Moderation as a Political and Philosophical Virtue in Xenophon’s Memorabilia

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MODERATION AS A POLITICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL VIRTUE
IN XENOPHON’S MEMORABILIA

a dissertation

by

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Abstract

This study of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* investigates the famous Socratic thesis that virtue is knowledge. Specifically, it is an attempt to understand the claim that anyone who knows what the right thing is to do, automatically chooses to do it. I concentrate on Socrates’ view of one particular virtue, namely moderation. This is both because moderation is the virtue that Xenophon’s Socrates most often identifies with knowledge, and because it is the virtue that Xenophon associates most closely with Socrates himself.

The first part of the dissertation considers whether the thesis that virtue is knowledge is an accurate description of ordinary moral life. The first task is to articulate the ordinary moral outlook. I examine the presentation of this outlook in seven conversations about political ambition in Book Three of the *Memorabilia*. I conclude that according to Xenophon’s Socrates, the moral outlook is based on two beliefs. One belief concerns the content of the moral law. It is the belief that we are obligated to do good for others, and in the first place to be good citizens and serve our country. The second belief is that morality is good, and the greatest good, for the individual who obeys the moral law, regardless of the apparent sacrifices that it requires. This second belief seems to be the basis for the view that virtue is knowledge: obedience to the moral law is
so good that anyone who knew this would automatically obey the law, and anyone who resists obeying it must be ignorant of how good it is.

The moral outlook combines these two beliefs. It holds that what is best for the political community is also best for the individual, or that the law that directs us to do good for others and the law that discloses to us what way of life is best for ourselves are the same law. This belief is so fundamental to the moral life that the question, whether what is good for the individual really coincides with what is good for the community, is not a legitimate question to raise, and it cannot be raised without departing somewhat from the ordinary moral attitude. On the other hand, once the fundamental assumption of moral life comes to light as a mere assumption, it is impossible to avoid investigating it, and to continue to assume that we know what virtue is.

Accordingly, the second half of the dissertation attempts to clarify this question, by examining Xenophon’s presentation of the Socratic education in Book Four of the Memorabilia. I argue that this part of the Memorabilia does not assume that virtue is political virtue, and rather shows how Socrates investigated what virtue is without this prior assumption. The last part of the dissertation is a preliminary effort to follow Socrates’ investigation of this question.
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Introduction

The recent rehabilitation of Xenophon’s reputation as a Socratic philosopher began with the work of Leo Strauss. It has progressed to the point that some of the recent scholarly literature is advancing the view that Xenophon’s Socratic writings are among the very small number of books that make available to their reader a genuine Socratic education. Such studies argue that Xenophon’s Socratic writings not only portray Socrates accurately, but also offer their readers the opportunity to become students of Socrates, by provoking them to seek guidance about fundamental matters and enabling them to find it in the written text.² The scholarship has advanced the farthest regarding Xenophon’s three shorter Socratic writings: his Oeconomicus, Symposium and Apology of Socrates.³ Less progress has been made in proving that Xenophon’s longest Socratic work, his Memorabilia, is a vehicle of Socratic education as well as a

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¹ My analyses of parts of the Memorabilia in this dissertation owes very much to the analyses of those sections in Strauss (1972) 55-83 and 91-123. I will not review the long history of the interpretation of Xenophon’s Socratic writings. I refer the reader to Bartlett (1996) 1-8 and Gray (1998) 1-9. For more recent developments, see Buzzetti (2003). The most noteworthy scholarship on the Memorabilia to appear in recent years is David Johnson’s work on the second and fourth chapters of Book Four (2003, 2005), which I discuss in the second part of this dissertation. The only attempt at an account of the Memorabilia as a whole remains Gray (1998); for an assessment and critique of this effort, see Buzzetti (2001).

² This view is by no means universally accepted, even among the small number of scholars who claim to consider Xenophon to be worthy of serious attention. The more common view is the one expressed by Cooper (1999) 14: “To be sure, Xenophon is not a philosopher himself and his purpose in writing his Socratic works is not in the least to display, reflect upon, or celebrate Socrates’ specifically philosophical opinions. So his testimony is inevitably of limited value for anyone whose principal interest is in Socrates the philosopher.”

³ See especially the essays in the edition of Xenophon’s shorter Socratic writings edited by Robert Bartlett (1996).
presentation of Socrates. The present study is an effort to further our understanding of Xenophon in this regard.

The best way to begin is with some indications that Xenophon himself gives about how to read the *Memorabilia*. Almost the entire *Memorabilia* is devoted to showing how Socrates benefited his companions (I 3.1). But occasionally, Xenophon claims to show, not that Socrates benefited his companions or taught them something, but that he “tried” to teach them something, and sometimes Xenophon says in his own name, not that he will show the reader something, but that he will “try” (see, for example, IV 3.1 and 6.1). In these cases, whether or not Socrates’ and Xenophon’s attempts succeed depends, not only on Socrates or Xenophon, but also on the interlocutor or the reader; indeed, in the parts of the *Memorabilia* that I will discuss in this dissertation, I will argue that much of Socrates’ teaching is lost on the interlocutors with whom he converses. Xenophon suggests in this way that whether or not we will learn at least some of what he aims to teach us in the *Memorabilia* depends on us, on if we are ourselves open to receiving that education.

At one point in the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon claims that it makes no difference, with a view to benefiting from Socrates’ instruction in the conversations that he reports in the *Memorabilia*, whether or not the student is the actual interlocutor, and whether or not he is even present at the actual conversation, as long as he is actively engaged in the concerns that they raise (IV 1.1). And he describes the type of person whom Socrates

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4 The most important exception to this is the work of Eric Buzzetti (1998, 2001), which has served as a model for my own study.

5 Unless otherwise stated, references in parentheses refer to Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*. The best edition of the Greek text is edited by Carolus Hude (Teubner, 1934). I also rely frequently on the excellent English translation of the *Memorabilia* by Amy Bonnette (1994).
judged to be capable of receiving an education in the most fundamental matters: someone who not only possesses exceptional intellectual qualities, but who also has a passionate desire to become a good person (IV 1.2). All of this means that the *Memorabilia* will only reveal itself to be a vehicle of Socratic education if we are open to being educated by it, and according to Xenophon’s description of the good students, this requires us to approach our study with a desire for practical guidance, with a specific problem or question in mind.

Accordingly, this study of the *Memorabilia* will aim to understand a specific problem, a specific phenomenon. This dissertation is a study of the common psychological phenomenon of knowing what the right thing is to do, and even desiring to do the right thing, but doing something else instead. This phenomenon contains three experiences. One is the desire or feeling of duty to be a good person, to do the right thing, together with the knowledge or a belief about what the right thing to do is. A second is the resistance to doing the right thing, a resistance that can be so powerful that even the greatest moral resolve cannot always make us do what we feel is required of us. The third is the feeling of dissatisfaction and disappointment with oneself that is familiar to anyone who has ever done something that he knew at the time to be wrong. The aim of our investigation is to understand why we sometimes do what we know is wrong, and why we feel bad about it, and what is required in order to overpower our resistance to doing the right thing.
One remark of Socrates’ that Xenophon reports contains an explicit account of this phenomenon. Interpreting this remark will be the central task of this dissertation. The subject of the whole remark is a particular virtue, moderation:

[Socrates] did not distinguish between wisdom and moderation, but decided that someone is both wise and moderate who, knowing the noble and good things, makes use of them, and knowing the shameful things, abstains from them (III 9.4).

The view that moderation is inseparable from wisdom means that no one can act correctly and “use” the noble and good things properly, unless he is also wise. The phenomenon of knowing what to do but doing the opposite is introduced as an objection to this claim. After this remark of Socrates’, Xenophon reports that someone asked Socrates about people who know what it is necessary to do, but do the opposite things. Aren’t such people wise, but incontinent? And does not this failure to do what one knows is right contradict the view that wisdom is inseparable from moderation? Socrates denies this: such people are rather unwise and incontinent,

…for I think that all people, choosing from among the things that are possible the ones that they think are most advantageous for them, do these things. Therefore, I believe that people who do not act correctly are neither wise nor moderate (III 9.4).

All people, people who act incorrectly as well as people who act correctly, do what they think is best for them. But people who act correctly are wise, and people who act incorrectly are unwise. Wisdom is the knowledge not only of our duties, of what is required of us, but also of our interests, of what is good for us. Or rather, the two coincide. According to this account, it is always in our interest to do the right thing, to be
good people, and this is what the wise and moderate person knows and what anyone who
is not wise and moderate does not know. When we act wrongly, we only think that we
know what our obligation is, because if we really knew this, then we would know also
that it is in our interest, and therefore we would do it. In response to our displeasure at
our failure to do what we know is right, this account would direct us to consider why it is
always in our interest to be good people.

This account is exposed to the objection that it contradicts one of our deepest
beliefs about morality, about what it means to be a good person. This is that we are
unconditionally obligated to obey the moral law, whether or not it is in our interest. The
belief that morality requires us to disregard our concern with ourselves, to transcend our
selfish interests and devote ourselves to something greater and more meaningful than
ourselves, is characterized here as a lack of wisdom, as ignorance of the fact that morality
is in our interest. Socrates implies not only that true virtue does not require any genuine
sacrifice of self, insofar as it is most to our advantage, but also that in order to be virtuous
one must know that this is the case and not think that one is genuinely sacrificing oneself.
This account implicitly denies that morality is noble. Or rather, the noble person seems
to disprove Socrates' claim that “all people” do what they think is most advantageous for
them. Whether or not morality is always in our interest, self-interest is surely not the
motive of the noble person, who satisfies his obligation even if he does not consciously
expect to profit in return, and even if he expects to be harmed. By implicitly denying this
and claiming that the only motive for satisfying our obligation is self-interest, Socrates
seems to degrade the moral attitude by reducing it to vulgar calculations of self-interest.
and utility. Socrates’ account raises two separate questions: is it always in our interest to
do the right thing? Further, what role does the knowledge or belief that it is in our
interest to do the right thing play in the motivation of the good person? What is the
relation between our duty and our interests, the noble and the good, both in itself and in
the motivation and attitude of the morally serious person?

Precisely this subject, the relation between the noble and the good, is the central
issue in the section of the Memorabilia that precedes this thematic discussion of
moderation, the first eight chapters of Book Three. The last chapter in this section
discusses this issue thematically, but the seven preceding chapters are even more helpful.
These chapters present advice that Socrates gave to politically ambitious “men who long
for noble things,” most of whom hold or aspire to the highest elective Athenian offices,
the generalship and the command of the cavalry (III 1.1; see Aristotle, Athenian
Constitution 61 and 43-44). Socrates advises these men about what is required of them in
order to accomplish what they aspire to do. And the central question proves to be what
the relation is between these noble things that it is the leader’s duty to accomplish, and
the good things that he and especially the citizens and soldiers whom he leads have a
right to hope for if they do what is required of them.

In the first section of this dissertation, we will study this account of political
ambition and of the relation between the noble and the good. Our aim will be to
understand the resistance to doing what is required of us, and how to overcome this
resistance. With a view to this problem, it is important to consider not only the
arguments of these conversations but also the action, the drama, the effects that they have
on the interlocutors with whom Socrates converses. We are interested not only in the
tasks and qualifications of military and political leaders, and the rewards for satisfying
these responsibilities, but also in the view that morally serious people hold of the relation
between these tasks and rewards. The clearest indication of this relation is which
proposals arouse the approval of Socrates’ interlocutors, and which provoke their
resistance. The reactions of the interlocutors indicate whether the relation between the
noble and the good that Socrates describes is the same as the view of this relation that
moves these men to serve their community, or their motives are based on a different view
of this relation.

We turn to these conversations about political life in order to clarify the relation
between what we are required to do and any benefit that may accrue to us as a result of
doing the right thing, between the noble and the good: whether or not there is such a good
result for us, and either way, if the desire for this result is consciously or unconsciously
our motive for doing our duty. We raise these questions because according to Socrates,
the reason why we fail to overpower our resistance to doing what we think our duty is, is
that we do not know that it is in our interest to do the right thing. We aim to discover if
this is true, if it is in our interest to do the right thing, and if we must know or believe that
this is in our interest in order to do the right thing. The first half of the dissertation
analyzes the first eight chapters of Book Three of the Memorabilia with a view to
evaluating this account. This analysis will prove to be insufficient for our task. For the
central finding of this analysis will be that according to Socrates, the noble is not good,
and the belief that it is always in one’s interest to act nobly is false. This finding
undermines Socrates’ official explanation of why someone does the opposite of what he
knows is right, which is that he does not really know what to do: if he did, then he would
know that this is what is best for him, and so he would do it. There turns out to be a great
difference between what is best for us and what satisfies our obligation. Unless we know
what our obligation is, we cannot understand what power this knowledge has to move us
to act, and we are certainly in no position to consider what in addition to this knowledge
may be required in order to move us to satisfy our obligation. The conclusion that we
will draw from this section of the Memorabilia is that in order to account for the
phenomenon that we are considering, we must first raise and answer the question, what is
our duty, what is virtue? Accordingly, the second half of this dissertation will investigate
Book Four of the Memorabilia, where Xenophon presents Socrates’ investigation of this
question.
III 1: Introduction

Xenophon introduces this section of the *Memorabilia* by promising to show that Socrates “benefited men who long for noble things by making them work carefully at what they longed for” (III 1.1). The noble things in question turn out to be high political offices, and the services that the holders of these offices perform for their community. Xenophon’s introduction does not make clear what Socrates himself thought about these noble things, and how he behaved in the case of those of his companions who did not spontaneously long for these noble things. Did Socrates encourage political ambition, or did he only help those of his companions who were already ambitious to succeed?

The very first remark of Socrates’ that Xenophon reports calls attention to this same question. Socrates convinces an ambitious companion of his to go study generalship with the sophist Dionysodorus, on the ground that it is shameful and unjust for someone who wants to be a general to let pass an opportunity to learn how to be one. Since such a person is entrusted by the city with matters that are of the greatest consequence to its welfare, he must do his best to deserve that trust (§1-3). If this is the only reason why someone should learn how to be a general, then it implies that someone who does not seek the city’s trust is not under any obligation to do this. Socrates’ remark invites us to wonder how far our obligation to our community extends, and in particular if it is up to us to choose whether or not we want to devote our whole lives to public
service. By repeating twice, once in his own name and once in Socrates’ name, the same ambiguity, Xenophon confronts us with this question. And as soon as we reflect on this question, we realize that we need to raise also a second, more fundamental question: how can we determine if we have this duty, and in general what our duty is?

Socrates’ advice succeeds, and his young companion leaves him to go become a student of Dionysodorus. The conversation resumes when the student rejoins Socrates and his circle after completing his studies. Socrates begins the conversation with what Xenophon emphasizes is a joke at the student’s expense: see how majestic he looks, now that he has learned to be a general! In fact, just as someone who has studied music or medicine is a musician or a doctor even if he is not actively practicing his art, so this one will be a general from now on, even if no one elects him. But someone who does not understand is not a general or a doctor, not even if he has been elected unanimously (§4).

It is not unusual for Xenophon to report a remark that Socrates makes in jest, but it is very unusual for Xenophon to call attention explicitly to the fact that it is a joke, especially since no such indication is needed in this case. Xenophon seems to want the reader to reflect on what makes this remark a joke. The joke is that even if the student knows everything about leading an army, which turns out not to be the case, he would still be far from being a general, unlike a graduate from a medical school, for example, who not only knows how to be a doctor but who is actually a doctor by virtue of that knowledge. The claim that the student is a general reflects a possible interpretation of the position that virtue is knowledge: this position might be taken to mean that virtue is the merely technical knowledge of how to do the things that virtuous people do. By
emphasizing that this is a joke, Xenophon warns us against interpreting in this way the famous Socratic teaching. Narrow, technical competence is surely a necessary condition for being a general, and someone who does not know what he is doing is not a real general, but it is not a sufficient condition. Socrates himself says what else is required in order to be a general: to be elected general, and to practice generalship. A general must persuade free citizens and especially citizen-soldiers to entrust him with the leadership of the army and to follow him into battle, and he must actually do the things that a military expert knows how to do, he must fight and win.

Next, Socrates asks the student what the first thing is that he learned from Dionysodorus. The student answers that the first thing that he learned was also the last thing: he only learned tactics. This gives Socrates a second opportunity to tell the student how far he is from being qualified to be a general. There are many other “parts” of generalship besides tactics, Socrates says, and the qualifications that he enumerates include not only other branches of knowledge but also natural dispositions and character traits:

…the general also should be fit to equip his army for war, fit to procure provisions for his soldiers, fit to contrive, fit to work, attentive, fit to endure, shrewd, both friendly and fierce, both straightforward and devious, both fit to guard and thievish, lavish, rapacious, fond of giving, greedy, cautious, ready to attack, and there are many other things both in his nature and in his understanding that the one who is going to be a good general must have (§6).

This is a much more extensive and adequate enumeration of the qualifications for generalship than the joke that nothing besides knowledge is required, but Socrates
concludes his speech by calling attention to the fact that even this enumeration is not complete: it is necessary for someone who is going to be a good general to have “many other things,” in addition to these. In this way, Xenophon encourages us to reflect on what is missing from this long list. The answer is suggested especially by the nasty qualities that Socrates attributes to the general. A good general is not simply a nice man. He has to harm as well as help, to deceive as well as to tell the truth. But he is not simply a nasty man, either. He deceives the enemy, and perhaps even his own soldiers, in order to help his community, if and when the interests of the community ever require it. This suggests one additional qualification that someone who is potentially both so dangerous and so helpful must have in order to be a good general, a qualification that Socrates does not mention explicitly: he must be a patriot and take his bearings from the goal of the welfare of the community. He must regulate his use of these nasty and nice tendencies with a view to this goal. It is not enough for him to be a skillful tactician or a fierce and brave fighter; he must be a public-spirited one, as well.

Indeed this quality, patriotism, has been absent from the whole conversation so far. The joke that someone can be a general without being elected general or even serving as one, implicitly denies that the general is a patriot, since a patriot would not be satisfied to know how to serve his community unless he actually served it in addition. More precisely, since Socrates jokes that the knowledge of how to be a general automatically makes someone a general, even apart from election or practice, he implicitly denies that patriotism is part of that knowledge and that someone who knows how to be a general knows in addition that it is incumbent on him to serve his
community. The joke distinguishes tacitly between two intellectual components of
generalship: the merely technical knowledge of how to be a general, and the patriotic
devotion to the community. And it denies implicitly that the second one of these is a part
of the general’s knowledge, and that knowledge is the basis for patriotism. Socrates
implies that the general’s motive for serving his country is not fully rational.

The remainder of this conversation suggests that one of the general’s tasks is to
foster this normative awareness of duty in his subordinate soldiers, in order to induce
them to fight bravely. This comes to light in a more detailed discussion of tactics, which
we recall is the only part of generalship that Dionysodorus taught the student (§5).
Socrates approves of learning tactics, but convinces the student that Dionysodorus taught
him this inadequately. The student finally realizes that Dionysodorus did not teach him
everything that he needs to know, and he accepts Socrates’ offer to examine this with
him. If their task were to seize money, Socrates explains, they would order the army
correctly by stationing the greediest soldiers in front. Since it is a matter of being
exposed to risk, the most ambitious (or honor-loving: philotimotatoi) soldiers should be
in front. The student agrees emphatically with the latter suggestion, on the ground that
these are the people who want to run risks for the sake of praise (§9-10). In order to
fulfill his responsibilities, the general depends on ambitious people like himself being
present in the ranks of the soldiers. Moreover, Socrates tells the student that tactics is a
matter not only of arranging soldiers in a certain order but also of speaking to them in a
certain way (§11). He implies that if such ambitious people are not present, or if there
are not enough of them or their devotion flags in a particularly dangerous situation, then
the general must arouse and encourage their ambition, their willingness to risk everything in order to serve their country. Generalship requires the general to reflect on and understand his own devotion to his community, in order to be able to appeal to and foster the same devotion in others.

After he brings this requirement to light, Socrates declines to teach the student anything further. He brings the conversation to an end by sending the student back to Dionysodorous for further instruction. It is clear now that Socrates himself knows the matters that he tells the student to try to learn from Dionysodorus, and that he declines to teach the student himself for other reasons. In addition, it is clearer than before why Socrates does not want to teach generalship, what precisely it is that Socrates does not want to tell the student about being a general. This is suggested by the point at which Socrates stops instructing the student. Socrates ends the lesson after he asks the student if Dionysodorus taught him where and how to use “each” of these orderings. The two different orderings that Socrates has mentioned are, first, the stationing of the greedy soldiers in the vanguard, and second, the stationing of the ambitious ones in the vanguard. Socrates implies that neither motive alone suffices for all of the tasks that generals and their armies are required to perform, for “there are many occasions in which it is not appropriate either to put in order or to speak in the same way.” The student answers that Dionysodorus did not teach him this, either. But Socrates refuses, not only in this conversation but also in this section of the Memorabilia as a whole, to clarify explicitly the precise roles that these two motives, personal greed and the noble aspiration to praise and honor, play in the moral attitude, and their relation to one another.
By sending the student back to Dionysodorus at this point, Socrates rather calls attention to the sophist’s attitude to this question. Socrates explains that if Dionysodorus understands what the student still needs to learn, and if in addition he is not insensitive to shame, then he will be ashamed to send the student away so wanting after having taken his money (§11). This implies rather nastily that Dionysodorus may be shameless, and even if he understands what the student wants to learn, he may still cheat the student as long as he thinks that he can escape punishment. And this alternative seems plausible, in light of the fact that Dionysodorus knows how to be a general at least to some extent, but he lacks the sensitivity to honor and shame, to virtue, that makes people want to serve their community and that makes ambitious men the best soldiers. Dionysodorus neither feels a patriotic attachment to any community, insofar as he travels around teaching generalship for pay rather than putting his knowledge in the service of his fatherland, nor does he foster this patriotism in his students or teach them to foster it in their soldiers.

The contrast between Dionsydorus and Socrates sheds some light on the question that the beginning of this chapter raised, concerning Socrates’ own attitude to the study of generalship. Like Dionysodorus, Socrates knows to a great extent, even more than the sophist does, how to be a general, and like Dionysodorus he declines to be a general. But unlike Dionysodorus, Socrates declines even to teach generalship, that is, to use his knowledge of generalship for pay (see I 2.5-7, 6.5). Both men seem to harbor a reservation about the practice of generalship, and according to the argument of this conversation this amounts to a reservation about the patriotic devotion to one’s community, about the concern with being a good person that makes people sensitive to
honor and shame, leads competent men to serve their communities and makes teachers unwilling to cheat their students. In the case of Dionysodorus, this reservation about patriotism has the effect of freeing him from these restraints, and makes him feel that he is not subject to any higher standard of conduct than his narrow self-interest. This is less clear in the case of Socrates.

Socrates does not seem to feel obligated to practice generalship himself, to teach his students how to help their community, or to encourage those of his students who have no interest in being generals to study this. But in the case of those of his companions who do show some interest in generalship, even students who are as unpromising as the interlocutor in the present conversation, Socrates not only urges them to get an education but also directs their attention to precisely the aspect of generalship that seems most problematic, to the duty that they consciously or unconsciously feel to serve their community. There seems to be some value to clarifying the feeling of moral obligation that is not exhausted by the services that this feeling motivates one to perform for the community. The next conversation that Xenophon reports supports this interpretation of Socrates’ attitude by taking up precisely the qualification for generalship that is so frequently alluded to in this conversation but never openly acknowledged, the general’s devotion to his community, and by showing that for Socrates, this is the fundamental qualification of a leader and the proper starting-point for the investigation of what political leadership calls for.
This conversation takes up that aspect of generalship that the previous conversation brought to light only by allusion and omission, the general’s obligation to his community. More precisely, it is an attempt by Socrates to foster this sense of obligation in his interlocutor, about whom Xenophon tells us only that he has been elected general. The fact that Socrates urges the general to devote himself to Athens and fulfill his responsibilities seems to contradict our analysis of the previous chapter, which argued that Socrates harbors a reservation about our obligation to our community. This apparent contradiction is easy to resolve, if we take into account the dramatic settings of the two conversations. Whereas the interlocutor in the first conversation was not yet a general, and it is likely that he will never be a general, Socrates’ interlocutor in this conversation is a general at the time of the conversation. Whatever reservations about generalship Socrates may feel, it is not appropriate for him to reveal them to someone on whom the city’s safety depends. Moreover, there is no indication that this particular general is interested in conversing with Socrates and investigating the questions about his obligation that came to light in the previous conversation. He remains silent throughout the conversation. Nor is this general very concerned with his obligation to begin with, since Socrates seems to feel that he needs to be reminded of his most basic responsibilities.

Socrates presents his advice in the form of an exegetical interpretation of Homer, specifically of two verses from the Iliad about Agamemnon. In the first verse, Homer called Agamemnon “shepherd of the people.” Socrates explains that just as shepherds
should take care that their sheep are safe and provided for and that the purpose of their being sustained is achieved, so the general should take care that the soldiers are safe and provided for and that the purpose of their being soldiers is achieved. This purpose, Socrates adds, is to become happier by overpowering their enemies. In the second verse, Homer “praised” Agamemnon, Socrates claims, by saying, “he is both, a good king and a strong spearman.” This is because he would be a strong spearman if he not only fought well himself but also were responsible for this for the whole army, and he would be a good king if he not only presided nobly over his own life but also were responsible for the happiness of his subjects. For the king is elected not for his own benefit but for the benefit of the electors as well, and generals are elected to lead their electors on campaign in order that the electors might live as well as possible (III 2.1-3). Socrates calls only the second appellation, “good king and strong spearman,” a kind of “praise,” and not the first one, “shepherd of the people.” He implies that Homer withheld praise from Agamemnon in the first verse. The main difference between Socrates’ interpretations of the two verses is that in the first one, the general is not said to be responsible for the happiness of the community as a whole, only for the happiness of his soldiers. The reason why Socrates does not consider this to be a form of praise may be a further similarity between generals and shepherds that Socrates tactfully refrains from mentioning: both lead their charges to their deaths. A general who cares too much about the happiness of his soldiers, not to mention one who cares about profiting personally from his soldiers like a shepherd profits from his sheep, neglects his duty.⁶ His primary responsibility is to his

community, and he is “praised” for satisfying this responsibility, and not for any happiness that may accrue to him or his soldiers as a result; such happiness is a merely incidental byproduct of his success.

Socrates concludes his address by instructing the general to fulfill his responsibility and telling him that it is difficult to find anything nobler than a general who does this or more shameful than its opposite, a selfish general who prefers his own happiness to his city’s. Xenophon remarks by way of explanation that by examining in this way what the virtue of a good leader is, Socrates took away everything else besides the making happy of whomever he leads (§4). In particular, Xenophon distinguishes by means of this remark between the noble and praiseworthy concern with the happiness of the city that Socrates recommends to the general, and the selfish concern on the part of a general with his own happiness. This distinction is already implied by the suggestion that the general leads his soldiers into danger and even death. But more generally, Xenophon seems to mean that for people who are genuinely absorbed in their duty to their community, the question of their own happiness does not even arise, nor, if it does arise, is it a legitimate question. The attitude that Socrates recommends is the thoroughly sincere and selfless devotion to morality that is based on a tacit distinction between duty and selfish desire. It is essential to the moral attitude that it identifies virtue as a kind of transcendence of our selfish, petty concerns, a voluntary devotion to someone else’s happiness, a fulfillment of our duty and not of our desire.

Yet this view is too extreme, or rather incomplete. The sharp distinction between obedience to the moral law and the pursuit of one’s own interests fails to account for the
claim that the moral law has on us. It does not explain why we feel bound to obey the law in the first place, and in particular why we feel that we have to ignore our happiness even to the point of doing something that is likely to harm us.

Moreover, as we have already noted, the speech that Socrates delivers here must be interpreted in light of the occasion on which it is delivered: an address to someone on whom the city’s welfare actually depends because he has been elected general, and who moreover shows no particular affinity either for his responsibilities or for a conversation with Socrates. The significance of these circumstances is that we cannot conclude from this conversation what Socrates’ attitude is to the questions that the previous chapter raised: the status of our duty to our community, and the desirability of the generalship. We recall that in that conversation Socrates called into question the rationality of this attitude and denied either to teach it to companions of his who did not already feel it or to teach his ambitious companion how and when a general might foster this patriotic feeling in his subordinate soldiers. And Socrates does not suggest in the present conversation that the patriotic attitude that he urges the general to adopt is a reasonable one. Indeed, this is the only conversation in this section of the Memorabilia, in which Socrates does not explicitly or implicitly equate political leadership with a kind of knowledge (compare III 1.4, 3.9, 4.6, 5.21-22, 6.17-18, 7.4, 8.5, 9.4-5).

Indeed, Xenophon calls attention not only to the view of virtue that Socrates endorses in this conversation, but also to the manner in which this view is presented: by examining “in this way” (houtōs) what the virtue of a good leader is, Socrates reduced political virtue to caring for the happiness of the led (§4). The manner of investigation
that Xenophon has in mind may be the appeal to Homer, on whose authority Socrates bases his claims about the general’s duty, a reliance on traditional authority that falls short of an apodictic demonstration that this is our duty. At any rate, in light of the suggestion that the result of this investigation is determined to some extent by the manner in which it proceeds, it is possible that the insistence on the primacy of our responsibility to our community is not as straightforward as it appears in this conversation. In the next conversation, this same subject of our duty to our community is taken up in the way in which it arose in the first conversation, as the problem of persuading subordinate soldiers to obey their commander and endanger themselves for the sake of their community. Meanwhile, Xenophon’s remark concerning the manner of the investigation of the virtue of a good leader seems to call for the following reflection. All of the conversations in this section of the *Memorabilia* examine “the virtue of a good leader,” the actions that political leadership calls for. But it is taken for granted that the leadership of one’s community is virtue and that what it means to be a good person is settled, even if the duties of such a person are unclear to the rather untalented men with whom Socrates converses. Or rather, for someone who is serious about doing their duty and serving their community, it is no simple matter even to raise the question, what makes the noble course of action virtuous: what is the mechanism, by which a human being perfects himself precisely by devoting himself to the welfare of others?
This chapter is remarkable for its uncommonly rich and detailed, yet economical and sparing, depiction of Socrates’ interlocutor. The only thing that Xenophon tells us about him at the beginning of the chapter is that this interlocutor has been elected to command the cavalry. This makes him not greatly inferior in rank to a general; according to Aristotle, the command of the army and of the cavalry were the highest elective Athenian offices (*Constitution of Athens* 43-44 and 61). Moreover, the cavalry commander or his family must be wealthy enough to bear the expense of maintaining horses. He belongs to the relatively well-off part of the citizenry, the part that is most likely to have the leisure to receive a liberal education. Further, the cavalry commander is quite young, for Socrates addresses him as “child” (*neania*) (III 3.1). The election to command the cavalry is clearly an important moment for such a person. It distinguishes him from among his already distinguished peers, and it opens before him even greater prospects of future success.

Socrates initiates the conversation by asking his interlocutor why he desired to command the cavalry. But Socrates, and not the cavalry commander, answers the question. Perhaps Socrates does not give the cavalry commander an opportunity to answer, or perhaps there is a protracted silence between Socrates’ question and his own answer, during which the cavalry commander realizes that he is at a loss to explain why he is so pleased with his new situation. At any rate, the cavalry commander agrees with Socrates that his aim was not merely to ride at the front of the cavalry formations; after all, Socrates points out, this is the task of the archers. Nor, he agrees, was it merely for
the sake of being recognized, since madmen, too, are conspicuous. In this way, Socrates makes the cavalry commander realize that he is not satisfied with mere prominence; he wants the deserved promise of a great benefactor to his community. Accordingly, he agrees emphatically with Socrates’ third suggestion, which is that his aim is to improve the cavalry with a view to benefiting the city (III 3.1-2). The cavalry commander claims to have been attracted to his office because of the opportunity that it affords to contribute to the happiness of the city. The office is not a reward but a responsibility.

Socrates appears to endorse the aspirations of the cavalry commander with as much enthusiasm as the cavalry commander himself. He even swears, which the cavalry commander did not do: “By Zeus, it is noble indeed, if you are really able to do these things” (§2). As this remark suggests, the remainder of the conversation is occupied by the enumeration of the cavalry commander’s duties. These duties are not surprising, and the fact that the cavalry commander needs to be made aware of them at all is a sign that he is ill prepared for his new office. Nevertheless, the education of the cavalry commander is of great interest, because more than half of the conversation is taken up by a consideration of how the cavalry commander can make his men obey him, and the examination of this point proves to entail a thorough investigation and attempt at clarification of the moral outlook that came to light in the last chapter.

The cavalry commander has just agreed that the only prominence that interests him is the prominence that a benefactor of his city deserves. When Socrates begins to question him about his tasks, and in the first place about how he plans to train the horses, it immediately becomes clear that he has not taken this to heart. He does not think that it
is his job to worry about the horses, although, as Socrates points out, he depends for his success on their strength and discipline. In this case, he is less concerned with his responsibility than with the indignity that certain kinds of work entail, and with the privileges of his rank. Yet he realizes his error, and when Socrates corrects him, he accepts the correction (§3-4).

The cavalry commander proves not to have thought much about his other responsibilities, either. Specifically, he does not realize what is required in order to prepare his men for battle. This is explained in part by the largely ceremonial function of the Athenian cavalry at the time of the conversation, which Socrates refers to by pointing out that the cavalymen are accustomed to riding on sandy racetracks, that is, in parades. Socrates asks the cavalry commander if he intends to lure enemies onto sandy terrain like these racetracks, or to conduct military exercises on the kinds of terrain where the wars are likely to be fought. The cavalry commander agrees upon reflection that it would be “better” if the horsemen practiced riding on the kind of terrain where they are likely to have to fight. When Socrates asks him if he plans to conduct target practice, he agrees that this would also be “better,” that is, he admits tacitly that he has not thought of this, either. And he admits explicitly that he has not thought about preparing his men psychologically for battle. In short, although the cavalry commander knows that he is responsible for the safety of his men, and he even volunteers that it is with a view to their safety that they should practice mounting their horses, he does not seem to have considered that he must expose them to risk (§5-7).
The major part of the conversation concerns how the cavalry commander can make his men obey him. He is especially interested in this: he asks Socrates for advice and addresses him by name for the first time when Socrates raises the question. Perhaps he is having trouble doing this. Socrates answers that just as in every matter human beings want to obey whomever they consider best, like sick people obey doctors, so it is likely that in horsemanship as well, the others will want most to obey whoever most visibly knows what should be done (§8-9). The cavalry commander interprets this to mean that his men will obey him if it is clear that he deserves to be in charge because he is the best cavalryman. This proves not to be what Socrates has in mind. Before we proceed to Socrates’ second, more explicit answer, we should consider what the cavalry commander misunderstands about Socrates’ first answer and about his own duties. He seems to interpret the analogy between military leadership and medicine to mean that just as people want to be treated by the best doctor, so cavalrymen want to be led by the best commander. But he does not seem to have reflected on the reason why people want to obey doctors in the first place, on the qualifications that give doctors their authority and on what the analogous motives and qualifications would be in the case of soldiers and their commander. Socrates makes explicit the reason why patients obey doctors, and in general why people obey experts in any matter whatever, in another conversation in the Memorabilia: they are aware of some need that they have for their expertise (III 9.11). The suggestion of the cavalry commander that his men will voluntarily obey the best cavalryman and that he can lead by example assumes tacitly that his men are aware of some need that they have and that the leadership of the best cavalryman satisfies. He
assumes that his men want someone to show them how to do their work well, and that they want to be good soldiers. Perhaps this is not a surprising assumption for the cavalry commander to make, since he is so pleased with his own position in the cavalry, but as Socrates proceeds to explain, it is a problematic assumption.

Socrates’ second explanation of how the cavalry commander should make his men obey him makes clearer than the first one why cavalrymen might resist being led by a superior horseman. Socrates corrects the cavalry commander by explaining that in addition, he has to teach his men that obedience is both nobler and safer for them (§10). It can be dangerous to be a cavalryman. In some respects, the cavalrymen will be safer by obeying their commander, for example by becoming better trained and by fighting in a good battle formation. In order to persuade his men that they will be safer under his command, the cavalry commander will have to do something that he almost certainly has not done until now; he will have to reassure his men that he knows what he is doing. But even if he does this, his men will never be simply safe in battle. Fighting obediently is almost never the course of action that is simply safest, because it is almost always safer not to fight at all. The two concerns to which Socrates advises the cavalry commander to appeal, safety and nobility, do not coincide. Socrates means rather that the cavalry commander should supplement his men’s concern with their safety by fostering in them a concern with the noble and an aversion to shameful and cowardly behavior. The responsibility of the cavalry commander to the city requires him to concern himself with his soldiers’ characters in order to persuade them to obey him. He must make them prefer to live and even, in the extreme case, to die nobly, than to live or die shamefully.
The cavalry commander admits that he has no idea how to accomplish this. Socrates reassures him that it is much easier to teach this than to teach that bad things are better and more profitable than good things (§10). It is easier for the cavalry commander to make his men obey him than to make them do bad things, because his orders are not simply bad. But because of the danger that they entail, they are not simply good, either. It is more accurate to say that it is sometimes partly bad for soldiers to obey their commander, when they are wounded or killed, but even then it is also good, insofar as it is noble and satisfies their obligation to the city.  

This is not the attitude of the cavalry commander. His great enthusiasm for his new rank, his failure to reflect on what is required of him in order to prepare his men for battle, and his naïve suggestion that the mere sight of his superiority will inspire his men to obey his instructions, all combine to give the impression that he thinks, or at least that he has thought until now, that it is simply good and not at all bad to serve in the military—at least when one has risen high enough in the ranks to be exempt from stable duty. If he understood how dangerous military service is, what price he might have to pay in return for these good things that he values so highly, then he might not remain confident that these things are good at all. Yet the remainder of the conversation shows that the superlative goodness that we attribute to noble things and noble people receives its character precisely from the harm or at least risk that those things entail. Nobility is so impressive and attractive because we hold simultaneously two beliefs about it: we consider it both good and bad. And the thought of the cavalry commander is not nearly

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as sophisticated as this. His devotion to his work and to his city proceeds from a far more superficial enjoyment of his rank and social status.

The cavalry commander asks Socrates if he means that in addition to everything else, he must work at being able to speak to his soldiers. Socrates responds by mocking the cavalry commander: did you expect to command the cavalry in silence? This is surely not what the cavalry commander thought. It is most unlikely that he expected that he would not have to order the cavalry to “halt,” and “march,” and the like. Rather, his question is formulated very awkwardly and inarticulately, and it shows that he lacks the qualification that he asks about and is not good at speaking. The “speech” that he has in mind is not just any speech, but a particular kind of speech, but he is unable to say what it is.

There follows a long remark of Socrates’ about the importance of speech that exceeds in scope the speech that is required for the relatively narrow purpose of leading the army: as many things as we have learned by means of the law that they are noble, on account of which we know how to live—we learned all of these things through speech, Socrates says; and if someone learns any other noble thing, he learns it through speech; and the worthiest teachers make use of speech the most; and the ones who most understand the most serious things, converse most nobly (§11). The most incongruous parts of this speech are its second and especially fourth parts: the notion of a noble thing and a kind of nobility besides what the law commands, and the puzzling mention of conversation, which Socrates seems to distinguish from the kind of speech that teaches what things are noble, and which he calls a noble thing in its own right, at least when it is
a conversation between people who “most understand the most serious things.” Neither of these mysterious references is called for by the purpose of the present conversation, which is to teach the cavalry commander what leading the cavalry calls for.

The remainder of the conversation sheds some light on these difficulties. Immediately after this enigmatic remark about speech, and without pausing, Socrates recommends a kind of speech that might be effective: one that appeals to the native Athenian love of honor. But the cavalry commander seems uncomfortable with this suggestion. He answers that it is only “plausible” (eikos) that the promise of praise and honor can motivate the cavalrymen to excel at their work and to voluntarily expose themselves to risk (§12-14). If indeed the cavalry commander is uncertain about this, then this would be a great change in his attitude, for it would be the first time that he becomes aware of the question, if the honor that accrues to the holders of high public office and the benefactors of their community is worth the risk that they must run in order to earn it.

Socrates’ next remark, which concludes this conversation, suggests tacitly that the cavalry commander’s reservation is justified. Socrates encourages the cavalry commander, and exhorts him to turn his men to what will benefit him, the cavalry commander, personally and the city through him. Socrates implies that the cavalry commander stands to profit from his own leadership. But he does not say that the cavalry commander’s leadership will be good for his soldiers, and he implies that it may not benefit them, and it may even harm them. Yet the cavalry commander does not seem to notice this tacit qualification of the otherwise mercenary attitude toward public service
that Socrates seems to endorse. He promises to try to follow this advice, and he
accompanies his promise with an oath, perhaps because he is surprised and heartened by
Socrates’ apparent insistence that his leadership is profitable for him, despite the dangers
and sacrifices that have just now become apparent to him (§15).

The emphasis that Socrates places on the profit for the cavalry commander
himself is justified not only by his desire to avoid disheartening an interlocutor on whom
the safety of the city depends, but also by the content of the moral teaching that he
encourages the cavalry commander to impart to his soldiers. Neither Socrates nor the
inarticulate cavalry commander says in so many words what the content of this speech
should be, but we have seen two indications that help us figure this out for ourselves.
The first is the reason why speech is required at all, why we do not spontaneously do
noble things. This is because, as the cavalry commander learns, noble things are
dangerous. We have passions that resist running the risks and making the sacrifices that
noble things call for, and especially our concern with our safety and our fear of dying.
The second indication of what kind of speech is required is the final remark of Socrates’
that we have just noted, where Socrates suggests to the cavalry commander that if he
successfully fulfills his responsibilities, then this will benefit him personally, and the city
through him. This implies that no matter what his office requires him to do, what danger
it seems to expose him to and what sacrifices it seems to demand, it is still in his interest.
It suggests that the motive that the cavalry commander should be animated by is self-
interest. Even the benefit that accrues to the city is a secondary consideration,
subordinate to the personal interest that the cavalry commander is encouraged to take in doing his duty.

These two indications, our resistance to doing what harms us, on one hand, and the tacit suggestion that the motive for acting nobly is self-interest, on the other hand, shed light on the speech or argument (logos) that Socrates has in mind. The argument in question must teach us that noble things are themselves the real objects of the passions that seem to resist doing these things, that they are what satisfy our deepest genuine desires. It must convince us that our deepest passion is to be good people and serve our community at whatever apparent cost, even at the cost of our lives, and that all conflicts between this passion for virtue and our other passions are only apparent, not real. Not only must it be good for us to do noble things; what is good about noble things must prove to be so good that it can outweigh something that is so bad that we would otherwise consider it the greatest evil, so good that even a noble death would be comparable to an act of mercenary greed. It must be so good to serve one’s community that anyone who knew how good it is would lose any desire to resist his duty and would do it willingly, and that the only reason why someone might not want to do his duty would be that he is ignorant of this. It must be so good, in other words, that virtue is knowledge.

This is a possible answer to the question that this dissertation began by posing: what basis is there for Socrates’ claim that when we want to do what we think is the right thing to do, but fail to do it, it is because we do not really know that this is the right thing, since if we did know this then we would know also that it is best for us, and therefore we
would automatically do it? According to the present suggestion, the knowledge that could automatically move us to action would entail the distinction between what we think that we want, which makes us resist doing our duty, and what we really want, which is to do our duty. It would entail the distinction between false and real objects of our passions and desires, and between false and real desires. It would be based on knowledge of ourselves, of our own desires and of what is truly best for us. The argument that could overcome soldiers’ resistance to obeying their commander and doing the right thing would have to account for our duty in terms of a coherent and comprehensive account of our natural constitution and situation. The knowledge in question is self-knowledge.

This suggestion sheds light on Socrates’ elaborate speech about speech. The speech implies that the significance of this demand for an account of our natural constitution and situation extends beyond the narrowly political context of this conversation. In particular, the suggestion that there are some noble pursuits that are not disclosed to us by the law, and that conversation is one such pursuit, invites us to wonder about the reason why we believe that the things that the law deems noble are the pursuits for which we are naturally suited. This question is not explored in the present conversation, whose starting-point is rather the emphatic agreement between Socrates and the cavalry commander that “it is noble, by Zeus,” to be a benefactor of one’s community (§2). What is demonstrated in the present conversation is rather that if we assume that the noblest pursuit is disclosed by the law, and the highest activity that human beings are capable of performing involves the risks to which soldiers are necessarily exposed, then those risks in no way diminish the choiceworthiness of the
noble. When virtue appears to implicate our deepest fears and arouse our strongest resistance, we defend the choiceworthiness of the noble by claiming that nothing is lacking from the happiness of the virtuous person, and that the peak of virtue is the peak of human happiness. We do not deny that our deepest concern is for ourselves—indeed, we are forced to admit this precisely by reflecting on what we owe to our community—but we claim that virtue satisfies this concern.

What attractiveness the noble loses from an examination of the work that it entails, it receives in return from the goodness that it confers on us as a result of our willingness to do that work. But this entails a very great modification of the moral attitude, when its attractiveness comes to depend on its goodness for us, and it becomes the conscious pursuit of what is best for us. For this robs morality of the element of selflessness and sacrifice that is so essential to the way that morally serious people understand their way of life. In the next conversation that Xenophon reports, Socrates forces his interlocutor to confront this transformation, and this proves to have a catastrophic effect on the interlocutor. Much proves to depend for him precisely on not admitting to himself that he believes that his sacrifices for the sake of his community coincide with his own deepest interests. It proves to be impossible for him to avow frankly his concern with his happiness, without by virtue of that avowal weakening his commitment to his community and to that way of life wherein he has unconsciously been hoping all along to find that happiness.
III 4: Nicomachides and Antisthenes

The examination of political virtue thus far has emphasized military leadership, and one task in particular: that of eliciting the obedience of one’s subordinates by explaining to them not only what their duties are but also why these are their duties, why virtue has such a powerful claim on our devotion. The conversation with the cavalry commander suggested that this language of sacrifice is imprecise, because it belongs to the moral attitude to deny that any moral obligation is a sacrifice, insofar as fulfilling that obligation makes someone a good person, and this is what is best for a human being. This led to the paradoxical conclusion that for the moral attitude, our obligations to our community and our concern with its welfare are in a sense mere means to the satisfaction of our deepest concern, which is our concern with ourselves. But as soon as we formulate the moral law in terms of our hopes for ourselves rather than in terms of what we owe our community, we are forced to raise a further question: is political virtue adequate to satisfy our deepest concerns? The present chapter answers this question in the negative, and considers the implications of this for the question of what a military leader must do in order to make his men obey him.

Socrates’ interlocutor in this conversation is a veteran soldier named Nicomachides. Socrates approaches Nicomachides when he sees him leaving the elections for public offices, and asks him who the new generals are. Nicomachides’ answer reveals that he is in a crisis. Further, Socrates probably did not know in advance that this is Nicomachides’ state of mind, since Nicomachides is upset because he ran for the generalship but lost the election, and Socrates did not attend the elections.
Nicomachides prefaces his answer with an angry outburst against the Athenians, who are “just the sort of people” not to elect him, despite what he clearly considers to be decisive qualifications for the generalship. These are his extensive experience on military campaigns and as a junior officer, and especially the many wounds that he has suffered over the years, wounds that he displays to Socrates (compare Plutarch, *Coriolanus* 14). Not only did the Athenians not elect him, the general whom they elected instead is not even a military man. He is a businessman, Antisthenes, who is not an infantryman, who serves in the cavalry but has never distinguished himself in any way, and who, Nicomachides concludes bitterly, knows nothing besides how to make money (III 4.1).

Rather than commiserate with Nicomachides, Socrates argues that Antisthenes will make a good general and, he implies, a better one than Nicomachides. His business skills and wealth are a good thing, Socrates points out, since he will be able to provision and equip the army. Nicomachides dismisses this consideration, and in turn Socrates raises a more serious one. This is that Antisthenes is a “lover of victory” (*philonikos*); he wants to win. He has a proven record of sparing no effort or expense to win all of the choral competitions in which he sponsored choruses. And just as it did not matter in those cases that Antisthenes knows nothing about singing or dancing, because his money enabled him to hire the best teachers of both, so it does not matter that he knows nothing about leading an army. If anything, he will spend even more money on the army than he did on his choruses, because the victory at stake is so much greater (§2-5).

This defense of Antisthenes is certainly problematic, and seems intended to be provocative, and indeed it has this effect on Nicomachides. But Socrates’ argument is
based on an important truth: it will serve Athens’ interests better to have as its general a wealthy man who will spare no expense to win the victory for his city than a brave soldier who cares more about fighting bravely and honorably than about doing whatever it takes to win, including devious and unscrupulous things (see III 1.6). Every community needs men like Nicomachides very much, and Nicomachides is a very good citizen, but Antisthenes contributes more to the city, and is the better and more virtuous citizen, than Nicomachides is.

Nicomachides attributes to his qualifications for the generalship a worth beyond their material contribution to the welfare of Athens. This seems to be because of the wounds that he has suffered and is willing to suffer; he thinks that his willingness to risk and sacrifice his own welfare for the sake of his city makes him the better man. But Nicomachides’ belief that his sacrifices make him a better man than the mercenary, profiteering Antisthenes seems to be untrue. Nicomachides believes that he is superior because of his ability to call into question the worth of the things that most men deem good and best, and his willingness to sacrifice those things. And indeed, Socrates does not deny that this is an impressive ability, nor does he defend Antisthenes’ concern with profit and his belief that victory is profitable. But according to what came to light in the conversation with the cavalry commander about the motives of soldiers, this very superiority that Nicomachides enjoys, the personal quality that makes him feel satisfied that he lives well and without which he would be displeased with himself, is itself a

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8 General Patton’s wonderful formulation of this point is that “no bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. He won it by making the other poor, dumb bastard die for his country.”
reward for his efforts, and the highest reward. His devotion to Athens proceeds, as much
as Antisthenes’ profiteering does, from a concern with himself and not exclusively or
perhaps even primarily with Athens, and indeed from a deeper concern with himself than
the one that Antisthenes feels. Moreover, to the extent that Nicomachides’ concern with
himself leads him to demand to be general instead of the better qualified Antisthenes,
then this concern conflicts with and even outweighs his devotion to his community and
its welfare. For Antisthenes, on the other hand, these two concerns coincide and there is
no conflict between his own happiness and the happiness of his community.

This defense of Antisthenes is nevertheless inconclusive, for it is not enough for
Antisthenes to want to win more than anything else; he must also be able to win.
Socrates concedes this: “whatever someone presides over, if he both knows what things
are needed and is able to procure these things, then he would be good at presiding over
whatever he is in charge of, regardless of if this is a chorus or a household or a city or an
army” (§6). The crucial requirement is procurement. Socrates has already pointed out
that Antisthenes is wealthy enough to provision the army and to staff it like he staffed his
chorus. But does Antisthenes command the resources that will procure the obedience of
Nicomachides and men like him? The problem of obedience, which the previous chapter
seemed to settle, is reopened in light of the considerations that show Antisthenes to be the
better citizen. Antisthenes cannot count on men like Nicomachides to fight and risk their
lives out of devotion to Athens, since the belief on which that devotion rests is rendered
untenable by Antisthenes’ election. It is true that if Nicomachides is honest with
himself, then he can be made to concede that Antisthenes deserves to be the general,
because on one hand Antisthenes’ motives do not make him a worse man than Nicomachides, since both men hold that service to the community is profitable, and on the other hand Antisthenes performs the greater service to the community. But this line of reasoning leads to the further conclusion that the greater the service to the community is, the more profitable it is, and this contradicts the premise of the argument, which is that it is worthwhile for Nicomachides to risk his life for the sake of the community because this is what is best and most profitable. If it is good to be a good person, and a businessman is a better person than a soldier, then it is better to be a businessman than a soldier. Since Nicomachides is not by virtue of his devotion to Athens the best human being, then his sacrifices are genuine sacrifices. Nicomachides cannot claim to be the best man and deny that his service to Athens entails a genuine sacrifice without accepting the election results and Antisthenes’ authority, and he cannot accept Antisthenes as his superior without admitting to himself that his service has the potential to harm him and being led to resist making the sacrifices that he was previously willing to make.

The reason why Nicomachides’ position contradicts itself is that it looks to two distinct and irreconcilable standards, without realizing or admitting that they do not coincide. One standard is what is best for Athens. According to this standard, Antisthenes is clearly superior to Nicomachides. The second standard is Nicomachides’ concern with himself, to which he appeals in order to justify the sacrifices that his responsibilities to Athens require of him. The two standards do not coincide because as opposed to Antisthenes’ concern with himself, which is satisfied by serving the community, Nicomachides’ concern with himself is not. The concern that Nicomachides
feels is based on his awareness that he is going to die and his belief that nothing is truly
good that he will lose when he dies. This is why Nicomachides insists that the greatest
virtue coincides, not with the greatest contribution to Athens, but with the greatest
sacrifices that Athens can require of its citizens. According to Nicomachides, death itself
can satisfy this concern with himself that nothing else can satisfy, if death is worthwhile
because he is perfected by dying, at least by dying in a particular way. But this view is
incoherent. It is not based on the coherent, rational account of the perfection of man’s
natural constitution and situation that the conversation with the cavalry commander
called for, because the position that the greatest good for man is identical to the greatest
evil is self-contradictory: it means that the best human being is a dead human being, that
is, not a human being at all. By hoping unconsciously for something that will be good for
him even if he has to die in order to acquire it, Nicomachides in a way forgets that he is
mortal. The standard of human goodness to which he appeals is a false standard.
Nicomachides has no more conscious knowledge of what virtue is than Antisthenes has,
and no coherent standard to appeal to in order to accuse Athens of injustice toward him,
since he cannot justify his claim to be the better man.

To return to the question, how Antisthenes can “procure” the obedience of men
like Nicomachides, Nicomachides cannot be induced to serve in the army voluntarily in
return for financial compensation, which Antisthenes seems to have to rely on in order to
fill the ranks of the army like he filled the ranks of his choruses. Nicomachides’ response
to Socrates’ claim that whoever knows what is needed and is able to procure it will be a
good leader of anything at all, a chorus or household or city or army, indicates how
unlikely it is that he can be persuaded to fight for pay: he swears with surprise at
Socrates’ suggestion that good household managers, literally “economists” (oikonomoi),
are good generals. Socrates compares generalship to three other kinds of leadership, and
of these, Nicomachides is most struck by the comparison between generalship and the
management of one’s private, economic affairs, and not the leadership of a chorus, which
has been the subject of discussion so far. He believes so firmly that military virtue calls
for disregard of self, that no one seems less qualified for this than an economist. Socrates
offers to compare the work of generals and household managers so that they may know
whether they are alike or in some way different. In the course of the comparison,
Nicomachides concedes that generals and economists have the same work in many
respects, but he objects that economists, unlike generals, do not fight. He concedes
further that economists as well as generals have enemies and profit from defeating them,
but objects that economics is useless in a fight. Socrates answers that because the
economist knows that nothing is more profitable than victory or more costly than defeat,
economics is in fact most useful for fighting, because the economist will only fight
battles that he can win (§7-11). In fact, since every battle is risky, this means that the
best economist will not fight at all. But his aversion to risk is a luxury that his
subordinates do not have. This is why it is so difficult to induce them to obey, since the
only rewards for military service that Antisthenes has to offer, indeed the only genuine
goods that accrue to someone who serves in the army, are things that soldiers must
survive in order to enjoy. And even if Nicomachides’ survival were guaranteed, it is
doubtful that he would be satisfied with a way of life whose peak is the enjoyment of
good things that he will lose when he dies, insofar as unlike Antisthenes, his whole life is based on his awareness that these enjoyments are not sufficient. It seems to be beyond Antisthenes’ power to bestow rewards that will solve this problem, on whose solution political life as a whole depends: the problem of reconciling the community’s need for good leadership with its need for good soldiers, its need to relegate those soldiers to the second rank with its need to solicit their services and sacrifices.

Socrates concludes the conversation by suggesting one reason why economists are nevertheless well-equipped to solve the political problem. He calls Nicomachides’ attention to the “greatest similarity” between generalship and economics: neither economics nor generalship, Socrates says, takes place without people, nor do public affairs and private affairs rely on different people. Rather, the people are the same, and whoever knows how to manage them well does well in both private and public affairs (§12). According to Socrates, generals, who lead in war the free citizens who deliberate and elect them, and economists, who rule over their slaves by threatening them with a beating if they disobey, manage the same people by means of the same skills. This amounts to the provocative denial that there is any difference between rule over a free man and rule over a slave. In particular, Socrates seems to imply that Antisthenes should rule over Nicomachides in the same way that a household manager rules over his slaves, and that the only good thing that Nicomachides can and should be promised in return for serving Athens that is consistent with the city’s needs, is the avoidance of painful punishment. This suggestion is justified by our failure to identify any motive that might persuade soldiers who see their situation clearly to do their duty voluntarily. The thesis
that noble action is so good for the noble person that he would not voluntarily do
otherwise, applies only where compulsion makes noble action preferable, or more
generally where what solicits noble action is not speech but an appeal to precisely those passions that the concern with the noble understands itself to transcend. Nicomachides cannot admit that he seeks his own good without being forced to recognize the conditions that make his pursuit good, to realize the true costs and rewards of political life, and perhaps to lose his commitment to it altogether. Only his unexamined moral attitude hid from him the unattractiveness of his situation.

Up to this point, the investigation of political leadership has concentrated on the leader’s qualifications and tasks, with particular emphasis on the task of making his subordinates obey him. The next chapter undertakes a substantive reflection in light of these considerations on the proper aims of good political leadership. In particular, it considers the limits on what even a good political leader can reasonably hope to accomplish, in light of the irrationality of political life that has come to light.

III 5: Pericles

Socrates converses with Pericles, a newly elected general and the son and namesake of the great Athenian statesman. The conversation takes place during the Peloponnesian War, when the tide has already turned against Athens. The subject is the current crisis and the prospects for stopping the city’s decline. It is unclear at first whether Socrates intends to deliberate with and advise Pericles about these matters, or merely to wish him success upon his election to the generalship. He approaches Pericles
and expresses his hope that with Pericles as a general, Athens will improve its military fortune and reputation, and will overpower its enemies. Pericles replies that he too would desire these things, only he is at a loss to discern how they may come to pass. Only then, Socrates offers to take stock with Pericles of the current situation in order to investigate to what extent these things are possible at present (III 5.1).

Pericles’ contributions to the ensuing investigation are characterized by unreasonable expectations about the political objectives that he should strive for and about the prospects for achieving them. Pericles attributes to the Athenians not only physical but also moral advantages over their Boeotian enemies: he considers them better disposed toward one another than the Boeotians are, and most ambitious and affectionate of all, and he thinks that the spectacular exploits of their ancestors predispose the present generation of Athenians to make great efforts on behalf of the community. In the course of the conversation, Pericles will discover that each of these qualities is either irrelevant to the present crisis or altogether absent. At first, because he believes that the Athenians enjoy advantages that enable them to save themselves and regain their supremacy, he attributes the current crisis only to a temporary climate of fear that arose after two military defeats that Athens suffered at the hands of the Boeotians, defeats that he calls “chance events” (sumphora). He believes that all that is needed is to free the Athenians from their fear (§2-4).

Socrates corrects him by explaining how much worse the situation would be if the Athenians were confident that they are not in any danger: confidence would only lead to neglect, easygoingness and disobedience, whereas fear makes people more attentive,
obedient and orderly. Indeed, Socrates himself did not at first seem inclined to advise Pericles, until he learned that Pericles is somewhat apprehensive about the situation. Perhaps fear is what makes Pericles himself receptive to good advice. Socrates also suggests tacitly that since fear is the only effective motive, only a limited recovery is possible. He indicates this by referring to the behavior of sailors at sea in order to illustrate his claim that fear is an effective motive. Fear is an uncommonly powerful motive in the case of sailors, since they depend for their survival on the welfare of the whole ship and crew, and in order to save themselves they have no alternative but to make extraordinary efforts. But a land army almost never finds itself in such a desperate situation, and the fear that they feel is unlikely to compel them as powerfully to assist their fellow soldiers and their country, much less to make the efforts that would be required to win the Peloponnesian War and restore the empire (§5-6).

Perhaps for this reason, Pericles is dissatisfied with Socrates’ suggestion that he rely on the Athenians’ fears. Instead, he suggests an alternative: since the Athenians are currently disposed to obey, he says, then now is the time to talk about how to produce in them the necessary change of heart, to turn them to fall in love again with their ancient virtue, fame and happiness. Socrates replies by comparing the desire for virtue with the desire for money. He points out in this way that the desire for virtue cannot be taken for granted like the desire for money can, and that it would be necessary first to explain to the Athenians why they should want to recover their ancient virtue. Pericles insists on learning how to teach this. Socrates suggests that they refer the Athenians to what is said

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about their oldest ancestors, whom they have heard were most excellent, and he proceeds
to review the history of Athens up to the generation of the Persian Wars, a history that in
light of his characterization of the first ancestors as the best is a process of decline. When
Pericles admits that he does not understand how the decline occurred, Socrates attributes
it to the neglect of themselves that the Athenians fell into on account of their
preeminence (§7-13). The ancestors who achieved preeminence, by that very
achievement precipitated the decline. Their virtue achieved its intrinsic aim, the
happiness that comes from victory (see III 2.1). They bequeathed to their descendants a
situation that was relatively free from danger, and once the concerns that called forth
their great efforts became less immediate and urgent, those efforts became unattractive.
The alternative to the unbearable pressure of a constant or nearly constant threat to the
survival of a community is the complacency that risks leaving the community defenseless
when such a threat eventually materializes.10

10 For a recent example of this phenomenon, consider the following excerpt from the
report of the government commission appointed to assess Israel’s performance in the war
against Hezbollah in the summer of 2006:

The IDF was not ready for this war. Among the many reasons for this we can mention a
few: Some of the political and military elites in Israel have reached the conclusion that
Israel is beyond the era of wars. It had enough military might and superiority to deter
others from declaring war against her; these would also be sufficient to send a painful
reminder to anyone who seemed to be undeterred; since Israel did not intend to initiate a
war, the conclusion was that the main challenge facing the land forces would be low
intensity asymmetrical conflicts.
Given these assumptions, the IDF did not need to be prepared for ‘real’
war. There was also no urgent need to update in a systematic and
sophisticated way Israel’s overall security strategy and to consider how to
mobilize and combine all its resources and sources of strength - political,
economic, social, military, spiritual, cultural and scientific - to address the
totality of the challenges it faces.
Pericles asks one final time how the Athenians could recover their ancient virtue, and Socrates recommends that they imitate the efforts that others, both the Athenian ancestors and the peoples who are currently preeminent, made in order to achieve their virtue (§14). By claiming that no less effort is required in the case of present-day Athens, Socrates again implies that there is no native Athenian predisposition to virtue. This finally dawns on Pericles, and moves him to despair. His despair expresses itself in a harsh condemnation of the Athenians, and a series of unfavorable comparisons between them and their Spartan enemies, who unlike the Athenians maintain a close connection with their ancestors. So great is the difference between the present and ancestral Athenian generations that Pericles does not even compare them to one another.

The realization that it is beyond his power to move the Athenians to save their empire forces Pericles to revise his view of his fellow-citizens and to realize that they in fact lack many of the qualities that he originally considered grounds for their superiority to the Boeotians. Instead, he believes, what Socrates is saying means that “political virtue [nobility and goodness] is far away from the city.” The longest part of Pericles’ criticism concerns the absence of the likeness of mind and mutual amity, the goodwill toward one another that might make people exert themselves on each other’s behalf, which he thought earlier that he discerned in Athens. The Athenians threaten, envy and disagree with one another, prosecute the most lawsuits against one another, prefer to profit at each other’s expense rather than to benefit through cooperation, and fight over

the common property as if it were someone else’s private property (§15-16). Moreover, Pericles now blames the current crisis on the Athenian regime itself, the domestic situation without regard to the foreign threat: from all this, he concludes, much mischief and badness are taking root, and much enmity and hatred are arising, on account of which he is always very afraid lest something befall the city that is too great for it to bear (§17). The recent defeats that Athens has suffered at the hands of the Boeotians are themselves the outcome of a process of internal decay, which would have proceeded this far and perhaps even further even if the military situation were not so grave.

Pericles wants not only to preserve the city but also to restore a decent way of life, to make the city’s preservation depend on it and thereby to vindicate it against the prevalent indecency that he finds so repugnant. And he is right to aspire to some kind of internal reform, because selfishness is not an adequate basis for political life. The crisis at Athens belies the argument of the previous conversation between Socrates and Nicomachides, which is that a household manager can be a good general because citizens can be motivated to do what their community requires by the desire for personal gain. In the case of the Athenians whom Pericles describes, it is precisely their economic concerns, their attachment to personal enjoyments, which make them unwilling to do what is necessary in order to secure their enjoyment of these things. They seem to believe that the good things that they enjoy make life worth living, but they are unwilling to make the efforts that would be required in order to keep them, because then they would risk losing them. Their fear of losing what makes life worth living makes them unwilling to defend it against the most serious threats. This means that they would really prefer to
live without these things than to die trying to preserve them. If we are not willing to run
the greatest risks to preserve what we think makes life worth living then it does not really
make life worth living, whatever it is, and it is not as attractive as we think. The prospect
of dying diminishes the attractiveness of these other enjoyments. Or rather, the
enjoyment of these things is ordinarily enhanced by the illusion that we are more secure
than we actually are. The economic life, the life of gain, is similar to the moral life
insofar as it unconsciously takes its bearings from, and seeks to assuage, our fear of
dying. It differs from and is inferior to the moral life because the economic attitude
entails an even greater self-deception than the moral attitude does. Whereas for the moral
attitude, this unconscious awareness that we are mortal expresses itself as the willingness
to give up everything else in exchange for something that is so good that it is worth dying
for, for the economic attitude, it expresses itself as the refusal to part with things that are
not themselves worth dying for.

But Pericles is powerless to dispel the illusion that he senses that the Athenians
are under. He believes that the situation could be remedied by altering the object of the
Athenians’ desire, by making them desire the honor that accrues to someone who serves
his city, which he deems intrinsically desirable, instead of the happiness that is available
to someone who shirks his duty, which depends on the illusion that we are secure. This
was the attitude of Nicomachides in the previous conversation, where it came to light that
someone who thought through the claim that political virtue is intrinsically attractive and
desirable could thereafter be induced to lay down his life for his community only under
coercion. Like the Athenians, Pericles aims at a kind of happiness whose attractiveness
for him is increased by an illusion. The Athenians who resist his attempts at reform
discern the illusory character of the happiness that Pericles hopes for. Yet their
discernment does not indicate their superiority to Pericles in any respect, for they are so
insensitive to the genuine desire that moves him that they think that the illusion that
Pericles is under is his inability to realize that he is urging them to adopt a way of life that
threatens their comfortable lifestyles. The claim in the previous conversation that the
motives for political virtue are reducible to the desire for economic gain does not mean
that these motives are sufficient to maintain a political community in the long run, only
that they are the only motives that political leadership can appeal to, and that the tasks
and aims of political leadership need to be determined with a view to what can be
achieved on the basis of these motives alone.

Socrates tries to reassure Pericles that his despair is too extreme. As proof that
the Athenians are not incurably bad, Socrates mentions the orderliness of the navy,
athletes, choruses, even the Court of the Areopagus—an institution whose weakening by
Pericles’ father contributed to the current lawlessness—but not the soldiers. When
Pericles points out that none of this mitigates the deplorable state of the army, Socrates
replies that perhaps Pericles will have no trouble handling the situation, since most
generals do not know how to discharge their responsibilities, but this is surely not the
case with Pericles. Pericles realizes that Socrates means this not as a compliment but
rather as an exhortation to study generalship, one that he accepts (§18-24). By now, we
can be fairly confident that Socrates does not mean that Pericles will ever be able to solve
the problem of obedience to the point where he will be able to save the empire, even if he
studies generalship. But someone who considered seriously what being a soldier and a general entails would not harbor Pericles’ unreasonable expectations. He would rather realize how far soldiery falls short of the simply good and attractive pursuit that we have in mind when we talk about virtue and how similarly unreasonable Pericles’ expectations are to the desires that he criticizes on the part of the Athenians. But in Pericles’ case, Socrates’ advice to study generalship and become a better general may reflect rather his expectation that Pericles is incapable of this insight, an expectation that is supported by Pericles’ refusal or inability to lower his hopes for the recovery of Athens.

Socrates concludes the conversation by telling Pericles almost explicitly how little is at stake for him in fulfilling his responsibilities. He advises Pericles to attempt these things, if they please him, for whatever he accomplishes will be noble for him and good for the city, and even if he cannot accomplish some one of them, he will neither harm the city nor shame himself (§28). The decline of Athens is irreversible, and no greater harm can come to the city as a result of Pericles’ leadership, even if the Athenians fail at the efforts that are still within their reach. Even a military deployment that Socrates recommends to Pericles is only a feeble last stand (§25-27). This desperation, which Socrates acknowledges only at the very end of the conversation and only with great delicacy, explains in part why he calls success noble for Pericles, and assures him that even failure is not shameful, but does not tell Pericles which course of action would be good for him personally, like he told the cavalry commander at the end of their conversation (III 3.15). Pericles, who has assumed responsibility for the fate of Athens, is in as precarious a position as the city is. The needs of the city and the fears of its
citizens are so great, that their expectations of their leaders are that much greater, too. If Pericles succeeds in arousing the Athenians to action, it will likely be by fostering hopes that he is bound to be unable to fulfill and thereby risking their anger at him when he inevitably disappoints them. Defeat against such overwhelming odds would not be shameful, but any success that he might have will likely fall short of the aspirations of the Athenians, and this may lead them to judge his generalship a failure and penalize him accordingly, no matter what he does. And indeed, Xenophon reports in his *Hellenica* that Pericles was one of the generals who led Athens to victory at Arginusae and who were subsequently executed unjustly and illegally for their conduct there (*Hellenica* I 7; cf. *Memorabilia* I 1.18, IV 4.2).

The argument of the last two chapters has turned our view of the relation between the noble and the good on its head. Our original view was that political virtue is itself the greatest good, and the best thing for us is to be good people and do whatever the moral law requires of us. The demands of virtue determine what happiness it is legitimate for us to hope for; the noble is more fundamental than the good. Now, however, the opposite appears to be the case. The good is more fundamental than the noble, and it determines what is noble, what efforts a good leader should demand from his soldiers and citizens. The demands that it is reasonable for a political community to make of its citizens are circumscribed by the concerns that citizens have with their own welfare, by the limits on the sacrifices that they are willing to make. This requires us to reconsider the meaning of Socrates’ claim that virtue is knowledge, as well. This is the subject of the next two chapters.
III 6: Glaucon

The interlocutor with whom Socrates converses in this conversation is Glaucon, the son of Ariston, the same Glaucon who accompanies Socrates to the conversation that is recorded in Plato’s *Republic* and who is one of the protagonists of that dialogue. Xenophon refers explicitly to Plato in the introduction to his own dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon: when Glaucon is not yet twenty years old, his ambition to preside over the city is already so great that he is already trying to make public addresses, and none of his relatives is able to dissuade him from making a fool of himself. But Socrates, who is well intentioned toward him for the sake of two of Glaucon’s relatives, his uncle Charmides and his brother Plato, stops him all by himself (III 6.1). As this introduction suggests, there is a very great difference between Xenophon’s presentation of Glaucon and Plato’s. Whereas Glaucon displays a very great aptitude for the political matters discussed in Plato’s *Republic*, Xenophon presents him here as ignorant and incompetent, and not at all suited for the political activities that Socrates stops him from attempting. This is because the concern that Glaucon is so clearly moved by in the *Republic*, the concern with justice, is not one of the subjects that Socrates discusses with Glaucon. Nor does this reflect a misunderstanding on Xenophon’s part of the Socratic teaching about politics. Rather, this section of the *Memorabilia* so far has had as its primary theme the distinction between the naïve and rash idealism of a Glaucon and the sobriety of a good political leader, between the false hopes that seem necessarily to accompany dreams of
great political achievements, and the careful and deliberate weighing of resources and prospects that leads to salutary political results.

Socrates accosts Glaucon, who is perhaps on his way to address the Assembly again, and makes him pause at least temporarily by flattering him about the nobility of his undertaking and the great fame and rewards that he may expect if he succeeds. When Glaucon hears these things, according to Xenophon, he swells with pride and is pleased to remain, presumably in order to hear more praise. Socrates then asks Glaucon about his plans for benefiting the city, and he quickly confounds Glaucon, who is unable to name even the first good deed that he wants to do for the city. Glaucon is forced to admit his utter ignorance of everything that he would need to know in order to preside over the city: the city’s revenues and expenditures, its military power both absolutely and relative to its enemies, its defenses, and its geography more generally including its natural resources and food supply (§2-13).

This exchange recalls Socrates’ insistence throughout this entire section of the Memorabilia that generalship requires knowledge and that someone cannot be a general unless he is a competent man. But Socrates no longer claims, as he did in jest in the first conversation in this section, that knowledge is not only a necessary qualification for a general but also a sufficient one and that nothing besides knowledge is required in order to be a general. That claim proved to depend in particular on the ability of the general to make his men obey him by means of persuasion alone, by speaking (III 3.11). But this aspect of generalship turned out not to be a matter of knowledge alone; Nicomachides could not be persuaded to obey Antisthenes. Instead, making soldiers obey their
commander turned out to require the support of extrinsic rewards and punishments, which led Socrates to claim that political leadership of free citizens is essentially the same as the rule of a master over his domestic servants. Socrates tacitly recalls this claim in the sequel, in the form of a rebuke that he addresses to Glaucon: one would never manage even one household nobly, to say nothing of the more than ten thousand households that comprise the city, unless one knew its needs and worked carefully at providing for them. Glaucon should try first to manage the household of his uncle Charmides, who is severely poor, but whom it turns out that Glaucon is unable to persuade to obey him. In this case, Socrates points out, it is unreasonable for Glaucon to expect to be able to make the Athenians obey him. Socrates concludes by exhorting Glaucon to try as much as he can to acquire knowledge of whatever he wants to do (§14-18).

Socrates encourages Glaucon to learn how to do whatever he wants to do, but not to learn what he should do. Yet it is by no means clear that Socrates holds that political leadership is the right course of action even for a competent man. It is true that the dramatic setting of this conversation confirms that Socrates held that honor, which is the proper reward for good leadership, is something serious and worth taking trouble over, insofar as the aim of the whole conversation is to prevent Glaucon from disgracing a family that Socrates cares about. But this does not mean in addition that Socrates holds that honor is worth the risks and sacrifices that public service calls for. Rather, Xenophon’s presentation of Socrates as a teacher of politics is characterized by Socrates’ attempt to distinguish as much as possible between the question of how to be a good
leader, how to discharge the responsibilities that these ambitious interlocutors have or want to have, and the question of whether or not these men are right to want to be leaders.

The next conversation sheds some light on this second question by presenting the only person whom we see Socrates advising to go into politics. Socrates proves to be better at persuading people to serve their community than any of the interlocutors with whom he has discussed this problem in this section of the *Memorabilia*. He persuades a superlatively talented political man, who possesses all of the necessary qualifications for public life but who is reluctant to go into politics, to do this. It is true that his interlocutor is the notorious Charmides, who is known not only to have taken Socrates’ advice to go into politics but also to have become a tyrant (*Hellenica* II 4.19). But Charmides’ tyranny is not a sufficient reason for concluding that his motives are defective or confused, and for rejecting Socrates’ argument that the political life is the best life for Charmides and, since Charmides is so impressive, that it may be the best life simply. We can only determine this by examining the motives, to which Socrates appeals in order to persuade him to go into politics. We must determine if Charmides can give a satisfactory account of himself or if, notwithstanding his many impressive qualities, he hides something from himself, he lies to himself about his situation. The question that the next conversation considers is if political virtue in the best case, the case of someone who is really qualified to be a good leader, can be based on the self-knowledge that the conversation with the cavalry commander called for, or if it is precisely Charmides’ lack of clarity about his situation, his susceptibility to false hopes like the ones that we
discovered in both the moral attitude and the non-moral, economic attitude, that makes the political life best for him.

**III 7: Charmides**

The high regard that Socrates has for Charmides is already on display in the conversation between Socrates and Glaucon, which would not have taken place but for Socrates’ goodwill towards Charmides and Plato. Immediately after that conversation, Xenophon reports a conversation between Socrates and Charmides himself. This conversation shows why Socrates held Charmides in such high regard. Indeed, Charmides is so much more impressive than the other political men in this section of the *Memorabilia*, that his similarity to those men is less immediately apparent than his similarity to Socrates himself is. Like Socrates, Charmides is very poor; he is much more talented than his politically active contemporaries; he gives good advice in private to political men; yet he refuses to play a leading role in public life (III 6.14, 7.1, 7.3). Yet Socrates urges Charmides to become active in public life, which means that he discourages Charmides from behaving in this respect like Socrates himself, who did not even vote in the elections (III 4.1). Notwithstanding the many similarities between the two men, the advice that Socrates gives to Charmides indicates that there is a great difference between them.

Socrates begins the conversation by asking Charmides what he would think of someone who was capable of winning a contest and earning honor for himself and his fatherland, but who refused to compete. Charmides calls such a person soft, and a
coward. Next, Socrates asks Charmides if someone who could enlarge his city and gain honor for himself by attending to its affairs, but who hesitates to do this, would not in all likelihood be considered a coward. Charmides hesitates to agree with this second suggestion; he answers only, “Perhaps.” Charmides asks Socrates why he is asking these questions, and Socrates explains that he thinks that Charmides, who is capable, hesitates to attend to the city’s affairs, which are necessary for him to participate in, insofar as he is a citizen. The implication is that Socrates is accusing Charmides of cowardice.

In reply, Charmides asks what deed Socrates observed him perform that made him think that Charmides is a capable politician. Charmides does not dispute his duty to the city, only Socrates’ assessment of his ability to fulfill it. Socrates replies that he has observed Charmides’ great ability in his associations with the people who are active in the affairs of the city, for whenever they consult him, Socrates sees that he advises them nobly, and whenever they make a mistake, he criticizes them correctly (III 7.1-3). In this way, Socrates brings to light a difference between these conversations of Charmides’ and the conversations that Socrates himself is said to have had with political men. Unlike Charmides, Socrates was not known for criticizing public figures for their mistakes, at least to their faces (compare I 2.32-33). It takes some boldness, even courage, to criticize powerful men in this way. To be sure, Charmides’ boldness is not rash or unreasonable, since he has good grounds for thinking that he has nothing to fear from these men; on the contrary, his good advice and his evident lack of personal ambition make him an asset to them. But this comparison between Socrates and Charmides suggests that Charmides is more courageous than Socrates is, and that contrary to what the opening exchange of the
conversation might have suggested, his preference for private life is not based simply on cowardice.

Charmides protests that the behavior of his that Socrates refers to does not justify the conclusion that he draws from it, since to converse in private and to compete among the multitude are not the same thing. Socrates appears not to understand what difference between private and public affairs Charmides has in mind. He replies that it does not matter to a competent arithmetician or to a superior citharist whether they exercise their skill in private or among the many. This reply recalls the view of political leadership that we have encountered in almost every chapter in this section of the *Memorabilia*, the view that political leadership is a matter of merely technical competence, like the skill of an arithmetician or a citharist. Charmides differs from the other interlocutors with whom we have seen Socrates converse, not only because he possesses the knowledge that a leader should have, but also because he is aware that this knowledge is not sufficient to make him a good leader. He is sufficiently self-aware to realize that something else in addition to knowledge is required, something that he thinks that he lacks.

What Charmides thinks that this additional qualification for public life is, comes to light in his explanation of what he considers the difference between private and public speaking. This is that awe and fear, which arise naturally in people, beset one more in crowds than in private gatherings (§4-5). Charmides is ashamed and afraid to speak in public. This seems to mean that he is concerned with the public reaction to what he will say. He doubts his ability, not to discern the policies that would be best for Athens, but to convince the democratic Assembly to follow his advice. In fact, Charmides’
awareness of how difficult it is to enact prudent policies in a democracy and his feeling of inadequacy in this regard might follow from the same insight that makes him so politically astute. This is the insight that the goals of public policy are determined not only by the needs of the community but also by the limits on the ability of the leader to make the citizens obey him, and that most people resist good leadership to an unreasonable extent because they are unreasonably attached to their private enjoyments. The same insight, which Pericles was incapable of because of his desperate hopes for a restoration of the empire, teaches Charmides both what good leadership calls for and also how difficult it is to persuade people to follow good advice, and makes Charmides believe that this is beyond him. The most he can do, he seems to believe, is to advise privately men whom he considers superior not only to the *demos*, by virtue of their ability to understand and accept his recommendations, but also to Charmides himself, by virtue of their willingness and ability to withstand the resistance and scorn of the *demos*, and to enact these policies. Charmides believes that his interlocutors possess some qualification for public life that he lacks, and that this qualification is not only an acquired skill like rhetorical talent but also and especially a certain natural boldness that makes them braver than him and less prone to fear and embarrassment. This explains why Charmides equivocates at the beginning of the conversation, when Socrates asks him if a competent man who refuses to participate in public life is a coward (§2). If he preferred private life over public life as a matter of principle, then he would answer unequivocally that such a person is not a coward, because leading the *demos* is intrinsically shameful, and shameful behavior is never brave, nor is honorable behavior cowardly. Instead, he answers
“perhaps,” apparently out of embarrassment: he is aware that his preference for private life reflects a defect in him, and he really believes that the correct answer is “yes.” This earlier answer shows that Charmides is embarrassed for not going into politics, just as he now admits that he is too embarrassed to go into politics. He appears to be at an impasse.

Since Charmides is too ashamed to expose himself to the scorn of the assembly, Socrates replies by depreciating the assembly. Following Charmides’ belief that these leading men whom he advises are superior to him, Socrates calls them “most prudent” and even “strongest,” perhaps by virtue of the toughness that they seem to have and that Charmides seems to lack. Charmides, Socrates says, is neither in awe of these better people nor afraid of them, but he is ashamed to address the most senseless and weakest people. Socrates reminds Charmides who the members of the assembly are, whose esteem or contempt for him he seems to value so highly: manual laborers and people whose only concern is making money. Yet Charmides can silence the objections of those professional politicians who disagree with him—even, Socrates adds, the ones who have contempt for him. It is silly for him to hesitate to address the assembly (§5-7). Socrates argues that since Charmides will not fail, he has no reason to feel ashamed. This implies that the only reason why Charmides should feel ashamed of himself is if he fails to lead the city well.

Yet this is not the reason why Charmides is ashamed, as his next and final objection shows. He objects that the members of the Assembly often ridicule people who speak correctly. It is not a matter of success or failure, but of ridicule itself: Charmides does not want to be a good leader if he is treated with disrespect, any more than he wants
to be an unsuccessful leader. Socrates refutes Charmides’ preference for private life by pointing out that the leading men ridicule Charmides as well, and since he makes such easy work of them, Socrates is amazed that he thinks that he is unable to approach the others (§8). The leading men are no more moved by Charmides’ political astuteness and sobriety than the *demos* is. They want the same policies as the *demos* does, the ones that have as their goals spectacular achievements and unqualified gains for the city and its leaders (III 6.2). They advance better arguments on behalf of those policies than the shoemakers and blacksmiths do, and yet Charmides is able to silence them, and therefore he may be expected to silence the Assembly the same way, without exposing himself to any more disrespect than he exposes himself to by conversing with the leading men.

Whereas Charmides’ concern to behave honorably by serving his city to the greatest possible extent can be satisfied better in public life than in private life, neither public life nor private life can satisfy adequately his concern to avoid ridicule and to be treated with the respect that he deserves. His preference for private life reflects his false belief that these two concerns, his concern to behave honorably and his concern to receive honor and to be acknowledged for his great worth, coincide. This is because he is not satisfied to serve Athens, unless his great abilities that make him such a talented public servant are acknowledged in addition. He convinces himself that he is unable to lead the democracy well, in order to justify to himself his refusal to expose himself to the disrespect with which the *demos* treats even its good leaders. The respect that Charmides is concerned to receive has the character of a supplement to an activity that he does not find intrinsically desirable. It reflects a reservation that he harbors about political
leadership. Charmides demands a reward for his services that is not the necessary accompaniment of those services because he is dimly aware that something in him, some need or longing, goes unfulfilled by political virtue. And this awareness expresses itself as the unconscious demand that it be good for him to be a good person, essentially the same demand that Nicomachides expresses, only on a much higher level because it is attached to an activity that has a much stronger claim to be considered virtuous and worthy of a reward. Yet Charmides’ notion of what it means to be a good person, and his motive for taking an interest in the happiness of his community, is based in part on a false understanding of himself.

Charmides is unable to draw the consequences for himself from that same insight that makes him such an impressive man and such a talented politician. For that insight is the same one that Pericles proved to be incapable of in an earlier conversation, the insight into the intractable character of political situations, which character arises from the unreasonable attachments that people have to pursuits that they consider more fulfilling than they really are because they do not admit to themselves that no good thing is as secure as they think that it is. Charmides wrongly exempts his own pursuit, his exercise of political skill on a very high level, from this insight. Accordingly, Socrates expands the category of the demos to include Charmides himself. He exhorts Charmides not to be ignorant of himself and not to make the error that most people make, for the many examine the affairs of others without turning to take themselves under review, but Charmides should try to pay attention to himself (§9). And yet, if Socrates refuted Charmides’ defense of private life in order to encourage Charmides to pay more attention
to his opinions about virtue, by distinguishing between what Charmides thinks that virtue is and the respect that he falsely believes to be a necessary accompaniment of virtue, then this attempt must be judged a failure, in light of Charmides’ eventual career as a tyrant.\textsuperscript{11} Tyranny is not a surprising outcome for an extremely talented politician who combines disdain for the \textit{demos} with such a deep concern with his dignity.

Socrates concludes the conversation by encouraging Charmides to do whatever is in his power to improve the city’s situation (§9). But although Socrates presents this advice as if it is consistent with or even a consequence of his exhortation to self-knowledge, the analysis of political leadership in these seven conversations suggests that it is not. For this analysis has demonstrated that good political leadership proceeds from an insight into human nature that depreciates the entire sphere of human action, including the actions that political leadership itself calls for. By juxtaposing these two exhortations, Socrates rather recalls the tension that has run throughout these chapters, between the advice that we have seen Socrates give to political men, and the deeper concerns that that advice could not help but arouse. Socrates suggests in this way that the problem that has come to light, the tension within the moral life between our concern with our own good and our obligation to prefer our community’s welfare to our own, cannot be solved within the horizon of moral and political life. Accordingly, the next chapter not only considers solutions to the problem that are not themselves political, it

\textsuperscript{11} The most thoughtful discussion of this problem, whether Socrates was attempting to dissuade Charmides from the path that eventually led him to become a tyrant, or he actually encouraged this outcome, is by Starr (2007) 21-41.
considers them in a conversation between Socrates and the leading representative in the
*Memorabilia* of the apolitical life.

**III 8: The Good and the Noble**

The next chapter presents a conversation between Socrates and someone who is clearly not one of the “men longing for noble things,” whom Xenophon identified as the beneficiaries of Socrates’ teaching in the first seven conversations (III 1.1). Socrates’ interlocutor is the hedonist Aristippus. This is the second conversation between him and Socrates that Xenophon reports in the *Memorabilia*. In the first one, Socrates refuted Aristippus’ defense of incontinence and hedonism and his critique of political virtue, and tried to persuade him to care about being a good person (II 1). This second conversation between them makes clear that Socrates’ earlier attempt failed, and Socrates does not make the same attempt a second time.

Yet this conversation with Aristippus is related thematically to the seven conversations with political men. Its subject is the relation between the noble and the good. This relation, in the concrete form of the relation between our obligation to our community and our own interest, was at the heart of the conversations with the political men, each of whom proved to be confused about it. In the conversation with Aristippus, Socrates states explicitly the view of the relation between the noble and the good that much of his advice to the political men presupposed tacitly. This is the paradoxical view that our concern with the noble and specifically with political virtue is in fact a species of our more fundamental concern with our own good, the view that virtue is a kind of greed.
And in this conversation, it becomes clearer than before that this is not an adequate account of our experience, of the relation between our sense of moral obligation, on one hand, and our concern with ourselves and with the good things that the moral law requires us to surrender, on the other hand.

Neither interlocutor is primarily interested in the subject matter of the conversation, in expounding the relation between the noble and the good. Xenophon explains that Aristippus wants to refute Socrates, just as Socrates refuted him in their first conversation, and he chooses the subject of the conversation with a view to this. Aristippus asks Socrates if he knows something good, confident that Socrates will name some such good thing as food, drink, money, health, strength or daring, and that Aristippus can show that this is also sometimes bad (III 8.1-2). The confidence that Aristippus feels about this seems to reflect his understanding of Socrates’ defense of political life and political virtue in their first conversation. Aristippus thinks that according to Socrates, political virtue, “the kingly art,” is happiness, and indeed some remarks that Socrates makes in that conversation support this view (II 1.17 and 28-29). He believes that Socrates holds the naïve view of the goodness of virtue that Socrates alluded to in the conversation with the cavalry commander above all, the view that virtue is so good that it is worth sacrificing everything else in order to be virtuous. Aristippus is confident that Socrates will identify something as the greatest good and allow Aristippus to refute him by showing that it is also sometimes bad and does not justify the unqualified preference for doing one’s duty no matter what the cost.
For his part, Socrates is animated by two motives, according to Xenophon. On one hand, he wants to benefit his companions, and he answers with a view to this instead of being on guard lest his speech become somehow entangled (§1). Indeed, although almost the entire Memorabilia is devoted to showing how Socrates benefited his companions, this is the only conversation in the Memorabilia where Socrates is explicitly said to “want” (boulomenos) to benefit them (see I 3.1). Xenophon calls attention to the effect that the conversation has on the audience, rather than on Aristippus himself. This explains why it is plausible to suppose that this conversation is still part of the section of the Memorabilia in which Xenophon shows how Socrates benefited “men longing for the noble things”: the beneficiary of this conversation is the audience, not the interlocutor.

On the other hand, according to Xenophon, Socrates views Aristippus as an annoyance, and wants to make him go away: Socrates, Xenophon explains, who knows that if something annoys us then we need what will stop it, answers in the manner in which it is also best to act (§2). Both in speech and in deed, Socrates shows in this conversation how to make an annoyance stop. The conversation combines two goals: frustrating Aristippus and benefiting the more morally serious audience. And Xenophon indicates how Socrates achieves both of these goals by calling attention to Socrates’ failure to guard against his speech becoming entangled. Socrates avoids contradicting himself in the way that Aristippus hopes, but his response to Aristippus involves him in another difficulty, one that Aristippus does not notice and may even be incapable of noticing but that the audience, which is more sensitive to the claims and character of the
noble than Aristippus is, may notice. It is a difficulty that discloses itself only to someone who is more serious about moral life than Aristippus is.

Socrates avoids being refuted by answering Aristippus’ question about the good correctly, that is, by adopting the same view of the good that Aristippus intends to use to refute him. He asks Aristippus if he means something good for fever, or good for eye disease, or for hunger, and Aristippus answers that he means none of these. Socrates retorts that if Aristippus means something that is good for nothing, then Socrates neither knows such a thing nor needs it (§3). Everything is good with a view to a particular need, a particular annoyance, and nothing is good in every respect. This answer is not what Aristippus expects, but it does not silence him. Instead, he asks Socrates next if he knows something noble. Aristippus’ point is not simply that Socrates does not know what the good is, but rather that this view of the good that both Aristippus and Socrates hold appears to contradict Socrates’ endorsement of the noble, of political virtue. The noble imposes an order and a limit on our pursuit of the good things. It demands certain efforts and sacrifices in exchange, it seems, for other rewards. Aristippus seems to believe that these efforts that the noble calls for lose their rationale if even the highest good is also sometimes bad, if it is good only for particular things and bad for others. He can conceive of no principle for ordering one’s life besides the enjoyment of as many good things as possible to the fullest possible extent.

This means that Aristippus is utterly insensitive to the claim of the noble as noble and not merely as something good, to the “longing for noble things” that these conversations explore. It is true, as we found, that upon interrogation about its motives,
the devotion to virtue appeals to the goodness of virtue for its support. But prior to this appeal, the devotion to virtue is the devotion to a law that does not seek anything in return for obeying the law, and it finds its fulfillment precisely in forgetting oneself and devoting oneself to others (see III 2.4). And this dim awareness that our greatest powers and highest faculties are not self-regarding and self-serving is preserved even in the appeal to the goodness of virtue. For this appeal takes the specific form of the view that precisely the virtuous action that appears to call for the greatest disregard of self and to entail the greatest evil for man, death, somehow coincides with and is outweighed by the greatest good for man, when it is a noble death. The crucial difference between this concern with oneself and the concern that animates Aristippus is that the concern that the noble person feels is accompanied by a deep dissatisfaction with the good things that the noble requires us to forgo, and this dissatisfaction remains even when we realize that the noble, like all other good things, is also sometimes bad. To Aristippus, on the other hand, the good things that the noble excludes or restricts appear at least as attractive as the ones that the noble permits and provides, and the limits that the noble imposes on the pursuit of our own good appear senseless. This seems to be why Socrates is unable to discuss these matters frankly with Aristippus: the solution to the problem that Aristippus is asking about is based on an experience that Aristippus has not had or that he is not sufficiently honest with himself to acknowledge that he has had. Whatever Socrates’ true view is of what pursuits are noble and have intrinsic rather than merely instrumental worth, and of what makes these things noble, Aristippus has no access to this view because he has never experienced the noble as something other than the good.
Socrates avoids being refuted by Aristippus by answering precisely what Aristippus thinks: the noble is nothing other than the good. There are many noble things, some of which are as unlike as can be, like a noble shield and a noble javelin. Each thing is noble with a view to its own proper use. Even Aristippus is surprised by this: he encourages Socrates to say in what way the noble things are all alike and what they all have in common, and he expresses surprise that Socrates’ view of the noble is no different than his view of the good (§4). Aristippus’ resistance to Socrates’ answer implies that even he does not think that everything that satisfies a need or desire is automatically noble by virtue of the gratification that it provides; he, too, believes that the noble is something other than the good.

Socrates declines to explore this implicit concession that Aristippus makes, since this would interfere with his purpose of making Aristippus go away. Instead, in response to Aristippus’ objection, Socrates repeats more insistently his claim that the noble is also good. This is the same view that he insisted on in many of the conversations with the political men: the view that our obligation and our interests coincide, either in the sense that the problem of making subordinates obey their commander can be overcome by showing them how good it is for them to do noble things, or in the sense that the noble things that soldiers and citizens can be induced to do are limited by their overriding concern with their own good. But the present conversation, and in particular the view of the good that Socrates and Aristippus share, forces Socrates to modify this view of the relation between the noble and the good, and to depart still further from the ordinary moral understanding of virtue. Socrates has admitted that nothing is simply good. Each
thing is good for the needs or desires that it satisfies, and not for other things; it is not
efficient to call something good, without saying what the particular use is, for which it is
good. This means that Socrates can no longer maintain that the same things are good and
noble without admitting that they are in other respects bad and shameful:

First, virtue is not good with a view to some things and noble with a view
to others; next, human beings are called noble and good with respect to the
same thing and with a view to the same things; the bodies of human beings
also appear noble and good with a view to the same things; and all other
things that human beings use are considered noble and good with a view
to the same things, whatever they are useful for (§5).

This means, as Aristippus realizes, that even a dung-cart is noble, when it is well-suited
to its particular work.

This position implicitly denies that the noble affords us any more guidance about
how to live than the good does: even virtue is only sometimes noble and choiceworthy,
namely when it is useful. According to Socrates’ position, virtue is only a noble and
worthwhile pursuit for a human being when it is also in our interest, and nothing is
always in our interest. As he remarks at the end of the conversation with Aristippus, the
same things are both noble and shameful, and both good and bad (§6-7). This last claim
is the position that Aristippus intended to force Socrates to admit, and he goes away after
Socrates says it, thinking, no doubt, that he and Socrates are in agreement.

But silencing Aristippus is only one of the two goals that Xenophon attributes to
Socrates in this conversation. The other goal is to benefit his companions, and according
to Xenophon this makes Socrates less careful about not contradicting himself than he
might otherwise be (§1-2). In this way, Xenophon directs us to look for a contradiction
in Socrates’ position. We find such a contradiction between Socrates’ implicit claim that the only standard for determining what kind of pursuits are worthwhile is utility, and his claim that everything good is also sometimes bad. The contradiction is that the basis for choosing something that is both good and bad cannot simply be utility, because according to the view that everything good is also sometimes bad, nothing is any more useful than it is useless and harmful. In addition to mere utility, there is always the conscious or unconscious awareness of the purpose for which something is useful, with a view to which the beneficial effects of a particular pursuit outweigh its harmful effects. Every choice that we make on grounds of utility presupposes such a goal, or activity, or way of life, with a view to which the things that we choose are useful, and this means that it presupposes a principle according to which we consciously or unconsciously decide that one way of life and the things that are useful for it is most desirable and worthiest of pursuit. The consideration that is higher than mere utility is a consideration of what kind of person we want to be, what kind of activity we want to devote ourselves to. This is precisely what the word “noble” refers to, but this is also excluded by Socrates’ explicit characterization of the noble in the conversation with Aristippus as something that is also shameful and undesirable, and that is not desirable at all apart from its utility.

Aristippus did not notice this difficulty with Socrates’ position because he is insensitive to this aspect of the noble. But Socrates’ other audience is likely to include people who are sensitive to this, who are aware that there are higher considerations than mere utility. Such people would not be satisfied by Socrates’ crude utilitarianism. Moreover, by going so far as to call the noble not only good but also, in addition to this,
bad and shameful, Socrates emphasizes to such people with particular force the patent inadequacy of this utilitarian view. He focuses our attention on the aspect of the noble that is almost entirely absent from these conversations, whatever it is that is intrinsically choiceworthy and noble and in no way shameful, that makes what conduces to it good and useful and whatever interferes with it harmful, and that is itself a desirable goal wholly apart from considerations of whether or not it is in our interest and useful for us to be such a person, whether or not this way of life is itself good with a view to something else.

Xenophon appends to the conversation with Aristippus a conversation about the relation between the noble, the useful or good, and the pleasant, at which Aristippus was not present. This conversation clarifies somewhat the aspect of the noble that has been almost entirely absent from the investigation so far, the standard that determines that the things that conduce to it are useful and good (and therefore also noble, in the sense in which Socrates uses that word in the conversation with Aristippus). Admittedly, this conversation does not completely resolve the question, because Socrates does not discuss what it means to be a noble human being, that is, what the proper aim or activity or virtue of a human being is, with a view to which other things can be said to be truly good for us. Instead, he talks about houses, and about how to build houses: what kinds of houses are good, pleasant and noble, and in particular what makes them noble. This turns out to be neither simply identical to what makes houses useful, nor entirely independent of this. Socrates continues to maintain that considerations of utility are essential to determining what is noble, but he also acknowledges for the first time that the noble and the good are
not simply identical, and he suggests in this way how one might investigate what pursuit is truly noble for a human being, without getting entangled in the utilitarian considerations that we have not been able to escape so far.

   First, Socrates says that the same houses are both noble and useful. This appears to repeat what Socrates told Aristippus, which is that all things are noble with a view to the same things and in the same respect as they are useful. Yet in the sequel, Socrates suggests that a house should be constructed so that it is both most pleasant and most useful (§8). Socrates admits the validity of pleasure as a consideration, and he explicitly distinguishes it from mere utility. Pleasure conforms in one respect to what we mean by the noble: idle pleasure is desirable for its own sake, for the sake of mere enjoyment, but not useful for the sake of anything else. This appears to be a very great concession to the hedonist Aristippus, specifically to his position that mere pleasure is the only thing that is higher than the good, and the only source of guidance and order in our otherwise haphazard pursuit of all of the partially good things.

   Yet Socrates emphasizes that he has in mind, not just any pleasure like Aristippus seems to mean, but rather a particular pleasure: the pleasure of being warm in winter and cool in summer, that is, the pleasure that is associated with the specific function of houses (§9). And he elaborates on this restriction in the last part of his advice about house building: the house where “one oneself” (autos) would have the most pleasant refuge at all times and where one would keep one’s possessions (or “the beings”: ta onta) safest is likely to be the most pleasant and noblest one. In this last remark, Socrates explicitly distinguishes between the noble and the pleasant, and associates the noble rather with the
security of one’s possessions, with what is merely useful, like he did in the conversation with Aristippus. And he emphasizes this distinction between what is noble and intrinsically desirable, on one hand, and what is merely pleasant, on the other hand, by adding that paintings and tapestries deprive one of more delights than they provide (§10).

Socrates does not seem to retract his earlier suggestion that the noble is pleasant. Even the security of one’s possessions, which he associates with the noble, is ultimately for the sake of future pleasure and enjoyment, for the sake of the “delights” that these possessions provide. By disparaging the useless visual arts, he seems to mean that the possessions in which one delights should be one’s proper possessions, the ones whose enjoyment is proper for human beings, for “one oneself.” Likewise, in the first part of the discussion of house building, Socrates did not identify what is noble about houses with just any pleasure, but rather with the pleasure that arises from the proper use of houses. Both remarks agree that neither considerations of pleasure alone, nor considerations of utility alone, can disclose to us what is noble. The noble is both pleasant and useful: it is the pleasure that is proper to human beings, and the specifically pleasant character of the uniquely human function. It is the realization that the highest activities of which we are capable are not useful for the sake of something else; they are merely intrinsically pleasant, they afford the pleasure of being fully human and enjoying one’s proper “possessions,” the possessions that are naturally suitable for us.

More precisely, the condition for recognizing the highest human possibilities, to say nothing of realizing those possibilities, is freedom from the expectation that the highest activity is useful because it leads to an even higher activity or pleasure, from the
expectation that the highest activity of which we are capable is anything but merely pleasant. With a view to our investigation of moral life, this means that what is ultimately most significant about the concern with one’s duty to one’s community is not the prospect of something so good that it makes even death beneficial, but the awareness that we are going to die, that the other pleasures and attachments that we tend to think make life worth living lose something of their importance in light of this fact, and that we must somehow take our bearings from things that are more important than these transient enjoysments. What is missing from the moral attitude is the acknowledgment that this awareness that we are mortal is not a useful thing, not a means to identify what compensates us for the loss of our life and of all of our other enjoysments, and that no such compensation exists besides this awareness itself which, Socrates suggests, is itself something pleasant. Perhaps what is missing is the ability to take pleasure in this activity.

Socrates illustrates what the freedom to enjoy this pleasure entails by applying his teaching about house-building to two particular structures, temples and altars. According to Xenophon, Socrates said that the most becoming place for these structures is where they would be most visible and least underfoot, for it is pleasant to pray when one catches sight of one of them, even from afar, and it is pleasant to approach them if one is in the appropriate state of purification (§10). Pleasure is the only consideration that Socrates raises here. In particular, he does not call these proper functions of temples and altars useful. It is possible that by calling prayer pleasant but not useful, Socrates means to identify it as one of the noble things that are not merely useful and desirable for the sake
of something else, but also intrinsically pleasant and desirable. And he may have in mind
that prayer is not only pleasant but also one of the so-called useful pleasures, in the sense
that it is a pleasant activity that is proper to human beings as such (see I 4.13). But if this
is the case, then he must also mean that the condition for experiencing the pleasure that
prayer affords is the freedom from the expectation that prayer is useful in the strict sense,
the expectation that our prayers will be answered.

III 9: Political Virtue

This chapter includes the thematic account of the psychological phenomenon that
we are investigating, the phenomenon of doing what one knows is wrong. We have
attempted to clarify this account by investigating the moral life and in particular the
tension between the demands of the moral law and our feeling of obligation to obey the
law, on one hand, and our conscious or unconscious concern with our own interests, on
the other hand, the tension between the noble and the good. Xenophon indicates
explicitly the relevance of the discussion of the noble and the good in the preceding
chapter to the considerations of the present chapter by beginning this chapter with a
reference to what came before, the adverb “again” (palin).

The account of moderation is one of many separate remarks of Socrates’ that
Xenophon presents in this chapter. These remarks are about a variety of themes, the most
prominent of which are the virtues. The subject of the first remark is courage. Xenophon
reports what Socrates answered when someone asked him if a courageous disposition
arises naturally in some people or if it is the product of education. Socrates answers that
just as some bodies are naturally stronger than others, so some souls are naturally more
courageous than others, and he adds that this is confirmed by the observation that
different souls nurtured by the same laws differ greatly from each other in daring (III
9.1). The law cannot overcome these natural differences between people, even when it is
accompanied by coercive enforcement. The investigation of political life in the previous
chapters confirms this observation. Human nature is not infinitely malleable; it is
something definite and limited.

Next, Socrates remarks that in his view, every nature will increase in courage
through learning and through practice, as is shown by the unwillingness of Scythians and
Thracians to fight against Spartans with one kind of weapon, and the unwillingness of the
latter to fight against the former with other kinds (§2). This difference cannot be the
result of the greater natural resistance of one people or another to frightening things; it is
rather the result of greater proficiency in one kind of weapon than in another. A natural
resistance to frightening things may make it easier to acquire this kind of proficiency with
a weapon, but it is not a necessary condition of this proficiency, nor is it a sufficient one.
The courage that arises in this way depends primarily on military training, whether or not
one is naturally brave, and whether or not one holds the conviction that dying in battle for
one’s community is noble and a virtue (see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1116b15-22).

Socrates adds that similarly in all other things, he observes that people both differ
from one another by nature and improve greatly through careful work, and that from this
it is clear that everyone, no matter how naturally talented they are, should learn and
practice those things at which they want to become worthy of mention (§3). Just as in the
case of fighting with a particular kind of weapon, so in every case, skill at performing the activity does not necessarily reflect a natural aptitude for it. Such skill may be the product of training, instead. The great contribution that training and practice make to these skills means that we can be trained to some extent to do things that are contrary to our natural bent, contrary to the virtue to which human beings are naturally predisposed. And this means that our natural bent cannot be discovered simply by analyzing whatever activities we are capable of excelling at and investigating what the natural predisposition for these activities would have to be. This remark about courage amounts to an argument against a particular method of investigating the question, what is virtue (see II 6.39). Moreover, the method that it argues against is the method that all of the conversations with political men in this section of the Memorabilia have employed. This was to accept at face value the belief that all of Socrates’ interlocutors held, the belief that the leadership of one’s community is virtue, and to inquire, what qualifications are required in order to do this?

This is not to deny that the inquiry that we have been conducting has been useful and even essential in many ways. It enriched our understanding of ourselves, of our natural desires and faculties, our conflicting tendencies both to be attracted by the prospect of performing great services for our community and to resist performing these services. It has yielded many insights that are necessary not only in order to discover that we are ignorant of what virtue is and that we have not been investigating virtue the right way, but also to conduct that investigation correctly. We will recall only two especially important insights. One is the demand that came to light in the conversation with the
cavalry commander to account for our duties, for what is required of us, in terms of what we are, in terms of the natural constitution of man. To be sure, the specific suggestion that we could overcome our resistance to doing what is required of us by realizing that our duty is itself the fulfillment of our deepest desires proved to be incorrect. But this negative result taught us that we lack an adequate foundation for this assumption that our duty is to serve our community and that this must be the fulfillment of our natural bent. And a second insight, which taught us why this error is so powerful and attractive, suggested also how it might be avoided and how the investigation of virtue might be conducted more adequately. This error is attractive because it appeals to our deepest concern, our fear of dying, and it holds out the hope that death might not be as great an evil as we fear. The error that we make is to indulge this hope, to seek some profit from our awareness of our situation besides that awareness itself. The more adequate investigation of virtue would have to avoid this error. We have discovered what is required in order to investigate the question, “what is virtue,” but we have not conducted that investigation.

The next statement that Xenophon presents is the remark about moderation that this study as a whole has aimed at interpreting. Socrates did not separate from one another wisdom and moderation, but rather judged that someone is both wise and moderate who, knowing the noble and good things, uses them, and knowing the shameful ones, abstains from them. This remark displays an imbalance, insofar as a wise and moderate person is said to avoid some, but not all, of the opposites of the things that he is said to pursue: he pursues both the noble things and the good ones, but avoids only the
shameful ones. This imbalance reproduces the crucial ambiguity that we discovered within in the moral attitude, namely its inability to decide unequivocally either that the noble is in our interest and also good, or that it is detrimental to our interest and that what is shameful is not necessarily also bad. The moral attitude is characterized by the attempt to hold these two contradictory beliefs simultaneously, and further to hide from oneself that one holds these beliefs. We deny unconsciously that morality is harmful by believing unconsciously that the noble is good, and we deny unconsciously that our deepest concern is with ourselves by believing consciously that the moral attitude is a selfless one.

Next, Xenophon reports Socrates’ account of the phenomenon of doing the opposite of what one knows is right. He introduces this phenomenon as an objection to Socrates’ account of moderation: someone asks Socrates if he would concede that people who understand what they should do, but do the opposite, are wise but incontinent, and therefore that wisdom is separable from moderation. Socrates resists this conclusion and claims instead that such people are indeed incontinent but not wise, “for I think that all people, choosing from among the possible things the ones that they think are most advantageous for them, do these things” (§4). Socrates implies that people who are both wise and moderate choose to do the right thing because they know that it is in their interest, but these people who do the wrong thing do not know this, and since they do not know that the noble is good, then they are unwise. But we have learned that Socrates himself does not believe that the noble is good, despite Xenophon’s attempts to hide this
view of Socrates’ from his careless readers. This is not a correct statement of Socrates’ own view of the phenomenon.

Nor is this account an accurate representation of the ordinary moral view. To be sure, it belongs to the moral attitude to hold that the correct course of action is in one’s interest, like Socrates says. But this is only one part of the moral attitude, and therefore it is a paradoxical formulation of that attitude. It ignores the aspect of moral actions that morally serious people have especially in mind when they speak of the goodness for them of the moral life: the sacrifice and harm that moral action entails. Socrates’ account ignores the self-contradiction within the moral attitude. It is a provocative formulation, rather than a merely descriptive one. It leads, as we saw especially in the conversation with Nicomachides, to the characterization of morality as a self-interested, economic pursuit, and to the justified resistance to this characterization on the part of morally serious people.

In the case of people who fulfill their moral obligation, Socrates’ paradoxical claim that all people always do what they think is to their advantage does not mean that moral action is actually good for them, only that they believe unconsciously that it is, and that this belief discloses to them their true concerns and that morality does not satisfy these concerns. On the other hand, people who are unable to do what they think is right pursue lesser, shallower good things. Men like Antisthenes and Aristippus, who are entirely insensitive to the claim of morality to be good, believe that these things are all that is required in order to live well. But the people, to whom the objection to Socrates’ view of moderation refers, are not Antistheneses and Aristippuses. They are aware that
they fall short of what they believe is their duty, and this awareness leaves them displeased with themselves, because they sense that they are not good people. Their displeasure expresses a reservation about the enjoyments, in favor of which they neglect their duty, a reservation that reflects an even dimmer awareness of their own longings than the one that moral people have. This inferior self-awareness is what Socrates seems to mean by their lack of wisdom.

What remains unclear is how Socrates’ statement about moderation applies to a third type of person, the most important type: someone who neither hopes for greater happiness in return for doing his duty than he has a right to expect, nor shirks his duty because he prefers to seek greater happiness by other means. We have no basis yet for determining if someone who knows what virtue is, automatically does what is required of him, or if the knowledge of true virtue is the necessary but not sufficient condition of virtuous action, and what supplement to this knowledge might be required. We will take up this question in the next chapter, where we will examine the section of the Memorabilia where Xenophon no longer limits himself to presenting remarks of Socrates’ that represent the ordinary moral view, even in a paradoxical form. The subject of that section of the Memorabilia is not Socrates’ understanding of the moderation that morally serious people practice, or unconsciously believe that they practice, but rather the moderation that Socrates himself taught and practiced.
Introduction

The previous chapter attempted to evaluate Socrates’ official account of the phenomenon of knowing what the right thing is to do, but doing the opposite: whenever we resist doing what we think is right, it is because we are ignorant that it is always in our interest to do the right thing. We considered whether this is an accurate description of ordinary political morality. We assumed tacitly that we knew what the right thing to do is, namely to serve our country, and that it was only a matter of determining if this is good for us. But this assumption proved false: we discovered that we lack adequate justification for the assumption that virtue is political virtue and that a good human being is a good citizen. Our investigation of political leadership and political virtue led us to realize that we do not know what virtue is and how we should live, and that we need to investigate these questions from the beginning. The argument of this chapter is that Xenophon devotes the major part of Book Four to presenting this investigation as Socrates conducted it, including the results of the investigation.

The main result of Socrates’ investigation of virtue is that philosophy is the best pursuit and the best way of life, and wisdom is the greatest good. This is not surprise: it is one of the first things that everyone learns about Socrates. Moreover, the same conclusion seems to follow from the view of the noble that came to light near the end of the previous chapter: that activity is noble, which is the highest function of a human
being, when that function is not deemed useful for the sake of something else, but is rather exercised for its own sake (see p.74-75 above). Our examination of the moral life suggested that this function is our self-consciousness, our awareness that we are mortal, and that the exercise of this function is what makes the moral attitude superior to other, ordinary human pursuits. This awareness is the root of the noble disdain for merely transient, selfish, human concerns that makes a morally serious person willing to forgo these things. A second, equally essential ingredient of the moral attitude is the unconscious expectation that this awareness of our situation is somehow useful to us and leads to the greatest happiness. We suggested that the truly noble activity does not expect this. It does not demand more from the awareness of our situation than merely to understand our situation. And this seems to be a description of philosophy.

But the argument of Book Four of the *Memorabilia* shows that the matter is more complicated. In the first place, it is not clear that we can know how we are naturally constituted and what our highest function or faculty is. Without this knowledge, we seem to have only our own subjective experience of the moral law as evidence for what virtue is. Yet subjective experience is not a sufficient basis for determining the content of a standard, whose claim over us does not depend on our assent and that feels rather as if it is imposed on us from outside and above us. I argue that this problem is at the heart of this section of the *Memorabilia*.

In order to follow the account of the investigation of virtue in these chapters, it is necessary to attend to two distinct aspects of Xenophon’s presentation. One is the content of the education in virtue that Socrates imparts to one particular student. This education
includes a long protreptic conversation in which Socrates convinces a potential student that he is in need of guidance about how to live, followed by thematic discussions of piety, justice and continence, and an education in dialectics that consists of dialectical definitions of the virtues. The second element of Xenophon’s presentation of the Socratic investigation of virtue is his presentation of Socrates himself, of Socratic education as the characteristic activity of Socrates. The first chapter in this section of the Memorabilia explains how much effort Socrates spent trying to convince people that they are in need of an education. Moreover, Xenophon makes clear that Socrates’ aim in doing this was not simply to confer on as many people as possible the benefits of a genuine education, for Socrates spoke in this way with many people who were incapable of benefiting from such an education. The final chapter in this section, whose subject is dialectics, emphasizes still more the interest that Socrates took in dialectical conversation for its own sake, apart from its salutary effect on the interlocutor.

The problem that runs throughout this entire section is the relation between these two aspects of Socratic education: the content of the teaching that Socrates conveys in speech, and the activity of teaching and in particular of conversation. We will seek an explanation for this second aspect of the Socratic education, the activity of teaching, in the first aspect, which is the content of the teaching: we will bear in mind the question, what considerations arise in the conversations between Socrates and Euthydemus that

12 It is true that Socrates’ interlocutor in the conversation about justice is the sophist Hippias, and not the student Euthydemus, who is Socrates’ interlocutor in the other four conversations in this section (IV 4.5 ff.). But I will show that Xenophon makes clear that the Socratic education includes an investigation of justice, that the conversation with Hippias makes clear what the result of that investigation is, and that Euthydemus shows signs in a later conversation of having learned what Socrates teaches Hippias about justice. As for the reason for this change of interlocutors, see pages 136 and 142-143 below.
suggest why conversation might itself be the noble activity *par excellence* (see III 3.11)?

In light of what we learn from this investigation of virtue, we will return in a concluding chapter to the question of this dissertation as a whole: the question of moral psychology, of the relation between the knowledge of what virtue is and the concerns that make us resist being virtuous.

**IV 1: Socratic Education**

The first chapter is an introduction to this section of the *Memorabilia* as a whole. It introduces both of our themes, the interest that Socrates takes in education and the content of the education that Socrates imparts to suitable students, and it raises the question of the relation between them. On one hand, Xenophon presents Socrates as a teacher and a benefactor of his students. On the other hand, Xenophon makes clear that Socrates holds that only a certain kind of person can fully benefit from a genuine education, but he tries nevertheless to convince even ineducable people that they need an education.

According to Xenophon, Socrates is so beneficial with regard to every matter and in every way that it is clear, even to a poor observer, that nothing is more beneficial than being a companion of his and spending time with him anywhere and in any pursuit. The mere memory of Socrates when he is absent is a great benefit to those who accept, or understand (*apodedesthai*), him. Indeed, his jokes are no less profitable than his serious remarks are (IV 1.1).
Accordingly, Xenophon turns to one of Socrates’ jokes: Socrates often says that he is in love with someone, but according to Xenophon he is clearly not interested in beautiful bodies, but rather in souls that have grown up naturally well formed for virtue. Xenophon explains how Socrates identifies these “good natures” (agathas phuseis): they learn quickly whatever they apply their minds to, they remember what they learn, and they desire all of the learnings through which one can nobly manage a household and a city, and on the whole make good use of human beings and human affairs. Socrates believes that if such people were educated, they would not only be happy themselves and manage their own households nobly, but also be able to make other people and cities happy (§2). The joke seems to be that Socrates claims to be attracted by physical beauty, but in fact he cares only about a kind of inner beauty, about the intellectual and moral qualities that are the necessary preconditions for an education in virtue.

Yet Xenophon proceeds to explain that Socrates is also interested in people with defective natures. And it is not the case that he converses with these people only because he does not yet realize that they are defective. On the contrary, Xenophon explains that Socrates “did not approach all people in the same way,” but rather addresses each person in the way that would make clear to him why he was in need of an education (§3). In order to address someone in this way, Socrates must realize not only why that person needs an education, but also why he thinks that he does not need an education. This implies that Socrates realizes that his interlocutor does not spontaneously desire to make every effort to be a good person, like the people with good natures do. In order to
address these people in the way that he does, Socrates must realize that they do not have good natures.

Xenophon does not explain why Socrates takes an interest in the education of people who do not have good natures. This interest is especially in need of explanation, since Xenophon claims that people with good natures who receive an education in addition stand to become happy and able to make others happy, and this implies that someone without a good nature does not stand to profit from an education in this way. Socrates seems to be interested in making people realize that they are in need of an education, regardless of their ability to profit from it, or of the way in which they stand to profit. Turning people toward an education and imparting that education to promising students are for Socrates two different goals, and the first goal seems to interest Socrates not only as a means to the second one but also in its own right (see I 4.1).

This sheds further light on Socrates’ joke about being in love. Even if Socrates is attracted by good souls more than by beautiful bodies, he does not form exclusive attachments to the people with whom he claims to be in love. He forces himself to forgo even the company of the finest human beings in order to converse with these lower types. Perhaps the joke is that Socrates characterizes his conversations as an erotic activity at all, as an activity that he performs primarily out of attraction to the human beings with whom he converses.

The discussion of these different natures calls attention to the relation between the theme of this section of the Memorabilia, which is the Socratic education to genuine virtue, and the question of this dissertation as a whole, which is whether the knowledge
of virtue is all that is required in order to act virtuously, and if not, then what else is required. In Book Three, we saw that Socrates seems to endorse the first alternative, although we also concluded that the matter is not so simple. Here, the arguments with which Socrates tries to persuade the bad natures that they need an education suggest that knowledge may not be sufficient for virtue. To people with one type of bad nature, who think that they are good by nature and who look down on learning, Xenophon reports that Socrates explains that the natures that seem to be best need education most of all, not only in the case of human beings but also in the cases of horses and dogs. If spirited horses and fierce dogs are properly trained, then they become the best, but otherwise they become hardest to handle and worst. Likewise, human beings who are naturally strong-souled and able to accomplish whatever they attempt need to learn how to judge what to do, or else the combination of unrestraint and their natural strength makes them the worst and most harmful (§3-4). According to this speech, the qualities that belong to the natures that “seem to be best” are not the intellectual and moral qualities that Xenophon mentioned before, but rather a kind of irrational, animal strength and spiritedness, which Xenophon did not mention among the qualities of the good natures. Socrates’ speech to these self-confident people concedes that not only the knowledge of what one should do but also the strength to do what one knows is right, is required in order to be “the best.” As opposed to the section of Book Three that we considered, where Socrates says at the very beginning of the first conversation and then again on almost every page that knowledge is the necessary and sufficient condition of virtue, here his view of the matter is more ambiguous.
Xenophon concludes this introductory chapter by mentioning a second, lower kind of defective person, who thinks highly of his wealth and believes that he has no need for education in addition, because he will be able to accomplish what he wants and to be honored by human beings by virtue of his wealth. Socrates tells such people that they are simpleminded to think that they can live well without knowing what to spend their money on, or to think that they can distinguish between beneficial and harmful things without learning how to do this, or that they can be thought well of by virtue of their money alone (§5). This advice implies that the aim of the education that Socrates has in mind is not narrowly political, since otherwise Socrates would have no complaint against wealthy men, for he holds that a good economist is a good general (III 4.7 ff.). Education makes the good natures happy and capable of making other people happy, but it does not necessarily make them concern themselves with other people’s happiness, like the political men whom we considered in the previous chapter did. Perhaps the encouragement of political ambition is one of the lesser benefits that people who do not have good natures derive from the Socratic education, people who do not desire above everything else to achieve clarity about what it means to be a good person. The Socratic education may make the best-qualified student prefer his own happiness to the happiness of others. Just as Xenophon tacitly retracted his suggestion that Socrates’ preoccupation with education was motivated by a kind of attraction to beautiful souls, he now tacitly calls into question the suggestion with which the chapter began, namely that the Socratic education should be understood as an act of beneficence on Socrates’ part (§1).
IV 2: Euthydemus

Xenophon undertakes to describe at greater length how Socrates approached a different type of person, who is not contemptuous of education, but who thinks that he has already happened upon the best education, and thinks highly of himself because of his wisdom (IV 2.1). Unlike the examples in the previous chapter, Xenophon presents a long conversation between Socrates and a representative of this type. Indeed, four out of the next five chapters present conversations between Socrates and this same interlocutor, whom Xenophon chooses as Socrates’ exemplary student. This chapter presents the first conversation between them. Its function is elenctic and protreptic: Socrates convinces his interlocutor Euthydemus, who thinks that he is already wise, that he does not know what he thinks that he knows, and that he is in need of an education, and the conversation ends when Euthydemus surrenders to Socrates’ guidance.

The fact that Socrates tries to persuade Euthydemus that he needs an education does not mean that Euthydemus has a good nature, for we saw in the previous chapter that Socrates tried to convince people with bad natures, too, that they need an education. Nor does the fact that Socrates makes Euthydemus aware of his ignorance prove that Euthydemus has a good nature. The difference between good natures and bad ones is not that people with good natures are willing to talk to Socrates for long enough to be refuted, or even that they take their refutation to heart, but rather that only the good natures could fully comprehend and benefit from the education that Euthydemus learns that he needs (IV 1.2).
It is true that Xenophon attributes a concern with education to the type of person, whom Euthydæmus represents, and Euthydæmus himself expresses a sincere concern with being a good person, which is one of the qualities of a good nature. But there is no question that he lacks the other two qualities, which are a quick mind and a good memory. Indeed, Euthydæmus’ evident lack of these qualities, and his resulting evident inaptitude for a genuine education, demonstrate how important these qualities are. As for Euthydæmus’ moral seriousness, even this is defective. The education that he thinks has made him the wisest and best man in his generation and that has given him hopes of limitless success, consists in having filled his library with many writings of the poets and of the most highly reputed sophists. There is no indication that he has read these books, and even if he has, there is ample indication that he is not a careful reader (see especially IV 2.24-25). Instead, Xenophon explains, the great distinction of Euthydæmus is his physical beauty. Perhaps he is even a famous beauty; he may be the same Euthydæmus with whom the oligarch Critias was in love (I 2.29-30). The education of Euthydæmus that occupies most of the remainder of the Memorabilia is a caricature of the genuine Socratic education. The drama of these conversations shows what impression the Socratic education makes on someone whose concern to act rightly is not matched by the intellectual aptitude for investigating and clarifying his concern.\footnote{Morrison (1994, 185 n.7) and Johnson (2005, 47 n.20) argue that Euthydæmus has a good nature. Only Johnson provides some evidence for this claim: first, he points out that Euthydæmus was beautiful and that Socrates claimed to be in love only with the good natures. But Xenophon never suggests that all beautiful people have good natures, and Johnson admits that Socrates made this remark “jokingly” and that “there is nothing overtly erotic about Socrates’ conversations with Euthydæmus.” Second, he points out that Euthydæmus was serious about moral virtue, as opposed to the two types of people whom Xenophon mentions at the end of Chapter One. But neither Morrison nor Johnson takes into account Euthydæmus’ sheer stupidity, his utter lack of the two intellectual characteristics of the good natures.}
Xenophon tells at length the charming story of Socrates’ ‘courtship’ of Euthydemus, his initial attempts to engage Euthydemus in conversation. We will only summarize the main points. When Socrates hears that “Euthydemus the beautiful” has acquired a large library and a high opinion of himself, Socrates goes to great lengths to attract Euthydemus’ attention. He leads his companions repeatedly to a workshop where Euthydemus, who is too young to go into the agora by himself, spends much of his time, and tries to interest Euthydemus in joining their conversation (IV 2.1). The remark about Euthydemus’ youth calls attention to the fact that neither Euthydemus nor Socrates, nor Xenophon for that matter, ever mentions Euthydemus’ parents. In the case of this particular student, Socrates does not seem to be exposed to the charge of undermining parental authority (see I 2.49).

On the first of these occasions, someone asks Socrates a question about the Athenian statesman and hero Themistocles: whether he owed his superiority to education or to his nature. Socrates answers that it would be naïve to think that such great skill could be acquired spontaneously. He answers this way, Xenophon explains, because “he wanted to move Euthydemus,” not because Themistocles had a teacher (IV 2.2; see Thucydides I 138.3). This is another indication that the education in which Socrates tries to interest Euthydemus is not necessary for narrowly political aims. Yet we will see that these never cease to be the aims that most preoccupy Euthydemus.

After further attempts, Socrates has succeeded in arousing Euthydemus’ interest, and he notices that Euthydemus would like to have a conversation. Accordingly, Socrates goes alone to the workshop, and Euthydemus sits down next to him. This is the
only conversation in the *Memorabilia* that is explicitly said to take place in private (see Plato, *Laws* 666e-667a). Socrates begins the conversation by questioning Euthydemus about his bibliomania. He compliments Euthydemus for choosing to possess treasures of wisdom which, Euthydemus clearly holds, make their possessor rich in virtue, rather than treasures of silver and gold, which make human beings no better. But Euthydemus cannot say what he wants to improve at by collecting these writings. Socrates asks Euthydemus if he wants to be a good physician, or a builder, or a geometer, or an astronomer, or a rhapsode, and Euthydemus is not interested in any of these things. His lack of interest in geometry and especially in astronomy suggests that he is not equally interested in all of the writings of the wisest sophists: he is uninterested in the study of “what is called the *kosmos* by the sophists,” which Xenophon discusses earlier in the *Memorabilia* and which, Xenophon makes clear, was of interest to Socrates himself (see I 1.11-15 and IV 7, especially §6-7). Finally, Socrates asks if Euthydemus aims at the virtue, through which human beings become competent at political and economic affairs and at ruling, and beneficial both to other human beings and to themselves. Euthydemus agrees warmly that this is what he wants, whereupon Socrates praises him for a second time, this time for aiming at the noblest virtue and greatest art, the one that belongs to kings, which is called the kingly virtue or art (*hē basilikē*) (§3-11).

Socrates asks Euthydemus if he has considered whether it is possible to become good at these things without being just. Euthydemus answers that he has given thought to this, and it is not possible to become a good citizen without justice. In response to Socrates’ further questions, he claims that he is himself just and that he can explain the
works of justice and injustice. He is so confident of this that he doubts that what Socrates proposes next is necessary: to make lists of the just and unjust things under the headings “J” and “I.” He agrees nevertheless, perhaps so that whatever else the conversation achieves, he will be able to add a writing by Socrates to his library (§11-13).

The ensuing discussion of justice has five stages. In the first stage, Euthydemus instructs Socrates to list under “injustice” four activities that Socrates asks him about: lying, deceiving, evil-doing and enslaving. But in the second stage, Euthydemus admits that enslavement, deception and theft are just, when a general does them to an unjust enemy city. According to this revised view, the just man does whatever is required in order to help his community, even things that are harmful to others and that require him to be cruel and devious (see III 1.6). Accordingly, Euthydemus agrees to draw a far more complicated diagram and to put these things under the heading “justice,” as well as under “injustice,” and to draw the distinction that the same things are just to do to enemies and unjust to friends, with whom one should be most straightforward (§14-16).14

In the third and central stage of the investigation of justice, Euthydemus realizes that justice can require citizens to do to one another some of these things that he considers unjust to do to friends and just to do only to enemies. The examples are deception and theft: Euthydemus agrees that it is just for a general to embolden his soldiers by lying to them and telling them that reinforcements are on the way, for a father to persuade his son to take medicine by telling him that it is food, and for a friend to steal a sword from his friend when the owner is depressed and is a danger to himself (§17).

14 See Johnson (2005) 50-55 for a thorough discussion of the references in the present conversation to writing, and to the limitations of writing as a pedagogic method.
The second case is the only one where the requirements of justice do not contradict the requirements of the law. In the first case, the prohibition against manslaughter is set aside for the sake of the preservation of the community. In the case of the madman with a sword, the legal distribution of property is set aside for the sake of the preservation of the individual property-owner. In both cases, Euthydemus agrees that justice requires him to violate these laws. Justice is a higher standard than the law. The question is, what is this standard?

We have to consider the examples more carefully. In the case of the general who lies to his soldiers about reinforcements, Euthydemus believes that justice requires the general and the soldiers to do whatever their community requires of them, even if this requires the soldiers to be deceived by their general into risking and even losing their lives. Euthydemus is willing to violate a law that protects individual members of the community, the soldiers, for the sake of the community as a whole. The view of justice on which this determination rests, seems to be that the welfare of the community outweighs the welfare of its individual members (see III 2).

On the other hand, in the case of the madman with a sword, Euthydemus is willing to make an exception to a law on which orderly political life as a whole depends, the law that regulates the ownership of property, for the sake of an individual who may be harmed by this law. The justification seems to be that the protection of property rights should not be detrimental to the property owner, and it is not just to respect a friend’s legal rights when those rights are harmful to him. Someone who cannot use his property
well is not the just owner of that property. The just ownership of property, as opposed to strictly legal ownership, should serve the interest of the owners. We suggested that these examples show that Euthydemus thinks that justice is a higher and more authoritative standard than the law of the community, but he turns out to look to two different, contradictory standards. The standard that justifies tricking one’s soldiers into endangering themselves is that justice aims at the good of the community, even at the expense of the just individual. On the other hand, the standard that justifies stealing a madman’s sword is that justice aims at the good of the just individual, even at the expense of the laws that are most necessary for the preservation of the public peace (see Plato, *Laws* 736c-737b).\(^\text{15}\) The first chapter of this dissertation proved that this tension between the good of the community and the good of the individual, between the noble and the good, cannot be resolved within the horizon of political life.

Euthydemus is surprised to learn that it is sometimes just to do to friends and fellow-citizens the things that he previously considered it unjust to do to friends and just to do to enemies. But he does not yet realize that his view of justice is incoherent. Instead, he tries one last time to revise his messy list of just and unjust things, by putting these cases, too, in the column of just things (§18). The possibility of distinguishing

\(^{15}\) The example of the madman with a sword is not merely a narrow, marginal exception to the otherwise valid distribution of property. Rather, the principle that justifies this exception has an exceedingly broad application. If property ownership depends on the ability to use property well then, for example, all children who can benefit from a college education should receive one, and all children who cannot benefit from one should not receive one, and all parents should have the resources to pay for the appropriate education of their child. Further, the redistribution of educational opportunities and the resources to pay for them would have to take place constantly, and the determinations would have to be made by a genuinely competent judge with absolute authority. In general, the political arrangements that would be necessary in order for each citizen to receive what he deserves would encounter such resistance, and the attempt to implement a perfectly just political arrangement would require such great force, that it would destroy the community. By the second standard of justice, which is the welfare of the community, such arrangements would be most unjust. See the excellent discussion of this problem in Buzzetti (2001) 10-15.
clearly between just and unjust actions has not been called into question for him by the incoherence of his view of justice that has come to light. This incoherence, which is the root of his confusion, remains far beneath the surface of the conversation, and beyond Euthydemus’ grasp of the problem. In the next stages of the conversation, Socrates will convince Euthydemus that he does not know what justice is. But even then, we will see, Euthydemus will not grasp the problem that has just come to light, the problem of the relation between the noble and the good, much less realize that there is no completely adequate political solution to the problem. He will continue to assume that there is such a solution, but that he is ignorant of it, and he will remain ignorant of how deep his ignorance really is.

Socrates raises the case of people who, by deceiving their friends, harm them. He asks Euthydemus, who is more unjust, someone who does this willingly or unwillingly? Euthydemus is reluctant to continue, since he no longer trusts his answers, and all of his earlier answers now seem incorrect to him. This admission illustrates what is at stake in Socrates’ question: someone who lies unwillingly to other people, lies also to himself. Euthydemus ventures that voluntary harm is more unjust than involuntary harm (§19). His answer is not an arbitrary guess; it reflects his belief that justice is beneficial to one’s friends and fellow citizens. This belief made Euthydemus willing to permit a general to lie in order to induce his soldiers to benefit the city, and to permit a friend to steal from his friend in order to prevent the victim of the theft from harming himself. On the understanding that justice benefits friends and fellow citizens and injustice harms them,
then voluntary injustice is intentional, deliberate harm, and is worse than involuntary
injustice, which is equally harmful but is at least not inflicted out of malice.

Socrates refutes Euthydemus by means of the claim that justice is knowledge, a
skill that can be taught and learned and performed according to a fixed set of rules, and
by means of an analogy between justice and writing. Euthydemus agrees that there is
knowledge of justice like there is of writing. This belief is the tacit assumption of the
whole investigation of justice so far, which assumes that the just actions can be known
and distinguished once and for all from the unjust actions. This belief was called into
question by the previous stage of the investigation, which concluded that justice requires
us both to harm individual members of the community in order to benefit the community
as a whole, and to violate the law of the community in order to benefit individual citizens.
Yet it was not called into question for Euthydemus. He seems to be unaware that his two
opinions about justice contradict each other and that justice requires individual citizens to
be harmed for the sake of the community. He does not realize that the sacrifices that
citizens make for the sake of the so-called common good actually inflict harm on them.
He believes unconsciously that justice is always good for the just man. Euthydemus
reconciles his two contradictory views about justice by means of the false belief that
justice is a common good, and that the just man who benefits others is himself benefited
in a mysterious way by doing this. This belief prevents Euthydemus from seeing the
similarity between a soldier who is deceived into fighting for his country against hopeless
odds, and a madman with a sword.
On the basis of Euthydemus’ agreement that justice is knowledge, Socrates forces him to agree that involuntary injustice is worse than voluntary injustice. He asks Euthydemus if someone who intentionally writes incorrectly knows how to write. Euthydemus agrees, and he offers without being asked the reason why: such a person could write correctly if he chose to. Likewise, Euthydemus agrees that someone who is voluntarily unjust knows what things are just, whereas involuntary injustice proceeds from ignorance of what is just. If Euthydemus understood his own position better, then he might object that the analogy between justice and writing is incorrect because whereas someone who knows how to write might choose to write incorrectly, no one who knows how to be just would choose to be unjust, at least according to Euthydemus’ view that justice is good for the just person (III 9.5). But Euthydemus insists that voluntary injustice is possible. Indeed, he seems to believe sincerely and deeply that some people commit injustice voluntarily, since at an earlier point in the conversation he expressed indignation at the injustice that he sees all around him (IV 2.12). His indignation may reflect his unconscious doubt that it is really always better to be just than to be unjust. Insofar as he believes both that justice is always good for the just man and that voluntary injustice is possible, his view of justice contradicts itself, and he is wrong to agree that justice is knowledge.

Euthydemus’ inability to decide whether justice is good for the just man and therefore voluntary injustice is impossible, or justice is always good for others even at the expense of the just man and therefore voluntary injustice is possible and worse than involuntary injustice, leads to his refutation. Socrates asks Euthydemus if he means that
in the same way that someone who knows how to write is more skilled at writing than someone who does not know how to write, so someone who knows the just things is more just than someone who does not know them, even if neither person actually does the just things. Euthydemus realizes that this amounts to the admission that voluntary injustice is more just than involuntary injustice, and he answers that he seems to himself to be saying these things, but he does not know how (§19-20).

Next, Socrates asks Euthydemus about someone who wants to speak the truth but never says the same things about the same things: who, when he points to the same road, at one time points east and at another time west, and when he announces the result of a calculation, at one time calls it greater and at another less. Euthydemus answers that such a person does not know what he thought that he knew. This amounts to the concession that since he contradicts himself about justice, he does not know what justice is, like he previously thought that he does (see IV 2.12). After Euthydemus implicitly admits his ignorance of his own ignorance in this way, the fifth and final stage of the examination of justice takes up the subject of slavishness (see I 2.49-50 with III 9.6). Socrates and Euthydemus discussed enslavement in the first and second stages of the investigation, but Socrates did not force Euthydemus to concede in the third stage that it is sometimes just to enslave friends, like it is sometimes just to lie to them or to steal from them. Now, Euthydemus agrees that the name “slavish” applies especially to people who do not know what the noble and good and just things are, and he comes close to admitting that he deserves to be enslaved (§21-23).
Euthydemus is reduced to despair, because he thought that he was “philosophizing a philosophy” by means of which he would be educated most of all in the things that befit someone who longs to be a virtuous citizen, a noble and good man (kalokagathos), and he is now dispirited because he is aware of his ignorance of these things but not of any road that he might take to become better (§23). His reflection on justice has convinced him that he needs to find another path to the nobility and goodness that he longs for, but it has not made that goal itself problematic for him. Yet Socrates has suggested that it is precisely Euthydemus’ confusion about the proper goal that is responsible for his miserable condition. For one thing, this is the source of the confusion in both of Socrates’ examples of people who do not know what they think that they know. Someone who at one time points east and at another time west down the same road is not confused about the road, only about the destination. Likewise, the other person in Socrates’ example, who calls the same calculation at one time greater and at another time less, is not necessarily confused about the result of the calculation, since any quantity is both greater and less in comparison to different quantities (§21). More to the point, Euthydemus is confused about what justice requires of him precisely because does not understand what a noble and good man is. He is confused about the relation between the noble and the good, about whether the two coincide and what is noble is also good, or the noble is noble precisely because it is not necessarily good, because of the disregard of self that it calls for. Yet he is in no doubt that he should strive to be an outstanding citizen. The root of Euthydemus’ confusion is the one thing that seems not to have been called into question for him.
Here we see clearly the connection between the two sections of the *Memorabilia* that the two parts of this dissertation consider. The education of Euthydemus begins by trying, and failing, to impress on Euthydemus the findings of the conversations with the political men in Book Three. It succeeds in making Euthydemus aware that he does not know what his duties are, but not that this reflects a deeper confusion about his situation. Nevertheless, the conversation proceeds as if Euthydemus did realize this, and at every stage of the education of Euthydemus Socrates directs the conversation to the next subject that it would be appropriate to take up if Euthydemus really understood what Socrates tried to teach him about the previous subject. For even if Euthydemus had realized that he is ignorant not only of how to be a virtuous citizen but also of what virtue is, the attempt to enumerate just and unjust actions could not have settled this second question. Such an attempt can at most bring to light the incoherent belief about justice that characterizes the moral attitude, and the farthest that it can reach seems to be the point that was reached by Xenophon’s analysis of political leadership that we considered in the last part of this dissertation. Accordingly, Socrates changes the subject.

The next subject is self-knowledge. Socrates asks Euthydemus, who does not know what road to take, if he has ever taken the road to Delphi. Not only has Euthydemus been to Delphi, he has been back a second time. He has seen the inscription “know yourself” on the temple, but he has not taken it to heart, since he assumes that he knows this well enough. Euthydemus inadvertently indicates the reason why Socrates takes up this subject by adding that he would hardly know anything else if he did not know himself. Socrates replies by informing Euthydemus that he does not know himself.
adequately simply by virtue of knowing his own name. Self-knowledge is rather the knowledge of one’s power (\textit{dunamis}), and one’s power must be determined relative to one’s tasks, and in the first place relative to “the human use,” the proper activity of a human being as such (§24-25). When Euthydemus agrees, Socrates proceeds to deliver his longest speech in this conversation.

The speech begins with a general statement: it is clear, Socrates says, that human beings experience the most good things on account of knowing themselves, and the most bad things on account of being deceived about themselves. Next, Socrates proceeds to distinguish between two components of self-knowledge: the knowledge of the things that are suitable for oneself, or to which one is suited (\textit{ta epitēdeia}), and the knowledge of one’s powers and abilities (\textit{ha dunantai}). Further, Socrates distinguishes between four types of people: those who know both of these things, who do the things that they know how to do and who use other people for their benefit; those who do not know their own power, and as a result of this ignorance of their power do not even know what they are doing; those who know what they are doing, who are honored and entrusted with other people’s affairs; and those who do not know what they are doing, who are dishonored and ruined (§26-29). \textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{16} Johnson ((2005) 64-65) suggests that this speech calls attention to an additional kind of self-knowledge, and that this is in a way the most important kind: in Socrates’ description of the third type of person, who knows what he is doing and who is entrusted with other people’s affairs, Johnson calls attention to the people who voluntarily entrust their affairs to such a person. He suggests that this submission to the guidance of others requires a kind of self-knowledge, the knowledge of one’s ignorance, and that Euthydemus exhibits this kind of knowledge at the end of the conversation, when he surrenders completely to Socrates’ guidance. This may be true, although I think that Johnson overestimates how much Euthydemus understands at the end of the conversation (see 112-113 below). At any rate, awareness of one’s own ignorance is not the only reason why people might entrust a competent man with their affairs. Someone may turn his affairs over to someone else even if he is no less competent at managing his own
Most of the speech is devoted to the consequences of knowing or being ignorant of one’s powers. In particular, the third type of person, who “knows what he is doing,” is contrasted with the second type, who is said not to know what he is doing because he does not know his own powers; the knowledge of what one is doing appears to be equivalent to, or a consequence of, the knowledge of one’s powers. Nothing is said about whether the second, third or fourth types know or are ignorant of what is suitable for them. Only the first type is said to know this. The most striking differences between the descriptions of this first type of person, who knows what is suited to him, and the third type, who knows himself in the sense that he knows his own powers, are that there is no mention of honor or dishonor in the case of the person who knows what is suited to him, and that this person is not said to be a benefactor to other people, only to associate with others in a manner that is beneficial to himself. The implication of this speech about self-knowledge seems to be that the pursuit that is suited to us is not intrinsically beneficial to others, nor does it aim at or receive honor for its reward. We should recall in this context the indication in the first chapter in Book Four that Socrates tried to persuade uneducable people to get an education, even though they could not have benefited from an education, and the implicit suggestion that education was at least partly a self-interested activity on Socrates’ part (see pages 88 and 90 above). The first category of people that Socrates describes in this speech may include Socrates himself.

The brief mention of what is “suitable” indicates that the question of what our powers are is a secondary one. We can only determine what our powers are after we first affairs than the person to whom he entrusts them. For example, Socrates knows how to be a general, but he has no interest in practicing generalship.
determine what the suitable, proper activity for a human being is, what virtue is, and it is with a view to this activity that we have to assess our powers. Every investigation of our powers already assumes, consciously or unconsciously, a particular task, with a view to which we decide which of our abilities are relevant and which people are best. For example, in the investigations of what political leadership calls for in Book Three, it was assumed that political leadership is virtue, and that this is the activity that is “suitable” for a human being, and the rewards for this activity, especially the praise and honor that accrue to benefactors of their community, are the greatest goods for a human being. But this discussion of self-knowledge implies that the pursuits that are honored the most do not require us to know what is suited to us, and they may even be incompatible with this knowledge. Certainly the achievements that receive the highest honors call for great powers, talents and efforts, and this demanding character seems to be one reason why they are so honored. Yet perhaps the determination that these particular human powers are the noblest ones and the ones worthiest of employment and development lacks adequate foundation. Perhaps great political exploits fail to give other, no less important and impressive human abilities their due, like our capacity for forming attachments to other people, for love (see Xenophon, Symposium 4.59-60). Even the greatest political men may lack self-knowledge, not in the sense that they are ignorant of what political achievements they are capable of, or of the limits on their powers that they must take into account in order not to fail in their ambitious undertakings, but in the sense that they do not consider adequately which of the many tasks that they can perform by virtue of their great talents is the worthiest use of their energies. Political activity is characterized here,
as it was characterized in Book Three, as a determination of our tasks according to what we take to be our powers or our highest powers, as opposed to a measurement of our powers on the basis of what is required for our proper tasks. The suggestion is that in order to investigate virtue adequately, we need to not take our bearings from the highest estimation, approval and honor, and other rewards that certain activities receive, which do not necessarily afford guidance about what human perfection is (see Xenophon, *Hellenica* VII 3.12).

But there is no indication that Euthydemus understands this distinction and that his own political aspirations are called into question for him by Socrates’ approach. Indeed, by presenting political virtue as also dependent on a kind of self-knowledge, albeit a lower kind, Socrates spares Euthydemus the realization that he is ignorant of himself in a much more fundamental way than he realizes. In light of Euthydemus’ evident incapacity for the investigation that would be required in order to acquire the knowledge that he lacks—an incapacity that is on display in his initial belief that he knew himself adequately, even after he discovered that he did not know what justice is—this is an act of charity on Socrates’ part.

Euthydemus looks to Socrates in order to find out where to begin to investigate himself. Socrates suggests that the place to begin is from what sorts of things are good and what are bad (§30-31). He does not say why this is the case. There are two possible reasons: either what is suitable for us is identical to what is good for us, or not. If not, then Euthydemus’ failure to identify the good in the ensuing discussion would imply that no adequate account of a good human life can be given by reference only to the good
things that accrue to someone who lives that life. Like the conversation with Aristippus in Book Three, the present consideration of the good raises the possibility that true virtue, true nobility, is something different and higher than anything merely good.

Euthydemus is sure that he knows what is good and bad, because if he did not, then he would be even lower than a slave. He makes three attempts to say what these things are. His first answer is that health is good and sickness is bad, and he adds a refinement of which he is doubtless proud and says that the “causes of each of these things,” the things that conduce to each condition, are also good.17 Socrates chooses not to respond by asking Euthydemus if he has amassed such a large library because he thinks that it is good for his health. Instead, he explains that both health and sickness are good when good results follow from them and bad when bad ones follow. Euthydemus asks, when is health ever bad, or sickness good? When, Socrates, answers, sick people are exempted from participating in shameful campaigns, harmful voyages and many other things where people who are strong enough to participate, perish, and people who are left out because they are weak, are saved. (The “many other things,” in which strong people perish and from which weak people are saved, include honorable campaigns, in addition to the shameful ones that Socrates mentions explicitly.) The view of health that Socrates advances here is identical to the view of good things in general that we saw him advance in his conversation with Aristippus in Book Three: health is good with a view to some things, and bad with a view to other things (III 8.2-3). Euthydemus realizes that all such

things that are sometimes beneficial and sometimes harmful are no more good than they are bad (§31-32).

For this reason, Euthydemus’ next answer does not attempt to distinguish between good things and bad things, but rather to identify something that is absolutely good, as opposed to these things that are both good and bad. Euthydemus suggests that this is wisdom, because a wise man does better with respect to every matter than an unwise man. Socrates refutes the argument on behalf of wisdom by showing that wisdom leads to bad results as well as to good ones, and that Euthydemus is wrong to think that a wise man always does better in everything than an unwise one (§33, see III 9.12-13). Yet precisely if nothing is good for its possessor in every situation, and every good thing is also bad, then the bad results that wisdom can lead to do not rule out the possibility that wisdom is not only good but even the best thing. But even if wisdom is the best thing, this does not mean in addition that it can be determined to be the best thing on the basis of considerations of the good alone, and this does not contradict our argument in the conversation with Aristippus that since everything is both good and bad, considerations of the good do not by themselves afford adequate guidance about how to live. If wisdom is the greatest good, this determination is not based solely on the good results that wisdom leads to for the wise man, but also and especially on its suitability for us, on the determination that in addition to satisfying our needs and doing the other things that we enjoy, a part of being human, and the highest part, is simply to understand our situation.

Euthydemus’ final suggestion is that the least ambiguous good is being happy. Socrates does not deny this. He only points out that the components of unambiguously
good happiness must be themselves unambiguously good, and Euthydemus cannot
conceive of happiness without things whose goodness is ambiguous, like beauty and
strength and wealth and reputation (§34-35). Therefore, he understands Socrates to mean
that he is wrong to praise being happy. Euthydemus is probably right to this extent, that
he is not satisfied with happiness whose components are also sometimes bad. His
happiness depends on the illusion that its components, whatever they are, are always
good and will never lead to bad results. Since he resists the conclusion that everything
good is also sometimes bad, he does not realize that this is not human happiness. Instead,
he concludes only that he does not know what the components of such happiness are: he
replies that if he is not correct even in praising happiness, then he “agrees” (homologō)
that he does not know what to pray to the gods for (§36). He seems to mean that he asks
the gods for good things that are never bad and that could afford him the happiness that
he longs for (see Plato, Second Alcibiades 138b-c). Socrates does not elicit this remark
about prayer from Euthydemus by means of any question, but Euthydemus says
nevertheless that he “agrees” that he is ignorant in this respect, as if he draws the
conclusion that Socrates has been intending all along to teach him what the simply good
thing is that he should pray for. Perhaps he knows that Socrates is in the habit of praying
for the simply good things (I 3.2). But the conversation with Euthydemus seems to have
called into question the adequacy even of the Socratic prayer, since it calls into question
the adequacy of the object of this prayer, something completely good, to fulfill our
natural bent. Our natural abilities exceed our capacity for happiness. In particular, we
are aware that the good things that are available to us by means of our own efforts are
never completely good, and this awareness is not itself something good and it does not enhance our happiness. On the other hand, prayer reflects a very different attitude than this toward these limits on our powers. It supplements these limits, not by means of the pursuit of something other than happiness, but by pursuing happiness by different means: by seeking external assistance to supplement our own powers to make ourselves happy, and to overcome their limitations. Euthydemus’ formulation implies that the highest consideration for the pious man remains, perhaps unconsciously, his own good; if more authoritative guidance about how to live is available from some other source than our hopes for happiness, then this guidance is obscured or overlooked by prayer.

Piety, and the assumptions on which it rests, are the subject of the next chapter. For now, Socrates turns from Euthydemus’ confession that piety has become a problem for him, back to politics. He suggests that even if Euthydemus was overly confident that he knew all of these other things, he surely must know what a democracy is, since he desires to preside over one, and of course Euthydemus agrees. But Euthydemus proves unable to say what a democracy is, what distinguishes the regime and the ruling class that gives it its specific character from other regimes and their rulers. He answers that the members of the *demos* are the poor, who do not have enough money for their needs, as opposed to the rich, who have more than enough. But Socrates points out to Euthydemus that some people with very little property have more than they need, and some people with very great property do not have enough. Euthydemus agrees, and volunteers that even some tyrants are forced to commit injustice, on account of their neediness. Socrates suggests that this means that these tyrants are also members of the *demos*, or that
Euthydemus’ definition of democracy fails to distinguish adequately even between such visibly opposite regimes as tyranny and democracy.

Euthydemus attributes this conclusion to his worthlessness, his inability to follow the argument, and as a result he goes away convinced that he is really a slave (§36-39). But this suggestion is a plausible one in light of the previous discussion of the good. Anyone is a member of the *demos* who makes the error about happiness that Euthydemus makes, hopes for good things that are good in every situation. Someone who hopes for this kind of happiness never has what he hopes for, and never has enough property to satisfy his desires; he always needs more, and is always poor. The conclusion that it is difficult to distinguish between the different political regimes, between different rulers and views of justice, is a true consequence of the considerations that this conversation has raised (see also I 2.40-46).

Euthydemus’ final capitulation, his admission of his own ignorance, shows that he is ignorant even of the reason for his ignorance. He is ignorant of what he is ignorant of. He has not attended to the conversation sufficiently to realize that his extravagant hopes are responsible for his ignorance of what wealth and poverty are; that his ignorance of himself, of what is suitable for a human being, is responsible for his inability to think soberly about the good; and that his ignorance of what justice is, of the problematic relation between the noble and the good, is responsible for his failure to ask what is suitable for a human being, what is virtue, with an open mind. He is ignorant of the questions that he would have to raise in order to remedy his ignorance. Socratic ignorance is not ordinary ignorance, nor is it the consciousness of ordinary ignorance; it
is the awareness of the fundamental questions that would have to be answered in order to escape one’s ignorance. Our analysis has shown that this chapter is in complete agreement with the argument of the first part of this dissertation about what these questions are. But Euthydemus is not aware of these questions, and we have seen no sign that he is capable of discovering them.

Xenophon concludes this chapter by remarking that Socrates had other conversations of this sort and with this result, but many of the people whom he refuted in this way, went away and never came back. Euthydemus, on the other hand, realizes that the only way that he will become noteworthy will be by being together with Socrates, and he no longer leaves him alone and even imitates some of his pursuits. Socrates, for his part, once he perceives the condition to which he has reduced Euthydemus, upsets him as little as possible and explains to him most simply and clearly what he thinks that Euthydemus should know and what it would be best for him to pursue (§40). In light of what we have learned about Euthydemus, this last remark serves as a warning not to mistake Socrates’ advice about what is best for Euthydemus for his view about how it is simply best to live.

IV 3: Piety

The first conversation between Socrates and Euthydemus made Euthydemus aware of his ignorance about how to live, and at its end, Euthydemus turned himself over completely to Socrates’ guidance. The second conversation begins the positive part of Euthydemus’ education. The subject of this first part of Euthydemus’ positive education
is piety. Xenophon explains at some length what Socrates intends to achieve by making
piety the first subject of his positive teaching. His aim is not simply to make his students
pious, or indeed to provide any immediately practical guidance. On the contrary,
Xenophon explicitly distinguishes between the teaching about piety and the teaching that
will eventually provide practical guidance: Socrates did not hurry his companions to
become skilled at speaking and acting and contriving; he thought that before these things,
moderation should come to be present in them, because he held those who are capable of
these things but not moderate to be more unjust and more capable of evil; first, he tried to
make his companions moderate about the gods (IV 3.1-2, see I 2.14-17 and IV 1.3-4).

“Moderation about the gods” is not necessarily identical to piety. In the only
mention of moderation in this conversation, Socrates tells Euthydemus that it would not
be moderate to hope for more from others than from those who are able to benefit one
with respect to the greatest things, or to hope for this other than by pleasing them (IV
3.17). Socrates is silent about whether the opposite, to hope to receive the greatest
benefits and to solicit them by pleasing those whom one thinks are able to confer them, is
moderate in addition to pious (compare II 1.27-28). All that we can conclude from
Socrates’ remark is that the moderate person does not hope for more from anyone than he
has a right to expect. The relation between piety and moderation depends on what we
have a right to expect from the gods. This prior question is the central question of this
part of the Socratic education. The unspoken aim of this conversation is to discover what
natural or divine support there is for human life in general, and to discover the best way
to live by considering what particular of life enjoys the greatest such support. The
Socratic education to moderation undertakes the task that our investigation of moral life brought to light, namely to account for our duties in terms of our natural situation and constitution, for what we have to do in terms of what we are.

According to Xenophon, Socrates only “tried” to make his companions moderate about the gods (§2). This implies that he was not assured of success. The reason seems to be that the education in moderation demands something of the student, not only of the teacher. In particular, we will see that Euthydemus does not understand Socrates’ teaching, and we have already seen the reason why: he is too dull to attend to the fundamental questions, which the investigation of piety attempts to answer. Specifically, he is not conscious of his belief that justice is good for the just person, or that the noble is good, much less that this belief is false. Euthydemus believes unconsciously that our situation is fundamentally good, and he lacks the freedom to consider our situation with an open mind. As we will see, he arrives quickly at the conclusion that the world and everything in it exists for the sake of human beings. By indicating that Socrates could only “try” to teach moderation, Xenophon suggests that the true Socratic teaching about piety may not be accessible to Euthydemus, and may not be what Euthydemus takes this teaching to be.

In this respect, it is significant that right after this indication, Xenophon emphasizes that he was himself present at the conversation between Socrates and Euthydemus that he proceeds to relate (§2). He indicates in this way that the conversation with Euthydemus may have contributed to his own education as well as to Euthydemus’, and that he may have drawn his own conclusions from what Socrates told Euthydemus.
We have no reason to assume that Xenophon drew the same conclusions as Euthydemus, especially when he indicates clearly that a particular conclusion is erroneous, as we will see him do. Xenophon invites the reader to consider the effect that the conversation had on him personally, and on the audience in general, and not only on Euthydemus.

At the end of this section of the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon explains that Socrates was in the habit of discussing important matters by first presenting conventional views about them, and he did not reveal his true views at all unless these more conventional views provoked an intelligent question from his interlocutor:18

If someone contradicted him about something…he would bring the entire argument back to its hypothesis…[in this way,] the truth became clear even to the contradictors themselves. But whenever he went through an argument himself, he proceeded via what was most agreed upon, holding this to be safety in argument (IV 6.13-15).

Socrates is especially likely to be concerned with “safety in argument” in the conversation about piety. Impiety is the first of the crimes, for which Socrates was indicted and executed (I 1.1), and defending Socrates against these charges is the purpose of the whole *Memorabilia*. The present conversation serves this purpose by means of the effect that it has on Euthydemus, who takes it to be an entirely persuasive exhortation to piety (IV 3.15).

Euthydemus is the non-contradictor *par excellence*. In the case of the investigation of piety, he sets the tone for the entire conversation at its very beginning, when he confesses that he has never given thought to the provision by the gods of the things that human beings need (IV 3.3, compare IV 2.36). He has never doubted that he

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is adequately provided for, and he is unaware of any deficiency in his situation that only a
god could remedy. He has no standard by which to judge the case for piety that Socrates
makes. Accordingly, by the end of the conversation, indeed by the middle of the
conversation, Euthydemus is entirely persuaded that the gods care about nothing besides
making human beings happy (III 3.9-10). But since Euthydemus is so stupid, we must
see for ourselves whether or not this conclusion is justified by the argument. One sign
that this is not Socrates’ own view is that the conversation does not end when
Euthydemus arrives at it. Socrates continues to raise considerations that are not
necessary for the purpose of making Euthydemus pious.

We will argue that Socrates’ argument does not adequately demonstrate the case
for piety that Euthydemus is convinced by. The main purpose of the conversation is not
to prove or refute the view that providential gods care for us, but rather to suggest that it
is not possible to do either of these things. This result has far-reaching consequences for
our investigation of virtue, of the activity for which we are naturally suited. The fact that
we cannot know whether or not the gods provide for us and we have a duty to obey them,
seems to call into question our ability to determine objectively and scientifically what
virtue is and how to live. Moreover, this result seems to contradict the view that such an
objective, scientific understanding of human life is itself a part of the best life, since the
human mind is incapable of such understanding.

Xenophon helps the reader interpret and evaluate the evidence in favor of piety
that Socrates presents to Euthydemus by reporting another conversation about piety
earlier in the Memorabilia, between Socrates and a far more skeptical, intelligent and
impious interlocutor. That interlocutor, Aristodemus, is much more aware than Euthydemus is of the difficulties that the ordinary understanding of piety raises. It is true that the conversation with Aristodemus has the same result as the one with Euthydemus, and Socrates persuades Aristodemus to cease behaving impiously (I 4.2 and 19). But Socrates can handle any interlocutor however he pleases, and we must see if his defense of piety in that conversation is adequate (see I 2.14). We argue that in the conversation with Aristodemus, no less than in the one with Euthydemus, Socrates forces his interlocutor to accept an inadequate defense of piety. Nevertheless, it is helpful to compare the two conversations, because Socrates speaks more frankly to Aristodemus about certain aspects of our situation, about which Aristodemus is too smart to be deceived, and he speaks more frankly to Euthydemus about other aspects of our situation, which Euthydemus is too dull to be troubled by.

We will begin from the conversation with Euthydemus. In response to Euthydemus’ admission that he has never reflected on the fact that the gods provide for man, Socrates calls his attention to natural phenomena that he calls instances of this care. So many things that we need are provided for us: we need light, and the gods provide us with the sun; we need rest, and they provide us with nighttime; we need to tell the time and to work at night, and they make the stars shine. Further, food is given to us from the earth; water, without which we would not survive, is present to us in unlimited quantities; we need fire in order to provide for ourselves every useful thing for life, and the gods procure this for us, as well; even the annual motion of the sun is confined within limits
that benefit human beings (IV 3.3-8). All of this evidence inclines Euthydemus to wonder if the gods have any work besides serving human beings.

Even Euthydemus is reluctant to draw this conclusion, but only because the other animals share in these things (IV 3.9). He is certainly right that even if the world and the gods who are responsible for it support biological life in general, this is not sufficient evidence that a benevolent intention is at work in nature, much less that nature is benevolent toward human beings in particular. For one thing, as the remainder of the conversation makes clear, certain things in nature are harmful for human beings. For another thing, even if everything in nature were useful for human beings, this would still not necessarily mean that all of our needs are provided for. And even if all of our needs were provided for, this would still not amount to evidence that this provision is the product of deliberate design, like the products of human art. Yet Euthydemus is not aware of these difficulties: the “only” (monon) consideration that prevents him from concluding that the gods exist only to serve human beings, is that they appear to be benevolent not only to human beings but also to animals. By rebutting this objection and convincing Euthydemus that there is some natural provision, or divine care, specifically for the human species, Socrates leads him immediately to the further conclusion that the gods do nothing besides care for the human species, and that the whole world and everything in it exists for the sake of man. Socrates accomplishes this by means of the consideration that the animals are born and sustained so that human beings may use them for food and as helpers in war and in many other kinds of work (IV 3.10).
In order to support this view that everything in the world was designed in order to benefit human beings, Socrates carefully restricts his enumeration of natural phenomena to ones that can plausibly be thought to be beneficial to us. For example, he speaks to Euthydemus only of domesticated animals, not of wild ones. More importantly, he speaks in the sequel only of the human soul and not of the human body, which is more clearly vulnerable to harm and death than the soul is. Euthydemus does not notice these omissions. Yet we know that Socrates and Xenophon are both aware of them, because in the other conversation about piety, the conversation with Aristodemus, Socrates explicitly discusses the natural constitution of the human body. The conversation with Aristodemus shows that Socrates himself does not believe the view that he teaches Euthydemus, the view that human beings are the sole objects of the gods’ concern, or even the main ones.

In the conversation with Aristodemus, just like in the conversation with Euthydemus, Socrates defends the view that the gods devote particular care to the human species against the objection that the gods support only animal life in general, and human life only to the extent that we are animals with the same faculties and activities as the other animals (I 4.11). But Socrates tells Aristodemus that the gods’ concern with human beings is manifest not only in the soul that they give us, but also in the human body, as well as in the conjunction of body and soul. Since at least some of the care that the gods take for human beings is coextensive with the life of the human body, the greater comprehensiveness of this account amounts to greater frankness about the limits on the divine care for human beings. It is a more sober, moderate view of the place that man
occupies in the world than Aristodemus’ view that the gods do not distinguish between man and the other animals, and also than Euthydemus’ view that there is no care for any species besides man.

The account begins from the human body. Socrates tells Aristodemus that only human beings are given upright posture by the gods, by virtue of which we see more in the distance, contemplate (theasthai) more the things above, and undergo fewer bad things. And the gods put in us sight, hearing and a mouth. All animals have these three faculties, but Socrates has just explained that the human sense of sight is unique by virtue of our upright posture, and he seems to mean that our ears and mouth are unique, as well.\(^{19}\) In addition, Socrates omits the nose from his enumeration of the peculiarly human senses, and he mentions the hands, instead, which we use instead of our noses in order to ascertain the invisible characteristics of surrounding objects. As for the mouth, the human sense of taste (as opposed to the faculty of absorbing nourishment, which depends on the teeth more than on the tongue) is not a means of self-preservation, but rather a means of pleasure, and corresponding to this, only the human tongue possesses articulate speech (I 4.11-12; compare I 4.5).

Next, Socrates turns to the human soul. Socrates tells Aristodemus that “the greatest thing” is that the soul that the god implanted in man is the best, better than the souls of the other animals. Only the human soul perceives that the gods exist, who put in order the greatest and noblest things; only the class of human beings serves the gods; the human soul is also the most able to guard against physical suffering and the most capable

\(^{19}\) See Maimonides (1975) 75-78; Straus (1980) 161-162.
of learning (I 4.13). Socrates does not go so far as to attribute to human beings dominion over the other animals, like he does in the conversation with Euthydemus. Instead, he calls human beings a “class” (or tribe: *phulon*), one species among many. The care for one species is irreducible to the care for another one, to the provision of animals for domestication and use by human beings, or the provision of human beings as prey for wild animals. The fact that the gods care for man has no bearing on whether or not they care for other species, because there is no evidence that they care exclusively for man, and Socrates admits tacitly to Aristodemus that there is rather evidence to the contrary.

The discussion of the human body reminds us that we are mortal, and Socrates refers to this again in the sequel when he tells Aristodemus that in comparison to the other animals, human beings live like gods, which implies that we do not live like gods except in comparison to the other animals (§14). Human beings are constituted as a discrete species, but we are mortal, and therefore we are clearly not the sole objects of divine care. This is not only because what causes our death is not beneficial for us, because this might only mean that the world is constituted for the benefit, not indeed of any individual human being, but of the whole species. But in addition, it is possible and even likely that the entire human species will someday cease to exist, and whatever will exist after we are extinct cannot possibly exist for the sake of human beings. If anything, what will survive us occupies a higher rank in nature than we do.

Socrates’ description of the constitution of the human species in the conversation with Aristodemus supports a very different view of our situation vis-à-vis the gods than either Euthydemus or Aristodemus holds. The common-sense view that mankind is
naturally constituted as a discrete species, which we have attributed to Socrates, is implicitly contradicted by both Euthydemus and Aristodemus. Euthydemus’ belief that the gods have no work besides caring for man is oblivious to our natural vulnerability, to the many phenomena and species that are indifferent and even hostile to human life. Aristodemus’ view that there is no special care at all for human beings goes to the opposite extreme and ignores the richness of human life, the experiences that are available to us but not to the other animals. Aristodemus and Euthydemus both ignore massive facts about human life, and Socrates implicitly rejects their views by calling attention to the facts that they ignore.

With a view to the investigation of virtue, what we can know about our natural constitution contradicts both Euthydemus’ piety and Aristodemus’ atheism. The reason why this investigation nevertheless takes the form of an investigation of piety is that we are naturally constituted with concerns that lead us to inquire about the gods, and these seem to be our deepest concerns. We are naturally concerned to know whether or not the gods care for human beings, not only or primarily if they care for the human species as a whole by constituting it differently from the other species, but also and especially if they care for each individual human being, if each of us personally enjoys special divine care and providence. Accordingly, after the discussion of the natural constitution of man, each of the two conversations about piety turns to this question.

The investigation of personal providence arises from our awareness of our neediness and vulnerability, of that aspect of human life that Socrates discusses more frankly with Aristodemus than with Euthydemus. But Socrates does not talk about the
concern with personal providence with Aristodemus, nor does he even acknowledge that it is a legitimate concern. The question is raised by Aristodemus himself, for whom the case for piety depends on whether or not the gods counsel him personally about what he should and should not do, like the counsel that Socrates claims to receive from his daimōn. Socrates even feigns surprise that Aristodemus demands to know that the gods care for him personally, in addition to ‘caring for’ the entire species (I 4.14-15; see I 1.4-5 and IV 8.1).

On the other hand, in the conversation with Euthydemus Socrates not only acknowledges the legitimacy of this demand but even calls attention to it himself, because Euthydemus of course does not raise it. Socrates even acknowledges tacitly in this conversation that the demand for personal providence is itself an attribute of the human species. He does this by including in his enumeration of the unique characteristics of the human species the power of “explanation,” of expressing ourselves (hermēneia). By means of this faculty, we share with one another all of the good things, we have common affairs, and we lay down laws and live politically. Right after Socrates mentions this faculty along with the other uniquely human faculties of perceiving and calculating what things are advantageous for us, he adds that the gods advise people who consult divination about what is advantageous for them, and that this advice supplements our ability to discern this for ourselves by means of the other three faculties (IV 3.11-12). The purpose of divine providence is to supplement our inability to satisfy our own needs and desires. In particular, by mentioning providence immediately after he mentions law, Socrates implies that we look to the gods to supplement or support what we perceive as a
deficiency of law in this regard, of merely human legislation. As our study of Book Three concluded, the devotion to the moral law is a particularly deep and impressive expression of our concern with our own welfare. It expresses our fear of dying in the form of the unconscious hope that death, which is the worst thing that can befall a human being, might somehow be the best thing that a human being can undergo and the condition of the greatest happiness. The moral attitude hopes for a kind of happiness that would be free from the bad consequences that attend all of the good things that we can procure for ourselves. No merely human legal enactment could provide this kind of happiness; only a god could provide it (see IV 2.34-36). Moreover, since different things are good for different people, and for the same person in different situations, then the happiness that we hope for would have to be provided separately for each individual human being by providential gods.

Since Euthydemus is in no doubt that the gods actually provide for human beings and even that they do nothing besides this, Socrates can call his attention to the causal relation between the hopes that we harbor and the expectation that the gods will fulfill our hopes, without weakening this expectation. But to Aristodemus, Socrates does not mention this relation. The natural human traits that Socrates mentions to Aristodemus include the tendency to perceive and worship gods, but not law, which Socrates mentions to Euthydemus as one function of the faculty of explanation (I 4.13 and IV 3.12). By speaking about piety but not about law, Socrates abstracts as much as he can from the natural concern that moves people to worship gods. He presents piety as a natural and necessary human activity, but he is careful not to mention the hope that the pious person
harbors that he will benefit from this activity. This is consistent with his aim in the conversation with Aristodemus, which is to stop him from behaving impiously and ridiculing pious people (I 4.2). The defense of piety would be weakened if Socrates identified his own view of piety, which is that piety arises from a natural human hope for divine care, a hope that is not necessarily fulfilled. The reason why this weakens the defense of piety is that a hope is unreasonable unless there is evidence that it is necessarily fulfilled. If Socrates conceded that human beings would pray to gods whether or not there was any reasonable hope that our prayers will be answered, then he would defeat his own purpose in the conversation with Aristodemus.

In the conversation with Aristodemus, Socrates refuses to concede one bit of the case against piety. When Aristodemus refuses to accept that the gods worry about him unless they send him personal guidance about what to do, Socrates responds by referring him to the guidance that the gods give to the whole city, which applies to Aristodemus as well. Aristodemus is not convinced by this argument, and so Socrates concludes by advising him to consult divination personally: to try to find out from the gods, by serving them, if they want to give him advice about things that are unclear to human beings. This could mean simply that Aristodemus should ask the gods what he wants to know, and see if they answer him. But Socrates may also mean his advice literally: Aristodemus should consult the gods about the question, whether or not the gods advise people who consult them. Whether or not divine counsel is available about what is not clear to human beings, is itself not clear to human beings without divine counsel. The gods know these matters, Socrates explains, because they are omniscient and omnipotent; the human mind
is too weak to know the most important matters, including whether or not the case for piety is true (I 4.14-18). This weakness of the human mind means that piety is necessarily not rational.

To Euthydemus, who has no idea how weak the rational case for piety is, Socrates is more frank about this weakness of the human mind. After he calls Euthydemus’ attention to divination, Socrates tells him how to know that what Socrates says (not what the gods say) is true. Socrates does not say explicitly what claim of his he has in mind, and Euthydemus may believe that Socrates is teaching him how to confirm that the sole concern of the gods is to make human beings happy, but this is the opposite of what Socrates means. Socrates tells Euthydemus not to wait until he sees the visible shapes of the gods, but rather to revere and honor them when he sees their works (§13). He seems to mean that since we cannot see the gods with our own eyes, the only alternative is to limit our conclusions about them to what we can deduce from ‘their’ visible works. The advice that Socrates gives to Euthydemus implies that the only legitimate guidance that he should rely on is what he can know about the world, and further that our only access to the world is what we can perceive by means of our senses. No information about the gods, or about anything else, is available to us in any way besides through our senses: we can know only what we perceive, not what the invisible causes are of the perceptible phenomena, and by what necessity they are the way that they are. The only thing that we know about the ‘gods’ is that they are the causes of the world as it presents itself to us; we have no basis for demanding of the world anything but that it be the way that it is.
Only for Euthydemus, who thinks that everything in the world, without qualification or exception, is beneficial for man, does the perceptible world support the case for piety. In truth, on the basis of the only evidence that Socrates is willing to accept, the cases for and against piety are both inconclusive. Causality, necessity, purpose, are all imperceptible. There is no perceptible beneficence in nature, because to the human observer, everything appears both good and bad, and both noble and base (III 8.1-7). Socrates’ advice implicitly rejects the teleological reasoning that he employs both in the conversation with Euthydemus and in the conversation with Aristodemus, where he argues that human beings are the work, not of chance, but of design (see I 4.4 ff.).

Socrates confirms that on the basis of his advice, nothing can be known about the gods, not even if they exist, by turning from speaking of the gods to speaking of perceptible natural phenomena: the sun, lightning, wind and, most importantly, the human soul. The soul, Socrates says, has a share of the divine if any human thing does, and that it is king in us is manifest, but even it is invisible (§14). We are invisible and mysterious to ourselves. The same limit on our ability to perceive the design and purpose of the external world, applies also to our ability to understand ourselves, to discover our own design and purpose. We can know our soul, like we can know the gods, only through its works.

This must be understood in light of what Socrates indicated to Euthydemus about the work of the soul, including our devotion and obedience to law, and the hope for providential care that arises in connection with our devotion to law. From these activities of our soul, we can know how deeply moved we are by the demands of what we consider
the divine law, and how urgent it is for us to live up to those demands. We can go further and say that the most important thing for us is to know whether or not we live under a divine law at all, to understand ourselves and to live in light of the truth about the most fundamental matters. We have interpreted our feeling of obligation to obey the moral law even when it commands us to disregard our own interests as the requirement to live rationally, on the basis of a sober assessment of our situation and in particular of those aspects of our situation that do not contribute to our happiness, on the basis of an understanding of the world as an object of scientific knowledge and not merely as an object of active concern. But we seem to have no access to the most adequate understanding of our place in the world, to the knowledge of the design and purpose of the natural order as a whole and of human nature in particular.

If anything, our very inability to know these things seems to speak powerfully against the view that the highest human activity is to understand our situation. Perhaps we were wrong even to distinguish between the unreasonable hopes that characterize the ordinary moral attitude, on one hand, and objective, scientific sobriety and clarity about our situation, on the other hand. The demand for a disinterested account of our situation may itself be a demand for something that is not available to us. It may be yet another expression of our concern with ourselves. Perhaps we merely hope that our awareness of our mortality, which arouses in us such great fear, is somehow the key both to realizing our greatest potential and to achieving a measure of security by understanding why this is necessarily our situation. Perhaps we cannot live rationally. The human soul is “invisible” to us, as Socrates says, because we are more deeply and thoroughly ignorant
of ourselves than we previously realized. If anything in us is highest, if any faculty
affords us authoritative guidance about how to live, then it may be a completely different
experience, an emotion or passion. The main result of the Socratic investigation of piety
is not that we cannot know whether or not there are gods; even this is in a way secondary.
We do not even know if knowledge is the standard by which we should try to find our
bearings in the world. Or rather, to the extent that it seems to be beyond our ability to
understand the world, reason does not seem to be an authoritative source of guidance.20

Euthydemus is disheartened by what Socrates says, not because he understands it
but because he cannot think how to repay the gods for their beneficence. Socrates
encourages him by reminding him of the instruction of the Delphic god to gratify the
gods by obeying the law of the city. According to Socrates, this means that one should
sacrifice to the gods according to one’s means, which Socrates claims is the law
everywhere (IV 3.15-16; see I 3.3). The law of the city determines what piety requires.
But our obligation to obey the law of the city does not depend on whether or not the gods
reward us for doing this. This implies that our obligation to obey the law arises
independently of, and prior to, our hopes for a divine reward for obeying the law.
Socrates implies that the law, whatever its source, is more fundamental than our hope for
something good that will accrue to us as a result of the law, and that the law does not
depend for its validity on the result for us of obeying it.

This reminder that what we hope for is secondary, compared to our awareness of
our duty to obey the law whether or not it satisfies these hopes, suggests an alternate,

20 See Strauss (1979) 112.
more sober interpretation of these results of our investigation of piety. Our investigation has concluded that a certain kind of understanding of ourselves and of the world, why and for what purpose we are alive, is not available to us. And since the law seems to direct us to try to understand ourselves and to live in accordance with this understanding, the limits on our ability to understand seem to be limits on our ability to obey the law, and limits on the validity of the law as the authoritative source of guidance about how human beings should live. But Socrates reminds us that this contradicts our experience of the law, of being bound by a law and not being simply free to live however we please. The law does not depend for its validity on the result for us of obeying the law, and if it commands us to try to understand our situation clearly, then it does not depend on any particular result of our attempts to understand. Our experience of the obligation to take our bearings from what is highest in us and in the world does not lose its force simply because we cannot understand why we experience this obligation.

Socrates reminds us of the distinction of which we are already aware, between our feeling of obligation to obey the law and our hope for a reward for obeying it. And in light of the considerations that have come to light in this chapter, this distinction is more radical than we previously realized. For even our desire to understand our feeling of obligation, to understand why we are so attracted by what does not seem to serve our interests in any way, itself implicates our deepest hopes. It aims to support our feeling of obligation with the awareness of the ultimate ground of our obligation, the awareness that our feeling of obligation is grounded in the cause and purpose of the species and of the whole world. The endeavor to prove or disprove the case for piety is itself pious. It finds
reassurance and comfort in the hope to understand the ultimate causes of our situation. Such hope is denied us by our experience of a law that commands our unconditional obedience and promises us nothing in return. The proper interpretation of this law is the subject of the next chapter.

IV 4: Justice

This is the only chapter in the Memorabilia that is explicitly and entirely devoted to justice. Its purpose, like the purpose of the Memorabilia as a whole, seems at first to be to demonstrate that Socrates was himself just. The chapter begins with a discussion of Socrates’ deeds, and in particular his obedience to the law, and then proceeds to a long conversation in which Socrates argues that justice is obedience to the law. Yet as a defense of Socrates, this chapter is unconvincing. On one hand, the deeds that are attributed to Socrates do not prove that he was as obedient to the laws as Xenophon claims that he was, and therefore, according to Socrates’ own definition of justice, Socrates was not perfectly just. On the other hand, this definition of justice turns out to be false. The final section of this conversation discusses a higher, “unwritten” law, and since the written law of the city turns out not to be perfectly just, one might conjecture that the unwritten law is the perfectly just law. But this requires us to explain precisely what the defect is in the written law, and what Socrates means by an unwritten law.

None of this explains why Xenophon presents this discussion of Socrates’ justice and his view of justice immediately after the chapter about piety and in the middle of his presentation of the education of Euthydemus. One explanation is suggested by fact that
the first part of the chapter is a discussion of Socrates’ deeds (IV 4.1-4). Since the previous chapter was meant to show that Socrates attempted to make his companions moderate before they became skilled at taking action, one might think that the just deeds that are discussed here, and the skill at taking action that is mentioned in the previous chapter as the next subject of discussion after moderation, are the same (see IV 3.1-2). But this skill at taking action is the subject of the next chapter (see IV 5.1). The consideration of justice in the present chapter appears rather to complete the education in moderation that the discussion of piety in the previous chapter began. Moderation about the gods proved to be a sober refusal to assume more about our situation vis-à-vis the gods, and to demand greater happiness from the gods in return for obeying the law, than we can know to be warranted. In the same way, moderation about justice proves to be sobriety about the content of the law, about what is truly required of us as opposed to what we think that we would have to do in order to achieve what we hope will be the good result for us of obeying the law.

According to Xenophon, Socrates showed in his deeds his view of justice by dealing both lawfully and beneficially with everyone in private, and by obeying the rulers with respect to the things that the laws command both in the city and on campaigns (IV 4.1). Xenophon reports three episodes that seem intended to support this claim. The first is that Socrates refused to allow an illegal vote to proceed in the Assembly when he was presiding over it, despite the insistence of the demos (§2). The case before the Assembly was that of the Athenian generals who won an important naval battle but who committed a crime of impiety when they failed to collect the bodies of the dead on account of bad
weather. The Assembly wanted to convict them all with a single vote instead of trying them separately, as the law required. Socrates refused to violate his oath of office by allowing an illegal vote to proceed (I 1.18). Yet the first conversation between Socrates and Euthydemus might suggest that Socrates does not consider upholding one’s oath to be in every case a requirement of justice (IV 2.17-20). In this case, Socrates’ refusal to violate his oath and the law seems to reflect his abhorrence of the act itself, of the ingratitude that the Athenians showed their benefactors, and their imprudent disregard of the city’s interests (see IV 4.24). The law that Socrates refuses to violate is a moderating force against the democracy and its tendency to violate its own laws, violations which are, however, lawful insofar as they are the acts of the democratic assembly. Rather than proving that Socrates accepts the authority of the democratic regime, this episode seems to show that he harbors reservations about it.

The second episode seems to be chosen with a view to counteracting the impression, which the previous example might have given, that Socrates was hostile to the democracy. This is Socrates’ conduct under the rule of the oligarchic Thirty that overthrew the democracy. According to Xenophon, Socrates considered their commands illegitimate and illegal, and for this reason he disobeyed their prohibition against his conversing with young people, as well as their command to lead someone to his death (IV 4.3). But elsewhere in the Memorabilia, Xenophon reports that Socrates did not consider democracy a more legitimate regime than oligarchy, or election a better claim to rule than force: he said that neither those who have been elected or chosen by lot nor those who have seized power by force are rulers, only those who understand how to rule (III 9.10).
And Socrates denied emphatically that the *demos* understands how to rule better than the oligarchs (III 7). The illegitimacy of the Thirty seems to be only a pretext for Socrates’ disobedience to their restrictions on his philosophical activity, that is, an insincere and insufficient excuse for his violation of a law (see I 2.31-34).

The third and final episode is Socrates’ behavior at his trial. According to Xenophon, Socrates could have easily been released if he had flattered the jurors and pleaded for his life in the customary manner. But he refused to do anything illegal, and preferred to die remaining within the boundaries of the law than to live transgressing them (IV 4.4). It is unclear what law Socrates would have violated by pleading for his life. Had his pleas succeeded and gotten him acquitted, he would have borne some responsibility for the violation of the law by the jurors, who swore oaths to judge according to the laws and to not be moved by pity or flattery (see Plato, *Apology* 35b-c). But Socrates himself explains his conduct at his trial by referring, not to the law, or to his concern for the law-abidingness of his fellow citizens, but to his *daimon*, which prevented him from planning his defense (IV 8.4 and Xenophon, *Apology* 5 and 8).

Rather than strengthening the case that Socrates was just, this episode seems to suggest that even when Socrates obeyed the law, he did so not out of reverence for the gods of the city, or for the god at Delphi who instructs people to obey the law of the city, but on the basis of some other guidance (see IV 3.16). This implies that Socrates rejected the city’s moral authority. The most that these three episodes prove about Socrates’ justice is that he adhered to a standard that coincides with the best and most moderate elements in Athenian public life, but this means that he did not simply obey the law.
Next, Xenophon reports a conversation about justice that Socrates once had with the sophist Hippias from Elis. This is the only one of the five consecutive conversations that we are considering in this part of the dissertation, in which the interlocutor is not Euthydemus. Moreover, the conversation makes clear that Xenophon did not choose Hippias because Hippias is any more intelligent than Euthydemus is. Perhaps he chose Hippias with a view to his purpose of presenting Socrates as a defender of justice, and in particular of the view that obedience to the law is just that he attributes to Socrates in this conversation. It serves this purpose far better to portray Socrates as a public-spirited representative of Athens in a debate with Hippias, who is a foreigner and a celebrity, than to portray one of Socrates’ infamous conversations with his fellow-citizens about justice (see I 2.37). Moreover, it would be implausible for Xenophon to portray Socrates teaching his intimates what we will see him teach Hippias about justice. This is certainly not what he taught Euthydemus (IV 2.13 ff.), although Euthydemus may be present at this conversation and shows signs in a later conversation of having been convinced by Socrates’ position (IV 6.6).

Indeed, Xenophon begins his account of the conversation between Socrates and Hippias with an indication of how it differs from what Socrates says to his intimates about justice. After being absent from Athens for some time, Hippias is present when Socrates is telling some other people that it is a wondrous thing that there are plenty of teachers of the arts, and some people say that all places are full of teachers who can make a horse or a cow just, but there is nowhere to go if someone wishes to learn justice oneself or to have one’s son or slave taught it (§5). At the end of this remark, Socrates
conflates three varieties of the desire for an education in justice: the desire to learn justice oneself, the desire for one’s servants to be just, and the desire for one’s son to be just. A decent person wants to be just because he believes that otherwise he cannot live well, but he wants his servants to be just, not in the first place so that the servants will live well, but so that they will not neglect their duties or steal his property or run away, that is, for the sake of the happiness of the master and not of the servant. Moreover, he educates his son, and his parents educated him, not with a view exclusively to either one of these aims, but rather with a view to a combination of the two that is not entirely coherent: parents tell their children that obedience to their parents is itself the condition of their happiness (see Plato, * Laws* 662d7-e8). This incoherence seems to be why Socrates suggests here that justice, unlike the arts, cannot be taught (compare IV 2.20).

Hippias mocks Socrates for saying the same things that Hippias heard from him a long time ago. Socrates concedes this and, he adds, what is even more terrible, he says the same things about not just any things, but about the same things. For his part, Hippias announces proudly that he always tries to say something different—not, Socrates gets him to admit, about things that he knows, like how many letters are in “Socrates” or if twice five is ten, but certainly about justice. Hippias thinks that he has something new to say about justice that neither Socrates nor anyone else can dispute. Swearing by Hera, Socrates twice calls such a speech a great good, if it can settle disputes about justice between jurors, parties to lawsuits and factions, as well as between cities (§6-8). This brief exchange brings to light two different standards, by which a definition of justice might be evaluated. One is the truth of the definition: whether or not it always says the
same things about the same things. The second is its usefulness: whether or not it
suffices for settling disputes about justice. The two standards are not in agreement about
the correct definition of justice. The consensual resolution of a dispute about justice
requires all of the parties to agree that they are receiving what they think that they
deserve. Such a resolution must be, or seem to be, a common good. But our reflection
on the investigation of justice in the first conversation between Socrates and Euthydemus
led us to conclude that there is not always a common good. The belief that justice is
good for all of the parties to a just arrangement sometimes entails the incoherent
assumption that what harms one’s interest for the sake of the community, by virtue of this
very harm also serves one’s interest (see p.95-99 above). Someone who holds this belief
will not always be able to say the same things about the same things. Conversely, a
definition of justice that avoids this confusion, and distinguishes clearly between what is
consistent with our interests and what is detrimental to our interests, cannot but increase
our resistance to doing some things that the law of the community requires of us. Of
course this clarity about justice may also disclose to us our true duties, but this guidance
will not necessarily coincide with the guidance that we receive from the law of the
community, and it will not persuade all people to consent to do what the law requires.

Hippias refuses to deliver his speech before Socrates himself says what he thinks
justice is. Socrates claims, like Xenophon claims about Socrates at the beginning of the
chapter, that he shows in deed what things he considers just. Hippias agrees that deeds
are more trustworthy than speeches, for many who say just things do unjust ones, while
no one who does just things is unjust (§9-10). According to this view, the deeds of
Socrates’ that Xenophon discusses at the beginning of this chapter do, in fact, prove that
Socrates is just. The only thing that matters, according to Hippias, is that Socrates obeys
the letter of the law, and Socrates does this in all three cases: he does not violate his oath
of office or try to induce his judges to violate theirs, and he resists the illegitimate
oligarchic decrees. Speeches about justice do not matter to Hippias, much less what
Socrates thinks privately (see I 1.19). In particular, it is irrelevant that Socrates’ behavior
betrays deep reservations about the Athenian democracy and its moral authority, about
the legitimacy of the Athenian law. For Hippias, justice is the performance of the actions
that are prescribed by the law, regardless the motive for obeying the law, the disposition
or intention of the just man. Hippias gives no weight to the just disposition or intention,
to the devotion to justice.

Although Hippias believes that speeches about justice do not matter, he insists
that Socrates define justice. Socrates obliges him: “I say that the lawful is just.” Hippias
does not understand what Socrates means by “lawful” and “just.” Socrates makes
Hippias define law. According to Hippias, law is what the citizens write down after
agreeing what one should do and refrain from. According to Socrates, obedience to these
laws is just. Hippias raises only one objection to this definition: not that it is false, but
that it belittles justice. No one could believe that law and the obedience to law are
serious things, since even the legislators often repeal their own laws (§11-14). Hippias
seems to mean that this is a defect, not of certain particular laws but of all laws, of
political law as such. He does not explain why this is necessarily the case, why all laws
are defective in this way, and perhaps he does not understand why. Our previous
discussions of justice suggest an explanation: human law is mutable because the necessity that moves us to obey the law of the community is weaker than the necessity that moves all people to do whatever they think is to their advantage. All people consciously or unconsciously want most of all what they think is best for them, but no law is always good, because every good thing is also sometimes bad in some way (III 8.1-7, 9.4). Citizens will remain obedient to the law only if the law does not remain the same.

Socrates replies to Hippias’ objection by following it to its extreme consequence: this insult to law-abiding people applies also to orderly conduct in war, since wars are always followed by peace. In order to be consistent, Hippias would have to criticize the defenders of the fatherland, just as he criticizes people who obey the laws. Socrates compares legislating and repealing laws, on one hand, to declaring war and making peace, on the other hand. Hippias takes this to be a refutation of his objection. He denies emphatically that he means to criticize defenders of the fatherland (§13-14). But his objection to Socrates’ definition applies no less to fighting in war than to any other form of service to the community, and it is no less valid in this case. Hippias admires nobility too much too apply his objection consistently to political life as a whole, and Socrates’ ad hominem response to Hippias succeeds only for this reason.

When Hippias proves unwilling and unable to press his objection, Socrates devotes his longest speech in the conversation to praise of law-abidingness: it is the aim of outstanding political leadership, the condition of a city’s excellence both in war and in peace, the aim of the laws themselves, and the cause of many good things for the law-abiding citizens personally (§15-17). Socrates suggests to Hippias that obedience to the
law has a worth of its own, independent of the content of the law, and that habits of
obedience to law are even more important for the city and the individual, and contribute
more to their happiness, than the particular actions that the laws direct the citizens to
perform. He directs Hippias’ attention away from the unstable, mutable content of the
law, which Hippias criticizes, to the obligation to obey the law regardless of its content.

We have already seen that Hippias is insensitive to this obligation to obey the law
regardless of its content. We learned from Hippias’ claim that deeds are more importat
than speeches that he conceives of justice as a set of merely technical rules about what to
do and what not to do, and he is unaware of the feeling of devotion to the law, of the
authority of law as such. In the mouth of someone who is insensitive to this aspect of
justice, the objection that a mutable law is unserious is itself unserious. It is oblivious to
what all of these mutable laws have in common: their appeal to the same motive in us, the
same feeling of devotion. This is precisely what Socrates’ long speech tries to impress on
Hippias.

Yet despite this weakness of Hippias’ objection to Socrates’ definition of justice,
we have seen that Socrates makes Hippias withdraw the objection, but does not refute it.
Moreover, after his long speech Socrates offers Hippias an opportunity to object again to
the view that the same thing is both lawful and just, and he implies in this way that he has
not truly settled Hippias’ objection (§18). Perhaps by tacitly directing Hippias’ attention
to the feeling of obligation to obey the law no matter what it commands us to do, and
even if it changes, Socrates indicates what a more adequate basis would be for raising this
same objection. For our devotion to the law itself furnishes a standard for judging the
law, for judging if a particular law is really what we mean by a law. As Socrates reminded us at the end of the conversation about piety, this standard is higher than and independent of anything that we hope for as a result of obeying the law. The law is characterized precisely by its indifference to our hopes, by its necessity, its unyielding and absolute authority. Against a law that is repealed or changed, the most serious objection that can be raised is not that it is insufficiently good, it is that by changing in order to accommodate our concern with the good at all, it falls short of what we mean by a law. In this form, Hippias’ objection to Socrates’ identification of justice with the law of the city is valid. But this is certainly not what Hippias means, because he is utterly insensitive to this aspect of the law.

Hippias seems like a strange spokesman for this feeling of being bound by necessity. But there is one way in which Hippias’ view of justice is closer to this view of the law than the ordinary moral view is. Hippias experiences the demands of the law as essentially arbitrary, imposed on him for no apparent reason, and certainly not with a view to his happiness or to any other coherent goal. He experiences justice as this kind of necessity, something that seems to be in no way in his interest but that he is required to obey nevertheless. The ordinary moral attitude could not share this view. It would sense dimly in the law a mysterious evocation of our deepest desires and hopes, and precisely in this respect it is superior to Hippias’ attitude. It is precisely Hippias’ moral obtuseness, his evident disdain for justice, that makes him a spokesman for the view that the feeling of obligation to be just is the feeling of being bound by an absolute law. This explains more adequately why Xenophon chose Hippias instead of Euthydemus to
discuss this aspect of the law with Socrates. Euthydemus, who believes unconsciously that obedience to the law of the city is good for him and who was convinced at the end of the last conversation that the gods support his legal obligations, has no notion of the view of the law that is at issue in this conversation about justice. Hippias is better equipped to be a spokesman for this view, but not because he is superior to Euthydemus in any way; rather, he is qualified because he is inferior to Euthydemus in almost the only respect in which anyone could be inferior to Euthydemus, which is that he is less morally serious.

When Socrates offers Hippias the opportunity to object again to the view that justice is the law, Hippias declines (§18). He is satisfied by the claim that obedience to the law of the community, whatever that law might be, is just. Yet Hippias’ agreement does not diminish the difficulty with Socrates’ definition of the just as the lawful, the difficulty that what we mean by the law does not receive adequate expression in Hippias’ definition of law. Obedience to the law of the community, when that law commands us to prefer the community’s welfare over our own, entails the unconscious expectation that the law is good. Since nothing is always good, then this obedience is not identical to the obedience to a law that is always necessary, whatever form this obedience may take.

After Hippias declines to raise another objection, Socrates begins the last part of the conversation by asking him if he knows any unwritten laws. He indicates in this way that Hippias was wrong to define law as what the citizens agree on and write down (see §13). Hippias volunteers that unwritten laws are the laws that are held to be lawful in the same way everywhere. He seems to mean that they are free from the instability and mutability of the written, political law that came to light in the last part of the
conversation. Hippias does not think that human beings established these laws, since they could not have all convened in order to legislate them, nor do they speak the same language (§19). Socrates leads Hippias in this way to retract the two main elements of his original definition of law: that the laws are written down, and that they are arrived at by agreement among the citizens.

Hippias thinks rather that the gods legislated these laws for human beings, and that for this reason the first law is to honor the gods. He agrees that it is also law everywhere to honor one’s parents. He seems to mean that the gods legislate this law as well. But Hippias does not think that the prohibition against sexual intercourse between parents and children is a “god’s law.” The reason why he doubts that the prohibition against incest is divine is because he perceives that some people transgress it (§19-20). Hippias substitutes “divine law” for “unwritten law,” or rather, he seems to conflate the two. Moreover, his claim that the prohibition against incest is not divine adds something that his definition of unwritten law did not include: a divine law is never disobeyed. What Hippias means by a divine law could not exist. If there were such a law, it would not be enough for it to be a perfectly good law, which means to be legislated by a providential god; it would also have to be known to be perfectly good, since people will obey a law only if it appears to them to be most to their advantage (III 9.4). But the conversation about piety showed that this is impossible.

Socrates defends the divine origin of the prohibition against incest between parents and children, and in order to do this, he disputes Hippias’ claim that it is impossible to violate a divine law. The difference between the laws laid down by the
gods and the laws laid down by human beings, according to Socrates, is rather that it is impossible to escape the penalty for the former (§21-23). Not the obedience to a divine law, according to Socrates, but the consequence of obedience or disobedience, is necessary and impossible to contravene, and corresponds to what we mean by law. This is a very great difference from Hippias’ view that the unwritten, divine law is universally known and always obeyed. According to Socrates, the law that is law in the highest sense is not universally known, but rather must be discovered; and it cannot be known to be good, and therefore it is not necessarily obeyed. What is necessary is not necessary for us to know or to do; it is simply necessary, and nothing results for us from discovering this necessity besides the knowledge itself.21

With a view to the question of this dissertation, the question of how to account for our resistance to doing what we know is right, it is significant that Socrates might have corrected Hippias’ view that everyone both knows and obeys the law by claiming instead that everyone who knows the law obeys it, but not everyone knows the law. This would have been in agreement with the view that we considered in the first part of this dissertation, which is that nothing besides knowledge is needed in order to overcome our resistance to obeying the law. Socrates implicitly rejects this view. We are now in a

21 I agree with Johnson (2003), who argues correctly that the unwritten, or divine, law is the basis for criticizing the defective human laws (239-240), against Morrison (1995), who argues that Socrates’ true view is that justice is obedience to the law of the city. But Johnson claims further that the basis for this criticism is the view that “the just is always beneficial,” and this claim is without foundation in the text of this chapter. The criticism against the written law that is raised is not that the laws are bad, it is that they are mutable, and the superiority of unwritten law to written law is not that it is better, it is that the punishment for violating it is inescapable. Johnson fails to notice that this chapter is the only discussion of justice in the Memorabilia that does not argue or imply that justice is good. According to Johnson, by the “unwritten divine law” Socrates means the law that is given for the benefit of man by “the wise and beneficial divine creator, who has set up [the world] to our advantage as human beings” (270). This seems to be because he is taken in by the teleological teaching of Chapter Three, which he takes to be Socrates’ own view: “Socrates simply says what he thinks” [Johnson (2005), 54 n.32].
position to explain why: according to Socrates, this view combines and conflates two
different kinds of knowledge. One is the knowledge of what is good for us here and now.
The other is the knowledge of the laws that describe the consequences of our actions.
This second kind of knowledge does not disclose to us which actions to choose, insofar as
it discloses to us what is always the same, but we always choose what we think is good,
and the same thing is sometimes good and sometimes bad. The tendency to conflate these
two kinds of knowledge leads us to believe erroneously that the law is interested in our
welfare, and that the necessity to which we sense that we are subject, and in the first
place our own death, is not only unavoidable but also good and best for us. This error
prevents us from heeding the law, both by leading us to believe that the law requires
greater sacrifices of us than it actually does, and also by making us unwilling to surrender
what the law actually requires us to surrender. On one hand, this error is responsible for
the great attraction that the moral law, which commands us make such great sacrifices,
has for us. On the other hand, even with regard to what turns out to be actually required
of us, we hope that this is not simply necessary but that we are compensated for it in
some way. This hope is so powerful that we are liable to believe that even the very
awareness of what is necessary is itself good, as we saw in the discussion of piety in the
previous chapter.

A final unwritten law that Socrates discusses illustrates beautifully how what
Socrates means by obedience to the law avoids both of these errors. The law that
Socrates discusses is the prohibition against ingratitude. Like the other laws that Socrates
discusses in this last section of the conversation, the penalty for transgressing this law is
the necessary consequence of the transgression. The penalty is that ungrateful people wind up friendless, and are forced to depend on people who hate them (§24). Although it is possible to disobey this law, unlike Hippias’ suggestion about the divine law, it is necessary to obey it in order to enjoy the consequences for oneself of ordinary decency, such as being liked and trusted and befriended by other decent people and all of the good consequences of this. Yet this is an extremely sober, even severe, account of the duties of decency and friendship, one that is entirely devoid of any notion of seeking the good of another for that other’s sake, any element of nobility. And it is an equally sober account of the rewards for obeying the law, which amount to nothing more than receiving in return the same treatment that one gives others.

The life according to the law enjoys good things like these benefits of society and friendship, and fulfills the obligations that are necessary in order to enjoy these things in return; in this respect, it is not a life of self-denial. The law permits us the enjoyments that we are naturally sensitive to and that make a human life complete, and perhaps even a broader range of enjoyments than ordinary morality permits, insofar as it does not demand the extreme sacrifices that ordinary morality requires. But the law about ingratitude also imposes strict limits on the extent of these benefits and obligations, limits that are narrow compared to the virtually limitless demands that we make of ourselves and of others. It requires us to steel ourselves against the temptation to forget ourselves and seek greater satisfaction than is consistent with the activity that makes us fully human, which is to be aware of the absolutely necessary laws under which we live. The next chapter considers what is required in order to observe these limits.
The subject of this chapter is continence. Xenophon distinguishes explicitly between continence and moderation. Moderation is what Socrates thought that his companions should learn before becoming skilled at speaking and acting and contriving (IV 3.1). Continence, on the other hand, is identified with the “skill at action” that Socrates preferred to teach only after his companions had already become moderate. The most prominent difference between moderation and continence is that moderation is an intellectual disposition, whereas continence is emphatically not a product of knowledge alone, but rather of training, and practice (IV 5.1, see III 9.1-3).

Xenophon does not distinguish so clearly between moderation and continence in the first three books of the *Memorabilia*. For example, the thematic statement about moderation that we examined in our first chapter employs the two terms interchangeably:

[Socrates] did not distinguish between wisdom and moderation… and when he was asked if he holds that people who know what to do, but do the opposite, are wise but incontinent, he answered, “no more than unwise and incontinent…I hold that those who do not act correctly are neither wise nor moderate” (III 9.4, emphasis added).

Socrates’ initial remark is about moderation, but the unnamed questioner asks about continence. Yet Xenophon considers the question and Socrates’ answer to it relevant to Socrates’ view of moderation, and indeed Socrates seems to use incontinence and immoderation interchangeably in his answer to this question.
This ambiguity concerning the relation between moderation and continence corresponds to other obscurities that we observed in the presentation of virtue in Book Three, and in the first place to tendency to reduce the noble to the good, the knowledge of our duty to the knowledge of what is in our interest. Virtue was said to be so good that no reasonable person would do or want to do anything else (III 9.5), and it was compared to the knowledge that a businessman has of how to make a profit (III 4.7 ff.). The inquiry that has led us to distinguish between moderation and continence began from the distinction between the noble and the good. Its crux was the distinction that the previous two chapters drew between piety and justice, between the view that the law discloses to us what is necessarily in our interest, and the view that the law discloses to us what is necessary whether or not it is in our interest. We argued that this second view is Socrates’ view of the law. Virtue is the pursuit of noble things in addition to and apart from good things.

Continence is required in order to live in accordance with this distinction between the noble and the good. Our natural concern with the good is so powerful that it tends to determine our view of what is noble. The ordinary moral view is characterized by the unconscious refusal to admit to oneself that the noble is not good, and this distorts our view of what virtue is. In order to do what is truly noble and not necessarily good we must restrain ourselves from expecting any comfort from this besides the satisfaction of being a good person. On the other hand, since continence is called for by the insight that the good and the noble are distinct, it belongs least of all to the continent person to deny himself the enjoyment of genuinely good things. But here, too, some effort is called for
in order to avoid abandoning oneself to these enjoyments, losing sight of virtue and neglecting the noble activity that we must perform in order to be fully human, in addition to and apart from these enjoyments. Accordingly, in the conversation about continence that Xenophon presents in this chapter, Socrates argues that continence is necessary both with a view to virtues like wisdom and moderation, and with a view to the proper enjoyment of good things like food and sex and the higher pleasures of friendship and political life.

If the noble were also good, then in order to live well there would be no need for continence, or for any additional effort besides the knowledge of what is good and noble, since all people do what they think is most to their advantage (III 9.4). The happiness that this alternative seems to promise is not necessarily greater than what is actually proper for us, and may even be less, if we believe that virtue calls for extreme self-denial and sacrifices. Yet this view is still extremely powerful and attractive, and this seems to be because it appeals to one particular desire in us: the desire that the proper use of the faculty that perceives that we are mortal be to enhance our happiness, that the object of this faculty be something good and that death not be the great evil that it seems to be. This hope is a false hope, but since it is so powerful, continence is required both in order to do what is noble and not intrinsically beneficial, and also in order to do what is good but not as good as we might hope, to do what is good without thinking that the good is itself noble and in every respect choiceworthy.

The conversation about continence that Xenophon reports is between Socrates and Euthydemus. It resumes the presentation of Euthydemus’ education. Continence is what
Socrates teaches his more talented students after they become moderate, but of course Euthydemus is neither talented nor moderate. In particular, we have suggested that the importance of continence is apparent only to someone who understands Socrates’ teaching about moderation, specifically the distinction between piety and justice, between what we hope for and what is required of us. The conversation about moderation between Socrates and Euthydemus did not have this effect on Euthydemus. It seems rather to have led him to conclude that the law is what the gods require him to do in return for all of the good things that they give him (IV 3.15). Euthydemus does not perceive the distinction between the noble and the good. And since he does not understand this, he cannot understand continence, because continence is said to be “useful with a view to virtue,” or as Socrates says elsewhere in the Memorabilia, the “foundation” of virtue, and not itself a virtue (see I 5.4).22 Indeed, it is unclear why Socrates chooses to talk to him about continence at all, unless it is simply because Euthydemus will not go away (IV 2.40). At any rate, the present discussion of continence is characterized by ambiguity concerning the activity, with a view to which continence is necessary. This is a concession to Euthydemus, whose view of what this activity is differs greatly from Socrates’ view.

Earlier in the Memorabilia, continence is said to be useful both for ordinary political virtue and for Socratic virtue (see II 1.1-7 and I 6.8-9). In the conversation with Euthydemus, Socrates equivocates between these two aims. On one hand, he maintains that continence is the necessary condition of wisdom, and he calls wisdom “the greatest

good.” This is the only occasion in the Memorabilia, on which Socrates calls anything the greatest good (IV 5.6; compare IV 2.33 and 4.16). Yet although Socrates speaks more frankly than usual about wisdom, he conflates wisdom with prudence, the faculty of choosing what is in our interest (IV 5.6 and 11). And he comes close to equating moderation with continence, like the discussion of moderation in Book Three that we concluded is flawed. However, Socrates carefully refrains from equating the two: he says that the works of moderation are the very opposite of the works of incontinence, but not that moderation and incontinence are themselves opposites, or even that the works of moderation and the works of continence, or the works of immoderation and incontinence, are the same (§7). Further, he points out near the end of the conversation that continence is the necessary condition for learning and working at anything noble and good, such as nobly caring for one’s body and managing one’s household and benefiting one’s friends and city and overpowering one’s enemies (§10-11). All of this allows Euthydemus to continue to believe that political virtue is the worthiest human pursuit, and that this is the aim of continence.

Corresponding to this unspoken difference of opinion between Socrates and Euthydemus concerning the aim of continence, Socrates indicates quietly that there are certain differences between the view of continence that he encourages Euthydemus to hold and his own view. He tells Euthydemus that incontinence is identical to the enslavement to physical pleasures, and continence is “the opposite” of this, whatever this may be (§3, 6-11). Yet right after Socrates associates incontinence with bodily pleasure for the first time, he adds a more nuanced modification: a free person does the best
things, and someone who possesses impediments to this is not free (§3). This more precise statement implies that freedom and unfreedom do not correspond precisely to insensitivity and sensitivity to bodily pleasure, both because some sensitivity to pleasure turns out to be compatible with doing the best things, and because there can be other “impediments” besides bodily pleasure to doing the best things, including not only inanimate things but also people and our attachments to people. Later in the conversation, Socrates explains that a continent man is not simply insensitive to pleasure, and that he even experiences more pleasure than the incontinent man does: with regard to food and drink and sex and sleep, the “most necessary and most frequent” things, continent people enjoy these things even more than incontinent people do, because they wait until they are genuinely in need, when these things become as pleasant as possible (§9). Continence is not only or primarily the resistance to these low pleasures, which do not, after all, prevent most people from devoting most of their time to more worthwhile things. It is also and especially the resistance to the greatest and most attractive pleasures, the things that we enjoy the most and that have such a strong claim on our serious attention that they threaten to distract us from our proper pursuits.

Socratic continence is more demanding than ordinary continence, despite the appearance of greater permissiveness that it might receive from its more relaxed attitude toward physical pleasure. Ordinary continence, such as the continence that aims at political virtue, rejects these lower pleasures in favor of worthier pursuits, and it may reject certain pleasures more absolutely than Socrates does. But an outstanding political

\footnote{Bonnette (1994) 169 n.47 notes that the Greek word for “impediments” is used in the masculine gender, and that this implies that the impediments are people (or other living beings).}
figure might be continent in this way and still give himself over entirely to other pursuits in a way that Socrates would deem incontinent. Real incontinence is allowing one’s pursuit and enjoyment of any pleasure, however genuine and serious it may be, to be enhanced by an illusion, like the illusions that enhance the desire for honor of politically ambitious men (see III 1.10). Even extreme, ascetic self-denial can be incontinent in this way, if it is based consciously or unconsciously on the false belief that virtue calls for such great efforts and that these efforts are justified because the rewards for virtue are so great. Real continence is the enjoyment of the greatest happiness that human beings can enjoy without succumbing to illusions like these. It is the way of life that is consistent with the practice of true virtue, with the proper activity of a human being who understands his situation clearly and accepts it. The greatest difference between ordinary, continence and Socratic continence concerns, not the amount and kind of pleasure that each permits itself, but rather the different aims, at which the two kinds of continence direct their efforts. False continence makes great and impressive efforts to satisfy a very deep but ultimately false hope, whereas Socratic continence aims at the freedom from false hopes.

The whole conversation abstracts from the most important question, the question of the aim of continence. Finally, at the very end of the conversation with Euthydemus, Socrates seems to identify this aim, but his remark is one of the most ambiguous and enigmatic in the whole *Memorabilia*. He tells Euthydemus that only continent people can investigate the best of the things and, separating them dialectically (*dialegontas*) into classes (*genē*) in speech and deed, choose the good things and avoid the bad ones (§11).
Socrates does not clarify any of the ambiguities in this remark, such as what the “best things” are, what “classes” he has in mind, or by what procedure the classification proceeds. Most importantly, this remark does not clarify if the best activity is theory or practice, investigating the best things or choosing well, speech or deed.

Xenophon appends to this conversation two additional remarks of Socrates’, which do not seem to be addressed to Euthydemus, and which begin to clarify this ambiguity. According to the first remark, continence makes men the best and happiest and most able to practice dialectics, or converse, or separate (dialegesthai): the Greek word for “dialectics” has all three meanings. Socrates told Euthydemus that dialectics makes one able to choose the good and avoid the bad; he presented it as a means to some further end. But according to this additional remark, dialectics is one of three aims of continence, and is said to be a desirable pursuit in its own right and not merely as a means to the other two aims.

Dialectics itself is the subject of the second and final remark that Xenophon adds. The remark begins with an etymological account of the word “dialectics.” According to Socrates, the term originated as a description of the activity of companions who deliberate in common and separate things into classes. Dialectics, according to this etymology, refers both to the means by which this investigation is conducted, namely conversation, and to the aim of the investigation, which is a sort of separation and classification. Socrates adds that one should try most of all to prepare oneself for this activity and work at it, because from this men become best and most able to lead and most able to practice dialectics (§12). One aim of working at dialectics is dialectics.
Dialectics seems to aim at no higher activity than itself. This implies that in Socrates’ own view, the practical aim that he ascribes to dialectics and indeed to continence in his conversation with Euthydemus is not more desirable than this dialectical activity, or desirable apart from this activity. Socrates seems to assert the superiority of practice to theory only for the benefit of Euthydemus. These concluding remarks that are not addressed to Euthydemus assert more explicitly the primacy of theory. They suggest that all of the efforts that the continent man makes, and the happiness that he enjoys, are somehow incomplete unless they are accompanied by some kind of attempt to understand the world.

But Socrates fails to explain in these enigmatic remarks what dialectical conversations he has in mind: what things are classified, and into what classes, and why conversation itself is so central to theoretical activity. This conclusion serves only to raise these questions. We will attempt to address them in our discussion of the next and final chapter that we will consider, which is devoted entirely to the subject of dialectics.

IV 6: Dialectics

In this chapter, Xenophon undertakes to try to show how Socrates made his companions “more skilled at dialectics.” According to the plan of the Socratic education that Xenophon announced at the beginning of the chapter about piety, the next subject should be “skill at speaking” (IV 3.1). Xenophon devotes this chapter to a particular kind of speech, to dialectics, which was mentioned enigmatically at the end of the last chapter as the aim of continence. But dialectics, or indeed any kind of speech, is not the explicit
theme of the conversation in this chapter. This chapter is devoted to dialectical
definitions of the virtues, and not to an explanation of dialectics itself. Xenophon’s next
remark seems to explain why: Socrates held that people who know “what each of the
beings (ta onta) is” can explain this to others, but it is no wonder if people who do not
know this get confused themselves and confuse others (IV 6.1). The knowledge of each
of the beings is necessary in order to be able to speak properly. But the speech that
Socrates refers to here is not conversation (dialegesthai) but rather “explanation,” or
literally “exegesis” (exēgeisthai). And the precision with which Xenophon identifies the
theme of this chapter as “skill at dialectics,” rather than “skill at speaking” in general like
he did in his original remark about the plan of the Socratic education, suggests that there
is an important difference between dialectics and other kinds of rhetoric, including the
exposition or explanation of what one already knows. We suggest that dialectics is the
way in which each of the beings becomes known, rather than a mere display of that
knowledge. These definitions of the virtues show in deed rather than in speech what
dialectics is.

“The beings” appear to be “the best things” that Socrates spoke of at the end of
the last chapter (IV 5.11). There is no question here, as there was in the last chapter, of
the knowledge of these things being a means to choosing the good things and acting
rightly. We have already seen indications that this is a fiction for the benefit of
Euthydemus, and it is now dropped. It is true that the knowledge that is at issue here
might appear to be in the service of acting rightly insofar as the beings that Xenophon
presents Socrates as investigating are the virtues. Yet this is contradicted by the fact that
in this chapter, Xenophon tacitly retracts the claim, which he made at the beginning of
the *Memorabilia*, that Socrates’ investigations were limited to the virtues or “the human
things” (I 1.16). Instead, he presents the definitions of the virtues as examples of
Socrates’ manner of investigating “each” of the beings (IV 6.1). At issue here is Socrates’
thoretical activity itself.

The first definition is of piety. To Socrates’ first two questions, Euthydemus
answers that piety is the noblest sort of thing, and the pious person is the sort of person
who honors the gods. Next, Socrates prompts Euthydemus to claim that it is not
permitted to honor the gods however one wishes, but rather there are laws according to
which it is necessary to honor the gods. Euthydemus agrees further that the one who
knows these laws knows how it is necessary to honor the gods, and that whoever knows
this honors the gods correctly, and therefore that the pious person is the one who knows
the laws about the gods (§2-4). The main result of the definition is that piety is
knowledge.

The crucial part of this definition is the account of the feeling of obligation to
obey the divine law. According to Socrates, whoever knows the law about honoring the
gods obeys that law, because he does not deem it necessary to honor the gods in any other
way, and no one honors the gods in any other way than the one that he deems necessary
(§3-4). The definition denies implicitly that one can know what the law commands and
still decide that it is not necessary to honor the gods at all. But Socrates does not account
for this conviction that it is necessary to honor the gods at all, the feeling of obligation
that gives the duty to worship the gods the force that his definition presupposes.
The reason why Socrates does not account explicitly for the conviction that it is necessary to honor the gods at all seems to be the limitation that he imposes on himself by defining virtue as knowledge. For we learned from the conversation in which Socrates tries to teach Euthydemus “moderation about the gods” that the basis for the feeling of obligation to be pious is the unconscious belief that piety is good, and we learned that this belief is never based on knowledge, and that it is impossible to know if piety is good. The basis for piety is the non-rational belief that the gods care for us and support our deepest hopes and provide the ultimate reassurance that our striving is not in vain. Insofar as the present definition of piety does not claim that piety is or includes the knowledge of the good, it does not contradict this claim. But by insisting that piety is rational, and ignoring the non-rational element of piety, it contradicts the phenomenon of piety, the faith that is so impressive precisely because it requires us to make great efforts without the support and assurance of our reason. The attempt to provide piety with an entirely rational basis deprives it of its character as a virtue.

Next, Socrates turns from the laws that prescribe how we should honor gods to the laws that prescribe how we should treat (chrēsthai) human beings. Just as he asked Euthydemus if it is permitted to honor the gods however one wishes, he asks if it is permitted to treat human beings however one wishes. Euthydemus answers not only that there are laws that regulate these matters, like he answered the analogous question about the gods, but also that the person who knows these lawful things is lawful, like the conclusion to which Socrates led him in the case of piety (§5). But the two cases are not strictly parallel. Socrates indicates this by reversing the order of his questions about the
Socrates asks what sorts of things are called just, and Euthydemus answers that the just things are the things that the law commands (see IV 4.12). Socrates leads Euthydemus to the conclusion that is analogous to the conclusion about piety: “we would define correctly by defining the just people to be those who know the lawful things concerning human beings” (§5-6). Whereas according to an earlier definition of justice in Book Three, one must know that the commands of the moral law are noble and good in order to be able to obey those commands, here Socrates maintains that it is not necessary to know even this, only what the law commands (compare III 9.5). And the present definition is in a way more correct, because we learned from Socrates’ conversation with
Hippias that what we mean by a law is something that can be known to be necessary, and
this does not include whether or not something is in our interest. The definitions of
justice in books Three and Four refer to different aspects of the law. The earlier
definition refers to the very deep concern with our own welfare that is inseparable from
the awareness of law and that leads us to believe that virtue is good, and the present
definition refers to the law itself. As Socrates tells Euthydemus right after Euthydemus
defines justice as law, “both the people who do the just things and [those who do] the
necessary things are doing what the laws prescribe” (§6).

As a definition of virtue, the dialectical definition of justice is no more satisfying
than the definition of piety was. Just like in the definition of piety, so also in the case of
justice Socrates claims that the knowledge of what the law commands has the power to
move us to obey the law. And like in the definition of piety, Socrates excludes from the
definition of justice the motive for obeying the law and treating other human beings well.
But in the case of piety, the discovery that the motive for obeying the law is not rational
seems to destroy the obligation to obey the law, and this is not the case with justice.
Unlike the laws about the gods, Socrates holds that the laws that he is discussing here are
real laws. His language reflects this difference: in the crucial part of the definition of
piety, he speaks narrowly about the knowledge of “how it is necessary to honor the
gods,” and of the “lawful things about the gods,” whereas in the analogous part of the
definition of justice he speaks broadly about the knowledge of “the things that the laws
prescribe” and “the things that it is necessary to do” (§3-4 and 6). Likewise, before he
raises the question, what is justice, Socrates speaks of how it is lawful “to treat [other]
human beings,” but in the definition of justice he speaks only of what is “lawful concerning human beings,” which may refer not only to our legal duties to others, but also and perhaps even primarily to duties to oneself (§5-6). The suggestion seems to be that there are intelligible laws, which can be known to be laws and whose content can be known, but these laws do not completely govern our relations with other people, and they are in themselves indifferent to these relations. Just like in the case of piety, so in the case of justice, Socrates abstracts from the concern with the good that gives it its character as a virtue.

The next subject that Socrates turns to is wisdom. Socrates leads Euthydemus to define wisdom as “scientific knowledge” (epistēmē) (§7). The mention of wisdom right after justice and piety suggests that wisdom is itself a virtue. The clear, precise understanding of our situation, without any illusions or hopes about our place in the world, is itself our proper activity, which is suitable for us by nature. Piety and justice are not consistent with this clarity, for the pious and just attitudes are based on distorted views of our situation, and the attempt to define piety and justice as fully rational activities distorted their character. Only wisdom is consistent with self-knowledge. This is why, in another conversation in the Memorabilia, Socrates identifies ignorance of oneself as the opposite of wisdom (III 9.6).

But wisdom is not simply self-knowledge, the knowledge of what virtue is. We have already noted that Xenophon presents these definitions of the virtues as examples of Socrates’ manner of investigating what “each” of the beings is. Moreover, even the knowledge that wisdom is virtue cannot be based, as our investigation has been based so
far, on the interpretation of our subjective experience of devotion to virtue and to the law. What is required is to discover what is suitable for human beings as such by virtue of our natural constitution, without succumbing to the hopes and fears that distract us from this. For the implicit theme of the parts of the *Memorabilia* that we have considered in this dissertation has been how the question, what is virtue, implicates our deepest hopes. We learned from Book Three what a false sense of security is afforded to us by the belief that the best human being is the brave soldier who dies gloriously in battle, or the talented politician who improves the lot of his city and earns deserved esteem and renown. And we have seen in the discussion of moderation in Book Four that this is no less true of the belief that virtue is the intellectual activity that discovers the hidden causes of the world and of the human situation. We are comforted by the belief that wisdom is available to us and that the world is intelligible, and this comfort rather than our genuine capacity for wisdom may be responsible for our belief that this is what virtue is. Precisely because we have learned to characterize wisdom by its refusal to succumb to false comfort, we must be sure that our determination that wisdom is virtue meets this standard. Indeed, this resolve to avoid any illusion about what virtue is, seems to be why Socrates insists that virtue is knowledge.

Socrates proceeds to clarify the activity, by means of which wisdom is acquired, and in the first place the objects of wisdom. He does this by raising the question, is it possible for a human being to know all of the beings? The answer to this question depends on the answer to the further questions, how many beings are there, and what is a being? What is intelligible in the world? Euthydemus is sure that no one can know even
the smallest part of the beings (§7). His answer implies that he thinks that by “a being” Socrates refers to a particular object that we perceive by means of our senses, and by “all of the beings” he refers to the totality of these objects, for there are infinitely many of these objects, but our experience of them is limited in duration and in space. Socrates himself implies in a different conversation that no human being can know all of these things (I 4.17-18). But this interpretation of wisdom is ruled out by Xenophon’s claim at the beginning of the Memorabilia that Socrates rejected the view that “being (to on)...is an infinite multitude,” and indeed that this was so far from Socrates’ view that Socrates compared people who held it to madmen (I 1.14). Moreover, it is difficult to imagine what the mere enumeration of the perceptible contents of the world contributes to our understanding. In order to know anything about any object besides the mere fact that it exists, we would need to know in addition its relations with other objects, its likeness to some and unlikeness to others. We do not understand the world unless we understand its organization and articulation, any more than we understand ourselves by knowing our own name (IV 2.25).

If this organization, and not the mere enumeration of particular objects, is what Socrates means by wisdom, then by “a being” he refers to one of the units, according to which the world is organized: the categories or classes according to which we perceive and classify the contents of the world. We recall that at the end of the previous chapter, Socrates referred to dialectics as an activity of separation into “classes” (genē) (IV 5.11). We recall also that Xenophon intends the definitions of piety and justice and wisdom to serve as examples of the manner in which Socrates defines “each” of the beings. Piety
and justice and wisdom were defined, not as particular pious or just actions or particular objects of wisdom, like Euthydemus and Socrates attempted to ‘define’ justice in their first conversation, but as what all pious, just or wise things have in common (see IV 2.13 ff.). Wisdom appears to be the discovery of these classes, according to which the objects that we perceive are organized and presented to us.

Like everything else that we can know, this classification is based on sense perception (IV 3.13). But it is not identical to sense perception, and the organization of the given world cannot be perceived passively, because not every class or category that presents itself to us, not every way in which our experience is organized, is genuine. The task of wisdom is to distinguish between real classes and false classes. The distinction between real and false classes comes to light more clearly in the next two definitions, whose subjects are the good and the noble. Socrates asks Euthydemus if one should search “in this manner” (houtō) for what is good. This question calls our attention to the activity of definition itself, to what constitutes a definition. On the basis of the previous definitions of the virtues, we suggested that a definition says what all of the defined things, all members of the class that is defined, have in common. More precisely, it is what distinguishes all members of the class from everything that is not a member of the class, what distinguishes one class from another. This last requirement comes to light in the definitions of the good and the noble, because the good and the noble do not meet this requirement. The definitions of the good and the noble in this conversation are the same as their definitions in the conversation with Aristippus in Book Three (III 8.2-7). Euthydemus agrees that the same thing is not beneficial for all people, that what is
beneficial for one person is sometimes harmful for another, and that the good is nothing other than the beneficial. The same analysis applies to the noble. Nothing is noble for all things; rather, each thing is noble and useful for the same things (§8-9). There is no way to distinguish all good things as such from all bad things, or all noble things from all shameful things. This is why justice and piety could not be defined in terms of the good: goodness is not an intelligible attribute of things, a criterion for distinguishing between some things and others. Everything that is good is also bad, and everything is good in some way. The problem is not that a law cannot be known to be good, because everything is good and can be known to be good in some way; it is that every law is both good and bad. If by justice we mean good law, then the just things do not constitute a discrete class, and there is no such thing as justice.24

If wisdom is the knowledge of the organization of the world, then the activity by which wisdom is acquired is not only the enumeration of the classes or categories in which the world presents itself to us, but also the distinction between real and false classes, between attributes like “good” that are not intelligible because all of the good things cannot be distinguished from all of the bad things, on one hand, and real, intelligible attributes, which always belong to everything that meets the same finite criteria, on the other hand. The former, false attributes change their character depending on the particular needs and circumstances of the human perceiver, and they have no independent existence. The others, by contrast, seem to afford us access to something

24 Compare Cooper (1999) 25, who argues that “wisdom is to be identified with knowledge…of what is good…and what is fine or noble,” but who admits that if this is what Socrates means, then “the discussion of wisdom…seems incomplete.”
beyond our own concerns, something that is always the same regardless of what we happen to desire or need at the time, and that inheres in the perceived things themselves. These true attributes of things seem to be what Socrates means by “the beings” and “the best of the things,” and their enumeration and distinction from one another what is meant by wisdom.

These considerations may clarify somewhat what Socrates means by wisdom. But they do not settle the question, is wisdom available to us, even in this relatively modest form, and is this the proper activity of that part of us that is aware that we are mortal and dissatisfied with things that are merely good? Or are we wrong to hope even for this limited clarity about the world, which consists not of understanding how the world always was and will be and by what necessity each thing is the way that it is, but only what is truly present in the world during our lives as opposed to what we falsely believe about the world? What after all is the basis for distinguishing between uninterested perception and our active and urgent concern with our own good, since both are peculiarly human modes of access to the world? It seems equally plausible that our sense perceptions are all relative to us and in service of our needs. Our perception of heat, for example that food is too hot or cold to eat, seems to vary depending on how hungry we are. Our ability to hear sounds seems to vary depending on how absorbed we are in other activities, or how tired we are. It seems possible that temperatures and sounds are not qualities of the world itself, which are present whether or not we notice them, but rather that they depend for their presence on the attitude of the human perceiver. It is unclear if we have access to any character of the world itself, and if our
distinction between intelligible and unintelligible qualities of the perceptible world really leaves us better off with regard to the possibility of living rationally, of recognizing and taking our bearings from the truth about our situation, or if we have no choice but to abandon the hope of understanding. We may be forced to conclude that our desire to understand reflects, not our ability to understand, but our unconscious desire for the comfort that such understanding would afford us, insofar as it would reassure us that we are not merely striving blindly in a world whose hostility to us is palpable but unintelligible. The view that virtue is wisdom may depend on an illusion just as much as the view that virtue is political virtue does. The alternative is not only that wisdom is not virtue, but also that our faculty of understanding is not what is highest in us and does not afford us authoritative guidance. And if this is the true interpretation of our feeling of obligation to obey the moral law, then we may be wrong to take our bearings from our awareness of the law, and our feeling of obligation may be a burden that we would be better off without.

I cannot find a solution to this difficulty in the *Memorabilia*. But it seems to me that even if it is unclear how Xenophon solves this problem, he calls attention to the form that the solution would have to take. If there is any possibility of resolving this problem, then it must be on the basis of some evidence, some perceptible phenomenon. To repeat, the problem is that we are still unsure that our devotion to the law is anything but another expression of our concern with ourselves. The alternate interpretation of this feeling of devotion that we have been trying to elaborate is that this feeling bespeaks a division in us between all of our needs, desires and hopes, and a separate part of us that is
disinterested and that does not aim to enhance our happiness but only to understand our situation, and that renders unacceptable to us any feeling of satisfaction that is based on an illusion of security about this. And we were forced to call this account into question by the consideration that we have no evidence that this is the case besides our own subjective experience, and that our desire for understanding may in fact prove to be a disguised form of the desire for comfort, insofar as even merely believing that we have some access to the true character of the world is comforting in some way. Since we can only know what we perceive by means of our senses, we can only know that this is a true interpretation of our experience if there is some perceptible phenomenon, in which this division in us is visible.

At the end of this chapter, Xenophon brings to light one such phenomenon. He brings it to light dramatically: Euthydemus proves to exhibits this division within himself. And this is appropriate, because the alternative that we have been forced to consider, the possibility that we cannot know what virtue is and live fully rationally, and we would be better off without our uneasy dissatisfaction both with our pursuit of our own interests and with other pursuits that we might deem worthier, implies that it may be better to be Euthydemus than Socrates. It may be better to be as unreflective and as unaware of the problems that we have been considering as Euthydemus is, than to devote one’s whole life to reflecting on them and, what is worse, to forcing others to reflect on them.

The final subject that Socrates and Euthydemus take up is courage. Socrates leads Euthydemus first to the conclusion that courage includes the knowledge of the terrible
and dangerous things. In particular, Socrates distinguishes between courageous people and two other kinds of people: people who are fearless out of ignorance that they are in danger, as well as people who are afraid of what is not dangerous (§10). But this does not answer the question, how does the courageous person behave? There seem to be two possibilities. One is that the courageous person, who according to Euthydemus knows what things are dangerous, is steadfast in the face of these dangers. This is what most people seem to mean by courage, but this is not simply based on the knowledge of what is dangerous, and perhaps it is even incompatible with this knowledge. It may rather be the case that as opposed to people who are ignorant of what is dangerous, the courageous person knows what things are dangerous, and as a result he is afraid of these things but not of other things, as opposed to people who are afraid even of things that are not dangerous.

Accordingly, Socrates gets Euthydemus to clarify what he means by courage by speaking, not of what courageous people know, but of what they do. This turns out to be that they behave nobly in dangerous situations (§11). Euthydemus believes both that the courageous person knows what is dangerous and that he exposes himself to danger and harm.

Next, Socrates asks Euthydemus about cowards: do people who are incapable (mē dunamenoi) of behaving nobly in dangerous situations know how they should behave? This is the question that this whole dissertation has been considering: is it possible to know what one should do, but do the opposite? Euthydemus hesitates: he replies “perhaps not” (ou dépou). He is right to hesitate, because he believes that a courageous
person knows what is dangerous, and that he knows how bad courage may be for him, and such a person may not behave nobly in a dangerous situation even if he is not ignorant but rather knows that it is his duty to risk his life. Yet Euthydemus does not reject Socrates’ suggestion that the failure to behave nobly is a product of ignorance. The sequel explains why, when Socrates, who notices Euthydemus’ resistance, tries to overcome it by reminding him that he believes that courage is a virtue, and Euthydemus agrees wholeheartedly: those who know what to do behave well, and these are the only people who behave well, and if they do not make a mistake, then they do not behave badly. Euthydemus does not doubt that courage is a virtue, and that it is our duty to be courageous; on the contrary, he seems to think that no one would expose himself to such danger unless he knows that it is his duty. He seems to mean that to someone who knows that it is his duty to act bravely, it should not make any difference that courage is dangerous. This explains why he agreed even half-heartedly with Socrates’ previous suggestion that cowardice proceeds from ignorance, even though he believes that courage is harmful. But Socrates tries to get Euthydemus to agree further that people who behave badly, necessarily make mistakes, and he again encounters resistance: Euthydemus calls this only “plausible” (eikos) (§11). He is still not convinced that cowardice is due to ignorance. His resistance to Socrates’ suggestions is weak, but its weakness is much less significant, in light of the fact that it is Euthydemus who resists. Xenophon concludes the chapter with a remark that we have already commented on, about the importance for Socrates of the difference between interlocutors who objected to his arguments and
interlocutors who did not (§13-15; see p.116 above). He suggests in this way that this is Euthydemus’ finest moment.

What is significant about Euthydemus’ hesitation is not that he contradicts himself about courage, insofar as he believes that it is potentially harmful and also that cowardice is due to ignorance, which implies that courage is good. He has been contradicting himself in this way since the beginning of his first conversation with Socrates. Rather, it is that he is aware that he contradicts himself, and that he is somehow uneasy about this. He shows that he is aware that courage is harmful by hesitating to call cowards ignorant. He agrees that cowardice is ignorance, and this seems to reflect his view that his obligations should not be affected by whether or not it is in his interest to satisfy them. Yet he hesitates a second time, and this shows that the danger that courage entails does, in fact, affect his feeling of obligation and his confidence that the right course of action is the noble one. Euthydemus seems to be aware that the only way to defend the duty to be steadfast in the face of danger is by maintaining that the noble is also good for the courageous person. This bothers him, because he believes that it should not matter that courage is bad, because the noble is higher than the good. He senses that there should be some justification for his duty besides that it is in his interest, but he cannot find any such justification. His hesitation expresses dissatisfaction with the feeling that courage is only a virtue if it is in his interest. He feels that there must be some more appropriate object of his concern than himself. This is the same experience that we have when we are displeased with ourselves for failing to do what is required of us, displeasure that we feel not because we believe that our interests would be better
served by doing our duty, but because we feel that whether or not we do our duty should not depend on if this is in our interest.

Moreover, this is the first indication that we have received that Euthydemus is sensitive to the claim of the moral law in this way. Even the first discussion of justice, which certainly suggested that the basis for our devotion to justice includes but is not exhausted by our belief that justice is good, did not make Euthydemus aware of the problem. He attributed his confusion in that conversation to his own stupidity rather than to the complexity of the matter itself (IV 2.39). He has never called into question his belief that some moral or political activity is adequate to satisfy his deepest aspirations, until now. It may be that it has taken Socrates four long conversations in order to discover that Euthydemus is dissatisfied, however dimly, with any pursuit that turns out to be motivated merely by his concern with himself, and that something in him is not motivated by this concern. If he chose, Socrates could force Euthydemus to clarify this dim dissatisfaction, just as this whole dissertation has been attempting to do, and ultimately to concede that he, too, wants more than anything else to live in light of the truth. But Socrates, who does not want to upset Euthydemus, chooses not to do this (IV 2.40). Instead, this is the last exchange between Socrates and Euthydemus that Xenophon reports. It is as if once Socrates finds out that Euthydemus, too, feels this tension and has within himself this division, he no longer has a reason for conversing with him.

This is plausible because Socrates has just learned something from Euthydemus, something that it has taken him four long conversations to find out and that he could not
have found out any other way. This is that Euthydemus is dissatisfied to resolve the tension between the noble and good by appealing to the goodness of virtue, and his own sensitivity to the moral law is not reducible to his concern with his happiness. He is moved by something besides his concern with himself: the feeling of obligation to obey a law makes no contribution to his happiness in return. This discovery may not benefit Euthydemus in the least, insofar as Socrates shows no inclination to continue his education, and Euthydemus is probably incapable of clarifying this inchoate awareness, or of benefiting from clarifying it. But if we are moved by the concern to understand our own experience of the moral law, to know if our feeling of obligation directs us to what is outside us and higher than us and in no way interested in our welfare, or if even this interpretation of the law is inescapably bound up with our concern with ourselves, then we receive valuable help from Euthydemus. We discover the observable phenomenon, through which this division in us comes to light: what to look for not only in ourselves but also in human nature in general. This turns out to be the phenomenon that we have been examining all along, the displeasure that we feel when we fail to do what we believe that we know to be the right thing to do.
Conclusion

This study of the *Memorabilia* has investigated Socrates’ view of the phenomenon of knowing what to do, but doing the opposite. Our investigation has distinguished between three parts or aspects of this phenomenon. One part is the feeling of knowing what to do, and in particular the devotion to virtue, the feeling that we are obligated to do what we know or believe is required of us. Accordingly, the moral attitude has been a major theme of this study, even its central theme. A second part of this phenomenon, and a second theme of this study, is whatever desire or concern moves us to do something other than what we think is required of us. The third part of this phenomenon is the displeasure that we feel when we experience it, displeasure at our inability to devote ourselves wholeheartedly to being good. It is the inchoate awareness that whatever the reasons are for failing to do one’s duty, these are not adequate excuses. We feel that the moral law does not depend for its authority over us on our assent to it.

Our articulation and investigation of the different parts of this phenomenon and the third part in particular, the feeling that our obligation should not depend on its harmony with our interests, has transformed our understanding of moral life. This is because our ordinary understanding of morality is based on the unconscious assumption that our obligations and our interests are in harmony with one another. We tend to justify our obligations by means of the belief that satisfying them is good and best for us, and that our obligations owe their power to the good results for us of satisfying our obligations. Socrates expresses this tendency axiomatically: “all people, choosing from
among the possibilities the things that they consider best for them, do these things” (III 9.4). According to this view of morality, there is no genuine difference between our feeling of obligation and our desire for what serves our interest. If they are distinct, as they are in the phenomenon of moral weakness, then this reflects the ignorance that what we are required to do is in fact best for us. We are wrong to interpret our displeasure at failing to do right as the feeling that our obligation should not depend on its harmony with our interests. Our belief that morality is in our interest, which we tend not to acknowledge to ourselves, hides from us our even deeper belief that morality is not in our interest, which we are even more reluctant to acknowledge. Our conclusion that our obligation is prior to and independent of our interests appears paradoxical to the ordinary moral view, because it contradicts much that we believe about our obligation. In order to arrive at this conclusion, we have had to correct our understanding of our obligations, to discover both that they do not coincide with our interests and that even after we discover this we still feel bound by our obligations. Above all, we have had to realize the influence that our desires and hopes exert on our ordinary opinions about virtue.

The root in us, in our natural constitution, of our feeling that our happiness is not the highest concern and that we are obligated to live a certain way whether we want to or not, is that we are aware that we are going to die. The root in us of the tendency to deceive ourselves about virtue and to believe that our obligations and our interests coincide, is the fact that this prospect, this awareness of how unsupported our striving and our happiness are, is what we fear most of all. What we want most of all is to be reassured that this is not the case.
The core of every incorrect view of virtue is the unconscious, false belief or hope that death is not as terrible a thing as it seems, at least not for the virtuous person. This belief affects our view of what our obligations are. It makes us unconsciously view the best activity and way of life as means to an end, and further to an end that is not within our reach, the end of depriving death of its fearsomeness. Such views of virtue are false, not only because they aim at unattainable goals, but also because the striving for these goals is not the proper activity for a human being. We can only find these pursuits fulfilling if we pretend to be something other than we are. The most extreme instance of this is the case of someone who is willing to lay down his life because he believes unconsciously that this is the greatest good for him. But this is not the only instance, or the most common one. There are many pursuits that require us to deny ourselves many of the most natural and enjoyable experiences on the ground that this is what is noble and what we are obligated to do, and this self-denial is in some way inhuman. Such false views of virtue hinder our pursuit of true virtue, of the activity that is most suitable for us.

The two chapters of this dissertation discussed two powerful views of virtue, and exposed how both of these views are affected by the same illusion: why they are false, and what correction they require. First, we considered political virtue. We concentrated on the most demanding aspects of political virtue, the sacrifices that political communities require their leaders and their citizens to make, and we considered how the ordinary moral attitude justifies these sacrifices. This justification turns out to be that such sacrifices are intrinsically worthwhile and, in addition, that what is most in our interest and best for us is to make these intrinsically worthwhile sacrifices and be good
people. The second part of this belief, which is that the noble is good and that the
greatest good for man coincides with the greatest evil, is false. In turn, the first part of
this belief turned out to depend on the second part. We do not believe that these
sacrifices are worthwhile unless they make us good people and it is good for us to be
good people. We were led to conclude that the belief that these sacrifices are intrinsically
worthwhile is arbitrary, and that we do not know what virtue is.

The part of this ordinary moral attitude that affords the truest guidance about how
to live is what remained after we were disillusioned of the belief that a noble death can
somehow be good for us. This is the noble disdain for merely economic concerns, for all
of the enjoyments that make life worth living and that make so many people resist
serving their country. The moral attitude is aware that what matters more than any of
these concerns, and the most, is that we are going to die, and that this casts a shadow on
the worth of ordinary human concerns. But the moral attitude makes an exception to this
insight for itself. It hopes that precisely its ability to realize that our petty concerns and
efforts do not matter, is the exception to the rule that it itself perceives, and that the
ability to rise above these concerns is the condition of the happiness that we always long
for but can never have. The moral attitude hopes that we can act on our awareness of
what is most important, noblest and highest, in a way that is itself good for us; it hopes
that the noble is good.

The correction that this attitude requires is to distinguish between the noble and
the good, and to extend the depreciation of the human things to all of the human things,
including the awareness of our mortality that is itself the source of this insight. The only
good thing that we have a right to hope for in return for performing noble services for our fellow-citizens is their gratitude and friendship, and the only thing that we can hope for in return for the awareness that we are going to die, on which the moral attitude is based, is the pleasure of understanding, of being fully human. To this extent, our study of political virtue ended with the vindication of our intuitive reaction to our failure to do what we think is right. We are justifiably displeased with ourselves for allowing our concern with ourselves to distract us from virtue.

Yet our obligation is not what we initially thought. Virtue turns out to be a matter of understanding that we are mortal, but not of acting on that understanding in an unconscious attempt to fundamentally alter our situation, as ordinary political virtue does. Moreover, the activity of understanding is itself transformed when we realize that our intellectual efforts do not aim at our own happiness, and that we are not the most important objects of our own attention. Virtue is rendered less anthropocentric, less focused on the human things whose insignificance is made clear to us by our dim awareness of the highest things, and more focused on the highest things themselves. The correction that ordinary morality requires seems to be supplied by philosophy.

Accordingly, the second chapter considered the Socratic education to philosophical virtue. Like the ordinary moral attitude, the ordinary approach to understanding our situation proves to be influenced by the illusion that we can be secure against what we fear most. The Socratic approach to philosophy is presented as the correction of a pseudo-scientific attitude, which is itself a correction of the ordinary moral attitude insofar as it is free from the illusion that what we fear most is actually best
for us. This pseudo-scientific view is that although what we fear most will inevitably come to pass, still our ability to understand can afford us a measure of security by discovering the ultimate reasons why we must die and why we exist at all. This, too, proved to be an illusion. We cannot know the meaning or purpose of human life. We can know so little about our situation that we are forced to raise the questions, can we know anything at all, and even if we can, is achieving the little knowledge that we can have really the greatest use of our abilities?

The Socratic approach to these questions answers them in the affirmative, on the basis of the analysis of our devotion to virtue, our experience of being bound by law. Our obligation to obey the law is unconditional. It is the awareness of something simply necessary. This awareness of necessity is itself a natural activity of the human soul and, Socrates claims, its highest activity, no matter what its object turns out to be, no matter what the intelligible necessities are. The other view, the view that philosophy aims at specific results and depends for its validity as a way of life on its ability to achieve these results, Socrates associates rather with piety, with a law that is called into question if we cannot be sure that there is some divine support for the law. And Socrates insists that our awareness of the moral law is correctly described as justice, and not as piety. The pious attitude falls victim to a more subtle form of the same false hope as the moral attitude: the hope that nature is not indifferent to our welfare. It is the hope that what we perceive of the natural order is in harmony with our needs and passions and that our faculties are in harmony with one another.
The question is if Socrates’ view of moral life is correct. Does this division in us really exist, so that the highest part of us finds its fulfillment in the truly disinterested acceptance of things the way that they are, without trying to derive any benefit from those things that are indifferent or hostile to our happiness, or any greater benefit from the things that are good for us than our natural situation allows? Can justice really be distinguished from piety, and is it really more fundamental than piety? Is the mere acceptance and understanding of necessity a truly meaningful intellectual activity, even if we cannot discover conclusive answers to the most fundamental questions? We suggested that part of the answer to these questions is furnished by the very phenomenon that we have been considering all along, by the fact that we are displeased with ourselves when we put our interests ahead of our obligations. To the extent that all people naturally experience or can be made to experience this displeasure and to concede explicitly or implicitly to an interlocutor that they have this experience, this means that no good thing, no happiness, no feeling of security or reassurance, is as important to us as simply obeying the law and taking our bearings from what we can know to be necessary, distinguishing between what is intelligible and what is unintelligible and living in accord with the former. We simply cannot be satisfied with ourselves if we do not live rationally.

The failure to do what one knows is right proceeds from the concern with oneself, but it is not the consciously selfish rejection of these aspects of our duty that we think are bad, because we are displeased with ourselves when we do what we know is wrong. On the contrary, we are naturally devoted to the moral law and feel obligated to obey it,
which means that we are dimly aware that we are subject to a necessity that is indifferent to our interest. Our concern with ourselves is rather unconscious: deep down, we are reluctant to admit to ourselves that what is required of us is not in our interest. We succumb unconsciously to the hope that no truly disinterested activity is required of us, and that our obligations and our interests always coincide.

This hope leads us in at least two ways to fail to do what we think is right. One way is by distorting our view of what virtue is and making the demands of virtue seem impossibly high, in order for it to seem plausible that the fulfillment of these demands may lead to the happiness that we hope for most of all. Another way in which this same hope can increase our resistance to virtue is by distorting our view of the happiness that is actually available to us, and making us believe that it is somehow noble and an intrinsically worthy object of our efforts, as worthy or worthier than virtue itself. By being carried away by our hopes, we lose sight of virtue. It is in order to avoid this that Socrates puts so much emphasis on continence, on “inner strength” (enkrateia): not so much in the sense of ascetic self-denial and insensitivity to pleasure, but as a matter of being on guard against losing control of oneself and succumbing to a false view of virtue or a false view of happiness, and in either case to a course of action that we somehow know is wrong.

But this raises a further question: do we really always unconsciously try to deceive ourselves into believing that we act out of a concern with ourselves, and that our most fundamental concern is with our own happiness? Have we really demonstrated this, or have we accepted uncritically Socrates’ axiom that “all men, choosing the option that
they think is most to their advantage, do this” (III 9.4)? To be sure, our investigation of
the moral attitude demonstrated that the noble devotion to one’s community is based on
an unconscious concern with oneself, and in the second part of this dissertation we
reached the same conclusion about the intellectual concern with first causes. But this is
hardly an exhaustive enumeration of human endeavors and motives. In particular, we
have not considered the concern with friends and family, with particular people whose
happiness seems to us to be important in its own right and a worthy object of our striving,
even if we receive nothing in return besides knowing that they are made happy by our
efforts.

Our study has not accounted for motives like friendship and love, for the genuine
devotion to another person. These motives seem to contradict Socrates’ claims that all
human action is self-interested. The mere fact that each of us is concerned with
something other than his own happiness remains far from being an adequate basis for
concluding that the only activity that satisfies this concern is a purely theoretical activity.
At the very least, we must admit that we lack the understanding of human psychology
that would be required in order to demonstrate this. Xenophon himself indicates clearly
that these questions are necessary and important, by devoting the section of the
Memorabilia that immediately precedes the analysis of political life, from which our
study began, to friendship. Absent an adequate understanding of the matters that are at
issue in this earlier section of the Memorabilia, we cannot conclude that the Socratic
view of moral psychology is true.
Bibliography


