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SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY, RATIONALISM, AND "OBEDIENCE": DECISION MAKING WITHOUT DIVINE INTERVENTION [1]

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The main aim of this paper is to explain why Plato's Socrates[2] devotes himself to philosophy. In so doing, I hope also to show that he does not sincerely believe that any of his decisions, about philosophy or anything, involve any kind of divine intervention. As my conclusions are contrary to a good bit of first-rate, recent scholarship on the subject, and also contrary to part of what Socrates himself says in Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, I think it is especially important to clarify these issues, however repeated commentary (by, again, the best scholars in the field) on the same texts may seem to have exhausted the need for further clarification. Confusion about these issues entails grave misunderstandings of the Socratic philosophy that Plato meant to depict, at least in his "early" dialogues.

Section 1. Socratic Philosophy: Mere Method, or Pursuit of Wisdom and Happiness?

It is crucial first to understand what is the nature of philosophizing, according to Socrates, and the fact that, predominantly, his stated reasons for philosophizing do not invoke any god or any command. The prominent place of the oracle story in the *Apology*, and its connection there with Socrates' account of his peculiar "practice (*pragma*)", has led some able commentators to conclude that Plato's Socrates is not even a philosopher[3] or that his "philosophizing" does not involve the pursuit of genuine wisdom.[4] In fact, such conclusions clash with most

[1] For helpful feedback, I am indebted to Ben Bradley, Mark Chekola, Mark Lukas, Gary Matthews, and Erik Wielenberg.

[2] My focus is Socrates as Plato depicts him in his "early" dialogues, not necessarily the "historical" Socrates. For the purposes of this paper, I accept the usual division between "early" and "middle" dialogues, where "early" includes at least *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Protagoras*. *Gorgias* and *Meno* are often considered "transitional" between early and middle, so my interpretation of Plato's "early" Socrates does not hinge on those two works, however consistent (I and many others think) they are with the "earlier" dialogues. I shall also occasionally cite even later dialogues, where I think such references are telling, though nothing crucial depends on such references.

[3] J. Adam 1916, ix

[4] Forster 2006, 17-19; Weiss 2006, 243-244, 252

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http://gramata.univ-paris1.fr/Plato/article119.html,

of what Socrates says about philosophy in Plato's early dialogues generally and in the *Apology* in particular. I shall return to the matter of the oracle, but in order first to establish what is philosophizing for Socrates, consider a familiar passage from the *Apology*:

> . . . This actually happens to be the greatest good for a human—to make accounts/statements/arguments (*logoi*) each day about virtue and about the other things concerning which you hear me discussing and examining myself and others—and . . . the unexamined life is not livable for a human. . . . (*Apol.* 38a)[5]

It is fairly uncontroversial to infer that what Socrates here calls "making *logoi*" and "discussing and examining" (cf. 23b-c, 29e, 33c) are the main activities of what he elsewhere terms simply "philosophizing" (28e5, 29d5).[6] Nor is it very controversial to infer that Socrates uses the term "philosophizing" to refer to the core activities involved in the attempt to acquire virtue. But as this latter inference has recently come under formidable criticism,[7] and as the story of the oracle in the *Apology* (20c-23c) rather obscures it, it would not hurt to review the evidence.

First of all, when Socrates characterizes making *logoi*, discussing, and examining as "philosophizing", nothing suggests that "philosophizing" simply *means* making *logoi*, discussing, and examining. Michael Forster considers the same passages just cited and concludes that philosophizing is being "virtually equated with cross-questioning oneself and others..." (2006, 17). But other evidence suggests that that goes too far. It is plain that such are the main activities of the philosopher, according to Socrates; but they are not what he thinks philosophy *is*, plain and simple; for, it is critical to note, the activities are *goal*-driven. Of course a philosopher discusses, cross-examines, makes *logoi* about virtue, lacks wisdom, and is aware of lacking it.[8] But insofar as one is a

[5] Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own, based on the Oxford Classical Text.

[6] Cf. Weiss 2006, 247. Interestingly, the "discussing, asking and answering, affirming and denying" that occur in one's own thoughts are treated, at least in later dialogues, as not fundamentally different from the *logoi* between two or more interlocutors (*Theaet.* 189e-190a, *Soph.* 263e-264a, *Phil.* 38b-e).

[7] Weiss 2006; Forster 2006 and 2007.

[8] Forster correctly says that Socrates' characterizing himself as a "philosopher" "may well connote his lack of knowledge and his awareness of his own ignorance" (2007, 17-18). Certainly it does. This is made explicit at *Lys.* 218a-b: philosophers are neither wise nor unwise, but between wisdom and ignorance: they "have ignorance" but are not "ignorant" or "unlearned" as a result of it, since they regard themselves as not knowing what they do not know (cf. *Symp.* 204a). But there is no reason to suppose, as Forster seems to, that this represents the *entire meaning* of "philosopher" anywhere in the dialogues.

"philosopher", one *wants* wisdom and *pursues* wisdom.[9] In ancient Greek, this is virtually a tautology, prompting Socrates in the *Lysis* to assert that ". . . the ones who are already wise no longer philosophize. . ." (218a; cf. *Symp.* 204a). A philosopher *philosophizes*—i.e., loves wisdom (even if wisdom does not love the philosopher back; *Lys.* 212d5-e1). *Euthydemus* 288d8 actually has: "...Philosophy is acquiring knowledge (*Hē de ge philosophia ktēsis epistēmēs*)." That translation is rather too literal. Socrates must mean that philosophy is the *process* of acquiring knowledge, just as the "ascent to reality" in the *Republic* is called "philosophy" (521c).[10]

As such isolated passages could perhaps be explained away, we should consider more substantial evidence: Socrates thinks that if we want happiness (and we all do), it is "necessary" to love wisdom—i.e., to strive to acquire wisdom (*Euthyd.* 282a1-b6, c8-d1, e2-4, 288d6-7, 289c7-8)—*genuine* wisdom, *genuine* virtue, because to do well—to act correctly (at least consistently enough to be happy) requires wisdom.[11] We find a related view attributed to Socrates in a

[9] Weiss appears to acknowledge this: ". . . The more philosophical among us . . . deeply desire to know, yearn to know, and *strive* to know" (2006, 251; her emphasis). But, concerning *Socrates'* philosophy, she seems to accept Forster's more narrow definition: "What makes what he does philosophy is that he attempts to [get his interlocutors to think as he does] by asking questions and presenting arguments" (252). I shall presently address the concerns that seem to have led Weiss to this conclusion.

[10] Forster notes *Euthyd.* 288d (2007, 17 n. 40), but apparently does not think much of it. By the way, it is true that at *Euthyd.* 307, Socrates seems to suggest that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are philosophers. But if so, he evidently believes they are *bad at philosophy*. It is not that "philosopher" *means* something different when applied to them. Rather, what Socrates means is that there is a single practice (the pursuit of wisdom), and some do it well and others do it poorly. Presumably, there are different *ways* of doing it poorly: one could genuinely desire real wisdom but be bad at getting it, or one might not genuinely desire it and so practice philosophy disingenuously, etc. (So similarly there are bad politicians etc.) Of course, even if "philosopher" did really mean something other than *pursuer of wisdom* when applied to the likes of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, this does not supply us convincing reason for taking the term to have such a meaning in other contexts, particularly in those where it is applied to Socrates, whom Plato consistently *contrasted* with the sophists. Again, Forster evidently would not agree (2006, 17).

[11] Cf. *Hipp. min.* 366d3-368b1 and *Gorg.* 466e, 509d-e. Although Socrates arrives at the same conclusion at *Meno* 88c, he later (97a, 97b-c, 98b-c) appears to withdraw this conclusion because having true opinion without knowledge seems to lead to success as well. Vlastos thinks (1991, 228 n. 91) this indicates a shift from genuine Socratic doctrine to Platonic. (Cf. his contention that the *Meno* is "a hybrid, firmly elenctic down to 80E, firmly non-elenctic after that" (115 n. 41). See also Kraut 1984, 301-304.) Penner has defended a plausible interpretation according to which Socrates genuinely recants neither the success-requires-wisdom doctrine nor the virtue-is-wisdom doctrine (1987, 310-320; 1992, 165 n. 63). Forster, who accepts *Meno* 96e ff. pretty much at face value (2007, 10ff.), recognizes (11) that *Meno* 100a implies that divinely inspired true belief is only a "shade (*skia*)" compared with "real (*alēthes*)" virtue; Forster nonetheless maintains that Socrates held that humans were incapable of such "real virtue". Forster believes that for Socrates true belief without understanding is "in many cases...beneficial for action" (2007, 31). If this is meant to suggest that true belief by itself is *consistently* beneficial in practice, it seems

number of passages in the earlier dialogues: viz., that one cannot be genuinely good without being genuinely wise.[12] Since Socrates' view is that we all ought first and foremost to care for our souls' (i.e., ourselves) being as good as possible (*Apol.* 29d-30a, 30a-b, 36c, 39d, 41e), he must think we ought to care about becoming as wise as possible—which of course he actually also states (29e1, 36c7).[13] In this way, we should take quite seriously Socrates' claim, in various early dialogues, that he himself wants to have genuine wisdom (*Charm.* 166c7-d6, *Lach.* 201a2-6, *Euthyd.* 274b2-3 and 285c2-4, *Hipp. min.* 369d2-e2, *Prot.* 348c5-e5; cf. *Apol.* 20c1-2, 22b5). Even if we do not think Socrates is altogether hopeful of getting it

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to contradict even the Socrates of post-80e *Meno*: Socrates explains the difference between knowledge and mere true belief (97e-98a): true opinions are not "worth much" until tied down with reasoning —i.e., until they become knowledge (98a); that is why knowledge is "more valuable" (98a)—in fact "so much more valuable" (97d)—than mere true belief. How are we to explain the difference Socrates here acknowledges if he were supposed to consider mere true belief sufficient for long-term benefit or success?

[12] This is pretty explicit at *Lach.* 194d1-3, *Hipp. min.* 366d3-368b1, *Lys.* 210d1-4, *Euthyd.* 282e2-4; cf. also *Gorg.* 459e5-6, 506d5-8 and *Rep.* 1.349e. It is certainly implied in the *Apology* as well; see 23b4-7 with 29d-30b. Brickhouse and Smith have argued that Socrates thought that virtue—as a condition of the soul, as opposed to virtuous activity—is unnecessary for happiness (1994, 129-130) and that wisdom is unnecessary for consistently performing virtuous actions and thus being "good" (2000, 148-152). I believe such conclusions fly in the face of almost everything Socrates says on the matter. It is worth noting that they are driven to such a conclusion because they accept Socrates' claim never to have done injustice (*Apol.* 33a, 37a) and they believe he is sincere in disavowing genuine wisdom. It should be understood what a precarious stance that is; in fact, I think it is ultimately untenable in light of the overwhelming textual evidence that Socrates accepts the goodness-requires-wisdom doctrine. Brickhouse and Smith have suggested a variety of implausible but imaginative alternatives: that "elenctic knowledge", along with frequent assistance from the *daimonion*, can serve as a substitute for genuine moral knowledge (1994, 60, 132); that Socrates has just "been lucky" in not doing injustice his whole life (2000, 152); or that "scrupulous" managing of appetites keeps "them from interfering with his deliberations about what is best" (2006, 273). Though I cannot adequately defend the point here, I am afraid that we had better concede that Socrates may have been dissembling when he claims not to have any genuine wisdom, something that Plato consistently represents almost all his interlocutors as suspecting in any case (not only Callicles and Thrasymachus but even Socrates' friends and associates: see *Apol.* 23a, *Lach.* 180b-c, 200c-d, *Charm.* 176b, *Ion* 532d; *Meno*. 71b-c, *Symp.* 175c-d, 217a, 218d, 219d-e, 222a; *Rep.* 2.367d-368c and 6.506b-d; cf. *Phaedo* 118a15-17). I believe that Socrates' characteristic "disavowals" were not meant (by Socrates or by Plato) to be taken as seriously as they usually are by commentators nowadays. It is helpful to keep in mind, in this connection, that Socrates in the *Apology*, despite his famous coyness (at 20b-e, 21d, 22c-d, 23b), later clearly characterizes himself as a "good" man (28a7-b2, 41d), and that there is no simpler way of describing one as *virtuous* in ancient Greek than calling one "good" (see Senn 2005, 5 n. 14). And, as I have said, Socrates consistently maintains that virtue requires genuine wisdom.

[13] In the *Apology*, as in other dialogues, *phronēsis* stands for genuine wisdom. Forster translates the word as "practical judgment" (2007, 4), which rather obscures the possibility (and, as I believe, the reality) that Socrates is urging us toward genuine wisdom. His translation cannot be called "inaccurate", but there is no compelling reason to suppose—in fact many compelling reasons to reject the idea—that for Socrates "practical judgment" is anything less that genuine wisdom. Cf. Burnet 1916, 258.

straightaway from the interlocutors present at the time of the claim, there is substantial evidence for thinking that Socrates' hope is that such wisdom is attainable together, "in common" (*Lach.* 201a, *Prot.* 348d, *Charm.* 166c-d, *Gorg.* 505e, *Meno* 86b-c), i.e., in dialogue with others.[14] He repeatedly makes it clear that such is his paramount aim in discussing and questioning (*Charm.* 166c-d, *Hipp. min.* 369d-e, *Prot.* 348c-e, *Gorg.* 453c1-4, 457e3-458b1). This is why Socrates consistently evinces a marked preference for discussing with educated gentlemen (*Prot.* 347c-e), those reputed for wisdom (*Hipp. min.* 369d-e, *Prot.* 348d-e, *Gorg.* 447a, 448d, *Meno* 89e, *Apol.* 23b), and wealthy adolescents who have philosophical potential (*Charm.* 153d, *Lach.* 180c, *Lys.* 203b-204b, *Apol.* 23c, *Theaet.* 143d).[15]

All of us who are not already completely wise, then, according to Socrates, ought to be philosophers, since philosophy is necessary for virtue ("goodness") and wisdom, and hence necessary for happiness.[16] And it seems that this is at least part of what Socrates is attempting to "persuade" the Athenians of in his typical encounters with them. In the *Euthydemus* we find what appears to be an example of one of Socrates' habitual exhortations: Socrates asks the sophists Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, who claim expertise in making people good (273d-e with 274d-e), to make the young Cleinias "turn toward" philosophy (275a), where this is meant as a plea to get Cleinias to care about virtue, i.e. about his becoming a

[14] Forster, on the other hand, seems to require that Socrates' claim is no more than a disingenuous ploy to set up an interlocutor for refutation (2006, 18-22), all with a view to proving wisdom to be humanly unattainable. Cf. Weiss' conclusion that "the core of Socratic moral inquiry" is merely "Socrates' attempt to get his interlocutors to think as he does" (2006, 252).

[15] Despite this, there is sometimes rather overblown significance attached to passages like *Apol.* 17c9, 30a3-4, and 33b1-2. They seem to be part of why Vlastos ventures to characterize Socrates as a "populist", a "street philosopher", choosing not to "confine . . . moral inquiry to a tiny elite" (1991, 18, 48, 110, 177; 1994, 103). That Socrates saw no intrinsic importance in his interlocutor's wealth or poverty, or that the general public might find him in the Agora "and other places", hardly makes him a populist.

[16] For this reason, Socrates' characterizing the main activities of philosophy as the "greatest" good (*Apol.* 38a, cf. 41b) could cause confusion. However we understand that locution, it can hardly mean the *ultimate* good, since, as I have shown, philosophy is desirable, according to Socrates, as a means to some *further* end. In any case, there are independent reasons for thinking Plato does not (always) use "greatest" to mean "ultimate": For instance, in a not unrelated passage, *Phaedo* 89d2-3, he makes Socrates say that there is "no greater evil" than hating *logoi*, and only a little later (90d6-7) that hating *logoi* results in being "robbed of truth and knowledge of the things that are (real)", an evidently more ultimate evil (cf. 66b, 83c-d). Similarly, at *Gorg.* 452d Gorgias claims that the power to persuade is *both* the "greatest good" *and* the cause of things that (presumably) are good in some more ultimate sense. A few scholars do think that for Socrates philosophizing has *some* intrinsic value (Vlastos 1971, 19; Penner 1992, 150 n. 14; Kraut 1984, 271 n. 43)—however little is the evidence for such an interpretation (see Irwin 1977, 91; McPherran 1996, 222 n. 115). But, as far as I can tell, philosophizing is rarely interpreted as the sole ultimate good for Socrates (see, however, Reeve 1989, 178).

good man and to learn what he must learn to be so. (In fact, at 275a "philosophy" and "attention to virtue" appear to be co-referential if not synonymous.) When the brothers fail, Socrates himself gets Cleinias to turn toward philosophy (282d, 288d) by getting him to desire wisdom as necessary for happiness. That this is typical of Socrates' exhortation of Athenian youths is corroborated by *Lysis* 210 and *Protagoras* 311a-314b.[17]

This is what the "attention to virtue" (31b5, 41e5)—or, alternatively, "attention to the soul" (30b2) or "self" (36c7)—in the *Apology* is all about too, and it is just what Socrates there is himself committed to and what he is "exhorting" and "persuading" the Athenians to do throughout the speech. It is true enough that that does not exactly leap off the pages of the *Apology* as it virtually does in other dialogues. A careful look, however, does reveal the same view in the *Apology* itself. Again, his concern there is clearly about the soul's being "good" (sc., virtuous)—in other words, as "wise (*phronimos*)" as possible (29e1, 36c7). As the above account of "philosophy" indicates, we simply misunderstand the Socrates of the early dialogues if we interpret the "wisdom (*phronēsis*)" of the *Apology* as the mere "human" wisdom involving only awareness of the limits of one's knowledge, if only because it is from the wisdom to which he exhorts everyone to attend (29e1)—but *not* from mere awareness of the limits of one's knowledge—that "money and all the other things [come to be] good for humans both in private and in public" (30b).[18] The point is made explicitly in the *Charmides*: "For it is not knowledge of knowledges and of lack of knowledges [whose peculiar product (*ergon*) is substantively beneficial for us]; rather, [it is knowledge] of good and bad" (174d).[19] For this reason, awareness of the limits of one's knowledge may indeed "profit" one (*Apol.* 22e), but only in that way explained in the *Meno*: i.e. it is profitable as a prerequisite to seeking greater, substantive knowledge (84b-c).[20]

Again, the same point is not quite as explicit in the *Apology*, but it is indeed there. Though his main focus in the *Apology* is on what he calls "human wisdom", there are telling indications that Socrates is, even in the *Apology*,

[17] Weiss is perhaps correct that "there are no instances of direct exhortation in any of Plato's dialogues outside of the *Apology*" (2006, 248-249), but only if by "direct" exhortations she just means (as she seems to) exhortations that are not "summaries of conclusions that emerged from elenctic exchange" (249). On that definition, however, it is unclear that even the exhortations in the *Apology* are "direct" ones.

[18] The translation is based on Burnet's perceptive gloss (1924, 124).

[19] Cf. Senn 2005, 5.

[20] When Socrates' accomplishment (*ergon*) of merely getting (some) Athenians to attend to virtue (i.e. to philosophize) is described as the "greatest" good for them (*Apol.* 30a-b, 36c), we cannot interpret "greatest" as meaning *most ultimate*. Cf. note 16.

concerned with having not merely "human" wisdom, but genuine wisdom.[21] One is his reference to "truth" at 29e2, appearing on a list which also includes "wisdom (*phronēsis*)" and improvement of the soul (cf. "truth" at *Crito* 48a7). And (assuming that soul = self) we know, from the discussion at *Apol.* 20a-c, that concern for substantive improvement of soul (his paramount concern in the *Apology*) is naturally connected, in Socrates' mind, to the quest for a *teacher* who has genuine wisdom and knowledge and can instill genuine virtue in students. All this sounds very much like his own quest for a teacher (*Lach.* 201a, *Euthyphro* 5a, *Euthyd.* 274b, *Meno* 96d-e), self-improvement through learning (*Charm.* 166c-d, *Hipp. min.* 369d-e, *Prot.* 348c-e), and his "attention to virtue" (*Crito* 45d, 51a), which he expresses in similar terms in other dialogues. Indeed, at *Apol.* 20c1-2 Socrates claims that he would "preen" himself and "luxuriate" if only he had the knowledge that the sophist Euenus advertises as having and teaching: viz., knowledge about how to be a virtuous/good human. Furthermore, in his account of his examination of the poets, he claims that he initially hoped to "learn" something from their poems, assuming they were genuinely wise (*Apol.* 22b). One further indication that Socrates in the *Apology* expects, ideally, to learn from philosophical conversation is at 41c: ". . . it would be an overwhelming [amount] of happiness to discuss with and *to be with* and to examine . . ." legendarily wise men and women like Agamemnon, Odysseus, and Sisyphus if he had the opportunity (my emphasis). "To be with (*suneinai*)" was the regular expression for *to be a student of* (cf. *Apol.* 19e-20a; *Lach.* 186e, *Prot.* 316c, 318a; *Gorg.* 455d; *Meno* 92b; *Phaedo* 61d). Again, whether or not Socrates really believed any of these specific individuals were genuinely wise is beside the point; the point has to do with the real aim of philosophical conversation. All of this points to the same, largely self-centered concern for having genuine wisdom which Socrates repeatedly claims to desire in other early dialogues.

But what of the assertion, made in the course of the *Apology*'s oracle story, that all human wisdom is worthless, whereas "the god" has genuine wisdom? Certainly Socrates is trying at this point in his speech to convince the Athenians that he never found anyone among them who is genuinely wise. As usual, he (disingenuously or not) includes himself in this estimation. So he tells them that "human wisdom is worth something little—actually, nothing" (23a7),[22] and that "really the god is wise" (23a5-6), by which he may have meant that *only* the god is wise.[23] A number of excellent commentators[24] argue that Socrates considered the

[21] So I disagree with Weiss' view that Socrates in the *Apology* is "not a man whose aim is to attain wisdom . . ." (2006, 244), as well as with her more general conclusion that "the core of Socratic moral inquiry" is merely "Socrates' attempt to get his interlocutors to think as he does" (252).

[22] A. Adam 1914 ad loc.: "καί corrects ὀλίγου and introduces a stronger word." Cf. Smyth 1984, 650.

[23] Taylor glosses the phrase: "In reality god [i.e. god alone] is wise. . ." (1998, 22; his brackets).

wisdom that he and all humans lack to be unattainable in whole or in part by humans. But Socrates' actual words at 23a-b seem to require no more than the view that what humans happen to have—that which passes for "wisdom"[25]—is worthless, not really wisdom. Some of his words in fact suggest that he may not even have wished to go *that* far: what he says is that "...I'm afraid (*kinduneuei*), you men, that really the god is wise...." The Greek *kinduneuei* certainly suggests *some* kind of qualification, usually rendered as "it is probable" in English. Moreover, Socrates does not even actually say that "only" the god is wise. He does say "human wisdom...is worthless", though this too is governed by the *kinduneuei* of 23a5. Furthermore, "worthless" need not mean *inherently* or *inevitably worthless*. And such a reading certainly is unlikely, given the rest of what Socrates says in the speech and in other early dialogues (the exhortations to virtue already reviewed).[26] It is worth noting that Socrates actually says in the *Apology* that he has made the Athenians—or some of them anyway—"happy" (36d10), which (interpreted literally), together with the success-requires-wisdom doctrine, suggests that it is *possible* for humans to be happy and to have genuine wisdom.

If Socrates in the *Apology* did not really believe that we ought to try to achieve genuine wisdom—indeed if he believed it was humanly unattainable—then it is hard to understand why he was so concerned with human "improvement" or what he can have meant by it. Socrates certainly thought that awareness of one's own ignorance was "profitable" in some sense (*Apol.* 22e); but he did not consider this awareness genuine wisdom, since he acknowledged that it certainly was not sufficient for doing well (see the *Euthyd.* protreptic passages and especially *Charm.* 174d). It is true that Plato sometimes depicts Socrates as

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[24] Vlastos 1994, 64; McPherran 1985, 301; Reeve 1989, 149-150; Reeve 2000, 36; Weiss 2006, 244, 250; Forster 2006, 12-13

[25] There is a parallel here with Socrates' (probably intentionally) fallacious reasoning in *Prot.* 319e-320b and *Meno* 93a-94e to the effect that virtue is not teachable. Below I discuss these passages specifically.

[26] Benson's arguments in favor of the kind of interpretation that I here support are well worth considering (2000, 181-182). Forster, who thinks it "seems clear" that 23a7 is "a timeless statement about the human condition in comparison with the divine" (2006, 12; 2007, 3-4), says, "Even taken alone, or just in its immediate context, the statement . . . could hardly be interpreted as harbouring such a tacit qualification as *at the moment* or *so far*" (2006, 13 n. 25). He does not explain *why* it could "hardly" do so. No doubt his interpretation of the words by themselves is certainly a possible one, but not compelling, especially given the other evidence and indications I have already reviewed. Forster is quite right that the timeless interpretation would have agreed with traditional Greek thought and even perhaps the traditional way in which Delphic oracles were "timelessly" interpreted. But we should not *expect* that Socrates' interpretation would agree with tradition (though we may indeed expect that Socrates might make it appear to his uncareful audience that he agreed with tradition). As far as I can tell, Forster offers no *argument* in support of his timeless interpretation, upon which much of his 2006 and his 2007 heavily rely. I see that Hatzistavrou also has recently accepted the interpretation that I favor (2005, 85).

denying that goodness comes from learning, teaching, or any kind of "human attention" (e.g. *Prot.* 328e), but there are ample reasons for concluding that Socrates is not to be taken seriously in such cases. Among the reasons are his otherwise constant exhortations to strive for wisdom (already reviewed above). Another is the fact that there are pretty transparent holes in the arguments that Socrates is supposed to have endorsed against the teachability of virtue, and it is fairly clear that Socrates was aware of the holes (see *Prot.* 360e-361b).[27] It may be that in Socratic dialogues not by Plato, improvement—making someone good—could have been something other than making someone acquire genuine wisdom, genuine virtue;[28] but in Plato at least, making a person good is none other than instilling genuine virtue (*Prot.* 348e-349a and passim; *Lach.* 190b with 186a; *Euthyd.* 273d with 274d8-e1).[29]

Section 2. Socratic Rationalism: Subordinating or Autonomous?

Before I proceed in addressing specifically the oracle issue, it will be helpful to discuss, at a general level, what Socrates claims motivates his actions. In

[27]The arguments at *Prot.* 319e-320b and *Meno* 93a-94e trade on the ambiguity of "virtue", which may either mean *the "virtue" of Pericles et al.* or else mean *genuine virtue*. What saves us from concluding that Socrates took the argument seriously is the fact that we know Socrates did not believe Pericles et al. had genuine virtue. The key to understanding the virtue-is-unteachable argument was seen long ago by, e.g., J. Adam 1893, xix and Burnet 1914, 171, 173-174. It is no coincidence that one glaring flaw in the argument Socrates is supposed to endorse is in its pointing to the failure of the best current and past politicians and sophists to make anyone good (*Prot.* 320a-b, *Meno* 93b-94e, 96b-c) in order to prove that virtue is not teachable, and so not knowledge. Of course Socrates' argument may be relying on the ambiguity of *didakton* which may mean *already taught* instead of *capable of being taught*; if so, the argument is a red herring anyway.

[28] So Forster cites Aeschines (2007, 13).

[29] Forster does not deny that Socrates was seeking a kind of human improvement that went beyond awareness of ignorance. (Forster correctly observes (2006, 6) that Socrates does not consider awareness of ignorance to be genuine wisdom; and we should agree since Socrates quite clearly has reservations (*Apol.* 20d9, 20e7, 29b4, 38c3-4) about even calling such awareness "wisdom".) Forster's idea seems to be that such improvement entailed acceptance of "the right ethical views" (2007, 13) in absence of genuine understanding. It is unclear how, on Forster's interpretation, Socrates believed one should go about acquiring such views; but part of it, no doubt, involved accepting a reliance on the god or gods for inspiration (2007, 31-32); perhaps one was also to trust that such views might be transmitted to one by certain humans like Socrates himself (2007, 32) or the divinely inspired poets (2007, 33). But, on Forster's interpretation, then, effort or "attention" would seem largely unnecessary; indeed, perhaps what most people require, according to Socrates, is simple *indoctrination* in the correct beliefs? To me, the idea seems wildly implausible given Socrates' aims and efforts as Plato portrays them. For one thing, Socrates' view about human improvement would, on Forster's kind of interpretation, appear to be not that much different from the traditional ancient Greek view. Forster perhaps would agree, given his frequent comparisons of Socratic thought with traditional thought (2006, 6 n. 13, 10, 13 n. 25). Are we to believe Socrates—or Plato in his "early" period—thought he had no novel message to bring to Hellas?

response to Crito's plea for Socrates to "be persuaded by/obey me" (*Crito* 44b, 45a, 46a), Socrates replies,

> We ought, therefore, to consider whether we must do these things or not, as I—not now for the first time, but actually always—am the sort of man such as to be persuaded by/obey none of my things[30] other than the statement (*logos*) that to me, when I reason (*logizomai*), appears best. (46b)

He invokes the principle in this context in order to let Crito know that he will not be persuaded by/obey even his dear friend, but will only be persuaded when he has reasoned the matter through for himself; what determines his decisions is always and *only* the conclusion of his own argument.[31] Let us call the principle "Rationalism".

Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith's ingenious interpretation of *Crito* 46b would circumvent the role of "reasoning" in Socrates' decision making; they do not seem to think that it expresses what I am calling Rationalism:

> Socrates does say that he would be persuaded by *nothing* but *logos*, but why must we assume that divination would fall into some category other than persuasive *logos*, for Socrates, and, hence, that Socrates would never put his faith in divination unless he had some (other) persuasive *logos* to do so? (1994, 193)[32]

Their question is meant rhetorically. But I believe there is a better answer than the one they accept. On their reading, Socrates' *logos* would appear to include any form of "persuasive" justification. They thus seem to be neglecting the crucial clause "*when I reason*". Liddell and Scott make it tolerably clear that it would be a mistake to regard *logizomai* as having a sense that does *not* suggest calculating or reasoning or argument.[33] And that should be especially clear in the present instance, considering the *argument* that Socrates proceeds to present after stating

[30]Burnet's gloss on the phrase is: "The soul, with its thoughts and feelings, as well as the body and its appurtenances, are all included in a man's 'belongings' " (1924, 188; cf. *Crito* 47c6). "My things" surely also includes Socrates' family and friends (cf. *Meno* 92b, J. Adam 1893, and Weiss 1998, 59 n. 6). The possessive is a typical Greek way of referring to personal and/or familial affairs; cf. *Apol.* 23b, 31b, 36c, *Crito* 54b.

[31] He says "the statement that to *me* appears best"; so it is a little difficult to take too literally his invitation to consider the matter "in common" (46d, 48d), particularly given the dominant role that Socrates plays not only in the following discussion but typically.

[32] McPherran also adopts (1996, 179, 203 and 2011, 124) the kind of interpretation of *logos* that Brickhouse and Smith favor. Corey (2005, 224) and Partridge (2008, 291) seem to as well.

[33] Liddell and Scott 1996, s.v., II.

the principle. For this reason, the English translation "reflect" is far too imprecise, as (I would say) is "consider".[34]

Another defect in Brickhouse and Smith's interpretation of *Crito* 46b is that *logos* for them includes things that do not even have truth-value: they argue that the *daimonion*'s "promptings" (which they variously describe as "alarms", "warnings", "monitions", "commands", "directives") would count as *logoi* for Socrates.[35] And, if we use the English term "reason" to translate *logos*, this may sound fine. But the primary issue with which Socrates is concerned at *Crito* 46b is *truth*: "Friend Crito, your spiritedness is worth much if it is on the side of something correct." The surrounding passage (46b-47a and 48-49; cf. 54d) makes it clear that the subject matter is statements/positions presented in speech ("stated") and arrived at by a process of deliberative reasoning (46d, 48d, 49d). Socrates' concern is: "Was it, or wasn't it admirably stated . . . ?" (46c8-d1).

We should, therefore, accept Liddell and Scott. Citing our very passage, they define *logos* as a "*rule*, *principle*, *law*, as embodying the result of λογισμός" (original emphasis).[36] What Socrates means by *logos* is a statement, expressing a rule or principle of conduct,[37] that is the conclusion of a reasoned argument.[38] I shall, however, presently return to Socrates' reaction to the *daimonion*, as it does raise the question of whether *Crito* 46b is consistent with how Socrates' behavior is depicted in the *Apology* and other dialogues.

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[34] It could be a mere coincidence, but whereas Brickhouse and Smith 1994 faithfully translate the word at their 178 ("when I reason"), they soften this to "when he considers it" while defending their interpretation at 193. Indeed, in their 2000, where they give the same interpretation, they prefer Grube's translation "on reflection" (247).

[35] They would evidently not be troubled by the fact that "my things" at *Crito* 46b5 would presumably also include "my usual prophetic thing" (*Apol.* 40a); for they would explain that *Crito* 46b is consistent with Socrates' being persuaded by some of "my things", provided he has "considered" them or "reflected" on them.

[36] Liddell and Scott 1996, s.v., III.2.d.

[37] Cf. Burnet 1924, 188.

[38] Brickhouse and Smith object to Grube's translation of *logos* as "argument", claiming that it "would beg the question about what might count as a 'reason' for Socrates" (2000, 263 n. 16). Needless to say, there is no question begging, provided we accept Grube's interpretation *in light of what the context implies*. Woodruff suggests an interpretation that similarly seems to circumvent the influence of reasoning: "Socrates does not say that he achieves this result [i.e., his conclusion] solely *by* reason, but only *while* he is reasoning" (2000, 137, original emphases). Woodruff too seems to undervalue the context of *Crito* 46b. In any case, it strikes me as a grossly unnatural interpretation of Socrates' words to suppose that his point here is only that he will accept whatever conclusion he arrives at *in the course of* his reasoning whether or not that conclusion came about as a *result* of the reasoning.

But in order better to clarify my interpretation of *Crito* 46b, let us consider Socrates' apparent deference for "expert" opinion (*Crito* 48a, *Lach.* 184e-185a)—expressed not just in abstract terms, but personally too (*Apol.* 28d-e, 29b). The Rationalism of *Crito* 46b seems expressly to *rule out* not only "nonrational" obedience but also any bit of reasoning whose core premise states simply that someone other than Socrates (even an expert) believes that an act is best (or orders the act to be done). So the Rationalism of *Crito* 46b might well be called "Autonomous Rationalism". This indeed is the whole point of Socrates' stating that he is persuaded by the conclusion of *his own* reasoning, *not by anything else*, not by anyone *else's* conclusion (or command).[39] Socrates could hardly offer an argument like the following as an example of how he is persuaded *not* by the expert but only by the conclusion of his own reasoning:

1. This expert believes that Socrates should do X. [Alternatively: This expert orders Socrates to do X.]
2. If (1), then Socrates should do X.

Therefore, 3. Socrates should do X.

Indeed, if he were to accept the above argument, it would mean that he *is* obeying the expert (whether or not he happens "also" to be obeying "his own" conclusion). That is precisely the point of the above argument. And so accepting it would thus directly conflict with the principle that "*I am persuaded by none . . . other than. . . .*" Though accepting an argument like the one above is consistent with some kind of Rationalism (we might call it "Subordinating Rationalism"), it is not consistent with the Autonomous Rationalism that Socrates expresses at *Crito* 46b.

In light of *Crito* 46b, then, the only way to account for passages like *Apology* 28e and 29b, where Socrates seems to admit "obedience" to an expert (or to a god), is to interpret the expert's order or belief as having no causal role in Socrates' decision.[40] How can we make sense of this? To see how, we need only

[39] This is just the point that Hatzistavrou misses when he claims that *Crito* 46b is consistent with what he calls "weak subordination" to authority (2005, 111). It is true, as Hatzistavrou says, that according to *Crito* 46b "one should consider only rational arguments". But *Crito* 46b does not allow just *any* rational argument. Hatzistavrou's attribution of "weak subordination" to Socrates conflicts with *Crito* 46b in yet a more fundamental way: It is clear, from Hatzistavrou's account of "weak subordination" (79), that any "rationalization" that Socrates may indulge in plays no causal role in his obedient actions. So Socrates is free to "agree" or "disagree" with the command, but the command is what determines his action, since he would obey even if he "disagreed" (101). This comes out quite starkly in the case of the *daimonion*: According to Hatzistavrou , Socrates will "abstain from an action because the *daimonion* so prescribed, thus obeying his *daimonion*, even though he has rationalized the *daimonion*'s command and he himself believes that the relevant action is bad" (95).

[40] Again, exactly the opposite of Hatzistavrou's interpretation.

look carefully at how he describes his "obedience": he "abided by" the order (28e); he does not "disobey" a superior (29b). This language entails only that Socrates' decision is *in accordance with* the superior's order. It does not mean that the order was in any way the impetus for his decision. In other words, he sometimes acts *according to* orders, but never acts *on* orders—not a trivial difference. Socrates' "obedience" is thus consistent with Autonomous Rationalism.[41]

One further indication of Socrates' Rationalism is his determination never to take into consideration/account, in decision making, *anything* other than whether his action will be just or unjust (*Crito* 48c-d; *Apol.* 28b, 28d, 32d). It is explained to us in quite clear and explicit terms that the ultimate basis for this determination is concern for the condition of his own soul.[42] It is worth noting that this is in precise agreement with his reasons for philosophizing, already explained.

But, according to Socrates, mere belief (even true belief) that an act is good/just is evidently not enough. This is the whole point of submitting to the persistent Socratic demand "to give a rational account (*logos*) of oneself, the manner in which one now lives, and the manner in which one has led one's life" (*Lach.* 187e-188a). Such language suggests that those who refuse to do so are not abiding by the Autonomous Rationalism of *Crito* 46b; as Socrates puts it in the *Meno*, "knowledge is more valuable than correct opinion", because true opinions "aren't worth much, until one binds them down by explanatory reasoning (*aitias logismōi*)" (98a).[43]

That is precisely why Socrates criticizes Euthyphro's prosecution of his father, which seems to be based on the diviner's belief that the action is loved by the gods (*Euthyphro* 6e-7a); Euthyphro proves incapable of producing a genuinely "explanatory reasoning" for his belief that his action is virtuous.

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[41] Nehamas comes roughly to the same conclusion (1987, 43-45), but he does so without considering *Crito* 46b, and he balks (as I do not) at interpreting Socrates as willing to "obey" superiors (Nehamas prefers to speak of "persuasion"). As Nehamas points out, Socrates' Rationalism allows him to be persuaded by an argument that a superior may offer. But, in such cases, he is persuaded not simply by the fact that it is a superior who offers it; rather, he accepts the argument *after using his own reasoning* to come to what happens to be the same conclusion. Again, the wording and context of *Crito* 46b make this unmistakable.

[42] See *Crito* 47d3-5, 47e7-48a7 and my 2005, 18. We are not to let the terms "just" and "unjust" distract us from this point; for, as Socrates uses the terms, they are plainly either synonymous or co-referential with the terms "good" and "bad", "admirable" and "shameful". See *Crito* 48b7, 49a5-6, 49b4-5, and again my 2005, 18.

[43] Again, the *Meno* is not, in my view, a departure from the earlier dialogues concerning the value of genuine knowledge. Passages such as this keep me from following commentators who (like Kraut 1984, 301-304) believe that Socrates in the *Meno* abandons the position that knowledge is necessary for virtue. See my n. 11 above.

Though Socrates does not deny that if all the gods in fact love an act then the act is assuredly virtuous, he nonetheless is not satisfied with that as an answer to the question about what makes the act virtuous (11a-b). Socrates' compelling concern about *that* sort of question is one thing that calls into question the idea that Socrates could in his own case find ultimate satisfaction even if he were assured that an act was loved by all gods. Especially in light of Socrates' adherence to the success-requires-wisdom doctrine (canvassed above), it is doubtful that it is sheer intellectual curiosity, and not practical concern, that motivates Socrates' quest for an answer to the question *What makes an action virtuous?* One lesson of the *Euthyphro* seems to be that, even if we can be assured that X is a telltale feature of virtuous action (such that an action is virtuous if and only if it has X), knowing that an action is X is not a sufficiently justifiable reason for choosing that action (as Socrates clearly does not believe that Euthyphro is justified in his, even if he has correctly divined the gods' love). In order to be justified in choosing an action, we must have genuine knowledge to the effect that that action is virtuous; and in order to have genuine knowledge like that, we must know what virtue *consists* in, not just its telltale qualities. (In the language of *Euthyphro* 11a, we must know its substance (*ousia*), not just an affection (*pathos*).) Having a true belief to the effect that an action is virtuous (because that action is X) is not sufficient for knowledge that the action is virtuous; and for Socrates knowledge is necessary for full justification of a course of action. Again, the reason for this is because Socrates believes that genuine knowledge is necessary for doing well. That is the ultimate foundation for the Socratic principle that "fearless" action (including declaration) concerning the good and the bad requires genuine knowledge of the good and the bad.[44] This of course is why Socrates never accords wisdom even to the blessed who act or speak by divine dispensation (*Apol.* 22b-c, *Ion* 533d-534e, *Meno* 99b-d, *Lach.* 198e-199a). We have, then, plenty of reason to think that Socrates would never deliberately choose an act out of divine inspiration; he does not consider that a source of genuine knowledge about virtue, and so it cannot be the basis of confident decision making.

Now, I happen to believe that, given Socrates' belief that he is "good" (*Apol.* 28a7-b2, 41d) and that he has never done any injustice (33a, 37b; cf. 27e3-5), and given his view that one cannot be genuinely good without genuine wisdom, it follows that Socrates thinks he does act in light of genuine knowledge about the good—not just belief. Here, however, is not the place to defend this further step. Whether or not he really considers himself genuinely wise need not be settled for the purposes of this paper; for at any rate he clearly regards himself as *striving* for wisdom and *endeavoring* to act wisely. So my point in this section

[44] The principle is prominent in the *Euthyphro* (4a-b, 4e, 15d-e), but also appears at *Lach.* 186c-d and (implicitly) at *Apol.* 24d3-5 (cf. *Euthyphro* 2c) and elsewhere. It is indeed the basis for Socrates' usual (disingenuous) reverence for his interlocutors' "wisdom".

of the paper has been, not that Socrates follows the above principles unerringly, but only that he strives to follow them and thinks that anyone who "cares for the soul" and "attends to virtue" ought to follow them.

Section 3. Socrates' *Daimonion*: Reflection or Reflex?

Given how "frequent" (*Apol.* 40a) and "usual" (40c) was the occurrence of Socrates' *daimonion*,[45] it is often considered at least prima facie reason to question Socrates' commitment to the principle expressed at *Crito* 46b. Indeed, the phenomenon is usually interpreted as involving an "order" that Socrates immediately "obeys". Is this not, then, striking evidence that Socrates often acts *on orders*, and so contrary to my Autonomously Rationalistic interpretation of *Crito* 46b?

I should say first that I agree with most recent commentators in concluding that the *daimonion*, as Socrates describes it, is the sort of thing that "trumps"[46] conclusions that Socrates had been about to act upon before its occurrence. Formidable scholars have maintained that there is no text that suggests such a conclusion.[47] But that is pretty clearly a mistake. Socrates' description of what the *daimonion* does at *Apol.* 31d, 40a, and *Phaedr.* 242c, together with his description of his reaction to it at *Euthyd.* 272e, do strongly suggest that the *daimonion*'s occurrence is *immediately* followed by Socrates' ceasing his intended course of action.[48]

[45] Since the subject of this paper is Plato's Socrates, I do not consider the accounts of Xenophon and spurious Platonic works. Though *Alcibiades I* otherwise agrees with how the *daimonion* is presented in Plato's dialogues, one of many things that mark it as spurious is that it describes the *daimonion*'s operation in a way that Plato's Socrates conspicuously avoids: claiming the act that it opposed (103a) was something "the god" did not allow (105d, 124c). In Plato, only the *daimonion* itself is said not to allow, though it is indeed "of/from the god".

[46] The term was first used in this context in a debate between Vlastos and Brickhouse and Smith (Smith and Woodruff 2000, 195ff.).

[47] Vlastos 1991, 286-287 and Woodruff 2000, 141. According to Vlastos the *daimonion* brings Socrates a "message", a "monition" that "tells him to do or believe" something; but it does not contradict Socrates' intended course of action; it only operates in cases when he ends up acting on the basis of either (A) "independent grounds" that he had already rationally formulated or (B) "intuitive" grounds (a "hunch") that he only later rationally articulates and accounts for (1991, 283-285). So Vlastos seems to believe that it is simply an expression of his own powers of reasoning. (This kind of interpretation dates back at least to Jackson 1874, 241-242.) Weiss 1998 and 2005 accepts a similar conclusion, except that Weiss, unlike Vlastos, thinks that the *daimonion* does frustrate Socrates' intended course of action.

[48] Cf. Reeve 1989, 69; Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 193; McPherran 1996, 205 n. 64; Weiss, 2005, 86; Corey 2005, 222; Long 2006, 73; Partridge 2008, 289-290.

This also means that the texts that discuss the *daimonion* do not give us any reason to think that Socrates accepts a form of Subordinating Rationalism whereby he sometimes acts *on orders* in light of the following kind of argument:[49]

1. I am experiencing the *daimonion*.
2. If (1), then I should not do what I was about to do.

Therefore, 3. I should not do what I was about to do.

If the *daimonion* functions in such a way as to necessitate immediate action, then it seems to preclude further reasoning on that particular occasion. That is to say, it cannot be interpreted as a phenomenon that Socrates reflects upon and then, on the basis of such reflection, rationally decides to act, as some commentators appear to think.[50]

But many scholars seem to think that our texts do support the idea that Socrates' reaction to the *daimonion* consists in a conscious decision to accept the experience itself as a sufficient reason for acting (or, more accurately, for stopping a course of action).[51] There is, however, a different and straightforward interpretation of the nature of the *daimonion* which I have not seen clearly articulated. It is indeed an interpretation that the texts themselves naturally

[49] Even if the *daimonion* is not interpreted as an order or as issuing an order, this kind of argument cannot be accommodated by Autonomous Rationalism since it forgoes the truly "*explanatory* reasoning" about the action's goodness that (as I argued earlier) Socratic Rationalism requires. Brisson 2005 seems ultimately to accept this type of Subordinating Rationalism. On Brisson's interpretation, the *daimonion* seems to be just a bare sign devoid of linguistic content; but it is never "inexplicable" (10), because it "enables" Socrates to "use his reason" to *infer* "injunctions" (12). This is what makes his reactions to it "autonomous", according to Brisson, even though he "does not enjoy complete 'moral autonomy'" (12), since he sometimes depends upon such signs. Partridge has recently argued for a rather similar interpretation. So, much like Brisson, Partridge is certainly correct in concluding that Plato's descriptions of the daimonion do not entail that the phenomenon has any "informational or discursive content" (2008, 287-288, 296). But I disagree with the "agnostic" position that Partridge prefers: "It is, after all, a subjective experience that, moreover, is not adequately described . . ." in a way that warrants attributing "informational or discursive content" to it (288; cf. 297). As I shall presently argue, since it is consistently described as "preventing" or "holding back" Socrates, and described only as "a kind of" voice, we do indeed have positive indication that it had no linguistic content.

[50] Kraut (2000, 16) and Long (2006, 73) both seem to accept a Subordinately Rationalistic interpretation of *Crito* 46b, according to which action in accordance with the *daimonion* is consistent with *Crito* 46b because his action is based on inductive reasoning concerning past reliability of the *daimonion* (cf. Jackson 1874, 242 and Corey 2005, 224). What is apparently overlooked in this kind of interpretation is the fact that Socrates could not even begin such an inductive test without violating the rational principle in the first instance, as Brickhouse and Smith point out (2005, 57).

[51] Reeve 1989 and 2000, Brickhouse and Smith 1994 and 2000, McPherran 1996, Weiss 1998 and 2005, Benson 2000, Hatzistavrou 2005. For whatever reason, Benson seems to be only one of few who actually describes the phenomenon as "divine intervention" (247 n. 88), though the term is perfectly apt on this sort of interpretation.

suggest, and one that happily makes them consistent with an Autonomously Rationalistic interpretation of *Crito* 46b.

First of all, it is well worth noting that most commentators are guilty of (unwittingly) embellishing Socrates' account of the *daimonion*. It is usually said to give Socrates "orders" or "warnings", and that Socrates "obeys" the *daimonion*.[52] But it is important to recognize that none of our texts say or suggest "orders" or "warnings", or even "obedience". In fact, they describe something quite different in nature, whose implications have not been sufficiently appreciated or clearly understood by most commentators. Whenever Socrates actually describes the operation of the *daimonion*, he says only that, when it "comes" or "happens" to him (*moi gignetai*) (*Apol.* 31d, *Euthyd.* 272e, *Rep.* 496c, *Theaet.* 151a, *Phaedr.* 242b; cf. *Euthyphro* 3b), it "always *turns me away* (*apotrepei*) from that which I'm about to do" (*Apol.* 31d), or "always *holds me back from* (*epischei*) what I'm about to do" (*Phaedr.* 242c; cf. *Apol.* 40b), or "*opposes* me (*moi enantioutai*)" in some action or statement (*Apol.* 31d, 40a-c), or "*doesn't allow* (*ouk eai*) me" to do something (*Phaedr.* 242c), or "*prevents* (*apokōluei*)" an action (*Theaet.* 151a). As that is an exhaustive list of descriptions of its activity, we have every reason to interpret them literally rather than figuratively. We might consider a figurative interpretation of such expressions as "turns me away" or "holds me back", but only if the *daimonion* were ever described as "ordering" or "warning".

Socrates does call the *daimonion* "a kind of voice". Not only, however, does he never describe what it says, but he never even says that it *says* anything. He certainly never says he is "persuaded" or "dissuaded" by it, nor even goes so far as to suggest that he "obeys" it. Indeed, the descriptions we are given seem to indicate hardly more than a kind of brute (albeit divine) force, literally deflecting or otherwise blocking Socrates' intended course of action. I would suggest, then,

[52] It is variously described as issuing a "command" (Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 195 and 2005, 50; McPherran 1996, 189; Hatzistavrou 2005, 95), "prohibition" (A. Adam 1914, 15; Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 251; Reeve 1989, 69 and 2000, 35; Brisson 2005, 5-6; Long 2006, 64, 72), "injunction" (Woodruff 2000, 141; Weiss, 2005, 86; Long 2006, 65), "prescription" (Hatzistavrou 2005, 90, 95), "order" (Corey 2005, 221). The *daimonion* is just as frequently described as "warning" him (Jackson 1874, 236; A. Adam 1914, 15; Nussbaum quoted in Kraut 2000, 32; Brickhouse and Smith 1989, 168 and 1994, 133, 203 and 2000, 152, 235 and 2005, 60; McPherran 1996, 186-190 and 2005, 17-19 and 2011, 125; Kraut 2000, 16; Brisson 2005, 10; Weiss 2005, 90, 95-96; Corey 2005, 221; Long 2006, 63-64) or issuing "monitions" (Vlastos 1991, 170, 283-284, Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 190-194 and 2005, 49; McPherran 2005, 16 and 2011, 125), though it is hard to tell whether this is supposed to be something different from "command" or "prohibition", especially as some of the same commentators seem to use both sets of terms interchangeably. We also hear of "admonitions" (Jackson 1874, 236; Kraut 2000, 16; Weiss 2005, 88; Long 2006, 65; McPherran 2011, 125), whether or not this is meant as yet a different category. At any rate, Socrates is almost universally characterized as "obeying" or being "persuaded/dissuaded" by the *daimonion*.

that what Socrates does, as soon as it "comes" or "happens", is purely reflexive and altogether non-deliberative.[53]

To be sure, the fact that Socrates calls the *daimonion* "a kind of voice" is consistent with an interpretation that attributes to it linguistic content of some kind.[54] But our texts hardly require such an interpretation. After all, Socrates never calls it "a voice", but only "a kind of" voice (*phōnē tis*) (*Apol.* 31d, *Phaedr.* 242c). And he says only that he "seems" to hear such a thing (*Phaedr.* 242c). So I am sympathetic with some who have suggested that Socrates did not regard the *daimonion* as literally a voice.[55] But even if we allow it some linguistic content, its

[53] To his credit, Partridge 2008 seems to acknowledge the possibility of the sort of account I offer here. However, he rejects it, arguing (296) that the idea that the *daimonion* "is merely an arresting experience" is not compatible with even a "qualified rationalism" for Socrates (which Partridge cleaves to). Consequently, he himself accepts "something like a twinge theory" (297), according to which the *daimonion* "unsettles him momentarily" (305). And so Partridge attempts to answer such questions as: "why Socrates did not view it as a gut feeling or his own subconscious sense that an action is inadvisable" (297-298), and how "the subjective experience of an informationally-empty event [c]ould draw his attention to what he was about to do" (300), and "how could Socrates know it was a warning" at its very first occurrence? (304). On my account, this problem of interpretation—an alleged problem *for Socrates* about *how* to react to the *daimonion*—does not even arise, because Socrates' reaction does not require *interpretation*, inasmuch as it does not involve a *decision* to react to it. And, as I argue, my account does not conflict with Socrates' Rationalism simply because his Rationalism has to do only with decision making, not purely reflexive action. Partridge does occasionally describe the daimonic phenomenon in ways that may make it seem as though he accepted my account ("his reflexive obedience to the sign" (296), "the sign stops Socrates" (300), "the sign prevents" (302), "the sign stops him in his tracks" (304)). But it is clear that those descriptions are no more literal on Partridge's account than the usual interpretations of the *daimonion*. In fact, on his account, even Socrates' own "exclusively apotreptic" descriptions are not to be taken literally, as they are based, not on the intrinsic nature of the experience itself, but on "the frequency of the sign's occurrences and the confidence in the regularity of its operation that the frequency supports" (301). Indeed, Partridge explains that at least "for the first few instances of the sign's operation in Socrates' life" it operated "in such a way that it le[ft] reason alone to determine that he ought not to do" what he was about to do (306). Again, on Partridge's account, Socrates experiences just an unsettling "twinge", which may be only "arresting enough" to "simply arouse his curiosity and heighten his self-awareness and awareness of his surroundings. . ." (302). Partridge's Socrates does not *experience* actual opposition from the *daimonion* when it occurs; rather, it is only in retrospect that he "would *come to see* the sign *as* a warning or opposition" (301, my emphasis).

[54] Some scholars speculate that the *daimonion* effectively *says* something like "no" or "stop" (Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 195 and 2000, 248; McPherran 1996, 197, 200, 204-205; Woodruff 2000, 141; Weiss 2005, 87; Long 2006, 67; cf. Vlastos 1991, 283). Brisson is considerably more careful about this than many are (2005, 2), as is Partridge (2008, 287ff.). See note 57 below.

[55] J. Adam 1916, xxviii and Joyal 2005, 107. Jackson reports the metaphorical interpretation as a "common" one in his day (1874, 232), though he himself does not accept it. Erik Wielenberg has brought my attention, in this connection, to C. S. Lewis' remark on human pain: ". . . [P]ain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world" (2001, chap. 6). Pain would thus also be "a kind of" divine voice, i.e. metaphorically.

linguistic content is not manifest in the ways Socrates describes himself as reacting to it. So it appears that whatever linguistic content it *may* have plays no causal role in Socrates' behavior. It may be rather like my shouting "no" at my tomcat, which causes him immediately to stop attacking his little sister, but not in virtue of the linguistic content of my shout, which he presumably cannot grasp in any case.

We also simply go beyond our texts if we interpret the nature of the *daimonion* as itself signaling Socrates not to do what he is about to do, or as signaling to him that he should not do what he is about to do. Such interpretations are tempting, as he does indeed describe the phenomenon as a "sign" (*Apol.* 40b, 40c, *Rep.* 496c, *Euthyd.* 272e, *Phaedr.* 242b), and once even as "prophetic" (*Apol.* 40a).[56] But, lacking any further information, we should adopt a conservative interpretation of our texts. The use of the terms *sēmeion* and *mantikē* do suggest that it signals or prophesies *something*. But *what* it signals or prophesies is never explicitly described. Considering what he says at *Apol.* 40a—that it has always been "very frequent, opposing me even in small matters if I was about to act in some way not correct"—, it could be that Socrates does think of it as signaling or prophesying that what he is about to do would be not correct. Still, Socrates never says as much. And it is worth recognizing that, even if he had, it would not mean that the "sign" itself had any linguistic content. I suggest that Socrates regards the *daimonion* as a sign, not in his immediate reaction to it (since, as I have said, that reaction is purely reflexive), but only after he reflects on his reaction to it. Likewise, I (or, for that matter, any observer) may regard the reflexive pull of my hand away from the stove as a sign (or "prophecy") that the stove is hot or that touching it would be bad, though of course there was no linguistic content to my hand's movement.[57]

On my interpretation of the *daimonion*, therefore, the phenomenon does not require that he ever violates the Autonomous Rationalism of *Crito* 46b, simply because Autonomous Rationalism applies only to decision making (to

[56] There is no reason to interpret "mantikē" here to mean "prophetic *skill*", as Joyal does (2005, 102). "*Mantikē*" ("prophetic") is feminine due to its antecedent: the "*phōnē*" ("voice") of *Apol.* 31d3. That the term refers simply to his "sign", and not a "skill" or "power", is further corroborated by the symmetry between "*hē eiōthuia moi mantikē*" at *Apol.* 40a and "*to eiōthos sēmeion*" at *Apol.* 40c, *Euthyd.* 272e, and *Phaedr.* 242b. Cf. Brisson 2005, 3.

[57] Brisson concludes that, though Socrates' "acoustic" sign is "equivalent to something like '*mē*', 'do not'" (2005, 2), it does not constitute "articulated discourse" (11). Indeed, the *daimonion* "manifests" or "reveals a prohibition through the intermediary of a sign" (11), but presumably, according to Brisson, only because Socrates, using his powers of reasoning, may *regard* it thus (12). This part of Brisson's account seems plausible enough to me, though I cannot accept his broader conclusions. Likewise, I agree wholeheartedly with Partridge 2008 in concluding that Socrates only "came to view" the *daimonion* "as" a warning, though I cannot accept Partridge's broader conclusions. See my notes 49 and 53 above.

"obeying" or "being persuaded"), not to reflexive behavior. Socrates never regards the *daimonion* as a *reason for* deciding anything; it is at most the *cause* of some of his reflexive actions.[58]

Section 4. Delphic Oracle: Order or Irony?

Predominantly, I have so far argued, Socrates' stated reasons for philosophizing do not invoke a god or an order. But in perhaps his most famous defense of his philosophical lifestyle, a divinity is invoked in a most striking way: I mean of course the passages in Plato's *Apology* where he describes the oracle and the mission that is alleged to derive from it. This account has obscured Socrates' real reasons for philosophizing, and is understandably, I think, the main reason why many excellent scholars are led to misinterpret Socrates' real purpose.

It is well known that in some passages of the *Apology* Socrates gives his audience the impression not only (*i*) that he philosophizes because of a divine order (23b, 28e-29a, 29d, 30a, 33c, 37e-38a), but also (*ii*) that his philosophizing with the Athenians is a service that greatly benefits them (30a, 36c, 36d10) while having no perceptible benefit, but rather great adversity, for himself (23b-c, 31b-c, 21e2-3, 22e7-23a2, 28a5-9). He even purports to continue to be motivated by this selfless, divine purpose right up to the present moment in his "defense" speech: ". . . I am far from speaking a defense on behalf of myself, as someone might suppose; rather, I do so on behalf of you, lest you somehow err regarding the god's gift to you by voting against me" (30d-e). I shall refer to propositions (*i*) and (*ii*) as "DO" and "PS", respectively.[59] They are clearly of a piece; Socrates connects the two explicitly: he offers his own personal adversity as proof that his activity is motivated by divine will, rather than his regard for personal welfare

[58] We might here recall Socrates' view that the Homeric poems were not really spoken *by Homer* (*Ion* 534d), that they are "not human" or even "from human" but "godly and from gods" (534e). So it may well be said that the actions that the *daimonion* causes are not strictly speaking *Socrates*' actions, that the actions—like the *daimonion* that causes them—are not human or from human but "godly" (cf. *Apol.* 31c) and "from god" (cf. *Apol.* 40b). Similarly, it looks as though Socrates is genuinely "mindless" in his daimonic behavior, just as the poets and Corybantic dancers are when they make poetry and dance (*Ion* 534a). So one might think that Socrates "seems to hear" (*Phaedr.* 242c) a voice in the very sense that the Corybantes "seem to hear the *auloi*" (*Crito* 54d), as both respond helplessly. These parallels are interesting and telling, but not to be taken too far: McPherran is certainly right that Socrates never describes himself as "having a god in" him or being "possessed" by a god, as he sometimes characterizes poets and Bacchic dancers. McPherran, however, goes too far in concluding that Socrates' daimonic experiences cannot even have involved the "replacement" of consciousness that the poetic and Corybantic experiences do (1996, 195-196).

[59] Think: "Divine Order" and "Public Service/Private Sacrifice".

(31a-c). So DO and PS must be accounted for (or discounted) together.[60] I shall try to show that neither proposition represents the truth; Socrates presents them (in the *Apology* alone,[61] we should always keep in mind), not indeed to deceive anyone, but to mock his accusers.

Some commentators make a great deal of the fact that the oracle was not by itself sufficient for the mission described in DO and PS, explaining that the divine order was not in—or was, at any rate, not clear from—the oracle itself, but rather was something Socrates had to infer from his own "examination" and reasoning. An interpretation along such lines seems to cast Socrates as a Subordinating Rationalist:

1. The divine oracle meant that I should philosophize.
2. If (1), then I should philosophize.

Therefore, 3. I should philosophize.

For this reason alone, there would be good reason to reject such an interpretation. Taking DO and PS seriously, however, involves a more fundamental problem.

It should be clear that DO conflicts with Socrates' Autonomous Rationalism, simply because DO suggests that news of the oracle motivated a decision to "examine" its meaning, though the oracle does not count as a *logos* in the sense required by *Crito* 46b.[62] It was of course a *statement* (or, in any case, a *word*); but it was clearly not, at the crucial time (i.e. the time that it allegedly motivated his "examination"), a statement that he was persuaded of due to his

[60] The connection between the two propositions has not been sufficiently appreciated by scholars who are unwilling to accept DO whole-heartedly but who appear to take quite seriously the idea (PS) that Socrates' real mission is largely one of public service, rather than (as I believe) largely self-centered. These include Reeve 1989, 72 and 155, Vlastos 1991, 177, Stokes 1992, 62ff., and McPherran 1996, 222. Weiss (1998, 13) and Nehamas (1999, xxx-xxxi) see quite well that PS cannot be taken any more seriously than DO, though Weiss seems to lose sight of this in her 2006 analysis of the *Apology* (see my note 9 above).

[61] We do of course in the *Phaedo* hear of the "exhortation" that "continually" comes to Socrates in his dreams to "make and work at music" (60e). But this apparent exception actually proves the rule: For one thing, Socrates' (alleged) point in mentioning his dream exhortation is that, after so many years, he is not even sure that he was "conceiving" it correctly, as he now says he thinks it may well have meant "popular" music, and not philosophy. Also, he makes it fairly plain that, if the dream was exhorting him to philosophize, it was exhorting him to do "the very thing" that he "was [already] doing"; indeed, he reiterates this three times in the brief passage (60e7-8, 61a2, 61a4). So at most he was philosophizing only in *accordance* with the dream's orders, and not *on* its orders. Likewise, nothing more is implied by the similar reference in the *Apology* to divine orders transmitted in dreams (and other "divinations") (33c).

[62] As I explained earlier, some commentators mistakenly interpret *logos* broadly enough to include such things as the oracle (Brickhouse and Smith 1994, McPherran 1996).

own reasoning. Indeed, it was (according to the story) a statement that "for a long time" he did not *believe*, simply because he did not even know what it *meant* (*Apol.* 21b2-6). He does say he knew throughout this time that, whatever it meant, it was true (because it was divine). So, in that sense, he believed *that it was true*. But, since he did not know what *it* was, he can hardly have been persuaded by *it*.

Given this, it is hard to take seriously the suggestion (*Apol.* 21e) that he really believed that it was "necessary" to "make the god's thing be of the most importance" despite the great risk that his "examination" of it (allegedly) seemed to involve. Again, his whole point here is that he (supposedly) did not at that time even understand precisely *what* the god's "thing" was. So the oracle story appears to conflict, not only with the letter of the Rationalistic principle of *Crito* 46b, but also with his determination not to perform a course of action unless it is clearly "just"—i.e., as I explained earlier, that it is best for himself (his soul). As Socrates himself seems to have recognized (*Apol.* 21e2-3, 22e7-23a2), it was far from clear, at the time, that his chosen method of examining the oracle was really in his interest (assuming, of course, that he did not already understand its meaning). These are powerful reasons for rejecting the story about the risky, selfless divine mission of DO and PS.

Another indication that Socrates does not seriously endorse DO and PS is that his "proof" (*Apol.* 31a-c) of the divine nature of his practice—viz., his poverty—also entails a rejection not only of the Rationalism of *Crito* 48b but even of a principle that is one main focus of Socrates' habitual exhortations: to be inattentive to money (*Apol.* 29d-e, 30a-b). The alleged proof in fact trades on an ambiguity in the expression "my own things", conflating attention to material well-being and attention to the soul's good condition: He claims that the oracle story must be the truth—that his behavior is divinely inspired, "not human", irrational—because, in his "service to the god", he has been inattentive of all of his own things (*tōn emautou hapantōn*), particularly personal finance. Accepting the "proof" entails accepting that being inattentive to money is "irrational". Accepting the "proof" furthermore entails a rejection of the Rationalism of *Crito* 46b, which requires (at least) rational behavior: according to his "proof", he does not "have any rational account (*logos*)" of the behavior that results in his condition (*Apol.* 31b6-7).[63] Surely, quite extraordinary, by Socrates' own lights, if it were true!

[63] The argument at 31a-c seems to be of this sort:

1. I have some rational account for my behavior only if I attend to my own things.
2. I attend to my own things only if I am not poor as a result of my behavior.
3. I am poor as a result of my behavior.

Therefore, 4. I have no rational account for my behavior.

As the above considerations are grounded in rather general principles, some of them based on dialogues other than the *Apology*, they may be less than thoroughly convincing. But there are in Socrates' presentation of the oracle story itself plenty of indications that he does not take DO and PS seriously:

One indication is the fact that he consistently does not expect his audience to take them seriously (20d4-5, 37e-38a), warning them twice (20e, 21a) not to jeer at him for what he is about to say.[64] He anticipates (30c) that they will likewise make an uproar after they hear him claim that he is making his "defense" speech for their sake and not for his (30d-e).[65] Of course none of that logically entails that Socrates thinks they should not accept the story. But if the oracle story were really part of a serious effort to defend himself, it would be remarkable for him to waste so much space with an explanation which, he both anticipates (20d) and concludes (37e-38a), will be not only unconvincing but also regarded as a joke. And one might well think the defendant doth protest too much for the story *not* to be in jest. Indeed, my own interpretation of the oracle story is that it is a joke—in fact, a mockery of his accusers—which his audience would be unable to understand if they were to take the story seriously.

But the oracle story itself contains even more powerful reasons for rejecting DO and PS. According to DO, the supposed point of the oracle story is to explain how he came to understand that he must philosophize in his now characteristic way, and part of that understanding is supposed to have come from what he allegedly learned from the oracle about the nature and value of genuine wisdom. So if we are to take the oracle story at face value, then Brickhouse and Smith's conclusion would indeed sound reasonable: ". . . His certainty about the moral importance of his mission is derived from various forms of divination, and not from whatever conception of virtue he has developed and continues to test by means of the *elenchus*" (1989, 107).[66] But a careful look at the oracle story reveals

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Therefore, 5. My behavior is not human, but divinely inspired.

Of course Socrates does not really accept premise (2), and so cannot accept the "proof".

[64] Note also the incredulous exclamation that he anticipates (28b3-5) one of his judges making in reaction to his account of his peculiar "practice". The imagined judge could hardly expect Socrates to be "ashamed" of his purpose if the judge accepted it as a genuinely divine one.

[65] At 30e2-3 Socrates again concedes that his account might sound "laughable". (J. Adam (1916, 86) and Burnet (1924, 126) suggest that "laughable" refers specifically to the gadfly simile. There is, however, no compelling reason to interpret the remark so narrowly.)

[66] Furthermore, they add, ". . . Socrates has not undertaken to test elentically whether testing elentically is worthy, and found it to pass the test. . . . Therefore, his confidence in the value of his mission cannot derive from elentic justification" (105). The idea that Socrates' commitment to the method and practice of philosophy (at least in the *Apology*) is primarily due to the divine order inferred from the oracle, rather than to his own independent judgment, is also accepted by many

that Socrates cannot have really learned about the importance of philosophy, or about the nature and value of genuine wisdom, *from the oracle* or even from his "examination" of it. According to the story itself, before he had even arrived at the allegedly momentous conclusion described at 23a, Socrates was already taking for granted the fairly sophisticated axiological position outlined in the so-called protreptic passages of the *Euthydemus* and expressed in other early dialogues: he makes it clear that he had already determined (22d) that garden-variety craft-knowledge is not wisdom in the "greatest things"—in fact, that it is worthless by itself.[67] So the supposed examination of the oracle actually itself hinges crucially on a preconception about virtue that Socrates had evidently already developed—precisely what Brickhouse and Smith allege cannot be true.

Socrates does admit craftsmen know "many admirable things" and, in that respect, are indeed "wiser" than Socrates, a "wisdom" that their lack of modesty "conceals" (22d). But we are not to make too much of all that: For one thing, he never says he cross-examined the craftsmen *about their crafts*, nor does he ever say he wanted to learn crafty matters from them (though, in rather stark contrast, he did express (22b) an interest in learning about the *poets*' works). But, more importantly, he concludes, despite all their craft-knowledge, that the craftsmen were not in the end *really* any wiser than he:[68] "human wisdom is worth something little—actually, nothing" (23a7). He is willing to allow that craft-knowledge is in some sense "admirable"; but he evidently was, from the start, committed to the view that it is strictly speaking not good at all if it is not conjoined with genuine wisdom—precisely the view we find the supposedly more enlightened Socrates espousing in other early dialogues (*Euthyd.* 281d-e and 288e ff., *Charm.* 173d-e and 174b, *Lach.* 194e-196a, *Gorg.* 511b-514a). Again, what is

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recent commentators, including Kraut 1984, 15, 238; Kahn 1996, 96-97; Benson 2000, 248; Hatzistavrou 2005, 94-95; Forster 2007, 11, Partridge 2008, 290 n. 19. Kahn, however, in light of *Crito* 46b, argues (perhaps uniquely) that Plato depicts a fundamentally different Socrates in the *Crito* than the "deeply religious" Socrates we find in the *Apology* (1996, 88ff., 97).

[67] Stokes also argues that certain features of the oracle story suggest that Socrates had already understood what the oracle story is supposed to have taught him (1992, 69-70); and Stokes argues (61-67), as I do, that Socrates had reasons for his "mission" that were entirely independent of the oracle. But Stokes' account of Socrates' real mission, and of the purpose of the oracle story, is rather different from mine.

[68] He does say that the craftsmen's immodesty—thinking they know things they do not ("the greatest things")—"conceals" the craft-wisdom they do have (22d8-e1). This could suggest that their craft-wisdom would indeed make them overall wiser than Socrates, were it not for their immodesty. But such an interpretation conflicts with his conclusion that all human wisdom is worth "nothing". The false dilemma of *Apol.* 22e1-4 may somewhat obscure the point. But plainly Socrates never takes interest in the clear, but unmentioned, option of keeping his modesty while *adding* craft-wisdom. (We surely are not to think that craft-knowledge *inherently* comes along with immodesty. *Gorg.* 511d-512b gives an example of a craftsman free of the conceit highlighted at *Apol.* 22d-e.)

crucial to observe here is that Socrates did not *discover* the view from talking with the craftsmen; rather, he depicts himself as having known it all along: garden-variety craft-knowledge was just not what he was interested in in the first place. Without understanding, from the beginning, precisely how to distinguish the craftsmen's knowledge from wisdom in "the greatest things", he could not have so confidently concluded that the latter is indeed "other" (*Apol.* 22d7) than the craftsmen's knowledge.[69]

Now, wisdom *in* "the greatest things" he does indeed deny having. But he never in the *Apology* denies knowing the *nature* of such wisdom. He claims not to have wisdom in the greatest things, but there is no indication that he was ever unaware of exactly what *sort* of wisdom it is. This is why, later in the dialogue, he so confidently avers what he says he has always "been in the habit of" saying to anyone he encounters: viz., that they should not "attend to" money, reputation, bodies, or anything other than "wisdom (*phronēsis*), truth, and the soul"—i.e., that they should first of all be trying to acquire genuine virtue (29d-30b). His point is that the latter are "the things worth most" (30a1-2). But this is nothing new;[70] it is just another way of putting the point expressed earlier at 22d and 23a: that wisdom in "the greatest things" is not the knowledge of the money-makers, or of the doctors or trainers, or of the rhetoricians, etc. Indeed, once this is understood, we should recognize that his own neglect of those "paltrier things" does not come, as he slyly suggests (23b-c, 31a-c), from "service to the god", allegedly understood only after discovering the oracle's meaning; rather, that neglect is required by the axiological principles implicit in his early "examination" of the oracle's meaning.[71]

One significant problem with taking the oracle story seriously is that we must then draw a very different conclusion about Socrates' chief purpose than the one we are presented with in the other early dialogues: we must regard Socrates as concerned primarily, not with a personal search for wisdom, but with proving

[69] Nor could the oracle's *prima facie* meaning, together with his own lack of craft-knowledge, have given him sufficient confidence for ignoring craft-wisdom. After all, if he were at that point as yet uncertain that the oracle's *prima facie* meaning was its true meaning, how could he at that time have been confident in dismissing craft-wisdom as irrelevant, especially since "*sophia*" was commonly used to refer to craft-knowledge?

[70] So I disagree with Stokes that we find at 29d-30b "far more positive content" than earlier in the dialogue (1992, 75).

[71] For this reason alone, we must reject McPherran's proposal that, before Socrates allegedly discovered the oracle's meaning, the value that he found in philosophy was "significantly qualified by ordinary prudential considerations", e.g. about "money and leisure" (1996, 222). Another, more powerful consideration against McPherran's interpretation is that the relative values that Socrates himself places on philosophy on the one hand and those "external goods" on the other are precisely the values he believes *everyone* should place upon them, as his habitual exhortations make plain. Thus his philosophical obligations are in no way "special".

to others their own lack of genuine wisdom. I do not doubt that the latter was a concern of Socrates. But it was, at most, a subsidiary one. It cannot, however, be such if DO and PS are the truth. John Burnet put this point very well a century ago:

> We need not doubt . . . that Socrates actually gave some such account of his mission as that we read in the *Apology*, though we must keep in view the 'ironical' character of this part of the speech. Most English critics take it far too seriously. They seem to think the message of Socrates to his fellow-citizens can have been nothing more than is there revealed, and that his sole business in life was to expose the ignorance of others. If that had really been all, it is surely hard to believe that he would have been ready to face death rather than relinquish his task. (1916, 242-243)

I do not entirely follow Burnet's last sentence; surely many have died in the name of a god for what others would consider far less worthy causes. But Burnet's main point here was that we take the oracle story too seriously if we conclude that Socrates really thought it explained his purpose. I would go further than Burnet; for even some of those who have regarded Socrates' true mission as involving more than simply exposing others' ignorance also take the oracle story far too seriously. I believe that Socrates would have acted and lived pretty much as he had even if the oracle had never delivered the famous response, even if he had never received or heard of another such oracle or any other divine sign. As I have explained, it is clear that Socrates had reasons of his own for choosing a philosophical life, arrived at independently of divine influence—reasons which he clearly regarded not only as sufficient for his peculiar behavior, but as the *proper* explanation of it, the gods having played little or no part—and certainly no causal role in his decision making.

I do not mean to deny that Chaerephon did receive a response of the kind reported in the *Apology*. Nor do I wish to deny that Socrates thinks he is acting in accordance with divine wishes. But this is quite different from denying, as I do, that Socrates believes he had received an explicit order to philosophize or believes that he is acting *on* any special order from a god. I would say rather that, based on his own determination that philosophizing is good, Socrates has *inferred* that the god wants him (and us all) to philosophize.[72] This, I suggest, accounts for the

[72] This, I assume, is what makes Weiss say that "to obey the god and to act according to one's own reasoned conclusions about what justice requires are, at bottom, the same thing" (1998, 11; cf. 17 n. 28; also cf. her 2005, 85-86).

speculative terms he chooses (*Apol.* 23a5, 23a8, 28e5) to describe his views about the supposed "order".[73]

If what he says in connection with the oracle story is not meant to be taken seriously, what then is its purpose in Socrates' defense speech? As I have indicated already, I believe that it was meant as a scathing joke, moreover one that was supposed to be transparent. Just consider how incredibly full of tragic ironies Socrates' trial and conviction would be, if the oracle story were indeed supposed to be the truth: he has been charged with impiety for acting in a way that is in reality more pious than any other Athenian's action, so much so that he is practically irreplaceable (*Apol.* 30e-31a); it is actually the plaintiffs (35d6-7), and the judges voting for his execution, who do not acknowledge the gods, as executing Socrates for not acknowledging the gods will thwart the divine purpose of Socrates' life (30d-e); the method which he used to discover his special divine mission, and which the divine order requires that he continue using, is the very thing that, despite its being a uniquely beneficial and divine "gift" to them, so infuriates the Athenians (21c8-d2, 24a6-7, 30e7-31a6), and ultimately is what leads to his own prosecution and execution (23e4, 28a5-9, 28b4-5); indeed, the very ones whom the god has chosen him to save are the ones who will put him to death and thus doom themselves to go on living "incorrectly". Reality is rarely so replete with tragi-comedy. Instead, I suggest that we, as well as Socrates' Athenian audience, were supposed to interpret DO and PS as part of an elaborate effort by Socrates to mock his accusers and to highlight their own very real crimes (30d5-6, 33b4-5, 39b5-6, 41d6-e1), in which, Socrates gravely believed, the judges who voted against him were complicit (41b3, 41d6-e1).[74]

As I have argued, there is otherwise no way to make coherent sense of his commitment to the Autonomous Rationalism that we find not only in other early dialogues but also in the *Apology* itself.

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[73] Reeve (1989, 71), Vlastos (1991, 171-172), and Stokes (1992, 48) too think the speculative terms are significant.

[74] Since (as I have tried to show) the substance of the oracle story and Socrates' own framing and commentary provide his audience ample opportunity to see that he cannot have meant it seriously, we need not worry that Socrates would scruple to speak "ironically on a matter of substance" in this instance. So Brickhouse and Smith's concerns about ironic interpretations (1989, 40ff. and 89-90) simply do not apply here because he does not "risk being intentionally misleading". The fact that Socrates repeatedly voices doubt in his ability to give a "full" defense of himself "in so brief a time" (19a, 24a, 37a-b) is further indication that Socrates was not (pace Brickhouse and Smith) overly concerned about producing an "effective" defense.

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