Socrates on Cookery and Rhetoric

Abstract: Socrates believes that living well is primarily an intellectual undertaking: we live well if we think correctly. To intellectualists, one might think, the body and activities related to it are of little interest. Yet Socrates has much to say about food, eating, and cookery. This paper examines Socrates' criticism of 'feeding on *opson*' (*opsophagia*) in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and of *opson* cookery (*opsopoiia*) in Plato's *Gorgias*. I argue that if we consider the specific cultural meaning of eating *opson*, we can see that Socrates takes a nuanced stance on food and cookery: he recommends careful consumption and skillful production, not austerity or abstinence. This nuance in Socrates' discussion of food changes our interpretation of Socrates' criticism of rhetoric in the *Gorgias*: in comparing rhetoricians to *opson* chefs—not to pastry chefs, as many have assumed—Socrates evokes the dangers of indulging in speeches while acknowledging their necessity for Athenian public life.

Keywords: Plato, intemperance, appetites, food, Gorgias, pastry chef

I. INTRODUCTION[1]

Food, eating, and cookery were of great interest to Greek writers in the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Literary engagement with this topic spans from comic commentary on excessive, luxurious eating and elaborate cookery to serious engagement with cookery as a craft and medical treatises on dietetics.[2] Instructions on how to cook were collected in

[1] I first started wondering about whether Socrates would ban pastry baking in conversations with Jeff Fisher and the Ancient Philosophy Reading Group at Loyola University Chicago. Jeffrey Turner, Rusty Jones, Ravi Sharma, Justin Vlasits, Thomas Blackson, Steven Goldman, Naomi Reshotko, and William O. Stephens all provided tremendously helpful written comments on earlier versions of this paper. I would also like to thank Marta Heckel, Ian Hensley, Peter Osorio, John Proios, Joshua Mendelsohn, Leigh York, and Richard Kim as well as the participants of the following conference meetings and workshops for their questions and suggestions: the History of Philosophy Roundtable at Loyola University Chicago (10/2020), the Ancient Philosophy Society at Pennsylvania State University (4/2022), the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy at the Central APA (2/2022), and the West Coast Plato Workshop (9/2020).

[2] For a helpful discussion, see Wilkins, Harvey, and Dobson 1995, esp. parts 3, 5, and 6.

cookbooks—at the time, a new literary genre modeled on instructions in other crafts and sciences, such as medical instructions on how to treat the sick.[3] The collection of recipes by Mithaikos (mentioned in Plato's *Gorgias* 518b, among other sources) is perhaps the first and most famous widely distributed Greek cookbook. While professional cookery and hedonic eating (that is, eating for the sake of pleasure) was a subject of mockery in our literary sources—the boastful chef even became a comic stock character—medical dietetics (that is, eating to preserve or reestablish health) was taken seriously.[4] When the Hippocratics began regarding nutrition as crucial in treating and preventing diseases, dietetics became "one of the most relevant branches in ancient Greek medicine".[5]

I will show that Socrates added his salt to this discourse by commenting on how one should consume and produce food. While interpreters have noted the importance of food and eating for other ancient Greek philosophers—such as the Pythagoreans (who famously abstain from beans), or the Cynics (whose peculiar eating habits are one of their most prominent features), and for Plato in his middle and later dialogues (where he claims that overindulgence in food is the "greatest threat to philosophy"),[6] Socrates' comments on food

[3] Hill and Wilkins 1995, 145; Wilkins 2000, xxvi.

[4] To what extent this literary discourse reflects historical developments or societal views is uncertain (Wilkins 2000, xxvi, 363). Perhaps the demand for fine cookery and private chefs increased, and thus cookery became more specialized and professionalized (Hill and Wilkins 1995, 146–147). This, in turn, may have led chefs to develop professional pride and try "to assimilate their alleged art to other respectable occupations, such as medicine" (Notario 2015, 128), which may have inspired cookbooks as well as comic representations of the "boastful chef" (Wilkins 2000). What is certain, however, is that sources reflect an engagement with food, eating, and cookery that ranges from funny to serious and that reflects attitudes ranging from contempt to respect.

[5] Notario (2015, 123–124); see also Jouanna and Allies (2012). For Hippocratic writings on nutrition, see esp. *Regimen in Health*, *Regimen in Acute Diseases*, and *On Regimen* 1-4. The three branches of ancient Greek medicine were regimen (διαιτητική), medication (φαρμακευτική), and surgery (χειρουργία) (Bartos 2015, 19). Nutrition was part of 'regimen', which also included exercise and baths. Regimen emerged as a new medical approach once illnesses were no longer conceived of as divinely sent (Bartos 2015, 18).

[6] Hill 2008, 96, on *Timaeus* 72e. For an analysis of the psychology of hunger in Plato's *Republic*, see Vogt 2018, 2017.

and eating in the Socratic dialogues of Plato and Xenophon have not been the focus of much investigation.[7]

This lack of scholarly engagement is somewhat unsurprising. Socrates seems to be an intellectualist about living well: we live well if we act well, Socrates thinks, and we act well if we have true beliefs or, better yet, knowledge about what is best for us to do.[8] In this account, the Socratic quest for living well is primarily (according to some interpreters, even exclusively) an intellectual undertaking. Intellectualists care about the intellect—beliefs and reasoning. It might seem that eating, as an activity related to the body, is only of interest to the intellectualist insofar as it can interrupt, perhaps even disturb, our thinking and prevent us from living well. This intellectualism may seem to go hand-in-hand with Socrates' apparent asceticism—his turning away from the body by devaluing, limiting, or perhaps even avoiding bodily pleasures and activities that involve such pleasures.[9] The only thing

[7] See only Notario 2015. By 'Socrates', I here refer to the various literary portrayals in the Socratic dialogues of Xenophon (*Memorabilia*, *Oeconomicus*, *Apology*, and *Symposium*) and Plato (*Euthyphro, Apology*, *Crito, Charmides, Laches, Lysis, Euthydemus, Meno, Protagoras, Ion, Hippias Minor* and *Major, Gorgias*, and *Republic I*). For this classification of Plato's dialogues, see, e.g., Brickhouse and Smith 2010, 18. I take it that the historical Socrates inspired the literary character named 'Socrates', but I will not speculate about the historical accuracy of the literary portrayals. I believe that there is some continuity between Socrates' comments on food in Plato's early, middle, and late dialogues—especially with the *Republic*, as I show below.

[8] The main textual evidence for Socrates' intellectualism is *Prot.* 358b–d. We can distinguish between two interpretations of this passage: desire intellectualism (we always desire what we believe is best) and action intellectualism (we always do what we believe is best). Some argue that Socrates is both a desire intellectualist and an action intellectualist (Penner 2000), while others argue that he is only an action intellectualist (Brickhouse and Smith 2010). For a discussion of both interpretations, see Möbus 2024 and Brickhouse and Smith 2013. My interpretation does not seek to settle whether or not Socrates is a desire intellectualist. Rather, I seek to demonstrate that even if Socrates is an intellectualist of some sort, he is one who cares about food and eating habits. See also fn. 44 below.

[9] One of the main pieces of evidence for Socrates' asceticism is Plato's *Phaedo* (esp. 64e–67e and 82e–83c). Interpreters have proposed different interpretations of these passages: 'austere asceticism' (the philosopher actively avoids every bodily pleasure and the activities that involve such pleasures as much as possible and in all circumstances; see Ebrey 2017), the 'evaluative reading' (the philosopher correctly evaluates bodily pleasures as being of no value, of disvalue, or of little positive value; see Woolf 2004), 'normative dualism' (the philosopher does not disdain the body but merely values the soul over the body and its care; see Zoller 2018), and 'epistemic discernment' (the philosopher "actively withdraw[s] assent from incorrect evaluations

one might expect the ascetic to say about food and eating is that one should abstain as much as possible.

But we will see that Socrates is not at all disinterested in food and eating and that his stance is much more nuanced than one might expect. I will argue that a common theme in Socrates' comments on food and eating is a suspicion of and warning about one type of food in particular: *opson* (ὄψον), that is, any food added to the staple food (bread). I will here take a closer look at two passages: in an amusing passage in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (3.14.2–4), Socrates calls out a fellow dinner guest for eating *opson* without bread, calling him an *opsophagos* (ὀψοφάγος), someone who 'feeds on *opson*'; in a passage in Plato's *Gorgias* (462b–466a), Socrates harshly criticizes professional *opson* cookery (ὀψοποιία). I will show that reading these two passages comparatively can enhance our understanding of both: Socrates' criticism of professional producers of *opson* (ὀψοποιός)[10] in Plato's *Gorgias* helps us understand his criticism of unrestrained consumers of *opson* (ὀψοφάγοι) in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, and vice versa.[11]

I argue that once we understand the specific cultural meaning of eating *opson*, we see that Socrates takes a nuanced stance on food, eating, and cookery: he recommends careful consumption and skillful production of *opson*, not austerity or abstinence. Socrates believes that we should consume *opson* very carefully because indulging in *opson* can promote psychological and physiological disorder in the individual as well as disorder in the

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the body inclines us to make"; see Marechal 2023, 1). My own interpretation does not speak to asceticism in the *Phaedo*, but I will argue that the passages that I discuss from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and Plato's *Gorgias* do not support austere asceticism or the evaluative reading, but rather a version of normative dualism.

[10] The other ancient Greek term for 'chef' is *mageiros*. Originally used to refer to the person performing the cutting and cooking of a sacrificial animal, in Middle and New Comedy, the *mageiros* becomes a boastful chef for hire. On the difference between *opsopoios* and *mageiros*, see Wilkins (2000, 363, 370, 396).

[11] Many interpreters have argued that Xenophon and Plato present incompatible accounts of Socrates that must be studied separately (see esp. Dorion 2009). Against this 'separatist' reading, Johnson (2021) has argued that Xenophon's portrait of Socrates is compatible with Plato's. Xenophon's is not an alternative picture of Socrates, Johnson (2021, 4–5) argues, but one that complements and adds to Plato's. I here follow Johnson in what he calls a 'compatibilist' approach. I show that when it comes to food and eating, Xenophon illuminates Plato's portrayal of Socrates, and vice versa. For other compatibilist readings of Xenophon's and Plato's Socrates, see Jones and Sharma 2019; 2020.

polis and even in the cosmos. The *opsophagos* personifies these dangers. By serving pleasant meals without any regard for the good of the consumer, the *opson* chef nourishes the condition of *opsophagia* ('feeding on *opson*'). However, if produced skillfully and consumed carefully, *opson* can contribute to the human good. This nuance in Socrates' discussion of food also changes our interpretation of Socrates' criticism of rhetoric in the *Gorgias*: in comparing rhetoricians to *opson* chefs—not to pastry chefs, as many have assumed—Socrates evokes the dangers of indulging in speeches while acknowledging their necessity and potential positive value for Athenian public life. Speeches, like *opsa*, are not superfluous or inherently bad, but they can be consumed and produced wrongly—analogous to the case of the *opsophagos* and conventional *opson* chefs—and then they cause great harm.

This paper has four main parts. I will first explain that *opson* is any food added to the staple food (bread) and thus a necessary part of one's diet (Part II). I then analyze Socrates' criticism of 'feeding on *opson*' in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (Part III) and his attack on professional *opson* cookery in Plato's *Gorgias* (Part IV). I propose that Socrates attacks the professional producers and unrestrained consumers of both *opson* and speeches because indulging in them promotes psychological and physiological disorder in the individual as well as disorder in the *polis* and the cosmos (Part V).

II. EATING *OPSON*

The typical ancient Greek meal had three parts: *sitos* (σίτος), *opson* (ὄψον), and drink (πότος).[12] *Sitos* refers to 'staple foods', which were usually made from barley (like barley bread and cakes) and sometimes from wheat.[13] *Opson* (plural: *opsa*), from which we get the English term 'opsony', is notoriously difficult to translate. English translators have rendered *opson* as 'prepared food' or 'delicacy' but also as 'appetizer' or 'seasoning'.[14] While each of these translations may work in certain contexts, none of them accurately captures the meaning of *opson*. Consider Socrates' list of *opsa* in *Rep*. 372c2 (salt, olives, cheese, boiled

[12] For a very helpful discussion of *opson* and its role in the ancient Greek meal, see Davidson 1995; 1997.

[13] Barley provided the staple food "for those without access to scanty home-grown wheat or state-promoted wheat imports" (Braun 1995, 25).

[14] See the entry in Liddell, Scott, Jones, and McKenzie 1940.

roots, and vegetables), his comments on onions as *opsa* (Xen. *Symp*. 4.8.5; Plat. *Ion* 538c3), and Athenaeus' various references to all sorts of fish as *opson* (see esp. *Ath*. 7.4). These examples show that some (but not all) *opsa* are seasonings or delicacies, that *opsa* may be served as appetizers but can also be part of the main course, and that *opsa* are usually prepared to some extent (but so is *sitos*).

For better translations of *opson*, we may turn to the non-English dictionaries by Pabón (1967, Spanish), Bailly (1901, French), and Gemoll (1908, German), which propose the following translations, respectively: "companage"; "tout ce qu'on mange avec le pain"; and "alle was zum Brote gegessen wird, besonders Fleisch, Fisch, Gemüse". In other words, *opson* is an 'add-on food', that is, *any* food added to the staple food of bread, such as spices, cheese, nuts, fish, meat, and vegetables. To get a better idea of what *opson* means, we can help ourselves to the following comparison. Envision a typical Ethiopian meal. The *injera* (the sour fermented, spongy flatbread) is the *sitos*. All the delicious stews (*wat*) and salads on top of the bread are the *opsa*. Pieces of the bread are torn to take bits of the stew, and then both are eaten together. In a similar way, ancient Greeks would take a piece of *sitos* and eat it together with some *opson*.

We learn in Xenophon that Socrates maintains very frugal eating habits, limiting himself to *sitos* and simple, easy-to-come-by *opson*. Socrates

> schooled his body and soul by following a regimen which, under ordinary circumstances, would afford anyone a life of confidence and security and make it easy to meet the required expenses. For he was so frugal that it is hardly possible to imagine a man doing so little work as not to earn enough to satisfy the needs of Socrates. He ate just enough food to make eating a pleasure, and he was so ready for his food that his desire for staples (*sitos*) was his add-on food (*opson*). Any kind of drink was pleasant to him because he drank only when he was thirsty. (Xen. *Mem*. 1.3.5, trans. Marchant 2013, modified)

Xenophon describes Socrates' frugal eating habits with the idiomatic phrase: "Socrates' desire for staples (*sitos*) was his add-on food (*opson*)". In other words, 'hunger is the best sauce' (Marchant 2013). When Socrates eats, he is so hungry that he is satisfied with simple meals. Of course, this does not mean that Socrates abstains from *opson* entirely—not even Socrates can live on bread alone—but it suggests that Socrates needs only a small amount

of *opson*. Further, the passage suggests that when Socrates does eat *opsa*, he is satisfied with simple ones that are easy to come by for someone living a frugal life—like salt, olives, cheese, boiled roots, and vegetables (*Rep*. 372c). This does not mean that Socrates never consumes fancier *opsa* like fish or meat; however, it suggests that Socrates does not eat them often. In addition to what Socrates eats (mainly *sitos* and simple *opson*), this passage also speaks to when and how much Socrates eats. According to Xenophon, Socrates eats when he is hungry; he does not eat excessively or merely for pleasure.

Socrates' diet is so remarkably frugal that it is a common subject of mockery in both Xenophon and Plato: "Your food and drink are the poorest", Antiphon ridicules, "You are living a life that not even a slave would put up with. […] Consider yourself a teacher of unhappiness" (Xen. *Mem*. 1.6.2–3). In the *Gorgias*, Callicles compares the frugal life to which Socrates aspires to live to the lives of stones and corpses (*Gorg*. 492e), and in the *Republic*, Glaucon compares it to the life of a pig (*Rep*. 372d).

Socrates' conversation with Glaucon in *Republic II* reveals just how important Socrates considers a frugal diet for a good life. While *Republic II* is usually not considered to be an 'early' dialogue and thus does not provide evidence for a narrowly Socratic view of food and eating, it does offer a particularly clear discussion of the dangers of *opson* that is remarkably similar to what we will find in Xenophon's and Plato's Socratic dialogues. When Socrates and Glaucon set up a fictitious city to investigate justice, Socrates explains that they will be guided by their needs (χρεία, *Rep*. 369c10): "Our first and greatest need is to provide food to sustain life" (*Rep*. 369d1–2). When Socrates later specifies the kind of food that would satisfy the citizens' primary needs, Glaucon is stunned: Socrates appears to have the citizens live on *sitos* alone—wheat and barley bread and cakes—without any *opson* (Ἄνευ ὄψου, *Rep*. 372c2). In response to Glaucon's complaint, Socrates explains that of course the citizens will have *opson*: salt, olives, cheese, boiled roots, vegetables, figs, chickpeas, beans, myrtle, and acorns. Socrates' comic response is telling. It confirms that *opson* is any food added to the staple food of bread, and it shows Socrates' concern with *opsa* that are simple and rural (eaten 'in the country', ἐν ἀγροῖς, *Rep*. 372c6) as opposed to fancy and urban. Glaucon complains that such a diet is insufferable for humans and only appropriate for pigs

(*Rep*. 372d).[15] Socrates is happy to go along with Glaucon's request and add fancier kinds of *opsa*, but he emphasizes the consequences of this change in diet: if the citizens live according to the Socratic diet, they will live long lives in peace and health (ἐν εἰρήνῃ μετὰ ὑγιείας, *Rep*. 372d1–2). If, however, they live according to the Glauconean diet, they will be more prone to war and sickness (*Rep*. 373d1–2, e2–7). Thus, depending on the diet, we get two different cities: one 'true' and 'healthy', the other 'luxurious' and 'feverish' (*Rep*. 372e–373a). Note that Socrates' claim is not only or mainly that a certain diet is a symptom of an unhealthy life but rather that a certain diet promotes such a life. Give them fancier *opsa*, Socrates seems to claim, and their lives will decline.

Below, I will argue that in both Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates expresses a very similar stance on food and eating as he does in the *Republic*: eating well is the foundation of a good life for the individual and the *polis*, and we should watch out for those who risk our health and peace by cooking or indulging in delicious *opsa*. Thus, while *Republic II* may not be evidence of a narrowly *Socratic* view of *opson* and its dangers, it does suggest some continuity between Socrates' stance on food in Plato's early and middle dialogues. At the same time, my discussion will reveal a significant nuance in Socrates' stance: the Socratic diet is frugal but not austere. Socrates does not avoid the pleasures of eating, nor does he necessarily abstain from eating delicious *opson*.

III. Socrates against *Opsophagia* in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*

Socrates does not shy away from scolding those who exhibit improper table manners regarding *opson* and *sitos*. Xenophon reports that Socrates once called out a fellow dinner guest for eating *opson* without any bread by calling him an *opsophagos* (ὀψοφάγος), that is, a person who 'feeds on *opson*'. Turning to the other dinner guests, Socrates asks,

> "Can we say, gentlemen, for what kind of action a man is called an *opsophagos*? For, in fact, everyone eats *opson* on the *sitos* whenever it is available, but I don't think they are called *opsophagos* for this reason." "No, certainly not", said one of those present. "What, then, if someone eats the *opson* itself, without the *sitos*, not because

[15] Glaucon's concern seems to be that the Socratic diet is too simple (pigs have very simple needs) and not distinctively human. Glaucon worries that the Socratic diet does not contribute to a good *human* life (thanks to my anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me).

> he is in training, but for the sake of pleasure (ἡδονῆς ἕνεκα)—does he seem to be an *opsophagos* or not?" "If not, it's hard to say who does", replied the other. Someone else said, "What about the man who eats a large amount of *opson* on a bit of *sitos*?" "To me, it seems that this one too would rightly be called an *opsophagos*", said Socrates. (Xen. *Mem*. 3.14.2–3, my translation)

The *opsophagos,* Socrates says, can be identified by his actions: he eats *opson* without *sitos* (or a lot of *opson* with a little bit of *sitos*) not because he is an athlete who requires an *opson*-heavy diet (like Milo the wrestler in Aristotle *EN* 1106b4), but simply because *opson* is pleasant.[16] Hearing this insult, the dinner guest takes some bread with his *opson*, but Socrates does not let it go: let us see, Socrates comments loudly, "whether he treats the *sitos* as his *opson* or the *opson* as his *sitos*" (Xen. *Mem*. 3.14.4).

Socrates believes that the *opsophagos* is doing something wrong, and that is why he calls him out at the dinner party. But what is the *opsophagos*' crime? If you have attended dinner parties with an *opsophagos* or are familiar with the TV show *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, the answer to this question might seem obvious to you. The *opsophagos* seems to go over his allotment, that is, over the socially acceptable amount of food to take for oneself. In the TV show, Larry David calls out a fellow dinner guest for shoveling caviar onto his cracker: "You know, we're each entitled to take a certain amount, so everybody else can have a little bit, too. Feels like you're going over." For David, the fellow guest is violating the rules of distributive justice—caviar is a zero-sum good, so if you take too much, someone else has less or none. Now imagine that running out of caviar is not a concern at said dinner party. There will be enough for everyone. Would you still judge the *opsophagos*? If so, why? Socrates, as will become clear below, might still judge the *opsophagos* because, for him, *opsophagia* is a symptom of a larger issue, namely, of being an intemperate person—

[16] Two things are noteworthy about Socrates' definition of *opsophagia*. First, Socrates defines the *opsophagos* by his actions, not his body. The *opsophagos* is a wrongdoer—he violates common eating practices—but he may or may not be fat. For Socrates, the fat body can indicate overindulgence (*Gorg*. 518c), but it does not necessarily do so. As Hill (2008; 2011) argues, this is unlike today, when the fat body is often incorrectly taken as a walking proof of wrongdoing and irrationality. Second, in contrast to many other ancient sources, Socrates does not define the *opsophagos* as a person who indulges in one kind of *opson* specifically: fish (see esp. *Ath*. 7.4). Instead, Socrates seems to deliberately extend the concept of *opsophagia* to include problematic eating of *opson* generally, not of fish specifically (Davidson 1997, 33–34).

someone who wants more and more, not only at the buffet but also in other areas of life. I suspect that Socrates' criticism of *opsophagia* still resonates with us today. Even if running out of caviar at the party is not a concern, we might still judge the *opsophagos* because we suspect that his eating habits reflect on him as a person and reveal him as someone who also behaves intemperately when it comes to other goods, such as money and power.

For a first hint as to what exactly Socrates finds problematic about *opsophagia*, we can return to Xenophon's testimony above. The *opsophagos*, Socrates explains, eats *opson* simply "for the sake of pleasure" (ἡδονῆς ἕνεκα). Pleasure is one of the defining features of *opson*. About onions, Socrates says that they are called *opson* because or in so far as (ὡς) they make bread and drink pleasant (Xen. *Symp*. 4.8).[17] *Sitos*, on the other hand, is famously unpleasant; people generally do not indulge in barley bread and cakes. Despite being a staple food, barley bread was known to be "poor stuff".[18] It was so poor that the Romans "mostly fed [it] to animals", and "even slaves were fed on wheaten bread".[19] The thing that made *sitos* palatable was *opson*.

Since *opson* is pleasant, it is a 'persuader'; it 'persuades' one to eat more and more, even when one is full, as Socrates warns his dinner companions:

> Whenever [Socrates] accepted an invitation to dinner, he guarded himself without difficulty against filling oneself up beyond the limit of satiety (τὸ ὑπὲρ τὸν κόρον ἐμπίμπλασθαι); and he advised those who could not do likewise to watch out for those foods that persuade one (τὰ πείθοντα) to eat when one is not hungry and to drink when one is not thirsty. (Xen. *Mem*. 1.3.6, trans. Marchant 2013, modified)

These passages reveal what Davidson (1995; 1997) calls the "ambivalence" of *opson*. On the one hand, *opson* is one of the standard parts of a typical Greek meal: "Everyone eats *opson*", Socrates notes (Xen. *Mem*. 3.14.2). On the other hand, *opson* is somewhat

[17] Socrates' comment that onions make drinks pleasant is curious. Perhaps, he references Homer's *Iliad* 11.630, where Hecamede prepares a drink made of wine, honey, barley, and goat cheese, adding "onion as *opson*". This drink, also referenced in Plato's *Ion* (538c), was known as *kykeon*—a medical potion for the wounded but also a ritual drink for those initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries (Delatte 1955), possibly with hallucinogenic effects similar to LSD (Wasson, Hofmann, and Ruck 2008).

[18] Braun 1995, 27. However, refined forms of barley cake could be less poor and even tasty (Wilkins 2000, 16–17).

[19] Braun 1995, 27, 34.

superfluous; it is an essential inessential, a "dietary accessory", a "mere garnish" that is pleasant and persuasive and thus a possible object of overindulgence, threatening to take over the meal.[20]

While Xenophon presents a rather comic dinner scenario, with Socrates calling out an *opsophagos* for his improper table manners, in the *Gorgias*, Plato paints a much more serious and tragic picture of *opsophagia*. There, Socrates describes what it is like when *opson* has not only taken over one's meal but one's entire life.

IV. SOCRATES AGAINST *OPSOPOIIA* IN PLATO'S *GORGIAS*

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates seeks to talk to the famous rhetorician Gorgias, but as Socrates arrives, we learn that he is late for the "feast" (ἑορτῆς, *Gorg*. 447a3).[21] Gorgias had just given his audience a taste of his art, serving "very dainty" (μάλα ἀστείας) speeches, "varied and fine" (πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ, *Gorg*. 447a5).[22] But Socrates is, of course, not interested in feasting. He did not come to indulge in a presentation (ἐπιδείξεται, *Gorg*. 447b2); instead, Socrates hopes to have a discussion (διαλεχθῆναι, *Gorg*. 447c1) with Gorgias. The very first words of the dialogue set the tone for that discussion: Socrates might be late for the feast, but he is just in time for war and battle (πολέμου καὶ μάχης, *Gorg*. 447a1).[23] In what follows, Socrates will challenge Gorgias and his fans Polus and Callicles to defend their alleged art, rhetoric (ῥητορικὴ), against the charge of being nothing other than professional *opson* cookery (ὀψοποιία) for the soul. For Socrates, both rhetoricians and *opson* chefs are mere "servants and satisfiers of appetites" (διακόνους καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν παρασκευαστὰς, *Gorg*. 518c3–4).[24] They fill up people's appetites (τὰς ἐπιθυμίας ἀποπιμπλάναι, *Gorg*. 503c5) with

[20] Davidson 1995, 206–207; 1997, 24.

[21] Doyle notes (2006, 601) that Socrates is late because "Chaerephon made [him] linger in the market-place", that is, because he was doing philosophy in the *agora*. On Socrates coming late to dinner parties because of his philosophizing, see also Plato's *Symposium* 175a–176a, 220c–d.

[22] The adjective ἀστεῖος (dainty, elegant, refined) is often used, especially by comic poets, to describe fancy, urbane dishes (Sansone 2009, 632).

[23] Several interpreters have noticed the importance of the very first words of the *Gorgias* ("war and battle") (Burnyeat 1997, Doyle 2006), but few have drawn attention to the reference to food and cookery ("feast") that follows right after (Sansone 2009).

[24] In *Charm.* 167e, Socrates states that pleasure (ἡδονή) is the object of appetite (ἐπιθυμία).

pleasure without any consideration for what is truly good for the consumer (*Gorg*. 464d, 501a–b, 503a, 513d–514a).[25]

The allusions to food in the opening scene of the *Gorgias* foreshadow the importance of Socrates' comparison between rhetoric and *opson* cookery. This comparison is central to Socrates' criticism of rhetoric. But despite its importance, it has not yet been fully analyzed; further, Socrates has often been misinterpreted as comparing rhetoricians to 'pastry chefs'. These interpretations stem from mistranslating *opsopoiia* (ὀψοποιία) as 'pastry baking'.[26] But, as we saw, *opson* does not refer to 'pastries' but to 'add-on foods', that is, to anything eaten with bread (*sitos*). This is confirmed when Socrates mentions one *opson* chef, Mithaikos, by name (*Gorg*. 518b6). Mithaikos' famous cookbook did not survive, unfortunately. A partial version of his only remaining recipe can be found in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists* (*Ath*.); it is a recipe not for pastry but for ταινία, a kind of fish (*Ath*. 7.128). In the *Gorgias*, Socrates does not have a beef with pastry chefs, but with *opson* chefs, that is, with those who make *opson* (such as fish) professionally and elaborately and thus produce particularly delicious *opsa*.[27]

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[25] For the idea that the *opson* chef knows how to prepare pleasant meals, see also *Theaet*. 178d–e.

[26] See, e.g., Moss's "The Doctor and the Pastry Chef" (2007), Zeyl's translation of the *Gorgias* (1997), and Irani's discussion of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* (2017). Nichols (1998, 13, 45) translates ὀψοποιία as 'cookery' but interprets it as 'pastry baking'. Notably, several non-English translations do not make any reference to 'pastry baking'. For example, Schleiermacher (1805) translates ὀψοποιία as 'Kochkunst' and Ruiz (2003) as 'culinaria'. However, these translations can be misleading in other ways, suggesting that Socrates considers *opsopoiia* an art ('kunst') or that it is concerned with fancy foods, whereas it is not an art but a practice (ἐμπειρία) that is concerned with making anything that is eaten with bread delicious.

[27] The historical Socrates had little or no acquaintance with pastries (as John Wilkins explained to me in conversation). Refined sugar was not widely available in classical Athens. The closest thing to what we might think of as pastries were (pan)cakes (πέμματα), dough boiled in oil and sweetened with honey (*Ath*. 14.54.1–2; 14.55.24). Other specific *opson* foods mentioned in the Platonic corpus are also often mistranslated as 'pastry' or 'dessert'. For example, *hedusmata* (ἡδύσματα) in *Rep*. 404c6 does not refer to 'sweet desserts' (as Grube and Reeve (1997) suggest) but rather to 'seasoned dishes' or 'seasonings', which include pepper and vinegar (*Ath*. 2.74.17; 2.76.1). Likewise, translating *tragemata* (τραγήματά) in *Rep*. 372c7 as 'desserts' can be misleading. *Tragemata* were served as snacks or after the main course, but they were not necessarily sweet (Wilkins 2000, 40 n. 158). Socrates mentions, for example, chickpeas and beans.

Understanding *opsopoiia* as pastry-baking is not only historically incorrect but also philosophically hazardous, as it affects our interpretation of Socrates' criticism of rhetoric. If Socrates were comparing rhetoricians to pastry chefs, we might take him to suggest that speeches, like pastries, are superfluous, and thus we can live without them. In fact, they have only negative nutritional value; they are bad for us. In that case, we might conclude that Socrates recommends that we abstain from consuming both speeches and pastries and that we abolish both rhetoric and pastry baking. However, once we see that Socrates compares speeches to *opsa* and not to pastries, his position becomes much more nuanced.

On the one hand, speeches and *opsa* are pleasant and thus risky—they threaten to take over politics and meals, respectively. When speeches and *opsa* are professionally prepared, these threats become imminent. Laymen's rhetoric and cookery can be tasty and thus risky, but their products are not as enchanting as those of professionals.[28] This is, I propose, why Socrates attacks professional speech- and *opson*-makers. Professional speeches—especially courtroom speeches, which seem to be Socrates' main target in the *Gorgias*—are seasoned with a blend of pleasant ingredients (flattery, drama, poetry, comedy, and juicy gossip) for the sake of maximal enjoyment (ἥδιστον, *Gorg*. 521e).[29] Defendants may flatter the jury and slander their opponents; they may recite verses and tell jokes; they may beg for mercy and present their weeping wives and children—behavior that Socrates famously condemns (*Apol*. 34c–35b). As Hall (1995) argues, courtroom speeches were performances that entertained and pleased audiences in ways similar to comedies and tragedies in the theater.

On the other hand, *opsa* and speeches are ordinary and necessary parts of Athenian everyday life: an *opson* is not a pastry that one may or may not eat after the main course but is a necessary part of the main course. No one can live on bread alone. Likewise, speeches are the bread and butter of Athenian life. Athenian democracy needs speeches.[30] So, when Socrates compares rhetoric to *opson* cookery and criticizes both, he does not suggest that we

[28] Like speeches, *opsa* can be persuasive, as we saw above (Xen. *Mem*. 1.3.6). Especially fish was known for its seductive powers (Davidson 1997, 10; 1993, 63–64).

[29] See, e.g., Philocleon's explanation for his obsession with jury duty in Aristophanes' *Wasps* 548–575.

[30] In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates defines rhetoric very broadly as wherever and whenever people speak (*Phaedr*. 261d10–e4). On that definition, we cannot live without speeches in an even more fundamental sense.

should abstain from speeches and *opsa* entirely.[31] Far from it! We need both *opsa* and speeches.

One might think that perhaps Socrates does not recommend abstinence, given that this is impossible, but austerity. Austerity has sometimes been attributed to Plato's Socrates, most prominently in the *Phaedo*, and in the following sense: the austere philosopher actively avoids every bodily pleasure and the activities that involve such pleasures as much as possible and in all circumstances (Ebrey 2017, 2, 7, 11). When it comes to food, that would mean that the austere philosopher avoids eating *opson* as much as possible, and when he does eat *opson*, he intentionally makes his meal unpalatable in order to avoid deriving pleasure from eating. Whatever may be going on in the *Phaedo*, this is not what Socrates does in Plato's *Gorgias* and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. We saw above that instead of avoiding the pleasures of eating, Socrates "eats with pleasure" (ἡδέως ἤσθιε, Xen. *Mem*. 1.3.5). The pleasures that Socrates derives from eating appear to be what he in the *Gorgias* calls "good bodily pleasures", that is, pleasures that produce bodily excellence (ἀρετὴν τοῦ σώματος, *Gorg*. 499d).[32] Thus, in both Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates experiences pleasures from eating. While Socrates could avoid or at least significantly reduce these pleasures—for example, he could make his meals less appealing in taste, smell, and sight by oversalting them or consuming them next to the latrine—he does not do so. Socrates sometimes even makes his meals more pleasant. At one dinner party, Socrates orders that a large amount of *opson* be distributed equally among all dinner guests (Xen. *Mem*. 3.14.1). Socrates does this to disincentivize the person who brought all the *opson* from bringing such large amounts to future dinner parties; but by sharing the *opson*, Socrates makes the meal more pleasant for all the guests, himself included. Thus, he does not actively

[31] See also fn. 36 below.

[32] Socrates' distinction between good and bad bodily pleasures suggests that, at least in the *Gorgias*, he does not ascribe to what Woolf (2004) in his interpretation of the *Phaedo* has coined the "evaluative reading". In this reading, Socrates evaluates bodily pleasures, depending on the circumstances, as being of no value, of disvalue, or of little positive value. However, when Socrates in the *Gorgias* says that certain bodily pleasures are good (ἀγαθαί, *Gorg*. 499d7), he does not qualify their positive value as little. Rather, Socrates seems to think that experiencing good bodily pleasures is of significant value: good bodily pleasures restore bodily health, which is necessary for living well (*Gorg*. 504e, 512a; see also *Crit*. 47e). In *Charm*. 165d1, he says explicitly that health is "of no small benefit" (οὐ σμικρὰν ὠφελίαν).

avoid the pleasures of eating as much as possible and in all circumstances; in this case, he actively increases these pleasures.

I propose that Socrates argues neither for austere meals nor austere speeches. He even seasons his own speeches with pleasant ingredients: Socrates recites poetry (*Gorg*. 526d) and tells myths (*Gorg*. 523a–524a); he makes references to tragedy (*Gorg*. 492e) and comedy (*Gorg*. 481c–e,[33] 505e). He even ridicules and insults his opponents when he calls the rhetorician a "friendship-faking sucker-up" (*kolax*, *Gorg*. 463a-b) and compares the rhetorician's way of life to the life of the "scratcher" (a man who "has an itch and scratches it […] to his heart's content […] his whole life long", *Gorg*. 494c) and the *kinaidos* (a womanish man with a foul mouth and a busy bottom, *Gorg*. 494e4).[34] Socrates could serve more austere speeches, but he chooses not to.[35]

On the 'pastry' interpretation, pastries and, by analogy, pleasant speeches are unhealthy and bad. Thus, their production (pastry baking and rhetoric) and consumption (eating pastries and listening to pleasant speeches) are also bad.[36] But on my interpretation, pleasant speeches and *opsa* are neutral; they are not inherently bad, and whether they lead to bad consequences depends on the producer and consumer.[37] Speeches and *opsa* become problematic when they are professionally prepared for maximum pleasure and served to anyone without the guidance of real experts on the human body and soul (*Gorg*. 517e–518a). But if served skillfully and consumed wisely, speeches and *opson* can contribute to the

[33] Socrates here calls to mind Cleon's alleged love for the demos in Aristophanes' *Knights*.

[34] In discussions of the *Gorgias*, the *kolax* is commonly understood as a "flatterer" and the *kinaidos* as a "passive homosexual". I believe that these translations are incorrect and misleading and offer alternatives above, though I here cannot argue for them. For a recent reinterpretation of the *kinaidos*, see Sapsford 2022.

[35] *Pace* Moss (2007, 239), who argues that "[d]ialectic […] provides no pleasures". At least the audience might experience Socrates' insults as funny and enjoyable.

[36] For what I call the 'pastry' interpretation, see Moss 2007.

[37] See also Socrates' comment in *Phaedr*. 258d4–5: "It's not speaking or writing well that's shameful; what's really shameful is to engage in either of them shamefully or badly". See further *Rep*. 559a–d, where Plato distinguishes between a desire for *opson* that is necessary and conducive to bodily health and one that is unnecessary, harms body and soul, and should be restrained. For the Socratic idea that wise use makes things good for us and ignorant use makes things bad for us, see *Euthyd*. 281d.

human good (*Gorg*. 517e–518a, 527c). In other words, producing and consuming speeches and *opson* well are skills (τέχνη, *Gorg*. 503d1).

In my reading, Socrates' distinction between good or true rhetoric (τῇ ἀληθινῇ ῥητορικῇ) and bad or *kolaktik* rhetoric (τῇ κολακικῇ ῥητορικῇ, *Gorg*. 517a)—that is, rhetoric that only aims to please—follows naturally and plausibly. Socrates claims that we "must flee" (φευκτέον, *Gorg*. 527c3) *kolaktik* rhetoric but not true rhetoric. Likewise, we might infer that we should avoid *kolaktik* cookery—that is, cookery that only aims to please—but not true cookery—that is, cookery that contributes to the human good. Perhaps good rhetoric can aid justice (soul-correction) by making healthy speeches pleasant, and good *opson* cookery can aid medicine (body-correction) by making healthy meals tasty.[38] However, conventional rhetoricians like Gorgias and *opson* chefs like Mithaikos do not contribute to the human good because they aim only at maximizing pleasure (ἥδιστον, *Gorg*. 521e1), and thus Socrates rightfully criticizes them. The problem, it seems, is not pleasure *per se* but maximizing pleasure without any concern for the human good.[39]

By catering to our appetites without any concern for our good, conventional *opson* chefs and rhetoricians promote a certain kind of life (*bios*), namely, a life of unrestrained pleasure-seeking (*Gorg*. 492d–495a). In defending rhetoric, Callicles argues that such a life is a good life. He lives well, Callicles proclaims, who does not restrain his appetites but allows them to become as large as possible and then "fills them with whatever he may have an appetite for at the time" (*Gorg*. 492a2–3). The happy life, Callicles claims, is a life of

[38] *Pace* Moss (2007, 246), who argues that "for Socrates to seek help from an orator would be equivalent to a doctor seeking help […] from a pastry chef—an unpromising prospect indeed. The pastry chef might be able to sweeten some bitter medicine, but in doing so he would strengthen unhealthy appetites and thereby undermine the cure". I agree that a doctor would not seek help from a pastry chef (after all, the pastry chef does not know how to make healthy meals, like broccoli, tasty), but I suggest that a doctor would seek help from an *opson* chef. By making healthy meals more pleasant, the doctor does not necessarily strengthen unhealthy desires. If Socrates thought that experiencing *any* pleasure in meals (and speeches) would strengthen unhealthy appetites in everyone, he would recommend abstaining from pleasant meals (and speeches) or at least avoiding them as much as possible, in which case Socrates would be an austere ascetic, a possibility that I rejected above.

[39] Or, more precisely, maximizing certain pleasures, as Socrates himself might be a hedonist of some kind. For Socratic hedonism, see e.g., Rudebusch 1999.

constantly filling and emptying one's appetites. In Callicles' account, rhetoric is conducive to the happy life because rhetoricians can get "a greater share" (πλεονεκτεῖν) of goods for themselves and their associates (*Gorg*. 483c). Against Callicles, Socrates argues that the life of unrestrained pleasure-seekers is "terrible (δεινὸς), shameful (αἰσχρὸς), and miserable (ἄθλιος)" (*Gorg*. 494e5).

To better understand Socrates' criticism in the *Gorgias*, I introduce the character of the *opsophagos* that we encountered above in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. The *opsophagos* illustrates the life of unrestrained pleasure-seeking and of taking 'a greater share' in at least three important ways. He is thus walking evidence of the harmfulness of conventional *opson* cookery and, by analogy, rhetoric.

First, the lives of unrestrained pleasure-seekers center around satisfying their appetites. Socrates describes such a life as busy and stressful because the objects of pleasure-seekers' appetites are often "scarce and difficult to come by, procurable only with much toil and trouble" (*Gorg*. 493e). Socrates' description applies well to the *opsophagos*. For the *opsophagos*, *opson* is the first and last thing on his mind: he is "in the habit of taking a walk, first thing in the morning, in the fish market" (*Ath*. 8.27), and on his deathbed, his last wish is to finish his meal (*Ath*. 8.26). He deeply mistrusts others and constantly worries that they might steal his precious *opson*, not even trusting his own mother to watch his food (*Ath*. 8.25). Professionally prepared *opson* is also expensive and harder to come by than home-cooked *opson*. *Opsophagia* is thus economically stressful and dangerous. The restlessness and anxiety of the financially-ruined *opsophagos* was a common trope.[40]

Second, the appetites of such pleasure-seekers are undisciplined (ἀκόλαστον) and insatiable (ἀπληστίαν); they are "leaky jars" that require constant filling (*Gorg*. 493b). Such agents take pleasure in constantly filling and emptying their jars, not in the state of being full (*Gorg*. 494a–b).[41] We can see this insatiability in the *opsophagos*' eating manners. The

[40] As Davidson observed (1997, 186–193; 1993, 55–56). See, e.g., *Ath*. 8.32. Note the similarity to rhetoric: like *opson*, professionally written speeches were expensive. Gorgias, in particular, was known for having made a lot of money (*Hip. Maj*. 282d–e), presumably by charging high fees.

[41] The kind of pleasure that the *opsophagos* experiences is pleasure from contact, that is, from taste or touch. Thus, various sources report mockingly that the *opsophagos* wishes for a crane's throat (Aristotle *EN* 1118a32–

opsophagos consumes *opson* quickly and hastily by, for example, eating *opson* without bread, as we saw above, or, as popular opinion has it, by gulping down a hot piece of fish, thereby burning himself (*Ath*. 8.32) or even dying (*Ath*. 8.35; see also *Ath*. 8.26).[42]

Third, insatiable pleasure-seekers violate social order to "get a greater share" (πλεονεκτεῖν), which Callicles regards as admirable, natural, and just (*Gorg*. 483c–d). The *opsophagos* violates social order at the table. Not only does he eat *opson* without bread, but it is rumored that some *opsophagoi* even spit on the food to make it inedible for anyone else (*Ath*. 8.35). I suggest that this disorder, injustice, and lawlessness are at the heart of Socrates' attack. I will propose that Socrates calls out the *opsophagos* and attacks the *opson* chef (and, by analogy, the unrestrained consumers and conventional producers of speeches) because indulging in *opson* promotes disorder beyond the dinner table—in the individual, the *polis*, and even the cosmos.

V. Individual, Political, and Cosmic Disorder

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates argues that each thing—whether body, soul, animal, or artifact—is good if it realizes its excellence (ἀρετὴ) and that it realizes its excellence if it is brought into its "own order" or "the order that belongs" to it (οἰκεῖος κόσμος, *Gorg*. 506d5–e5). The soul's own order is 'law' (νόμιμόν τε καὶ νόμος, *Gorg*. 504d2), which Socrates defines as having self-control (σώφρων, *Gorg*. 507a1). The souls of insatiable pleasure-seekers like the *opsophagos* are thus disorderly and lawless. While Socrates' diagnosis of intemperance in the *Gorgias* remains somewhat cryptic, it is worth pointing out how innovative it is. According to North (2019, 190), "No one had previously defined the virtue

b1; see also *Ath*. 8.26). When the food goes down the *opsophagos*' throat, it tickles his palate—it is this haptic experience that the *opsophagos* wants to prolong when he wishes for a crane's throat.

[42] We can now see more clearly that the *opsophagos* shares characteristics with the glutton and the gourmet but cannot be fully identified with either one (Davidson 1995, 209–210). Like the glutton, he is greedy. But unlike the glutton, the *opsophagos* has a refined palate, preferring extravagant *opsa* over simple ones. This he shares with the gourmet. But unlike the gourmet, the *opsophagos* does not take pleasure in connoisseurship, that is, in carefully distinguishing different kinds of flavors and ingredients, as does, for instance, the wine connoisseur (Aristotle *EN* 1118a25–35). *Opsophagia* is, then, not only about excess; neither is it only about eating fancy foods.

[i.e., temperance] as 'good order or arrangement within the soul'". If this is so, no one before Socrates had understood intemperate agents like the *opsophagos* in terms of psychological disorder.

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates advises that "we must keep it [i.e., the soul of an insatiable pleasure-seeker] away (εἴργειν) from its objects of appetite (τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν; ἀφ' ὧν ἐπιθυμεῖ) and we must not permit (μὴ ἐπιτρέπειν) the soul to do anything other than what makes it better" (*Gorg*. 505b).[43] Our actions can make the soul better and more orderly, but, we may infer, they can also make it worse and more disorderly. Socrates describes the worsening of the soul through overindulgence with the imagery of leaky jars (*Gorg*. 493a–494b): the more that goes into the leaky jar (i.e., the appetites), the more that must go out, and thus the holes in the jar become bigger and bigger (i.e., the agent desires more and more). Acting intemperately, then, promotes *pleonexia*, wanting more. *Opsophagia* is thus a symptom of a disorderly soul, and indulging in *opson* promotes psychological disorder.[44] But this is not to

[43] I take it that Socrates here outlines a two-part therapy for insatiable pleasure-seekers: first, abstinence ("keeping the soul away (εἴργειν) from its objects of appetite") to prevent the soul from getting worse, and second, "redirecting" (μεταβιβάζειν, *Gorg*. 517b5–6) the soul's appetites to improve it. Xenophon mentions the second step when he reports that Socrates put an end to people's gluttony (λίχνους) and other vices by "making them desire virtue" (ἀρετῆς ποιήσας ἐπιθυμεῖν, Xen. *Mem*. 1.2.2). Some souls, Socrates believes, are incurable (*Gorg*. 525b–e). Note that Socrates recommends abstinence as a means of correction specifically for insatiable pleasure-seekers, not as a day-to-day practice for all.

[44] I here do not take a stance on how exactly indulging in *opson* promotes psychological disorder. Depending on one's interpretation of Socratic intellectualism, at least two interpretations seem possible. Following Brickhouse and Smith (2010; 2013; 2015), one could argue that indulging in *opson* strengthens the *opsophagos*' appetites, which in turn inclines him to believe that eating *opson* is good. Alternatively, following Blackson (2022), one could argue that indulging in *opson* strengthens the *opsophagos*' 'liking' for *opson*, where 'liking' refers to the belief that *opson* is good. The more the *opsophagos* indulges in pleasant *opsa*, the stronger his 'liking' for them becomes. It might seem that 'desire intellectualists' (see fn. 8) would reject the idea that indulging in *opson* promotes psychological disorder. Desire intellectualists argue that for Socrates in Plato's early dialogues (in contrast to Socrates in Plato's middle and late dialogues), only conversation—and not habituation—can educate (improve) or corrupt (worsen) the soul (see, e.g., Reshotko 2006, 35, n. 18; Penner 2018, 95, n. 24 and 110, n. 49; 2000, 164; 2011, 289). The reason, their argument continues, is that habituation affects non-rational desires, but such desires are absent from Socratic psychology. I am not convinced that habituation is necessarily incompatible with desire intellectualism, but I can only briefly outline my reasoning here. According to desire intellectualists, appetites like hunger are mere 'itches' (not full-fledged

say that eating *opson* promotes disorder in everyone. Socrates can enjoy *opson* (even particularly delicious ones on occasion) without risking disorder, whereas the *opsophagos* cannot. Thus, different diets are good for different people (*Gorg*. 505a).

Xenophon's Socrates offers a different, though compatible, diagnosis of the dangers of *opson*: indulging in *opson*—specifically in various *opsa*—is problematic, Xenophon's Socrates explains, because we can become accustomed to it (Xen. *Mem*. 3.14.5–6). He who mixes (συμμιγνύων) many different (πολλὰ […] παντοδαπὰ) *opsa* and crams them into his mouth all at once risks "getting into the habit of eating many things at the same time" (τῷ ἅμα πολλὰ ἐσθίειν ἐθισθέντι). Then, when there is no such variety, "he thinks that he gets less than his share (μειονεκτεῖν) because he desires what he is used to (ποθῶν τὸ σύνηθες)", while he who is used to eating only one kind of *opson* (ἑνὶ ὄψῳ) with one piece of bread will easily make do. Getting into the habit of eating a variety of *opson* promotes *pleonexia*, and thus, when there is no such variety, the person who "wants more" (*pleonektein*) feels like he is "not getting enough" (*meionektein*).

Thus, while Plato's Socrates in the *Gorgias* identifies a problem with the consumer's soul ("indulging in *opson* itself promotes psychological disorder in some people"), Xenophon's Socrates identifies a problem with "the types of *opson* consumed (a variety, prepared so as to induce maximum pleasure)" as well as with "the way in which *opson* is consumed (a variety in every mouthful)." Food being 'moreish' (i.e., so pleasant that one wants to eat more) "is one kind of danger that Socrates identifies," but such foods are more dangerous for some than for others.[45] In order to eat *opson* properly, we might have to attend to the distinct sources of danger separately.

In the *Gorgias*, variety is a problematic feature of both *opson* cookery and rhetoric. The *opson* chef serves "many pleasant meals of all sorts" (πολλὰ καὶ ἡδέα καὶ παντοδαπὰ, *Gorg*. 522a3), constantly changing the ingredients of dishes to cater to the taste of his

desires) that can only inform our deliberation (but cannot cause beliefs) about what is best to do (Penner 1991, 201, n. 45; 2011, 263; Reshotko 2006, 85–87). But even if we accept this, one could argue that we cannot deliberate well if we are constantly 'itching' for *opson*. Thus, it seems that even if Socrates is a desire intellectualist, he might still have an interest in influencing his hunger 'itch' by maintaining frugal eating habits.

[45] I owe this helpful distinction between the different diagnoses of the dangers of *opson* as well as the comparison to "moreish" foods to my anonymous reviewer.

customers. Likewise, the rhetorician serves "many" (πολλὰ, *Gorg*. 447a5) speeches, constantly changing their content to please the audience (*Gorg*. 481e). People's tastes change, but what is truly good for them—physiologically and psychologically—stays the same. Thus, we find Socrates emphasizing that, in contrast to the rhetoricians, he always says the same things (*Gorg*. 491b, 527d).[46]

Opsophagia is not only detrimental to psychological health—it also throws the body into disarray. Socrates says in the *Gorgias* that the body is orderly when it is healthy and disorderly when it is sick (*Gorg*. 504c). Overindulging in *opson* leads to bodily sickness (νόσον, *Gorg*. 518d1, d4), that is, to disorder. Socrates claims that *opson* chefs bring about bodily sickness and disorder when they "fill and fatten (ἐμπλήσαντες καὶ παχύναντες) people's bodies […] and destroy (προσαπολοῦσιν) their original flesh" (*Gorg*. 518c5–7). Since bodily health and order are necessary for living well (*Gorg*. 504e, 512a; see also *Crit*. 47e), *opson* chefs harm their consumers.[47] Note again the similarity to rhetoric. Rhetoricians, Socrates argues, have given the city festering sores (ὕπουλός, *Gorg*. 518e4), filling it with

[46] See also Xen. *Mem*. 4.4.6. The idea that variety (ποικιλία) promotes intemperance and psychological disorder also features prominently in Plato's middle dialogues. In *Rep*. 404d–e, Plato compares eating a variety of *opson* (ποικιλίαν ὄψου) to composing lyric odes and songs from a variety of rhythms. Rhythmic variety (ποικιλία), Plato claims, causes intemperance (ἀκολασίαν). Rhythmic simplicity (ἁπλότης), by contrast, causes moderation (σωφροσύνην). Likewise, in *Symp*. 187e, Plato has the doctor Eryximachus compare indulging in *polyhumnia*, which causes intemperance, to indulging in *opson* cookery, which causes bodily sickness.

[47] Socrates seems to believe that a baseline of bodily health is necessary to acquire and maintain psychological excellence (*Hip*. *Min*. 366c, *Prot*. 345b; see also Xen. *Mem*. 3.12.6). However, Socrates also says that nothing bad and harmful can happen to the virtuous person (*Apol*. 30c–d, 41d; *Gorg*. 527d), perhaps suggesting that not even a terrible sickness could harm such a man. For a discussion of these passages, see, e.g., Smith 2021, Chapter 5; Rudebusch 1999, 115–122; and Irwin 1986. Relatedly, we may wonder whether bodily health, in addition to being instrumentally valuable for psychological excellence, has any intrinsic value. For a very helpful discussion of this question, see Szaif 2009. Szaif proposes that for embodied beings like us, bodily health is good in itself and conditionally constitutive of happiness: bodily health constitutes happiness in a weak sense (i.e., bodily health is "glückssteigernd" but not "glücksstiftend", 2009, 243) and under the condition that it is used wisely. This might explain why Plato's Socrates repeatedly says that bodily health is good and that disease is bad (*Charm*. 165c–d, *Lys*. 218e, *Prot*. 354b, *Gorg*. 467e, 478c) while also claiming that only wisdom or knowledge is always good and that all other goods are in themselves indifferent (*Euthyd*. 280e–281d). For a discussion of health as a conditional or 'variable' good in Xen. *Mem*. 4.2.31–36, see Jones and Sharma 2020.

what gratifies the citizens—"fortification, dockyards, an empire, and tribute" (*Gorg*. 519a; see also 455e, 517c) or, to pick more contemporary examples, tax cuts and football stadiums—without caring about what is truly best for the city.

Xenophon's Socrates also shows a serious concern for the body. He urges everyone to care for their bodies (Xen. *Mem*. 3.12.5) and reproves those who neglect their bodies (Xen. *Mem*. 1.2.4), even commenting publicly on people's physical appearance (Xen. *Mem*. 3.12.1–4). It is shameful, Socrates maintains, to be careless with one's body and not try to make it as beautiful and strong as possible (κάλλιστος καὶ κράτιστος, Xen. *Mem*. 3.12.8.2). Care for the body is for the sake of bodily health. It includes watching what one eats and drinks as well as exercise (Xen. *Mem*. 4.7.9). Eating food that benefits both soul and body is part of a well-ordered life (τοῖς κοσμίως διαιτωμένοις, Xen. *Mem*. 3.14.7). Indulging in *opson*, Socrates warns us, "ruin[s] stomach, heads, and souls" (Xen. *Mem*. 1.3.6). As Diogenes Laertius tells the story, Socrates' own "way of life (δίαιταν) was so remarkably well-ordered (εὔτακτός)" that "on the many occasions when a plague (λοιμῶν) broke out at Athens, Socrates was the only man who did not fall ill" (DL 2.25.9–11).

Of course, Socrates advises us not to care more for the body than for the soul (*Apol*. 30a–b). The soul is still more valuable than the body (*Gorg*. 477b–e, 512a5–6; *Crit*. 47e6–48a3). Thus, when at the end of his life, Socrates must choose between bodily and psychological well-being, he chooses the latter, rejecting his friend Crito's help to flee prison. Socrates chooses to ingest something that poisons his body—hemlock—rather than something that poisons his soul—wrongdoing. And yet, once we acknowledge that bodily well-being is important for living well, Socrates' simultaneous disdain of conventional cookery and appreciation of medicine and dietetics becomes much more plausible. The physician, Socrates thinks, produces a "fine product" (καλὸν ἔργον, *Charm*. 165d1–2). In my reading, Socrates is not hostile toward the body or toward certain kinds of foods—he is not *somaphobic* or *opsonphobic*.[48] Rather, he believes that caring for the body by eating well is an important part of living well.

[48] These passages further support that Socrates in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and Plato's *Gorgias* is not an austere ascetic. The austere ascetic disdains the body and activities related to it, such as eating. In my reading, austere asceticism misidentifies the target of Socrates' disdain. Socrates does not disdain the body but bodily disorder and the activities and people that promote such disorder. This shift in target is important, as Zoller

At this point, we understand that *opsophagia* is bad for the individual because it leads to psychological and physiological disorder and an overall disorderly, stressful way of life. This insight may have led Socrates to follow a certain frugal diet, but why, we might wonder, is it any of Socrates' business how much *opson* other people eat? Why not 'eat and let eat'? I propose that Socrates calls out the *opsophagos* and criticizes *opson* chefs because he is concerned for the well-being of the *polis*.

When Socrates in the *Gorgias* summarizes the conclusion to his argument against the undisciplined life, he moves seamlessly from the life of the insatiable pleasure-seeker to the life of the robber (λῃστοῦ βίον, *Gorg*. 507e3) and from disorder in the individual to disorder in the *polis*:

> He should not allow his appetites to be undisciplined or undertake to fill them up […] and live the life of a robber (λῃστοῦ βίον). Such a man could not be dear to another man or to a god, for he is unable to do anything in common (κοινωνεῖν γὰρ ἀδύνατος), and where there's no sense of community (κοινωνία) there's no friendship (φιλία). (*Gorg*. 507e, trans. Zeyl 1997, modified)

Insatiable pleasure-seekers have lawless souls and, we can explain on Socrates' behalf, they resort to lawless behavior to satisfy their appetites—from eating *opson* without bread to other more serious crimes. Those who live their lives in the service of their appetites put pleasure over the law. Characters like the *opsophagos* were thus commonly suspected of crimes and seen as a threat to the order of the *polis*.[49]

The kinds of crimes and societal disruptions that Socrates alludes to when he compares the life of the pleasure-seeker to the life of the robber are more serious than, for example,

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explains: "One disturbing aspect of the austere […] interpretation […] is its presumption that bodies and what happens to them […] are irrelevant to a philosopher's sphere of interest" (2018, 149). But "[w]hen we devalue the physical, we lessen concern for all that is linked with it—women, people of color, […] animals, and nature itself" (2018, 8).

[49] As Davidson (1993; 1995; 1997) has shown. In Diphilus' comedy *Merchant*, for instance, the city keeps a close eye on who buys what at the market. Someone who "continually buy[s] fish in a big way" gets interrogated. If he cannot provide proof of property and income that can meet such expenses, he gets executed right away "because it is not possible for him to live without some criminal act. Of necessity he will steal clothes at night and burgle through walls or be in league with men who do such things or be a blackmailer in the market or be a false witness" (*Merchant* fr.31, trans. Wilkins 2000, 297–298).

stealing eel from a fishmonger. The robber (λῃστής) takes a greater share by force (βίαιον, *Soph*. 222c5); in this way, he differs from the thief (κλέπτης). The robber raids and plunders on land and sea; thus, λῃστής is sometimes translated as 'pirate' (see, e.g., *Pol*. 298d). His crimes lead to fighting and war.[50] The robber is thus a threat to the social order in a more substantial, political sense: robbers are outlaws—they live outside the law. When, earlier in the *Gorgias*, Callicles praised the rhetorician as belonging to the class of superior men who take a greater share "by force" (βίᾳ, *Gorg*. 488b3–5), he inadvertently praised the life of the robber.[51]

For us, it might be a bit of a stretch to think of pleasure-seekers like the *opsophagos* as robbers or pirates. But for Socrates' contemporaries, *opsophagia* is commonly associated with criminals, specifically with political disruptors.[52] Taking a greater share at the dinner table indicates a general tendency to want more—more *opson*, but also more money, power, and influence. The most extreme case of 'taking a greater share' and the most serious political crime and threat to the *polis* is tyranny.

In the *Gorgias,* the threat of tyranny becomes apparent when Polus himself compares rhetoricians to tyrants, boasting that both are "powerful" because they can do whatever they

[50] Plato in the *Republic* explains that consuming fancy *opson* leads not only to national but also to international political disorder. Once we introduce fancy *opson*, we have a luxurious city (τρυφῶσαν πόλιν, *Rep*. 372e3), and such a city will need more and more land to satisfy its citizens' appetites, which will lead to war against their neighbors (*Rep*. 373d–e).

[51] Notice again the similarity to the historical Gorgias' rhetoric that persuades its audience by force (*Hel*. 12).

[52] As Davidson 1993 and Olson and Sens 2000, l–li, have shown. See, e.g., Aristophanes' *Knights* (928–940) and Timocles' *Delos* (*Ath*. 8.27), where *opsophagia*, specifically the desire for fish, is linked with taking bribes; see also Antiphanes' *Rich Men* (188K–A), where buying all the fish at the market, leaving nothing for others, is considered undemocratic. The inference from *opsophagia* and intemperance to the life of the robber and political disruption is particularly clear in Aeschines' speech "Against Timarchos" (1.189–1.191): Timarchos "behaved as he did, because he was a slave to the most shameful vices, *opsophagia*, expensive dinner parties, flute-girls, *hetairai*, dice and all those other things which a free and noble man should not allow to overwhelm him […] For he who despises the laws and *sophrosune* comes to be in a particular condition in his soul, which is plainly revealed by the disorderliness of his conduct […] The impetuous pleasures of the body are what fill the robbers' bands (πληροῖ τὰ λῃστήρια), and put men on board the pirates' boats. These pleasures are for each man his Fury, urging him to slay his fellow citizen, to serve the tyrant, to help overturn the democracy" (trans. Davidson 1995, 212–213).

"want" (*Gorg*. 466a–481b). Polus challenges Socrates to consider the Macedonian tyrant Archelaus (*Gorg*. 470d)—does he not live an enviable, happy life? By comparing rhetoricians to *opson* chefs and tyrants, the *Gorgias* alludes to the image of the feasting tyrant.[53] Tyrants famously indulge in *opson*, and while this idea is only implicit in the *Gorgias*, it becomes explicit in the *Republic*. There, Socrates says that tyrants

> are always occupied with feasts […] and wander in this way throughout their lives, […] look[ing] down at the ground like cattle, and, with their heads bent over the dinner table, they feed, fatten, and fornicate (εἰς τραπέζας βόσκονται χορταζόμενοι καὶ ὀχεύοντες). To get a greater share (πλεονεξίας) in these things, they kick and butt them with iron horns and hooves, killing each other, because their desires are insatiable. For the part that they're trying to fill is like a vessel full of holes. (*Rep*. 585e–586b, trans. Grube and Reeve 1997, modified)

This passage echoes some of the main characteristics of the *opsophagos* that we identified in the *Gorgias*. The *opsophagos* has insatiable desires, or a 'leaky jar'; he leads a disorderly, stressful life, 'wandering' around (see also *Prot*. 356d5), trying to get a greater share, which leads to crimes and political disruption. Ultimately, the *opsophagos*' attempts to satisfy his appetite are in vain, for his leaky jar will never become full.

But Socrates is not done yet. After having connected the life of the insatiable pleasure-seeker to the life of the robber, he continues connecting the life of the robber not only to political but even to cosmic disorder:

> Wise men claim that partnership and friendship, orderliness (κοσμιότητα), self-control, and justice hold together heaven and earth, and gods and men, and that is why they call this universe (τὸ ὅλον) a world order (κόσμον), my friend, and not an undisciplined world-disorder (οὐκ ἀκοσμίαν οὐδὲ ἀκολασίαν). […] You've failed to notice that geometrical equality (ἡ ἰσότης ἡ γεωμετρικὴ) has great power among both gods and men, and you suppose that you ought to practice getting the greater share (πλεονεξίαν δεῖν ἀσκεῖν). That's because you do not care about geometry (γεωμετρίας ἀμελεῖς). (*Gorg*. 507e–508a, trans. Zeyl 1997, modified)

[53] For a particularly clear passage outside of Plato linking *opsophagia* with tyranny, see, e.g., Aristophanes' *Wasps*, 493–495. See also Davidson's discussion (1993).

Socrates does not further explain why or how exactly taking a greater share violates cosmic order. Perhaps cosmic order is the divine product that we humans can assist the gods in producing (*Euthyp*. 12e–14a).[54] Knowledge of the divine product is, presumably, out of reach for us humans (it would surpass human wisdom, *Apol*. 20d–e), and thus we should not expect Socrates to give a full-fledged account of how we can serve the gods.[55] Yet Socrates is certain that his own philosophical activity is service to the god (*Apol*. 21a4, 23b7, 30a7), so much so that he centers his whole life around it.[56] Socrates alludes to his life in service of the god at the beginning of the *Gorgias* when he explains that he arrived late for Gorgias' performance because he was kept in the marketplace by Chaerephon—the very person who delivered the oracle's response that no man is wiser than Socrates, which in turn sent Socrates on his mission of leading the philosophic life (*Apol*. 20e–21d). Socrates' mention of Chaerephon in the opening scene of the *Gorgias* is hardly a coincidence. Rather, it foreshadows Socrates' charge of impiety against the rhetorician that comes into focus towards the end of the dialogue: the rhetorician's activity is a disservice to the god because it promotes cosmic disorder. In light of these cosmic ramifications, Socrates' harsh words at the very end of the dialogue follow plausibly: the life of the conventional rhetorician (and, by analogy, the *opson* chef) is worth nothing (οὐδενὸς ἄξιος, *Gorg*. 527e7).[57]

I conclude that Socrates' comparison between rhetoric and *opson* cookery is very apt and carefully chosen. By comparing rhetoric to *opson* cookery, Socrates calls to mind the lawlessness of the unrestrained consumer of *opson*, the *opsophagos*, whose crimes go far beyond the dinner table. By filling their consumers' appetites with anything they desire, conventional rhetoricians and *opson* chefs nourish such lawlessness and promote injustice

[54] In Xen. *Mem*. 1.4.2–19, Socrates explains that the god designed the cosmos to be orderly and purposeful, thus suggesting, perhaps, that an orderly cosmos in which everything fulfills its purpose is the divine product to which we can contribute.

[55] As McPherran (1996, 66) has argued.

[56] For a further discussion of Socratic philosophizing as a service to the god, see McPherran 1996, esp. Chapters 2.2 and 4.2.

[57] We can find the idea that our individual actions have cosmic ramifications more explicitly in Plato's later dialogues, as Carone (2005) and Armstrong (2004) argue. In the *Laws*, Plato even suggests that *pleonexia* is responsible not only for all moral evils but also for all natural evils, thus endorsing "a strongly symbiotic picture of the relation between humanity and the cosmos" (Carone 2005, 13, 184).

and impiety—political and cosmic disorder—not just metaphorically, but literally. They are the cause of sickness (τοὺς αἰτίους) in the individual and the *polis*, and people like Callicles are accessories (συναιτίων) to their crimes (*Gorg*. 519a–b).

VI. Conclusion

A comparative reading of Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and Plato's *Gorgias* has proven to be beneficial to our understanding of both texts. The *Gorgias* illuminates Socrates' criticism of *opsophagia* in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* by giving us more insight into the psychology of the *opsophagos*. At the same time, including the *opsophagos* in our interpretation of the *Gorgias* helps us understand Socrates' harsh criticism of *opson* chefs. Socrates attacks *opson* chefs, I argued, because they produce maximally pleasant *opsa*, tempting people to overindulge and nourishing the condition of *opsophagia*. Socrates calls out the *opsophagos*, the unrestrained consumer of *opson*, because his eating manners are a symptom of a lawless soul and because such a person tends to resort to lawless behavior—from eating *opson* without bread to crimes like theft, bribery, and even revolution—to get a greater share. *Opsophagia* is not simply an embarrassing faux pas at the dinner table but a serious threat to the order and health of the individual, the *polis*, and the cosmos.

I proposed that Socrates attacks the *opsophagos* and the *opson* chef not because he disdains the physical sphere—his own body, other people's bodies, the political body, and related activities like eating and giving speeches—but because he values order. Careful consumption and skillful production promote order in the individual, the *polis*, and the cosmos. Careful consumption means frugality (being able to live on simple *opson*), not austerity (avoiding *opson* as much as possible). If we read Socrates' comparison between rhetoricians and *opson* chefs in light of his view on food and the cultural meaning of indulging in *opson*, Socrates' criticism of rhetoric becomes much clearer and more nuanced: speeches are a necessary part of Athenian public life, but the way they are prepared and served conventionally—for maximum pleasure and without any concern for the health of the *polis*—is very dangerous.

Plato, as well as other philosophical descendants of Socrates, inherited his concern for food and eating. In the *Republic*, Plato describes the guardians' diet in detail, making

sure that they live on simple *opson* only (*Rep*. 404b–e).[58] Epicurus famously advises against eating extravagant *opson*, for "barley cakes and water provide the highest pleasure when someone in want takes them" (*Letter to Menoeceus*, DL 10.131). Musonius Rufus, Epictetus' teacher, "used to speak frequently and very emphatically" on the subject of food, advising his students to eat inexpensive, easy-to-come-by foods (*Discourse* 18A). He harshly criticizes *opsophagia*, comparing *opsophagoi* to swine and dogs (*Discourse* 18B). "The throat was designed to be a passage for food", Musonius Rufus asserts, "not an organ of pleasure" (*Discourse* 18B). If we wish to live well, he maintains, we should, like Socrates, eat to live rather than live to eat.[59]

Apol.	Plato *Apology*
Ath.	Athenaeus *Deipnosophists*
Charm.	Plato *Charmides*
Crit.	Plato *Crito*
DL	Diogenes Laertius *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*
EN	Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*
Euthyd.	Plato *Euthydemus*
Euthyp.	Plato *Euthyphro*
Hel.	Gorgias of Leontini *The Encomium of Helen*
Hip. Maj.	Plato *Hippias Major*
Hip. Min.	Plato *Hippias Minor*
Lys.	Plato *Lysis*
Phaedr.	Plato *Phaedrus*
Pol.	Plato *Statesman*
Prot.	Plato *Protagoras*
Rep.	Plato *Republic*

[58] The guardians eat no fish, no seasonings (ἡδυσμάτων) like pepper and vinegar, and no Attic (pan)cakes (Ἀττικῶν πεμμάτων); they eat only roasted meat, no boiled meat; for, Plato explains, "if one's body is to be in a good condition, one must keep away from all such things" (*Rep*. 404c).

[59] For this characterization of Socrates, see also Diogenes Laertius (DL 2.34).

Soph.	Plato *Sophist*
Symp.	Plato *Symposium*
Theaet.	Plato *Theaetetus*
Xen. *Mem.*	Xenophon *Memorabilia*
Xen. *Symp*.	Xenophon *Symposium*

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