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LACHES BEFORE CHARMIDES FICTIVE CHRONOLOGY AND PLATONIC PEDAGOGY

Despite long overdue scholarly discontent with the nineteenth century dogma that his dialogues are best understood in terms of Plato’s intellectual development,¹ its most recent rival suffers from a similar disability. Christened “fictive chronology” by Charles Griswold Jr. in 1999,² an ordering of the dialogues in relation to their dramatic dates replaces a story about Plato’s with another about Socrates’ development: both stories suffer from a characteristically modern and un-Platonic concern with time, change, and Becoming. The persistence of attempts to outflank Platonism by historicizing Plato is an interesting phenomenon in its own right: in addition to revealing the enduring influence of evolutionary patterns of thought, its latent cause with respect to Socrates is the influence of Leo Strauss, principal twentieth-century critic of the developmentalist reading of Plato and inventor of its Socratic counterpart.³ In any case, the research of Debra Nails⁴ has now allowed Catherine Zuckert⁵ to produce a comprehensive reading of all the Platonic dialogues based on fictive chronology while Laurence Lampert (2010) has recently applied the principle in detail to *Protagoras*, *Charmides*, and *Republic*.

Before this new form of chronological over-determination becomes a twenty-first century dogma, *Laches* and *Charmides* will here be used to illustrate both the inadequacy of ordering the dialogues by fictive chronology and the merits of replacing an admittedly out-dated developmentalist approach with a new

For Mrs. Appleyard’s youngest daughter: Rosamond Kent Sprague. Except where noted, all translations from *Lach.* and *Charm.* are hers; citations of the text are based on Burnet 1900-07. Thanks are also due to Jonathan R. Bruno, Tom Brickhouse, Dimitri El Murr and an anonymous reader; the latter’s suggestions and criticisms were very helpful.

¹ Among many others, see Rowe 2007, 48-51, 248. Gould 1987 is a good example of a “developmentalist” reading of *Lach.*

² Griswold 1999, 386-90 especially 387.

³ Strauss 1966 and Strauss 1989, 103-183, especially 154: “The individual Platonic dialogue is not a chapter from the *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* or from a system of philosophy, nor is it the product of an occasion or the relic of a stage of Plato’s development.” Strauss’s account of Socratic “development” is usefully summarized at Zuckert 1996, 132-64.

⁴ Nails 2002, especially 307-30.

⁵ See Zuckert 2009, 8-19, especially 9 n. 19.

conception of Platonic pedagogy based on a more natural conception of reading order.⁶ The threshold form of my thesis is that *Charmides* must not be read in isolation from *Laches* on the basis of fictive chronology (Sections 1-3) while its more developed form (Sections 3-5) uses the reading order hypothesis to show that *Laches* actually precedes *Charmides* on pedagogical grounds *despite* fictive chronology.

Section 1. Fictive Chronology and the *Charmides*

Consistent with the moderation of her path-breaking book,⁷ Zuckert avoids the worst ramifications of considering *Charmides* and *Laches* in accordance with fictive chronology. Given the dates of Potidaea and Delium (*Charm.* 153a1 and *Lach.* 180b1-2), she naturally considers *Charmides* prior to *Laches* but despite a considerable chronological interval between the two dramatic settings, she nevertheless manages to preserve the traditional and indeed obvious juxtaposition of the two (cf. Nails 2002, 311-2) by discussing *Laches* immediately after *Charmides* (Zuckert 2009, 237-58). But this chronological juxtaposition is only made possible by her decision to ignore the possibility that any of the conversations depicted in *Gorgias*,⁸ the pair of *Hippias* dialogues,⁹ and the *Republic*,¹⁰ take place before *Laches*. It should be noted that Nails classified these four as “Dialogues with Problematic Dramatic Dates” (Nails 2002, 324-7); the presence of Plato’s masterpiece among them should probably be taken as a *reductio ad absurdum* on the entire enterprise.¹¹ But Zuckert’s decision to preserve, within the context of fictive chronology, the *Charmides/Laches*

⁶ See Altman 2010; the influence of e.g. Kahn 1996 qualifies the use of “new.” For an early application of Kahn’s “prolepsis” (Kahn 1996, 48 and Kahn 1981) to *Charm.*, see Van Der Ben 1985, especially 95 and 98-9 n. 14.

⁷ Her independence from Strauss is particularly praiseworthy; see 224 n. 16, 299, 354 n. 136, 363 n. 153, and 493.

⁸ Although the only attested visit of Gorgias to Athens was in 427 B.C. (i.e. between Potidaea and Delium) other indications suggest a later date or rather a hopeless muddle where fictive chronology is concerned; see Nails 2002, 326-7.

⁹ These dialogues are considered at Zuckert 2009, 257-77, i.e. the fourth part of Chapter 4. The conversations with Hippias refer to the visit of Gorgias to Athens (see previous note and Nails 2002, 313).

¹⁰ Zuckert 2009, 301-2 n. 43; for similar passages, see 353 n. 134 and 487 n. 8.

¹¹ Nails 2002, 324: “The version of *Republic* that has come down to us is not a seamless dialogue, and it was not edited from the standpoint of dramatic date; thus there would be jarring anachronisms if any of the candidate specific dates between 432 and 404 were assigned definitively.” To preserve the possibility that Plato was concerned with fictive chronology, Nails revives the fiction of an independent *Thrasymachus* (see Kahn 1993) and suggests that we are confined to an unedited version of *Rep.*

juxtaposition conceals to a large extent the most dangerous implications inherent in her organizing principle.

These implications become more obvious in Lampert's book: he scarcely mentions *Laches* while *Charmides* is preceded by *Protagoras* (and the *Alcibiades* dialogues)¹² and then followed by *Republic*, a dialogue for which he finds a specific date only a few weeks after *Charmides* (Lampert 2010, 405-11). By reading *Republic* as the sequel to *Charmides*, Lampert argues that the charms from Thrace to which Socrates refers in *Charmides* but never actually reveals there (cf. *Charm.* 156d3-5 and 175e3) are to be sought and found in *Republic*;¹³ this connection ultimately becomes the basis for divorcing Plato from the Idea of the Good and redefining the shorter, not the Longer Way (*Rep.* 504b1-505a4), in reference to it.¹⁴ The significant point here is that because he is only considering a small number of dialogues in an exclusively chronological context, Lampert has no reason to consider *Charmides* in relation to *Laches*. Quite apart from his understanding of the *Charmides-Republic* dyad, Lampert ignores far more obvious or natural connections, like those that caused Thrasyllus to place *Cleitophon* before *Republic* and *Charmides* next to *Laches*. Zuckert, by contrast, finds a way to preserve these Thrasyllan connections.

Zuckert's Chapter 4 ("Socrates Interrogates His Contemporaries about the Noble and Good") is divided into four parts, the first on *Protagoras*, the second divided between the two *Alcibiades* dialogues and *Charmides* (Zuckert 2009, 237-47), the third on *Laches* (Zuckert 2009, 247-58), and the fourth on the two *Hippias* dialogues. This structure emphasizes the links between *Charmides* and *Alcibiades Major* and there are many such links, not all of them mentioned by Zuckert.¹⁵ Her guiding statement builds on the presence of both Critias and Alcibiades in *Protagoras* (*Prot.* 316a4-5) and, more importantly, on the juxtaposition in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 1.2.12-48 of two men "Socrates was

¹² In arguing for the dramatic priority of *Prot.* to *Alcibiades Major*, both Zuckert and Lampert (Lampert 2010, 126 n. 146 and 143-4; Zuckert 2009, 217-8 n. 4), correctly draw attention to the fact that Socrates does not actually speak with Alcibiades in the former. But both miss what I regard as the most important "natural" indication of sequence: at *Alcibiades Major* 111a1-4, the otherwise astonishingly obtuse youth (cf. 108c6-d4) employs an ingenious argument Protagoras had used in his hearing at *Prot.* 327e3-328a1; see Denyer 2001, 122. For the pedagogical value or purpose of *Prot.*, see Guthrie 1975, 235.

¹³ Lampert 2010, 233, 241, 245, 249, 271, 305-6, and 388.

¹⁴ Lampert 2010, 296 and 353: "The short road leads to the bright and beautiful that secures the moral universe in the ruling principle of the Good."

¹⁵ The most obvious example is the definition of temperance as self-knowledge; see Denyer 2001, 222. Cf. Lampert 2010, 156-7 and 180 n. 60.

not able to divert from their tyrannous ambitions."¹⁶ But her principal concern is the following: "In the *Alcibiades I* and the *Charmides*, Socrates shows that acquiring knowledge is necessarily an interactive process."¹⁷ This is clearly a significant link although she weakens her case for the juxtaposition of *Charmides* and *Alcibiades Major* by astutely pointing out a significant difference between the two: the former is a private conversation while Critias in *Charmides* (like Nicias in *Laches*) must be concerned with his audience's reaction (Zuckert 2009, 245-6).

When Zuckert turns to *Laches*, however, she for the most part fails to draw attention to the many connections between it and *Charmides* that will be discussed in Section 3.¹⁸ The only time she mentions *Charmides* in her account of *Laches* is both disjunctive and dependent on the presuppositions of fictive chronology:

By showing that Socrates was no longer known only to the young men and foreign teachers who frequented the gymnasium but was now recognized by the leading conservative politicians in Athens (Nicias and Laches), if for different reasons, Plato indicates that the philosopher's reputation had grown in the ten years between this conversation and that depicted in *Charmides*. Nicias, for example, knows of Socrates.
(Zuckert 2009, 248)

Given that Critias and young Charmides (cf. *Charm.* 156a6-7 and *Lach.* 181a1-3) are no less familiar than Nicias is with the reputation of Socrates as well as his views or statements (cf. *Charm.* 161b5-6 and *Lach.* 194d1-2), and that both dialogues take place in gymnasia (cf. *Lach.* 178a1 and *Euthyd.* 271d3),¹⁹ this distinction seems forced. And even though Zuckert draws attention to the important and obvious connection between *Laches* and *Protagoras* on the

¹⁶ Zuckert 2009, 229 and (on Xenophon) n. 24; cf. Lampert 2010, 134-40. Zuckert offers no defense for using Xenophon to elucidate Plato's arrangement of the dialogues but she presupposes—accurately, in my judgment—Plato's knowledge of Xenophon.

¹⁷ Zuckert 2009, 247; cf. 235, 243, and 246.

¹⁸ Zuckert 2009, 256 n. 72 notes without comment that Socrates quotes the same passage from Homer in both dialogues.

¹⁹ Emlyn-Jones 1996, 2: "The precise venue of the conversation is not stated; the exhibition of *hoplomachia* the participants have just been watching (178a1) may be presumed to have taken place in one of the Athenian *Gymnasia*, the dramatic setting for many of Plato's Dialogues and where Socrates often converses (see e.g. *Lys.* 204a)." Both *Lys.* and *Euthyd.* take place at the Lyceum, the only identified venue for a display of martial arts in Plato (*Euthyd.* 271a1). And Stesilaus (*Lach.* 183c8-184a7) must be reckoned a *foreign* teacher (cf. the passage from Zuckert quoted above).

meaning of courage,²⁰ she fails to note the significant connections between *Laches* and *Alcibiades* that will be discussed in Section 2. In conclusion, her emphasis on fictive chronology leads her to neglect the close connections between *Laches* and *Charmides* and even tempts her to suggest a thematic disjunction between the two.

Section 2. *Laches* and *Alcibiades Major*

In order to address the question of whether young men (*Lach.* 185c3) ought to learn how to fight in armor, Socrates secures prior agreement from Nicias that if we are consulting about eye-medicine, we are really discussing the eye (*Lach.* 185c5-9), if bridles, the horse (*Lach.* 185d1-5), and generally, the thing for the sake of which we are consulting rather than the thing that will be applied to it (*Lach.* 185d5-12). Since a plausible case could be made for the view that training in martial arts is an important part of *physical* education, it is significant that Socrates refuses to identify the body as the thing for the sake of which we are discussing fighting in armor:

Socrates. So do we now declare that we are considering a form of study for the sake of the souls of young men.
(*Lach.* 185e1-2)

In his commentary on this passage, Chris Emlyn-Jones (1996, 77) remarks:

S. [sc. Socrates] makes this basic move very casually, and receives immediate and unquestioning assent from N. [sc. Nicias], which suggests that Plato does not believe that S. is introducing a controversial or difficult idea.

It would be more accurate and natural to say—and with this suggestion I broach the question of a Platonic pedagogy based on reading order—that Plato presupposes his reader’s familiarity with *Alcibiades Major*. It is here that Socrates asks Alcibiades a series of questions leading the young man to assert (cf. *Alcibiades Major* 112d10-113b7) that he himself is not his body but his soul.²¹ And this is

²⁰ Zuckert 2009, 252-3; in addition to Denyer 2008, 174-5, see Erbse 1968 and Devereux 1992.

²¹ See Denyer 2001, 213-20 on *Alcibiades Major* 129b5-130e6.

only one of three allusions between *Laches* 185d1 and 190b1 to this most accessible of Platonic dialogues.²²

Socrates will prove that Alcibiades needs to attend to his soul by refuting the claim that the young man already knows what justice is. This refutation depends on the following seemingly innocuous exchange:

Socrates. And you know only the things you have learnt from others or discovered yourself? *Alcibiades.* What could I know besides?
(*Alcibiades Major* 106d4-6; translation W.R.M. Lamb)

While it is comparatively easy to reveal through questioning that Alcibiades has had no *reliable* teacher of justice (*Alcibiades Major* 111a5-112d9), Socrates must first extract an agreement from the young man that there never was a time at which he did not believe that he already knew what justice was (and therefore had an incentive to discover what it was for himself) before gaining agreement that the youth has not in fact discovered it for himself.²³ In *Laches*, by contrast, Socrates requires no cross-examination to reveal his own status:

Now I, Lysimachus and Melesias, am the first to say, concerning myself, that I have had no teacher in the subject. And yet I longed after it from my youth up. But I did not have any money to give the sophists, who were the only ones who professed to be able to make a cultivated man out of me, and I myself, on the other hand, am unable to discover the art even now.²⁴

²² It goes without saying both that the authenticity of *Alcibiades* has been disputed and that Denyer 2001 will be reckoned an important milestone in its rehabilitation should it be once again embraced; see his nuanced discussion at Denyer 2001, 14-26. Its authenticity is defended at Zuckert 2009, 216 n. 2 and assumed in Lampert 2010. My own approach to restoring it to the canon would be based on pedagogical grounds as mediated by the concept of Reading Order. Note that although *Alcibiades Major* was often placed first in ancient reconstructions of Reading Order (see Denyer 2001, 14 n. 6), this placement was based on its content rather than its pedagogical accessibility to neophytes.

²³ See Denyer 2001, 101 for a list of much more compressed parallels (or references) to this passage in other dialogues; the connection between *Lach.* and *Euthyd.* will be discussed in Section 4. below.

²⁴ *Lach.* 186b8-c5. The art in question is that of caring for the souls of the youth (*Lach.* 186a8; cf. *Alcibiades Major* 130b2-11) so that they become good (*Lach.* 186b4-6; cf. *Euthyd.* 291d1-6). Although the possibility of irony in the quoted passage should not be ignored, Socrates has already given himself another way out before this confession (*Lach.* 186b1-5): "Or if any one of us says that he himself has had no teacher but has works of his own to tell of, then he ought to show which of the Athenians or foreigners, whether slave or free, is recognized to have become good by his influence." This escape route will be discussed in Section 4. with reference to *Euthyd.*

And it is the reader’s familiarity with *Alcibiades Major*—where it is on the rich young man’s past, not his future,²⁵ that the Socratic refutation of self-discovery entirely depends—that unlocks the humor of what Socrates says next:

If Nicias or Laches had discovered it or learned it, I would not be surprised, because they are richer than I and so may have learned it from others, and also older, so they may have discovered it already.
(*Lach.* 186c5-8)

The third allusion connects the most beautiful passage in *Alcibiades Major* to the most confusing passage in *Laches*, a passage that will be considered in Section 5 below. In *Alcibiades Major*, Socrates uses the parallel between the eye and the soul to explain the acquisition of self-knowledge through interaction with another.²⁶ In *Laches*, Socrates explicates an admittedly confusing general statement of methodology (*Lach.* 189e3-8) with the same analogy between the eye and sight (*Lach.* 190a1-b2) that he had applied in *Alcibiades Major* to the soul and the virtue of the soul, i.e. wisdom (*Alcibiades Major* 133b2-11), and that he now intends to apply first to the soul and virtue generally (*Lach.* 190b3-c7) and next to the soul and courage specifically (*Lach.* 190c8-e3). The fact that the identification of human beings with their souls in *Laches* actually begins with a reference to the eyes (*Lach.* 185c6; cf. *Charm.* 156b6) is but one further indication that the entire passage between 185c5 and 190e3 presupposes and is intended to remind the reader of *Alcibiades Major*. Naturally this kind of claim applies no less to *Charmides*: in addition to the fact that it revisits the theme of self-knowledge generally, the view of Socrates quoted by Critias (*Charm.* 161b6) leads eventually to a verbal identity with *Alcibiades Major* (*Charm.* 164d4 and *Alcibiades Major* 131b4; cf. Denyer 2001, 222). But it is not because *Charmides* is set at approximately the same time period as *Alcibiades Major* that it echoes the earlier and simpler dialogue: both *Charmides* and *Laches* echo *Alcibiades Major* because they, despite the time-interval between Potidaea and Delium, are best understood as twins.²⁷

²⁵ At *Alcibiades Major* 109e7, Socrates asserts that Alcibiades could have discovered for himself how to know about the just and unjust things (109e1-2) “if you thought you did not know” (Lamb). Although Laches is brought to a discontented confession of inability (*Lach.* 195a6-b4), Nicias places his ultimate confidence in being taught by others (*Lach.* 200b2-7).

²⁶ See *Alcibiades Major* 132c9-133c17 and Denyer 2001, 229-37; cf. Zuckert 2009, 235-47.

²⁷ Lost in the ancient debate about trilogies or tetralogies in Plato is the far more obvious and natural category of twin-dialogues (*Zwillingsdialoge*) of which *Sophist* and *Statesman* are the least controversial examples. In addition to the pair of *Alcibiades* and *Hippias* dialogues, one might also cite *Timaeus/Critias*, *Hipparchus/Minos*, and *Laws/Epinomis*. Since the authenticity debate has rendered this pattern all but invisible, a renewed recognition of the pattern necessarily adds a new dimension to the authenticity debate.

Section 3. *Charmides* and *Laches*

Here it is tempting to employ the least philosophical of proofs: the *argumentum ad verecundiam*. German scholars in particular have been drawing attention to the parallels between *Charmides* and *Laches* for the last hundred years.²⁸ The most detailed and sensitive treatment of these parallels is Reinhard Dieterle's *Platons Laches und Charmides; Untersuchungen zur elenktisch-aporetischen Struktur der platonischen Frühdialoge* (1966).²⁹ This claim is by no means intended to discount the contributions of my own countrymen in this field. In addition to Rosamond Kent Sprague (1973), the studies of Gerasimos Santas (1971 and 1973), Francisco J. Gonzalez (1995 and 1998), and Walter T. Schmid³⁰ bear witness to the intimate connection between *Charmides* and *Laches*.³¹ Nor is ancient testimony lacking: Thrasyllus places the two side by side in his Fifth Tetralogy.

Without rejecting the many subtle and important parallels between *Charmides* and *Laches* identified by these and other scholars, my own approach to linking the two dialogues is intentionally *superficial*: how does Plato make it *obvious* to any given reader that the two are to be read and considered as a pair? The purpose of this paper is to use these particular twins in order to reject a proposal for reading the dialogues *solely* on the basis of fictive chronology, a proposal that threatens to disconnect them. The word "solely" is emphasized here because there is no question that in the case of e.g. *Theaetetus*, *Euthyphro*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*, Plato has often made the chronological ordering of his dialogues *obvious*. *Laches* and *Charmides* are important in this context because even though they are separated in time as indicated by the dates of two important battles, they are nevertheless linked in many other obvious ways indicating that it was Plato's *intention* to have his readers read them together and, moreover, that it is this intention that best explains why so many have done so. To that extent, my purpose in exploring the link between *Charmides* and *Laches* is not only to call into question an exclusive reliance on fictive chronology as the basis for ordering Plato's dialogues but also to reject *en passant* two far more serious errors: the view

²⁸ Mutschmann 1911, 474 ("fast wie Zwillinge"); Gomperz 1912, 250; Pohlenz 1913, 56; and Natorp 1914, 20 ("Zwillingsbrüder").

²⁹ See Dieterle 1966, 72-4, 142 n. 1 (see previous note), 162 n. 1, 163-4, 168 n. 3, 175-6, 183 n. 1, 186 n. 3, 195 n. 1, 200 n. 3, 204 n. 1, 206 n. 1, 209 n. 1, 212 n. 2, 222, 228 n. 1, 231, 285, 295-6, 300 n. 1, 307 n. 1, and 308-19.

³⁰ *Charm.* is "sister dialogue" to *Lach.* at Schmid 1992, 1, 25, and 70; cf. Schmid 1998, 148 and 178 n. 22.

³¹ Other instances could be found between Grote 1867, 468-501 and Wolfsdorf 2005, 335-40.

that Plato had no authorial intentions whatsoever and that each of his dialogues must be interpreted in complete isolation from all the rest (Press 1993).

The most obvious connection between *Laches* and *Charmides* is that each is concerned with a single virtue: this accounts for the ancient decision of Thrasyllus to link them with *Theages* and the modern decision to consider them most often in connection with *Euthyphro* (e.g. Crombie 1962). The facts that stand at the basis of disjoining the two on the basis of fictive chronology—the dates of Delium and Potidaea—offer another obvious link: two dialogues linked by concern with one particular virtue also emphasize Socrates’ service as a soldier in one particular battle.³² Both dialogues likewise presuppose the reader’s knowledge of history: certainly the dates of Potidaea and Delium depend on Thucydides. Of course the connection with history is probably far deeper: if *Laches* cannot be understood without Thucydides (who narrates the end of Nicias) the historical significance of *Charmides* depends on having read the account of Critias in Xenophon’s *Hellenica*.

Closer to the text, particularly in the context of history, is Plato’s decision not to name the dialogues *Nicias* and *Critias*; every competent teacher who considered the two dialogues as a pair would ask students to explain the analogy between the two titles and thus about Plato’s intentions in having named them as he did. Another unmistakable link is the fact that Socrates quotes *Odyssey* 17.347 in both. Socrates quotes it at the end of *Laches* (*Lach.* 201b2-3) in order to encourage his interlocutors to pursue their inquiries into courage regardless of any considerations of shame, while he quotes it early in *Charmides* (*Charm.* 161a4) as a dubious *argumentum ad verecundiam* against Charmides’ final attempt to discover for himself what temperance is before shamelessly passing off a statement that depends on the authority of Critias as his own (cf. Schmid 1992, 208-8 n. 4 and Hyland 1981, 69). The comparative complexity of these two identical citations—the subtle difference made palpable through the superficial similarity—corroborates R.K. Sprague’s admirable comment: “I have placed *Laches* first as being simpler than the *Charmides* and as providing a more leisurely introduction to the Socratic method.”³³ When all is said and done, the most natural and therefore compelling reason for reading *Laches* before *Charmides* is that it proves to be easier to read and therefore consistent with a sound pedagogical practice evidently recognized as such by one of history’s greatest teachers.³⁴

³² Both *Symp.* 221a2-b1 and *Apol.* 28e2-3 mention both battles.

³³ Sprague 1973, vii.

³⁴ Cf. Crombie 1962, 214: “The turn of courage comes in the *Laches*, and it is treated more intelligibly than self-restraint in the *Charmides*.” An easily overlooked aspect of the increased difficulty of *Charm.* is that it deals with worse men than *Lach.*; cf. *Rep.* 409a1-e1.

Section 4. Between *Euthydemus* and *Charmides*

As a great teacher, Plato was also playful (*Rep.* 536e3-537a1) and this fact becomes obvious to the student who begins to think in terms of reading order. There are, of course, obvious sequential connections between dialogues as is the case with *Sophist* and *Statesman*; other examples are the references to *Parmenides* at *Sophist* 217c4-7 and the allusions to *Republic* at *Parmenides* (*Parm.* 126a2; cf. Miller 1986, 15, 18, and 194 n. 13). But these hints indicate general priority rather than actual sequence. A better example of what I am calling a “natural” connection joins the end of *Symposium*, where Socrates departs for the Lyceum, to the beginning of *Lysis*, which discovers him *en route* thither (see Altman 2010). And the journey that begins at Agathon’s house continues: *Euthydemus* is the only Platonic dialogue set in the Lyceum. This obvious and natural connection is decisive and having recognized it, the reader will easily discover additional reasons to think it deliberate on Plato’s part. To begin with, Laches’ entire posture, his self-confessed albeit only partial misogyny (*Lach.* 188c4-d2), offers pleasing counterpoint and a perfectly understandable response to the specious and repelling arguments the reader, not Laches, has just encountered in *Euthydemus*.

The more complex thematic advance *Laches* makes over *Alcibiades* also links *Laches* to *Euthydemus*. In *Laches*, Socrates offers a third way to prove that one knows what any given virtue is: in addition to being able to identify the teacher who has taught you, one may demonstrate its acquisition not simply by a spoken claim to self-discovery but through the deeds so highly valued by Laches (*Lach.* 188d2-8; cf. *Rep.* 399a5-c4), i.e. by pointing out another person, whether free or slave, who has become good as a result of you (*Lach.* 186b1-5). As soon as Ctesippus—introduced to the reader in *Lysis* (*Lysis* 203a4)—is identified as playing Iolaus to Socrates’ Hercules in his battle with Euthydemus the Hydra and Dionysiodorus the pesky crab (see Altman 2007, 371-5), *Euthydemus* becomes an illustration of Socrates’ mastery of this virtuous pedagogy. By learning from Socrates how to turn the tricks of the brothers against themselves for the benefit of his beloved, Ctesippus the student proves his teacher “wrong”—or rather vindicates Socrates’ provocative pedagogical practice—by doing more good than harm (*Euthydemus* 297d1-2). In the context of *Euthydemus*, then, Socrates’ merely implicit profession of pedagogical ineptitude in *Laches* (*Lach.* 186c5) can hardly be considered definitive, especially since the dialogue ends with his commitment—within the limits of piety (*Lach.* 201c4-5; cf. *Theages* 130e5-7)—to participate in the education of Thucydides and Aristides (*Lach.* 200b3-5; cf. *Theages* 130a4-e4).

It is, however, to far more obvious and natural connections that I am attempting to draw attention here. A subtle but unmistakable linguistic connection between *Euthydemus* and *Laches*—reminiscent of the twin citations of Homer’s *Odyssey* that connect *Laches* with *Charmides*—occurs when Socrates offers himself “as a Carian” (cf. *Lach.* 187b1 and *Euthyd.* 285c1) while Crito’s concern for Critobulus at the end of *Euthydemus* (306d2-307c4) is echoed by the concern of Melesius and Lysimachus for their sons at the beginning of *Laches*. But the *natural* connection—the one that makes Plato’s intentions manifest to any reader—is the presence of martial arts in both dialogues: in addition to teaching a warlike eristic, Euthydemus and Dionysiodorus are also expert in fighting in armor (*Euthyd.* 271d4-272a1) while *Laches* opens immediately after a similar display. Having attended to natural connections obvious to any youngster, the careful reader (*Rep.* 537a1-2) will then be rewarded by a far deeper level of comprehension and to that deeper level it is now time to turn.

Charles H. Kahn concludes his chapter on *Charmides* with a discussion of *Euthydemus* (Kahn 1996, 206-9; cf. Kahn 1988, 548-9). But it is characteristic of Kahn’s revolutionary notion of “proleptic” or “ingressive composition” (Kahn 1996, 59-60) that he gives the last word to Plato’s masterpiece (Kahn 1996, 209): “Here as often we see that, in the threshold dialogues, all roads lead to the *Republic*.” Kahn is pointing to the fact that the Idea of the Good offers Plato’s solution to the infinite regress into which “the royal art”—itself analogous to “the knowledge of knowledge proposed in the *Charmides*”—stumbles in *Euthydemus*:

What began in the *Laches* and *Charmides* and continued in the *Meno* and *Euthydemus* as a search for beneficial knowledge, knowledge of the correct use of instrumental goods, finds its climax here at the end of *Republic* VI, in an appeal to knowledge of the good itself.³⁵

Despite the fact that he places *Euthydemus* after *Charmides* instead of before *Laches*,³⁶ Kahn’s *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (1996) is the principal modern forerunner of the conception of Platonic pedagogy based on reading order for which I am arguing here:³⁷ all of the dialogues Plato intends the student to read before *Republic*—including

³⁵ Kahn 1996, 209; cf. Rowe 2007, 248.

³⁶ In Kahn 1996, *Lach.* and *Men.* are treated in Chapter 6, *Charm.* in Chapter 7, and *Euthyd.* in Chapter 10 (321-5); he plays down the parallels between *Lach.* and *Charm.* at 183.

³⁷ Cf. Kahn 1996, 48: “My six stages may be thought of as the proposal for an ideal reading order.”

Euthydemus, *Laches*, *Charmides*, and *Gorgias*—are “proleptic” with respect to it.³⁸ Once *Charmides* is recognized as closer to *Republic* VI than *Euthydemus*, it is easy to see why *Laches* stands between them notwithstanding the priorities of “fictive chronology.”

Despite the fact that she is attacking Kahn where I find significant common ground with him, Mary Margaret McCabe makes precisely the right point about *Euthydemus* in contrast to *Republic*:

The *Euthydemus*, on the other hand, claims that wisdom is an intrinsic good, good itself by itself. This seems to mean both that wisdom is itself a good and that it is the source of the goodness of any other goods there might be. But that thought, it might be said, is the complete opposite of the view offered in the *Republic*. For there the intrinsic good, though an object of knowledge, is the source of goodness independently of whether it is known.
(McCabe 2002, 4)

McCabe is right: “the royal art” in *Euthydemus* is not knowledge of the Good but is, itself, *qua* beneficial knowledge, good.³⁹ Because it is assumed to be beneficial and thus makes men happy, this knowledge alone cannot be productive of things that are neither good nor bad.⁴⁰ In fact, once Ctesippus is recognized as Iolaus, “the royal art” is best understood as the pedagogical art of Socrates being

³⁸ Erbse 1968, 39 (translation mine): “What one would like to say about all the works of this period—at least about the dialogues between *Protagoras* and *Republic*—applies as well to *Charmides*: they are not only written in order to communicate isolated philosophical discoveries but are also at the same time a curriculum constructed from psychagogic points of view [*ein nach psychagogischen Gesichtspunkten aufgebauter Lebrgang*] that pursues the goal of preparing the reader for apprehending the Ideas.”

³⁹ *Euthyd.* 292a4-b3 (translation W.H.D. Rouse): “*Socrates*: Then what of the art of kings, ruling all which it rules? What does it make? Perhaps you cannot say exactly. *Crito*: No indeed, I cannot. *Socrates*: Nor could we, my dear *Crito*. But I know one thing [*ἀλλὰ τοσόνδε γε οἶσθα*], that if it is the art we seek, it must be helpful [*ὠφέλιμον*]. *Crito*: Certainly. *Socrates*: Then surely it must provide something good [*ἀγαθόν γέ τι*] for us? *Crito*: Obviously, *Socrates*. *Socrates*: But good [*ἀγαθόν δέ γέ*], as *Clinias* and I agreed together, is nothing but some kind of knowledge [*οὐδὲν εἶναι ἄλλο ἢ ἐπιστήμην τινά*]. *Crito*: Yes, you said so.”

⁴⁰ *Euthyd.* 292b4-c2 (Rouse): “*Socrates*: Again, all the other ‘works of politics’ as one might call them—and there are many, for example, to make the people rich and free and without party spirit—all these things turned out to be neither good nor bad [*οὔτε κακὰ οὔτε ἀγαθὰ*], but the necessary thing was to make [*ποιεῖν*] them wise and to give them a share of knowledge [*ἐπιστήμης*], since knowledge was to be that which profited them [*ἢ ὠφελούσᾳ*] and made them happy [*εὐδαιμονίας ποιοῦσα*]. *Crito*: That is true, that is what you agreed, according to your report of what was said [*ὡς σὺ τοὺς λόγους ἀπήγγειλας*].” *Crito*’s caveat is astute; see Altman 2007, 374.

practiced in the dialogue.⁴¹ But even for the reader who fails to make this identification—i.e. the reader who, like Crito (*Euthyd.* 291a1), fails to recognize what sort of man Ctesippus is (*Euthyd.* 273a8) or has become (Altman 2007, 374)—the knowledge that can “impart no knowledge but itself alone,” appears to be devoid of any other recognizable content.⁴² By sharply contrasting *Euthydemus* with *Republic*, McCabe goes on to reject Kahn’s proleptic reading of the former:

In response, I maintain that the difference between an ethical theory where the explanation of value is located in a state of the agent and one where it is located outside is too radical for that story to be told. That is to say, between the two accounts of the good itself by itself in the *Euthydemus* and the *Republic*, the one where the good is internal to the agent, the other where it is external, there lies a genuine inconsistency, and one which is central to whatever view we might suppose that grand plan to be. Such a case, as I suggested, is hostile to the proleptic view.
(McCabe 2002, 5)

Because Kahn⁴³ places *Euthydemus* closer to *Republic* than *Charmides* (and also fails to recognize the sharp distinction McCabe has correctly identified between *Republic* and *Euthydemus*), he also fails to see the equally sharp difference

⁴¹ *Euthyd.* 292c4-d7 (Rouse): “*Socrates*: Then does the art of kings make [ποιεῖ] the people wise and good [ἀγαθούς]? *Crito*: Why not, *Socrates*? *Socrates*: But does it make all of them good, and good in all respects? Does it impart every knowledge, shoemaking and carpentry and all the others? *Crito*: I do not think so, *Socrates*. *Socrates*: But what knowledge does it teach? [ἀλλὰ τίνα δὴ ἐπιστήμην;] And what are we to do with it? [ἢ τί χρησόμεθα] For it must not be a contriver of any of the products which are neither good nor bad [τῶν μήτε κακῶν μήτε ἀγαθῶν]; it must impart no knowledge but itself alone [ἐπιστήμην δὲ παραδιδόναι μηδεμίαν ἄλλην ἢ αὐτὴν ἑαυτῆν]. Can we say what it is [τίς ποτέ ἐστιν], and what we are to do with it? Would you like us to say it is the one by which we shall make other men good [ἄλλους ἀγαθοὺς ποιήσομεν]? *Crito*: Yes, certainly.” For the crucial phrase ἐπιστήμην δὲ παραδιδόναι μηδεμίαν ἄλλην ἢ αὐτὴν ἑαυτῆν, see Kahn 1996, 208 n. 29.

⁴² *Euthyd.* 292d8-e7 (Rouse): “*Socrates*: And what shall these be good [ἀγαθοὶ] for, and how useful to us? Shall we say, to make others the same, and they to make others, and so on? And good at what? We cannot see, since we have despised [ἠτιμάσαμεν] what are generally said to be the works of statecraft, and as the proverb goes, it is always ‘Corinthus, son of Zeus.’ We are just as far from knowing, or farther, what is that knowledge [τίς ποτέ ἐστιν ἢ ἐπιστήμη] which will make us happy [εὐδαιμονίας ποιήσει;]. *Crito*: Yes, indeed, *Socrates*, it seems you got yourselves into a nice mess [ἀπορίαν].” For the same infinite regress—or eternal pedagogical enterprise (cf. *Rep.* 328a3-4)—see *Cleitophon* 408d5-6. Cf. the use of ἀτιμάσις by Critias at *Charm.* 173d7.

⁴³ Cf. Friedländer 1964, 77: “Behind this involved discussion [sc. in *Charm.*] which, in part, deliberately veils what is half revealed, there emerge a kind of knowledge that is superior to all other branches of knowledge and a conception of politics that is superior to the best practical brand because both aim at the highest good. This view may be confirmed by following this line of thought from the *Laches* and *Charmides* through *Euthydemus* up to the *Republic*.”

between *Euthydemus* and *Charmides*.⁴⁴ Before showing the place of *Laches* in Plato’s pedagogical project and how it mediates “the difference” McCabe claims is “too radical” for any “story” based on “the proleptic view” to bridge, the first point to be made is that the only way Critias can avoid the conclusion that his version of temperance has no object except itself is to admit that it must know what is good and bad.⁴⁵ In the *Euthydemus*, “the royal art” was presumed to be good *qua* knowledge (*Euthyd.* 292b1-2); the problem was to distinguish it from other kinds of knowledge whose products are no more good than bad (τῶν μήτε κακῶν μήτε ἀγαθῶν at *Euthyd.* 292d2-3, also 292b7). In *Charmides*, by contrast, we are searching for a *virtue*, i.e. for something that we must assume from the start is beneficial, good, and fine (Wolfsdorf 2003, 291), and Critias is trying to show that it is a form of *knowledge*. The problem is that the only form of knowledge that Critias can show to be beneficial is not temperance.⁴⁶ Intent on vindicating his definition of temperance at all costs, it is ironically the intemperate Critias to whom Plato entrusts the honor of introducing the proleptic phrase “the science of the Good;”⁴⁷ given the tyrant’s bent, it is perfectly appropriate that he relegates this majestic conception to a merely subordinate role:

“But why should not this be beneficial [ὠφελοῖ]?” he said.
 “Because if temperance really is a science of sciences [τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ἐπιστήμη] and rules over [ἐπιστατεῖ] the other sciences, then I suppose it would rule [ἄρχουσα] over this

⁴⁴ Kahn 1996, 325 (emphasis mine): “As we have seen at the end of Chapter 7 [sc. on the connection between *Charm.* and *Euthyd.*], Socrates’ second protreptic [sc. in *Euthyd.*] ends with a regress that can be resolved only when the *content* of the royal art is identified as the highest object of knowledge, the *megiston mathēma* of *Republic* VI.” It is only the *object* of “the royal art” that is truly kinglike; cf. *Rep.* 508a5 and *Rep.* 517b7-c5.

⁴⁵ To which admission Socrates responds at *Charm.* 174b11-d2: ““You wretch,” said I, “all this time you’ve been leading me right round in a circle and concealing from me that it was not living scientifically that was making us fare well [τὸ εὖ πράττειν] and be happy [εὐδαιμονεῖν ποιοῦν], even if we possessed all the sciences put together, but that we have to have this one science of good and evil [περὶ τὸ ἀγαθὸν τε καὶ κακόν]. Because, Critias, if you consent to take away this science from the other sciences, will medicine any the less produce health, or cobbling produce shoes, or the art of weaving produce clothes, or the pilot’s art any the less prevent us from dying at sea or the general’s art in war?” “They will do it just the same,” he said. “But my dear Critias, our chance of getting any of these things well and beneficially [ὠφέλιμως] done will have vanished if this is lacking.” “You are right.””

⁴⁶ *Charm.* 174d2-7: ““Then this science, at any rate, is not temperance, but that one of which the function is to benefit [τὸ ὠφελεῖν] us. And it is not a science [ἡ ἐπιστήμη] of science and absence of science but of good and evil [ἀλλὰ ἀγαθοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ]. So that, if this latter one is beneficial [ὠφέλιμος], temperance would be something else for us.””

⁴⁷ Cf. the merely physical sense of “idea” found at *Charm.* 157d2, 158b1, and 175d7; cf. *Euthyd.* 271b4-5.

science of the good [τῆς περὶ τὰγαθὸν ἐπιστήμης] and would benefit [ὠφελοῖ] us.”⁴⁸

Socrates will naturally have nothing of this: after hurling Critias’ earlier definition back in his teeth,⁴⁹ he easily demonstrates that such knowledge is useless.⁵⁰ Socrates then takes the blame upon himself for being useless while nevertheless emphasizing that Critias too has been utterly defeated.⁵¹

But *Charmides* has nevertheless taken the reader an important step closer to *Republic*: a *singular* good (τὰγαθὸν; cf. *Sophist* 251c1) has for the first time been identified as the highest *object* of knowledge rather than as the highest knowledge’s intrinsic property or content, as was the case in *Euthydemus*. This process begins in *Laches*.⁵² In the earlier dialogue, the singular is absent: the analogous definition in the conversation with Nicias was “knowledge of goods

⁴⁸ *Charm.* 174d8-e2; cf. Eisenstadt 2008, 495: “However, Critias’ remark at 174d8-e2 near the end of their discussion, shows that he still harbors his ambition to rule Athens in light of an epistemology which Socrates has attempted to refute [n. 12].” Eisenstadt 2008, 495 n. 12 concludes astutely (emphasis mine): “Presiding over others and *dictating what is good and what is bad* so as to benefit the few describes well the rule of the Thirty Tyrants in 404 B.C.E. among whom the historical Critias played a leading role.” See also Notomi 2000, 247.

⁴⁹ *Charm.* 174e3-8: “And would this science make [ποιοῖ] us healthy,” I said, “and not the art of medicine? And would it perform [ποιοῖ] the tasks of the other arts rather than each of them performing its own task [ἔργον]? Didn’t we protest solemnly just a moment ago that it is a science of science and absence of science and nothing more [ἐπιστήμης μόνον ἐστὶν καὶ ἀνεπιστημοσύνης ἐπιστήμη, ἄλλου δὲ οὐδενός]? We did, didn’t we?” “It seems so, at any rate.”

⁵⁰ *Charm.* 174e9-175a8: “Then it will not be the craftsman [δημιουργός] of health?” “Certainly not.” Because health belonged to another art, didn’t it?” “Yes, to another.” “Then it will be of no use [οὐδ’ ἄρα ὠφελίας], my friend. Because we have just awarded this work [τὸ ἔργον] to another art [ἄλλη τέχνη], isn’t that so?” “Yes, indeed.” “Then how will temperance be useful [ὠφέλιμος] when it is the craftsman [δημιουργός] of no useful thing [οὐδεμιᾶς ὠφελίας]?” “Apparently it won’t be of any use at all, Socrates.”

⁵¹ *Charm.* 175a9-b4: “You see then, Critias, that my earlier fears were reasonable and that I was right to blame myself for discerning nothing useful in temperance? Because I don’t suppose that the thing we have agreed to be the finest of all [κάλλιστον πάντων] would have turned out to be useless [ἀνωφελές] if I had been of any use [εἴ τι ἐμοῦ ὄφελος] in making a good search [πρὸς τὸ καλῶς ζητεῖν]. But now we have got the worst of it in every way [πανταχῆ γὰρ ἠττώμεθα] and are unable to discover [εὐρεῖν] to which one of existing things [τῶν ὄντων] the law-giver gave this name, temperance.”

⁵² Kahn 1996, 150-4 (“2. The *Laches* as an Introductory Dialogue”) especially 151: “One indication of the introductory function of the *Laches* is the unparalleled length of the dramatic prologue, which occupies the first half of the short work [note 3].” 151 n. 3: “Its closest rival is the triple prologue of *Protagoras*, which occupies ten [Stephanus] pages [*Lach.* “covers eleven”] in a dialogue more than twice the length of the *Laches*.” An important part of this prologue will be considered in Section 5.

and evils.”⁵³ Like “the science of the good” in *Charmides*, the knowledge of goods and evils *in general* overthrows Nicias’ earlier future-oriented definition;⁵⁴ as a result of adding past and present goods, he can easily be shown to have defined virtue as a whole rather than courage specifically.⁵⁵ Whereas Critias shows himself willing to subordinate the knowledge of the good to his version of temperance rather than permit such knowledge to overthrow it, Socrates begins the process that will overthrow Nicias’ definition of courage by slyly suggesting that Nicias will be willing—as he was during the retreat from Syracuse (Thucydides 7.50)—to subordinate the knowledge he must surely have possessed *qua* general to the only science that truly makes *future* goods and evils its sole legitimate object.⁵⁶ It is important to recognize that once we agree that neither dialogue can be understood without the reader’s “mantic”⁵⁷ awareness of what fates await Nicias and Critias, the limits of “fictive chronology” become apparent even on

⁵³ *Lach.* 199a6-c2: “*Socrates*: Well then, do you agree with us, Nicias, that the same knowledge has understanding of the same things, whether future, present, or past? *Nicias*: Yes, that is how it seems to me, Socrates. *Socrates*: Now, my good friend, you say that courage is the knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful, isn’t that so? *Nicias*: Yes, it is. *Socrates*: And it was agreed that fearful and hopeful were future goods [τὰ μὲν μέλλοντα ἀγαθὰ] and future evils. *Nicias*: Yes, it was. *Socrates*: And that the same knowledge is of the same things—future ones and all other kinds. *Nicias*: Yes, that is the case. *Socrates*: Then courage is not knowledge of the fearful and the hopeful only, because it understands not simply future good and evils [πέρι τῶν ἀγαθῶν τε καὶ κακῶν], but those of the present and the past and all times, just as is the case with every other sort of knowledge. *Nicias*: So it seems, at any rate.”

⁵⁴ *Lach.* 199c3-d3: “*Socrates*: Then you have told us about what amounts to a third [σχεδόν τι τρίτον] part of courage, Nicias, whereas we asked you what the whole of courage was. And now it appears, according to your view, that courage is the knowledge not just of the fearful and the hopeful, but in your opinion, it would be the knowledge of practically [σχεδόν τι] all goods and evils [περὶ πάντων ἀγαθῶν τε καὶ κακῶν] put together. Do you agree to this new change, Nicias, or what do you say? *Nicias*: That seems right to me, Socrates.”

⁵⁵ *Lach.* 199d4-e5: “*Socrates*: Then does a man with this kind of knowledge seem to depart from virtue in any respect if he really knows, in the case of all goods [τὰ τε ἀγαθὰ πάντα] whatsoever, what they are and will be and have been, and similarly in the case of evils? And do you regard that man as lacking in temperance or justice or holiness to whom alone belongs the ability to deal circumspectly with both gods and men with respect to both the fearful and its opposite, and to provide himself with good things [τὰ ἀγαθὰ] through the knowledge of how to associate with them correctly? *Nicias*: I think you have a point, Socrates. *Socrates*: Then the thing you are now talking about, Nicias, would not be a part of virtue [μόριον ἀρετῆς] but rather virtue entire [σύνπασα ἀρετή]. *Nicias*: So it seems.”

⁵⁶ *Lach.* 198e2-199a5: “*Socrates*: And I suppose that both of you could bear witness that, in the case of the affairs of war, the art of generalship is that which best foresees the future and the other times—nor does this art consider it necessary to be ruled by the art of the seer [τῆ μαντικῆ], but to rule [ἄρχειν] it, as better acquainted with both present and future in the affairs of war. In fact, the law decrees, not that the seer should command the general, but that the general should command the seer [μὴ τὸν μάντιν τοῦ στρατηγού ἄρχειν, ἀλλὰ τὸν στρατηγὸν τοῦ μάντεως]. Is this what we shall say, Laches? *Laches*: Yes, it is.”

⁵⁷ Cf. Emlyn-Jones 1996, 115: “obviously a historical anachronism.”

chronological grounds: it is not only that the end of Critias followed that of Nicias but that Nicias’ failure in Sicily made Critias’ subsequent success at Athens possible. In short, despite merely chronological appearances, *Charmides* actually belongs to a far more advanced stage of Athenian degeneration than *Laches* (Schmid 1992, 179-80), a stage where the “easier”⁵⁸ reduction of virtue to proficiency makes the moral worth of virtue an embattled concept, as it will soon enough prove to be in *Gorgias*.⁵⁹

The underlying reason that the dilemma Critias faces brings us closer to *Republic* VI than the infinite regress of *Euthydemus* is that the subject under discussion in *Charmides* is a virtue, not a master form of knowledge. Of course virtue *may* be knowledge (hence the intellectualist position entrusted by Plato to Nicias and Critias; cf. Devereux 1977) but it *certainly* is good; unlike all other forms of knowledge, “the royal art” of *Euthydemus* must produce *results* that are good without qualification. Careful consideration of the introductory passage in *Laches* (189d4-190e6) that leads up to the question τί ἐστὶν ἀνδρεία (*Lach.* 190e3) will reveal it to be the point of transfer between the elusive knowledge that makes men good in *Euthydemus* and the collapse of “the knowledge of knowledge” as a definition of temperance in *Charmides*.

Section 5. What Begins in *Laches*

Socrates: Let us do what Lysimachus and Melesias suggest, Nicias and Laches. Perhaps it won’t be a bad idea [οὐ κακῶς] to ask ourselves the sort of question we proposed just now: what teachers have we had in this sort of instruction, and what other persons have we made better [τίνας ἄλλους βελτίους πεποιήκαμεν]? (*Lach.* 189d4-e1)

⁵⁸ *Charm.* 173c3-d8: “And, if you will, let us even agree that the mantic art [τὴν μαντικὴν] is knowledge of what is to be and that temperance, directing her, keeps away deceivers and sets up true seers [τοὺς δὲ ὡς ἀληθῶς μάντιες] as prophets of the future. I grant that the human race, if thus equipped, would act and live in a scientific way [ἐπιστημόνως ἂν πράττοι καὶ ζῶη]—because temperance, watching over it, would not allow the absence of knowledge to creep in and become our accomplice. But whether acting scientifically [ἐπιστημόνως πράττοντες] would make us fare well [εὖ πράττομεν] and be happy, this we have yet to learn [μαθεῖν], my dear Critias.” “But on the other hand,” he said, “you will not readily [οὐ βραδίως] gain [εὐρήσεις] the prize of faring well by any other means [ἄλλο τι τέλος] if you eliminate [ἀτιμάσης] scientific action [τὸ ἐπιστημόνως; cf. *Polit.* 293c5-d3 for the removal of all restrictions on those who are ἐπιστημόνως πράττοντες].” “Instruct [προσδίδαξον] me on just one more small point,” I said.”

⁵⁹ Recent scholarship suggests that *Gorg.* will one day be recognized as a “virtue dialogue” concerned with justice: see Stauffer 2006 and *Gorg.* 527b2-c4.

As already shown in Section 2, this passage marks a break with *Alcibiades Major*: in accordance with the practical bent of *Laches*, Socrates replaces the self-discovery of theoretical knowledge with a proven capacity to make others better. And this capacity shows that we still have one foot in the world of *Euthydemus* where—quite apart from the claim that Socrates *qua* teacher actually makes Ctesippus both good and happy there—the knowledge sought is “the one by which we shall make other men good” (ἄλλους ἀγαθοὺς ποιήσομεν at *Euthyd.* 292d5-6) and happy (εὐδαιμόνας ποιούσα at 292c1 and εὐδαιμόνας ποιήσει at 292e5). Thanks to the emergence of the τί ἐστὶν ἀνδρεία question, this world is going to be left behind—or rather, it will appear to have been left behind—in *Laches*:

However, I think there is another sort of inquiry that will bring us to the same point [εἰς ταὐτὸν] and is perhaps one that begins somewhat more nearly [σχεδὸν δὲ τι καὶ μᾶλλον] from the beginning [ἐξ ἀρχῆς].
(*Lach.* 189e1-3)

With this remarkably tentative description, Socrates next introduces this new sort of inquiry—an inquiry that will lead eventually to the question: “what is courage?”—in a remarkably opaque manner:

Suppose we know [ἐπιστάμενοι], about anything whatever, that [a] if it is added [παραγεγόμενον] to another thing, it makes that thing to which it is added [παραγέμετο] better [βέλτιον ποιεῖ], and [b] furthermore [προσέτι], we are able to make [καὶ προσέτι οἳοί τε ἐσμεν αὐτὸ ποιεῖν] the addition to it [παραγίγνεσθαι ἐκείνῳ], then clearly [δῆλον ὅτι] [c] we know the very thing about which we’ve become counselors [αὐτὸ γε ἴσμεν τοῦτο οὗ περὶ σύμβουλοι ἂν γενοίμεθα] as to how one might attain it most easily and best [ὡς ἂν τις αὐτὸ ῥᾶστα καὶ ἄριστ’ ἂν κτήσασατο]. Perhaps you don’t understand what I mean...⁶⁰

This self-consciously confusing passage plays an important role on the path that leads to *Republic* VI not only in an ontological but also in a methodological sense (cf. Kohák 1960 and Hoerber 1968, 103-4): it anticipates the passage, likewise misunderstood by Socrates’ interlocutor (Glaucón), that first defines the penultimate section of the Divided Line without any reference to either geometry or arithmetic (*Rep.* 510b4-10), the latter introduced only later to explain the explicitly difficult general description that precedes it (*Rep.* 510c1-511a2). This procedure is clearly intentional on Plato’s part: in both cases, the careful reader

⁶⁰ *Lach.* 189e3-7. Sprague’s translation modified: I have added “to which it is added” (ὃ παραγέμετο) and added “to it” (παραγίγνεσθαι ἐκείνῳ) and have substituted “we’ve become counselors” (σύμβουλοι ἂν γενοίμεθα) for “we are consulting.”

must consider the general and more confusing definition on its own merits. In *Laches*, the thing to be added (the verb παραγίγνεσθαι is the *Leitmotiv* of the entire passage under consideration)⁶¹ will become *virtue* (or rather a part of it) and therefore, in accordance with [a], something that necessarily makes us *better*. Although this sort of inquiry will no longer require us to identify our teacher, [b] presupposes what I have called “the world of *Euthydemus*” and although this premise will soon silently disappear from view, its presence draws attention to the effectiveness of Socrates *qua* teacher: it is on the basis of the action (if not the argument) of *Euthydemus* that condition [b] is or rather has already been met and that the conclusion of *Laches* is consistent with the failure to define courage in words.⁶² The germ of the immediate future—i.e. a series of “virtue dialogues” where the evidently virtuous Socrates will fail to elicit definitions of the virtues—is found in [c], a germ that will cause the unwary to forget its explicit and continuing dependence on [b]. But [a] should not be slighted: the external Good will eventually emerge from its logical priority to this particular βέλτιον.

Perhaps you don’t understand [οὐ μανθάνετε] what I mean, but will do so more easily [ῥᾶον μαθήσεσθε] in this way: suppose we know that [A] sight, when added [παραγενομένη] to the eyes, makes better those eyes to which it is added [βελτίους ποιεῖ ἐκείνους οἷς παρεγένετο], and furthermore [προσέτι], [B] we are able to add [παραγίγνεσθαι] it to the eyes, then clearly [δῆλον ὅτι] [C-1] we know what this very thing sight is [ὄψιν γε ἴσμεν αὐτὴν ὅτι ποτ’ ἔστιν], about which we should be consulting as to [C-2] how one might obtain it most easily and best [ἤς πέρι σύμβουλοι ἂν γενοίμεθα ὡς ἂν τις αὐτὴν ῥᾶστα καὶ ἄριστα κτήσασαίτο].⁶³

The example of vision and sight—even without any reference to the objective Sun—offers another parallel to (or rather a proleptic anticipation of) *Republic* VI. But the crucial matter for now is that the germ of the τί ἐστι question, applied to

⁶¹ For a valuable discussion of the verb, see Schmid 1992, 96 and *Theages* 130d1-2; note that Socrates is questioning Aristides son of Lysimachus (*Theages* 130a4-5). There is thus something to be said for the view that *Socrates* is the thing that “when added” (παραγίγνεσθαι) makes the souls of the youth better. Cf. Schmid 1992, 196 n. 5 and 209 n. 6. Cf. O’Brien 1963, 147.

⁶² Kohák 1960, 123 (on the tripartite structure of *Lach.*): “There will be, first of all, the introduction in which Lysimachus and Melesias discuss with Nicias and Laches the education of young men in general and that of their own sons in particular. Then there will be the body of the dialogue which inquires unsuccessfully into the nature of courage, and finally a conclusion in which Lysimachus requests further instruction from Socrates—in spite of the fact that Socrates is supposed to have failed to solve the problem posed in the body of the dialogue. Not only is there a definite conflict between the body and the conclusion, we also have a twelve-page preface introducing a seven-page dialogue.”

⁶³ *Lach.* 189e7-190a5. See Schmid 1992, 96 for the repeated use of μανθάνειν.

the virtues here, has been tacitly smuggled into this second version. Despite numerous verbatim repetitions, [c] has undergone an easily overlooked but obvious transition: in the general statement, in accordance with the practical concerns of Melesias and Lysimachus, the very thing we know (*αὐτό γε ἴσμεν τοῦτο*) is *at best* merely a means of making their sons better in the best and easiest way.⁶⁴ By adding the fateful words *ὅτι ποτ’ ἔστιν*, [C-1] now gains heuristic independence for the *τί ἐστι* question as distinct from the practical goal, then restated verbatim in [C-2]. Socrates immediately emphasizes the importance of this change just in case we missed it:

Because if we knew neither this very thing [*αὐτό τοῦτο*]*—i.e.* [*ὅτι*] what sight is [*ποτ’ ἔστιν ὄψις*]*—nor* hearing, we would hardly be worthy counselors and doctors about either the eyes or the ears as to the manner in which either sight or hearing might best be obtained. *Laches*: You are right, Socrates.⁶⁵

The repetition of *αὐτό τοῦτο* from [c] only serves to make the smuggled addition of *ὅτι ποτ’ ἔστιν* from [C-1] all the more conspicuous; it is from this addition that the series of virtue dialogues—first *Laches* and then *Charmides*—now takes its start:

Socrates: Well then, Laches, aren’t these two now asking our advice as to the manner in which virtue [*ἀρετή*] might be added [*παραγενομένη*] to the souls of their sons to make them better [*ἀμείνους ποιήσειε*]? *Laches*: Yes, indeed. *Socrates*: Then isn’t it necessary for us to start out knowing [*τὸ εἰδέναι ὅτι*] what virtue is [*ποτ’ ἔστιν ἀρετή*]? (*Lach.* 190b3-b8)

What can we learn from Plato’s provocative comparison of *ἀρετή* to *ὄψις*? Sight is a natural *capacity* of the eye; an eye without sight is defective and requires the immediate attention of a doctor. It is therefore natural to speak of *restoring* sight to the eyes; a doctor who accomplished this result would certainly be making the eyes *better* but would be doing so only by restoring the characteristic excellence of an eye (*Rep.* 518c4-d2). The analogy does not emphasize the knowledge of the doctor (cf. *Rep.* 518d3-7) as much as it does the natural function of the eye; the

⁶⁴ “At best” because there is a natural temptation to read the eye/sight passage back into the general one, as does Emlyn-Jones 1992, 90-1.

⁶⁵ *Lach.* 190a6-b2. Sprague translates: “Because if we didn’t know what sight in itself was...”

doctor’s art cooperates with and thereby restores that function.⁶⁶ Virtue is therefore the natural excellence of the soul best understood as a natural capacity of the soul, a capacity *to do* something. Since sight is best understood as the action characteristic of the eye; Socrates is therefore suggesting that virtue is also best understood as an *action*. If virtue is like sight, it too must be directed at certain external objects: the capacity to see connects the eyes to the objects of sight. Only in *Republic* VI (*Rep.* 507d8-508c2) will Plato or Socrates remind us that this connection presupposes *light* and indeed the source of light. A natural question is: what are the external objects upon which virtue operates and for an answer, we will need to wait. But in the context of McCabe’s important distinction between *Republic* VI and *Euthydemus*, the important point is that the turn from an internal good (like knowledge) to an external one—whether the good in question proves to be more similar to the objects of sight or the source of light that makes vision possible—occurs in *Laches*.

If only because they presumably love Socrates, Plato scholars should really be more considerate of Laches the man: Plato presents him as praising our hero both well and truly (*Lach.* 181a7-b4 and 189b1-6). But Laches also sells himself short in the following exchange:

Socrates: Because if we are not absolutely certain what it is [ὅτι ποτε τυγχάνει ὄν], how are we going to become counselors [σύμβουλοι γενοίμεθ’] as to the best method of obtaining it [ὅπως ἂν αὐτὸ κάλλιστα κτήσαιο]? *Laches*: I do not think that there is any way in which we can do this, Socrates.⁶⁷

In fact, Laches offers Lysimachus and Melesias consummate counsel even without appearing to possess such knowledge: they should consult Socrates as to the education of Thucydides and Aristides. If Laches is not absolutely certain as to what courage happens to be, he certainly recognizes virtue when he sees it or, to speak more precisely, when he actually saw it with his own eyes in action, embodied in the son of Sophroniscus at Delium (*Lach.* 189b5). A sense for history requires us to remember that a fighting retreat requires more courage than a spirited assault; it seems reasonable that Laches not only saw Socrates conducting himself in a calm and steadfast manner under pressure from a

⁶⁶ Schmid 1992, 97: “In addition to this main point [sc. the need for teleological knowledge implied by the analogy, i.e. “we need to understand what man or human life is *for*”], the analogy raises a number of other suggestions, though it is not obvious what, if anything, we are to do with them. One is that virtue is somehow *natural*, the soul doctor’s task not being one of putting something alien into souls that are innately blind but rather one of removing impediments to what is already there.”

⁶⁷ *Lach.* 190b8-c3. I have substituted “to become counselors” (σύμβουλοι γενοίμεθ’) for Sprague’s “to advise anyone.”

confident and irresistible foe but also saw him steadying others who were despondent and frightened. Although it would be difficult to say whether the objects of Socrates’ virtuous actions at Delium were his friends, his enemies, his commanders, his subordinates, or himself, his courage was necessarily embodied in actions and indeed is meaningless without them. We must therefore wonder: can virtue really be knowledge *simplement*?

Socrates: We say then, Laches, that we know what it is [εἰδέναι αὐτὸ ὅτι ἔστιν]. *Laches*: Yes, we do say so. (*Lach.* 190c4-5)

The armchair philosopher (cf. Witte 1970, 139 and Tuckey 1951, v), especially one who is aware of the crucial importance of dramatic context while interpreting Platonic dialogues, would do well to remember that the “we” that joins Socrates and Laches is the first-person plural of comrades in arms who have stood shoulder to shoulder in battle:⁶⁸ these men saw each other in action and know that each of them knows what he saw of the other (cf. *Symp.* 220e7-221c1), just as they both saw many others who behaved disgracefully.

Socrates: And what we know, we must, I suppose, be able to state [οὐκοῦν ὁ γε ἴσμεν, καὶ εἴπομεν δήπου τί ἔστιν]. *Laches*: Of course. (*Lach.* 190c6-7)

Any reader who has been tested in battle knows that this is simply not true: soldiers are suspicious of talk where courage is concerned. I suggest that this is why Plato named the dialogue after Laches. Socrates already knows that Laches will not be able to state what courage is but that he will bravely try to do so when asked to do so by a respected comrade. It is often overlooked that Socrates is responsible for replacing Laches with Nicias as an interlocutor (*Lach.* 194b8-c1). By contrasting him with Laches, Plato’s artistry ensures that we will recognize that Nicias has confidence in words, not deeds, in knowledge, not action, in himself, but not in Socrates.⁶⁹

Socrates: Let us not, O best of men, begin straightway with an investigation of the whole of virtue—that would be too great a task—but let us first see if we have sufficient knowledge of a part. Then it is likely that the investigation will be easier [ῥᾶων] for us. *Laches*: Yes, let’s do it [ποιώμεν] the way you want, Socrates. (*Lach.* 190c8-d2)

⁶⁸ Emlyn-Jones 1999, 134 does well to remind us of the disjunction between “fighting in armor” and the phalanx.

⁶⁹ For an advance on de Laguna 1934, see Dobbs 1986, especially 828-9 n. 2 and 848.

The use of the word *ποιῶμεν* proves that Laches, good soldier that he is, has not lost sight of the dialogue’s principal objective: the education of young Aristides and Thucydides. Although the investigation of a *part* of virtue will not in fact prove easier (*ῥάων*), *Meno* will prove that the alternative approach is scarcely foolproof. In any case, Laches is correct: the noblest (*κάλλιστα*), the best, and the easiest way for the sons of Melesias and Lysimachus to acquire virtue is through the ministrations of Socrates, whether or not he or anyone else can articulate what courage is.

Socrates: Well, which one of the parts of virtue should we choose? Or isn’t it obvious that we ought to take the one to which the technique [*μάθησις*] of fighting in armor tends to lead? I suppose everyone would think [*δοκεῖ δέ που τοῖς πολλοῖς*] it leads to courage, wouldn’t they? *Laches*: I think they certainly would. *Socrates*: Then let us undertake first of all, Laches, to state what courage is [*ἀνδρεία τι ποτ’ ἐστίν*].
(*Lach.* 190d3-8)

Socrates does not call courage a *μάθησις*; it is only “the many” who would imagine that training in e.g. the martial arts conduces to bravery on the battlefield. There were probably skilled athletes among those who panicked at Delium and ignorant rustics who fought like heroes. But the important point is that for the first time, the *τί ἐστίν* question is about to be applied to a virtue (the *τί ποτ’ ἐστίν* is transitional); the complex introduction that precedes it in *Laches* is another proof of this pedagogical priority. Suggesting as it does that courage is something that is talked about, not done, this question will receive no answer here. But the question brings us closer to the Good than “the royal art” of *Euthydemus*, despite the latter’s apparent proximity to *Republic*.

Socrates: Then after [*μετὰ τοῦτο*] we will go on to investigate in what way it could be added [*παραγένοιτο*] to the young, to the extent that the addition [*παραγενέσθαι*] can be made through occupations and studies. But try to state what I ask, namely, what courage is [*τί ἐστίν ἀνδρεία*].
(*Lach.* 190d8-e3)

Here it is at last: the famous question has finally emerged from the mysterious description of “another sort of inquiry,” a pedigree Plato emphasizes by sounding the *Leitmotiv* once again with *παραγενέσθαι*. There will, of course, be no *μετὰ τοῦτο* in the short run (cf. *Cleitophon* 408d7); only by means of “a greater way round” (*Rep.* 504b2) will Socrates bring Plato’s brother (and Plato will bring the reader) towards the distant goal of *Republic* VII. But even though Critias will be the first to mention *τάγαθόν*, we are already far closer to it than one might think, thanks to *Laches*:

Laches: Good heavens, Socrates, there is no difficulty about that: if a man is willing [ἐθέλοι] to remain at his post [ἐν τῇ τάξει μένων] and to defend himself against the enemy without running away [μὴ φεύγοι], then you may rest assured [εὖ ἴσθι] that he is a man of courage. *Socrates*: Well spoken, Laches.⁷⁰

It would be a terrible mistake to image that Socrates’ response here is ironic: Laches has spoken well and the fate of Socrates proves it. The manifest joke of both *Laches* and *Charmides*—another important connection between the two—is that the *actions* of Socrates prove that he manifestly possesses the virtues whose verbal definitions remain elusive (Gonzalez 1995, 163-71); he will soon enough similarly prove himself to be just (*Gorg.* 521d6-e2), wise (*Theages* 130e5-10), and pious (*Men.* 99e3-100b7).⁷¹ But there was a reason why Plato began the series of “virtue dialogues” with courage, as the famous passage where Socrates explains why he moved past even the most promising of the physicists in the final *Phaedo* shows:

Or again, if he [sc. Anaxagoras] tried to account in the same way for my conversing with you, adducing causes such as sound and air and hearing and a thousand others, and never troubled to mention the real reasons [τὰς ὡς ἀληθῶς αἰτίας], which are that since Athens has thought it better [βέλτιον] to condemn me, therefore I for my part have thought it better [βέλτιον] to sit here, and more right to stay [δικαιότερον παραμένοντα] and submit to whatever penalty she orders. Because, by dog, I fancy that these sinews and bones would have been in the neighborhood of Megara or Boeotia long ago—impelled by a conviction of what is best [τοῦ βελτίστου]!—if I did not think it was more right [δικαιότερον] and honorable [κάλλιον] to submit to whatever penalty my country orders [τάττη] rather than take to my heels [φεύγειν] and run away.
(*Phd.* 98d6-99a4)

Nor is this final vindication of Laches’ first definition an isolated instance as *Apology* 28d-29b9 proves: a passage that is not only studded with variants of ἐν τῇ τάξει (*Apol.* 28d7, 28d8, and 29a1), μένων (*Apol.* 28d8; cf. Dieterle 1966, 59 n. 3), and μὴ φεύγοι (*Apol.* 29b9) but also mentions Delium (*Apol.* 28e3). Even εὖ ἴσθι

⁷⁰ *Lach.* 190e4-7; see Schmid 1992, 100 on ἐθέλοι.

⁷¹ See O’Brien 1963, 134-5 n. 5 for the two ways of reading *Lach.* summarized at Hoerber 1968, 105: “either as an attack on the thesis that virtue is knowledge, or as an argument for the unity of virtue.” Considering a series of “virtue dialogues” beginning with *Lach.* and leading up to *Rep.* offers a middle course between these extremes: each virtue is distinct but all are equally dependent on the Good. For knowledge of ignorance of *the Good*, see Tuckey 1951, 82.

puts in another appearance there and those who insist on a lethal cocktail composed of Socratic ignorance and “virtue is knowledge”—a world Plato will connect with Critias in *Charmides*⁷²—would do well to remember *Apology* 29b6-7,⁷³ a passage that reminds us that the process through which the reader finally comes to recognize that “the better” is not something internal like knowledge, began in *Laches*.

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⁷² For a “Critian” reading of *Lach.*, see Rabieh 2006, 160: “A philosopher’s courage ultimately depends, then, on the knowledge that the wise and happy human being always pursues what is best for himself in the circumstances...In this way, a philosopher, in a certain sense, always pursues what is good.”

⁷³ “But to do wrong and disobey one’s superior [$\tau\tilde{\omega}$ βελτίονι]—yes, God and man—that *this* is evil and shameful, I *know*.” Translation mine.

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