesn't seem to think of others when explaining the nature and the possible benefits of the *elenchus*.[64]

Moreover, apart from warning about the possible harm that conversation might do to others, Socrates seems to worry about the interlocutors themselves and the danger that they are in:

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[64] Interestingly, one can find parallels between conversation and courage in relation to other people. Just as we have seen that conversation can affect others, in the same way, the decisions that generals have to make in a battle affect their soldiers.

> Then I don't suppose, Laches, that according to your statement you and I are tuned to the Dorian mode, because our deeds are not harmonizing with our words. In deeds I think anyone would say that we partook of courage, but in words I don't suppose he would, if he were to listen to our present discussion. (193e)

This passage comes after Laches' realisation that he is not able to define courage and Socrates seems to be warning him that this does have an effect on their lives. It is important to remember that it was Laches who stated earlier that he enjoyed talking to those whose deeds match with what they say and he added that he knew Socrates from when they '*shared a common danger*' (189b) and could vouch for his *'valour'*. By saying that their deeds do not match with their words, Socrates' worry at 193e then seems to be that if Laches doesn't know what courage is, then how can he vouch for Socrates' valour?[65] What if, instead of participating in courageous behaviour, they participated in cowardice? If conversation is to be understood as a place where one's life is being tested, which is indeed something that Nicias acknowledges in his speech, then it seems understandable that conversing with Socrates might be something of which the interlocutors could be afraid.

We can find a similar argument in terms of why would one fear an encounter with Socrates in the *Symposium* in Alcibiades' speech:

> [The great orators] never upset me so deeply that my very own soul started protesting that my life—my life!— was no better than the most miserable slave's. And yet that is exactly how this Marsyas here at my side makes me feel all the time: he makes it seem that my life isn't worth living! [...] He always traps me, you see, and he makes me admit that my political career is a waste of time, while all that matters is just what I most neglect: my personal shortcomings, which cry out for the closest attention. So I refuse to listen to him; I stop my ears and tear myself away from him, for, like the Sirens, he could make me stay by his side till I die. Socrates is the only man in the world who has made me feel

[65] The claim *'In deeds I think anyone would say that we partook of courage, but in words I don't suppose he would, if he were to listen to our present discussion.'* is not as straightforward as one might think as it is not immediately clear to which deeds Socrates is referring. He might have in mind the deeds that Laches was talking about at 189b and under that reading, the disharmony would be about their past deeds on a battlefield and their present discussion. Alternatively, the deeds might refer to their present inquiry. Socrates, just a couple lines later, says that they should endure with their search, *'so that courage itself won't make fun of us for not searching for it courageously'* (194a). On this reading, the claim would be that they are searching courageously, however they are unable to find a definition of courage. It is important to add that these are not two opposing readings and one doesn't exclude the other. Socrates might be indeed referring both to their present inquiry and their past actions when talking about their deeds.

> shame— ah, you didn't think I had it in me, did you? Yes, he makes me feel ashamed: I know perfectly well that I can't prove he's wrong when he tells me what I should do; yet, the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: [...] My whole life has become one constant effort to escape (φεύγω) from him and keep away, but when I see him, I feel deeply ashamed, because I'm doing nothing about my way of life, though I have already agreed with him that I should. (*Sym.* 215d-216c)

Firstly, it is worth noting that just like Nicias' speech, Alcibiades uses the language of battle to describe his encounters with Socrates - Socrates entraps him, Alcibiades then wants to escape him and at the same time, he is willing to stay by Socrates' side until he dies. Moreover, similarly to Nicias' speech, Alcibiades describes conversations with Socrates as being concerned with life and he mentions both personal shortcomings and his professional choices that Socrates is interested in.

However, we are presented with a more detailed explanation of why the elenctic experience is one that might induce fear in the interlocutor. We learn that Socrates is interested in one's past and current life and Alcibiades' anxiety stems from the fact that it's one's shortcomings that are the focus of the discussion - both personal and professional. Therefore, one aspect of the anxiety is connected to the fact that Socrates' focus is on an interlocutor's past shortcomings. As we have seen, this aspect of conversation is also present in the *Laches* as Socrates at 193e warns Laches about the possible disharmony between their current discussion and their past courageous actions, suggesting that what they thought were acts of courage were in fact acts of cowardice.

Alcibiades' description goes even further as it helps us to understand why this focus on past shortcomings might be anxiety inducing and something to be feared. Alcibiades tells us that Socrates makes him feel as if his life is not worth living and his life seems incredibly miserable. And if we believe that one's happiness and good life is connected to one's actions, which is indeed something that Socrates seems to suggest elsewhere,[66] then what Socrates gets Alcibiades to realise is that he hasn't lived a good life - and that seems like a claim that one might be too afraid to acknowledge.

[66]Most notably at *Ap.* 29d *ff.*

In addition to this, another aspect of this fear is the fact that the past is generally unchangeable. What I mean by this is that if someone realises that their past action has been a mistake, then one's ability to rectify it might be either entirely impossible or incredibly hard to achieve. If we take as an example Laches and Nicias, we can easily imagine a situation where they originally believed that they made a correct and courageous decision, even receiving major praise for it, only later realising through Socrates' questioning that their action wasn't virtuous and there is nothing they can do to revert it. Or, imagine Laches telling Melesias' son not to learn the skill of fighting in armour and learning a couple of years later that Melesias' son was killed on a battlefield precisely because he wasn't able to successfully defend himself against the enemy. These examples show why one could fear an encounter with Socrates and why one would need courage to endure it - it is because it might reveal our past shortcomings, it might tell us that we were mistaken about our actions and there is potentially nothing that we could do about it.

One might, however, reject this pessimistic view of Socratic elenchus as a constant reminder of one's past errors and offer instead a more optimistic and forward looking reading of the elenchus. This is precisely what Nicias' description of the elenchus seems to do - he does talk about the examination of one's life, but Nicias seems to place more stress on the future and on the fact that as a result of the elenchus, one will pay more attention to one's future learning. And, as I have suggested earlier, this is precisely why Nicias finds Socrates' company pleasurable. This could then mean that there actually isn't anything to fear for an interlocutor; the interlocutor should simply focus on the future benefits of his encounter with Socrates.

I believe there are two reasons why this understanding of the elenchus doesn't represent the full picture of the nature of *elenchus*. First, I suggested earlier that one of the features of the past is that often, one cannot undo what has already happened. I used the example of Laches wrongly suggesting to Melesias' son that fighting in armour is a worthless skill that should not be pursued and the son dying as a consequence of that. If it is the case that Socrates is interested in testing one's life, then even if one is focusing on the future benefits of the elenchus, that doesn't change the fact that those past actions will be brought into focus.

Second reason why the optimistic understanding of the elenchus doesn't seem to capture what Socrates seems to be doing is related to Alcibiades' awareness of his own failure to change his course of life:

> [T]he moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways [...] I feel deeply ashamed, because I'm doing nothing about my way of life, though I have already agreed with him that I should. (216b-c)

Alcibiades seems to be well aware that the outcomes of his discussions with Socrates rarely translate into changing his way of life and he tells us that this creates a great deal of tension and shame for him. Therefore, rather than looking forward to Socrates' questioning, Alcibiades seems to find the prospect of another encounter with Socrates dreadful and certainly something that requires courage. Now, this might be understood more as an insight into Alcibiades' psychological state, rather than an overall point about the nature of elenchus. Why shouldn't we simply reject Alcibiades' account in favour of Nicias'? After all, Nicias seems to be the more 'reasonable' interlocutor out of the two interlocutors featuring in the *Laches*, the one who values knowledge and is well acquainted with Socrates. However, the situation is slightly more complicated even when it comes to Nicias as Plato seems to be deliberately creating tension between what Nicias the character says and Nicias' actual failure as a general at Syracuse.[67] Surely, as readers we should be thinking about Nicias' failure during the expedition to Sicily and his decision to follow the advice of the diviners instead of following military procedure when we are reading the *Laches*. And with this fatal failure in mind, we should be asking whether Nicias actually paid close attention to what Socrates was saying, especially when he said at 199a that the *'general should command the seer'* and not the other way around.

While I suggested that Nicias' overly positive picture of the *elenchus* might be too simplistic, it would be a mistake to disregard it altogether. We have just seen that we often cannot change the past, and in many cases, we are not able to change ourself, and it is these things that make elenchus a fearful experience; it is nevertheless important to retain the positive aspect of it. If elenchus' only role was to delve into the past, then it would be similar to a painful medical procedure that doesn't treat anything. However, the goal of the *elenchus* is always beneficial and Nicias is correct to claim that he will get something out of it. However, what he doesn't seem to fully acknowledge is that the process of getting there is a fearful one as it is based on examining one's life.

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[67] *Cf.* Thuc 7.50.4

I would like to suggest that there is another way of thinking about conversation and danger - one which is more directly connected to a threat to one's physical life. This is best exemplified in the *Apology*; there, the picture is very clear - Socrates is in grave danger as the jury might sentence him to death because of his profession. Socrates even uses the battle analogy to claim that when one is put on a battlefield by someone, it would be cowardly to flee this battle (*Ap.* 28d *ff*). In this example, conversation is clearly taken to be a dangerous act, it is something where there is a lot at stake for Socrates - namely his actual life.

However, in this case, the role of conversation doesn't seem to play an essential role in terms of this being an act of courage. The source of danger comes from the Athenians and is not connected to the act of conversation itself. We can think of other similar examples which illustrate the same idea - be it a decision to stand up to a bully and to talk to them about their behaviour or a decision to approach someone to ask them for a date. Both of these actions pose a certain risk to the agent - the risk of getting beaten up in the first case, or the risk of being rejected in the second case and we would naturally think that these are situations in which courage can be displayed. However, the danger of conversation in these situations is, similarly to the case of Socrates in the Apology, extrinsic to the conversation; it is the circumstances that make it a danger. This is not to say that these situations shouldn't be considered as acts of courage, indeed it would be a grave mistake to claim that Socrates' willingness to continue his mission despite the danger of being sentenced to death wasn't an act of courage. What I would like to suggest, however, is that these situations differ substantially from the cases that Nicias and Alicibiades describe as the danger in the elenctic conversation is internal to it, it is the fact that Socrates is interested in testing one's life through conversation that makes it a dangerous act.

2.6 Conversation and knowledge

In the previous section, my aim was to explore the idea of conversation being endurance in the face of danger and my motivation for this was to show that courage can be displayed in conversation. We have seen that one of the themes introduced in the *Laches* was the idea of courage being some kind of endurance in the face of danger and by thinking about conversation

in the same way, I tried to show that there is a structural similarity between the way that we think about courage and the way that we think about conversation.

However, I suggested that the *Laches* introduces another theme in the discussion - knowledge and its relation to courage. This theme was introduced by Laches who attempted to defend a view that the less knowledgeable and less skilled one is, the more courageous one is. Socrates wasn't persuaded by this as he was worried that if this was the case then courage would be a foolish thing. Nicias then introduced a definition of courage which was explicitly connected to courage as he defined it as knowledge of the fearful and hopeful. In section 2.4 I argued that for Laches, courageous behaviour must be accompanied by a relevant skill and with knowledge that the outcome of the action will be good. And one of Socrates' worries about Nicias' account was that to possess this level of knowledge seems too demanding and unachievable for humans.

Similarly to the previous section, the purpose of this section is to explore whether there is any structural similarity between the way that we can think about courage and its connection to knowledge and the way that we can think about conversation and its connection to knowledge. And just like with the previous section, the reason for doing this will be to show that there are structural similarities between courage and conversation which should support my overall claim that courage can be displayed in conversation.

There is, of course, a very straightforward way of connecting conversation with knowledge as Socrates is trying to see whether the interlocutors possess knowledge and he is also interested in obtaining it. However, my focus in this section will be on something else, as my goal will be to see whether it is possible to think about the skills and the knowledge of outcomes in the context of conversation in any meaningful way. We have seen that for Nicias, skills played an important role in courageous behaviour as possession of these was supposed to ensure that an action will be successful. Moreover, Nicias was also focusing on the idea that courageous action must be aiming at some future good and the role of the skills was to ensure that this would happen. So, is it possible to think about conversation in the same manner? Do we know that the outcome of conversation will be good and are there any skills needed to ensure that conversation will be a successful one?

I would like to approach this question by returning once more to Socrates' worry which he raised against Laches' understanding of courage as endurace of the soul. Socrates raised an objection that some cases of endurance might simply be too foolish to attempt and it would lead to inevitable failure - if someone is diving into wells without any skill, it's not clear that that sort of behaviour should be considered courageous. And once the discussion moved to Nicias' understanding of courage, it was precisely his insistence of the importance of skills that was a response to Socrates' worry about foolish endurace - skills, Nicias believes, mitigate the likelihood of failure.

I would like to propose that we can raise these worries about conversation as well. It is definitely not far-fetched to think that certain conversations are 'foolish' and enduring them wouldn't move the discussion forward in any meaningful way. And at the same time, we can definitely think of many devices that one can use to ensure that conversation will move on in a constructive manner. Unpacking this ideal fully is beyond the scope of this Chapter and for my present purposes, I would like to focus on the way that Socrates conducts his conversation with Laches and Nicias. We will see that, much like a good general, he seems to think about the best way to proceed with the conversation and, on multiple occasions, he will change the strategy to ensure that the conversation is moving in the right direction.

The first strategic decision in terms of how to proceed with the conversation actually comes from Laches, who suggests at 180c that Socrates should join the discussion. Laches suggests that since Socrates is *'always spending his time in places where the young engage in any study or noble pursuit of the sort [Melesias and Lysimachus] are looking for'* (180c), he should become a part of the conversation. Later in the conversation, when Laches and Nicias end up disagreeing over the benefits of learning to fight in armour, Lysimachus suggests that Socrates should cast the deciding vote (184e). Socrates decisively rejects this as the correct strategy and suggests instead that they should find out whether any of them is an expert as one should listen to what experts think, rather than what the majority believes (184d *ff*).

Importantly, the *Laches* presents Socrates not only as someone who makes these strategic decisions about how to best conduct their enquiry, it also presents him as someone clearly thinking about the importance of ensuring that the best strategy is chosen:

> S: The question is really, I suppose, that of whether your sons turn out to be worthwhile persons or the opposite—and the father's whole estate will be managed in accordance with the way the sons turn out. M: You are right. S: So we ought to exercise great forethought in the matter. M: Yes, we should. S: Then, in keeping with what I said just now, how would we investigate if we wanted to find out which of us was the most expert with regard to gymnastics? (185a-b)

This passage comes directly after Socrates' explanation why they should listen to experts instead of the majority and Socrates is explicitly warning the interlocutors that they should be more careful about the best way to proceed. In the current passage, he explains that this is because the topic that they are considering is an important one; they are, after all, being concerned with the future of Melesias' and Lysimachus' sons. As I suggested earlier, this shows Socrates as someone who is clearly interested in the question of what is the best way to proceed in a conversation as he seems to be aware that an incorrect strategy might put the lives of the two sons in danger.

There are two further passages where Socrates changes the course of the discussion. At 189e, Socrates suggest a better course of action for their enquiry:

> Let us do what Lysimachus and Melesias suggest, Nicias and Laches. Perhaps it won't be a bad idea to ask ourselves the sort of question which we proposed to investigate just now: what teachers have we had in this sort of instruction, and what other persons have we made better? However, I think there is another sort of inquiry that will bring us to the same point and is perhaps one that begins somewhat more nearly from the beginning. (189e)

Compared to 154e where Socrates was arguing against the approach to decide based on what the majority thinks, here, Socrates isn't as critical to Nicias' and Laches' suggestion, nevertheless he believes that a better course of action is available to them.

And another strategic decision can be found at 194c where Socrates decides to ask Nicias for help:

> SOCRATES: Then, if you agree, let's also summon Nicias here to the hunt— he might get on much better. LACHES: I am willing—why not? SOCRATES: Come along then, Nicias, and, if you can, rescue your friends who are storm-tossed by the argument and find themselves in trouble. (194c)

Here, once Socrates refuted Laches' position by showing him that some of his accounts of courage would count as foolish endurance and foolish things cannot be virtuous, Socrates decides to invite Nicias to help them with their search.

All of these passages show that Socrates is sensitive to the way that the conversation is being conducted to try to ensure that a positive outcome will be reached. And just as we can ask whether an unskilled person diving into a well isn't simply a case of foolishness and rashness, we can ask the same about the conversation itself. Wouldn't it be a foolish decision to base the future of the two sons based on what the majority thinks? Or wouldn't it be foolish for Socrates to continue his discussion with Laches even after Laches' confusion became apparent?

Since we have seen Socrates attempting to mitigate the possible failure of the discussion by changing the way that it's being conducted, we might think that his own position on courage is similar to Nicias', who also believes that skills are used to mitigate the dangers of courageous action. This might be the case to a certain degree, however, we shouldn't forget that Socrates also raised the demandingness objection against Nicias' account of courage and I would like to show that the same idea could be used in relation to conversation.

We have seen that for Nicias, courageous action was only such action which was accompanied by the relevant skill and knowledge of its goodness. In response to this, Socrates raised a worry that courage understood in this way might be unachievable by humans and only reserved for the gods. He explained that to be courageous, we would need to possess knowledge of past, present and future goods and evils and that is something that simply wasn't possible for human beings. Moreover, I suggested that this overly demanding account of courage seems to remove something important that many might consider an essential part of courage - a certain degree of vulnerability and the idea that something is at stake for the person involved in courageous action. But if one knows that one will prevail as one possesses god-like knowledge, then is there any room left for courage? This led to my conclusion that courageous actions is to be found between two extremes - on one hand, we should agree with Socrates' objection to Laches that foolish and rash behaviour which will not achieve anything doesn't seems courageous, and on the other hand, courageous action which is too safe doesn't seem to be courageous any more.

The purpose of this Chapter is not to pinpoint where exactly courage lies, instead I would like to suggest that this sort of dilemma can be used to think about the nature of conversation as well. When we are thinking about Socrates' mission, should he only enter those conversations where he is absolutely certain about the outcome and he is in full control of every step of the conversation? Or should he enter any conversation, regardless of the circumstances and enduring it just for the sake of endurance? We should be able to see that both of these options do not represent what Socrates does or what he should do. He certainly doesn't possess the god-like knowledge of all goods and evils and he cannot predict whether his encounters will be of any value to him or to the people around him. He doesn't fully control the interlocutors, he doesn't know whether they will engage with him and he certainly doesn't know what they will reveal to him. At the same time, as we have seen, he is not rash in his approach to conversation and he changes his strategy to try to achieve that the conversation develops in a positive way.

2.7 Socrates' courage

In sections 2.5 and 2.6, I argued that conversation should be understood as a place for interlocutors to display courage. I did this by looking at two main themes introduced in the *Laches* - courage as endurance in the face of danger and courage as knowledge of the fearful and hopeful and I argued that these themes can be applied to the way that we think about conversation. What is not yet clear is whether Socrates can also display courage while conversing with others. While we have seen that there is quite a lot at stake for those examined by Socrates, either because conversation has effect on the lives of others, or because conversation can be used as a tool for realising one's past mistakes, do these considerations apply to Socrates as well? I would like to propose that both of these do.

In Section 2.5, I argued that conversation should be understood as a risky enterprise for the interlocutors since their discussion might put other lives at stake. This was most evident from 186d:

> Socrates: They would never have given their opinions so fearlessly on the subjects of pursuits which are beneficial and harmful for the young if they had not believed themselves to be sufficiently informed on the subject. (186d)

Socrates' caution stemmed from the fact that he was well aware that the outcome of the discussion would have consequences for the way that the two sons would be educated. Their lives were at stake both figuratively and literally: literally, because one of the topics discussed was whether learning to fight in amour was beneficial, and wrong advice could have fatal consequences, and figuratively because the outcome of the conversation could determine whether the lives of the two sons would become worthwhile. It is important to add, however, that this is something that Socrates is responsible for as well as he is one of the participants in the discussion.

Another example of other lives being at stake and conversation being a risky enterprise can be found in the *Protagoras*. There, Hippocrates can't hide his excitement to finally see Progratoras, hoping to obtain wisdom (*Prot.* 310d). Socrates agrees to accompany Hippocrates and to talk to Protagoras. This dialogue then starts with Hippocrates on one hand, eager to learn from a famous sophist, and Socrates on the other hand, wary of the dangers that the sophists represent due to their lack of knowledge. The rest of the dialogue could therefore be understood, among other things, as Socrates' attempt to show Hippocrates not to seek knowledge by studying with Protagoras. Once again, Hippocrates' future is at stake and Socrates enters the conversation with Protagoras not knowing its outcome; he doesn't know how Protagoras will react, what he will say and whether he will be willing to engage with him. Just like with the earlier example of the two sons, conversation is not risk-free as Socrates doesn't fully control Protagoras and cannot predict whether he will be able to successfully demonstrate Protagoras' lack of knowledge.

Moreover, I would like to suggest that it is the lives of the interlocutors themselves that Socrates is responsible for. As we have seen in Chapter 1, one of Socrates' aims during his life was to reveal to the interlocutors that they are mistaken about their claims to knowledge and to get them to care about the state of their souls and truth. While this is certainly a worthwhile endeavour, it is by no means clear that Socrates will succeed at all times. Not only does Socrates not know whether the interlocutors will engage with him, whether he will be able to be persuasive in his arguments, he also doesn't know whether his examination will not make the interlocutors angry and even less willing to participate in any attempts to make them care for their souls. Now, the situation in the *Laches* is slightly different as he is asked to join the

conversation, however the same worry remains and he doesn't know what Laches' and Nicias' reaction will be to the outcome of their conversation.

I believe that it is not just other lives that are at stake for Socrates, but his own life is at stake as well. In 2.5, I argued, by focusing on Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*, that engaging in a conversation with Socrates takes courage because Socrates' constant examination might lead to interlocutors becoming aware of their past wrongs and constantly being reminded about them and there is no reason to deny that this applies to Socrates himself; after all, it is Socrates who warns Laches at 193e that their words do not seem to match with their previous deeds.

One might say that this doesn't apply to all conversations that Socrates is having as the courageousness of Socrates' past actions is being questioned only because he knows Laches and so Socrates' life is at stake only incidentally. However, this worry doesn't seem to hold if we look closer at the way that Socrates introduces the idea of their past actions being put in doubt. The passage at 193e where Socrates introduces the distinction between their *logos* and *ergon* comes after a rather lengthy passage where Socrates and Laches discuss the question of what is courage. From 193a to 193d, the question of whether foolish endurance can be virtuous is being discussed and once Socrates and Laches realise that foolish things cannot be virtues, Socrates then suggests that their words and deeds are in disharmony. In other words, it is not the case that Socrates is examining Laches' particular past act of courage to then proclaim that their actions and deeds are not in tune. Rather, Socrates is examining the question of what is courage in general terms and the outcome of that discussion makes him realise that their deeds and words are not matching. So, Socrates seems to have this ability to reflect on the general and theoretical discussion and to connect it with his past, therefore being open to the possibility of realising his own past mistakes.

2.8 Conclusion

Before I move on to discuss the virtue of piety, I would like to think about the *Laches* in the wider context of my thesis. I set out in Chapter 1, that I would like to use the *Apology* as an interpretative framework for the other dialogues and I established three separate stages of Socrates' philosophical journey. I argued that Socrates only realised the final value of

conversation in the third stage and for most of his life, he treated conversation as an instrumental good. I concluded Chapter 1 by asking whether the dialogues fit into this picture. And I believe that the content and the drama of the *Laches* indeed both validate and illustrate the argument set out in Chapter 1.

Firstly, we were able to see in this Chapter, that the *Laches* is an *aporetic* dialogue and, at the same time, that Socrates is using it in order to find the definition of courage. We can therefore conclude that the conversation in the *Laches* has an instrumental value. At the same time, Socrates never explicitly says that conversation is the greatest good, nor that it is something to be done for its own sake. However, not only have we seen that there was a structural similarity between the discussion of courage and conversation, Socrates alluded to the possibility of exhibiting courage in conversation. Now, this is absolutely crucial because it enables us to see Socrates as reflecting on the nature of conversation which should then help us to explain his realisation that conversation is a final good.

3 PIETY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this Chapter is to argue that, just as in the cases of courage and temperance, the virtue of piety can be displayed in conversation. At first glance the application of piety to conversation doesn't seem to make much sense. This is mainly because piety as a virtue seems to be concerned with the relation between gods and men, and so to call interlocutors during a conversation pious might be rather surprising. Conversation, after all, seems to be a purely human transaction, with one person giving account to another person. To establish a connection between piety and conversation, we will look at the *Euthyphro* to learn that Sorcrates thinks about piety as a service to the gods and we will look at the *Apology* to learn that Socrates frames his mission as a service to the gods. To find piety will then mean to identify what it is in Socrates' examination of others that the gods find desirable, and to do so, we will look into the *Phaedo*.

We have seen in Chapter 1 that the *Apology* presents us with a nuanced account of Socrates' philosophical journey. I argued that Socrates' use of conversation has developed throughout his life. In the first stage, Socrates used conversation to make sense of the prophecy; in the second stage he used it to test others and himself to ensure that no one wrongly thinks that they have knowledge if they in fact lack it and he also used it to gain knowledge himself; in the third stage, Socrates realised that conversation is an end in itself.

Now, the *Euthyphro* is no different from *Laches* in some sense, as we won't be able to find a clear definition of piety in this dialogue. So, just like the *Laches*, it is an *aporetic* dialogue and so rather than searching for a specific definition of piety, we will be looking at ways that Socrates seems to think about piety. In the second part of this Chapter, I will focus on Socrates' mission being presented as a service to the gods in the *Apology*. While many commentators correctly say that Socrates' mission is a manifestation of piety,[68] the argument in support of this claim needs careful consideration as it's not immediately clear on what grounds should someone who spends his life testing others be taken as a pious person.

3.2 Piety in the *Euthyphro*

The conversation between Socrates and Euthyphro occurs just before the events described in the *Apology*. Socrates, awaiting his trial, is approached by Euthyphro who, we learn, is planning on prosecuting his father (4b). Despite the fact that this is considered impious by the many, Euthyphro claims that he is indeed doing something pious and that his knowledge of piety is superior to the majority of people (4e). And given that Socrates will be tried for impiety, he asks Euthyphro to teach him about this virtue (5d).

Euthyphro's initial attempt to define piety as '*what I am doing now*'[69] (5d) is quickly dismissed as there are many many other pious actions and Socrates asks Euthyphro about *'the form* (εἶδος) *itself that makes all pious actions pious'* (6e). Euthypro then defines piety as *'what is dear* (προσφιλὲς) *to the gods'* (7a), however Socrates is not happy with this definition as he gets Euthyphro to admit that gods sometimes disagree between each other (7e). As a result of this, Euthyphro will redefine piety as what is dear to all the gods (9e) and this will introduce the so called Euthyphro's dilemma by Socrates: *'Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved by the gods?'*[70] (10a).

After Euthyphro realises his inability to propose a satisfactory definition of piety (11b), Socrates suggests that there is possibly a connection between piety and justice by asking

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[68] For example McPherran 1992, Brickhouse & Smith 2004.

[69] Unless stated otherwise, I am following Grube's translation revised by Cooper.

[70] ἆρα τὸ ὅσιον ὅτι ὅσιόν ἐστιν φιλεῖται ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν, ἢ ὅτι φιλεῖται ὅσιόν ἐστιν;

Euthuphro whether he thinks that' a*ll that is pious is of necessity just*'[71] (11e). With this help, Euthyphro defines piety as '*the part of the just that is concerned with the care of the gods'* (τὸ περὶ τὴν τῶν θεῶν θεραπείαν). Socrates rejects this definition since caring for someone implies benefiting and making someone better which would make piety to be the part of justice concerned with making the gods better (13d). Socrates' worry seems to be that humans, being inferior to the gods, could hardly have the capacity to improve the gods. Based on this criticism, Euthyphro claims that piety is rather a sort of care that slaves take of their masters, or in Socrates' words, a service (ὑπηρετική) of men to the gods (13d) and he then asks Euthyphro to clarify what it is that the gods achieve by having us as their servants.[72] Euthyphro's answer will again be quite vague as he claims that they will achieve '*many fine things*' (13e) and he eventually specifies what he means by saying that piety is *'knowledge of how to say and do what is pleasing to the gods at prayer and sacrifice in order to preserve both private houses and public affairs of state'* (14b). Socrates will go on to describe this understanding of piety as *'knowledge of how to sacrifice and pray'* (14c), *'knowledge of how to give to, and beg from, the gods'* (14d) and a *'trading skill between gods and men'* (14e).

This amended definition of piety seems to resolve the problem that the earlier definition of piety as a care for the gods had, as it no longer entails the idea of gods being improved by humans. Instead, it is humans who are improved by piety, since, as we have just seen, Socrates describes this account of piety as a trading skill or knowledge of how to beg from the gods and Socrates explicitly claims that there is no good that humans don't receive from the gods (15a). Even if it is no longer gods who are being improved by humans, according to Euthyphro, they still benefit from their relationship with humans. After all, this aspect of piety is needed to capture the idea of piety being some kind of exchange. Euthyphro therefore explains that the gods receive various gifts from humans, namely honour, reverence and anything else that pleases them (15a). This statement will get Euthyphro into trouble yet again as he will admit that we should give the gods whatever is dear to them. And, as we have seen, piety understood as what is

[71] I do believe that this suggestion is deliberate. NB that even in the Protagoras, Socrates is arguing that piety is the same as courage.

[72] Socrates: *'Tell me then, my good sir, to the achievement of what aim does service to the gods tend?* (ἡ δὲ θεοῖς ὑπηρετικὴ εἰς τίνος ἔργου ἀπεργασίαν ὑπηρετικὴ ἂν εἴη) [...] *What is that excellent aim* (ἔργον) *that the gods achieve, using us as their servants?*' 13e.

dear to gods has already been refuted as a definition of piety and so the dialogue ends in an aporia with Socrates suggesting to investigate once again from the beginning (15d), a suggestion that will be rejected by Euthyphro who instead decides to abandon the conversation.

Even if the *Euthyphro* is an aporetic dialogue and no definition of piety is reached, there are two passages that are often used by scholars[73] to determine how Socrates seems to understand piety. As I mentioned in the introduction, it would be a mistake to attempt to attribute a final definition of piety to Socrates, however that doesn't mean that Socrates does not have at least some beliefs about the nature of piety and one such belief can be detected from his suggestion at 11e that piety is a part of justice and the fact that Socrates is doing so here should make us think about the role of this suggestion to take piety as part of justice. The context of the suggestion is important, and there is good reason to believe that Socrates was actually offering a helping hand to Euthyphro. Just before Socrates' suggestion to think of piety as part of justice, Euthyphro reached the state of aporia, not being able to define what piety is, and admitting that whatever he proposed got refuted by Socrates. It is also worth keeping in mind that Socrates' discussion with Euthyphro starts with a real-world problem - Euthyphro's prosecution of his own father and so any attempt to derail the discussion even further by suggesting unlikely or purely wrong ideas about the nature of piety would not be helpful in any way to determine whether Euthyphro's decision to prosecute his father was indeed *correct.*[74]

With this in mind, we can presume that Socrates finds plausible the idea of piety being a part of justice. However, there is another passage which might also give us an insight into the way that Socrates thinks about piety. When Euthyphro introduced the idea of piety as a service to the gods, we saw that this definition had two aspects - human beings benefiting from the gods, and the gods benefiting from humans. However, Socrates' criticism focused solely on the latter aspect and Euthyphro failed to establish in what way the gods benefit from piety and the idea of piety as service to the gods that benefits humans wasn't put into question.

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[73] For example McPherran 1992, Weiss 1994, Brickhouse & Smith 2004

[74] While it is correct to say that Socrates doesn't start his conversation with Euthyphro by explicitly stating that one of his worries is that Euthyphro might be doing the wrong thing in prosecuting his father, when we look at the ending of the dialogue, Socrates explicitly warns Euthyphro that prosecuting his father without having a proper grasp of piety would be a mistake and so we can say that one of Socrates' aims was to make sure that Euthyphro doesn't do the wrong thing. Moreover, the fact that Socrates suggests that piety is a part of justice is relevant in the context of Euthyphro prosecuting his father - if his action will end up being impious, it will also be an unjust action.

In order to obtain a better grasp of what it means to be in service of the gods, it is worth looking at the examples used by Socrates and Euthyphro. The term service - ὑπηρετική is introduced at 13d where Euthyphro specifies that when he said that piety is a care of the gods, he means a kind of care that slaves take of their masters (13d). As a result of this, Socrates becomes interested in the *ergon* that the gods are aiming at - and tries to get Euthyphro to specify what is this *ergon* that the humans are aiding the gods to achieve. We have already seen that Euthyphro will fail to provide a satisfactory answer and will instead focus on piety as some sort of exchange between humans and gods. However, it is important to stress that the idea of humans aiding the gods in some *ergon* is not put into question. While it is true that Euthyphro fails to specify what this *ergon* is, Socrates never questions the idea itself and therefore it is safe to assume that Socrates thinks about piety in terms of a service of humans to the gods aimed at some *ergon*.

McPherran (1992, 229) helpfully summarises what Socrates thinks about piety in the following way:

> (1) Pious acts are acts that please the gods,[75] (2) they are species of just acts (3) whose performance is a service to the gods (4) which assists them with their work productive of a good result and (5) that all these elements exist in the context of a limited agnosticism that precludes their specification in full detail[76]

McPheran calls this reading of the *Euthyphro* a cautiously constructivist reading and the reason for his cautiousness is motivated by Socrates' disavowals of knowledge and more specifically his claim in the *Apology* that he doesn't possess any wisdom more than human (20d). The idea then

[75] In his account, McPherran only lists claims 2-5 and then adds that he would include claim 1 in the full account.

[76] Reeve (1989, 64 n74) argues that 'service to the gods' cannot be the definition or part of the definition that Socrates is searching for. First, he argues that it is inconsistent with Socrates' claim that determining the *pankalon ergon* holds the key to the definition. While this criticism applies to those who believe that 'service to the gods' is the full definition of piety, it doesn't do much damage to McPherran's account as he includes *pankalon ergon* in his account. Second, Reeve argues that when Socrates says at 14b that Euthyphro's account of piety could have been much briefer, Euthyphro in his account that he gives at 14b doesn't include the phrase *huperetike theois*. So, Reeve argues, if we wanted to understand piety as service to the gods, we wouldn't be able to take Socrates' remark seriously. McPherran's view of this passage is that what Socrates is seeking is Euthyphro's admittance of his own ignorance. So, when Socrates says at 14b that Eutyphro's account could have been much briefer, what he means is that Euthpro should have said that he didn't have an account of piety. Third, Reeve argues that piety understood as service to the gods is inconsistent with Socrates' wider view that virtues are identical to knowledge. Again, this is an issue only if 'service to the gods' was the full definition of piety, which it isn't for McPherran.

is that to fully know the gods' *ergon*, one would need to possess divine wisdom and as that is not something that Socrates has, a full grasp of piety is beyond his reach.[77]

As we are able to see, while the *Euthyphro* gives us a good indication about how Socrates thinks about piety, this account isn't sufficient for us to connect piety to conversation, which is the overall aim of this Chapter. To do so, I will move my focus onto the *Apology* as in it, Socrates frames his mission as a service to the gods.

3.3 Socrates' service in the *Apology*

The *Apology* is often discussed by interpreters in tandem with the *Euthyphro* when it comes to determining what piety is as Socrates refers to being in the service to the gods on several occasions. Apart from a certain thematic connection between the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*, it is also worth noting that there is a dramatic connection between these two works; in fact they are dramatically sequential. Socrates' discussion with Euthyphro happens just before his trial and the fact that he conducts a discussion about the nature of piety just before his trial where he is accused of impiety, during which he also claims that he is in the service of the gods should give a good reason to look at the *Apology* together with the *Euthyphro* when determining the nature of piety. We will be able to see that the *Apology* sheds more light on several aspects of the account of piety[78] introduced in the previous Section. In relation to (3), Socrates will claim that he is in service to the gods; in relation to (4), Socrates will say that the gods care about humans; and finally, in relation to (5), Socrates will deny the possession of divine knowledge.

Let's then start with the *Apology* 23b, where Socrates confirms that he is indeed in service of the gods:

> This man among you, mortals, is wisest who, like Socrates, understands that his wisdom is worthless. So even now I continue this investigation as the god bade me—and I go

[77] It is hard to determine whether Socrates also thinks that others cannot possess this divine wisdom. He certainly claims that *he* doesn't possess it and based on his encounters with others, he says that many are mistaken about their claim to wisdom. However, there is a possibility that some individuals might possess it. In fact, Socrates admits that the poets and the seers say many fine things that are divinely inspired (*Ap.* 22c) and one can indeed read the beginning of the *Euthyphro* as Socrates' genuine attempt to determine whether Euthyphro himself possesses this divine wisdom.

[78] (1) Pious acts are acts that please the gods, (2) they are species of just acts (3) whose performance is a service to the gods (4) which assists them with their work productive of a good result and (5) that all these elements exist in the context of a limited agnosticism that precludes their specification in full detail.

> around seeking out anyone, citizen or stranger, whom I think wise. Then if I do not think he is, I come to the assistance of the god and show him that he is not wise. Because of this occupation, I do not have the leisure to engage in public affairs to any extent, nor indeed to look after my own, but I live in great poverty because of my service to the god. (τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ λατρείαν)[79]

We can learn two things from this passage - that Socrates believes that he is in service of the gods and that this service consists in showing those who are not wise that they are not wise. The same theme can be also found later at 28d where Socrates claims that he would obey the god in his quest rather than the men of Athens:

> [W]herever a man has taken a position that he believes to be best, or has been placed by his commander, there he must I think remain and face danger, without a thought for death or anything else, rather than disgrace. It would have been a dreadful way to behave, men of Athens, if, at Potidaea, Amphipolis and Delium, I had, at the risk of death, like anyone else, remained at my post where those you had elected to command had ordered me, and then, when the god ordered me, as I thought and believed, to live the life of a philosopher, to examine myself and others, I had abandoned my post for fear of death or anything else. [...] I differ from the majority of men, and if I were to claim that I am wiser than anyone in anything, it would be in this, that, as I have no adequate knowledge of things in the underworld, so I do not think I have. I do know, however, that it is wicked and shameful to do wrong, to disobey one's superior, be he god or man. [...] Men of Athens, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey (πείσομαι) the god rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy, to exhort you and in my usual way to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: 'Good Sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul?

This passage shares some of the characteristics with the previous passage as Socrates claims again that the gods ordered him to examine others and himself. And while Socrates never explicitly uses the word service in this passage, the use of the battlefield imagery does fit very well with the idea that obeying one's superior essentially means being in their service. Indeed, if we replaced

[79] It should be noted that the Greek term for service used in this passage differs from that used in the Euthyphro. Whereas Socrates uses ὑπηρετική throughout the *Euthyphro*, in this passage, Socrates uses λατρεία.

the commander-soldier imagery with slave-master imagery used in the *Euthyphro*, the sense of the passage would remain unchanged.

This passage also offers us further insight into the nature of Socrates' service as we learn that Socrates' goal is to ensure that people care about wisdom, truth and the best possible state of their souls. If it's the case that Socrates is obeying the gods' command and what he is doing is ensuring that others care for wisdom, truth and their souls, it follows that it is the gods who want people to care about these things.

To complete this picture, at 31a, Socrates adds that the reason why the gods ordered him to examine others:

> Another such man will not easily come to be among you, gentlemen, and if you believe me you will spare me. You might easily be annoyed with me as people are when they are aroused from a doze, and strike out at me; if convinced by Anytus you could easily kill me, and then you could sleep on for the rest of your days, unless the god, in his care for you, sent you someone else (εἰ μή τινα ἄλλον ὁ θεὸς ὑμῖν ἐπιπέμψειεν κηδόμενος ὑμῶν). That I am the kind of person to be a gift of the god to the city you might realize from the fact that it does not seem like human nature for me to have neglected all my own affairs and to have tolerated this neglect now for so many years while I was always concerned with you, approaching each one of you like a father or an elder brother to persuade you to care for virtue.

In this passage, Socrates tells us that the gods sent him to examine others because they care about humans. If we read this passage in connection with the previous one, the picture that we get is that the gods want people to care about wisdom, truth, and their souls and this idea of the gods caring about humans is briefly mentioned in the *Euthyphro* as well, when Socrates says at 15a that there is no good that humans don't receive from the gods. We have seen in Chapter 1 that wisdom, truth and a good state of soul play an important role in human happiness and so we can say with great degree of certainty that the gods indeed care about human happiness and that this is why they sent Socrates to examine others and himself.

To return to the account of piety established in the Euthyphro, these three passages that I have discussed shed more light on two aspects of the account: that piety is a service to the gods and that pious acts help the gods with their work productive of a good result. We saw that the language of giving commands and obeying mirrored closely the language of master and slave

imagery used in the *Euthyphro*. We also learnt that the service in question was examining others. Importantly, Socrates also provided us with an indication of the god's ergon that Socrates is helping to achieve as we learned that the gods care about human happiness.

In the three passages that I have just discussed, Socrates' account of his mission revolved around the idea of examining himself and others to make others realise that they lacked wisdom and to make them care about it. However, in Chapter 1, I argued that Socrates' mission isn't uniform and that there are three distinct stages of his journey. In the first stage, Socrates is approaching others to make sense of the prophecy, in the second stage, he is approaching others to examine them in order to make them care about wisdom, truth and their souls and to obtain knowledge himself, and in the third stage he realises the final value of conversation. Based on the three passages discussed above, should we conclude that Socrates was pious only during the second stage of his journey? I would like to argue that this is not the case and that piety can be found in all three of the stages.

In Chapter 1, I used the following passage to argue that Socrates has eventually realised the final value of conversation:

> If I say that it is impossible for me to keep quiet because that means disobeying (ἀπειθέω) the god, you will not believe me and will think I am being ironical. On the other hand, if I say that it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for men, you will believe me even less (38a).

However, this passage seems also to be relevant to our present investigation concerning piety. Socrates' claim is that there are two reasons for his inability to 'keep quiet' - first, because if he did so, we would be disobeying the gods, and second, because conversation is the greatest good for humans. We have already learned that for Socrates all good comes from the gods and they indeed care about humans, and so if conversation is the greatest human good, then it follows that participating in this kind of conversation is a service to the gods and therefore an act of piety.

A similar situation arises when we consider the first stage of Socrates' journey - his attempt to make sense of the prophecy:

> When I heard of 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; what then does he mean by saying that I am the wisest? For surely he does not lie; it is not legitimate for him to do so." For a long time I was at a loss as to his meaning; then I very reluctantly turned to some such investigation as this; I went to one of those reputed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I could refute the oracle and say to it: "This man is wiser than I, but you said I was." (21b)

One might think that Soctates' decision to question the prophecy and to try to refute it is inconsistent with pious behaviour. However, as I showed in Chapter 1, this kind of questioning of prophecies is used as an interpretative device to make sense of them and indeed inquiring into the meaning of the prophecies was expected.[80]

Still, one could argue that in this first stage, Socrates is not in service of the gods as the purpose of Socrates' testing people was different in the first stage compared to the second stage. In the second stage, he was approaching others to ensure that they care about wisdom, truth and the best possible stage of their souls, however this wasn't the case in the first stage. In it, Socrates was approaching others in order to make sense of the prophecy and it seems that he wasn't particularly concerned about the souls of those people. However, this argument only works if we limit gods' *ergon* to caring about humans by the means of Socratic *elenchus*. We have seen that Socrates acknowledges the limits of human wisdom and so placing limits onto what the gods desire would make little sense and there is no reason to deny that the gods might care about Socrates specifically and they used the Delphic prophecy for him to discover the nature of his mission.

So far, we focused on Socrates' claim that he is in service to the gods, and we explored what gods' ergon meant in the context of the *Apology*, namely caring about humans and these two ideas were a part of the definition of piety that I introduced earlier. However, the *Apology* also sheds some light on the final aspect of this definition: '*that all these elements exist in the context of a limited agnosticism that precludes their specification in full detail.* (McPherran 1992, 229)' By 'elements', McPherran's definition is relating to the following four aspects of

[80] I used the example of Herodotus blaming Croseus for failing to inquire into the prophecy, resulting in his defeat: *"As to the oracle, Croesus had no right to find fault with it: the god had declared that if he attacked the Perians he would bring down a mighty empire. After an answer like that, the wise thing would have been to send again to inquire which empire was meant, Cyrus' or his own. But as he misinterpreted what was said and made no second inquiry, he must admit the fault to have been his own"* (Herodotus 1.91-92).

piety: (1) Pious acts are acts that please the gods; (2) they are species of just acts; (3) whose performance is a service to the gods ; (4) which assists them with their work productive of a good result.

Now, claiming that these four elements are subject to 'a limited agnosticism doesn't mean that these might turn out to be incorrect descriptions of piety. Instead, we should understand this limited agnosticism as suggesting that Socrates will not be able to provide the full explanation of these elements. So, while Socrates believes that continuing in his mission is something that pleases the gods, and he claimed on multiple occasions in the *Apology* that the gods care about us, this doesn't mean that he has a full understanding of the gods' nature and what they find pleasing. He does indeed tell us about his lack of divine knowledge on multiple occasions in the Apology - at 19b *ff*, Socrates vehemently denies the accusation raised against him that he *'busies himself studying things in the sky and below the earth'* (19b) and at 29d, he claims that he has '*no adequate knowledge of things in the underworld.'* He also famously proclaims in the last sentence of he *Apology*:

> Now the hour to part has come, I go to die, you go to live. Which of us goes to the better lot is known to no one, except the god. (42a)

While it is true that Socrates quite often talks about this lack of knowledge, not only in the *Apology* but also in other dialogues, these three passages differ in one aspect as they explicitly refer to the knowledge of the gods[81] and Socrates' ignorance of it. Since it is the case that to understand piety, one must understand the gods' *ergon*, but understanding this would count as knowledge of the gods, then Socrates's knowledge of piety will always be limited.

The goal of this section was to show that the *Apology* complements and expands on the discussion of piety in the *Euthyphro*. We have seen that Socrates describes his mission as a service to the gods while at the same he expressed agnosticism toward the knowability of the gods. We also learned that the gods care for us and Socrates' service consists in ensuring that others care about virtue. Now, the goal of this chapter is to investigate whether piety can be exhibited by the interlocutors in a conversation and in one sense, the link between conversation and virtue has been established as soon as Socrates stated that he is in service of the gods. If it is the case

[81] Interestingly, while at 19b and 29d, Socrates denies knowledge of the gods, at 42a, he denies knowing what the gods know.

that the gods want humans to care about virtue and Socratic elenchus is a way to achieve that, then Socrates is indeed participating in a pious activity.

However, this explanation doesn't seem satisfactory. First, from the account presented both in the *Apology* and the *Euthyphro*, it is not clear why the gods would care about our wellbeing. While Socrates certainly says that they do care about us, he doesn't offer any proper explanation. Some commentators suggest, perhaps correctly, that the gods are probably wholly good and that is why they care about us and while this certainly seems reasonable,[82] however, Socrates doesn't draw an explicit inference from the gods' goodness to their caring for humans in the *Apology* or in the *Euthyphro*.[83]

Second, it is unclear why the gods chose elenchus as a method for ensuring that humans care about virtue. It is worth keeping in mind that it is through examining others that Socrates discovered the meaning of the prophecy and he continued using this method in his other encounters to ensure that Athenians cared about virtue. But is there something special about this method? Couldn't the gods use another device to ensure that humans care about virtue - they could have used a *daimon* to serve as a guide to the lives of humans or indeed used an altogether different device to achieve this.[84]

The second half of this chapter will address these two points by looking at the *Phaedo*. I would like to propose that the discussion of the nature of the soul and more precisely Socrates' claim that reason is the divine element in humans will help us answer both of these points.

3.4 Piety in the *Phaedo*

So far, my main focus in finding a connection between piety and conversation was the *Apology* and the *Euthyphro*. We've seen that Socrates thinks that approaching others and *'making logoi'*[85] with them, testing and examining both himself and the interlocutors is

[82] *Cf.* Vlastos 1991 or McPherran 1992. Vlastos correctly points out that Socrates' criticism of Euthyphro's initial definitions of piety suggest that he doesn't share the anthropomorphic conception of the gods with Euthyphro.

[83] One option would be to look at the *Timaeus*, a dialogue which describes the gods in great detail. However, there are two issues with that - first, there isn't any dramatic connectedness between the *Timaeus* and the *Apology*, and second, the main speaker of the *Timaeus* is not Socrates.

[84] It is worth saying that the gods do use other means of achieving their goals - for example, the Delphic prophecy or Socrates' daimon. Moreover, Socrates' claim in the *Apology* that the poets and the seers often say divine things seems to suggest that they can also be used as a device to guide humans.

[85] τοὺς λόγους ποιεῖσθαι (*Ap.*38a)

something that the gods want him to do. What Socrates presents then, is an idea that taking care of one's soul and searching for wisdom is somehow important to gods. The question then is, what precisely is this connection between taking care about one's soul and the gods? Now, it would be incorrect to blame Socrates for not dealing with the question in the *Apology* as the purpose of his speech was indeed quite different. However, I will show that we can find a more complete answer in the *Phaedo*.

Even though the main purpose of the *Phaedo* is for Socrates to argue for the immortality of the soul[86], there are parts of the dialogue that can help us see what would make conversation pious and dear to gods. I will focus on two passages - Socrates' explanation of this thesis that philosophy is a practice for dying, and his third argument for the immortality of the soul. My aim will be to show that the practice of conversation can be considered something divine.

One could raise a worry that the *Phaedo* is a fundamentally different dialogue compared to the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology* and therefore any attempts to read them together would be controversial. And while it is the case that there are differences between these three works, there is a dramatic connectedness between them - Socrates's conversation with Euthyphro is happening just before the trial that is described in the *Apology* and, following the death sentence, the *Phaedo* depicts Socrates' final moments on Earth. Moreover, there is also a thematic connectedness between these three dialogues as all of them deal with the divine - the *Euthyphro* is a dialogue concerned with the nature of piety, the *Apology* presents Socrates as someone in service to the gods and, as we will see, the *Phaedo* will be exploring the connection between the soul and the divine.

Finally, the *Phaedo* also uses the language of serving the gods. At the beginning of this dialogue, Socrates discusses whether suicide is permisible (61e *ff*) and he claims that we are the gods' possesion and it wouldn't be right to kill ourselves *'before a god had indicated some neccesity to do so'*[87] (62c). This claim is then turned against him by Simmias who asks *'Why should truly wise men want to avoid the service of masters better than themselves, and leave them easily?'*[88] (63a) suggesting that by being willing to die, Socrates is abandoning his service to the

[86] For a summary of the arguments for the immortality of the soul, see Bostock 1986.

[87] Unless stated otherwise, I am following Grube's translation revised by Cooper.

[88] τί γὰρ ἂν βουλόμενοι ἄνδρες σοφοὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς δεσπότας ἀμείνους αὑτῶν φεύγοιεν καὶ ῥᾳδίως ἀπαλλάττοιντο αὐτῶν;

gods. Regardless of whether Simmias is being fair to what Socrates has actually said, it's worth noting that language in this exchange is remarkably similar to both the language used in the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*. In the *Euthyphro*, as we have seen, the definition of piety as a service to the gods was illustrated by Socrates using the image of gods being the masters and humans being the slaves. Moreover, in the *Apology*, Socrates says that it wouldn't be right to abandon one's post if one has been placed by one's commander. And if these passages help us to make sense of seeing piety as a virtue that can be exhibited in conversation, then, since the Phaedo uses the same language to describe what Socrates is doing, it makes sense to look at it more closely.

3.5 Philosophy as a Practice for Dying

The *Phaedo* depicts the final conversation between Socrates and his friends prior to his death and so it is perhaps not altogether surprising that their discussion revolves around the question whether one should fear death. Socrates' response will be that humans have a soul - the most divine element in them which is immortal. And, if they take care of the soul, then they shouldn't be worried at all about dying as *'some future awaits men after death [...], a much better future for the good than for the wicked'* (63c).

For Socrates, philosophy will be the best way of taking care of one's soul and he will even describe philosophy as a practice for dying. At 64c, he defines death as a separation of the soul from the body, claiming that the philosopher's goal is to disassociate from the body to the greatest possible extent during his life. The reason behind this, Socrates argues, is that one's body poses an obstacle in the pursuit of philosophy. At 65b, Socrates states that if a philosopher's aim is to obtain knowledge, then the body will be of no use as the '*physical senses are not clear or precise' (65b).* Clarity and precision are after all one of the conditions for knowledge and these can only be fulfilled by pure reasoning. In addition to this, at 65d-e, Socrates argues that senses cannot grasp true objects of knowledge - forms such as justice, or beauty; these can again be grasped solely by using the soul's reasoning.

At 66b, Socrates adds that the body keeps us busy in a variety of ways. He mentions two specific examples - nurture and diseases. Socrates is especially critical towards diseases as *'they fill us with wants, desires, fears, all sorts of illusions and much nonsense'* (66c). His point seems to be

not just that diseases refrain us from thinking by making us weak and tired, but also that they have a negative effect on our reasoning capacities.

As a result, we can see that Socrates has two major objections to the soul's association with the body. First, the body is of no use in relation to acquiring knowledge, and this is particularly worrying as he understands philosophy as a continuous attempt to grasp knowledge. Second, the body has its own needs and wants which either hinder us from doing philosophy or make doing it impossible as it affects us in negative ways. Socrates therefore concludes that a sort of *purification* is needed and one's soul should disassociate from the body to the greatest possible extent.[89]

3.6 Soul as akin to the Divine

Understanding philosophy as a kind of purification is only a first step of Socrates' argument that one shouldn't fear one's death as Socrates still needs to explain the importance of purification by the means of philosophy. To do this, Socrates will look into the nature of the soul to tell us that it is akin to the divine realm and, if purified from the body by the means of philosophy, it will be able to move to this realm with ease once it gets separated from the body.[90]

For my purposes, rather than focusing on the soundness of the affinity argument itself, an argument which defends the idea that soul is the most divine element, I would like to instead focus on the way that Socrates describes the soul. At 79d Socrates tells us:

> [W[hen the soul investigates by itself [without body] it passes into the realm of what is pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging, and being akin (συγγενὴς) to this, it always stays with it whenever it is by itself and can do so; it ceases to stray and remains in the same state as it is in touch with things of the same kind.

Socrates will use this passage to argue that the soul is immortal as the soul can investigate things that are pure, immortal and unchanging, and it can remain doing so because it is akin to

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[89] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to determine what precisely Socrates' attitude towards the bodily pleasures is, however there are broadly two lines of thought. Some interpreters (*cf.* Ebrey 2017) argue for an ascetic interpretation claiming that the philosophers should avoid any bodily pleasures, while others (*cf.* Woolf 2004, Russell 2005) argue for a weaker thesis, claiming that philosophers do not need to avoid bodily pleasures at all costs, they only need to maintain the correct attitude towards them.

[90] For a fuller discussion of the affinity argument, see Apolloni 1996, Elton 1997, and Woolf 2004.

these things.[91] And so precisely because it can lead a continuous investigation into the realm of the pure, unchanging and immortal, it is, according to Socrates, itself immortal. This leads Socrates to conclude that the '*soul is most like* (ὁμοιότατον) *the divine, deathless, inteligible, uniform, indissoluble, always the same as itself' (80b)* and this will enable him to say that since this is the soul's nature, after death, '*it will make its way to a region of the same kind* (γενναῖον)*, noble, pure and invisible' (80d).*

It is worth noting that the soul which practises philosophy makes two types of journeys into the divine realm. The first journey occurs each time that the soul is thinking while in its embodied state and this is what Socrates is claiming at 79c. The second journey occurs when a person dies and the soul is separated from the body. And what Socrtates claims is that if the soul is accustomed to the first type of journey, then the second journey would be much easier.

3.7 Soul, Philosophy and Conversation

We learned in the previous two sections of this chapter that there is a very close connection between the life of philosophy and the divine. We have seen that the practice of philosophy is a continuous attempt to dissociate from one's body which in turns enables the soul to be closer to its true nature, itself being akin to the realm of the immortal, changeless, and most importantly for the purpose of this chapter - the divine. In the first half of this Chapter, we have seen that piety was defined as a service to the gods in the *Euthyphro*, and Socrates admitted in the *Apology* that he was following their command, however, two questions still remained: first, why do the gods care about our wellbeing and second, whether there is something special and unique about the elenchus that they chose that as a means to care about humans. The fact that the soul is the most divine element in us and that the life of philosophy is an attempt to reach its natural state will help us, I believe, to address these two questions.

One might object, however, that these passages in the *Phaedo* do not actually show that *conversation* can be pious, since Socrates has only been talking about philosophy and did not explicitly equate *elenchus* or conversation to philosophy. Moreover, at 80e Socrates tells his

[91]Socrates does accept earlier (79c) that the soul can use the body for investigation as well, using the body's senses to do so. However, the soul cannot do so continually and it easily gets '*confused and dizzy, as if it were drunk'* (79c). This is because it isn't akin to the always-changing objects of the senses, or in other words, its nature is *unlike* the body's nature.

companions that it's only the practising of philosophy the *right way* which ensures soul's dissociation from the body making the act of death easier:

> If it is pure when it leaves the body and drags nothing bodily with it, as it had no willing association with the body in life, but avoided it and gathered itself together by itself and always practiced this, which is no other than practicing philosophy in the right way, in fact, training to die easily.

In this passage, Socrates is making a rather demanding statement: first, one has to practice philosophy the *right way* to achieve the desired state of purification, second, this needs to be done *throughout one's life* - therefore, this must be a continuous effort. What is this right way that Socrates is talking about and does a life of conversation fulfil these criteria?

To answer these questions, we should look at Socrates' rather hopeful and perhaps even cheerful attitude in the *Phaedo*. One should always remember that the context of his arguments for immortality of the soul and for his claim that philosophy is a practice for death is a deeply personal one as he'll soon be put to death. Surprisingly, his attitude is much more positive. Not only does he famously tell his companions not to cry like women and children, he also believes that he has no reason to be afraid of death as he is expecting to join a 'company of good men'. He tells Simmias and Cebes:

> I should be wrong not to resent dying if I did not believe that I should go first to other wise and good gods, and then to men who have died and are better than men are here. Be assured that, as it is, I expect to join the company of good men. This last I would not altogether insist on, but if I insist on anything at all in these matters, it is that I shall come to gods who are very good masters. That is why I am not so resentful, because I have good hope that some future awaits men after death, as we have been told for years, a much better future for the good than for the wicked. (63b-c)

If Socrates believes, as his arguments do indeed suggest, that it's only the practising of philosophy the right way which ensures soul's dissociation from the body and that this must be a continuous effort, what does it mean if Socrates thinks that he himself is expecting to join the

company of good men? What does it mean if he is not afraid of dying?[92] The answer must be that he thinks that his life fulfils both of the conditions mentioned earlier - that he practised philosophy the right way and that he did so continuously. And given Socrates' description of his philosophical journey in the *Apology* and the amount of dialogues which represent this journey, there seems only one activity that meets both conditions - conversation. Now, one might argue that what Socrates means by philosophy in this passage is different to what he was doing by approaching others. However, the focus on this philosophical practice being done continuously strongly suggests that Socrates is referring to the practice of conversation. It would indeed be very strange if Socrates was presented to us by Plato as someone whose central activity throughout his life was conversation but there would be another continuous activity that has been practising which resulted in lack of fear dying.[93]

There is another passage which suggests that conversation is the right way to practise philosophy can be found towards the final pages of the *Phaedo* where Socrates ask his followers to take good care about themselves:

> '[B]ut what I am always saying, that you will please me and mine and yourselves by taking good care of your own selves in whatever you do, even if you do not agree with me now, but if you neglect your own selves, and are unwilling to live following the tracks, as it were, of what we have said now and on previous occasions, you will achieve nothing even if you strongly agree with me at this moment.' (115b-c)

While it is clear that Socrates is asking his followers to take care of themselves, it is far from clear what precisely it is that he is asking them to do. What are the tracks that they should follow? What is it that has been said that Socrates refers to? And why is it not enough to agree with Socrates at this one time?

I would like to suggest that Socrates is urging his followers to converse as a way to take care of themselves. While he doesn't explicitly says so, I submit that the most straightforward

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[92] One might object that Socrates actually isn't as hopeful about his afterlife as it may seem. In the passage above, he does indeed insert a bit of caution by claiming that 'This last [thing] I would not altogether insist on', however this worry seems to be unfounded as this claim is referring to 'I expect to join the company of good men.' rather to the whole idea of expecting good things in the afterlife. Socrates is solely being cautious about the exact shape and form of the afterlife.

[93] It is worth adding that this doesn't mean that conversation is the only way to practise philosophy. However, it might be the case that conversation is an archetype of the practice of philosophy and any other ways might be understood in relation to it.

way to understand his suggestion to follow the tracks of what they have said in their current discussion and on previous occasions is to take it as a call to continue with what Socrates has been doing in his life, namely to converse and examine himself and others. This reading indeed goes well with the previous point I made about Socrates' optimism - Socrates, in believing that a good future is awaiting him, is telling us that he believes that he practised philosophy the right way and continuously.

This appeal to continuity can be also found at 115b-c as Socrates is warning his followers that agreeing with him one time is of little use if they won't follow his own tracks. This idea indeed resonates well with the description of Socrates' mission presented in the *Apology*. As we have seen in Chapter 1, examination of himself and others is a way of life for Socrates, it's not something that one does from time to time, rather, it is something that defines Socrates and who he is. This also resonates with the claim made at *Apology* 38a - that to discuss virtue every day is the greatest good for humans and that unexamined life is not worth living. Socrates is clearly stressing that one-off examination is simply not sufficient for good life and, as we have seen, this idea is mentioned at the end of the *Phaedo*. So, it seems that both in the *Apology* and in the *Phaedo* in its focus on continuity of philosophical practice, Socrates thinks of conversation as a final good.

In my attempt to show that in the *Phaedo*, the practice of philosophy is to be understood as conversation and as what Socrates has been doing during his life, I would like to focus on the recollection argument (72e-78d) as well. The basic outline of the argument is that by thinking about instances of forms and by noticing their deficiencies, we are able to 'recollect' and think about the forms themselves. However, in order to recollect these, we must have a prior knowledge of them; but this is something that cannot originate from sense perception, and must therefore have its origin before our birth. Therefore, says Socrates, the soul must have existed before birth (76d-e).

Once again, my focus is not on the soundness of this argument and its place in Socrates' overall attempt at showing that the soul is immortal. However, Socrates does, on two occasions, refer to the practice of questions of answers:

> Therefore, if we had this knowledge, we knew before birth and immediately after not only the Equal, but the Greater and the Smaller and all such things, for our present argument is no more about the Equal than about the Beautiful itself, the Good itself, the Just, the Pious and, as I say, about all those things which we mark with the seal of "what it is," both when we are putting questions and answering them (ἐν ταῖς ἐρωτήσεσιν ἐρωτῶντες καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἀποκρίσεσιν ἀποκρινόμενοι). So we must have acquired knowledge of them all before we were born. (75d)

and

> Let us then return to those same things with which we were dealing earlier, to that reality of whose existence we are giving an account in our questions and answers (αὐτὴ ἡ οὐσία ἧς λόγον δίδομεν τοῦ εἶναι καὶ ἐρωτῶντες καὶ ἀποκρινόμενοι); are they ever the same and in the same state, or do they vary from one time to another; can the Equal itself, the Beautiful itself, each thing in itself, the real, ever be affected by any change whatever? Or does each of them that really is, being uniform by itself, remain the same and never in any way tolerate any change whatever? (78d)

The purpose of this Section is to establish that when Socrates talks about philosophy as a kind of purification and a way to use our soul in line with its nature and that conversation could be understood as doing precisely this. In other words, when Socrates praises philosophy, he is praising conversation as well. Now, in these two passages, Socrates doesn't talk about philosophy explicitly, however, the passages fit very well with the overall picture of our soul grasping the most divine, eternal and unchanging things - the forms. What is striking is that in these two passages, this grasping is done through the method of questions and answers and through answering the 'what it is' question and therefore, it should be safe to conclude that conversation does what philosophy does - it makes us use our reason to entertain the forms.

The goal of Sections 3.5-3.7 was to argue that when Socrates refers to the practice of philosophy, he is referring to conversation. This then meant that when he praised philosophy as a practice utilising the most divine element in us in order to grasp the forms, he was describing conversation as well. However, the purpose of this Chapter is to determine the ways that piety can be displayed in conversation and the next step in overall argument will be to connect the description of philosophy and conversation as an engagement of the divine element in grasping the forms and piety understood as a service to the gods.

3.8 Piety as a Service to the Gods Revisited

In the first half of this Chapter, my focus was on two works - the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*. The purpose of this was to establish a definition of piety as a service to the gods which assists the gods in their *ergon*. I've also established that the *Apology* presented Socrates precisely as this - as someone being in their service through the *elenchus.* However, I concluded that two questions still remained unanswered: the first was that it wasn't entirely clear why the gods care about humans. Piety was introduced as a service to the gods in the *Euthyphro* and Socrates told us in the *Apology* that he was in service to the gods. What this means is that Socrates' conversations with others aid the gods in achieving some good work. In the *Apology*, we were also able to see that one of the reasons why Socrates approached others was to ensure that they care about truth, virtue and the best possible state of one's soul. While one can easily see why one would want to ensure that one cares about virtue and truth, it is not clear why the gods would care about our wellbeing and happiness.

One possible answer to this question is to claim that the gods are wholly good and perfect and therefore desire our wellbeing and happiness, however, it is not clear whether Socrates actually thinks that the gods are wholly good, especially given what is said about them in the *Euthyphro*. Socrates' rejection of Euthyphro's definition of piety as doing what the gods love was based on the idea that in some cases, the gods disagree between each other and so it's not clear that the same things please all the gods. This anthropomorphisation of the gods is something that is present throughout both the *Euthyphro* - be it either the idea of gods having an *ergon*, or us being in their service. Of course, it might be objected that Socrates' descriptions of the gods in the *Apology* are a critique of Euthyphro's understanding of the gods, and he doesn't share these views. And while that might be the case, we do not get a detailed description of the gods' nature anywhere in these dialogues, so we cannot say for certain whether Socrates believes that they are indeed wholly good and perfect.

I would like to suggest that by introducing the *Phaedo* into this picture, we get a better understanding of why the gods care about us, one that doesn't rely on them being wholly good. The best place to start is to look at Socrates' worry that the majority doesn't care about their souls. He says at Apology 29e: *'you do not care or give thought to wisdom or truth, or the*

best possible state of your soul'[94] and if we think about this claim in the context of the *Phaedo* and Socrates' understanding of the soul as divine and of philosophy as a practice which utilises the soul in the proper way, then we might be able to see why the gods care about us and our wellbeing: if humans possess this divine element then it would make sense for the gods to care about something that has a share in their nature. Thinking about this care as being concerned with something that shares their nature helps us to partially understand why the gods would send Socrates to examine others. This line of thought can also be seen at Socrates' cryptic remarks during the initial discussion about whether suicide is permissible. At 62b, Socrates says that *'the gods are our guardians and that humans are one of their possessions* (κτημάτων)*'* and the claim that we humans are in the possession of the gods, taken together with the earlier claim that we possess a divine element should make it more clear why the gods would care about us.

The idea seems to be that if I am, let's say, a professional photographer and I lend a friend of mine my favourite camera, then I will be more than happy to provide guidance on how to use that camera - partly because it is my possession and I do not want it to be used poory, and partly because I share the passion of photography with them. If we apply this analogy to the gods and their relation to one's soul, they care about it, and about us, precisely because it shares their nature; it is in some way part of them, just like a camera is, in some way, an extension of me as a photographer.

I believe that this will also help us to answer the second question about the uniqueness of *elenchus* as it wasn't entirely clear from the *Apology* and the *Euthyphro* whether there was anything special about it that made it fitting for Socrates' display of piety. I suggested, after all, that the gods are 'in touch' via other means - be it either through *daimonion*, through poets and seers, or through dreams.

I'd like to propose that *elenchus* seems to have a special place for two reasons - first, that it engages the divine element in us - our reason, and second, that it gets us to think about the most divine things. I the *Phaedo,* Socrates presents to us a picture of the soul as resembling the divine and urges us to practice philosophy so that it can reach the divine realm:

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[94] φρονήσεως δὲ καὶ ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ὅπως ὡς βελτίστη ἔσται οὐκ ἐπιμελῇ οὐδὲ φροντίζεις;

> A soul in this state makes its way to the invisible, which is like itself, the divine and immortal and wise, and arriving there it can be happy, having rid itself of confusion, ignorance, fear, violent desires, and the other human ills and, as is said of the initiates, truly spend the rest of the time with the gods. (*Phaed.* 81a)

In this passage, Socrates talks explicitly about the afterlife, however he does suggest at 65c that the soul can, to a certain extent, access the realm of the divine through its use of reason:

> Is it not in reasoning (λογίζεσθαι) if anywhere that any reality becomes clear to the soul? - Yes. - And indeed the soul reasons (λογίζεται) best when none of these senses troubles it, neither hearing nor sight, nor pain nor pleasure, but when it is most by itself, taking leave of the body and as far as possible having no contact or association with it in its search for reality.[95] (*Phaed.* 65c)

In these two passages, we learn that the soul, by reasoning, is able to grasp this divine reality akin to itself. And as we have seen in Section 3.7, when Socrates talks about philosophy as a practice for dying in the *Phaedo*, he is indeed talking about conversation and *elenchus*.

Moreover, the *elenchus* doesn't have a special place as a manifestation of piety only because we get to use our most divine element in us. It also enables us to think about the most divine things. To show this, I would like to revisit the two passages that I mentioned in Section 3.7 relating to the recollection argument in the *Phaedo* 75d and 78d. At 78d, Socrates asks:

> Let us then return to those same things with which we were dealing earlier, to that reality of whose existence we are giving an account in our questions and answers; are they ever the same and in the same state, or do they vary from one time to another; can the Equal itself, the Beautiful itself, each thing in itself, the real, ever be affected by any change whatever? Or does each of them that really is, being uniform by itself, remain the same and never in any way tolerate any change whatever?

A similar thought is expressed at 75d:

> Therefore, if we had this knowledge, we knew before birth and immediately after not only the Equal, but the Greater and the Smaller and all such things, for our present argument is

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[95] ἆρ' οὖν οὐκ ἐν τῷ λογίζεσθαι εἴπερ που ἄλλοθι κατάδηλον αὐτῇ γίγνεταί τι τῶν ὄντων; ναί. λογίζεται δέ γέ που τότε κάλλιστα, ὅταν αὐτὴν τούτων μηδὲν παραλυπῇ, μήτε ἀκοὴ μήτε ὄψις μήτε ἀλγηδὼν μηδέ τις ἡδονή, ἀλλ' ὅτι μάλιστα αὐτὴ καθ' αὑτὴν γίγνηται ἐῶσα χαίρειν τὸ σῶμα, καὶ καθ' ὅσον δύναται μὴ κοινωνοῦσα αὐτῷ μηδ' ἁπτομένη ὀρέγηται τοῦ ὄντος.

> no more about the Equal than about the Beautiful itself, the Good itself, the Just, the Pious and, as I say, about all those things which we mark with the seal of "what it is," both when we are putting questions and answering them. So we must have acquired knowledge of them all before we were born. (75d)

It shouldn't go unnoticed that Socrates is referring to '*ti esti*' questions - a hallmark of his *elenchus*. Moreover, at 78d, he talks strikingly about *our* questions and answers, that is about something that he has been doing with his followers. It seems hard to imagine that Socrates has in mind something else than the *elenchus* and his examination of himself and others in these two passages. Moreover, if we look at the objects of these questions and answers, we can see that it is the forms themselves, or as we learn from the affinity argument, the things belonging to *'the realm of what is pure, ever existing, immortal and unchanging'* (79d) that are being discussed. The idea then is that in *elenchus*, we are not only using our most divine part, we are also using it to grasp and reach the most divine things and it would make sense that the gods would find that desirable.[96] Or, to return to the professional photographer analogy, if I lent someone who shares my passion for photography my state of the art camera, I would appreciate it more if it was used to capture worthwhile subjects, rather than, let's say, Oxford Street Christmas decorations.

So far, I argued that the reason for gods' caring about us is because we are using something that shares their nature in order to grasp the most divine things and that this constitutes an act of piety. However, it seems to be the case that the gods also prefer this form of piety over other, more traditional forms. This can be seen most clearly from the myth found at the end of the *Phaedo* where we get a description of the rewards and punishments of the dead:

> When the dead arrive at the place to which each has been led by his guardian spirit, they are first judged as to whether they have led a good and pious life. [...] Those who are deemed to have lived an extremely pious life are freed and released from the regions of the earth as from a prison; they make their way up to a pure dwelling place and live on the surface of the earth. Those who have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy

[96] It is also worth looking at the way that Socrates describes his mission in the *Apology*. When we look at 28d, Socrates tells the jury: *'Men of Athens, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey (πείσομαι) the god rather than you, and as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy.'* One way to translate πείσομαι is to take it to mean obey. However, it can also mean to be persuaded which introduces an ambiguity into what Socrates is trying to say, suggesting that there is a connection between obeying one's orders and accepting them by the means of reasoning.

> live in the future altogether without a body; they make their way to even more beautiful dwelling places which it is hard to describe clearly, nor do we now have the time to do so. Because of the things we have enunciated, Simmias, one must make every effort to share in virtue and wisdom in one's life, for the reward is beautiful and the hope is great. (*Phaed,* 113d-114c)

Socrates' description clearly states that the extremely pious individuals will be greatly rewarded, however he adds that those who practised philosophy would receive even greater rewards, suggesting that the life of philosophy is superior to the life of piety. For this argument to work, I must show not only that philosophy is superior to extreme piety, but also that philosophy is a superior type of piety. Regarding this, I would like to say two things - first, it is important to remember that the purpose of this passage and the myth is not to determine what counts as piety and what doesn't. While it's precise purpose is not easy to determine, it is an image showing the journey that the immortal soul undergoes after one's death[97] and using it to determine what counts as piety would be controversial. Moreover, Socrates in the *Phaedo* makes a distinction between ordinary virtue and philosopher's virtue (68c-69d), claiming that while the majority thinks about virtue as an exchange of pleasures for pleasures and pains for pains, philosophers practice virtue by exchanging wisdom. The argument itself it extremely difficult to interpret[98], however it certainly opens the possibility that Socrates' understanding of what counts as virtue and, more specifically, piety is open to further discussion.

As we have seen, the *Phaedo* was helpful in gaining a better understanding of Socrates' piety as it enabled us to create a link between *elenchus* as an activity which utilises one's reason and the divine nature of one's soul as rational. If this is the case, it's certainly worth asking what the connection is between the elenchus understood as an engagement of the rational soul and the definition of piety which I presented earlier in this Chapter:

> (1) Pious acts are acts that please the gods, (2) they are species of just acts (3) whose performance is a service to the gods (4) which assists them with their work productive of a good result and (5) that all these elements exist in the context of a limited agnosticism that precludes their specification in full detail

[97] On the role of the myth, see Sedley1989 and Betegh 2008.
[98] For an analysis of the 'Right exchange' passage, see Weiss 1987.

I would like to suggest that the story of the *Phaedo* as presented in Sections 3.4 - 3.7 provide a fuller grasp of this understanding of piety as we can now make better sense why certain actions are dear to the gods, why their performance is a service to them and why these action help to achieve gods' *ergon* - they are so because they are based on our use of the most divine element which is used to grasp the most divine things.

3.9 Conclusion

Before I move on to consider the virtue of temperance, I would like to conclude this Chapter by thinking about piety in the wider context of this thesis. What I would like to highlight is the idea presented in the *Phaedo* that philosophy, which we now know should be understood as conversation, should be practised continuously. This focus on continuity was introduced in two passages - at *Ph*. 80e and 115b-c and I think it is as close as we can get to Socrates explicitly confirming outside of the *Apology* that conversation is a final good. In some ways, this is to be expected - after all, if Socrates tells us in the *Apology* that conversation is the greatest good, which I take to mean that it is a final good, then it would make sense for the *Phaedo*, a dialogue dramatically posterior to the *Apology* to be in line with this understanding of conversation. And this might explain why it is that Socrates' final moments are spent by conversing with others.

4 Temperance

4.1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to explain in what way temperance[99] can be displayed in a conversation. This is part of my wider project to make sense of Socrates' claim that conversation is the greatest good for humans and my goal is to show that this is because what makes conversation the greatest good, among other things, is that it provides space for the participants to exhibit virtue. In order to establish a connection between temperance and conversation, I will focus on the *Charmides* - a dialogue concerned with this virtue. In some ways, it seems that this will be quite an easy job as Socrates, on multiple occasions, talks about the benefits of temperance in the context of examining what one knows and doesn't know:

> 'Then only the temperate man will know himself and will be able to examine what he knows and does not know, and in the same way he will be able to inspect other people to see when a man does in fact know what he knows and thinks he knows, and when again he does not know what he thinks he knows, and no one else will be able to do this.'[100] (167a)

While this passage seems to describe Socrates' mission of examining himself and others very well, Socrates questions on multiple occasions whether temperance as described in this passage is possible and much of the second half of the *Charmides* presents various attacks on the

[99] The Greek term *σωφροσύνη* has a broader meaning and has been translated as moderation, temperance, or, more recently, discipline (Moore & Raymond 2019). I will use 'temperance' as its translation in this Chapter.
[100] Unless stated otherwise, I am following Sprague's translation.

conception of temperance as knowledge of itself and other types of knowledge and he will claim that it seems to be both impossible and useless. And so, while Socrates connects temperance to conversation, he will also raise some serious concerns about the possibility of temperance, therefore, in order to see in what ways interlocutors can exhibit temperance in conversation, we will need to address those concerns.

I will argue that despite the concerns that Socrates raises, temperance is best understood as a certain commitment to knowledge. This commitment will involve two things - first, an ownership of one's beliefs and second, a commitment to seeking knowledge. We will see that for Socrates knowledge is hard and that in order to obtain knowledge, one must proceed systematically when considering the truth of *logoi.* However, I submit that temperance is distinct from piety, which we saw in the previous Chapter as using our most divine element. While it is true that to investigate *logoi* properly, one must follow certain rules of rationality, it doesn't follow that one would care to do so. And this is precisely what temperance provides - an ownership of one's beliefs and a commitment to enquiry. Of course, whether one has this commitment to knowledge determines what sort of person one is and we will see that in the *Charmides*, Critias will be presented by Plato as the one lacking it.

4.2 Charmides' introspection

In the opening scenes of the *Charmides*, Socrates is introduced to the beautiful young Charmides whose entrance will cause considerable turmoil amongst the men in the palastrea. The short exchange between Critias and Socrates just prior to Charmides' entrance introduces the central theme of the dialogue and provides a first glance into Critias' and Socrates' positions on temperance. Critias tells Socrates the following: '*As far as beauty goes, Socrates, I think you will be able to make up your mind straight away*'[101] (154a), to which Socrates responds: *'You mustn't judge by me, my friend, I'm a broken yard-stick as far as handsome people are concerned, because practically everyone of that age strikes me as beautiful'*[102] (154b). Notice how careful

[101] Περὶ μὲν τῶν καλῶν, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, αὐτίκα μοι δοκεῖς εἴσεσθαι. Of course, *autika* might be referring to the fact that Charmides is expected to enter the company of Socrates at any moment, however, there is no reason to presume that Plato cannot refer to both meanings of this sentence at the same time.

[102] Ἐμοὶ μὲν οὖν, ὦ ἑταῖρε, οὐδὲν σταθμητόν· ἀτεχνῶς γὰρλευκὴ στάθμη εἰμὶ πρὸς τοὺς καλούς – σχεδὸν γάρ τί μοι πάντες οἱ ἐν τῇ ἡλικίᾳ καλοὶ φαίνονται.

Socrates is in this passage - he seems to be well aware that some things might appear to someone one way at first, however, they might turn out differently at the end and compare this to Critias who can make up his mind straight away. I believe that this difference is present in the rest of the dialogue - we will see Socrates on one hand wanting others to consider things more carefully and to focus more and Critias on the other hand treating knowledge as something that is immediately available to us, that we can just pick and use when it suits us. And it is this attitude to knowledge as something immediate and easy which will make Critias lacking temperance understood as commitment to knowledge. It is precisely because he will treat knowledge as something that one can just take and use when it fits the occasion, that will make him as someone who doesn't *own* his beliefs, or in other words, there is a very loose connection between him and *his* beliefs.

The question of the access to one's epistemic states is introduced more explicitly a bit further in the dialogue. Now, it might seem at first that for Socrates, one's epistemic states are readily accessible for oneself, when he makes a claim that opinions have some sort of presence in individuals:

> Now it is clear that if temperance is present in you, you have some opinion about it. Because it is necessary , I suppose, that if it really resides in you, it provides a sense of its presence, by means of which you would form an opinion not only that you have it but of what sort it is. (159a)[103]

The wider context of this passage might indeed suggest that for Socrates, the way that things appear to us is readily available to us. Charmides, after all, comes in with a headache and Socrates is tasked with finding a remedy for it. Therefore, we are presented with an idea that, at least when it comes to our bodily states, these are immediately accessible to us.

However, during the discussion of finding a suitable remedy, Socrates tells Charmides that things are not always how they appear at first and suggests that perhaps, in order to treat his body, his soul must be treated first. (156e *ff*). Moreover, after Charmides' initial failure to define temperance Socrates says the following:

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[103] δῆλον γὰρ ὅτι εἴ σοι πάρεστιν σωφροσύνη,ἔχεις τι περὶ αὐτῆς δοξάζειν. ἀνάγκη γάρ που ἐνοῦσαν αὐτήν, εἴπερ ἔνεστιν, αἴσθησίν τινα παρέχειν, ἐξ ἧς δόξα ἄν τίς σοι περὶ αὐτῆς εἴη ὅτι ἐστὶν καὶ ὁποῖόν τι ἡ σωφροσύνη:

> 'Then start over again, Charmides, I said, 'and look into yourself with greater concentration, and when you have decided what effect the presence of temperance has upon you and what sort of think it must be to have this effect, then put all this together and tell me clearly and bravely, what does it appear to you to be? He paused and, looking into himself very manfully, said, 'Well, temperance seems to me to make people ashamed and bashful, and so I think modesty must be what temperance really is.' (160d-e)[104]

Perhaps surprisingly, after Charmides fails to define temperance, Socrates doesn't conclude that he is not temperate as a result of that. Rather, he suggests that Charmides looks into his soul with greater concentration to see what the effect of temperance is on his soul. Imagine if this was an example concerning bodily pain: if Charmides failed to say where it hurts, then it would be fairly easy for Socrates to conclude that he is not in fact in pain. However, in the case of temperance, he doesn't reach this conclusion and suggests instead to search for its presence more carefully.

The idea that one doesn't have immediate access to one's epistemic state isn't new to the *Charmides*. In one of the most famous passages of the *Apology*, Socrates discovers that many people mistakenly believe that they know something even though the opposite is the case (*Ap.* 22a *ff)*, and revealing to them their ignorance is indeed what he set out to do in this mission, and one can read the early dialogues as Plato's attempt to show this ignorance found in the interlocutors. I submit that the same will be the case for Critias and the way that he responds will be in stark contrast with Socrates' expectation of careful introspection. We can see the first glimpses of this in his initial responses when he takes over Charmides in the search for the definition of temperance. When he introduces a distinction between making and doing at 163a, he immediately refers to Hesiod as the source of this distinction. A bit later on, when Critias defines temperance as knowledge of oneself, he refers to the inscription at Delphi and explains how *it* should be understood. It seems then, that Critias doesn't introspect, he doesn't focus on what *he* believes, instead he immediately grabs onto a piece of information that can be discussed.

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[104] πάλιν τοίνυν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὦ Χαρμίδη, μᾶλλον προσέχων τὸν νοῦν καὶ εἰς σεαυτὸν ἐμβλέψας, ἐννοήσας ὁποῖόν τινά σε ποιεῖ ἡ σωφροσύνη παροῦσα καὶ ποία τις οὖσα τοιοῦτον ἀπεργάζοιτο ἄν, πάντα ταῦτα συλλογισάμενος εἰπὲ εὖ καὶ ἀνδρείως τί σοι φαίνεται εἶναι; καὶ ὃς ἐπισχὼν καὶ πάνυ ἀνδρικῶς πρὸς ἑαυτὸν διασκεψάμενος, δοκεῖ τοίνυν μοι, ἔφη, αἰσχύνεσθαι ποιεῖν ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ αἰσχυντηλὸν τὸν ἄνθρωπον, καὶ εἶναι ὅπερ αἰδὼς ἡ σωφροσύνη.

4.3 Critias' unstable opinions

In the previous section my focus was on Socrates' insistence that Charmides considers what he thinks with greater concentration and I suggested that this is where the idea of temperance being some sort of commitment to knowledge originates. In this section, I would like to focus on Critias and compare his behaviour with that of Charmides. We will see that Critias will care about not being refuted and he will try to be consistent in what he says, but we will also see that this commitment to knowledge will be shallow as he will care more about consistency than truth.

At 162e, Critias takes over from Charmides in defending a definition of temperance originally introduced by Charmides as doing one's own business (τὸ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ πράττειν). Socrates first objects to the definition of temperance as doing one's own business by mentioning craftsmen who seem to be doing other people's business. Critias replies at 163a by making distinction between *prattein* - doing and *poiein* - making. It is true that craftsmen make other people's things, however it doesn't follow that they are meddling with other people's business. This is so because he equates *prattein* to work that is admirable and useful.

This step results in slightly altering the definition of temperance since it is now *'doing of good things that is temperate'* (163e). Now, this isn't a radically new idea as this definition is a result of taking the original definition (doing one's own business) together with Critias' clarification that doing is always admirable and useful. What is interesting, however, is the way that this change of definition unfolds. As Charmides fails to defend the definition of temperance as doing one's own business, Socrates begins to suspect that the definition is not Charmides' own, but that it originated from Critias. Socrates then suggests that *'perhaps the one who said it didn't know what he meant either'* (162b) in an attempt to get Critias to engage with him. This provocation works very well and Critias remarks in anger: *'Do you suppose, Charmides, that just because you don't understand what in the world the man meant who said that temperance was minding your own business, the man himself doesn't understand either?'* (162d).

After this episode, Critias introduces the aforementioned distinction between doing and making to defend his definition of temperance, updating the definition of temperance to doing good things. The fact that Critias gets angry at Charmides for the poor defence of his definition and that he is able to introduce a distinction between doing and making in order to respond to Socrates' argument shows that he cares about what he says and about the way that he is portrayed. However, I suggested earlier that Critias' commitment to knowledge is a shallow one, so why should this be so if Critias clearly cares about not being refuted? To answer this question, Socrates' remarks concerning Critias' behaviour will be helpful: *'It was clear that Critias had been agitated for some time and also that he was eager to impress Charmides and the rest who were there'* (162c). Critias' commitment to knowledge doesn't seem to go very deep as he is presented by Socrates as someone who cares about appearing knowledgeable in order to impress others.

Another aspect of Critias' behaviour that supports this view of him are his repeated referrals to authorities. When he introduces a distinction between making and doing at 163a, he immediately refers to Hesiod as the source of this distinction. Now, there are situations where this is perfectly reasonable, and indeed even Socrates earlier talked about what he has learned from one of the Thracian doctors of Zalmoxis (156d). However, in the case of Critias, we should be noticing the fact that as soon as the conversation starts to focus on what he believes, he immediately attempts to change the focus of the discussion from himself to someone else.[105] This appeal to authority might seem a logical step for Critias as he appears even more knowledgeable and therefore more likely to impress Charmides, nevertheless, we should be asking ourselves whether he *truly* cares about knowledge, or whether he just *appears* to care about it.

We see a similar situation occurring a bit later when Socrates shows his dissatisfaction with Critias' definition of temperance as doing good things. Socrates suggests that there are cases where someone does something beneficial, while not knowing that they are indeed doing something beneficial and under Critias' definition, these individuals would be temperate while being ignorant of their own temperance (164 a *ff*). Critias' response is very telling:

[105] It is not only at 163a that he does it; he will use the same strategy at 164c *ff*

> "But this," he said, "Socrates, would never happen. And if you think it necessary to draw this conclusion from what I admitted before, then I would rather withdraw some of my statements, and would not be ashamed to admit I had made a mistake, in preference to conceding that a man ignorant of himself could be temperate. As a matter of fact, this is pretty much what I say temperance is, to know oneself, and I agree with the inscription to this effect set up at Delphi."

One might think that Critias' behaviour here is commendable - he amends his definition without hesitation, and provides one that addresses Socrates' worry. However, when we look more closely at his reaction, our optimism might be short-lived. The key part of this passage is Critias' pronouncement *'if you think it is necessary to draw this conclusion [...] then I would rather withdraw some of my statements.'* What should make us uneasy about this claim is that Critias doesn't seem to engage with the argument, it seems as if Socrates is doing all the work - the reflection and the thinking, while Critias nods along and amends his definitions in order to avoid inconsistency. It is also telling that immediately after he changes the definition, Critias goes on to explain the true meaning of the inscription 'Know thyself' at Delphi. Once, again, rather than discussing what *he* thinks, he tries to move the discussion towards something external - the inscription at Delphi.

When Critias explains that knowledge of oneself should be understood as knowledge of itself and other types of knowledge, Socrates gets uneasy and he begins to question whether knowledge of itself is even possible. We will return to his objections later, however, for present purposes, it is worth focusing on Socrates' description of Critias after they reached an impasse:

> When Critias heard this and saw that I was in difficulties, then, just as in the case of people who start yawning when they see other people doing it, he seemed to be affected by my troubles and to be seized by difficulties himself. But since his consistently high reputation made him feel ashamed in the eyes of the company and he did not wish to admit to me that he was incapable of dealing with the question I had asked him, he said nothing clear but concealed his predicament. So I, in order that our argument should go forward, said, "But if it seems right, Critias, let us now grant this point, that the existence of a science of science is possible—we can investigate on some other occasion whether this is really the case or not. Come then, if this is perfectly possible, is it any more possible to know what one knows and

> does not know? We did say, I think, that knowing oneself and being temperate consisted in this?" (169c-d)

On one level, this passage is hardly surprising in the context of other dialogues as interlocutors often achieve a state of aporia when being examined by Socrates. Moreover, Socrates' claim that he himself is in difficulties is also in line both with his previous statements in the *Charmides* and with other dialogues. Finally, this passage confirmed our earlier suspicion that Critias wants to *appear* knowledgeable and he is very eager to avoid any potential inconsistency in his claims in order to impress the others.

However, this passage offers us a crucial insight into what Socrates thinks about knowledge - that it is hard. Socrates himself admits that he is in difficulties and he tells us about Critias that he is unable *'to admit to [Socrates] that he was incapable of dealing with the question [Socrates] had asked him'* (169c). It seems then, that obtaining knowledge requires a great deal of careful consideration - something that Critias doesn't seem to do. And I would like to propose that the second half of the Charmides is supposed to do precisely that - to show us how difficult knowledge can be.

4.4 Enquiry into self-knowledge

The argument of the second half of the *Charmides* is famously hard to follow. Socrates spends a considerable amount of time discussing with Critias whether knowledge of knowledge is possible and he raises issues concerning reflexive and transitive relations of beliefs. In this section, I would like to show that the purpose of this enquiry is precisely to show that knowledge is hard - that it requires careful consideration of what is being said. This goes back to the idea of temperance as commitment to knowledge as being committed to something only makes sense if that something is not readily available to us.

The fact that Socrates will enquire into the possibility of self-knowledge, or knowing what one knows and doesn't know is of great importance as well. Of course, he could have showed us that obtaining knowledge is hard by enquiring into a variety of topics, however by focusing on self-knowledge, he seems to be starting from the beginning, since, if it's not possible

to know what one knows, then it's not clear whether there is any reason to have deep commitments to knowledge.[106]

This enquiry into self-knowledge starts when Critias moves from the definition of temperance as doing good things to temperance being knowing oneself:

> "[B]ut tell me if you think that a doctor, when he makes someone healthy, does something useful both for himself and for the person he cures."- "Yes, I agree." -"And the man who does these things does what he ought?" - "Yes." - "And the man who does what he ought is temperate, isn't he?" - "Of course he is temperate." - "And does a doctor have to know when he cures in a useful way and when he does not? And so with each of the craftsmen: does he have to know when he is going to benefit from the work he performs and when he is not?"[107] - "Perhaps not." - "Then sometimes," I said, "the doctor doesn't know himself whether he has acted beneficially or harmfully. Now if he has acted beneficially, then, according to your argument, he has acted temperately. Or isn't this what you said?" - "Yes, it is." - "Then it seems that on some occasions he acts beneficially and, in so doing, acts temperately and is temperate, but is ignorant of his own temperance?" - "But this," he said, "Socrates, would never happen. And if you think it necessary to draw this conclusion from what I admitted before, then I would rather withdraw some of my statements, and would not be ashamed to admit I had made a mistake, in preference to conceding that a man ignorant of himself could be temperate. As a matter of fact, this is pretty much what I say temperance is, to know oneself, and I agree with the inscription to this effect set up at Delphi." (164a8-d6)

I have already mentioned the ease with which Critias abandoned his original definition, just to introduce an updated one, treating temperance as knowledge of oneself. One of the reasons why we should be wary of this sudden change is that, upon closer inspection, it is not easy to pinpoint precisely what Socrates' worry is. In the examples he provides, he is asking us to consider doctors knowing whether they do something beneficial for their patients and for themselves and craftsmen knowing when they are going to benefit from the work they are performing. It then seems that his worry is not only whether a craftsman knows whether he is

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[106] We might think that the question of the possibility of *knowledge* is prior to any questions about *self-knowledge*, however I believe that one of the themes explored in the *Charmides* is the idea of knowledge important in relation to one's life. For Socrates, knowledge is not simply something out there, something that can be discussed as a pastime, instead it has deep connection with one's life and one's happiness; hence the focus on introspection and on self-knowledge.

[107] ἦ οὖν καὶ γιγνώσκειν ἀνάγκη τῷ ἰατρῷ ὅταν τε ὠφελίμως ἰᾶται καὶ ὅταν μή; καὶ ἑκάστῳ τῶν δημιουργῶν ὅταν τε μέλλῃ ὀνήσεσθαι ἀπὸ τοῦ ἔργου οὗ ἂν πράττῃ καὶ ὅταν μή;

truly skilled in his craft and can therefore successfully apply it (e.g. a doctor curing a patient), his scope of benefiting seems to be much wider and includes a question whether a craftsman knows whether certain action will be beneficial for himself.[108]

We can see already at this stage that Socrates is interested in the questions concerning the difficulty of knowledge as Critias' definition of temperance as doing good things leads Socrates to ask about the scope of the good - if I am a craftsman who can be temperate by doing good things, then what is the scope of these good things and how far ahead do I need to think about the benefits to be considered temperate. Related to this is another question that Socrates seems to be considering in this passage, namely whether knowing these benefits is essential for possessing knowledge - so, am I truly a craftsman if I do not know whether my actions will be beneficial? And of course, the wider the scope of these benefits is, the harder it will be for me to be knowledgeable.[109]

These indeed seem to be crucial questions about knowledge and so it is not easy to grasp the meaning of Critias' amended definition of temperance as knowing oneself. If knowing oneself should ensure that one knows that one's actions are indeed beneficial, then what is it that is involved in knowing oneself? Critias, when asked to clarify what he means by *knowing oneself,* states on multiple occasions (166c4-5[110]; 166e5-6[111]; 168a[112]) that temperance is *knowledge of itself and other types of knowledge.* This move between temperance as knowledge of oneself and temperance as knowledge of itself and other types of knowledge occurs between 165c-166c. When Critias defines temperance as knowledge of oneself, Socrates states that knowledge has two characteristics - that it is of something that is different to itself, and that it

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[108] We do get a version of this worry in the *Laches* as well. There, it is suggested that when it comes to knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful, this is something that a doctor doesn't necessarily have (196d) See also, Nicias' question to Laches at 195c: '*Do you suppose, Laches, that when a man's recovery is more to be feared than his illness, the doctors know this?'*

[109] In the *Theaetetus* (177c-179b), Socrates argues that only craftsmen are able to give expert judgements about the future. It then seems that if I cannot give expert judgments about the future, I am most likely not a craftsman. Also, the wider the scope of the future is, the harder it is for someone to give expert opinions.

[110] [T]he others are sciences of something else, not of themselves, whereas this is the only science which is both of other sciences and of itself.

[111] "Would it then," I said, "also be a science of the absence of science, if it is a science of science?" "Of course," he said.

[112] But we are saying, it seems, that there is a science of this sort, which is a science of no branch of learning but is a science of itself and the other sciences."

produces a benefit. So, medicine is knowledge of health and produces health as a benefit. Critias responds by stating that the object of temperance is oneself, however, it is not like other kinds of knowledge as it doesn't produce a benefit. He adds that there are indeed some types of knowledge for which it is not possible to state a result - be it calculation or geometry. Socrates seems to accept this but insists that mathematics has a distinct object of study that is different from itself. To this, Critias will claim, perhaps surprisingly, that temperance is unlike other types of knowledge and it is the only knowledge which is of itself and other types of knowledge:

> You arrive at the point of investigating the rest in which temperance differs from all the other sciences, and then you start looking for some way in which it resembles all the others. It's not like this; but rather, all the other sciences are of something else, not of themselves, whereas this is the only science which is both of other sciences and of itself. (166c)

What remains unclear is why Critias moved from talking about temperance as knowledge of oneself to taking it as knowledge of itself. During the short exchange at 165c-166c, Socrates asked Critias twice what the object of temperance as knowledge was and while Critias claimed that it was oneself in the first instance, his second response was that its object was knowledge itself.[113]

Whatever precisely Critias' understanding of temperance as knowledge of itself and of other kinds of knowledge is, it is clear from this passage that for him, this knowledge is distinct from possessing the first-order knowledge of the crafts. However, at the same time, it seems that this knowledge is in some relation to first-order knowledge as the claim that temperance is knowledge of other types of knowledge seems to capture precisely that. For Critias, then, temperance understood as knowledge of itself and other types of knowledge is both reflexive, that is, it is about itself, and intransitive, that is, it's content is not the content of first-order

[113] Gonzalez (1998, 48), claims that by defining temperance as knowledge of oneself, Critias abandons his earlier definition altogether, and his new definition leaves out any reference to goodness. We have seen however that this is not the case.

knowledge.[114] [115] In the next two sections I will be focusing on Socrates' exploration of these ideas and we will see that a consideration of these will be an arduous process which requires a great degree of concentration - something that Critias seems to lack.

4.5 Socates' worries about reflexivity and intransitivity

The first question that Socrates raises in relation to temperance understood as knowledge of itself concerns its reflexive and intransitive nature. This worry is first raised at 166a where Socrates claims that *'in the case of each one of these sciences what it is a science of, this being distinct from the science itself'*. This is picked up again at 167c-d:

> Then see what an odd thing we are attempting to say, my friend— because if you look for this same thing in other cases, you will find, I think, that it is impossible." [...] "Cases like the following: consider, for instance, if you think there could be a kind of vision that is not the vision of the thing that other visions are of but is the vision of itself and the other visions and also of the lack of visions, and, although it is a type of vision, it sees no color, only itself and the other visions. Do you think there is something of this kind?"

Socrates also mentions several other examples of this sort - hearing that hears itself (168d), desire for itself (168e),wish for itself (168e), fear of itself (168e), opinion of itself (169a), and sight that sees itself (168d). By stating *'there could be a kind of vision that is not the vision of the thing that other visions are of'* Socrates is establishing the thought that this knowledge of itself and other types of knowledge would be intransitive, meaning that it's content would not be the content of the first-order faculties. He then adds that reflexivity is impossible in a variety of psychological

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[114] *Cf.* McCabe 2007.

[115] Tuozzo (2011, 199) says: *'Critias' notion of σωφροσύνη involves doing good and noble things; and, given what we know of Critias' aristocratic heritage and sympathies, it is reasonable to suppose that at least part of what he has in mind is the cultivated aristocrat's management of the political affairs of the city. Such political management must in some sense control or oversee the activity of the crafts that take place in it, even if that is not its only, or even its most important, concern. Such control may well be expressed by the notion that σωφροσύνη knows these crafts, which neither know themselves nor are able to coordinate themselves toward a higher purpose.'* This definitely seems plausible, especially in the context of Socrates utopic description of a city governed by temperance at 171d-172a: *"'Neither would we ourselves be attempting to do things we did not understand—rather we would find those who did understand and turn the matter over to them—nor would we trust those over whom we ruled to do anything except what they would do correctly, and this would be that of which they possessed the science. And thus, by means of temperance, every household would be well-run, and every city well-governed and so in every case where temperance reigned. And with error rooted out and rightness in control, men so circumstanced would necessarily fare admirably and well in all their doings and, faring well, they would be happy. Isn't this what we mean about temperance, Critias," I said, "when we say what a good thing it would be to know what one knows and what one does not know?"'*

states - be it perception, belief, or desire, and so it's not clear why it would be possible in the case of knowledge. It seems then that the definition of temperance as knowledge of itself and of other types of knowledge is doomed to fail. It might come as a surprise that Socartes claims the following at 169b:

> I do not regard myself as competent to deal with these matters, and this is why I am neither able to state categorically whether there might possibly be a science of science nor, if it definitely were possible, able to accept temperance as such a science before I investigate whether such a thing would benefit us or not. Now I divine that temperance is something beneficial and good.

What should we make of Socrates' hesitation to categorically reject the idea of temperance as knowledge of itself and of other types of knowledge? I suggested earlier that the purpose of the second half of the *Charmides* is for Socrates to show that knowledge is hard, that is something that requires careful consideration and attention.

One approach found in the literature on how to address Socrates' worries about reflexivity and intransitivity focuses on the drama of the dialogue, paying attention to the way that Socrates conducts the investigation, looking at the way that intentional attitudes are captured in the dialogue.[116] The thought is that what Socrates does in the dialogue, or asks the interlocutors to do, directly contradicts the worries that he raises about the reflexivity and intransitivity of a variety of mental states.

In order to illustrate this point, let us look at the way that Socrates treats seeing. At 154c, he states:

> But even so, at the moment Charmides came in he seemed to me to be amazing in stature and appearance, and everyone there looked to me to be in love with him, they were so astonished and confused by his entrance, and many other lovers followed in his train. That men of my age should have been affected this way was natural enough, but I noticed that even the small boys fixed their eyes upon him and no one of them, not even the littlest, looked at anyone else, but all gazed at him as if he were a statue.

One of Socrates' worries from this discussion of temperance as knowledge of itself and other types of knowledge is that when it comes to other mental states, it doesn't seem possible for one

[116] Cf. McCabe 2007 and Moore 2015.

mental state to be an object of that mental state.[117] The object of sight is what is visible, and not sight itself, Socrates worries. In this passage, however, seeing seems to be a significantly more complex affair. During Charmides' entrance, Socrates is not only looking at him, but he is also seeing other people seeing Charmides, stating that *'all gazed at him as if he were a statue'* (154c).

This more complex use of seeing can also be found at 167c-d:

> "Then see what an odd thing we are attempting to say, my friend— because if you look for this same thing in other cases, you will find, I think, that it is impossible." "How is that, and what cases do you mean?" "Cases like the following: consider, for instance, if you think there could be a kind of vision (ἐννόει γὰρ εἴ σοι δοκεῖ ὄψις τις εἶναι) that is not the vision of the thing that other visions are of but is the vision of itself and the other visions and also of the lack of visions, and, although it is a type of vision, it sees no color, only itself and the other visions. Do you think there is something of this kind?"

In relation to this passage, McCabe (2007, 181) is correct to claim that *'[s]eeing, here, is both first-order (we are talking about seeing colours) and higher order (it has as its content something about sight')*. Here, again, the text seems to provide, in its dramatic frame, examples of seeing of seeing and seeing is presented as complex rather than simple.

There are also a great number of cases of Socrates asking for intentional attitudes about those attitudes. Even in the aforementioned passage at 167c, Socrates asks Critias to consider what he thinks, however, I would like to illustrate this point by the following passage:

> "And have you ever observed a fear that fears itself and the other fears, but of frightful things fears not a one?" "I have never observed such a thing," he said. "Or an opinion that is of itself and other opinions but opines nothing that other opinions do?" "Never." (*Charm*. 168a)

In this case, Socrates is asking about an opinion on opinion, or in other words, the object of his intentional attitude is the intentional attitude itself. And what makes this passage even more intriguing is that Critias seems to be denying precisely what he does - he is denying the possibility of opinion about opinion while presenting an opinion about opinions.[118]

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[117] *'Consider, for instance, if you think there could be a kind of vision that is not the vision of the thing that other visions are of but is the vision of itself and the other visions and also of the lack of visions, and, although it is a type of vision, it sees no color, only itself and the other visions*.' 167d

[118] For a full list of passages containing intentional attitudes about these attitudes, see Moore 2015, 93.

Based on these examples, it seems then that the argument about the impossibility of knowledge of itself and other types of knowledge seems to be in direct contrast with the drama of the dialogue and this seems to apply both to sense-perception and to cognitive states.[119] And so, Carone (1998, 276) correctly states:

> Far from denying the possibility of such a science, what Socrates has done for us and for Critias by presenting these puzzles is to make us reflect on reflexivity, and even more, to reflect on the nature of reflection. [...] So it seems that Plato is here, through Socrates, trying to raise philosophical challenges to engage the reader and his audience, though he never suggests that there is no such thing as self-knowledge.[120]

While this is certainly true, I believe that wanting the audience to engage with the argument isn't the only reason why this argument was set up in such a way; it seems that Socrates' wider point was to show that enquiry into knowledge is hard, that it is something that requires commitment and that Critias failed engage with it fully precisely because he lacks this commitment.

4.6 The uselessness of second-order knowledge

The second objection to Critias' conception of temperance as knowledge of itself questions its beneficiality and Socrates claims that temperance on its own cannot tell us what sort of knowledge one has or indeed lacks since only possession of a first-order science can determine that:

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[119] One might indeed raise a worry that the more complex understanding of seeing is based on an equivocation. McCabe's (2007, 182) answer is very helpful: - *'Well, an objection might run, perhaps the double use of sight reveals only an ambiguity in 'sight', or in 'perception' in general: sometimes it is used narrowly of sense-perception, when it may be brutish, and sometimes of perceptions of a more general, civilized, second-order kind. This passage, then, is but an instance of that general contrast; if the seeing of the frame is civilized, the seeing attacked in the argument is not. [...] But this objection may assume too much. For it assumes that Plato must begin with, must indeed already have fixed on, a brutish account of perception (sense- perception), and that he extends it to a metaphorical, civilized use without thinking that the structure of the latter has any bearing on the nature of the former. [...] We need not suppose, however, that 'perception' here is equivocated; nor does the composition of the passage, and its ostentatious double use of sight, encourage us to do so (there is no literary accident here). Perhaps, instead, Plato starts from a broad conception of perception, whose nature and delineations he is here trying to make clear. His careful composition, then, is part of his examination of the difference between a civilized and a brutish view of perception. Thus the frame invites us to think of perception in general, and sight in particular, as capable of being higher order, capable of having in its scope both the content of lower-order seeings and those seeings themselves.'*

[120] One can, in light of how intentional states are used in the drama of the dialogue, assess Socrates' critique itself. For a detailed analysis, see Carone 1998.

> "But by temperance, if it is merely a science of science, how will a person know that he knows the healthy or that he knows housebuilding?" "He won't at all." "Then the man ignorant of this won't know what he knows, but only that he knows." "Very likely." "Then this would not be being temperate and would not be temperance: to know what one knows and does not know, but only that one knows and does not know—or so it seems." "Probably." "Nor, when another person claims to know something, will our friend be able to find out whether he knows what he says he knows or does not know it. But he will only know this much, it seems, that the man has some science; yes, but of what, temperance will fail to inform him." "Apparently so." "So neither will he be able to distinguish the man who pretends to be a doctor, but is not, from the man who really is one, nor will he be able to make this distinction for any of the other experts. (*Charm*. 170c-e)

The idea seems to be that if someone presented a consistent argument about X, possessing knowledge of itself wouldn't be sufficient to determine that that argument is actually about X, and not about Y. While knowledge of itself might be able to determine that the premises and the conclusion of the argument are consistent, it seems that to know that the argument is about X, one needs to have knowledge about X as well. This, Socrates tells us, is quite worrying as we won't be able to distinguish a real doctor from someone who only pretends to be a doctor.

I would like to propose that Socrates is presenting a worry that should be taken seriously. Indeed, it seems to be the case that one cannot determine whether one knows X rather than Y, or even whether one knows X by appealing solely to second order knowledge and at least a certain acquaintance with X is needed to be able to determine whether one knows X. Now, this might pose a problem for Socrates' *elenchus* and his search for knowledge and, as we have seen in Chapter 1, disavows first-order knowledge of the worthwhile things (*Ap.* 20b *ff*) However, in response to this worry, Carone (1998, 279) correctly claims that *'we can at least say that Socrates is somehow acquainted with the objects of those crafts, without that needing to constitute knowledge in the strict sense of being able to provide a consistent, definitional and systematic account of such objects,'* and we might be able to say the same about knowledge of virtue - while Socrates certainly admits that he doesn't have a full knowledge of virtue, this

doesn't mean that he has at least some level of belief about the virtues and he does occasionally makes positive statements about what is right or wrong.[121]

The more central question in context of this Chapter is why Socrates introduces this worry about knowledge of itself as not being sufficient for determining whether one indeed has knowledge of X. I will show that this is connected to the idea of knowledge being hard and to Critias' lack of commitment to it. We have seen in Section 4.3 that Critias was introduced as someone who believes that knowledge is readily available, something that can be grabbed whenever one needs it, and I believe that Socrates arguing that one needs the possession of first-order knowledge as well shows precisely that knowledge and enquiry is hard.

The best place to start is to look at Socrates' description of Critias' ideal city:

> "Then, Critias," I replied, "what benefit would we get from temperance if it is of this nature? Because if, as we assumed in the beginning the temperate man knew what he knew and what he did not know (and that he knows the former but not the latter) and were able to investigate another man who was in the same situation, then it would be of the greatest benefit to us to be temperate. Because those of us who had temperance would live lives free from error and so would all those who were under our rule. Neither would we ourselves be attempting to do things we did not understand—rather we would find those who did understand and turn the matter over to them—nor would we trust those over whom we ruled to do anything except what they would do correctly, and this would be that of which they possessed the science. And thus, by means of temperance, every household would be well-run, and every city well-governed, and so in every case where temperance reigned. And with error rooted out and rightness in control, men so circumstanced would necessarily fare admirably and well in all their doings and, faring well, they would be happy. Isn't this what we mean about temperance, Critias," I said, "when we say what a good thing it would be to know what one knows and what one does not know?" (*Charm.* 171d-172a)

In Section 4.4, I've already mentioned Tuozzo's description of Critias as being interested in aristocratic management of the affairs of the city and this would include overseeing a variety of craftsmen and experts and this passage seems in line with that idea. However, what follows from Socrates' argument showing that knowledge of itself can only show *that* someone knows

[121] For example, he tells the jury in the *Apology* at 28d *ff* that it's cowardly to run away from a battlefield when commanded to remain at one's post.

something, but not *what* it is, is that second-order knowledge makes sense only in relation to first-order knowledge. So, it seems that Critias, once again wants it too easy - he thinks that he doesn't need to bother with first-order knowledge.

The same, I believe, can be said about Socrates' final worry about knowledge of itself, namely, that it doesn't seem to be beneficial as what is beneficial is determined by knowledge of the good and bad. Socrates' worry is as follows:

> Isn't it the sort of man who, in addition to the future, knows everything that has been and is now and is ignorant of nothing? Let us postulate the existence of such a man. Of this man I think you would say that there was no one living who was more scientific." "There is one additional thing I want to know: which one of the sciences makes him happy?[...] that it was not living scientifically that was making us fare well and be happy, even if we possessed all the sciences put together, but that we have to have this one science of good and evil. [...] "Then this science, at any rate, is not temperance, as it seems, but that one of which the function is to benefit us. For it is not a science of science and absence of science but of good and evil. So that, if this latter one is beneficial, temperance would be something else for us." (174a-c)

Socrates' line of argument in this passage is that to live well and be happy, having all types of knowledge combined together wouldn't be sufficient without the knowledge of good and evil and I would like to suggest that, just like with the previous argument, we are supposed to reflect the relation between knowledge and good.

Notice the scope of Socates' claim - he is not claiming simply that knowledge of itself is of no use and we should instead try to obtain knowledge of good or bad, he is actually talking about all knowledge combined, and this surely includes first-order knowledge. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to conclude that, rather than saying that knowledge is useless when it comes to our happiness, he is instead asking us to reflect on the nature of knowledge and its relation to good and bad.

It is worth adding that this is not the first time that Socrates raised this question about the connection between knowledge and good in the *Charmides*. Earlier, when Socrates discussed the definition of temperance as doing good things, he raised the following worry:

> "[B]ut tell me if you think that a doctor, when he makes someone healthy, does something useful both for himself and for the person he cures."- "Yes, I agree." -"And the man who does these things does what he ought?" - "Yes." - "And the man who does what he ought is temperate, isn't he?" - "Of course he is temperate." - "And does a doctor have to know when he cures in a useful way and when he does not? And so with each of the craftsmen: does he have to know when he is going to benefit from the work he performs and when he is not?" (164a)

I've already discussed this passage in Section 4.4, noting the scope of benefits that Socrates is working with when asking whether a craftsman knows whether they are going to benefit from their work. Socrates wasn't interested only in whether they know their use of skill will lead to a positive outcome, he was also asking whether their craft will benefit themselves.[122] One of the surprising things about this section of the Charmides was Critias' very quick and straightforward answer that the temperate person would not whether they've acted beneficially and redefined temperance as knowledge of oneself.

It seems then that when Socrates introduces his worry at 174a-c about the uselessness of knowledge of itself, he is instead asking us to reflect on the relationship between knowledge and good - is it the case that something counts as knowledge only if we know what it is good for? And if so, what is the scope of this benefit that we must take into account? Going back to the idea of temperance being a commitment to knowledge, Socrates seems to be telling us, once again, that knowledge is hard, it's not something that one can just pick and use, it is something that requires careful consideration and this consideration includes thinking about the good.

4.7 Temperance as commitment to knowledge

In the previous two Sections, I argued that the purpose of the second half of the *Charmides* is for Socrates to show that knowledge is hard. Obtaining knowledge, as we have seen, requires a lot of attention to what is being said, a lot of consideration of various arguments and I suggested that this was something that Critias lacked. We have seen in Section 4.3 that he did follow the argument and was able to amend his definitions to deal with Socrates' criticism,

[122] This line of questioning about the success conditions of knowledge seems to be very close to Nicias' understanding of courage as described in Section 2.3. I argued that for Nicias, an action is courageous if it's accompanied by the relevant skill and if a successful outcome can be achieved.

however, he only cared about consistency in order to avoid shame from not knowing something. So, I claimed, his commitment to knowledge was shallow.

In the introduction to this Chapter, I said that my goal was to show that for Socrates, temperance was a certain commitment to knowledge. And while we were able to see that Socrates had this commitment while Critias lacked it, it still remains to be seen whether temperance is indeed this commitment to knowledge. One might, of course, think that one's commitment to knowledge is of utmost importance, but deny that *temperance* should be understood as this commitment.

I do believe that there is a section in the Charmides which suggests that temperance should be understood as a commitment to knowledge. I believe that it is Charmides' definition of temperance as '*doing everything in an orderly way, and with tranquility*[123] (τὸ κοσμίως πάντα πράττειν καὶ ἡσυχῇ)'[124] (159b) can be read as a first draft of the idea of temperance being a commitment to knowledge.

Given the treatment that this definition will receive from Socrates, it is worth to start by considering the meaning of ἡσυχῇ. As Moore says, this term can be a sort of tranquillity, calmness, or decorum, or a *'calm and measured bearing in public life.'*[125] . Now, we will see that Socrates' criticism of this definition will be based on a very narrow understanding of ἡσυχῇ as slowness and will take the opposite of a ἡσυχῇ action to be a quick action. This will enable him to say that while virtue is also admirable, there are situations where the opposite of ἡσυχῇ is admirable. Therefore, temperance cannot be understood as a sort of tranquillity.

Socrates uses a barrage of examples to support his point that in some cases slowness isn't admirable. He gets Charmides to agree that 'playing the lyre quickly and to wrestle in a lively fashion is much more admirable' (159c), and that the same applies to boxing, pancration, running, jumping *'and all the movements of the body'* (159d). However, according to Socrates, it applies to the movements of the soul - learning something quickly is better than learning it slowly, similarly, teaching something or remembering something is better to be done with

[123] Following Moore & Raymond's translation here.
[124] Moore & Raymond (2019, 57) notice correctly that this definition seems to describe Charmides' behaviour in the dialogue so far.
[125] Moore 2019, 57

quickness rather than slowness. And it seems that it even applies that what Socartes and Charmides are doing at the moment:

> And when it comes to the soul's investigations (ζητήσεσιν) and deliberations (βουλεύεσθαι), I would imagine, it it's the most tranquil person - the one deliberating and discovering (ἀνευρίσκων) with considerable effort - whom we'd deen worthy of praise, but the one who does this as easily and quickly as possible. (160a)

Socrates' uncharitableness towards Charmides' definition is quite striking - instead of focusing on the whole definition of temperance as doing everything in an orderly way, and with tranquillity provided by Charmides, Socrates only picks one aspect of it - the tranquillity, and interprets it as slowness.

One way to think about this argument is that Socrates is revealing to us that Charmides lacks the orderliness and tranquillity from the definition by abandoning this definition too quickly. The thought might be that he is not committed and he lacks ownership of his belief. What helps this interpretation is that immediately after Charmides' definition is refuted, Socrates asks him to look into himself with greater concentration (160d) and to try to define temperance once again.

However, it might as well be the case that by dismissing this definition of temperance as doing everything in an orderly way, and with tranquillity, Socrates himself is being too rash and perhaps he made the mistake of dismissing this definition too quickly. One passage which seems to be relevant to this is his summary of his conversation with Critias towards the end of the *Charmides*:

> Furthermore, we gave our joint assent to many things which did not follow from our argument. For instance, we conceded that there was a science of science when the argument did not allow us to make this statement. Again, we conceded that this science knew the tasks of the other sciences, when the argument did not allow us to say this either, so that our temperate man should turn out to be knowing, both that he knows things he knows and does not know things he does not know. (175b)

This is another striking passage as Socrates lists all the things that he and Critias weren't supposed to do. I argued that the second half of the Charmides was supposed to show that knowledge is hard and that a certain commitment to seeking knowledge is needed from

interoctors. I have also presented Critias as lacking this commitment and it seems that this passage listing all the transgressions is a reminder to Critias and us that he indeed lacks this commitment. However, when we think about the implications of this passage, Socrates is saying that they have been too rash where they should have been more careful. So, he seems to be defending a position very close to Chardmides' idea of temperance as doing everything in an orderly way, and with tranquillity. To be committed to seeking knowledge, one should indeed proceed in an orderly way and with tranquillity.

While I am not arguing that Charmides' definition of temperance as orderliness and tranquillity is the actual definition of temperance, after all I take that the argument and the drama of the Charmides should make us think about temperance as commitment to knowledge, I do believe that it is an important first step in establishing precisely that.

4.8 Conclusion

The *Charmides*, in the wider context of this thesis, might be considered as potentially dangerous as it puts into question the possibility of knowing what one knows and doesn't know: after all, in the *Apology,* Socrates is very much interested in showing to the interlocutors that they mistakenly think that they know something. However, we have seen that this should not worry us because, rather than denying the possibility of self-knowledge, Socrates asks us to reflect on the difficult questions that arise from the notion of self-knowledge.

Moreover, similarly to the *Laches*, the *Charmides* is a dialogue which treats conversation primarily as an instrumental good, with its focus on determining the definition of temperance, however, it offers us plenty of insight into why temperance understood as commitment to knowledge can be exhibited in conversation, in line with the idea of conversation being a final good.

5 Norms of Conversation

5.1 Introduction

In Chapters 2-4, I looked at three virtues - courage, piety and temperance in an attempt to determine what it would mean for interlocutors to exhibit virtue in conversation. In relation to courage, we have seen that it is an endurance of the soul in the face of fear. We have seen that Socrates' examination was an examination of one's life and to truly examine one's life, one indeed needs courage, after all, examining one's life means questioning one's past decisions and evaluating whether one's life is worth living. Therefore, conversation, or more precisely Socratic *elenchus* enables one to display courage precisely because of its focus on one's life. In relation to piety, we have seen in Chapter 3 that this virtue was connected to the use of our most divine element in us - our reason to enquire into the most divine things. And we have seen that conversation, once again, enabled us to do this. In relation to temperance, we have seen that it is best understood as a sort of commitment to knowledge, and just as in the case of piety and courage, conversation is a place to exemplify this virtue.

So far, my argument has focused on the question whether conversation is a place where interlocutors *can* display virtue. Now, I would like to consider whether they *should* display it. Virtues such as courage, piety, or moderation have, after all, normativity embedded in them; they prescribe and guide our behaviour, and there is no apparent reason why this shouldn't

apply to conversation as well. The question then is whether the interlocutors displaying virtue in conversation aid in any way with the progress and success of the conversation. In other words, does Nicias' courage in the *Laches* mean that the conversation is a better one? Or, more generally, should we understand the virtues as norms of enquiry? To this question, my answer will be yes, these virtues should be also understood as conversational norms and my goal will be to show what role they play on the outcome of conversation.

5.2 Norms and outcomes

Socrates himself seems to be interested in the question of how conversations should be conducted both explicitly and implicitly. The best example of this interest is the initial exchange between Lysis and Socrates in a dialogue we have not considered so far, the *Lysis*. The Lysis is an aporetic dialogue concerning friendship, however it starts with a brief discussion between Lysis and Socrates. Once Lysis admits that he has nothing to be proud of, Socrates makes an off-camera remark, aimed at the unnamed friend:

> Hearing his last answer I glanced over at Hippothales and almost made the mistake of saying: "This is how you should talk with your boyfriends, Hippothales, cutting them down to size and putting them in their place, instead of swelling them up and spoiling them, as you do." (ὦ Ἱππόθαλες, τοῖς παιδικοῖς διαλέγεσθαι, ταπεινοῦντα καὶ συστέλλοντα, ἀλλὰ μὴ ὥσπερ σὺ χαυνοῦντα καὶ διαθρύπτοντα.) But when I saw how anxious and upset he was over what we were saying, I remembered how he had positioned himself so as to escape Lysis' notice, so I bit my tongue. (210e)

In his exchange with Lysis, Socrates seems to be giving us an example of what conversation should look like and he is being explicit about it. However, Socrates also seems to care about the way that conversation is being conducted implicitly and we have seen in Section 2.6 in the Chapter on Courage that Socrates changed the way that the conversation progressed - he decided to be the one asking the questions rather than answering, he changes the focus of the discussion and he invited Nicias to join the conversation when Laches reached a state of *aporia*.

This interest in how one should conduct a conversation cannot, however, be separated from the purpose of the conversation, especially since, as I've argued in the Chapter 1 - Socrates' Journey, Socrates does different things at different times and I introduced three stages of his

mission. Throughout his life, he approaches others (1) to make sense of the delphic prophecy, (2) to test himself and others whether they possess knowledge, to check whether others take care of virtue, truth and the state of their soul. Moreover, (3) if it's the case that conversation is the greatest good for humans and this makes conversation a place to display virtues, then one of the roles of conversation would be that as well. We can see that Socrates does a lot of things with conversation, so is it sensible to suggest that courage, temperance and piety should be regarded as conversational norms?

Let me start with the third stage of Socrates' journey as I believe that there is a very close connection between the purpose of the conversation and the conversational norms of piety, temperance and courage. If the purpose of conversation is indeed for interlocutors to exhibit virtue, then the conversational norms are embedded in this purpose. In other words, if the role of conversation is for interlocutors to exhibit virtue, then they *should* display these virtues - the norms and the goal become one thing.

It is a much more intriguing question to ask whether these three virtues can be understood as conversational norms in relation to the first two stages of Socrates' mission. In order to address this question, I would like to start by considering a norm that is widely agreed to be a conversational norm for Socrates - sincerity. I will then suggest that rather than taking sincerity as a conversational norm, we should think instead about the three virtues as the norms as they better capture the drama of the dialogues.

5.3 Sincerity as a conversational norm

A lot has been written about the role of sincerity in Socratic *elenchus*.[126] The question is simply as follows: Why is it the case that Socrates is predominantly interested in what the interlocutor believes?[127] The answer to this question will depend on what the purpose of Socrates' questioning is. If we think that Socrates' main goal is to obtain knowledge, let's say about courage, then it doesn't seem very obvious why Socrates would care what the interlocutor

[126] Cf. Vlastos 1994, Irwin 1995, McCabe 2000.

[127] Socrates explicitly asks the interlocutors to say what they believe on multiple occasions, for example: *Charm.* 160e, Prot. 331c. At the same time, in some dialogues, he doesn't explicitly ask the interlocutors to say what they believe, presumably because they are already saying what they actually believe - this seems to apply for example to the *Euthyphro* and the *Laches*.

believes in. This is especially so because he on multiple occasions rejects the idea of truth being democratic - the fact that the majority has the same belief about something doesn't make it correct.[128] If truth then must be established by following some objective, person-neutral principles, then this interest in sincerity isn't entirely clear. Why should it matter that Socrates, rather than asking for a definition of courage, asks what the interlocutor believes?

To address this, we should start by saying that it would be incorrect to claim that Socrates is only interested in obtaining correct definitions of virtues. His project, as outlined in the *Apology* and in Chapter 1, is very much interested in what sort of life is worth living and Socrates understands his mission, among other things, as revealing the ignorance of the interlocutors. Socrates seems to operate with an idea that there is a close connection between one's beliefs, one's actions and one's happiness. False beliefs, according to Socrates, lead to bad actions, the result of which is an unhappy life. This tight connection between these three allows Socrates to examine the worthiness of one's life by testing one's beliefs. If one cannot defend one's beliefs on, let's say courage, one will hardly be able to consistently be a courageous individual.[129]

Even if we accept that there is a connection between what one believes and one's actions and happiness overall, it is still not entirely clear why Socrates insists on the sincerity condition. It is possible to imagine a situation in which a definition of courage is being tested which results in an interlocutor's change of both their belief and the way they act as they are able to reflect on the conclusions of this exchange.

However, Socrates' worry based on his encounters with poets, politicians and craftsmen, is that they mistakenly think that they are wise and therefore seem to lack this sense of reflection.[130] One can indeed suppose that those who think that they are knowledgeable are less likely to question their own beliefs if they listen to an exchange that isn't directly questioning their own beliefs. This is very different to Socrates, who is well aware that he doesn't know anything worthwhile. Socrates' assumption then seems to be that both the realisation of one's

[128] For example *Lach.* 184c *ff*
[129] For the analysis of the *Apology*, see Chapter 1.
[130] *Ap*. 20b *ff*

own ignorance and an attempt to search for wisdom can be best achieved in cases where it's one's opinions that are being tested.

Sincerity requirement then seems to have an important place in Socrates' methodology as a reflection-enabling device. Conversations, for Socrates, aren't solely about obtaining definitions, they have an existential aspect and Socrates is testing the lives themselves and asking about the interlocutor's own beliefs is the quickest way to access the interlocutor's life.

One dialogue which works with the theme of sincerity is the *Laches*. We have seen in Chapter 2 that this dialogue helps us to understand the role of courage in conversation. The key passage for this was Nicias' description of Socrates' *elenchus*, presented as an investigation into one's life. (187d *ff*) However, this evaluation of one's life seems to presuppose certain conditions for it to occur at all. This is where sincerity seems to come into play again since if one isn't saying what one believes, then one will hardly be testing one's life. This is why it is certainly no accident that indeed one of the themes of the *Laches* is sincerity. The dialogue in fact starts by Lysimachus' short speech which focuses precisely on this aspect of conversation:

> Now there are some people who make fun of frankness and if anyone asks their advice, they don't say what they think, but they make a shot at what the other man would like to hear and say something different from their own opinion. But you we considered capable not only of forming a judgement but also, having formed one, of saying exactly what you think, and this is why we have taken you into our confidence about what we are going to communicate to you.(178a-b)

This passage can certainly be understood as a criticism of sophist practises. However, there is much more to it and we have to remember that Lysimachus wants advice regarding one of the most important things - how to raise his son. And in this context, it only makes sense for Lysimachus to want to discuss this issue only with someone who is frank, or in other words, who has an opinion and at the same time expresses it.

Lysimachus isn't the only one in this dialogue to express his thoughts about conversation. Laches adds the following later in the discussion:

> I have just one feeling about discussions, Nicias, or, if you like, not one but two, because to some I might seem to be a discussion-lover and to others a discussion-hater. Whenever I hear a man discussing virtue or some kind of wisdom, then, if he really is a man and worthy of the

> words he utters, I am completely delighted to see the appropriateness and harmony existing between the speaker and his words. [...] The discourse of such a man gladdens my heart and makes everyone think that I am a discussion-lover because of the enthusiastic way in which I welcome what is said; but the man who acts in the opposite way distresses me, and the better he speaks, the worse I feel, so that his discourse makes me look like a discussion-hater. Now I have no acquaintance with the words of Socrates, but before now, I believe, I have had experience of his deeds, and there I found him a person privileged to speak fair words and to indulge in every kind of frankness. (188c-e)

Laches' worry in this passage seems at first to be slightly different from Lysimachus' as he is interested in the harmony between one's words and one's actions. Lysimachus on the other hand stresses the importance of the harmony between what one thinks and what one says. However, it would be a mistake to treat these two remarks separately, ignoring the connection between them. Firstly, Laches himself ends this passage by mentioning frankess - he in fact admits that his experience with Socrates is that of him being frank. Talking about Socrates' deeds seems to play a crucial role in determining Socrates' frankness as Laches was able to compare what Socrates did with what Socrates said and pronounce him to be a frank and therefore discussion-worthy person.

It does seem to be the case, then, that saying what one thinks plays an important role in Socratic *elenchus*. However, one has to be very careful determining what it is that is precisely going on when an interlocutor says what he thinks. In the next section, the focus will be on two fundamentally different accounts of sincere interlocutors. We will see that Euthyphro will both present himself and will be sincere without having been affected by Socrates. This is very different to what we can see in certain other dialogues - the *Laches* for example, where Nicias is very well aware that the conversation will be about the interlocutors themselves and is able to commit to it. The difference will be in Euthyphro's and Nicias' attitudes towards the *elenchus* - both of them are prepared to say what they think, but Euthyphro, unlike Nicias, is not prepared to hear what Socrates is saying. He is willing to speak, but not to listen.

5.3 Euthyphro's and Laches' sincerity

Euthyphro starts his conversation with Socrates in a very promising way. He likens himself to Socrates as someone who speaks the truth but is not taken seriously. He is so

committed to the truth that he is even willing to prosecute his father for his crime and is certain that this act is by no means an impious one. As a self-proclaimed prophet, he is ready to share with Socrates what piety is. After the first couple of pages, we can certainly see that Euthyphro is willing to share what he truly thinks.[131] Similarly, the interlocutors in the *Laches* share this willingness to say what they believe and to be questioned by Socrates throughout the Laches, as we have seen in the previous Section.

Interlocutors in both of these dialogues also reach a state of *aporia*. Laches, for example, tells Socrates at 194a-b:

> I am ready not to give up, Socrates, although I am not really accustomed to arguments of this kind. But an absolute desire for victory has seized me with respect to our conversation, and I am really getting annoyed at being unable to express what I think in this fashion. I still think I know what courage is, but I can't understand how it has escaped me just now so that I can't pin it down in words and say what it is.'

And a similar situation arises in the Euthyphro:

> 'But Socrates, I have no way of telling you what I have in mind, for whatever proposition we put forward goes around and refuses to stay put where we establish it. (*Euth.* 11b)

As we can see, in both of these dialogues, the interlocutors are not only willing to say what they believe but they also seem to realise the issues with their positions and reach a state of puzzlement and so there is some kind of reflection present in them.

Now, let's compare the endings of these dialogues. In the *Laches*, when both Laches and Nicias fail to define courage, Laches makes the following statement:

> You are a clever man, Nicias, I know. All the same, I advise Lysimachus here and Melesias to say good-bye to you and me as teachers of the young men and to retain the services of this

[131] At times, Euthyphro seems to be the most willing interlocutor of all in terms of sharing with Socartes what he thinks: *'Soc: Now, however, if you, who have full knowledge of such things, share their opinions, then we must agree with them, too, it would seem. For what are we to say, we who agree that we ourselves have no knowledge of them? Tell me, by the god of friendship, do you really believe these things are true? Euth: Yes, Socrates, and so are even more surprising things, of which the majority has no knowledge. Soc: And do you believe that there really is war among the gods, and terrible enmities and battles, and other such things as are told by the poets, and other sacred stories such as are embroidered by good writers and by representations of which the robe of the goddess is adorned when it is carried up to the Acropolis? Are we to say these things are true, Euthyphro? Euth: Not only these, Socrates, but, as I was saying just now, I will, if you wish, relate many other things about the gods which I know will amaze you.'* (*Euth*, 6b-c)

> man Socrates, as I said in the beginning. If my boys were the same age, this is what I would do. (200c)

What we can see here is that Laches' inability to define courage led him to a conclusion that perhaps he and Nicias are not the best people to take care of Lysimachus and Melesias' boys. So, he was able to translate the outcome of the conversation into his decision about his life - namely not to be in charge of the two boys' education.

We have seen, that just like Laches, Euthyphro also reached a state of aporia, however, unlike Laches, Euphyphro fails to translate the outcome of the discussion into action:

> SOCRATES: If you had no clear knowledge of piety and impiety you would never have ventured to prosecute your old father for murder on behalf of a servant. For fear of the gods you would have been afraid to take the risk lest you should not be acting rightly, and would have been ashamed before men, but now I know well that you believe you have clear knowledge of piety and impiety. So tell me, my good Euthyphro, and do not hide what you think it is.
> EUTHYPHRO: Some other time, Socrates, for I am in a hurry now, and it is time for me to go. (15c-e)

It is important to stress that in both of these dialogues, the interlocutors are very much onboard with what Socrates is trying to do and they are willing to say what they believe. Moreover, we have seen that in both dialogues, a state of *aporia* is reached, which means that there must have been some level of reflection happening during the conversation which led to a realisation that the interlocutors' definitions were problematic. So, why is it the case that, unlike Laches, Euthyphro fails to realise that his planned course of action should perhaps be altered?

As an answer, I would like to propose that the reason why Euthyphro doesn't realise that he shouldn't be prosecuting his father has to do with his lack of temperance and his lack of piety. What we will see is that, similarly to Critias in the *Charmides*, Euthyphro lacks commitment to knowledge which I take to mean a lack of ownership of one's beliefs and a lack of commitment to enquiry. The wider goal of this approach is to show that the virtues that have been my main focus in this thesis - temperance, courage and piety should be understood as conversational norms and they make conversation worthwhile.

To show Euthyphro's lack of commitment to knowledge, I would like to start by looking at the beginning of Socates conversation with Euthyphro:

> EUTHYPHRO: So he has written this indictment against you as one who makes innovations in religious matters, and he comes to court to slander you, knowing that such things are easily misrepresented to the crowd. The same is true in my case. Whenever I speak of divine matters in the assembly and foretell the future, they laugh me down as if I were crazy; and yet I have foretold nothing that did not happen. Nevertheless, they envy all of us who do this. One need not worry about them, but meet them head-on. (*Euth.* 3b)

What is interesting about this passage is that Euthyphro presents himself as a prophet and a seer, and indeed a successful one. This of course means, at least according to him, that he will be able to tell Socrates about the nature of piety. However the significance of this remark becomes more clear when we look at what Socrates says about the seers in the *Apology*:

> I soon realized that poets do not compose their poems with knowledge, but by some inborn talent and by inspiration, like seers and prophets who also say many fine things without any understanding of what they say. The poets seemed to me to have had a similar experience. (*Ap.* 22c)

This *Apology* passage focuses primarily on the poets as Socrates approached those in order to make sense of the Delphic prophecy. However he does use the example of prophets and seers to make a point about poets. What Socrates says is that these people say things without any understanding and these things come to them by inspiration or talent.

As we have just seen, Euthyphro describes himself as a prophet and a seer. And if Socrates believes that seers speak without understanding, this can help us to figure out why Euthyphro failed to realise that he shouldn't be prosecuting his father as he doesn't know what piety is. It is important to stress, though, that, when speaking to Socrates, Euthyphro is not prophesying. But Socrates also warns us in the *Apology* that his experience with the poets was such that because they had this connection to the gods, they mistakenly thought that they possessed knowledge about other things. And this is how Euthyphro seems to be presented by Plato as well - because he is a prophet, he knows what piety is.

To understand Euthyphro's lack of commitment to knowledge, let me briefly return to the *Laches* as I believe that this dialogue reveals what it means to have deep commitments to

one's beliefs. The two main interlocutors - Laches and Nicias - are two famous generals and they are invited to talk about things closely related to their hearts - the skill of fighting in armour and courage - a virtue typically thought about in relation to warfare. And this connection between who they are and what they say is picked up by Laches himself when he says at 177c-d that he is always delighted if one's words are in harmony with one's deeds and by Nicias as well in his famous description of elenchus at 187d-188c where he claims that he is well aware that any discussion with Socrates will end up being a discussion about one's life.

Laches 187d-188c:

> NICIAS: You don't appear to me to know that whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and associates with him in conversation must necessarily, even if he began by conversing about something quite different in the first place, keep on being led about by the man's arguments until he submits to answering questions about himself concerning both his present manner of life and the life he has lived hitherto. And when he does submit to this questioning, you don't realize that Socrates will not let him go before he has well and truly tested every last detail. I personally am accustomed to the man and know that one has to put up with this kind of treatment from him, and further, I know perfectly well that I myself will have to submit to it. I take pleasure in the man's company, Lysimachus, and don't regard it as at all a bad thing to have it brought to our attention that we have done or are doing wrong. Rather I think that a man who does not run away from such treatment but is willing, according to the saying of Solon, to value learning as long as he lives, not supposing that old age brings him wisdom of itself, will necessarily pay more attention to the rest of his life.

But of course that being aware that one's life is being tested doesn't automatically mean that one will alter one's actions based on some arguments. What I do want to suggest is that Laches and Nicias are able to translate the outcome of the argument into action because their beliefs are truly theirs as they have been formed by their experience. When Lysimachus asks Socrates to say whether learning to fight in armour, his answer is quite telling:

> However, it seems to me to be more suitable, since I am younger than the others and more inexperienced in these matters , for me to listen first to what they have to say and to learn from them. (181d)

I do think that the theme of experience is something that the *Laches* explores. Both Laches and Nicias experienced Socrates' actions in a battle (181b and 188d) and that is why they can vouch for him. Similarly, Laches bases his argument against the usefulness of learning to fight in armour on his experience (184b). And similarly, Nicias has previous experience with Socrates' *elenchus* and that is why he is willing to be examined by him. And we shouldn't forget that the first half of the *Laches* is concerned with the theme of education as Melesias and Lysimachus would like to know what kind of training the two boys should pursue. So, in the first half of the *Laches*, the theme of education goes side by side with the theme of experience. It seems then that Laches' and Nicias' their decision not to educate the two boys after they failed to define courage can be explained precisely because their beliefs have been formed by their experiences, or in other words, they have ownership of their beliefs.

I think that the picture that the *Laches* presents is that one's beliefs are formed by one's previous experience. Therefore, what one has done as a person in the past will have an effect on what one believes and what is being discussed in the *Laches* are beliefs that were formed throughout Laches' and Nicias' lives.

Now, when it comes to Euthyphro, can we say the same about him? I would like to suggest that his beliefs do not have the same connection to his life and to who he is. To illustrate this point, let me briefly mention a poet that Socrates examines in the *Charmides* - Critias. There are, I believe, two instances where this sort of behaviour is exemplified by Critias.[132] After Charmides fails to define temperance, Critias takes over the discussion with Socrates. The first episode that I would like to focus on is his defence of the claim that temperance is minding one's own business. At 163a, he makes a distinction between doing and making, claiming that doing other people's business is different to making other people's things and therefore his definition is sound. What is interesting is that Critias immediately mentions Hesiod as the source of this distinction:

> "Tell me," I said, "don't you call making and doing the same thing?" "Not at all," he said, "nor do I call working and making the same. I have learned this from Hesiod, who said 'work is no disgrace'. Do you suppose that Hesiod, if he referred to the sort of things you

[132] A fuller discussion of this is offered in Section 4.3.

> mentioned just now by both the term 'work' and the term 'do', would have said there was no disgrace in cobbling or selling salt fish or prostitution? (163b)

A similar move is used a little bit later at 164d-e, where Critias decides to withdraw his previous statement and instead say that temperance is knowing oneself:

> As a matter of fact, this is pretty much what I say temperance is, to know oneself, and I agree with the inscription to this effect set up at Delphi. Because this inscription appears to me to have been dedicated for the following purpose, as though it were a greeting from the god to those coming in in place of the usual 'Hail', as though to say 'hail' were an incorrect greeting, but we should rather urge one another to 'be temperate'.

It is worth contrasting these two passages with an earlier exchange between Socrates and Charmides. After Socrates shows that Charmides' definition of temperance isn't satisfactory, he says the following:

> "Then start over again, Charmides," I said, "and look into yourself with greater concentration, and when you have decided what effect the presence of temperance has upon you and what sort of thing it must be to have this effect, then put all this together and tell me clearly and bravely, what does it appear to you to be?" (160d)

What we have here is Critias almost immediately grabbing other people's positions as if he wanted to keep the discussion not about himself, juxtaposed with Socrates' suggestion to look inside. And this internal/ external distinction seems to be applicable to the *Laches* and *Euthyphro* as well - Laches and Nicias are those who are looking into themselves, into their past lives and experiences to say what they think.

And we now know, Euthyphro considers himself to be a prophet and I would like to suggest that he does have the same shallow commitments to his beliefs as Critias. He is not used to the idea of one's arguments being connected to one's experiences and one's previous life; for him, what one says is just something that appears to one. Yes, he is sincere when he is talking to Socrates, but his commitments to what he says are very shallow.

Now, given that the *Euthyphro* is a dialogue about piety, it is worth asking whether Euthyphro, a self-proclaimed prophet, is also impious during his conversation with Socrates. In Chapter 3, I defined piety as an engagement of our most divine element in enquiring about the most divine things and the question is whether Euthyphro fulfils this criterion. To be fair to

Euthyphro, he does, at least to a certain degree, respond to Socrates' requests and alter his position accordingly. When Socrates tells him that his definition is too narrow, he introduces a more general definition. When he defines piety as what is loved by the gods (7a) and Socrates responds by saying that the gods sometimes disagree between each other, Euthyphro again changes his definition to say that piety is what all the gods love (9e). However, as soon as the discussion moves onto more difficult topics - namely, the question *'whether the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods'* (10a), Euthyphro will have trouble understanding what Socrates means and he will reach a state of *aporia*[133] (11b). It is worth noting that Euthyphro's inability to answer Socrates' question comes after the following remark made by Socrates:

> I'm afraid, Euthyphro, that when you were asked what piety is, you did not wish to make its nature (οὐσίαν) clear to me, but you told me an affect (πάθος) or quality of it, that the pious has the quality of being loved by all the gods, but you have not yet told me what the pious is (ὅτι δὲ ὄν, οὔπω εἶπες). Now, if you will, do not hide things from me but tell me again from the beginning what piety is, whether being loved by the gods or having some other quality—we shall not quarrel about that—but be keen to tell me what the pious and the impious are (τί ἐστιν τό τε ὅσιον καὶ τὸ ἀνόσιον). (*Euth.* 11a-b)

It seems then that while Euthyphro can talk about a quality of piety (that it is loved by the gods), he isn't able to say anything about it's actual nature. This is important because one of the key aspects of piety as I have described it in Chapter 3 is that it requires that one is attempting to grasp the most divine things - the forms. Interestingly, Socrates does ask Euthyphro to tell him about the *'form itself that makes all pious actions pious'* (αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος ᾧ πάντα τὰ ὅσια ὅσιά ἐστιν) (*Euth.* 6d) and so the fact that Euthyphro cannot say anything about the form of piety suggests that he isn't exhibiting piety in this dialogue.

I have established in this Section that Euthyphro lacked both piety and temperance and that is why, despite being sincere, he failed to realise that he shouldn't prosecute his father. Now, one virtue that I haven't considered when comparing the *Laches* and the *Euthyphro* is the virtue

[133] Moreover, there is a sense in which the argument doesn't really progress anywhere as the definition that Euthyphro introduces in the beginning, namely that piety is what is dear to the gods (7a) will end up being the final definition as well at 15b.

of courage. We have seen in Chapter 2 that courage can be exhibited in conversation as it is a sort of endurance in the face of danger. I argued that given Socrates' focus on testing one's life, courage is needed precisely for this purpose. To be examined by Socrates means to have one's life examined that this requires courage as one is in constant danger of realising one's past mistakes, or, in the case of Alcibiades, that ones' life is not worth living.

It is not entirely clear, however, whether courage plays any role in the *Euthyphro*. It is certainly the case that Euthyphro's life is being tested, and in fact his own father's life is at stake, however, it doesn't seem to be the case that Euthypro is aware of the fact that it is his life that is being tested. One possible way to explain is to say that Euthyphro doesn't realise that his life is being tested precisely because he has very shallow commitments to his beliefs. Owning one's belief doesn't only mean that this is something that I think it's true, it is also realising that it is connected to my life - it is *my* belief after all. And, as we have seen, Euthyphro doesn't seem to have any beliefs that are truly his.

5.4 Conclusion

Given the overall purpose of this Chapter, namely to show that the virtues of piety, courage and temperance should be taken as conversational norms, my focus on sincerity and on showing that Euthyphro wasn't temperate nor pious might have come as a surprise. However, I believe that through my analysis of the *Laches* and the *Euthyphro*, I showed that the three virtues are invaluable for the practice of conversation, that Euthyphro would have been better off if he had exhibited these virtues and they should be understood as conversational norms.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation was to take seriously Socrates' claim from the *Apology* that conversation is the greatest good, or, in Socrates' own words:

> [I]t is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for men. (38a)

I suggested in Chapter 1 that to take this statement seriously, conversation must be a final good. Socrates, after all, doesn't say that conversation is the greatest instrumental good, or that it is a great good among other goods, he simply says that it is the *greatest* good. I then suggested that one way of understanding this statement is to take conversation as the greatest good precisely because it enables the participants to display virtue.

Moreover, I argued that the *Apology* presents us with a developmental account of Socrates' mission and he hasn't always been aware of the final value of conversation. I argued that the Apology presents us with three separate stages of Socrates' mission: in the first stage, Socrates used conversation to make sense of the prophecy; in the second stage he used it to test others and himself to ensure that no one wrongly thinks that they have knowledge if they in fact lack it, and to search for knowledge; and in the third stage, Socrates realised the final value of conversation.

In Chapters 2-4, I then looked at three virtues - courage, piety and temperance in an attempt to determine what it would mean for interlocutors to exhibit virtue in conversation. In relation to courage, we have seen that it is an endurance of the soul in the face of fear. We have also seen that Socrates' examination was an examination of one's life and to truly examine one's life, one indeed needs courage. After all, examining one's life means questioning one's past decisions and evaluating whether one's life is worth living. In relation to piety, we have seen in Chapter 3 that this virtue is connected to the use of our most divine element in us - our reason to enquire into the most divine things. And we have seen that conversation, once again, enables us to do this. In relation to temperance, we have seen that it is best understood as a sort of commitment to knowledge, and just as in the case of piety and courage, conversation is a place to exemplify this virtue. Finally, in Chapter 5, I argued that these three virtues should be understood as conversational norms as they play a vital role in ensuring successful outcomes of the conversations.

I believe that the analysis of the dialogues in Chapters 2-5 also enabled us to see that they validated the developmental picture of Socrates' mission presented in Chapter 1. We have seen that in some dialogues, namely the *Laches* and the *Charmides*, Socrates treated conversation primarily as an instrumental good, however at the same time both the drama and the content of these dialogues showed us the ways that conversation can be understood as being worthwhile for its own sake. And the *Phaedo* also played an important role in validating the picture of Chapter 1 by its stress on the continuity of the practice of philosophy.

My goal in this thesis was to show conversation is indeed the greatest good for humans. I did this by focusing on Socrates and the interlocutors, arguing that conversation enabled them to display virtue and that these virtues make conversation worthwhile in all sorts of ways. Of course, it should not be forgotten that we, the readers of Plato's dialogues, are also in conversation with his texts and they give *us* the opportunity to exhibit virtue as well.

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