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Corresponding Author	Family Name	Rudebusch
	Particle	
	Given Name	George
	Suffix	
	Division	
	Organization	Northern Arizona University
	Address	Flagstaff, AZ, USA
	Email	

Abstract	<p>Intellectualism about human virtue is the thesis that virtue is knowledge. Virtue intellectualists may be eliminative or reductive. If eliminative, they will eliminate our conventional vocabulary of virtue words—"virtue," "piety," "courage," etc.—and speak only of knowledge or wisdom. If reductive, they will continue to use the conventional virtue words but understand each of them as denoting nothing but a kind of knowledge (as opposed to, say, a capacity of some other part of the soul than the intellect, such as the will or the appetites). Virtue intellectualists may be pluralists or monists. If pluralist, they identify the virtues with distinct kinds of knowledge. If monist, they identify all the virtues with one and the same kind of knowledge.¹ In a number of dialogues—including the <i>Euthyphro</i>, <i>Apology</i>, <i>Charmides</i>, <i>Euthydemus</i>, <i>Laches</i>, <i>Lysis</i>, <i>Protagoras</i>, and <i>Republic</i>—Socrates gives arguments that support Reductive Monist Intellectualism (RMI) about human virtue.</p>
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Chapter 10

Socrates, Wisdom and Pedagogy

George Rudebusch

10.1 Introduction

Intellectualism about human virtue is the thesis that virtue is knowledge. Virtue intellectualists may be eliminative or reductive. If eliminative, they will eliminate our conventional vocabulary of virtue words—"virtue," "piety," "courage," etc.—and speak only of knowledge or wisdom. If reductive, they will continue to use the conventional virtue words but understand each of them as denoting nothing but a kind of knowledge (as opposed to, say, a capacity of some other part of the soul than the intellect, such as the will or the appetites). Virtue intellectualists may be pluralists or monists. If pluralist, they identify the virtues with distinct kinds of knowledge. If monist, they identify all the virtues with one and the same kind of knowledge.¹ In a number of dialogues—including the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Euthydemus*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic I*—Socrates gives arguments that support Reductive Monist Intellectualism (RMI) about human virtue.

Socrates' arguments make RMI both an attractive philosophical hypothesis in its own right and an attractive interpretation of Socrates' own theory of piety, courage, and the other virtues. On this interpretation, expressions such as "piety," "the knowledge how to serve the gods," "courage," "the knowledge what to dread and what to dare," all refer to one and the same object, namely, the knowledge of the human good. I note that, for example, this sort of identification of piety with the whole of virtue is endorsed by Kant (at least when he sets aside non-rational religious revelation), and seems a consequence of some teachings of Hebrew prophets and Jesus.² My aim in this chapter is not to defend such profound philosophical hypotheses about piety or courage, although I shall briefly indicate the relevant Socratic arguments below. Nor is my aim here to establish RMI as the correct interpretation of Socrates. I seek here only to disarm an influential objection to RMI as the correct interpretation of Socrates.

G. Rudebusch (✉)
Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ, USA

46 According to this objection, RMI cannot be the correct interpretation of Socrates,
47 because in the *Laches* Socrates seems to believe that piety, courage, etc. are but parts
48 of virtue.

49
50 PW/L To Laches, he says, “I would not have us begin with the whole, . . . let us
51 begin with a part [of virtue, courage]” (190c8–10).

52 PW/N To Nicias, he says, “You yourself said that courage was a part, and there
53 were many other parts, all of which taken together are called virtue. . . .
54 In that case, do you say the same as I? I apply the term to courage,
55 temperance, righteousness, and the like. Would you not say the same?”
56 (198a–b).

57
58 Likewise Socrates in the *Meno* and *Euthyphro* raises the question and uses analogies
59 in such a way that his interlocutors, at least, take him to believe the conventional
60 view that piety, courage, etc. are but parts of virtue.

61
62 (PW/M) When Meno says, “Justice is virtue,” Socrates asks him, “Is it virtue
63 or a virtue?” Then Socrates explains how roundness is but a part of
64 shape, suggesting to Meno that Socrates sees justice in the same way
65 with respect to virtue. Meno says in reply, “You’re right, for I also
66 say (*kai egô legô*) that justice is but one part among others of virtue”
67 (*Meno* 73e). Socrates repeats this part/whole agreement at 78d.

68 (PW/E) When Euthyphro agrees that all that is holy is just, Socrates asks him,
69 “And is all justice holy, too?” Then Socrates explains how shame is
70 but a part of fear, suggesting by the analogy that piety is but a part of
71 justice. Euthyphro replies that piety is but a part of virtue, “For you
72 [Socrates] appear to speak rightly (*phainê(i) gar moi orthôs legein*)”
73 (*Euth.* 12d).³

74
75 If we take Socrates’ part/whole claims and suggestions about virtue as statements
76 of his own moral theory, we must either abandon monism as an interpretation of
77 Socrates’ moral theory and opt for pluralism or else give up the attempt to find a
78 coherent Socratic moral theory.⁴

79 My reply to this objection is to supplement the RMI interpretation of Socrates’
80 moral theory with an account of Socrates’ pedagogical technique, by showing that
81 (Section 10.3) Socrates distinguishes three levels of attainment of wisdom; that
82 (Section 10.4) Socrates’ life’s work is pedagogy, namely, moving people from the
83 lowest level to the middle level of attainment of wisdom, by testing and exami-
84 nation; that (Section 10.5) one of Socrates’ pedagogical techniques is to test his
85 interlocutor’s knowledge of a subject by giving him a false lead, that is, by making
86 a misleading suggestion; that (Section 10.6) this technique is illustrated with the
87 slave boy in the *Meno*; with the consequence that (Section 10.7) the RMI interpreta-
88 tion with this account of Socratic pedagogy explains as false leads Socrates’ claims
89 to Laches and Nicias and his suggestions to Meno and Euthyphro that courage is but
90 a part of virtue (namely, PW/L, PW/N, PW/M, and PW/E). In this way I disarm the

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91 objection to the RMI interpretation. I begin (Section 10.2) by reviewing the case for
 92 the RMI interpretation.

93

94

95 **10.2 Socratic Reductive Monist Intellectualism**

96

97 In Book IV of the *Republic* there is an account of justice as a harmony of ratio-
 98 nal, semi-rational, and non-rational elements within a tripartite soul (a tripartite
 99 soul also appears in the *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*). Book IV's non-intellectualist
 100 account of virtue is incompatible with Book I, in which Socrates argues that justice
 101 must be, precisely, wisdom (349b–350d). Other dialogues—including the *Apology*,
 102 *Charmides*, *Euthydemus*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Meno*, and *Protagoras*—portray a char-
 103 acter like the Socrates of *Republic* I who gives arguments that reduce virtue to
 104 wisdom.

105 In the *Laches* and *Protagoras* Socrates provides a simple and compelling argu-
 106 ment for the reduction of all goodness to wisdom: any non-wise trait which we
 107 might be tempted to identify as something good, such as confidence (*Prt.* 349e–
 108 350c) or endurance (*La.* 192b–d) will in some circumstances be foolish and bad.
 109 But neither foolish endurance nor foolish confidence is good. Hence any non-wise
 110 quality, such as confidence or endurance, is no more good than bad. And anything
 111 that is agreed to be good by the same reasoning must be wisdom. This argument
 112 justifies Socrates' surprising identification of good luck (*eutuchia*, *Euthd.* 279d),
 113 personal beauty (*kalos*, *Prt.* 309c), and “every [good] property” (*panta chrêmata*,
 114 *Prt.* 361b) with wisdom, and it entails, *pace* Protagoras (*Prt.* 350d), that even phys-
 115 ical strength is wisdom—if strength is something good. In the protreptic of the
 116 *Euthydemus* Socrates uses a similar argument to the same conclusion: any object
 117 (apart from wisdom) that we might be tempted to identify as something good, such
 118 as wealth, health, good looks, good birth, power, or honor (*Euthd.* 279a–b), produce
 119 no benefit without wisdom and are positively bad when led by ignorance (*Euthd.*
 120 281b–d). Depending on their use, these objects are no more good than bad; hence
 121 only wisdom is good and only ignorance bad. In the *Charmides* Socrates again iden-
 122 tifies, on the basis of the same sort of right-use considerations, this good wisdom
 123 as the particular “knowledge of good and bad” (*tês [epistêmês] peri to agathon te*
 124 *kai kakon*, 174c) “whose function is human benefit” (*hês ergon estin to ôphelein*
 125 *hêmas*, 174d). In the protreptic of the *Lysis* he argues, again from considerations of
 126 utility, that wisdom is the only thing human beings love with desire (210a–d: we
 127 are loved only insofar as we are wise). In *Republic* IV (349a–354a) he gives a dif-
 128 ferent sort of argument, from the structural similarity of craft knowledge to justice
 129 (*dikaïosunê*) and from the function of the human soul, in order to identify justice
 130 with the knowledge of human benefit (350d). The main objection to intellectu-
 131 alism, of course, is not its necessity to virtue but its sufficiency, for it gives no role
 132 to emotions, will, and desire in human virtue. However, in the *Protagoras* (352a–
 133 357e) Socrates effectively replies to this objection and shows that knowledge alone
 134 is sufficient for virtue by arguing that it is impossible for emotions to overpower
 135 knowledge of the good, and in the *Meno* (77b–78b) by arguing that all humans are

136 alike in willing and desiring what is good. These arguments identifying virtue with
 137 one type of knowledge enable us to understand Socrates' claims in the *Apology* that
 138 "virtue produces wealth and all other goods" (*Ap.* 30b) and that "nothing can harm
 139 a good man either in life or after death" (*Ap.* 41d).⁵

140 The arguments of the preceding paragraph are evidence that Socrates is a reductive
 141 intellectualist about virtue. But they do not tell us if he is a pluralist (making
 142 piety, courage, etc. distinct parts of virtue) or a monist (for whom the different names
 143 "piety," "courage," etc. all refer to the very same kind of knowledge). Socrates'
 144 refutation of Nicias indicates he is a monist. Nicias, like Socrates, is a reductive
 145 intellectualist: he says he has often heard an "excellent saying" from Socrates, that
 146 "every man is good in that in which he is wise" (*La.* 194c–d), and he agrees with
 147 Socrates that

148
 149 (RI) "If a man knows all good and evil, . . . he lacks no virtue" (*La.* 198d).

150
 151 Nicias is certainly a pluralist: he holds the conventional view that

152
 153 (CP) Courage is but "a part of virtue" (*La.* 198a).

154
 155 But Nicias runs into trouble when he tries to specify what part of the knowledge of
 156 good and evil courage is:

157
 158 (CF) Courage is "knowledge of future good and evil" (*La.* 198c).

159
 160 For, given CF, Socrates refutes Nicias by pointing out that knowledge is universal
 161 in time:

162
 163 (UK) If a kind of knowledge knows a thing, it will know it at any time, past,
 164 present, or future (*La.* 198d).

165
 166 Hence:

167
 168 (CA) Courage, "instead of being only a part of virtue, will be all of virtue"
 169 (*La.* 199e).

170
 171
 172 Socrates, as shown in the previous paragraph, accepts reductive intellectualism (RI).
 173 The universality of any given kind of knowledge (UK) is undeniable. This argument
 174 therefore refutes the pluralist doctrine that courage is but a part of virtue (CP).⁶

175 The same sort of considerations of the identity conditions for any given kind of
 176 knowledge, such as Socrates provides (*Ion* 531e–532a, 537c–540e; *H. Mi.* 367c–
 177 369a; *Grg.* 449d–454a; *Rep.* I 332c–334a) lead to RMI as a general account of the
 178 virtues and as the best interpretation of Socrates.⁷

179 The above arguments, which reduce an apparent multiplicity of goods and
 180 virtues to one single thing, the knowledge of human advantage, allow us to explain

181 Socrates' reaction to Protagoras' Great Speech. Socrates is surprised that Protagoras
182 would speak of virtue as a whole *composed of parts*.

183 You [Protagoras] say that virtue is teachable (*didakton*), and if I believe anyone [about this
184 point], I believe you. But your speech surprised me. . . . For. . . at many points in your speech
185 you spoke as if justice and temperance and piety and all these things, *taken together*, are
186 one thing, virtue. Please go through this point in your argument more precisely for me. Is
187 virtue one thing and justice, temperance, and piety parts of it, or are all these words I just
188 mentioned names of one and the same thing? (*panta onomata tou autou henos ontos*, *Prt.*
329b–d)

189 With this question Socrates is establishing the outlines of his public debate with
190 Protagoras, which will last for the remainder of the dialogue. Protagoras says the
191 answer is obvious: justice, temperance, etc. “are parts of a single thing, virtue”
192 (329d). Socrates, as the monist intellectualist interpretation is able to explain, is
193 surprised that a wise man would hold any part/whole thesis about virtue, indicating
194 that his own position identifies each of these alleged parts with one and the same
195 teachable thing, hence one type of knowledge.⁸

197

198

10.3 Three Levels to Wisdom

199

200 The case for the RMI interpretation is not yet established. For we have seen passages
201 contradictory to RMI (namely, PW/L, PW/N, PW/M, and PW/E). To explain these
202 passages I turn now from Socrates' arguments in moral theory to the pedagogy
203 he uses in his discussions with such pretenders to knowledge as Laches, Nicias,
204 Meno, and Euthyphro. This pedagogy is based upon an account of attainment of
205 wisdom.

206 In the *Apology* Socrates distinguishes three levels of attainment of wisdom. The
207 highest level is “real wisdom” (*tô(i) ontî sophos*, 23a), which is the property of God.
208 The middle level is being “wisest among men” (*humôn, ô anthrôpoi, sophôtatos*,
209 23b), which is the property of anyone who, like Socrates, “knows that he does not
210 possess real wisdom of any value” (*egnôken hoti oudenos axios esti tê(i) alêtheia(i)*
211 *pros sophian*, 23b). The lowest level is “not being wise, but seeming wise, especially
212 to oneself” (*dokein men einai sophos. . . malista heautô(i), einai d'ou*, 21c).

213 Socrates also calls this sort of wisdom *intelligence* (*phronêseôs*, 29e), and identifies
214 it as the perfection of the soul (*tês psuchês hopôs hôs beltistê*, 29e), and as the
215 human excellence which is righteousness (*Rep.* I 350d). Recognizing the supreme
216 value of wisdom and accepting the oracle's statement that such wisdom is not pos-
217 sessed by human beings (23a), Socrates values and recommends only one sort of
218 activity for a person at the middle level: “Each day to make arguments, engage in
219 dialogue, and carefully examine virtue and related topics—this is the very best thing
220 for a human being. Indeed, a life without this activity is not worth living for a human
221 being” (38a). Socrates, to judge from these claims in the *Apology*, reduces virtue and
222 value to wisdom and distinguishes three levels of attainment of wisdom.

223 Socrates presupposes these three levels in other dialogues. Meno's slave boy
224 began at the lowest level, thinking he knew what he did not know, but after Socrates'
225

226 questioning, he reaches the middle level and “no longer thinks he knows what he
 227 does not know” (*hōsper ouk oiden, oud’ oietai eidenai, Meno* 84b) and as a result
 228 the boy “is in a better position concerning the thing he does not know” (*beltion*
 229 *echei peri to pragma ho ouk ê(i)dei, 84b*), because while at the lowest level he
 230 would not have “attempted to seek for or to learn what he did not know but thought
 231 he did” (*epicheirêsai zêtein ê manthanein touto ho ô(i)eto eidenai ouk eidôs, 84c*).
 232 Now at the middle level, the boy desires wisdom and in that sense has become a
 233 philosopher.⁹

234 The *Lysis* draws a three-level distinction between the Good, the Neither-good-
 235 nor-bad, and the Bad. It is only at the middle level, the Neither-good-nor-bad,
 236 that there is desire for wisdom (*philosophein, 218a*). At the highest level, just as
 237 the good body possesses health, the good souls “whether divine or human” (*eite*
 238 *theoi eite anthrōpoi, 218a*) possess wisdom and hence do not desire it. At the low-
 239 est level, the bad souls are so ignorant they do not even desire wisdom (*oud’ au*
 240 *ekeinous philosophein tous houtôs agnoian echontas hōste kakous einai; kakon gar*
 241 *kai amathê oudena philosophein, 218a*). What distinguishes souls at the middle level
 242 is that, “although possessing ignorance, which is bad, they are not yet so foolish
 243 and ignorant [as the lowest level], for [at the middle level] they understand that
 244 they do not know what they do not know” (*hoi echontes men to kakon touto, tēn*
 245 *agnoian, mēpō de hup’ autou ontes agnōmones mēde amatheis, all’ eti hēgoumenoi*
 246 *mē eidenai ha mē isasin, 218a–b*). In the course of the *Lysis*, we see Socrates
 247 help the boys, Lysis and Menexenus, ascend from the lowest level to the middle
 248 level.

249 In the *Protagoras*, too, Socrates distinguishes three levels in his interpretation of
 250 Simonides’ poem.¹⁰ He calls the highest level “being (not becoming) good” (*ou. . .*
 251 *genesthai esthlon, . . . alla to emmenai, 340c*). As Socrates² interprets the poem, “a
 252 god alone can have this privilege” (*theos an monos tout’ exoi geras, 341e*) of being
 253 good; “to be a good man is impossible [for mortals] and superhuman” (*einai andra*
 254 *agathon. . . adunaton kai ouk anthrōpeion, 344c*). The level of becoming (not being)
 255 good is the difficult one (*agathon. . . genesthai chalepon eiê, 340c, 344c*), and he
 256 describes this condition as “the middle” (*ta mesa, mesos, 346d*). The lowest level is
 257 “being bad” (*kakon emmenai, 344c*).

258 Socrates in his interpretation of the Simonides makes two additional points that are
 259 consistent with the account of the three levels in the *Apology, Lysis, and Meno*. The
 260 first addition is that the middle level is good in the sense that “whatever is not bad is
 261 good” (*panta toi kala, toisî t’ aischra mē memeiktai, 346c*), meaning that the mid-
 262 dle ground is “accepted not blamed” (*ta mesa apodechetai hōste mē psegein, 346d*).
 263 The second addition explains the first: A soul in the middle state does nothing bad
 264 (*meden kakon poiê(i), 346d*). This second point, that the philosopher does nothing
 265 bad, explains what Socrates says of himself in the *Apology*: “I am persuaded that
 266 I have done nothing unjust to anyone” (*pepeismenos dê egō mēdena adikein, 37b;*
 267 *cf. 37a5*). If philosophers do not perform their moral duties, they are not blamewor-
 268 thy, since the error is due to ignorance and their ignorance, unlike the ignorance of
 269 non-philosophers at the lowest level, cannot be due to negligence.

10.4 Pedagogy from Lowest to Middle Level

271
272
273 According to Socrates, then, there are three levels of attainment of wisdom. Only
274 gods are at the highest level, possessing wisdom. Most human beings are at the
275 lowest level, ignorant to such an extent that they don't even desire to find wisdom.
276 And there are some, like Socrates, at the middle level, who are aware of their igno-
277 rance and thus desire wisdom. Obviously, people at the middle level with respect to
278 any type of knowledge—geometry, medicine, or the human good—are incapable of
279 knowledgeable acts. As a doctor benefits bodies by making their souls healthy, so
280 an expert at human benefit, that is, the sage or virtuous person, can benefit human
281 beings by making their souls wise. Just as someone who wants to be but is not yet a
282 doctor is incapable either of healing others or of making others into doctors, so like-
283 wise Socrates, who wants to be a sage, is incapable of healing the souls of others,
284 which is precisely to make them experts at the science of human goodness. And,
285 because this same science of human goodness is at once piety and justice, *only the*
286 *sage*, not the one who wants to be a sage, is able to do acts of beneficence, piety and
287 justice.

288 Nevertheless, at the middle level, above most people at the lower level, Socrates
289 is capable of a pedagogy that is in a sense beneficence, service to the gods, and
290 activity on behalf of justice, as he explains. To be at the lowest level, ignorant but
291 seeming wise, is an error damaging enough to negate any value in (“to hide from
292 sight”) the wisdom of any other craft (*kai autôn hê plêmmeleia ekeinên tèn sophian*
293 *apokruptein*, 22d–e) one may possess.¹¹ Socrates attempts on a case-by-case basis
294 to move his fellow citizens out of this lowest level into the middle level by combin-
295 ing “exhortation” with “demonstration” (*philosophôn kai humin parakeleuomenos*
296 *te kai endeiknumenos*, 29d), “questioning and examining and testing” each who
297 consents (*erêsomai auton kai exetasô kai elegxô*, 29e).¹² This activity of Socrates,
298 although not the true beneficence of the sage (who has the power to move people to
299 the highest level), nonetheless is beneficence in the sense that it is as great a good
300 as any that the Athenians have ever received (*ouden pô humin meizon agathon gen-*
301 *esthai en têt(i) polei*, 30a). This very same activity of Socrates, although not true
302 piety (which would perfect human beings in goodness by moving them to the high-
303 est level), nonetheless is piety—“Socrates’ service to God” (*tên emên têt(i) theôt(i)*
304 *hupêresian*, 30a) in obedience to what God commands (*tauta gar keleuei ho theos*,
305 30a)—in the sense that Socrates is changing us from bad to not-bad as we reach the
306 middle level. And this same activity of Socrates, although not true justice, which
307 would know how to make each of us just, nonetheless is in a sense justice, for
308 it is “really acting on behalf of justice” (*ton têt(i) onti machoumenon huper tou*
309 *dikaïou*, 32a) by taking us out of our bad condition. Socrates’ life’s work, there-
310 fore, is inexpertly done and not strictly speaking beneficent, pious, or just, but in
311 the relaxed sense of the *Protagoras*—“Call everything good which is not bad!”
312 (346a)—they are good and blameless acts, and in terms of the *Apology* they are
313 good in the sense that there is nothing better, more pious, or more just that Socrates
314 can do.

10.5 False-Lead Pedagogy

Socrates' pedagogy, as displayed in all the Socratic dialogues, consists among other things in testing (*Ap.* 29e), and Nicias confirms this is his practice (*La.* 188a–b).¹³ Sometimes the testing is a matter of asking the other for a justification or explanation of his actions:

To test Hippocrates' grit [*apopeirômenos tou Hippokratous tês rhômês*], I began examining him with a few questions. "Tell me, Hippocrates," I said, "In your present design of going to Protagoras and paying him money as a fee for his services to yourself, to whom do you consider you are resorting, and what is it that you are to become?" (*Prt.* 311b)

Socrates in his discussion with Hippocrates never misleads him with a false suggestion, nor does he need to drive him to self-contradiction to take him from the lowest level (seeming to himself to know what a sophist is, 312c: "I think I know") to the middle level (aware of his ignorance as to what a sophist is, 313c: "You appear not to know what a sophist is. . . .—That is likely, Socrates, from what you have said"; *ton de sophistên hoti pot' estin phainê(i) agnoôn... eoiken, ephê, ô Sôkrates, ex hôn su legeis*). Socrates also describes himself as tested when he meets someone with radically different (and presumably false) views, as when he meets Callicles in the *Gorgias* (*basanizousin*, 486d; same verb at 487a and 487e) and must try to produce that person as a witness for the truth of his own view (as he promised to do with Polus at 474a).

The sort of test that I need for my reply in defense of the RMI interpretation of Socrates occurs when one person makes a suggestion that is false but seems true to the ignorant. Socrates describes the following cases of such testing:

- Meletus looks like he is "making a test" (*diapειρômenô(i)*) in his indictment of Socrates "to see if Socrates, the 'wise man,' will recognize the contradiction in his jest" (*Ap.* 27a; see also *apopeirômenos*, 27e).
- Prodicus is testing (*apopeirasthai*) Protagoras (*Prt.* 341d) when Prodicus falsely says that Simonides meant "bad," not "difficult," by "hard," "in order to see if Protagoras can defend his statement."
- Protagoras was likely to have been testing (*apopeirômenos*) Socrates when Protagoras [falsely] said that virtue had parts (*Prt.* 349c).

There is good reason for Socrates to use this false-lead test in his pedagogy. In the first place, although he himself does not believe that any but God know what virtue is (*Ap.* 23a), he can determine if his interlocutors take themselves to be knowledgeable by falsely claiming or suggesting that his interlocutors have such knowledge. If his interlocutors pretend to knowledge, an additional false lead accepted by them will make it possible for Socrates to drive them into contradiction. I can think of no better way than this procedure, repeated as often as necessary, to help those of us at the lowest level recognize our own ignorance. And it is sound pedagogy for Socrates to refrain from eliciting positive doctrines from his interlocutors until they are at the middle level, by a principle of priority: interlocutors at the lowest level of attainment

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361 of wisdom need to reach the middle level much more than they need a few more
362 premises and conclusions conjoined to their conceit of wisdom!¹⁴

363 In what follows, I show that Socrates recycles four pedagogical steps with
364 interlocutors at the lowest level of attainment of wisdom:

- 365
- 366 1. (*Question*) Socrates asks the question.
- 367 2. (*False lead*) If necessary, he prompts the interlocutor with a suggestion that is
368 false, but seems true to those who are ignorant.
- 369 3. (*Accepted*) The interlocutor (unless he needed no prompting) accepts
370 Socrates' suggestion.
- 371 4. (*Refutation*) Socrates attempts to refute the interlocutor's answer.
- 372

373 If Socrates succeeds in refuting the interlocutor, he repeats his original question and
374 the process is repeated, as often as necessary, until the interlocutor either breaks off
375 the discussion or admits his ignorance.

378 10.6 Slave-Boy Illustration

379

380 I begin with the slave-boy discussion in the *Meno* to illustrate Socrates' use of these
381 four steps. I do not, in using this passage, make any claims about early vs. middle
382 dialogues or about whether the Socrates who argues for RMI also argues for a theory
383 of recollection. My thesis only requires that the slave-boy discussion, at least until
384 the boy reaches the middle level of attainment of wisdom, is an apt illustration of
385 how Socrates may test his interlocutors in the RMI dialogues. The subject, geometry,
386 is something both Socrates and his readers know, so that it makes a clear illustration
387 for this sort of Socratic test: no one will suggest that Socrates himself favors one
388 of the false leads on the grounds of its seeming truth. The boy, Socrates points out,
389 begins at the lowest level of attainment of knowledge about the square, "thinking
390 he knows when he does not know" (82e). We find the expected steps of the testing
391 process:

- 392
- 393
- 394 • (*Question*) Given a square of area 4, "Try to tell me how long each side of the
395 square of area 8 will be" (82de).
- 396 • (*False lead*) "The side of *this* square is 2 feet. What will be the side of the twice-
397 as-big square?" (82e). Socrates' suggestion to look to the *side* of the square of
398 area 4, rather than its *diagonal*, is misleading, as is his suggestion that the length
399 of that square's side, 2, is relevant to the twice-as-big-area problem.¹⁵
- 400 • (*Accepted*) "Obviously, Socrates, twice as big" (82e).
- 401 • (*Refutation*) Socrates questions the boy step-by-step (*ephexês*) until the boy
402 retracts his answer (82e–83c).
- 403 • (*Question*) Socrates repeats the original question (82c).
- 404 • (*False lead*) Socrates points out that doubling the side of the 4-foot square pro-
405 duces a 16-foot square, that the desired 8-foot square is double the 4-foot square

406 but half the 16-foot square, and that the 8-foot square will have a side bigger than
407 2, but smaller than 4 (83c–d). Socrates misleads by continuing to direct the boy’s
408 attention to the *sides* of the squares of area 4 and of 16, and by suggesting that
409 some simple relationship between those sides is relevant to the solution.

- 410 ● (*Accepted*) The boy seems influenced by Socrates’ suggestion, saying that the
- 411 ● 8-foot square will have a side of 3 feet (83e).
- 412 ● (*Refutation*) Socrates again cross-examines until the boy retracts his answer
- 413 ● (83e).
- 414 ● (*Question*) Socrates again repeats his original question (83e).

415
416 At this point, the boy describes himself as ignorant in strong terms: “By God,
417 Socrates, *I* do not know” (*alla ma ton Dia, ô Sôkrates, egôgê ouk oida*, 84a). He
418 has reached the middle level, knowing his own ignorance and “happy to look”
419 (*zêtêseien an hêdeôs*, 84b) for knowledge (84a–c).¹⁶ Socrates thereupon questions
420 the boy further, demonstrating that the square of area 4 has a side equal to the diag-
421 onal of the square of area 2 (84d–85b), leaving the boy in a “dreamlike” state (86d).
422 Socrates says that “if the same questions were put to him on many occasions and
423 in different ways [by someone who knows geometry], in the end he would have as
424 much knowledge as anyone on the subject” (85c–d).¹⁷

425 We should not expect this eliciting of positive doctrine to occur with Laches,
426 Nicias, Meno, or Euthyphro, since none of these ever reach the middle level. The
427 subject in the *Laches*, *Meno*, and *Euthyphro* is virtue, which, unfortunately, is not as
428 well known as geometry, so that I cannot assume a consensus among us interpreters
429 on the subject. However, if we accept the hypothesis that RMI is true, at least by
430 Socrates’ lights, we find parallels between these three dialogues and the slave-boy
431 passage of the *Meno*.

432 10.7 Application to *Laches*, *Meno*, and *Euthyphro*

433
434
435 Consider the *Laches*, where Socrates tests both Laches and Nicias. The *Laches*
436 begins with Nicias (at 180a), Laches (at 180b), and Socrates (181d) consenting to
437 help some old friends by advising them about the proper way to raise their children.
438 Unfortunately, Nicias and Laches disagree in their advice, and Socrates is called
439 upon to cast the deciding vote. Instead of voting, Socrates begins to cross-examine
440 the party. Nicias, who knows Socrates best, tells the party of his familiarity with
441 Socrates’ techniques and predicts that Socrates “will not let them go until he tests
442 (*basanisê(i)*) them well” (188a). All agree that the question is “how virtue may come
443 to the souls of their children and make them better” (*tin an tropon tois huesin autôn*
444 *aretê paragenomenê tais psuchais ameinous poiêseie*, 190b). Thus Socrates elicits
445 agreement that “we need to know what virtue is” (*oun hêmîn touto g’ huparchein*
446 *dei, to eidenai hoti pot’ estin aretê*, 190b)—“because, I suppose, if we did not thor-
447 oughly know what virtue actually is” (*ei gar pou mêd’ aretên eideimen to parapan*
448 *hoti pote tugchanei hon*, 190b) we could not be advisers about the best way to
449
450

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451 acquire it. After Laches agrees to this, Socrates makes the assertion, “Therefore
452 we claim to know what virtue is” (*phamen ara... eidenai auto hoti estin*, 190c).

453 My interpretation, according to which Socrates for pedagogical reasons some-
454 times makes false leads to test his interlocutors’ pretenses to wisdom, can explain
455 his claim to know at 190c: he is testing Laches and Nicias, as Nicias predicted and as
456 the illustrative dialogue with the slave boy in the *Meno* would lead us to expect, with
457 just the sort of test that Socrates has described others as making.¹⁸ The only alterna-
458 tive I can see to my false-lead interpretation is to give up on the project of a coherent
459 account of Socratic moral theory, not only between the *Laches* and the *Apology*, but
460 within the *Laches* itself, for even in that dialogue Socrates makes his characteris-
461 tic denial of knowledge of virtue, already at 186c and also at the conclusion of the
462 dialogue.

463 We find the same steps of the testing process, with Laches beginning at the lowest
464 level: “Yes [we know what virtue is]” (190c); “It is easy to say what courage is”
465 (190e).

- 466
- 467 • (*False lead*) “I would not have us begin with the whole... let us begin with a
468 part [of virtue, courage]” (190d) = PW/L.¹⁹
- 469 • (*Accepted*) Laches says, “Yes, certainly” (190d).
- 470 • (*Question*) What is courage? (190e).
- 471 • Laches needs no prompting from Socrates, and begins by giving a specific
472 instance instead of a general definition of courage.
- 473 • (*Refutation*) Socrates gets Laches to see that Laches has not answered the “What
474 is courage?” question by saying “Courage is staying at one’s post” (190e–191e).
- 475 • (*Question*) Again, “what is that common quality which is called courage?”
476 (192b).
- 477 • Laches again takes no prompting: “Courage is endurance of soul” (192b).
- 478 • (*Refutation*) Socrates gets Laches to revise his definition to “Courage is wise
479 endurance of soul” (192d), which he goes on to refute (192e–193e).
- 480

481 At this point in the dialogue, Laches has contradicted himself, but he blames the
482 *aporia* in the discussion upon something other than his own ignorance: “I am unused
483 to this sort of inquiry... I am really grieved at being unable to express my meaning,
484 for I think I do know (*noein men gar emoige dokō*) the nature of courage” (194a–b).
485 If we expect Socrates to be engaged in the pedagogy of moving Laches and Nicias
486 from the lowest to the middle level of attainment of goodness and wisdom, we may
487 interpret his claim (PW/L) that courage is but a part of virtue to be a test for them
488 and to cast no doubt on the hypothesis that Socrates’ moral theory is RMI.

489 Socrates next turns to Nicias, and we find the same steps of the testing process:

- 490
- 491 • (*Question*) “Tell us, Nicias, what you think about courage” (194c).
- 492 • (*False lead*) Laches proceeds to question Nicias until Socrates takes over, and
493 Socrates begins with a false lead: “You yourself said that courage was a part, and
494 there were many other parts, all of which taken together are called virtue... In
495 that case, do you say the same as I? In addition to courage, I call temperance,

496 righteousness, and the like virtue. Would you not say the same?" (198a–b) =
497 PW/N.²⁰

- 498 • (*Accepted*) "Certainly" (198a, b).
- 499 • (*Refutation*) 198a–199e. (See Section 10.2 above for discussion.)

500

501 Socrates does not get a chance to repeat his question to Nicias, for Laches inter-
502 rupts with abusive remarks. Nicias in reply quits the testing process: "Enough has
503 been said on the subject" (200b). Again, if we expect Socrates to be engaged in the
504 pedagogy of moving Laches from the lowest to the middle level of attainment of
505 goodness and wisdom, his claim (PW/N) that courage is but a part of virtue casts no
506 doubt on the hypothesis that Socrates' moral theory is RMI.

507 Consider next Meno, who also begins at the lowest level of attainment of wisdom,
508 taking himself to know what virtue is: "It is easy to say what virtue is" (71e). Again
509 we find the false-lead testing process.

510

- 511 • (*Question*) "What is virtue?" (71d).
- 512 • Meno needs no prompting from Socrates, and begins by giving a specific
513 in-stance instead of a general definition of virtue (71e–77b).
- 514 • (*False lead*) When Meno says "justice is virtue," Socrates asks him, "Is it virtue
515 or a virtue?" Then Socrates gives a roundness/shape analogy, suggesting that the
516 justice/virtue relation is like roundness/shape (73e, repeated at 78d) = PW/M.
- 517 • (*Accepted*) Meno in saying justice is one among many other virtues takes him-
518 self to be agreeing with Socrates (73e).
- 519 • (*Refutation*) Socrates gets Meno to see that Meno has not answered the "What is
520 virtue?" question by saying virtue is justice, temperance, etc. (74a–77a).
- 521 • (*Question*) Socrates repeats his question (77a).
- 522 • Meno needs no prompting; he says virtue is "desiring fine things and being able
523 to get them" (77b).
- 524 • (*Refutation*) Socrates shows all are alike in desiring the good, so revises definition
525 to "power to get good things" (77b–78b).
- 526 • (*False lead*) Socrates suggests that good things include health and wealth (78c).²¹
527 I call this a false lead because Socrates is well aware that health and wealth are
528 not goods, since without use they are no good at all and misused are bad (*Euthd.*
529 280d–281e).
- 530 • (*Accepted*) Meno agrees and adds, "high and prestigious office in the state" (78c).
- 531 • (*Refutation*) Socrates cross-examines until Meno retracts his answer (78d–79d).
- 532 • (*Question*) Socrates repeats his original question again (79e).

533

534 Meno, unable to answer, blames the *aporia* in the discussion upon something other
535 than his own ignorance: "Socrates, you are exercising magic and witchcraft upon
536 me and positively laying me under your spell until I am a mass of helplessness"
537 (80a).²² He has not reached the middle level, nor should we expect Socrates to
538 have been developing positive doctrines with his claims either (PW/M) that virtue
539 contains parts or that good things include health and wealth. Notice that Meno, like
540 Laches, does not get as close to RMI as Nicias, who was a reductive intellectualist.

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541 Accordingly Socrates, although ready in case Meno reached intellectualism in the
 542 discussion, does not get to use his false suggestion that virtue has parts. I suppose
 543 that had Meno (or Laches) managed eventually to define virtue as wisdom, Socrates
 544 would have used the suggestion that virtue has parts to refute him.

545 Consider, finally, Euthyphro, who also begins at the lowest level, thinking himself
 546 wise about the nature of piety (4e–5a, 5c). Again we find the predictable pedagogical
 547 pattern:

548

- 549 • (*Question*) “What is piety?” (4c).
- 550 • Euthyphro needs no prompting but gives specific instances instead of a general
 551 definition of piety (4d–6e).
- 552 • (*Refutation*) Socrates gets Euthyphro to see that he has not answered the ‘What
 553 is piety?’ question by giving instances of piety (6d–e).
- 554 • (*Question*) “Teach me what the form [of piety] is!” (6e).
- 555 • Euthyphro again needs no prompting: “Piety is what is pleasing to the gods”
 556 (6e–7a).
- 557 • (*Refutation*) Socrates gets Euthyphro to revise his definition to “Piety is what is
 558 pleasing to all the gods” (7b–8a), then gets him to agree that even the revised
 559 definition fails (9c–11a).
- 560 • (*Question*) “Begin again: say what the holy is” (11b).

561

562 At this point, Euthyphro is unable to answer. But he does not reach the middle level
 563 of coming to see his own ignorance. Instead, he blames Socrates for his own failure
 564 to answer: “Socrates, I’m not able to tell you what I have in mind. . . *you* are the
 565 Daedalus [making the assertions move out of place]” (11b–d).²³ Accordingly, our
 566 model of Socratic pedagogy predicts Socrates will not start to derive positive theo-
 567 rems about piety, but rather will keep giving him false leads until Euthyphro reaches
 568 the middle level. This is exactly what we find, if we assume the RMI interpretation
 569 to be correct:

570

- 571 • (*False lead*) When Euthyphro agrees that all that is holy is just, Socrates asks
 572 him, “And is all justice holy, too?” Then Socrates gives the fear/shame analogy,
 573 suggesting that justice is to piety as fear is to shame (12d) = PW/E.
- 574 • (*Accepted*) Euthyphro takes himself to be agreeing with Socrates’ own view:
 575 “That is my opinion; I think that you, Socrates, are clearly right” (12d).
- 576 • (*Refutation*) Socrates attempts but does not complete a refutation (12e–14b).

577

578 Socrates is frustrated by Euthyphro’s answer to his question, “What is the greatest
 579 result that the gods produce when they employ human beings in their service?” (as
 580 his remarks at 14b–c show). Euthyphro has a tendency to assimilate piety with jus-
 581 tice: his star instance of piety is “opposing [= “prosecuting”] unjust people (*tô(i)*
 582 *adikounti*. . . *epexienai*, 5d). And Euthyphro’s assimilation must have been natural
 583 for Greeks, for Socrates relied upon it in his argument identifying piety and justice at
 584 *Prt.* 330a–331b. Given this tendency, Socrates might well have expected Euthyphro
 585 to have answered the question how we serve the gods by saying, “We serve the gods

586 not by acts of shipbuilding, winning victory in war, or growing food, but by acts of
587 justice.” This answer would have enabled Socrates to go on to reach a contradic-
588 tion with his earlier false suggestion that piety is but a part of justice. Euthyphro,
589 frustratingly, does not get the point. Socrates, indefatigable, tries again:

590

- 591 • (*Question*) “Once more, how do you define the holy?” (14c).
- 592 • Euthyphro needed no prompting to suggest a new answer before the question was
593 even asked, “[Piety is] knowing. . . how to pray and sacrifice” (14b).
- 594 • (*False lead*) “And to give properly to the gods is to give them those things which
595 they happen to need to receive from us?” (14e: I call this suggestive question a
596 false lead because they agreed just earlier, 13c, that the gods can gain no benefits
597 from us).
- 598 • (*Accepted*) “True, Socrates” (14e).
- 599 • (*Refutation*) Piety becomes a business transaction, in which humans provide
600 ad- vantage to the gods, which Euthyphro recognizes is untenable: “What!—
601 Socrates, do you suppose that the gods gain anything by what they get from
602 us?”

603

604

605 Socrates can now raise again the question—“What, then, are the gifts we give to
606 the gods?”—to which we might expect a Greek such as Euthyphro to answer, “Our
607 proper gift to the gods consists of our human acts of justice to each other.” This
608 answer would allow Socrates to use his earlier false lead, that piety is but a part
609 of justice, to try to refute Euthyphro and bring him to the middle level. Euthyphro
610 does not find this answer, and leads himself into a different refutation (15b–c). And
611 so Socrates begins another cycle of the testing process with the question: “So we
612 must go back again, and start from the beginning to find out what the holy is” (15c).
613 Euthyphro here breaks off the conversation and hurries off (15d–e), never admit-
614 ting his ignorance or reaching the middle level, despite Socrates’ best efforts. Once
615 again, Socrates’ suggestion (PW/E) that piety is part of justice casts no doubt on
616 the RMI interpretation, just as his suggestion that the gods need our gifts need not
617 conflict with other passages, in the *Euthyphro* itself, where Socrates indicates that
618 the gods are perfect (6a–c, 13c).

619

620

621

622 10.8 Conclusion

623

624 On my account, there are dialogues that show us a Socrates engaged in the pedagogy
625 of helping move others from the lowest to the middle level of goodness or wisdom.
626 Those at the lowest level seem to know, though they are ignorant. Socrates describes
627 himself as testing such people. He is aware of the sort of test where one suggests
628 a false lead to see if the other will recognize its falsity, and we see him using just
629 such false leads in his cross-examination of the slave boy. We find false leads—that
630 Socrates, like most people, knows what virtue is, that health and wealth are good
things, that the gods need things—in his discussions with Laches, Nicias, Meno,

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631 and Euthyphro, whether or not we accept the RMI interpretation. If we suppose that
 632 Socrates held the RMI view of virtue, then among the false leads is the suggestion
 633 or claim that piety is but a part of virtue. Those claims and suggestions (namely,
 634 PW/L, PW/N, PW/M, PW/E) cast no doubt upon the interpretation that Socrates
 635 was a reductive monist intellectualist about virtue. I have therefore disarmed any
 636 objections to the RMI interpretation based upon those passages.

637 Let me consider one final objection. My argument, that Socrates makes claims
 638 and suggestions that are by his own lights false, is self-defeating as a defense of the
 639 RMI interpretation. For the only reasonable conclusion, if my pedagogical account
 640 is correct, is complete skepticism about the views of the Socrates of these dialogues,
 641 since no aporetic dialogue can contain any statement that counts as evidence for
 642 Socrates' views.

643 In reply, I readily admit that no statement taken in isolation from these dialogues
 644 can serve as evidence. What saves me from exegetical skepticism are not isolated
 645 statements but lines of argument, as sketched in Section 10.2, that lead to RMI. By
 646 contrast, *in none of these dialogues is there even one argument driving us towards*
 647 *a part/whole account of virtue.* Our task, then, to avoid skepticism about Socrates'
 648 moral theory, is to examine his arguments to see if they are as laughable as they at
 649 first seem or if, when closely examined, they prove to be compelling. The conse-
 650 quence of this approach is that the knowledge how to interpret Socratic texts is the
 651 very same as the knowledge of the truth about such things as piety.²⁴

654 Notes

- 655
- 656 1. Santas (1964) defended the philosophical viability of Socratic intellectualism. His paper was
 657 the seed from which has grown a flower of philosophically astute scholarship on Socratic intel-
 658 lectualism. The flower has two branches: Vlastos (1972) interpreted Socrates as a reductive
 659 *pluralist* intellectualist about virtue; Penner (1973) a reductive *monist* intellectualist, starting
 660 the scholarly conversation in letters to which this paper contributes.
 - 661 2. In *Religion Within the Limits of Unassisted Reason*, Kant writes:

662 Religion is the recognition of all our duties as divine commands. . . . In a universal
 663 religion there are no special duties towards God. . . . If anyone finds such a duty in the
 664 reverence due to God, he does not reflect that this is no particular act of religion, but a
 665 religious temper accompanying all our acts of duty without distraction.

666
 667 Among Hebrew prophets, Isaiah 1:11–17 says God wants justice, not ritual offerings, likewise
 668 Micah 6:6–8 and Psalm 50 (citations from Irwin 1989, p. 77 n. 16). Jesus summarizes the Ten
 669 Commandments as but two: love God and love others (Luke 10:27), and in the Parable of the
 670 Last Judgment makes clear that we love God by loving others (Matthew 25:32–46), which
 671 allows him to reduce divine commandments to only one Great Command, to love others (John
 15:12, 17).

- 672 3. Calef (1995, p. 9 n. 30), defending the RMI interpretation, grants that Socrates in his cross-
 673 examination at PW/E may allow Euthyphro to “flounder” but denies that Socrates misleads.
 674 He does not discuss PW/L, PW/N, or PW/M. McPherran (1985, p. 286), critical of the RMI
 675 interpretation, thinks that if Socrates misleads, he is blameworthy for sophism and “trickery.”
 He does not consider the possibility of pedagogical value in false leads.

- 676 4. Rickless (1998, p. 359) gives the following additional objection to the RMI interpretation:
 677 RMI makes Socrates' position in the *Protagoras* incoherent, because Socrates argues that
 678 (1) courage is identical to wisdom (i.e., knowledge)
 and that
 679 (2) courage is identical to knowledge of what is to be feared and dared.
 680 I reply that (1) and (2) are incoherent only if we restate (1) as
 681 (1') courage is identical to wisdom per se (that is, to the genus wisdom or perhaps the
 682 sum of all kinds of wisdom and *not* one species of wisdom only),
 but there is no reason why RMI cannot restate (i) in the consistent form of
 683 (1'') courage is identical to wisdom of a kind.
 684 This restatement of (1) as (1''), which Rickless himself accepts (*ibid.*, p. 362), disarms his
 685 objection.

686 Woodruff (1976) attempts to reconcile the seeming contradiction between the statements
 687 that courage is only a part but also all of virtue. Woodruff distinguishes courage in essence
 688 (*courage-itself*) from courage in accident (*courage-in-ingots*, as it were, on the model of the
 689 distinction between *the substance gold*, which is all one, and *gold-in-ingots*, which has as
 690 many parts as there are ingots). According to this distinction, some things can be true of
 691 courage-in-ingots that are not true of courage-itself. For example, it may be that the predicate
 692 *knowledge only of future goods and evils* is true of courage-in-ingots but false of courage-itself.
 693 Para>But, as it seems to me, Woodruff's distinction cannot escape Socrates' argument. To see
 694 why, let us accept Woodruff's distinction and make Woodruff's assumption that when Socrates
 695 speaks of courage as a part of virtue, he is speaking of courage-in-ingots, not courage itself.
 696 Accordingly, courage-in-ingots is a part of virtue. Moreover, as Socrates and Nicias agree,
 697 this very courage-in-ingots will be nothing but the knowledge or science of future goods and
 698 evils. And it is undeniable, as Socrates and Laches rightly agree, that *there is no distinction*
 699 between the science that knows future goods and evils and the science that knows goods and
 700 evils past, present, and future (*La.* 198d, 199a). Thus in whatever sense courage-in-ingots
 701 is the science of future goods and evils, it is precisely also the knowledge of all goods and
 702 evils, past, present, and future. It follows that courage-in-ingots is the whole of virtue, which
 703 contradicts Woodruff's interpretation.

- 704 5. Rudebusch (1999, pp. 108–13) defends the inference from virtue being knowledge of living
 705 well to a good man being invulnerable.
 706 6. I follow Santas (1969, pp. 197–202), who defends Socrates' argument against the pluralist
 707 doctrine that courage is but a part of virtue. Rickless (1998, pp. 361–2) and McPherran (2000,
 708 p. 313) interpret Socrates as a pluralist holding versions of RI, CP, and CF. Since Socrates
 709 rightly uses UK to *refute* just such pluralism, I take it that his argument refutes as well these
 710 two pluralist interpretations.
 711 7. Rickless (1998, p. 362), following Ferejohn (1984, p. 384), tries to distinguish temperance
 712 from justice on the grounds that temperance is the knowledge of what is good and bad *for*
 713 *oneself* while justice is the knowledge of what is good and bad *for others*. But the very same
 714 knowledge knows both—for example, it would be absurd to claim, Ion-like, to know how to
 715 heal not all human bodies, but only one particular human body! Again, the same authors, on
 716 the same pages, try to distinguish piety as a mere part of justice on the grounds that piety is
 717 knowledge of what is good and bad *for the gods*. But they must face a dilemma: if the gods
 718 are specifically the same as human beings with respect to their good and bad, then piety is
 719 precisely justice, while if the gods specifically differ from human beings, then piety will no
 720 more be a part of justice than the knowledge of horse training. Indeed horse training will be
 721 more like justice than piety, since horses, like human beings, have imperfections to remedy;
 722 the gods have no such imperfections and consequently their good and bad must be generically
 723 different from horse and human good and bad.
 724 8. It is a mistake, therefore, to interpret Socrates in the *Protagoras* to hold that courage, piety, etc.
 725 are mere parts of virtue in the way a lump of gold has parts, as do e.g., Vlastos (1973, p. 230),
 726 McPherran (2000, p. 313), and Woodruff (1976, p. 102). Socrates is undeniably surprised at

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721 any account that makes “justice and temperance and piety and all these things, *taken together*,
 722 one thing, virtue”—whether the account is in terms of parts of a face or parts of a lump of gold
 723 makes no difference to him. Protagoras chooses the parts-of-face version, and accordingly
 724 Socrates’ arguments are directed against that version. Had Protagoras chosen the parts-of-
 725 lump analogy, Socrates could have used arguments from the identity conditions of knowledge
 to refute him, as shown above, note 7.

726 9. The *Theaetetus* mentions additional advantages of the middle level in comparison to the lowest
 727 level. Thanks to Socrates’ “examination” (*exetasin*, 210c), any future investigations we make
 728 will be “better” (*beltionôn*, 210c), and even if we never escape our ignorance, our knowledge
 729 of it will make us “more civilized and easier for our companions to bear” (*hêtton. . . barus tois*
sunousi kai hêmêrôtêros, 210c).

730 10. The point that in this passage Socrates is comically outdoing the sophist at sophistry may
 731 be true; it does not follow that the doctrines Socrates attributes there to Simonides are not
 732 Socrates’ own.

733 11. At *Euthydemus* 281b–e Socrates explains why ignorance at the skill of human goodness will
 734 negate the advantages of other skills: a fool will get no benefit from doing many things; on the
 contrary, if a fool does less he will make fewer mistakes and be less wretched.

735 Brickhouse and Smith (1994, p. 17) mention an additional disadvantage to the lowest level:
 736 Socrates’ method of cross-examining others brings to light contradictions in the beliefs of
 737 those at the lowest level. “If one’s beliefs about how it is best for one to live are inconsistent,
 738 one cannot. . . follow all of one’s. . . inclinations; in such a condition, one will be doomed, at
 least to some degree, to a life of frustration and inner conflict.”

739 12. See Brickhouse and Smith (1994) and Benson (2000) for accounts of Socratic cross-
 740 examination.

741 13. I agree with the point, made for example by Brickhouse and Smith (1994, p. 15), that “Socrates
 742 does not always accept the truth of the premises he uses.” They prove the point by referring (1)
 743 to instances where Socrates uses *reductio ad absurdum* (“indirect proof”) and (2) to Socrates’
 744 use in the *Euthyphro* (6b–8b) of Euthyphro’s belief, which Socrates does not share, that the
 gods quarrel and disagree. I go beyond this point in my account of pedagogical testing.

745 14. Hugh Benson in correspondence has described my account of false-lead pedagogy as a ver-
 746 sion of his non-constructive account of the elenchus (see Benson 2000, pp. 35–36), adding
 747 to non-constructivism the “presumption that we can tell ahead of time—presumably in light
 748 of a comprehensive interpretation of the dialogues—which of the beliefs of the interlocutors
 749 Socrates thinks are false.” Benson’s non-constructivist thesis (p. 35) is that “Socrates neither
 750 can nor does conclude as a result of an individual elenctic episode the falsehood of the appar-
 751 ent refutand.” As Benson notes (p. 35 n. 14), “the only [account] that is directly at odds with
 752 [his] is the account according to which Socrates concludes *as a result of an individual* elenctic
 753 episode that the apparent refutand is false and he is justified in doing so”—he is “no longer
 sure that anyone ever wanted to recommend such an account.”

754 How can we tell which beliefs Socrates will think are false? In answer to this question,
 755 I have two points to make. First, according to the RMI interpretation (evidence for which
 756 is surveyed in Section 10.2 of this chapter), Socrates will think any non-monist account or
 757 non-intellectual account of virtue is false (eliminative accounts of the virtues disagree with
 758 Socrates’ reductive account only in terminology). Socrates would of course also recognize that
 the majority of people, then as now, are inclined to assent to non-monist and non-intellectual
 759 accounts of virtue. Second, according to the three-levels-of-wisdom pedagogical assumption
 I attribute to Socrates on the basis of Sections 10.3, 10.4, and 10.5 of this chapter—which I
 760 intend to be far less controversial than the RMI interpretation!—Socrates will be quick to test
 761 people to see if they assent to statements that they possess knowledge of human virtue.

762 My account here is also in agreement with Brickhouse and Smith (1994), who argue that
 763 Socratic conversation has a constructive function in two senses: first, “Socrates’ contributions
 764 to the conversation do betray his own beliefs” (p. 65), second, “to the extent that he has gener-
 765 ated inductive evidence through previous elenctic examinations for the necessity of his own

766 view for a coherent life, Socrates can claim to have established a general truth applicable to
 767 all” (p. 19). As Benson and Brickhouse and Smith all recognize, their non-constructivist and
 768 constructivist theses are mutually compatible (Brickhouse and Smith 1994, p. 12 n. 18; Benson
 2000, p. 35 n. 14).

769 15. As I recollect, Terry Penner pointed out the false leads Socrates suggests to the slave boy in a
 770 seminar in the late seventies. Penner’s point was that Socrates’ leading questions discourage
 771 the boy from acting as a sycophant, as one might expect from an enslaved person. For, if it
 772 is the case that the boy’s answers at 82e2–3 (“Twice the length”) and 83e2 (“Three feet”) are
 773 attempts at sycophancy, those answers fail to flatter Socrates, since the boy must retract both
 answers.

774 I endorse Penner’s point about Socrates asking questions that discourage sycophancy. My
 775 point is that there is an additional purpose to Socrates’ suggestions. His suggestion will only
 776 be taken to a false conclusion by a person who is both ignorant and is ignorant of his own
 777 ignorance. Precisely for this reason his false leads do not make Socrates a liar, that is, one who
 778 deliberately tries to mislead, but rather an expert at testing for ignorance in others by asking
 leading questions. (My thanks to Betty Belfiore for discussion on this point.)

779 16. “Before conversing with Socrates, the interlocutor may have felt no particular need to mend his
 780 ways. But the *aporia* that results from Socratic questioning gives the interlocutor an important
 781 reason to pursue the examined life: the recognition that one is seriously confused about how
 782 best to live” (Brickhouse and Smith 1994, p. 17).

783 17. I endorse Benson (2000, p. 259), who distinguishes four stages in Socrates’ conversation with
 784 the slave boy. First, “Socrates asks and explains the question.” Second, “Socrates refutes the
 785 slave boy’s initial answers. . . [until] the slave boy responds that he does not know.” Third,
 786 “Socrates leads the slave boy. . . to. . . belief.” Fourth (this stage is described but not illustrated
 787 by Socrates), “the slave boy would be led from true belief to knowledge.” And Benson on the
 788 same page makes the point that is essential to my thesis: “it is not until the third stage of the
 slave-boy conversation that the substantive theory” is elicited.

789 18. Again (see n. 15 above) I do not claim that Socrates tells a lie when he tests Laches in this
 790 manner. Socrates points out to Laches that implicit in the act of advising is a claim to know
 791 (190b7–c2). Laches agrees that there is such an implication in the act of advising *and does*
 792 *not express any reservations about the advising he has done or proposes to do* (190c3). From
 793 this fact Socrates infers (“therefore”) what must follow from Laches’ agreement in dramatic
 794 context: “[Since we are going to be advisors,] therefore we say that we know what virtue is.—
 795 Of course we say so” (190c4–5). Socrates’ statement of group knowledge (“we”) is not a lie
 about his own state of conscious ignorance but the first premise in what will be a *reductio ad*
absurdum. (Again I thank Betty Belfiore and Gail Fine for making this clear to me.)

796 My false-lead hypothesis explains another statement of Socrates, where he suggests that
 797 Nicias and Laches must be wise:

798 If Nicias or Laches has discovered or learned it, I would not be surprised; for they are
 799 wealthier than I am, and may therefore have learned of others, and they are older too,
 800 so that they have had more time to make the discovery. They do seem able to educate
 801 a man, for unless they had been confident in their own knowledge, they would never
 802 have spoken thus unhesitatingly of the pursuits which are advantageous or hurtful to a
 803 young man. (186c5–d3)

804 It is uncharitable to take this speech to be mean-spirited sarcasm. On the contrary, it is evi-
 805 dence of aristocratic good manners, which are governed by the general principle of charity,
 806 in this particular case requiring Socrates to assume the best of others and hence to interpret
 807 their knowledge claims in the best possible light. Moreover, although his suggesting there is
 808 a likelihood of wisdom in his companions is well-mannered, the suggestion also serves as a
 test, giving his companions an opportunity to accept or reject the suggestion of their wisdom.

809 19. Again Socrates is not telling a lie here. He hedges his words: to inquire into the whole of
 810 virtue is “perhaps more work” (*pleon. . . isōs ergon*, 190c9) than to inquire into a part. It is

10 Socrates, Wisdom and Pedagogy

- 811 more accurate to describe him here as opening a door, so to speak, to see if his conversation
812 partner will walk through it: a test.
- 813 20. Again Socrates does not tell a lie, since he himself does call courage, temperance, righ-
814 teousness and the like each virtue. It is more accurate to describe him as putting before his
815 conversation partner a test.
- 816 21. Again Socrates does not lie but tests: “And don’t you call such things as health and wealth
817 goods?” (78c5–6).
- 818 22. Meno, in not recognizing his own ignorance, does not reach the slave boy’s level of self-
819 understanding. This difference between Meno and the slave boy is unnoticed by Benson (2000,
820 p. 259), who states that “Socrates understands these first two stages of the conversation to be an
821 exact parallel to the main conversation with Meno. . . . By the end of the [stage where Socrates
822 has refuted his initial answers] the slave boy has reached the precise point Meno had reached.”
- 823 23. Brickhouse and Smith (1994, p. 22) seem to confuse the arrival of Euthyphro at *aporia* with his
824 attainment of the middle level. For they take the fact that “Euthyphro has been fully reduced to
825 *aporia* by *Euthyphro* 11b6” to entail that Socrates has no further work to do to bring Euthyphro
826 to the middle level, and hence that any subsequent examination of definitions is part of the
827 “positive” process of moving from the middle level to the highest level, a process which we
828 ought to expect to be free of false leads: “[After 11b6] Socrates continues his search for the
829 definition of piety by contributing one of what certainly appears to be his own views. . . that
830 piety is a part of justice.”
- 831 24. As it seems to me, Santas’s work is a paradigm of this identity of interpretation and philosophy.
832 I thank participants in the 2001 Arizona Plato Colloquium, especially my commentator Joel
833 Martinez, for helpful discussion and comments, and also Betty Belfiore for correcting many
834 errors in correspondence in 2005.

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Chapter 10

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