

The Ethical Philosophy of the Historical Socrates

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1. The Socratic Problem

Viewed as the first philosopher to have made ethics his central concern and ethics itself the central concern of ancient philosophy, Socrates has long held a special place in the history of Western ethical philosophy.¹ But the enormity of Socrates' influence sharply contrasts with the complete lack of direct evidence for his philosophy. Socrates did not commit his thought to writing. Attempts to recover the content of his philosophy must use such evidence as exists in the writings of others. The main sources that have been used include Old Comedy, principally Aristophanes' *Clouds*; the literature of the Socratic writings (*Sōkratīoi logoi*), principally Plato's and Xenophon's;² and testimony scattered throughout Aristotle's corpus. These sources are problematic in various ways. Consequently, the attempt to recover Socrates' philosophy is justly described as "the Socratic problem."³

Comedians tend to caricaturize. In *The Clouds*, Aristophanes presents Socrates as a pseudo-philosophical type, a man of corrupt values, his comically exaggerated features agglomerated from various historical individuals.⁴

The Socratic writings are usually treated as our most important source. But there is broad consensus among leading scholars today that the norms of the genre of Socratic literature recommended creative and personal adaptation and expression rather than strict historical fidelity. Disparities in significant detail between Plato and Xenophon corroborate this point.⁵ Moreover, as I have argued in work on Plato's early dialogues, the characters named "Socrates" in these writings are not strictly trans-textually identical. Rather, from dialogue to dialogue, Plato uses Socrates in various ways for various purposes, albeit in similar ways and for similar purposes.⁶ Xenophon does the same.⁷ I infer that other writers

¹ This chapter is a significantly revised and expanded version of D. Wolfsdorf, "The Historical Socrates" ["Historical"], in C. Bobonich, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Ethics* (Cambridge, 2017), 30–50.

² For an overview of the Socratics, cp. K. Döring, "The Students of Socrates," in D. Morrison, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Socrates [Companion]* (Cambridge, 2010), 24–47.

³ Cp. L.-A. Dorion, "The Rise and Fall of the Socratic Problem" ["Rise"], in *Companion* (2010) 1–23; R. Waterfield, "The Quest for the Historical Socrates," in J. Bussanich and N.D. Smith, eds., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Socrates [Socrates]* (London, 2013), 1–19. For a collection of responses to the problem, cp. A. Patzer, ed., *Der historische Sokrates* (Darmstadt, 1985).

⁴ Cp. A. Patzer, "Die Wolken des Aristophanes als philosophiegeschichtliches Dokument," in P. Neukam, ed., *Klassische Sprachen und Literatur*, Bd. 27 (Munich, 1993), 72–93; "Sokrates in den Fragmenten der Attischen Komödie," in A. Bierl and P. von Möllendorff, eds., *Orchestra: Drama Mythos Bühne* (Stuttgart, 1994), 50–81; D. Konstan, "Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds*," in *Companion* (2010), 75–90; A. Laks and R. Saetta-Cottone, eds., *Comédie et philosophie : Socrate et les présocratiques dans les "Nuées" d'Aristophane [Comédie]* (Paris, 2013).

⁵ Cp. Dorion "Rise."

⁶ Cp. D. Wolfsdorf, "Interpreting Plato's Early Dialogues," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 27 (2004), 15–41.

⁷ Cp. D.L. Gera, "Xenophon's Socrateses," in M. Trapp, ed., *Socrates from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Surrey, 2007), 33–50.

of Socratic literature also did. In sum, various authors used characterizations of Socrates to explore and advance philosophical thought of their own, albeit philosophical thought variously indebted to and inspired by the historical Socrates as well as variously informed by and engaged with one another.⁸

Aristotle arrived in Athens as a teenager in 367 BCE. His earliest extant testimonies must then have been composed more than a half-century after Socrates' death. This body of testimonial evidence has largely been discounted on the ground that Aristotle typically does not distinguish between the views of the historical Socrates and those of a character Socrates in a given Socratic writing.⁹ Moreover, most of the claims Aristotle attributes to Socrates can be recovered from Plato's Socratic dialogues.¹⁰

In view of the great influence that Socrates had on ancient ethical philosophy and that he has had on the entire Western ethical philosophical tradition, these evidentiary problems yield a disappointing result: we can plausibly grasp a few general, often only very general features of Socrates' ethics, but not its details. Moreover, the general features are ones that we would probably grasp prior to careful examination: that ethics was central to Socrates' philosophy; that Socrates' philosophical thought and activity were somehow informed by his alleged experiences of divinity; that Socrates viewed a condition of the soul (*psychē*), precisely knowledge of some kind as centrally responsible for wellbeing; and that some form of reasoned argumentation was central to Socrates' philosophical activity. On the other hand, it requires some expertise to confirm and clarify these claims and to explain why others as well as more detailed proposals are unwarranted or merely speculative. Regarding speculative proposals, in particular I will consider whether Socrates' ethics was eudaimonistic.

2. Ethics and the Scope of Socrates' Philosophy

Consider the following thesis:

(1a) Ethics was central to Socrates' philosophy.¹¹

⁸ In anglophone scholarship, the most significant recent attempt to solve the Socratic problem is Gregory Vlastos's argument that a set of Plato's dialogues, regarded as his earliest, represents a coherent body of philosophical thought, distinct from the thought of Plato's middle dialogues, and that the philosophy of Plato's early dialogues represents the thought of the historical Socrates. (*Socrates Ironist and Moral Philosopher [Ironist]*, Ithaca, 1991, esp. 45–106) Today most leading scholars of Socrates and the Socratic writings reject Vlastos's argument for various reasons. Cp. Dorion "Rise," esp. 14–16, and n.38 with references to M. Bandini and L.-A. Dorion, *Mémoires: Introduction Générale [Mémoires]*, vol. 1 (Paris, 2000).

⁹ Cp. A.-H. Chroust, "Socrates in Light of Aristotle's Testimony," *New Scholasticism* 26 (1952), 327–65—although I believe its conclusions are too extreme; T. Deman, *Le témoignage d'Aristote sur Socrate* (Paris, 1942); O. Gigon, "Die Sokratesdoxographie bei Aristoteles," *Museum Helveticum* 16 (1959), 174–212. For a recent, more charitable treatment of Aristotle's testimony, cp. N.D. Smith, "Aristotle on Socrates," in F. de Luise and A. Stavru, eds., *Socrates and the Socratic Dialogue* (Leiden, 2018), 601–22.

¹⁰ While Aristotle surely read many Socratic writings other than Plato's, in his surviving writings he has nothing to say about any particular others. Among other Socratics, he mentions Aristippus twice (996a32, 1078a33) and Antisthenes several times (104b21, 1024b32, 1043b24, 1284a15, 1407a9). For a recent discussion of Aristotle's conception of the *Sōkratikoí logoi*, cp. A.L. Ford, "Sōkratikoí Logoi in Aristotle and the Fourth-Century Theories of Genre," in *Classical Philology* 105 (2010), 221–35; "The Beginnings of Dialogue: Socratic Discourses and Fourth-Century Prose," in S. Goldhill, ed., *The End of Dialogue* (Cambridge, 2008), 29–44.

¹¹ By "Socrates' philosophy," I mean Socrates' mature philosophy. Plausibly, when he began to engage in philosophy the problems that preoccupied Socrates were those central to Presocratic philosophy. The autobiographical section of Plato's *Phaedo* (96a–102a) is consistent with this point. I see no way of identifying when ethics

No one would doubt this, but what actually justifies (1a)? One consideration is the prominence of related claims among ancient testimonies as early as Aristotle, claims for which there is no serious contradictory evidence.¹² Above, I said that Aristotle's testimony can largely be discounted; I did not say that it should wholly be discounted. In a few passages, Aristotle clearly takes himself to be describing the historical Socrates. Some of these remarks, taken in conjunction with other evidence, can be used to corroborate certain claims about Socrates.

A second consideration supporting (1a) is that ethics is central in most extant Socratic writings, including Plato's, Xenophon's, and the fragments of Aeschines. In addition, evidence regarding lost Socratic writings suggests that ethics was central to their contents too.¹³ This point also illustrates a methodological principle. Here is one way that Socratic literature can be used to make plausible claims about the historical Socrates' philosophy: if there is uniformity or if there are at least prevailing tendencies in the contents of the surviving literature or of what we know about the genre and these prevailing tendencies are not contradicted, then it is reasonable to infer that such content derives from the historical Socrates.¹⁴

(1a) does not exclude other topics from prominence in Socrates' philosophy. But consider one of Aristotle's testimonies. The context is Aristotle's account of the various philosophical contributions of his predecessors. Clearly then Aristotle takes himself to be making a claim about the historical Socrates:

And when Socrates, busying himself with ethical matters (*peri men ta ēthika*) and not nature as a whole (*peri de tēs holēs physeōs outhen*) . . .¹⁵

became a central focus of Socrates' philosophy. (For a valuable discussion of the relation between Socrates and his alleged mentor Archelaus, cp. G. Bétég, "Archelaus on Cosmogony and the Origins of Social Institutions," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 51 (2016), 1–40; and "Socrate et Archélaos dans les Nuées. Philosophie naturelle et éthique," in Laks and Saetta-Cottone, *Comédie*.)

¹² Thesis (1a) is to be distinguished from the claim that Socrates is the founder of ethical philosophy or that Socrates is the founder of the Western ethical philosophical tradition. The first of the two latter claims is most famously expressed by Cicero (*Tusc.* 5.10; cp. *Acad.* 1.4.15). The latter, which occurs for instance in Thomas Reid's lectures on practical ethics—"Socrates] has always been reckoned the Father of Moral Philosophy" (Thomas Reid, *Practical Ethics*, K. Haakonssen, ed. (Princeton, 1990), 110; cited from Jerome Schneewind, "No Discipline, No History: The Case of Moral Philosophy," in *Essays on the History of Moral Philosophy*, Oxford, 2010, 107–26, at 108)—continues to be advanced. For example, Terry Irwin's recent massive three volume *The Development of Ethics* (Oxford, 2007), 13–45, begins with Socrates and reiterates this position.

¹³ This evidence is assembled in G. Giannantoni, *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae* [SSR], vols. 1–4 (Naples, 1990). Some of this material is translated in G. Boys-Stones and C. Rowe, *The Circle of Socrates* [Circle] (Indianapolis, 2013). In particular, cp. SSR IV A 166, 167. On Antisthenes, most likely the oldest of the Socratics, cp. A. Brancacci, "The Socratic Profile of Antisthenes' Ethics" ["Profile"], in U. Zilioli, ed., *From the Socratics to the Socratic Schools* [Socratics] (New York, 2015); and S. Prince, *Antisthenes of Athens* [Antisthenes] (Ann Arbor, 2016). On Aeschines, cp. A.E. Taylor, "Aeschines of Sphettus," in *Philosophical Studies* (London, 1934), 1–27; C.H. Kahn, "Aeschines on Socratic Eros" ["Eros"], in P.A. Vander Waerdt, ed., *The Socratic Movement* [Movement] (Ithaca, 1994), 87–106; K. Lampe, "Rethinking Aeschines of Sphettus," in Zilioli, *Socratics*, 61–81.

¹⁴ Consider the following problem. In some Platonic dialogues, Socrates is the central philosophical protagonist; but the central content of those dialogues is not ethical, for example, *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus*. If the centrality of ethical content is a necessary condition of membership in the genre of Socratic literature, then appeal to this literature to justify (1a) is circular. Assuming a familiar view of Plato's literary chronology, one way around this problem is to restrict Plato's Socratic writings to Plato's early dialogues. The idea, familiar enough, would then be that later in his career, Plato's thought developed in directions beyond the scope of Socrates' philosophy.

¹⁵ *Metaph.* 987b1–2 (I cite the continuation below); cp. 1078b17; Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.2, 1.4.1, 4.7.2–8. (Note that I render "aretē," as commonly, as "excellence." I do not regard this as a strictly faithful translation, but a

This testimony supports (1a), but suggests further that:

(1b) The focus of Socrates' philosophy excluded *physiologia*, that is, the natural philosophy central to most so-called Presocratic philosophy.

Content from some of Plato's writings corroborates this aspect of Aristotle's claim.¹⁶ One might however wonder whether Aristotle's claim principally derives from these Platonic texts. But support for (1b) also derives from testimony pertaining to other Socratics' disregard of natural philosophy; for example:

For this reason, the ancient figure of Socrates, whom one might call the father and founder of wisdom of the more valuable sort, did not, even so, think that he should look into other things . . . and devoted all his research to good things and bad things and how a human being and a household and a city should become *eudaimōn* . . . The true chorus of Socrates stuck within these limits: Cebes, Phaedo, Aristippus, Aeschines.¹⁷

Granting then that the focus of Socrates' philosophy excluded *physiologia*, political concerns are also prominent in the Socratic writings. Generally, the distinction between ethical and political philosophy is not sharp in the Socratic writings. Indeed, concerns with the relation between personal welfare and the welfare of the state are prominent in the Socratic writings.¹⁸ One reason for this is that personal and civic identity in the classical Greek polis were intimately related. In Athens, the citizenry was by present day standards small, about thirty thousand men, and politics was broadly inclusive and involved direct representation.¹⁹ In fact, Aristotle himself remarks in a passage from *Parts of Animals*, in which he is also clearly talking about the period of Socrates' historical activity:

By the time of Socrates, [contemplation of nature (*tēi physikēi theōriai*)] had advanced; but in this period inquiry into nature (*to zētein ta peri physeōs*) ceased, and those engaged in philosophy turned their attention to excellence that is useful and political (*tēn chrēsimon aretēn kai tēn politikēn*).²⁰

I conclude that:

Political philosophy was also central to Socrates' philosophy.

serviceable one. On this point, cp. D. Wolfsdorf, "Civic and Anti-Civic Ethics among the Sophists" ["Sophists"], in J. Billings and C. Moore, eds., *Cambridge Companion to the Sophists* (Cambridge, forthcoming.)

¹⁶ *Ap.* 19a–d; *Phd.* 96a–102a.

¹⁷ Them., *Or.* 35.5, from Boys-Stones and Rowe, *Circle*, 256; cp. *SSR* IV A 166, 167, 169. Cp. Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.11–16, 4.6.2–8. Cp. *PBerol* inv. 21213 r (*Corpus dei Papiri Filosofici Greci ed Latini* I.1*** [CPF] (Florence), 1999, 771–3).

¹⁸ Cp. T. Brickhouse and N.D. Smith, *Plato's Socrates* (Oxford, 1994), 137–75; J. Ober, "Socrates and Democratic Athens," in Morrison, *Companion*, 138–78; T.L. Pangle, "Socrates in the Context of Xenophon's Political Writings," in Vander Waerdt, *Movement*, 127–50; C. McNamara, "Socratic Politics in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*," *Polis* 26 (2009), 223–45. The names of political figures in the titles of other Socratic writings include: Aeschines' *Militiades*, *Aspasia*, *Alcibiades* (*SSR* VI A 22); Aristippus' *Artabazus*, *Advice to Dionysios* (*SSR* IV A 144); Euclides' *Alcibiades* (*SSR* II A 10); Antisthenes' *Cyrus*, *Aspasia*, *Alcibiades*, and *Archelaus* (*SSR* V A 41). On Antisthenes' political philosophy, cp. Prince, *Antisthenes*, 678–86.

¹⁹ Cp. M.H. Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (London, 1991), 86–124.

²⁰ 642a29–31.

Additionally, there is compelling evidence that in pursuing philosophy Socrates took himself to be influenced in some way by divinity in some form. In Plato's and Xenophon's writings, this influence is referred to as a *daimōn*. As Walter Burkert has suggested, the Greeks thought of a *daimōn* not substantively as a divinity, but as a mode of divine presence or influence. In other words, a *daimōn* is a way that divinity makes itself or its power present.²¹ In fact, this is not the only sense of the term "*daimōn*." For example, the word is also used to mean "divinity" and sometimes "soul."²² However, Burkert's description conforms to the use of "*daimōn*" in Socrates' case.

Given that Socrates' experiences of divinity were significant to his philosophical life, it is likely that:

(1c) Divinity also played an important role in Socrates' philosophy.

Moreover, I suppose that the role of divinity in Socrates' thought was intimately related to his ethics and political philosophy. There are numerous reasons for thinking so. The simplest is just that religion pervaded most aspects of ancient Greek private and civic life.²³ But more direct confirmation of (1c) comes from the fact that the topic of divinity variously features in Plato's and Xenophon's Socratic writings as well as in Aeschines', Euclides', and Antisthenes'.²⁴

Further support for (1c) can be derived from Socrates' trial, at least in the following respect: Socrates was of course prosecuted for impiety. Granted this, I underscore that throughout my discussion I marginalize the trial of Socrates as evidence for the content of Socrates' philosophy. Even if we could establish Meletus', his associates', and the jurors' motives for prosecuting and condemning Socrates, this would clarify hostile and popular conceptions of Socrates. Further evidence would then be needed to corroborate the accuracy of those conceptions. In the present case, however, whatever Socrates' views of divinity, the fact that he was tried for impiety, in conjunction with the other evidence I have cited, corroborates (1c).

One further consideration bears on the scope of Socrates' philosophy. There is compelling evidence that in pursuing philosophy Socrates took a special interest in what we may call "method." Consider one further passage from Aristotle in which again he clearly takes himself to be describing the historical Socrates:

Socrates busied himself with the excellences of character (*ēthikas aretas*) and of these was the first to seek to define the universal (*peri toutōn horizesthai katholou*)... For there are

²¹ *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, 1985), 179–81.

²² Cp. G.S. Gasparro, "Daimonic Power," in E. Eidinow and J. Kindt, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Greek Religion* (Oxford, 2015), 413–28.

²³ Cp. R. Parker, *Athenian Religion: A History* (Oxford, 1996), esp. 152–217; J. Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion* (Chapel Hill, 1983).

²⁴ For Aeschines, cp. J.-A. Mallet, "The notion of *theia moira* in Aeschines of Sphettus' fragments," in F. de Luise and A. Stavru, eds., *Socratica III [Socratica]* (Sankt Augustin, 2013), 225–32. For Euclides, cp. A. Brancacci, "The Double *Daimōn* in Euclides the Socratic," in P. Destrée and N.D. Smith, eds., *Socrates' Divine Sign: Religion, Practice, and Value in Socratic Philosophy [Divine]* (Kelowna, 2005), 143–54. For Antisthenes, cp. *SSR V A* 179–82, and A. Brancacci, "La théologie d'Antisthène," *Philosophia* 15–16 (1985/6), 218–19. For Xenophon and Plato, cp. Destrée and Smith, *Divine*; and M. McPherran, "Socratic Religion," in Morrison, *Companion*, 111–37.

two things that one may rightly attribute to Socrates: epagogic arguments (*tous epaktikous logous*) and definition of the universal (*to horizesthai katholou*).²⁵

Below, I will examine Aristotle's attribution of these particular methodological concerns. Presently, I introduce them to draw attention to any concern with method that Socrates might have had. Note that I use "method" here broadly to refer to epistemology as well as rational inquiry and argumentation. For convenience, I will refer to such methodology by the term Plato and Aristotle use: "dialectic" (*dialektikē*).²⁶ I suggest, then, that:

(1d) Dialectic was central to Socrates' philosophy.

In proposing (1d), I presume that the role that dialectic played in Socrates' philosophy differed from the roles of ethics, politics, and divinity as follows. Ethics, politics, and divinity were topical foci. I presume that dialectic was also a topical focus.²⁷ But dialectic also played a formal and epistemological role in the practice of Socratic philosophy itself.

In addition to Aristotle's testimony, support for (1d) derives from the methodological concerns that feature in Plato's and Xenophon's Socratic writings as well as testimonies suggesting that other Socratics were especially concerned with dialectic.²⁸

In sum, I propose the following description of the general scope of Socrates' philosophy:

Ethics, political philosophy, and divinity were central topics of Socrates' philosophy. Dialectic was central too, both topically and instrumentally.

3. Socrates' Conception of His Philosophy

Socrates certainly did not conceive of his philosophy as inquiry into *ta ēthika*. The association of that phrase with ethics was principally due to the influence of Aristotle's character (*ēthos*)-centric conceptualization of ethics. The term "*ēthos*" and its cognates are not rare in Xenophon's Socratic writings.²⁹ But their occurrences do not suggest a

²⁵ *Metaph.* 1078b18–29. Cp. "[And Socrates] . . . was inquiring, among these [ethical matters], into the universal and was the first to focus his mind on definitions" (987b1–4).

²⁶ Aristotle uses the word in the *Metaphysics* passage in question. The earliest surviving occurrences of the word are in Plato. However, the titles *Peri tou dialegesthai* and *Peri dialektou* are listed among Antisthenes' writings (SSR V A 41). Cp. Xen. *Mem.* 4.5.12.8. On Aristotle's own conception of dialectic, cp. J.D.G. Evans, *Aristotle's Concept of Dialectic* (Cambridge, 1977); A. Beriger, *Die aristotelische Dialektik: ihre Darstellung in der Topik und in den Sophistischen Widerlegungen und ihre Anwendung in der Metaphysik M 1–3* (Heidelberg, 1989).

²⁷ Support for this claim derives from the importance of epistemological and argumentational topics in the works of various Socratics. I return to this point below.

²⁸ Some of this evidence is discussed below. Beyond that, on Aristippus, cp. K. Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism [Birth]* (Princeton, 2015), 57–63; T. Dorandi, "Epicureanism and Socraticism: The Evidence on the Minor Socratics from the Herculaneum Papyri," in Zilioli, *Socratics*. On Antisthenes, cp. A. Brancacci, *Oikeios Logos: La Filosofia del Linguaggio di Antistene [Oikeios]* (Naples, 1990); Prince, *Antisthenes*, 422–540. For Euclides, cp. SSR II A 3, 34. For a recent discussion of Socratic dialect in Xenophon, cp. Andreas Patzer, "Xenophon's Socrates as Dialectician" ["Dialectician"], in V. Gray, ed., *Xenophon [Xenophon]* (Oxford, 2010), 228–56; C. Natali, "Socrates' Dialectic in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*," in L. Judson and V. Karasmanis, eds., *Remembering Socrates: Philosophical Essays* (Oxford, 2006), 3–19. For a review of recent interpretations of Socratic method in Plato's Socratic dialogues, with particular focus on the *elenchos*, cp. D. Wolfsdorf, "Socratic Philosophizing," in Bussanich and Smith, *Socrates*, 35–65.

²⁹ *Mem.* 3.10.3.3, 5.8; 4.8.11.16; *Smp.* 8.3.6, 13.3, 16.2; *Oec.* 15.12.1, 21.11.1.

conception of ethical theory in terms of “*ēthos*.” At least until Plato’s last work, *Laws*, the term “*ēthos*” and its cognates are rare in his corpus. Furthermore, the idea that *ēthos* has a principal place within ethics is informed by a certain conception of the soul and its parts or faculties. Below, I argue that Socrates used “*psychē*” to mean “soul” and that psyche, conceived as soul, was central to his ethics. However, we have no compelling evidence regarding the historical Socrates’ view of the structure of the psyche.

It is more plausible that one way Socrates conceived of his philosophy was as inquiry into the good (*to agathon*),³⁰ more precisely the human good.³¹ Granted this, observe that the phrase “the human good” conflates an important distinction between “the goodness of a human being” and “that which is good for a human being.” I presume that Socrates took an interest in both, for both topics are engaged in the surviving Socratic writings as well as in what we know of the contributions and ideas of the Socratics whose writings do not survive.

It may be wondered whether Socrates’ interests included a more abstract concern with the good per se. For instance, the *Dissoi Logoi*, composed in the late fifth or early fourth century BCE, contains an abstract discussion of this kind, precisely into the relation between the good and the bad and whether the good is unified.³² Then again, Socrates’ concern might have been more narrowly focused on the nature of good citizenship and leadership. These latter topics are prominent in various Socratic writings. As such, they indicate one significant way that ethics and political philosophy might have been integrated in the historical Socrates’ thought.

If Socrates did take an interest in all three—the good, the human good, and good citizenship and leadership—there is no reason to believe that he regarded a description such as “the good” or “the good of a man”³³ as definitively identifying the unifying concern of his philosophy.³⁴ For instance, assuming Socrates conceived of his philosophy as unified in some way, reasonable alternatives might be: care for the self (*epimeleia heautou*),³⁵ political or royal craft (*politikē/basilikē technē*),³⁶ education (*paideia*) of some kind,³⁷ or service to the divine (*therapeia theou*).³⁸

In his *Memorabilia*, Xenophon characterizes Socrates’ philosophical concerns this way:

His own conversations always concerned human affairs (*ta anthrōpina*). He inquired into the nature of piety and impiety, excellence and badness, justice and injustice, sound-mindedness and madness, courage and cowardice, state and statesman, government and

³⁰ Cp. A. Patzer, “Sokrates also Philosoph: Das Gute,” *Studia Socratica* (Tübingen, 2012), 8–31. Cp. Pl. *Ap.* 29b8–9.

³¹ Cp. Pl. *Ap.* 38a1–6.

³² 90 DK, 1.1–17. Cp. Pl. *Prt.* 333d8–334d6; Xen. *Mem.* 3.8.1–4. Note that one of Antisthenes’ works has the title *On Good* (SSR V A 41).

³³ Cp. Pl. *Prt.* 325a2.

³⁴ It is also worth noting that in the fifth and early fourth centuries, phrases of the form “*τὸ α*,” where “*α*” stands for some evaluative adjective, are rare outside of the Socratic writings and the *Dissoi Logoi*. Possibly, Anaxagoras’ use of syntactically identical phrases consisting of non-evaluative adjectives, such as “the small/large” might have influenced ethical philosophers’ subsequent employment of phrases such as “the good/fine/just.”

³⁵ Cp. Pl. *Ap.* 36c; [Pl.] *Alc.* 1 127c. Cp. the phrase “*epimeleia heautōn*” in Aeschines’ *Alcibiades* (SSR VI A 50).

³⁶ Cp. Pl. *Prt.* 319a; *Grg.* 521d; *Euthd.* 291c.

³⁷ Cp. Antisthenes, fr. 41A Prince, fr. 160 Prince. Cp. the phrase “*paideia anthrōpōn*” in Aeschines’ *Miltiades* (SSR IV A 79). Aristippus apparently wrote a work entitled *Peri paideias* (D.L. 2.85).

³⁸ Cp. A. Brancacci’s claim that Antisthenes conceived of his ethical program as *epistēmē tōn praktēōn* (“*Episteme* and *Phronesis* in Antisthenes” [“*Episteme*”], *Methexis* 18 (2005) 7–28, at 9).

governors, and everything else that he thought someone truly noble (*kalon*) should know, or that anyone ignorant of would deserve to be called servile.³⁹

Xenophon hereby suggests that Socrates pursued knowledge that a noble person should have. Below, I will suggest that one of the salient terms that Socrates likely used to refer to such knowledge is “*sophia*” (wisdom). Given this, Socrates might have conceived of his activity simply as a pursuit of wisdom. In fact, Livio Rossetti has argued that Socrates and the Socratics were the first to define their intellectual activity as “*philosophia*.”⁴⁰ Whether or not we accept this thesis, it is likely that Socrates and in turn the Socratics took themselves to be involved in inquiry into a form of knowledge that they regarded as distinctive and especially important, and that the Socratics, if not Socrates himself, thereby appropriated the term “*philosophia*” and were subsequently responsible for an influential conception of it.

In short, there are various plausible ways that Socrates could have conceived the ethical facet of his philosophy or his philosophy as a whole. We cannot determine whether he privileged one over others.

4. Eudaimonism

From at least the mid fourth century, Greek ethical philosophy is, without exception or perhaps with one exception, eudaimonistic.⁴¹ Eudaimonism is a form of ethical theory according to which eudaimonia, understood as wellbeing, is the supreme value and governing principle (*archē*) of the theory. I have suggested that insofar as Socrates was concerned with ethics, he took himself to be concerned with the human good. I presume as well that Socrates viewed wellbeing as supremely valuable for a human being. However, I see no reason to believe that Socrates explicitly conceived of wellbeing as a governing principle in an ethical theory.

Granted this, it may be wondered whether Socrates actually spoke prominently of living a good life in terms of “*eudaimonia*”; and if so, how he understood that term.⁴² In considering these two questions, it will be helpful to remark on the meaning and use of terms with the root “*eudaim-*” in the fifth century.⁴³

Between its first extant occurrences in the seventh century and the end of the fifth century BCE, three senses of the noun “*eudaimonia*” and adjective “*eudaimōn*” appear to be distinguishable:

ETYMOLOGICAL: the condition of being favored by (a) divinity

THEODOTIC: wellbeing due divine favor

³⁹ 1.1.16; cp. Bandini and Dorion, *Mémorables*, n.44.

⁴⁰ “I Socratici ‘primi filosofici’ e Socrate ‘primo filosofo,’” in L. Rossetti and A. Stavru, eds., *Socratica 2008* [Soc28] (Amsterdam, 2010), 59–70.

⁴¹ Cp. V. Tsouana, “Is There an Exception to Greek Eudaimonism?” in P. Pellegrin and M. Canto, eds., *Le Style de la Pensée* (Paris, 2002), 464–89; Lampe, *Birth*, 92–100.

⁴² In Wolfsdorf “Historical,” I was more confident of positive answers to these questions; and I did not adequately assess the semantic evidence.

⁴³ The following linguistic remarks derive from a draft of Wolfsdorf, “Sophists.”

FELICITOUS: wellbeing.⁴⁴

Note that the polysemous sense alternations here turn on the relation of cause and effect. Such polysemy occurs widely through the world's lexica. For example, consider the following examples of cause-effect, including producer-product, sense alternations in the English words "sad," "abstract," and "newspaper":

The sad film made the audience sad.

These abstract paintings were created by Richard Diebenkorn, who in his early years was an abstract painter.

The headline in today's newspaper is that the newspaper is going out of business.

Independent support for the existence of an etymological sense of "eudaim-" derives from Aristotle, who makes the following remark in book 2 of the *Topics*:

Another method of attack is to refer a term back to its original meaning on the ground that it is more fitting to take it in this sense than in the sense that is now established... [Aristotle proceeds to offer several examples, including the following one.] Similarly, *eudaimōn* can apply to one whose *daimōn* is good (*spoudaios*), just as Xenocrates says: he who has a soul that is good is *eudaimōn*, for this [namely, the soul] is [according to Xenocrates] the *daimōn* of each person.⁴⁵

For instance, the following occurrence of the adjective in the Theognidea seems to have an etymological sense:

May I be *eudaimōn* and dear (*philos*) to the gods, Cyrnus. That is the only excellence I desire.⁴⁶

Contrast this with the following theodotic sense of the adjective in Bacchylides' fifth ode (c.475):

Prosperous (*olbios*) is he to whom god (*theos*) gives a fated share (*moiran*) of fine things and, together with enviable fortune, a wealthy life to live. For no mortal on earth has been *eudaimōn* in everything.⁴⁷

Observe the proximity of "eudaimōn" and "olbios" here. These terms are frequently conjoined. The conjunction encourages the thought that the theodotic sense of "eudaim-" more precisely entails a particular kind of wellbeing, namely a condition of wealth, which is to say, material prosperity. However, I resist this inference. Semantically, neither the theodotic nor, I suggest, the felicitous sense of "eudaim-" entails a specific form of wellbeing. Rather, wealth is a particularly common conception of wellbeing; and this is why the association is so common.

⁴⁴ The fundamental problem with the principal literature on the semantics of "eudaim-" is a failure to distinguish sense and reference. E.g., this defect mars C. de Heer, *Makar-Eudaimōn-Olbios-Euthychēs* (Amsterdam, 1969); M. McDonald, *Terms for Happiness in Euripides* (Göttingen, 1978), esp. 10–36.

⁴⁵ *Top.* 112a32–8.

⁴⁶ Theogn. 653–4. Cp. M.L. West, *Hesiod Works and Days* (Oxford, 1978), 364.

⁴⁷ Bacchylides 5.50–5.

The etymological and theodotic senses of “*eudaim-*” seem to coexist in the archaic period. The felicitous sense first appears in the later fifth century. Perhaps the clearest example occurs in the following passage of Herodotus:

I will proceed with my history, telling the story as I go along of small cities of men no less than of great. For most of those that were great once are small today; and those that used to be small were great in my own time. Knowing, therefore, that human (*anthrōpēiēn*) *eudaimoniē* never abides (*menousan*) in the same place, I will pay attention to both alike.⁴⁸

The phrase “human *eudaimoniē*” indicates that eudaimonia need not be an attribute of humans. I presume that the alternative to human eudaimonia that Herodotus has in mind is divine eudaimonia, which is precisely eudaimonia that does abide.⁴⁹ But in that case, the eudaimonia of a divinity cannot itself be due to a divinity.⁵⁰

Ignoring Socrates and the Socratics for the moment, through the fifth and early fourth centuries the term “*eudaim-*” is rare among philosophers. It occurs just six times: once in Gorgias; once in the *Dissoi Logoi*; and, somewhat exceptionally, four times among the ethical fragments of Democritus. For example, consider the noun in Democritus’ following political fragment:

Poverty (*peniē*) in a democracy is as preferable to so-called (*kaleomenēs*) *eudaimoniē* among dictators as freedom is to slavery.⁵¹

But observe that the expression “so-called” here corroborates my claim above that “eudaimonia” does not entail, but rather is saliently associated with wealth.

While the number of instances of “*eudaim-*” among fifth- and early fourth-century philosophical authors is small, if we had more texts, we would surely find other instances in them. For example, possibly the word occurred in Prodicus’ *Choice of Heracles*. At least, it occurs three times in Xenophon’s paraphrase of that work.⁵² Granted this, the principal point I want to suggest here is that there is no evidence to support the view that among fifth- and early fourth-century philosophers—and again ignoring Socrates and the Socratics—ethics was conceived explicitly in terms of the goal of “eudaimonia,” which is to say, as it came to be conceived in the classical period and thereafter.

Turning now to the Socratics, the term “*eudaimonia*” and its cognates are common in Plato’s Socratic writings and in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*. More precisely, Socrates’ ethical theory, as represented in Plato’s and Xenophon’s Socratic writings appears to be explicitly

⁴⁸ Hdt. 1.5.

⁴⁹ Herodotus, among others, sometimes attributes eudaimonia to entities other than humans or divinities, for example, to city-states and geographical locations: Corinth (Hdt. 3.52.13), Naxos (5.28.4), Euboia (5.31.12), Sparta (7.220.9); cp. Andocides, *On the Mysteries* on Athens at 109.8. But in these cases, the place is so described in terms of the resources it provides for its inhabitants’ wellbeing.

⁵⁰ Other attributions of eudaimonia to divinities occur in Plato (*Smp.* 202c6, *Ti.* 34b8) and Aristotle (*EE* 1217a23, *EN* 1101b23). Consider also Aristotle’s phrase at *EN* 1099b12: “*theodotan eudaimonian*.” The felicitous sense must also be the one that occurs in *EN* 2.1, where Aristotle asks how eudaimonia is attained and whether it is due to divine dispensation. If Aristotle were using “eudaimonia” in the theodotic sense, the question would be trivial. Note also that Theophrastus composed a work in one book entitled *On Divine Eudaimonia* (D.L. 6.49).

⁵¹ Democritus B251.

⁵² Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.17, 26, 34.

eudaimonistic. The evidence from Plato's dialogues in support of this claim has been much discussed elsewhere.⁵³ Here, I will remark on the evidence from Xenophon.

Terms with the root "*eudaim-*" occur twenty-five times in Xenophon's Socratic wrings. Granted this, the key question is whether there is evidence that eudaimonia was explicitly conceived as the supreme value in Xenophon's representation of Socrates' ethical theory. For example, the following instance of "*eudaimonia*" occurs in book 3.5, which is devoted to a discussion between Socrates and Pericles concerning the likelihood that under Pericles' command Athens' military will improve:

"Well," exclaimed Pericles, "if they [the members of the military] are now in the mood for obedience, it seems time to say how we can revive in them a longing for the old *aretē* and fame and *eudaimonia*."⁵⁴

This passage suggests that (the character) Pericles thinks that eudaimonia is at least among supreme values. But on the basis of this, it cannot be inferred that eudaimonia is explicitly conceived as the supreme value in Xenophon's Socrates' ethical theory. Moreover, this is the only instance of "*eudaimonia*" in section 3.5. So the broader context of the passage does not support any such inference.

More suggestive is the final section of *Memorabilia*, 4.8, which is devoted to a defense of Socrates' death. Here, Xenophon claims that Socrates' death was most noble (*kalon*), *eudaimon*, and dear to the gods (*theophiles*).⁵⁵ Moreover, the penultimate sentence in 4.8 and so of the *Memorabilia* as a whole is:

It seems to me that such a man [i.e., Socrates] is best (*aristos*) and most *eudaimōn* (*eudaimonestatos*).⁵⁶

This at least encourages the view that eudaimonia is conceived as among the supreme values in Xenophon's Socrates' ethical theory.

Consider also the following passages from book 1.6, which is devoted to a dialogue between Socrates and Antiphon concerning the value of philosophy for eudaimonia:

[Antiphon:] Socrates, I suppose that those who philosophize must become more *eudaimōn*. But you seem to have enjoyed the opposite from philosophy. For example, you are living a life that would drive even a slave to desert his master. Your food and drink are the poorest kind. The cloak you wear is not only poor, but is never changed in summer or winter. And you never wear shoes or a tunic . . . [Socrates:] You seem to think, Antiphon, that *eudaimonia* consists of luxury and extravagance. But my belief is that to have no wants is divine (*theion*), and that to have as few as possible comes next to the divine; and as that which is divine is best (*kratiston*), so that which approaches nearest to the divine is nearest to the best.⁵⁷

Antiphon evidently employs the felicitous sense of "*eudaimonia*" here and, as commonly, associates it with wealth. I suggest that in his response Socrates employs the felicitous sense

⁵³ E.g., Vlastos, "Happiness and Virtue in Socrates' Moral Theory," in *Ironist*, 200–32; T. Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (New York, 1995), 52–64.

⁵⁴ 3.5.7.

⁵⁵ 4.8.3.

⁵⁶ 4.8.11.

⁵⁷ 1.6.2,10.

as well. However, Socrates argues precisely against the common view of wellbeing as materially prospering. Moreover, in arguing that the best condition of human life is most akin to divine existence, Socrates also appeals to the godliness associated with the etymological meaning of the word “*eudaimonia*.” Finally, I underscore that Socrates explicitly suggests that *eudaimonia* is the best (*kratiston*) condition of life.

More evidence from Xenophon could be cited.⁵⁸ But let this suffice to support the conclusion that *eudaimonia* is explicitly treated as the supreme value in Xenophon’s Socrates’ ethical theory.⁵⁹

The contrast between the instances of “*eudaimonia*” in Plato and Xenophon, on the one hand, and in fifth-century philosophical authors, on the other, is noteworthy and calls for some explanation. I speculate that the relative frequency of “*eudaimonia*” in Plato’s and Xenophon’s Socratic writings owes to the conjunction of two things: Socrates’ conception of his philosophical activity as informed by a *daimōn* and Socrates’ critical attitude toward the value of wealth for wellbeing.

Regarding Socrates’ critical attitude toward wealth, there is compelling evidence that Socrates was poor. One source of evidence for this is old comedy. In addition to Aristophanes, several old comics ridicule Socrates for his poverty. For example, in a fragment from Ampeisias’ *Konnos*, a comedy performed in 423 BCE (the same year as the original version of Aristophanes’ *Clouds*), a character says:

Socrates . . . where would you be able to get a cloak? Your poor condition is an insult to the shoemakers. This man, however, hungry as he is, has never stooped to sponging a meal.⁶⁰

Compare the following statement from a character in a comedy of Eupolis:⁶¹

I hate Socrates, the babbling beggar, who’ll contemplate just about anything, but pays no attention to how he can eat.⁶²

Socrates’ poverty is also attested in the writings of the Socratics. For example, both Xenophon and Plato variously attempt to apologize for it:

“And how much, by the gods,” asked Critoboulos laughing, “would your property fetch at a sale, do you suppose, Socrates, and how much would mine?” “Well, if I found a good buyer, I think the whole of my goods and chattel, including the house, might readily sell for five minae. Yours, I feel sure, would fetch more than a hundred times that sum.”⁶³

⁵⁸ I have particularly in mind the instances in the exchange between Socrates and Aristippus at *Mem.* 2.1.11, 17, 26, 34; cp. 3.2.3, 4.5.12.

⁵⁹ Testimony suggests the possible use of “*eudaimonia*” by Antisthenes. Cp. D.L. 6.11 = 134 Prince. Cp. S. Prince, “Antisthenes and the Short Route to Happiness” [“Short”], in P. Bosman, ed., *Ancient Routes to Happiness* (Pretoria, 2017), 73–96.

⁶⁰ fr. 9 (= D.L. 2.27–8 = SSR I A 10); translation adapted from I.C. Storey, *Fragments of Old Comedy* (Cambridge, 2011), vol. 1. Storey notes that the common attribution of the fragment to *Konnus* is not secure. Cp. L. Edmonds, “Xenophon’s Triad of Socratic Virtues and the Poverty of Socrates” [“Poverty”], in G. Danzig, D. Johnson, D. Morrison, eds., *Plato and Xenophon* (Leiden, 2018), 255–76, at 254–5.

⁶¹ The comedy must have been composed c.429–411 BCE. On this dating for the *floruit* of Eupolis, cp. I. C. Shorey, *Eupolis: Poet of Old Comedy* (Oxford, 2003).

⁶² fr. 386 = PCG 5.511 = SSR I A 12.

⁶³ *Oec.* 2.3; cp. *Oec.* 2.11, where Socrates says he does not own animals or land.

In Plato's *Apology*, following his conviction, Socrates says that from his own resources he could pay a (measly) fine of one mina.⁶⁴

In sum, the historical Socrates was poor; he was publicly ridiculed for his poverty; and some of the Socratics attempted to defend his poverty. Granted this, in prose texts of the late fifth and early fourth centuries, the felicitous sense of "*eudaimonia*" is the most common one.⁶⁵ Moreover, in these contexts, wellbeing is most commonly associated with wealth. Now, the Socratics' representations of Socrates contradict a wealth-based view of human wellbeing. Moreover, as I have suggested, Socrates took his philosophy to be informed by his experience of a *daimōn* or daimonic thing. This encourages the hypothesis that at least some of the Socratics employed the term "*eudaimonia*" to characterize the aim of wellbeing precisely insofar as they viewed Socrates' philosophical activity as a form of divine service and so favorable to the divine and insofar as they sought to underscore the wealth-based view of human wellbeing.⁶⁶ Consider the following additional texts, which corroborate this view:

From Antisthenes: No lover of money is good, either as a king or as a free man.⁶⁷

"Come on, Antisthenes," said Socrates, "now tell us how you pride yourself on your wealth, when you have so little." "It's because in my view, my friend, people's wealth or lack of it lies not in their property, but in their souls."⁶⁸

From Aeschines: there is no poverty for a person in being fine and good.⁶⁹

In control of his lusts and appetites, he [Socrates] was most self-controlled of all men; further, in endurance of cold and heat and every kind of toil, he was most resolute; and besides, he was so trained to need only the moderate that, having very little, he was yet very content.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ *Ap.* 38b1–5; cp. T. Brickhouse and N.D. Smith *Socrates on Trial* (Oxford, 1989), 225–30. Note that Socrates' hoplite status does not contradict this evidence for his poverty. There is no ancient evidence linking the Solonian socio-economic classes with hoplites. On this, see V. Rosivach, "Zeugitai and Hoplites," *The Ancient History Bulletin* 16 (2002), 33–43.

⁶⁵ In Wolfsdorf "Historical," I suggested that in its common usage in fifth-century Athens, "*eudaimonia*" is understood in its etymological sense. Here, I was misled by C. De Heer, *Makar-Eudaimōn-Olbios-Eutykhēs* (Amsterdam, 1969). The basic problem with De Heer's account is the conflation of sense and reference throughout. As I have suggested above, in the late fifth and early fourth century in Athens, the felicitous sense was the most common one, at least in prose.

⁶⁶ The following, more speculative consideration lends further support to the preceding conclusions. Elsewhere, I have argued that both Socrates and the Socratics took a special interest in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. In particular, the Encomium to Work (vv. 287–319) and Prodicus' adaptation of it in *The Choice of Heracles* influenced how they framed and conceptualized some of their fundamental ethical concerns (D. Wolfsdorf, "Hesiod, Prodicus, and the Socratics on Work and Pleasure," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 35 (2008), 1–18). Note also that I did not discuss Antisthenes in this context; however, there is evidence for Antisthenes' engagement with Prodicus' *Choice of Heracles*' cp. Prince, "Short." At any rate, when I advanced my argument, I did not draw a connection with eudaimonism under that description. However, the ethical concerns at issue are eudaimonistic. They include questions such as: What is the place of pleasure in a good human life? And to what sort of work should one devote oneself? In fact, in Xenophon's paraphrase of Prodicus' *Choice*, each of the two paths of life offered to Heracles is characterized as "*eudaimonia*." (*Mem.* 2.1.26, 29, 33) Moreover—and I now think crucially—Hesiod's poem concludes with the first attested use of the word "*eudaimōn*."

⁶⁷ *Stob.* 3.10.41 = fr. 80 Prince. ⁶⁸ *Xen. Smp.* 4.34.

⁶⁹ *Stob.* 2.8.26. Cp. also Aeschines' favorable comparison of Aristides' poverty with Callias' wealth in his *Callias* (SSR VI A 75 = *Plu. Aristid.* 25, 4–9).

⁷⁰ *Xen. Mem.* 1.2.1.

These results provide some support for the view that Socrates himself might have explicitly conceived of his ethics as eudaimonistic, again on account of both his piety and the importance of the *daimōn* to his activity and in criticizing the common wealth-based view of eudaimonia.⁷¹ However, I underscore that this is a speculative suggestion.

5. *Psychē* and Knowledge

From the archaic period into the fifth century, the word “*psychē*” was principally used to mean “life” or “vital spirit.” For example, even as late as the text known as the *Anonymus Iamblichi*, typically dated to c.400, the author uses the word “*psychē*” in this way.

However, in the course of the fifth century, some philosophers appropriated the word “*psychē*” to mean something like “soul.”⁷² According to this usage, the psyche was regarded as in some sense a substantial unity, contrasted with the body, and responsible for a range of what we now call “psychological” capacities and functions. The earliest such secure instances occur in the fragments of Heraclitus.⁷³ Examples contemporaneous with Socrates occur among the ethical fragments of Democritus, for example:

Eudaimoniē does not dwell in herds or in gold; the soul (*psychē*) is the dwelling place of the divine (*daimonos*).⁷⁴

This philosophical development was momentous for the history of ethics, for the psyche thereby came to be viewed as a personal power governing or shaping one’s life.

In the case of Socrates, it is widely believed that:

(2a) Socrates used “*psychē*” to mean “soul.”

Indeed, it is widely believed that:

(2b) Psyche, that is, soul, was central to Socrates’ ethics.

Weak evidence for (2a) derives from two instances of “*psychē*” in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*.⁷⁵ David Claus comments: “remarkably, [these passages] attribute *sophia* to the *psyche*, an association that, with the exception of Heraclitus B118 and the Gorgianic *Helen*, is original to this play.”⁷⁶

But stronger evidence for (2a) comes from the following considerations. First, the word “*psychē*” has the sense of “soul” in Plato’s early dialogues and Xenophon’s Socratic writings; for example, consider the following instance from Xenophon:

When the soul, which is alone the indwelling center of intelligence . . .⁷⁷

⁷¹ Cp. D.M. Schaps, “Socrates and the Socratics: When Wealth Became a Problem,” *Classical World* 96 (2003), 131–57, who argues that Socrates’ attitude “constituted a radical departure from accepted ideas about wealth” (133); and D.L. Blank, “Socratics Versus Sophists on Payment for Teaching,” *Classical Antiquity* 41 (1985), 1–49.

⁷² Cp. D. Claus, *Toward the Soul* (New Haven, 1981); C. Huffman, “The Pythagorean Conception of the Soul from Pythagoras to Philolaus,” in D. Frede and B. Reis, eds., *Body and Soul in Ancient Philosophy* (Berlin, 2009), 21–43.

⁷³ E.g., B65. ⁷⁴ Democritus B171. ⁷⁵ *Nu.* 94, 414–15.

⁷⁶ (1981) 157; cp. C. Moore, “Socrates *Psychagōgos* (*Birds* 1555, *Phaedrus* 261a7),” in de Luise and Stavru, *Socratica*, 41–55.

⁷⁷ *Mem.* 1.2.53; cp. 1.2.23; 1.3.5.1.

Some of these dialogues were almost certainly composed in the decade immediately after Socrates' death. If Socrates did not use "*psychē*" to mean "soul," then the fact that Plato and Xenophon do so without fanfare or special explanation itself requires explanation.

Furthermore, there is evidence of the term "*psychē*" meaning "soul" in Antisthenes:

Antisthenes said . . . that the walls of poleis are vulnerable to the traitor within, but the walls of the soul are unshakeable and unbreakable.⁷⁸

From Antisthenes: Those who are going to become good men must exercise their body with gymnastics and their soul with education.⁷⁹

Finally, there is evidence from Attic Greek contemporaneous with Socrates of "*psychē*" used to mean "soul."⁸⁰

All of these considerations strongly encourage the view that Socrates used the term "*psychē*" to mean "soul" and that psyche, that is, soul, was central to Socrates' ethics. In short, I maintain both (2a) and (2b).

Granted this, a central feature of classical and post-classical Greek eudaimonistic ethics is the view that a certain condition of the soul is necessary for eudaimonia. With the exception of the various forms of skepticism, all of the major classical and post-classical philosophical schools maintain that one such condition of the soul necessary for eudaimonia is knowledge of some kind. For example, in Aristotle, the knowledge in question is called "*phronēsis*" (at least with respect to civic eudaimonia); and in the Old Stoics, it is called "*sophia*."

In considering these ideas in relation to the ethics of the historical Socrates, it will be helpful to distinguish the following claims:

(3a) Some condition of the soul is necessary for wellbeing (whether or not this is explicitly conceived as eudaimonia).

(3b) Some sort of epistemic state is necessary for wellbeing.

In addition, let me add the following claim, which is relevant to the assessment of Socrates' commitments to (3a) and (3b):

(3c) Entities such as courage (*andreia*), moderation (*sophrosynē*), and justice (*dikaïosynē*) are epistemic states.

Following Claus's remark on the instances of "*psychē*" in Aristophanes' *Clouds* cited above, I will assume that Socrates held that knowledge of some kind—there called "*sophia*"—is a condition of the soul. Accordingly, if Socrates held (3b), then he held (3a).

There is strong evidence that Socrates held (3b). The Socratics variously commit to some such position; for example:

[Antisthenes:] *Phronēsis* is the most secure wall; it neither crumbles nor betrays us.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Epiphan., *Abbreviated True Creed* 9.30 = fr. 107 Prince.

⁷⁹ Stob. 2.31.68 = fr. 163A Prince.

⁸⁰ Antiphon *Tetralogies* 1: 1.4.1, 4.5.4; 3: 1.6.4, 1.7.5; Herodes 82.5, 93.6, 93.9; Eur. *Alc.* 619.

⁸¹ SSR V A 134.16–17.

Euclides... claimed that the good was one thing, called by many names, sometimes “*phronēsis*,” sometimes “god,” at other times “intelligence” (*nous*), and so on.⁸²

In a fragment from Phaedo’s *Zopyrus*, the character Socrates claims to have cured his psychological defects by means of reason (*ratione*).⁸³

In a passage in Plato’s *Euthydemus*, Socrates argues that knowledge—which he interchangeably calls “*sophia*” and “*phronēsis*”—is the only condition of the soul that is invariantly good, and which is required for eudaimonia.⁸⁴

In Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*, Socrates identifies *sophia* and *epistēmē*;⁸⁵ and he claims that *sophia* is the greatest good (*megiston agathon*).⁸⁶

Accordingly, I infer that the historical Socrates was committed to (3b) and, again, therefore to (3a).

In addition, there is evidence from the Socratics to suggest that Socrates was committed to a position akin to (3c), again: entities such as courage (*andreia*), moderation (*sophrosynē*), and justice (*dikaiosynē*) are epistemic states.

Although the inquiries in Plato’s *Laches*, *Charmides*, and *Republic* book 1 all end in aporia, they all tend toward purely epistemic conceptions of courage, moderation, and justice respectively. Likewise, in *Protagoras* Socrates argues, albeit ultimately inconclusively, that courage, moderation, justice, and piety are all epistemic states.

In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon claims that Socrates identified moderation and *sophia*, and justice and *sophia*.⁸⁷ According to Xenophon, Socrates does not identify courage and *sophia*;⁸⁸ however, he does maintain that the degree of courage that a man naturally has may be augmented through learning (*mathēsis*) and practice (*meletē*).

Diogenes Laertius attributes the following *doxa* to the Megarians:

[Aristo of Chios] did not propose that there were many *aretai* [here, at least courage, justice, and moderation are included in the extension of “*aretai*”], as Zeno (of Citium) did; nor that there was one called by many names, as the Megarians did.⁸⁹

In light of the *doxa* that Diogenes attributes to Euclides, the founder of the Megarian school, that the good is called by many names, among them “*phronēsis*” and “intelligence,” I infer that Euclides was committed to the view that courage, justice, and moderation are epistemic states and, more strongly, that they are a single epistemic state.

In sum, there is some reason to believe that Socrates held that at least some members of the set {justice, courage, moderation, piety} are epistemic states. However, particularly in light of Xenophon’s treatment of courage, it seems prudent to resist the view that Socrates held that all of these entities are epistemic states. Perhaps Socrates’ own view was

⁸² D.L. 2.106 = Euclides 30.

⁸³ Cic. *Tusc.* 4.80 (= fr. 7 Rossetti); cp. G. Boys-Stone, “Phaedo of Elis and Plato on the Soul,” *Phronesis* 49 (2004), 1–23.

⁸⁴ *Euthd.* 278e–282a; cp. *Men.* 87b–89c. ⁸⁵ *Mem.* 4.6.7.

⁸⁶ *Mem.* 4.5.6. Note that Xenophon’s position is not that *sophia* is the only good or the only invariantly good thing. First, Xenophon recognizes the possibility of *akrasia*. So, he also recognizes the value of *enkrateia*. Furthermore, Xenophon acknowledges that *sophia* can be harmful to its possessor. In other words, he does not accept the Platonic Socratic view that no harm can come to an individual who possesses *sophia*.

⁸⁷ *Mem.* 3.9.4–5. ⁸⁸ *Mem.* 3.9.1–3. ⁸⁹ D.L. 7.161.

inconclusive regarding some of the so-called *aretai*, and various Socratics developed the idea in various ways.

6. *Technē, Sophia, Epistēmē*

Given that Socrates viewed knowledge of some kind as necessary for wellbeing, what did Socrates take this knowledge to consist in? For convenience, I will hereafter refer to the knowledge in question as “practical knowledge.”

In considering Socrates’ conception of practical knowledge, I will focus on Socrates’ conception of the dispositional epistemic attitude constitutive of practical knowledge. Regarding this attitude, in Plato’s and Xenophon’s Socratic writings, practical knowledge is often examined in relation to forms of technical or craft knowledge, in a word *technē*.⁹⁰ A familiar question in Platonic scholarship in particular is whether practical expertise is a *technē* or rather whether *technē* analogies are merely employed to explore ethical epistemology. *Technē* analogies are also used in fragments of Aeschines’ *Miltiades* and *Alcibiades*.⁹¹ In addition, Aristotle mentions that Aristippus favorably contrasted *technai* with mathematics, insofar as the former concern themselves with things that are good and bad.⁹² Consequently, I infer that in examining the nature of practical knowledge Socrates himself employed *technē* analogies. The fact that he did is itself a remarkable and ingenious contribution to ethical epistemology.⁹³

In light of the preceding, there is good reason to believe that Socrates would have called practical knowledge “*technē*” of some kind. For example, in Plato’s *Protagoras* he uses the phrase “*politikē technē*.”⁹⁴ Granted this, there is additional evidence on the basis of which to comment on another one of the signal terms that Socrates might have used to refer to practical knowledge.

To this point in the chapter, I have favored the term “*sophia*” and rendered it as “wisdom.” “*Sophia*” or the Ionian cognate “*sophiē*” was indeed one of the terms some philosophers of the fifth century such as Heraclitus and Empedocles employed to characterize a master skill or epistemic capacity that enabled its possessor to govern his life well.⁹⁵ Such usage itself adapted an earlier more general non-philosophical sense of “*sophia*” meaning “skill” in a more narrowly circumscribed domain, for instance, in carpentry, navigation, or poetry.⁹⁶

Contrast the relatively common term “*sophia*” with the term “*epistēmē*,” which first occurs only in the fifth century and through the century remains very rare. In fact, outside of one exceptional domain, there is no evidence that “*epistēmē*” was used among fifth-century philosophers at all. The exceptional domain is precisely the Socratic circle. For

⁹⁰ For Plato, cp. A. Balansard, *Technē dans les dialogues de Platon* (Sankt Augustin, 2001); D. Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato’s Understanding of Technē* (State College, 2007). For Xenophon, cp. R. Parry, “*Episteme and Technē*,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

⁹¹ SSR VI A 80, 48; cp. Kahn, “Eros,” at 90–1. ⁹² *Metaph.* 996a32–b1 (= SSR IV a 170).

⁹³ Cp. Pl. *Chrm.* 165c4–166a2, 171d1–172a8, 173c7–174b10. ⁹⁴ *Prt.* 319a.

⁹⁵ Heraclitus B112; Empedocles B3; cp. Xenophanes B2.

⁹⁶ For a discussion of the use of this term in the archaic and classical periods, see D. Wolfsdorf, “‘*Sophia*’ and ‘*Epistēmē*’ in the Archaic and Classical Periods,” in N.D. Smith, ed., *Philosophy of Knowledge: A History*, vol. 1 (London, 2018), 11–29.

example, “*epistēmē*” is by far Plato’s preferred knowledge term, occurring almost 600 times in his corpus. Compare this with about 225 occurrences of “*sophia*” and about 170 of “*phronēsis*.” It is then extraordinary that a rare noun—indeed in philosophical Greek without a single instance in the fifth century outside of the Socratic circle—is so abundant in Plato.

In considering this fact, note that Antisthenes wrote a work in four books entitled *On Opinion and Knowledge* (*Peri doxas kai epistēmēs*).⁹⁷ While there is little reason to believe that Antisthenes entitled the work himself, there is no reason to doubt that he centrally used “*epistēmē*” within it.

In addition it is noteworthy that “*epistēmē*” occurs at least twice in the meager fragments of the Socratic Aeschines,⁹⁸ as well as thirty-four times in Xenophon.

Given the prevalence of “*epistēmē*” among the Socratics and its complete absence among all other fifth-century philosophers, it seems likely that Socrates himself employed the term in his philosophical discussions. The following more speculative consideration may further support this conjecture. As I have suggested, according to thesis (1b) above—the focus of Socrates’ philosophy excluded *physiologia*—Socrates strikingly abandoned the cosmological or natural-philosophical inquiry of his philosophical contemporaries. Insofar as figures such as Heraclitus and Empedocles used “*sophiē*” to denote a master skill requiring cosmological and natural-philosophical understanding for the full realization of human potential, Socrates, in advancing an expressly non-cosmological, non-natural-philosophical ethical-political enterprise, may have deliberately appropriated the novel and—it should be added—non-Ionian term “*epistēmē*.”

The dearth of textual evidence severely impedes our grasp of how Antisthenes or Aeschines, let alone Socrates himself, understood *epistēmē*. However, a glimpse may be afforded by the way Plato’s Socrates, in a famous intellectual autobiographical passage in *Phaedo*, characterizes his predecessors’ interests in cognition:

Do we think with our blood or air or fire or none of these? And does the brain provide our senses of hearing and sight and smell, from which come memory and opinion (*doxa*), and from memory and opinion that has attained a state of rest comes *epistēmē*?⁹⁹

According to this description, a condition of *epistēmē*, in contrast to *doxa*, is stability. The question then is what constitutes the stability of *epistēmē*. I will return to this question in the following section.

Presently let me conclude this section by raising two questions. First, however he conceived of practical knowledge, did Socrates take himself to have achieved it? Here the Socratics’ presentations markedly diverge. Plato portrays Socrates as a subtle ethical-epistemological skeptic.¹⁰⁰ In his one remark on this subject, Aristotle claims that Socrates viewed himself as a skeptic.¹⁰¹ In a fragment from Aeschines’ *Alcibiades*, the character Socrates also appears to express skepticism:

⁹⁷ SSR V A 41.40.

⁹⁸ 8.49, 56 Dittmar; cp. 9.10; 17.1 Dittmar.

⁹⁹ *Phd.* 96b3–8.

¹⁰⁰ Cp. D. Wolfsdorf, “Socrates’ Avowals of Knowledge,” *Phronesis* 49 (2004), 74–142; D. Wolfsdorf, “The Socratic Fallacy and the Epistemological Priority of Definitional Knowledge,” *Apeiron* 37 (2004), 35–67.

¹⁰¹ *SE* 183b7.

And so although I knew no instruction (*mathēma*) that I could teach to anyone to benefit him, nevertheless I thought that in keeping company with Alcibiades I could, through loving him, make him better.¹⁰²

In striking contrast, Xenophon consistently attributes practical knowledge to Socrates and repeatedly portrays Socrates as beneficently applying it to his friends. I suggest, then, that it is unclear whether Socrates took himself to possess practical knowledge. While the evidence relating to Antisthenes on this topic is very limited, it is more plausible that he, like Xenophon, represented Socrates as possessing practical knowledge and teaching it to his associates.¹⁰³

Finally, since Socratic eudaimonia is understood to involve divine favor, the idea that eudaimonia also centrally depends on practical knowledge appears paradoxical. To what extent do humans determine their lives, and to what extent does the divine? One solution to this problem may lie in the idea that practical knowledge is the very thing that may be favorable to the divine. If Socrates engaged this question, how did he respond to it? Moreover, how would his conception of his *daimōn* feature in his response?

7. Method

Above, I referred to Socrates' philosophical method as "dialectic." I now consider some alleged features of it: *elenchos*, definition, and *epagōgē*.

Something called "*elenchos*" has traditionally been viewed as characteristic of Socrates' philosophical method. Basically, *elenchos* involves the exposure of inconsistency in an interlocutor's set of beliefs pertaining to some (typically) ethical topic. Inconsistency in turns indicates lack of practical knowledge or a pertinent part of it.¹⁰⁴ *Elenchos* may be humiliating for the interlocutor, but it may also serve to engender a philosophical motivation.¹⁰⁵ In numerous passages of Plato's and Xenophon's Socratic writings, Socrates' interlocutor is exposed as ignorant and such exposure is shameful and painful. In some cases, the exposure also inspires philosophical inquiry.¹⁰⁶ Aeschines' *Alcibiades* and *Aspasia* include examples.¹⁰⁷

Granted this, I resist identifying Socrates' method with and thereby limiting it to *elenchos*. Given his intellectual or dialectical facility, surely Socrates often exposed ignorance in his interlocutors. Moreover, such episodes surely struck his associates as memorable and philosophically significant.¹⁰⁸ But presumably Socrates also spent time with his associates cooperatively inquiring into ethical topics and problems.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰² SSR VI A 53.

¹⁰³ For a defense of this position, cp. M. Luz, "Antisthenes' Portrayal of Socrates," in C. Moore, ed., *The Brill Companion to the Reception of Socrates* (Leiden, 2019), 124–49.

¹⁰⁴ I elaborate on the reason for this below.

¹⁰⁵ For Socratic *elenchos* in Plato's Socratic dialogues, cp. the reference in n.28.

¹⁰⁶ For *elenchos* in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, cp. Bandini and Dorion, *Mémorables*, CXVIII–CLXXXII. Cp. also D.R. Morrison, "Xenophon's Socrates as Teacher," in Gray, *Xenophon*, 195–227.

¹⁰⁷ Cp. Kahn, "Eros." ¹⁰⁸ Cp. Pl. *Ap.* 23c2–5.

¹⁰⁹ In D. Wolfsdorf, "Socrates' Pursuit of Definitions," *Phronesis* 48 (2003), 271–312, I argue that in Plato's Socratic dialogues this is actually Socrates' prevailing attitude.

Note further that however prominently *elenchos* featured in Socrates' philosophical practice, the significance of doxastic consistency and more precisely coherence that *elenchos* entails suggests precisely this as a key feature of dialectic: doxastic coherence must have been a governing norm of Socrates' dialectic.¹¹⁰

With this conclusion in view, I briefly return to the topic of *epistēmē* and to the question of Socrates' conception of it. Recall that I left off that discussion with the idea that *epistēmē*, in contrast to *doxa*, entails stability; and I posed the question: In what does the stability of knowledge or specifically of practical knowledge consist? Evidence from the following two claims attributed to Antisthenes suggests that at least he held that the stability of knowledge or practical knowledge depends on reasons confirming the thing known:

Phronēsis is the most secure wall; it neither crumbles nor betrays us.¹¹¹

We must construct walls through our own indestructible reasonings (*analōtois logismois*).¹¹²

In light of Antisthenes' position,¹¹³ it is also plausible that Socrates himself viewed *epistēmē* as *doxa* that is *elenchos*-proof.

Observe that Plato's conception of *epistēmē* is, to this extent, consistent with Antisthenes'. According to one of at least two distinct, albeit interrelated conceptions of *epistēmē* that Plato advances in his corpus,¹¹⁴ *epistēmē* is a kind of judgment. In *Meno*, Plato precisely analyzes such judgment as true *doxa* with a reasoning (*logismos*) of the cause or explanation (*aitia*).¹¹⁵ The idea here is that one who achieves an epistemic judgment grasps the reasons that both justify the truth of and explain the content of the judgment.¹¹⁶ Arguably then, this conception of the etiological structure of practical knowledge, conceived as a life-governing *epistēmē*, derives from Socrates' himself.

Recall now that Aristotle attributes definition of the universal (*katholou*) and epagoge argumentation to Socrates. The term "*katholou*" is Aristotelian. But we may simply consider whether it was a prominent feature of Socrates' inquiries to pursue questions of the form "What is *F*?" where "*F*" stands for some ethical kind. The character Socrates pursues definition as such in a number of Plato's Socratic dialogues and occasionally uses the term "*horos*" (definition) and its cognates. Xenophon also attributes such pursuits to Socrates.¹¹⁷ There is no evidence of definitional inquiry in Aeschines' fragments. On the other hand, Antisthenes took serious interest in definitions as well as in theory

¹¹⁰ Cp. the topic of *homonioia heautōi* in Antisthenes in A. Brancacci, "Antisthene e Socrate in una testimonianza di Filodemo (T 17 Acosta Méndez-Angeli)," *Cronache Ercolanesi* 41 (2011), 83–91.

¹¹¹ SSR V A 134.16–17.

¹¹² SSR V A 134.17–18.

¹¹³ On this topic, cp. also Brancacci, "Episteme."

¹¹⁴ Cp. D. Wolfsdorf, "Plato's Epistemology," in J. Warren and F. Sheffield, eds., *Routledge Companion to Ancient Philosophy* (New York, 2013), 157–70.

¹¹⁵ *Men.* 98a.

¹¹⁶ Given the etiological condition, *epistēmē* so conceived is arguably best rendered as "understanding" or at least as "explanatory knowledge." Note that Plato also uses "*epistēmē*" to denote a field of knowledge, for example medicine or geometry. For example, compare the distinction between knowledge of medicine and knowledge that Coriscus has pneumonia. I suggest that Plato understands knowledge of facts and knowledge of a field as interdependent. This is because in order to acquire the etiological reasoning that makes judgment not merely true, but epistemic, one needs to acquire the body of knowledge constituting the pertinent field. In terms of cognitive development then knowledge of individual facts and knowledge of the pertinent field arise in tandem.

¹¹⁷ Cp. *Mem.* 1.2.41–6, 50; 3.9.4–10; 3.14.2; 4.2.13–22, 25–9; 4.4.11–25; 4.5.1–11; cp. Patzer, "Dialectician," 234–45.

pertinent to definitions.¹¹⁸ The weight of evidence therefore suggests that Socrates himself pursued questions of the form “What is *F*?”

A further question is whether definitional inquiry, at least in the case of ethical kinds, originates with Socrates. If so, this would be another major contribution that Socrates made to the history of philosophy and to ethical philosophy in particular. In *Metaphysics* A, Aristotle expressly claims that the historical “Socrates... was the first to devote his attention to definitions” (*Sōkratous... peri horismōn epistēsantos prōtou tēn dianoian*). On the other hand, shortly before this passage Aristotle states that the Pythagoreans, whom he treats as predecessors of Socrates, “also began to speak about and define (*horizesthai*) the what-it-is [i.e., essence]” of things.¹¹⁹ I suggest that Aristotle’s claims here can be reconciled if we understand him to mean that definitions of ethical kinds were central to Socrates’ philosophical project, whereas they were rather peripheral or at least relatively superficially pursued among the Pythagoreans. In that case, we may say that, in this regard, the major contribution Socrates made to ethical philosophy lay in the attention he gave to and the importance he placed upon defining ethical kinds.

I turn now to Aristotle’s attribution of *epagōgē* to Socrates. I will first clarify what Aristotle takes “*epagōgē*” to mean. The term is standardly translated as “induction” and therefore understood to refer to a form of inferential reasoning where information not contained in a premise set is derived from it. Precisely how Aristotle views such reasoning is controversial. In treating the issue, many scholars have focused on *Prior Analytics* 2.23, where Aristotle’s most sustained discussion of the topic occurs. Recently, however, John McCaskey has argued that the very interpretation of Aristotelian *epagōgē* as induction is misguided and that the error precisely results from focusing too narrowly on the *Prior Analytics* passage. Drawing on the uses of “*epagōgē*” throughout Aristotle’s corpus, McCaskey concludes that Aristotle and his philosophical contemporaries understood *epagōgē* as a form of argumentation in which a concept or the meaning of a general term is elucidated through comparison (*parabolē*).¹²⁰ For example, consider the following argument:

1. In the case of the *technē* of medicine, the individual who is *technikos* is the one who knows how to solve medical problems.
2. In the case of the *technē* of architecture, the individual who is *technikos* is the one who knows how to solve architectural problems.
3. etc.

¹¹⁸ SSR V A 147–59 and vol. 4, nota 34, 327–9; cp. the competing interpretations of Brancacci, *Oikeios*, and Prince, *Antisthenes*. And cp. L. Gili, “Antisthenes [sic] and Aristotle on Socrates’s Dialectic: A New Appraisal of the Sources,” in de Luise and Stavru, *Socratica*, 321–8.

¹¹⁹ *Metaph.* 987a19–20. Compare the brief doxographical section that opens the Peripatetic *Magna Moralia*. Here the author—I assume the text is based on Aristotle’s lectures—says that Pythagoras “was the first (*prōtos*) who undertook to discuss *aretē*” (*MM* 1182a11–12). And compare chapter 18, section 82 of Iamblichus’ *Life of Pythagoras*, where it is claimed that the oral teachings of the acusmatics were divided into three kinds: “for [teachings] some indicate what a thing is (*ti esti*); others, what is best; and others, what one must do or not do.” On the Iamblichus passage, which apparently derives from Aristotle’s lost work *On the Pythagoreans*, see W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge, 1972), 166–92.

¹²⁰ “Freeing Aristotelian *Epagōgē* from *Prior Analytics* II.23” [“Freeing”], *Apeiron* 40 (2007), 345–74; cp. F. Cajolle-Zaslavsky, “Étude préparatoire à une interprétation du sens aristotélicien d’*epagōgē*,” in D. Devereux and P. Pellegrin, eds., *Biologie, logique, et métaphysique chez Aristote* (Paris, 1990), 365–87.

4. Therefore, a *technikos* individual is one whose *technē*-specific knowledge enables him to solve *technē*-specific problems.¹²¹

As McCaskey emphasizes, *epagōgē* so understood is a signal feature of Socratic dialectic in Plato's early dialogues.¹²² Examples of epagogic argumentation also occur in Xenophon. In addition, there is an instance in Aeschines' *Aspasia*, which Cicero, our source, explicitly identifies as a case of "*inductio*," and which employs a *technē* analogy.¹²³

Based on the employment of epagogic arguments in these various Socratic writings, in conjunction with Aristotle's testimony, I infer that epagogic argumentation was a feature of Socrates' dialectic. Furthermore, the use of the *technē* analogy in the epagogic argument in Aeschines' *Aspasia*, as commonly in instances of epagogic argumentation in Plato's and Xenophon's Socratic writings, suggests that Socrates deployed the *technē* analogy particularly in conjunction with *epagōgē*.

8. Conclusion

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the primary reason the Socratic problem exists is that Socrates never committed his philosophical thought to writing. But why didn't he? It is doubtful that Socrates was illiterate. In any case—and although his intense devotion to philosophy reduced him to poverty—if Socrates had wanted to create philosophical compositions, he had wealthy friends who would have gladly paid for scribes. Since many of Socrates' philosophical contemporaries composed works, I assume that Socrates himself chose not to. This fact itself deserves consideration. Moreover, I suggest that such consideration should go hand-in-hand with consideration of the following question: Why did ethics become central to Socrates' philosophy at all? The answers I offer here are speculative, but certainly plausible.

Socrates' adult life coincided with the apex and subsequent defeat of the Athenian Empire. I conjecture that in the course of his life, perhaps especially in the last decades of the fifth century, Socrates became deeply concerned with Athens' imperial culture and with the ethical and political values of his fellow citizens. I suggest, then, that Socrates' practice of philosophy principally had a political objective. Socrates wanted to motivate his fellow Athenians and their sons to become good citizens and good political leaders. In pursuing philosophy himself, then, Socrates was driven by a sense of patriotism as well as the belief that his goal was divinely sanctioned.¹²⁴

Furthermore, Socrates believed that pursuit of his goal could be effective only through personal dialectical engagement. The reason for this relates to the central value that

¹²¹ The example is adapted from McCaskey, "Freeing," 364–5, he in turn appropriating it from Vlastos's (*Ironist*, 267–8) discussion of Pl. *Ion* 540b–d. At *Rh.* 1393b4–8, Aristotle cites a related argument and claims that it represents the sort of comparisons (*parabolai*) Socrates used.

¹²² Cp. M. McPherran, "Socratic *Epagōgē* and Socratic Induction," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45 (2007), 347–65.

¹²³ *SSR* VI A 70.

¹²⁴ In emphasizing that ethics emerged for Socrates with a certain civic orientation, it may be helpful to contrast this with, say, the Pythagoreans' purificatory-eschatological orientation to life. Socrates' civic orientation may also help to explain why the *aretai* are central to his ethics. Recall Aristotle's description of these as "useful and political."

Socrates placed on practical knowledge. Socrates appreciated that the ethical and political opinions and discursive habits of his contemporaries were complex and diverse, varied in subtle as well as unsubtle ways. Moreover, such opinions tend to be deeply held, anchored in forms of life as a whole. Consequently, identification, exposure, and adjustment or extirpation of such opinions is a challenging task.¹²⁵ But Socrates believed he possessed a level of dialectical skill effective to motivate at least some of his contemporaries to cultivate their souls by pursuing practical knowledge.

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¹²⁵ Pertinent to these facts is the topic of *polytropia* (versatility and adaptability), arguably central to Socratic dialectic, which I have not had space to consider here. Cp. D. LévyStone, “La figure d’Ulysse chez les Socratiques: Socrate *polutropos*,” *Phronesis* 50 (2005), 181–214.

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