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Do you see, Hippias, that I speak the truth, when I say that I am indefatigable in questioning the wise? And I run the risk of having this one good thing, all else that I have being of little account. For as to the actual condition of things I am baffled, and I do not know how they stand. I find it a sufficient proof of this that when I am together with one of you who are highly reputed for wisdom and to whose wisdom all Greeks bear witness, it is evident that I know nothing; for nothing, so to speak, seems the same to me as it does to you, yet what greater proof of ignorance is there than when someone differs with wise men? But I have this one marvelous good which preserves me: I am not ashamed to learn, but I inquire and I question and I am very grateful to the one who answers, and I have never deprived anyone of gratitude. For I have never denied it when I learned something, pretending that what I had learned was my own discovery; instead, I praise the one who taught me as a wise man and proclaim what I learned from him.

Socrates, *Lesser Hippias*

University of Alberta

A Commentary on Plato's *Greater Hippias*, or "On the Beautiful"

by

Laura Kathleen Field 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Political Science

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall, 2005

To my mother Lois Field

Abstract

The *Greater Hippias* is doubtless one of Plato's most comical dialogues, and reads as a scathing attack on the famous sophist, Hippias of Elis. And yet the ostensible subject of the work—*to kalon,* or the beautiful and noble—is one that demands seriousness on the part of anyone interested in ancient Greek philosophy. The following thesis takes the form of a systematic commentary on the dialogue. As such, it unfolds much as the text itself does, while at the same time seeking to uncover the relevance of the dramatic elements (such as the comical tone) to the philosophic purposes of the work. More particularly, the reader of the *Greater Hippias* is invited to consider the status of Plato's two interlocutors with respect to beauty. The conversation depicted allows us to examine the similarities and differences between the philosopher and the sophist, as we seek with them to unravel the mysteries of 'the beautiful itself.'

Acknowledgments

In the *Lesser Hippias*, Socrates describes how he has never deprived anyone of gratitude. The true magnificence of such a feat strikes me now, as I attempt formally (and without Socrates' irony) to offer thanks to all those who have helped me throughout my years at the University of Alberta, and the writing of this thesis in particular.

I would like, first and foremost, to thank my mother for her constant encouragement and consideration, and thoughtful patience, over these tumultuous university years. I can only hope that your lively sense of humor and open-minded curiosity, which we all enjoy so much when in your company, have also infused myself and these pages, which are dedicated to you. I also thank my dear brother Robert and my sister-in-law Norah for their supportive presence in my life. Thank you both for the many beneficial debates we have been able to share, owing to the astuteness and intellectual sincerity you each possess. Thanks as well to my uncle Johny, my aunts Betty, Jean, Margy, and Gina, and my cousin Lori, for their encouragement this past year.

Throughout my years at university, and especially those spent studying Plato and political philosophy, I have undergone many significant changes. Perhaps because of this very changefulness, some old friends have become all the more precious. I thank Midori Hyndman for her lovely and longstanding presence in my life. Thank you as well to Christie Dubé, whose company, even if long-distance, is always enlivening. Thank you, Christie, for your unshakable support this year in particular. My gratitude also extends to Trish Gerald, whose thoughtfulness I admire and whose friendship I treasure, as well as to Alexandra Jones for her distinctive charm, and to Dallas Bullock for her vital summertime company. And while I am fortunate to enjoy several enduring friendships, I thank Andrew Bibby in particular for sharing so much of his life with me over these years of change (and for his invaluable help editing). It has been an exhilarating journey, Andrew. Thank you.

In thanking my teachers Dr. Leon Craig and Dr. Heidi Studer, the shadow-like nature of this page and these words becomes all too clear. Professor Craig, I thank you for one thing alone, but one that from the perspective of the student is all-important, and which has been so especially evident this last year: your over-flowing generosity as an educator. This particular wellspring has filled my soul, and many of those I hold dear, for some time now—such that the gratitude I extend to them also redounds back to you. As well as back to Heidi Studer, who has also played a pivotal role in the education (understood in the fullest sense of the word) of so many of my friends. Of all the things I could thank you for, Heidi, I am most grateful for your natural integrity, which cannot help but powerfully affect all those who have the good fortune of making your acquaintance. I only hope that someday I am deserving of the gratitude I feel towards you both for the riches you have offered. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Professor David Wangler for his kindly agreeing to sit on my defense committee.

The community of students whose company I have enjoyed throughout my years at the University of Alberta is something of a marvel to me. Without Natalie Elliot, it is likely that I would never have been introduced to Political Philosophy, and possible that I never would have been able to appreciate friendship as I do now. Thank you, Nat, for your unparalleled strength of character; you provide a most beneficial mirror to my soul. I also thank Tobin Craig and David Verbitsky for the inspiring example they have

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I would count myself awash in wonderful camaraderie had I to finish here; there are others, however, who have become fine friends over the years here, and who have each contributed to my education and to the present work. I would like in this vein to mention Murray Bessette and Jon Pidluzny, who have been very supportive longtime companions. To the bright and multi-faceted Ruby Hussain, I say thank you for your tireless spirit and your quick, creative insights. You are so generous, Ruby, and you help this year is appreciated; I expect that our delightful friendship will continue to grow stronger in the future. I thank Mark Verbitsky for his consistent 24-hour good humour, and Joel McCrum for his good-natured thoughtfulness, and splendid musical tastes. Thanks as well to Sheldon Pelech, Rebecca Pooler-Lunse, and Erin Dolgoy for their heartening support throughout the writing of this thesis, and Rob de Luca for his support with respect to my anticipated studies. I can only hope that the future introduces me to teachers and friends that compare to those I have known here.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The *Greater Hippias* is the longer of the two Platonic dialogues which take the name of the 'beautiful and wise' Hippias of Elis (the other being, fittingly enough, the *Lesser Hippias*).[1] The *Greater Hippias* is the only Platonic dialogue, however, in which we see Socrates interact *in private* with a man the likes of Hippias. That is to say, it is the only dialogue in which we see the most famous of philosophers in private conversation with someone of that more problematic breed, the Greek sophist. Indeed, one of the main objectives of the dialogue seems to be to create a contrast between the two 'types' of 'beautiful' men—the 'lover of wisdom' and the 'wise one'—and the unique privacy of Socrates' and Hippias' conversation seems to contribute to this end. If the notoriety of the sophists is traceable to Plato, it is surely in large part a consequence of the contrast between the philosopher and the sophist that is so comically dramatized in both *Hippias* dialogues, and especially in this, the longer, private conversation.[2]

The two *Hippias* dialogues share more than their humorous tone, and the fact that in both their eponym is Socrates' primary interlocutor. Indeed, perhaps as much as any two works by Plato, the *Hippias* texts seem to come together, both dramatically and thematically, to form a unity of their own within the Platonic *cosmos*. Working under the assumption that in order to understand any such larger whole it is helpful to conceive of its parts as wholes unto themselves, the present analysis is concerned almost exclusively with the first of these texts. It is helpful at the outset, however, to refer to certain of

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[1] It may be the case that the 'Greater' and 'Lesser' in the dialogues' titles refer to nothing other than their respective lengths. All passages quoted from the *Greater Hippias* are from David R. Sweet's translation in *The Roots of Political Philosophy* (Thomas Pangle, Ed.), unless otherwise noted. All passages of the *Lesser Hippias* are from James Leake's translation in the same. When citing passages of the *Lesser Hippias*, the dialogue will be referred to as LH.

[2] Two other dialogues are also of major importance in this regard, *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, as well as the portrayal of Thrasymachus in Book I of the *Republic*.

Plato's other works, and to the *Lesser Hippias* in particular, by way of properly situating the 'whole' that is the *Greater Hippias* in its wider Platonic and historical contexts. The following introductory comments consider the characters, themes, and setting of the *Greater Hippias* within this framework. The *Hippias* dialogues, taken together, also provide a unique vantage point from which to consider a particularly controversial contemporary matter: that of Platonic interpretation.

The Sophists of Greece

While the *Hippias* dialogues are perhaps the least flattering of the Platonic portrayals of any actual sophist, it is important to note that Plato certainly did not treat all the sophists in the same manner.[3] There are three other dialogues focused upon other individual sophists—namely, the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias*, and the *Sophist*—and these portray the men in question as very intelligent. If we are left with certain impressions of the sophists (and philosophers) from our reading of Plato, the nuance of his overall treatment makes these difficult to articulate precisely and fairly. What we can say with confidence is that the sophists of Greece, unlike Socrates, claimed to be teachers of wisdom, and that they

[3] It is arguably difficult to characterize the type 'objectively,' insofar as so much of what we know of the Greek sophists is traceable to the Platonic dialogues themselves. Whereas everyone acknowledges Plato's and Aristotle's works as testimony to the character (good or bad) of the Greek philosophers, almost none of the sophists' works survive (which may itself be indicative of something...). Indeed, there are longstanding debates regarding the extent to which the word 'sophist' itself held the present connotation when these men were prominent in Greece, which was prior to Plato's writing. The Greek word (*sophistês*) from which we get our English term is composed by adding a suffix connoting a man who practices a profession (or technical craft—*technê*) to the word for wisdom (*sophia*). It could be literally translated as 'wisdom expert,' or 'wise one.' Plato's dialogues indicate that, as it was used in everyday life by Greeks and apart from his writing, the term certainly had connotations similar to the colloquial English 'wise guy' (such that a noble Athenian youth might very much wish to learn or be educated by a sophist, without desiring to become one himself. Cf., *Protagoras*, *Theages*, *Euthydemus*, *Apology*). At the very least, by the time of Socrates' trial, sophists were contentious figures. But it is fairly clear that Greek word was not as universally derisive prior to Plato as the English terms 'sophist' and 'sophistry' are now.

Though the term is never used in the *Greater Hippias*, we might keep in mind that 'philosopher' means literally 'lover (from *phile*) of wisdom,' and the use of the term by Plato surely had an equal impact on *its* subsequent use and meaning.

typically charged fees for teaching. They were apparently at the height of their influence during the 'Golden Age' of Athens under the famous statesman Pericles. Athenian literature at this time was reaching a height—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were writing their tragedies, Aristophanes his comedies, Herodotus and Thucydides their histories. Natural philosophy—the systematic inquiry into nature and its causes—was also coming of age in this period, the works of men like Heraclitus, Democritus, Parmenides, and Anaxagoras available widely throughout Greece. The sophists, for their part, traveled widely, giving public speeches, competing in festivals, and teaching. Sometimes they were active political participants (such as Hippias). Broadly speaking, the sophists differed from the natural philosophers in that they were specifically interested in persuasive speech and argumentation. Their students tended to be the young and wealthy men who were eager to learn rhetoric for the sake of gaining political acumen, and (ultimately) political power. The sophists, apparently, sometimes succeeded in this purpose—and if Hippias is to be believed, they were certainly successful at earning money. Insofar as Plato portrays many of the sophists as impressive men (quite irrespective of their earning power), he indicates that he considered them to be worthy of careful consideration, for one reason or another.

Hippias

For all that might be said of the other sophists, however, upon even a cursory reading of either dialogue bearing his name, Hippias seems to be hardly more than a bombastic fool. Understanding the subtleties of the sophist's character in relation to that of the philosopher *is* an important question that this interpretation will consider, but Hippias'

general character is never made an interpretative challenge. His willing acceptance of Socrates' flattery all through the *Greater Hippias*, his bold and unshakable claims regarding his own prudential and political powers, combined with his thoroughly unintelligent, yet strangely confident, responses to Socrates' dialectical questioning, are evidence for this dismissive judgment.

We might, in a spirit of generosity, retain the vague hope that after his conversation with Socrates, Hippias will, in private, reconsider some of his opinions—especially, perhaps, those concerning his own surpassing worth as a human being. However, the *Lesser Hippias*, which takes place two days later, makes it only too clear that this does not occur. Early on in the conversation depicted there, and despite what seems to *us* like an embarrassing conversation two days prior, Hippias flatly declares: "I've never yet met anyone better than I am at anything" (364a).[4] Suffice it to say, assessing Hippias' general character does not pose any great challenge in these dialogues, though determining the underlying sources of his attitude certainly does.

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[4] Socrates will, with suitable irony, 'substantiate' this claim at 368-d of the *Lesser*:

> You are altogether the wisest of all human beings in the greatest number of arts, as I once heard you boasting, when you yourself narrated your extensive and enviable wisdom in the marketplace beside the banking tables. You asserted that you had once come to Olympia, having all you had about your body as your own works: first, that the ring you were wearing (for you began with that) was your work, since you knew how to cut rings, and that another signet too was your work, and a scraper and an unguent bottle, all of which you yourself made; then you said that you had cut from leather the footwear you were wearing and that you had woven your outer clothing and your tunic, and then, what seemed most unusual to all and a display of the greatest wisdom, was when you said the belt of your tunic, which you were wearing, was like the very expensive Persian ones and that you had plaited this yourself. In addition to these things, you said that you came having poems—epic verses, tragedies, dithyrambs—and many speeches of all sorts in prose. And you said that you came with knowledge, distinguished from that of others, concerning the arts of which I have just spoken, and about rhythms, harmoniac, correctness of letters, and very many other things in addition to these, as I remember. And further, I forgot your artful device (as it seems) for remembering, in which you suppose you are most splendid, and I suppose I have forgotten many other things...

Situating the Dialogue: Dramatic and Thematic Context

That the conversation of the *Greater Hippias*, unlike that of the *Lesser*, occurs in private confirms our suspicions about the man; his boastful manner is not merely a public persona, adopted for 'commercial' purposes. Moreover, the privacy of their conversation may allow us to distinguish the philosopher from the sophist far more effectively than any public conversation could. In private with a man of no 'consequence,' such as Socrates, we are likely to see the sophist at his most genuine.[5] He has no one whom he needs to impress. Similarly, we are likely to see Socrates displaying peculiar behavior of his own in this context. Socrates' 'shameless' flattery will mislead no one except Hippias, and his corresponding mischievous dissembling throughout will offend no one, including Hippias.

When Socrates first encounters Hippias in the dialogue, it is evident that the sophist has been away from Athens for some time.[6] Socrates, perhaps curious whether and how the man had changed in his absence, instigates a conversation with him. In the early part of their discussion, Hippias invites Socrates to his formal presentation of a speech, which he tells us is to occur two days later. As it turns out, this public display immediately precedes the drama of the *Lesser Hippias*. Thus the two dialogues have a clear dramatic order. However, their dramatic relationship may indicate something more: that the *Greater Hippias* is first not only in temporal order, but also logically and pedagogically—such that whatever is learned in the *Greater Hippias* in private pertains

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[5] Hippias makes it quite evident that this is his opinion of Socrates, when he suggests that answering Socrates' questioning is a paltry matter compared to answering questions at the solemn Olympic festivals (LH, 364a).

[6] Perhaps he has been away ever since the earlier time portrayed by Plato, as Hippias is one of the sophists we meet in *Protagoras* (where he is also portrayed in a rather droll manner, cf., 315bc, 337c-338b, and 347a).

to what is learned and taught in the more public conversation of the *Lesser Hippias* two days later. The respective themes of the two dialogues provide further evidence for this 'logical order.'

The ostensible subject of the *Greater Hippias* is Beauty, and indeed, the subtitle of the work is "On the Beautiful."[7] The dialogue takes the form of a dialectical inquiry into the nature of Beauty, understood in the widest sense of the word.[8] The 'formal' search for the beautiful is preceded by an extended prologue, which introduces us to Hippias, as well as to subjects that are relevant to the subsequent investigation—such as wisdom, laws and lawfulness, and the various educational pursuits. The inquiry that follows, comprising the major part of the dialogue, advances along the familiar Socratic 'what is X' template.

Despite this inherently 'logical' dialectical model, the investigation itself proceeds rather haphazardly. It begins with Socrates' comic introduction of a roguish and intractable 'alter-ego,' whom the search for 'the beautiful' is supposedly meant to satisfy. The *logical* trajectory of the discussion is mainly compromised by Hippias' failure to grasp Socrates' primary intention: to find a definition of 'the beautiful itself.' Instead of providing potential definitions, Hippias commences the inquiry by offering three examples of beautiful things. Socrates eventually takes on a more positive role, he and

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[7] The subtitles of Plato's works are of ambiguous authority. Though this one is clearly appropriate to the work in question, others are far more contentious (such as that of the *Lesser Hippias*: "On the Lie").

[8] In fact, the Greek word *kalon* has a wider everyday sense than our English term 'beautiful,' and may be understood to describe all that is beautiful in appearance, as well as all that is more 'fine' and 'noble.' It is a very important term of commendation in Greek. For example, the Greek term that we translate as 'gentleman' (an English term which doubtless used to be more powerful than it is today) is *kaloskagathos* (the contracted version of *kalos kai agathos*), which literally means 'noble (or beautiful) and good.' Aristotle implies in his *Politics* that fostering 'gentlemanliness' is the main overarching purpose of political life (1179b). In the *Ethics* he describes how the beautiful can become an end in itself: "performing actions that are beautiful and serious is something chosen for its own sake" (1176b, aiming at such action is described as "the greatest of goods, if indeed virtue is that," at 1169a). The term connotes all that is desirable and admirable for human beings in general. See also Seth Benardete, *The Being of the Beautiful*, xv: "Athens seems to have been as passionately devoted to the beautiful as Jerusalem to the just."

his 'alter-ego' suggesting three possible definitions of the Beautiful for consideration. Their inquiry, however, continues to be impaired by Hippias' obtuseness, especially when Socrates further bewilders him with a flight into what seems like a realm of pointless, and vain, 'sophistical disputation.' Their search ends in *aporia*, or perplexity. Or rather, it ends in Socrates' alleged perplexity, and Hippias' genuine frustration. 'The beautiful' is not found, nor do the two men part on the most harmonious of terms.

Doubtless Hippias is not thrilled when this same 'annoying' Socrates attends his public display two days later, and is invited by their host to comment on the polished speech Hippias has presented (LH, 363a). Instead of providing the called-for assessment, Socrates engages Hippias in a debate about which is the better man—the 'brave' Achilles, or the 'wily' Odysseus. This question arises out of a familiar assessment of Homer's two seminal texts:

> I used to hear from your [Eudicus'] father, Apemantus, that the *Iliad* of Homer is a more beautiful [noble] poem than the *Odyssey*, and more beautiful [noble] in the measure that Achilles is a better man than Odysseus; for he asserted that of these poems, the one was composed about Odysseus, the other about Achilles. (LH, 363b)

Socrates will imply in the *Greater Hippias* that it may be impossible to make (or judge) any such argument without first understanding more precisely what beauty itself *is*.[9] As such, the dialogic interaction of the *Greater Hippias*, in which this question is explored at length, would seem to be preliminary to the matters discussed in the *Lesser Hippias*.[10] Socrates' statement regarding Homer's two books, and their respective protagonists,

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[9] And though this seems counter-intuitive, insofar as appreciating beauty does not seem to require knowledge of 'the beautiful itself,' it may be the case that any convincing argument regarding *relative* beauty will rest upon such understanding.

[10] And there is certainly the possibility that the lessons of the *Lesser Hippias* contribute in important ways to our understanding of the *Greater*. The subtitle of the *Lesser Hippias* is 'On the Lie,' and, indeed, Socrates ends up somewhat humorously defending the position that 'lying' Odysseus is in fact the better (and hence more beautiful?) man. Does Plato believe that beauty and dishonesty are somehow intimately related? Based on our everyday experience with the deceptive power of beauty, would this, should this, surprise us?

might also have an important reflexive pertinence with regards to Plato's *Hippias* dialogues, and our two interlocutors.

Situating the Conversation: Historical Context

Clearly the *Hippias* dialogues are related to each other both temporally and thematically; there are also indications that they share an important historical background.[11] As indicated, in the *Greater Hippias* we learn that Hippias is in Athens following a long absence. Plato also placed him in the *Protagoras*, which is set between 434 and 432bc, just prior to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian war in 431.[12] This is the long war (famously recounted by Thucydides), lasting from 431-411, in which Sparta eventually defeated Imperial Athens. It was, however, punctuated by a seven year cessation of hostilities from 421-414, known as the Peace of Nicias. From this we can surmise that Hippias' long absence from Athens has been due to the war, for his city—Elis—was an ally of Sparta's through the earlier part of the war. Indeed, Hippias boasts that he has recently spent significant amounts of time in Sparta, as his city's chosen diplomatic representative (281a). The fact that he is in Athens at all, therefore, allows us to gage the historical time-frame of the dialogue more accurately. It is likely that the two *Hippias* dialogues take place during the Peace of Nicias.[13]

This general historical background is potentially relevant because it is during the Peace of Nicias that Alcibiades—the most notorious some-time protégé of Socrates—

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[11] The possibility of an important historical element to the *Hippias* dialogues is explained lucidly in an article by Laurence Lampert entitled "Socrates' Defense of Polytropic Odysseus: Lying and Wrong-doing in Plato's *Lesser Hippias*." Much of what I say here regarding the historical setting is derived from my understanding of this article. See also David R. Sweet, in *The Roots of Political Philosophy*, 340.
[12] Cf. Lampert, 233.
[13] Cf. Lampert, 233 and David Sweet, 340.

proposed an intricate plot which included convincing Argos, Elis (i.e., Hippias' hometown), and Mantinea to switch allegiances toward Athens.[14] It is precisely at the historical juncture in which we find Socrates and Hippias conversing that Thucydides chooses to introduce Alcibiades into his history of the war.[15] The scheme of the fairly young, but already influential, Alcibiades was somewhat shocking. It involved persuading the Spartans to lie, and then subsequently exposing them as unscrupulous liars—thereby rousing the Athenian assembly against peace with the Spartans, and towards establishing allegiance with the Argives, Mantineans, and Elians.[16] The 'wily' Alcibiades later allied himself with the Spartans, before being reconciled with Athens only to yet again fall out of favor.

Given this external historical information, we might consider the possibility that Hippias—who is, according to him, his city's favorite ambassador—was part of the Elian embassy that must have been sent to Athens during this period. This may be relevant to Socrates' treatment of Hippias (and the Spartans?) throughout the dialogue. Furthermore, the reminder that Athens has long been at war with Sparta alerts us to the fact that polities have widely varying conceptions of what is 'beautiful' or 'noble' in politics and human life generally—Sparta being a city-state with such a very different constitution, upheld by very different laws, and cultivating very different activities and pursuits. The Athenian and Spartan regimes were each admirable in its own way, but very different in kind. That Plato places the conversation depicted in the *Greater Hippias* squarely in this context of

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[14] See Thucydides, 5.43-48, and Lampert, 233. Plato names two dialogues after Alcibiades, and he has an important role in both the *Symposium* and *Protagoras*.

[15] Lampert dates the work this precisely by suggesting that the references in the *Lesser Hippias* to the Olympic festivals indicate that the conversations were meant to occur in the Spring of 420—the year in which the Eleans excluded the Spartans from the temple during the Olympic games, and they were thus prevented from sacrificing or contending in the games (233-4). See also Thucydides 5.48.

[16] The theme of the *Lesser Hippias* (the lie) can thus be seen from new perspectives as well. See Lampert, 234-6.

peace and war, and friends and enemies, suggests that there may be a rather serious political background to this very comical dialogue "on the beautiful."

Reading Plato

To be sure, my introductory remarks thus far rely upon a number of assumptions about how to read a Platonic dialogue 'philosophically.' For, as is likely evident to anyone familiar with contemporary debates regarding Platonic interpretation, I am not in agreement with the interpretative methods that might currently be called orthodox among Plato scholars.[17] It is not my intention to present a comprehensive assessment of various approaches to Platonic interpretation, given that Plato has seen intelligent and ardent readers of numerous sorts for over 2000 years. Nevertheless, the question of how we should read texts—especially old, or more 'literary,' philosophical texts—is one that is contentious enough today to warrant, if not demand, fair consideration at the outset of any philosophical analysis. In order to situate and justify my preferred approach to reading Plato, I shall briefly present some of the basic principles presumed by my introductory comments to this point, and in all that follows. The assumptions of the currently dominant 'analytic' and 'critical' approaches (the former pertaining more to philosophy, the latter to literature in general) contrast so deeply and broadly with mine as to defy brief comparison.[18] I therefore list my own assumptions not as an argument

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[17] The following borrows widely from *The City and Man*, by Leo Strauss (particularly pages 50-62), and *The War Lover*, by Leon Craig (particularly the Prologue, "On Reading a Platonic Dialogue" xiii-xxxviii). Wherever possible I have provided citations, but both works offer much more comprehensive accounts of the approach I have adopted and defend here. See also Strauss' essay "Exoteric Teaching," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (63-71).

[18] In choosing these terms I have admittedly used broad strokes. I mean to emphasize two somewhat different approaches that are common today, the one having its origins in the other. In speaking of the 'analytic' school, I mean the positivist approach to philosophy that has been pre-eminent among (especially English-speaking) scholars since the early 20th Century, and continues to influence philosophy scholars to

against them, but simply in order to prepare the reader for the character of the interpretive commentary that follows, in light of which the propriety of my assumptions can be judged. Because the question of how we should read texts is inextricable from the question of how we believe they were written, I will also briefly consider what *I* take to be some of Plato's thoughts on the matter. After all, within the confines of the *Hippias* dialogues alone, Plato's Socrates touches on what are arguably the two most important issues of contemporary hermeneutical theory: historicism and esotericism.

The first assumption I have made that might displease certain scholars unduly influenced by a prominent 19th Century school of interpretation, is that the *Greater Hippias* was indeed written by Plato, and not some talented imitator of Plato.[19] Although it was universally accepted as a work of Plato's during antiquity, the authenticity of the dialogue has been called into question in more recent history, especially since Schleiermacher first raised the issue.[20] The *Greater Hippias* has subsequently been rejected on the basis of both its style and content. Insofar as Plato is acknowledged to be a master of a broad range of language and style, the arguments against the dialogue's

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such an extent that I believe it 'positively' precludes their reading Plato adequately. In short, the analytic school spends much more time analyzing the logic of Socrates' 'arguments,' and much less time understanding the dramatic context and actions that inform the arguments on a psychological level—thereby depriving the dialogues of much of their wholeness and richness. I argue here that both aspects of the endeavor are absolutely necessary. I would also argue that the 'critical' schools' prominence today is largely traceable to the impoverishment of Platonic interpretation by the positivists (and perhaps even bad readings of Nietzsche). When an analysis has ignored the subtlety of a work in all its poetic richness, it is very easy (and perhaps satisfying to the critic's vanity) to 'critique' it on the basis of its being 'doctrinal,' 'totalitarian,' 'chauvinist,' 'un-environmental,' or what have you.

[19] For an excellent defense of the authenticity of several contested dialogues, including the *Greater* and *Lesser Hippias*, see Thomas Pangle's introduction to *The Roots of Political Philosophy*.

[20] See Schleiermacher's *Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, 342-346. While Schleiermacher was the first to question the authenticity of many of Plato's dialogues, including the *Greater Hippias*, and was also very much involved in changing the course of Platonic scholarship towards the currently dominant approach (which I am critiquing), he nevertheless conceded much more than his 'followers' subsequently have with respect to the importance of the dialogical structure of the dialogues, as well as their 'esoteric' nature. See Strauss, "Exoteric Teaching."

authenticity based on philological or stylistic grounds fall rather flat.[21] And, as I intend to show, examining the content of the dialogue leads to practically conclusive grounds for its authenticity. Obviously in choosing to examine the dialogue as I have, I have rejected from the outset the contention that the *Greater Hippias* is spurious. And, indeed, most recent scholarship has tended to situate the work among the authentic dialogues.[22]

My second, and admittedly somewhat more 'problematic' assumption, is that Plato's works collectively constitute a coherent 'whole.' I by no means claim to know that this is true, as it could well take more than my lifetime to attain a perspective from which to judge Plato's entire corpus. But it is my 'working hypothesis,' and militates against the view that Plato's writings represent an 'evolutionary' trajectory of differing philosophic 'systems,' or doctrines, such that ideas presented in one (say, 'early') work contradict another (say, 'later') in a significant way. Whenever certain dialogues seem to 'contradict' one another, I regard it as more prudent to assume that this was Plato's intention—that the 'contradictions' and paradoxes that occur within and amongst his some 35 dialogues are there partly in order to preclude dogmatism—that is, to prevent interpretative endeavors that would seek too rigidly to define a Platonic 'system.' To allow that the whole might be coherent is not to suggest that the whole itself is rigid or absolute. Is it so strange to assume that Plato's *cosmos* could accommodate and even embrace mysteries about the natural cosmos?[23]

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[21] Most of those who have rejected the *Greater Hippias* do so on aesthetic grounds. It seems that they, essentially, do not like its levity. See Paul Woodruff, *Hippias Major*, 94. For a good argument regarding the stylistic versatility of geniuses, see Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, "Why I am so Clever," aphorism 4.

[22] See Woodruff, 94-5; Ivan Ludlam, *Hippias Major: An Interpretation*, 1-25; John M. Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, 898-9.

[23] Cf., Strauss, *The City and Man*, 61-62:

> Plato's work consists of many dialogues because it imitates the manyness, the variety, the heterogeneity of being. The many dialogues form a *kosmos* which mysteriously imitates the mysterious *kosmos*. The Platonic *kosmos* imitates or reproduces its models in order to awaken us

My third assumption, if fair, provides further evidence for the validity of the others. It is that Plato's choice of literary device—the dramatic dialogue—is significant for reasons both pedagogical and philosophical.[24] In relation to the point above, it is clear that the Platonic dialogue, much like the Shakespearean drama, occludes the dramatist from view—such that to treat any character's pronouncements—including Socrates'—as doctrinal, or surely representative of the author's actual opinion, is absurd. Every statement of Plato's characters may be interpreted, in part at least, as an invitation to a question, and thus aimed, in part at least, at arousing perplexity (and hence philosophy). Even if we *were* to grant that Plato treats Socrates as his own mouthpiece or voice, we must equally grant that Socrates (unlike, say, Aristotle or Hobbes) is always speaking to *someone else in particular* in the dialogues, and whatever he says needs to be interpreted accordingly.[25] The dramatic context of his (or the Athenian or Eleatic strangers') words and arguments must be given equal, if not primary, consideration to the words and arguments themselves.[26] Just as our own manners and candor vary according to who (or how many) we are speaking to, so we can see that Socrates' do so as well, for all of the same reasons. If we consider our own experience, we realize that such reasons include

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> to the mystery of the model and to assist us in articulating that mystery. There are many dialogues because the whole consists of many parts. But the individual dialogue is not a chapter from an encyclopaedia of the philosophic sciences of from a system of philosophy, and still less a relic of a stage of Plato's development. Each dialogue deals with one part; it reveals the truth about that part. But the truth about a part is a partial truth, a half truth.

"What allows Strauss to speak of mystery and truth in the same breath?," the positivist or critical theorist might ask. Perhaps it is that sometimes the truth about something can take the form of a more refined articulation of its perplexing nature.

[24] Cf. Strauss, ibid., 59-62.

[25] The issue of who is or is not Plato's 'spokesperson' is impossible to ascertain. See Strauss, *The City and Man*, 50-62 on Plato's clever 'choice' of the ever-ironic Socrates. See also Craig on irony, xxxi-xxxii.

[26] As Strauss explains: "By understanding the speeches in the light of the deeds, one transforms the two-dimensional into something three-dimensional or rather one restores the original three-dimensionality" (60). The *Hippias* dialogues provide a particularly excellent example of the priority of the drama—for so many of the arguments presented by Socrates are so patently inadequate (if not downright fallacious) that it is impossible to forget who he is speaking to: a most credulous interlocutor.

everything from concern for another's well-being, to concern for our own well-being, to the well-being of something (say, an idea) we care for.[27] And Socrates may well have thought of others.

If the perplexing dramatic character of the dialogues exists in part to prevent dogmatism and promote philosophy, then discerning the deeper coherence of these dramas is a challenge to those who have more than a superficial 'desire to know.' The assumption that this coherence exists—an assumption present in my claims, among others, about the possible historical back-drop of the Hippias dialogues—can best be defended by looking to what Plato himself (or, rather, his 'Socrates'—it is a very natural mistake) says about good writing in the *Phaedrus*, in a discussion concerning the various qualities of a speech written by Lysias:

> Socrates: Don't the parts of the speech appear to have been thrown together at random? Is it evident that the second point had to be made second for some compelling reason? Is that so for any of the parts? I at least—of course I know nothing about such matters—thought the author said just whatever came to mind next, though not without a certain noble willfulness. But you, do you know any principle of speech-composition compelling him to place these things one after another in this order?
> Phaedrus: It's very generous of you to think that I can understand his reasons so clearly.
> Socrates: But surely you will admit at least this much: Every speech must be put together like a living creature, with a body of its own: it must be neither without head nor without legs: and it must have a middle and extremities that are fitting both to one another and to the whole work. (277b-c)[28]

Granted that this passage does not conclusively prove Plato's mastery of such speech-writing, its reflexive quality ought to justify a provisional assumption regarding the underlying integrity of each dialogue. After all, who would establish such a literary standard, if he did not intend himself to meet it? This assumption can also be termed

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[27] Such that, for example, we might not be overly-eager to speak openly of our faith in certain deities to a self-professed nihilist or atheist. Or, similarly, we might choose not to speak publicly of aspects of a 'realist' political outlook from within a regime dedicated to universal human rights. For a good account of some other reasons why one might exercise great care in speaking, see Craig, *The War Lover*, xx-xxv.
[28] Nehamas and Woodruff, translators, in Cooper's *Complete Dialogues*.

'logographic necessity,' as it is in the *Phaedrus* (*anagkē logographikē*, 264b)—meaning that nothing said in the dialogues is spurious, but that each phrase and argument is included by Plato for some definite reason.[29] It is an assumption that makes interpretation far more challenging—hence, necessarily more 'philosophical' in the active sense—and is perhaps also one assumption that justifies writing a commentary that exceeds the length of the dialogue by a significant proportion.[30]

Doubtless many today would find it strange to grant Plato such respect *a priori*, and admittedly faith in such assumptions should come only through experience studying the dialogues themselves. But it would also seem that approaching the texts *without* such assumptions precludes one, *a priori*, from seeing the richness of his works. That so many scholars nevertheless do so is, I believe, traceable to the latent historicism of modern scholarship (and society), as well as to a democratic prejudice against the very idea of esoteric writing.[31] If Plato did *not* share these prejudices when he wrote, then understanding him requires that we rid ourselves of them to the best of our abilities, even if we choose, in the end, to disagree with his reasons for doing so. Again, the best place to turn for evidence of his perspective on these matters is his work. We do not have to go far, for the *Hippias* dialogues themselves speak to both historicism and esotericism. As

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[29] Again, to quote Strauss:

> Nothing is accidental in a Platonic dialogue; everything is necessary at the place where it occurs. Everything which would be accidental outside of the dialogue becomes meaningful within the dialogue. In all actual conversations chance plays a considerable role: all Platonic dialogues are radically fictitious. The Platonic dialogue is based on a fundamental falsehood, a beautiful or beautifying falsehood, viz. on the denial of chance. (*The City and Man*, 60)

[30] See Craig, *The War Lover*, xxxvi-xxxviii.

[31] 'Historicism,' very roughly, consists of the idea that progress *of all kinds* is a necessary consequence of humanity's movement through time. To suggest that Plato may have written 'esoterically' is to suggest, again very roughly, that he wrote in such a way as to say one thing to a superficial reader, and something else to the more thorough reader.

such, these questions will lurk in the background throughout the following study. At the outset, therefore, some brief comments regarding these matters must suffice.

The first question of the *Greater Hippias* is Socrates' inquiry into the cause of the fact that "those men of the past whose names are said to be great in regard to wisdom [...]—either all or most of them apparently held themselves back from political activities" (281c). Hippias responds that it is due to their lack of power and prudence to succeed at both the common and the private. Socrates articulates what may be a latent historical element of Hippias' 'theory,' when he asks: "Then, by Zeus, just as the other arts have progressed and in comparison with the craftsmen of today those of the past are poor, are we to assert that so too your art, that of the sophists, has progressed and that those among the ancients who were concerned with wisdom were poor compared with you?" Hippias is only too eager to agree to this theory of historical progress—and precisely *because* of this agreement, Plato would have us radically question the very possibility of the progress in wisdom that is implied.

No one, especially today, can deny the fact of progress in science and the technical arts. But most would also recognize a difference between the technical knowledge of the specialist and wisdom. In having Hippias, in particular, collapse the distinction and make the outrageous claim he does, Plato warns us with respect to the roots of such thinking—for perhaps no other interlocutor in Plato is as inanely vain as Hippias. It is certainly *un*wise to make any definite proclamations regarding progress in wisdom; after all, one would have to be as wise as the wisest person who ever lived in order to make a reasonable judgment on the matter. If one has sufficient modesty to leave this possibility aside, and is unwilling to believe that, say, modern progress in the

technical arts necessarily bespeaks a parallel phenomenon in that highest of categories which we call 'wisdom,' then reading Plato attentively and sympathetically, rather than superficially and contentiously is the only appropriate approach. Perhaps any text enjoying some reputation for profundity should be approached in this way at first.[32] Only when such an endeavor proves fruitless should a judgment be reached regarding the author's inadequacy.[33]

Socrates gives us a subtle warning regarding openness to the 'wisdom of the ancients' of his day. In the *Lesser Hippias*, we see how seriously Socrates has taken his own advice—for, unlike Hippias, in that dialogue Socrates displays a sincere willingness to engage one 'ancient' writer in particular. As already mentioned, in the *Lesser Hippias* Socrates involves Hippias in a debate regarding the two seminal character's of Homer's two seminal books. Over the course of the discussion, the philosopher displays the depth with which he has studied and understood Homer—although, ironically enough, his competence in this regard is most evident in his capacity to manipulate the Homeric text to his own advantage. He deliberately misrepresents Homer's beliefs, and in so doing he exposes Hippias' ignorance.[34] The sophist's belief in progress has prevented his learning

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[32] Were we not finite, we could be at leisure to approach more texts in this manner. As it is, it seems prudent to trust tradition (and one's teachers).

[33] This argument only deals with one might call moderate historicism—the belief that progress occurs through time, such that that later writers, by nature of their being later, necessarily understand more—even with respect to what the earlier author's intentions were when they wrote. As such, on this view people might make an argument about Plato's advocating totalitarianism simply because he was an aristocrat. One assumption here would be that that he (like all people, allegedly) was incapable of escaping the prejudices of his 'socio-historical circumstances.' There is, of course, a more radical form of historicism that similarly believes in progress, but also denies that we can understand the works of other ages and places/languages at all. This form of historicism is based on a radical denial of human nature as such, which though perhaps philosophically interesting, leaves much of our everyday experience unaccounted for. Taken to its extreme (and it may be nothing but its extreme), it would deny my being able to communicate at all, or gain any understanding of anyone else, past or present. Speaking to such an extreme view is not necessary when it comes to defending the study of Plato, for there is no common ground on which to communicate.

[34] Though he also, in the process, notes that it is impossible to know what Homer thought:

from 'those of the past who concerned themselves with wisdom'; this is a simple but invaluable cautionary lesson.[35]

The arguments of the *Lesser Hippias,* taken together, also demonstrate Socrates' willful *unorthodoxy* regarding his interpretation of the Homeric texts. For though the dialogue begins with his speaking of the traditional view that "the *Iliad* of Homer is a more beautiful poem than the *Odyssey*, and more beautiful in the measure that Achilles is a better man than Odysseus" (363b), it is only in order to question this 'common' opinion that it is raised at all. Indeed, the philosopher eventually ends up defending the unorthodox view that Odysseus is the better man—on the grounds, moreover, that Homer implicitly represented him as such. But the repercussions of such an argument are enormous, for 'wily' Odysseus was a notorious 'wise guy,' or *liar*. Could Socrates truly have believed that *Homer* believed what Socrates humorously concludes at the end of the dialogue: "he who voluntarily goes wrong and does what is shameful and unjust, if indeed there is any such person, would be no other than the good man" (376b).[36] Regardless of what *we* conclude about Homer's intentions (needless to say, this is not our present concern), it is probably for good reason that this view of Odysseus (and of

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> Let us leave Homer aside, since it is impossible to ask him what he was thinking when he composed these verses anyway, but since you are evidently taking upon yourself the responsibility, and you agree with these things you assert Homer said, answer on behalf of Homer and yourself in common. (365d)

Hippias thus becomes the mouthpiece of Homer in the *Lesser Hippias,* as Socrates is the 'mouthpiece' of himself in the *Greater.*

[35] Lampert explains the situation very clearly:

> Hippias is right about undeceptive Achilles and Socrates knew it from the start, having long been an indefatigable student of Homer. For who is likely to have studied Homer with greater assiduousness? A believer in the progress of wisdom who thinks he looks down on the ancients from a position above them and who admits in private that he studied Homer in order to win a hearing from tradition-loving Spartans (282a, 285d-e)? or one who doubts the progress of wisdom, thinking that the ancients may have been superior both in the tactfulness of their speech and in what they actually held? (245-246)

[36] The claim may be rendered innocuous when it is seen in conjunction with the more famous Socratic postulate that 'knowledge is virtue,' which implies that no one willingly does wrong.

cleverness as such) was not the traditional, 'orthodox' teaching that was taken away from Homer by most Greeks. Nor is it proposed in a serious manner in the context of the *Lesser Hippias*. If we try to imagine a society in which clever and unscrupulous lawyers are honored above noble and brave warriors, we may get a glimpse of the political problem faced by the ancients when they wrote.

Of course, it is difficult for many today, including many scholars, to imagine writers having such 'naïve' concerns regarding the over-arching morality of political life that they might dissemble (or engage in self-censorship) in their writing. That Homer, or Plato, may have 'hidden' potentially pernicious truths from the thoughtless reader is an idea that is likely to strike those many as radically antidemocratic and, hence, itself 'immoral' (and arcane). After all, who are Homer and Plato to decide who should and who should not have access to the truth?[37] But, strictly speaking, this argument is beside the point. Regardless of whether it is 'elitist' or not, and regardless of whether such 'elitism' is or is not immoral, if Plato defended, and so presumably practiced, prudential 'esoteric' writing, then the interpreter of any dialogue needs to take this into account.[38]

Moreover, Plato's "secrecy and sphinx nature," which some are bound to find offensive, may be precisely what, to others, makes reading the dialogues so particularly amusing and delightful.[39] Esotericism—or the multi-layering of meaning—contributes to the element of perplexity that is already inherent in the dialogical form of Plato's works. Just as Socrates speaks differently to his various interlocutors, Plato speaks differently to

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[37] These same might also be likely to question the idea of the existence of truth. I suppose one of my other assumptions, then, is that there is such a thing as truth, regardless of how difficult it is for one to grasp, even in part.

[38] As his Socrates suggests in *Phaedrus*, if implicitly—i.e., via his criticism of writing. He describes how "when it has once been written down, every discourse roams about everywhere, reaching indiscriminately those with understanding no less than those who have no business with it, and it doesn't know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not" (275e).

[39] See Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 28.

his various readers. One is hereby implicitly invited, and challenged, to become one of his *better* readers. This ultimately requires making oneself into an active participant in the conversation at hand. In the *Greater Hippias*, this action comes particularly naturally, because Hippias fails so miserably to contribute to Socrates' conversation in a meaningful way. "Surely there is more that can be said," we inevitably find ourselves thinking to ourselves. When the answers do not come readily, we are challenged to examine more closely what has or has not been said by the interlocutors, considering whether what they have said squares with, ignores, or contradicts, our actual experience. In the *Greater Hippias*, such personal reflections especially involve consideration of one's personal experience of Beauty. This commentary is the result of my attempt at this longer, somewhat meandering, path through the comical dialogue.[40] It is a route which has, fittingly enough, helped better my experience of the beautiful, insofar as it has allowed me glimpses of the underlying integrity and power of Plato's text.

[40] An attempt very much assisted by my own stubborn, yet ultimately friendly, 'questioner.' See *Republic* 435c and 497d for references to 'taking the longer path.' Both passages also refer to 'the *kalos* things' being difficult.

Part I: The Prologue (281a-287e)

The *Greater Hippias* seems, at first glance, to defy the Platonic/Socratic postulate that 'the beginning is the most important part of every work" (*Republic*, 377a). This is likely due to the prologue's outlandish tone. At the outset of the dialogue, Plato presents us with a Socrates in a particularly mischievous mood, and couples this with Hippias' oblivious self-assuredness, to create a situation of dramatic irony that borders on the hilarious. After teasing the 'wise and beautiful' Hippias with some equivocal praise, which the sophist seems to accept at face value, Socrates proceeds to question him about his various activities. In short order some strikingly counter-intuitive conclusions are reached. Socrates at one point even seems to endorse the popular view that "the wise man himself must be wise especially for himself" and that "the mark of this is whoever has earned the most money" (283a). Shortly thereafter, he and Hippias agree that "the Lacedaemonians break the law by not giving [Hippias] gold and turning their own sons over to [him, hence] we find the Laconians to be lawbreakers, and to be so in the most important matters, though they seem to be the most law-abiding" (285b). The prologue concludes with Hippias agreeing emphatically (swearing by Zeus) with Socrates' suggestion that "the Lacedaemonians enjoy you because you know many things, and they use you as children use old women to tell them stories in a pleasant way" (286a). Suffice it to say, Plato makes it especially difficult to take this preliminary conversation seriously.

Nevertheless, as the following treatment of the prologue seeks to demonstrate, questions and themes emerge in the opening of the dialogue that are fundamental to a

thorough treatment of the dialogue's explicit theme of the Beautiful.[1] Furthermore, it is in the prologue that we gain our first impressions of both interlocutors, which will inform our reading of the whole. Looking back on this comical prologue, we realize that we are tacitly invited from the outset to question the two men in terms of the main theme of the dialogue. That is, we are invited to ask which is truly the more 'beautiful and wise' human being. The far more challenging question, however, is why Plato has made the answer so obvious. Thus, the prologue initiates our thinking about why Plato has chosen this particular interlocutor for Socrates to engage in a discussion about, of all things, Beauty. As we strive to interpret the dialogue's substantive teaching we are challenged to assess our own changing reactions to the prologue, which proceed from amusement at its comic surface, to perplexity at its content, to delight at our recognition of its links to the later discussion and the theme of the dialogue. Why and how has Plato elicited these successive reactions from his reader? Another question emerges from this inquiry that seems to pervade the entire dialogue: what is the relationship between the comic and the beautiful?

Wisdom for a Man's Self (281a-283b)

The dialogue begins with Socrates greeting the famous sophist warmly: "Hippias, the beautiful and wise, how long a time it's been for us since you have alighted at Athens." Hippias' response is framed as an 'answer' to a 'question' he hears as implicit but is not expressly asked—namely '*why* has it been so long.' This is ironic insofar as part of the

[1] Some of these are alluded to in the seemingly more 'philosophic' latter part of the dialogue, without ever being discussed there. These include beautiful activities, pursuits, laws/lawful things, prudence, wisdom and learning. That these are major themes of the opening section indicates that there is a substantial underlying unity to the dialogue.

sophist's response includes a boast about his being considered "a most able judge and reporter of whatever speeches are made by each of the cities" (281b). As a result of this special competence, he is the favorite envoy of his city Elis, going "most often and regarding the most numerous and important matters" to Sparta. And so he has "had no leisure" for visiting Athens, Sparta's greatest rival.

As noted, we surmise early on that these two men are very different. Socrates' description of Hippias is perhaps the first such indication. There is evidence later in the dialogue that Hippias most likely is visually striking—probably handsome and distinguished looking, surely well-dressed (cf. 291a)—in stark contrast to the notoriously ugly and shabby Socrates. That the philosopher calls him wise, and that he readily accepts the description is another indication of the contrast; Socrates is famous for his claim of ignorance, that all he knows for certain is that he knows nothing (alluded to at 298c).[2] This 'Socratic humility' is juxtaposed with Hippias' unabashed vanity (another theme intertwined with the beautiful perhaps). Hippias' lack of leisure is the next indication we receive of his contrast to Socrates, who has so much leisure that he is eager to talk to Hippias![3] In his assertion about lacking leisure, we also see that Hippias presents himself first and foremost as an important public figure. Socrates too claims to render service to his city, but this is avowedly in a private capacity.[4]

Hippias' boasting of his public service is subtly undermined by the conversation that ensues. The ironic element of Socrates' humility surfaces in his next words to Hippias, as he praises the sophist's wisdom and perfection while simultaneously directing

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[2] With the possible exception of the matter of 'erotics,' cf. *Symposium* (177e), and *Theages* (128b).
[3] The notion of 'leisure' (*scholē*) is an important one in ancient thought generally. See Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book X, Chapter 7, and *Politics*, Book VI, Chapter 14.
[4] Cf. *Apology*, 31c.

their discussion away from his public contributions and towards his private gains. The ambiguity of the praise he offers is plain. Referring first to his private activities (which Hippias had made no mention of), he says that these consist in giving help to the young in return for great sums of money. Socrates disguises any criticism this might imply by suggesting that what Hippias receives is worth far less than what he offers. Depending on the philosopher's appraisal of the value of money, this could be a compliment or a slight. Socrates' praise of Hippias' public involvement is equally ambivalent: "in public you are able to benefit your city as one ought if he is not to be looked down on but is to be highly reputed among the many." Such benefits may, needless to say, be of little or no worth, depending on the quality of the judgments of those bestowing the reputation. In both cases, then, Socrates' praise is ironic, highlighting as it does the underlying interests involved in Hippias' activities—these being money and reputation for himself.

By the end of the dialogue, Hippias will quite openly describe what he believes to be 'beautiful' activity, and his own description echoes what Socrates implies with his ambiguous praise.[5] It is not surprising, therefore, that at this point he makes no effort to correct or qualify anything that is said. As such, Socrates continues, raising a matter which he claims perplexes him. Or rather, it seems that there are some other types of men who perplex him, now that he is in Hippias' presence; namely, the "ancient men whose names are said to be great in regard to wisdom" (281c). The 'ancient men' that are introduced first are: Pittacus, Bias, the "associates of Thales the Milesian," and "those still later down to Anaxagoras." These, along with the legendary Daedalus, are

[5] He will say that the most beautiful and worthy thing is "to be able to compose a speech well and beautifully in a law court or council chamber or in any other ruling group to which the speech is addressed and to go away having persuaded them and taking off not the littlest but the largest of the prizes, the salvation of oneself and one's money and friends" (304b).

contrasted with those he refers to later: Gorgias, Prodicus, and Protagoras—other famous sophists, and as such Hippias' foremost rivals.

Both sets of men are presented as part of the same argument, with Daedalus being the focal point of the analogy that the argument is determined to test. Socrates asks Hippias why 'all or most of' those reputedly wise men of the past 'apparently held themselves back from political activities.' Hippias' judgment of these men seems rather entrenched, for he answers Socrates' question blithely: it is because they "lacked the power and were unable by prudence to succeed at both the common and the private" (281cd). Implicit in his response is the assumption that both private and public activity are each desirable in themselves, *and* that there is some virtue (which he calls prudence) involved in combining the two. Taking up Hippias' thesis and abstracting out of it a historical element, Socrates asks whether this means that the 'art of sophistry' has progressed in a similar way as have the arts in general—so that "If Bias should come to life for us again now, he would be laughable compared with you [plural], just as the sculptors maintain that if Daedalus was born now and produced works such as those from which he has acquired his name, he would be ridiculous" (282a). The question Socrates initially raised hereby becomes twofold. First they must consider whether or not the 'art of the sophists' has progressed in the manner of the other arts as described; then, they must address whether or not this 'technical progress' is the cause of the present-day 'reputedly wise' being more involved in political things than their predecessors.

As we will see, Socrates and Hippias only partially complete this examination. Instead of engaging these questions directly on a theoretical level, examining the various aspects of such an analogy and articulating the larger questions that emerge from such a

consideration, Socrates and Hippias reach agreement rather quickly. Hippias agrees with the opinion expressed in the analogy—the sophists have progressed in this way. Socrates then offers proof that this is the case, although it is proof that rests on another common opinion. He suggests that because they make more money, they are clearly improving their art. Again, Hippias agrees with this opinion, and they move on with their conversation.

In taking up the first question that they are to deal with, the appropriateness of the analogy must first be considered. It is based on the idea of progress in the arts. Socrates suggests that there has been progress in the arts generally, citing the example of Daedalus' art, or the art of the sculptor. But the choice of Daedalus is a strange one, for several reasons. First, he was a mythical character, whose works, to the extent that they were known at all, were known only in legend.[6] Hence, it would be surprising for someone to maintain categorically that his own work surpassed that of Daedalus, and so it is odd that Socrates suggests that they readily do so. The claim of modern sculptors can only be presumptive, insofar as they have no way of judging Daedalus' work. Is the claim of the sophists likewise? The analogy is also peculiar in that sculpting is a strange craft to use to demonstrate the phenomenon of historical progress in the arts. Just as Socrates and Hippias will admit later with their mutual praise of Phidias (290c), sculptures are generally judged primarily for their beauty, and sculptors for their capacity to produce this. Such an expertise or talent would not seem to be capable of historical progression in the same way as the more technical arts (such as medicine, or metalurgy).

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[6] Pausanias, writing in the second Century AD, attributes many sculptures of Greece to Daedalus, but this seems to be unsubstantiated in earlier writings. Apollodorus, for example, places Daedalus historically alongside the mythical hero Hercules in his suggestion that "Daedalus made a portrait of Hercules at Pisa, which Hercules mistook at night for living and threw a stone and hit it" (*Library and Epitome*, Book 2, Chapter 6, Section 3).

In relation to this last point, and highlighting another peculiarity of the analogy, Daedalus himself was not known exclusively, or even primarily, as a sculptor, but rather as a clever *inventor* of some rather infamous devices.[7] Perhaps Plato would have us consider what progress would mean in Daedalus' other inventive arts, particularly his more notorious ones (e.g., the wings that would lead to Icarus' death, and the labyrinth used by Minos to house the minotaur). This would involve the recognition that, to the extent that his devices, expertise, and power were not always used for the most commendable of ends, there is a problem with regards to the notion of progress in the arts. The discussion of medicine in the *Republic* is useful in delineating the extent of the problem, insofar as medicine is easily mistaken for being good-in-itself. There, Socrates explains how the most sophisticated medicine is often used badly—it tends to thrive in 'sick' regimes, resulting in doctors that are experts in treating symptoms, and who ultimately end up fostering and prolonging disease rather than restoring health (405-406e). An increase in technical power of this kind is clearly not confined to only good uses, which could pertain to Hippias' art as well.

In recognizing some of the difficulties inherent in the analogy, and in the very idea of universal historical progress in the arts, we are made more aware of the difficulties of judging progress in the 'art of the sophist.' We are invited to consider whether this art is more like the neutral power inherent in Daedalus' technical expertise, or more like his capacity as a sculptor, who is guided by the natural end of creating beauty. In either case, we are forewarned that the sophist's art may be no less powerful, and no more restricted to beneficial uses, than the ambiguous arts of Daedalus. But this

[7] And as Apollodorus indicates, his sculptures were known less for their beauty than for their life-likeness. See also *Euthyphro*, 11b-e and 15b.

conclusion points us to a more fundamental problem with the analogy. For it seems bizarre to speak of an 'art of the sophist,' an art that must in some way be connected to *wisdom*, and yet might nevertheless be unguided and formally neutral in its power, as in the technical arts. This difficulty is subtly indicated by Socrates, in that he introduces the analogy without a clear indication of what the sophist's art involves—beyond its conferring some indefinite, but valuable (because expensive) 'benefit' to the youths whose families can afford it. We are left to our own assumptions. Hippias has implied that he supercedes the ancients in prudence and wisdom, and following from that, Socrates has tacitly suggested this prudence and wisdom must amount to a kind of art or expertise. For the sake of comparison, Socrates has seemingly conflated the activities of 'those among the ancients who were concerned with wisdom' with this art, implying that progress in the art would be accompanied by an increase in prudence or wisdom.

Socrates soon explicitly indicates what he considers to be one part, at least, of the sophist's art. When Hippias agrees that his art has progressed in the manner of the other arts, Socrates offers a proof that this is the case, at least insofar as the art "has progressed in regard to having the power to practice public affairs along with the private" (282b). Does this power of combining the two realms constitute *the* skill of the sophist and hence fully define his art? Or, is this only one *part* of the art, and the only part which Socrates is willing to admit has seen some progress? Regardless, Socrates mentions Gorgias and Prodicus as evidence that progress has occurred in this seemingly limited capacity, citing both their political activities and their private successes. Before the people, Gorgias "seemed to speak excellently," while Prodicus recently spoke before the council and "was very highly reputed" (282d). Furthermore, both 'made exhibition speeches and

associated with the youth' in private, for which in turn they received great sums of money. Their two-fold art seems to consist, therefore, in earning a great reputation in public, and lots of money in private—and all of this apparently through speech alone. Upon Socrates' mentioning Protagoras in the same vein, Hippias interrupts with his own corroborating evidence: he too has made wonderful amounts of money, and goes so far as to suppose that he has made more money than any other two sophists combined. Whereas Hippias clearly prefers to regard this as indicative of his own excellence, it is subtly being suggested that what is 'artful' about modern sophistry is especially connected with money-making, an activity that consists only in private gain, and that trades on a reputation acquired through public involvement.

Having thus been shown the nature of at least one kind of progress that has occurred in the sophist's art—it has progressed in its power to make money—we are left to wonder whether there is anything more to progress in the 'wise-one's' art *per se*. In particular, does it involve any actual progress in wisdom? Hippias' obtuseness in the dialogue would be some evidence to the contrary. So, too, are Plato's indications that the capacity to make increasing amounts of money does not necessarily imply an increase in the knowledge of the artist, let alone his wisdom. For this capacity depends on those *to whom* they 'seem to speak excellently,' those *by whom* they become 'very highly reputed,' and *from whom* they make so much money. The power of the sophists depends as much on the qualities of their audience as it does on their own art.[8] As Socrates explains, Hippias has given him "a great proof of how much both [Hippias'] wisdom *and that of the human beings of today* differ from the ancients" (283a, emphasis added). The luxuriating of Greece under the influence of imperial Athens, along with its own

[8] Just as the art (and power) of medicine may depend on the 'political health' of the regime.

democratization, may be external factors which contribute to Hippias' power as much as does his own expertise.

With these preliminary judgments regarding the progress of the art of the sophist in mind, we can turn back to the original question. Socrates first asked Hippias why it was that "those men of the past whose names are said to be great in regard to wisdom mostly held themselves back from political activities." However, as we have seen, in 'proving' that the art of the sophist has progressed, Socrates has emphasized the ability to combine diplomatic service with money-making through consorting with the young: this is where the progress has occurred. Now that it has been suggested that the sophist's political activities are subordinate to, and to some extent determined by, the success of his private ones, the original question no longer seems as pressing, for the sophist's political activities no longer seem as intrinsically important.

And indeed, at this point Socrates replaces his original question with another. He again mentions the activities of the ancients, but now shifts the focus onto their private activities. In contradistinction to Prodicus and Gorgias, Socrates says that "none of those men of the past ever thought it worthy to earn money as a wage or to make exhibitions of his own wisdom before all sorts of human beings—so naïve were those men and so unaware of how great the worth of money is" (282cd).[9] He hereby 'explains' why the 'ancients' did not engage in these private activities in the same way, and for the same purposes, as do the sophists. He will soon mention Anaxagoras again, this time not as an example of a wise man staying out of politics, but rather for his 'naïve' disinterest in money:

[9] This term we translate as 'naïve,' or 'simple-minded' (*euēthes*), means literally 'well-habituated,' and implying 'good disposition.' See also *Republic* 348b, where Thrasymachus uses the term to indicate that the just man is a 'naïve simpleton.'

> According to your argument the ignorance of our predecessors is great, since what happened to Anaxagoras, people say, is the opposite of what happened to you. For although a great deal of money was left to him, he neglected it and lost it all—so unintelligent he was at exercising his wisdom. And they say other things of this sort about other men of the past. So that this proof which you have revealed seems to me to be a beautiful one regarding the wisdom of the men of today compared with our predecessors, and it seems to many that the wise man himself must be wise especially for himself. The mark of this is, of course, whoever has earned the most money. (283ab)

So, we should note that whereas Socrates does answer the revised question of why the 'ancients' held themselves back from the private activity of money-making (they disagreed with the 'moderns' about its ultimate worth), he never answers the initial question of why the 'ancients' held back from political affairs.

If we attempt to answer this question on our own, the subtlety of Socrates' questioning becomes evident, as does the coarseness of Hippias' answer. Going back to the question's original formulation, we see this subtlety indicated by its very awkwardness: Socrates asks Hippias why *all or most* of the *reputedly* wise men of the past *apparently held themselves back* from political activities. In considering the list of men that Socrates gives, we notice that its formulation also contains some awkwardness: "Pittacus, Bias, *the associates of* Thales the Milesian, and those still later down to Anaxagoras." And if we depart from the dialogue proper in order to investigate the men themselves, we learn that Socrates' apparently awkward speech actually bespeaks his remarkable scrupulousness. In looking at other historical accounts of these men, we see that they are not to be capriciously collected into a single group of apolitical hermits. In Herodotus, for example, Pittacus and Bias are each politically active at least to the extent that they offer advice to their cities.[10] Aristotle, in his *Politics*, goes so far as to define

[10] For example, at I.27 of his *Histories*, Herodotus is unsure whether it was Pittacus or Bias who told a lie that prevented Croesus, who at the time was expanding his empire east into Greece, from subjecting the Ionian islanders, thus maintaining their freedom. See also I.74 and I.170.

one kind of kingly rule—dictatorship or elective tyranny—by Pittacus' example.[11] Whatever inclination he had to withhold himself from politics was apparently subordinate to the needs and demands of his city.

There is no historical evidence, therefore, that the ancient men Socrates refers to in any way 'lacked the power' or prudence to succeed at both the public and the private, as Hippias was so eager to state. Aristotle recounts a famous story about Thales that further ratifies this. In the *Politics*, Aristotle describes how Thales openly undertook to disprove the kind of accusation leveled by Hippias:

> When people had been mocking him for his poverty, insinuating that his philosophy was of no practical use to him, he drew upon his knowledge of the heavenly bodies to predict a large olive crop, and collecting some money while it was still winter he bought up all the olive presses in Miletus and Chius, securing them by partial payments very cheaply because of the absence of competing bids. When the proper time arrived there was a sudden demand for olive presses, which he then rented out on his own terms, making large profits for himself. (*Politics*, 1259a9)

Thales' actively seeking to prove the potential practicality of his wisdom may point to why Socrates chose not to refer to him directly. Thales proved himself 'worthy' by the very monetary standards Hippias appreciates. It is clear in this example, however, that this kind of activity was the exception for Thales. And indeed, he was also known to Aristotle as the first natural philosopher (*Metaphysics*, 983b).[12] It seems that politics and money-making were not the utmost concerns of any of these men: contrary to Hippias' thesis, the men mentioned by Socrates seem to represent a chronology of decreasing

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[11] Aristotle describes at 1285a how the Mytilenaeans chose Pittacus as dictator in a time of crisis, which is made evident through a drinking song of Alcaeus "they set up Pittacus, of ill parentage, to be tyrant of their gutless and accursed city, with great praise from the assembled throng." He is also described by Aristotle as a framer of laws (one such law was particularly harsh with respect to crimes committed by drunks, see *Politics*, 1274b).

[12] See also Plato's *Theaetus*, where Socrates describes how Thales, "while star gazing and looking up, fell in a well" (174a).

willingness to participate in public activity of any kind. Perhaps this was representative of their wisdom.

The opening passages of the *Greater Hippias*, then, have Socrates raise questions that are significant with respect to the theme of the *kalon* (the beautiful/noble/fine), and in particular the topic of beautiful activities and pursuits and wisdom, which are brought up later on but not discussed explicitly. We have learned that Hippias pursues money and reputation, but have little indication that he has any genuine care for real wisdom—and this necessarily detracts from his beauty. It does not take long for Socrates to cast the self-assured Hippias in a negative, even 'ugly/ignoble,' light. Despite the pride Hippias takes in his role in public affairs, his motives seem to be mainly private ones—he primarily covets money and reputation, to the detriment, perhaps, of his pursuing wisdom. Moreover, what is suggested in this opening discussion is repeatedly ratified in the course of the dialogue. But we are left with an unsatisfying account of the activities and motives of the ancients. What did they do if they did not engage in *either* the public or the private in the manner of Hippias and the other modern sophists, and why? We learn only that some of them supposedly 'held back' from political activity, and did not pursue private monetary gain by showing off their wisdom indiscriminately in public—in contradistinction to Hippias and other famous sophists who unite these two activities primarily for the sake of the latter. The recognition of this difference heightens our awareness of the tension between Hippias and Socrates. As becomes clear, Socrates shares the three characteristics he attributes to the ancients: he does not engage in political activity, does not take money for teaching, and does not make public displays of

his wisdom.[13] We have learned something about Hippias' activities and motives already; Socrates demonstrates his activity to us in the dialogue, and also explains (if somewhat elliptically) his motives. Plato would have us consider the beauty of their respective actions and ends, paying close attention to what each considers the role of wisdom to be in public and private life.

The Unlawful Spartans (283b-285b)

Having concluded that "it seems to many that the wise man himself must be wise especially for himself" and that the mark of this is "whoever has earned the most money," Socrates professes a curiosity about where Hippias makes the most money, puckishly suggesting it must be in Sparta, where Hippias (by his own account) spends the most time. Socrates exploits Hippias' conception of the good throughout the discussion—the good as practically equivalent to making lots of money. This creates a nice dramatic irony when other kinds of goods arise in the discussion, such as virtue, tradition, laws, and truth. The disjunction existing between what Hippias actually values and these other kinds of goods, to which he pays lip service, ultimately reflects the incoherence of his life and soul.

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[13] Cf. *Apology* 31c, where Socrates publicly explains aspects of his activity:

> Perhaps, then, it might seem to be strange that I do go around counseling these things and being a busybody in private, but that in public I do not dare to go up before your multitude to counsel the city. The cause of this is what you have heard me speak of many times and in many places, that something divine and daimonic comes to me, a voice—which, of course, is also what Meletus wrote about in the indictment, making a comedy over it. This is something which began for me in childhood: a sort of voice comes, and whenever it comes, it always turns me away from whatever I am about to do, but never turns me forward.
>
> This is what opposes my political activity, and its opposition seems to me altogether noble. For know well, men of Athens, if I had long ago attempted to be politically active, I would long ago have perished, and I would have benefited neither you nor myself. Now do not be vexed with me when I speak the truth. For there is no human being who will preserve his life if he genuinely opposes either you or any other multitude and prevents many unjust and unlawful things from happening in the city. Rather, if someone who really fights for the just is going to preserve himself even for a short time, it is necessary for him to lead a private rather than a public life.

Such a juxtaposition arises immediately in connection with Sparta. Hippias is concerned ultimately with private gain, though professing to be an educator; and he is a frequent envoy to Sparta, where the goal of education is singularly public, concerned as it is with the preservation of the city as a whole. Upon Hippias' swearing emphatically that he has earned no money at all there, Socrates feigns surprise. How wondrous and marvelous a thing it is that even though Hippias seems to concede that money is the greatest good, he nevertheless spends his time in Sparta and is not paid for his troubles! What accounts for this puzzling inconsistency? Is it because Sparta lacks the funds to pay Hippias? We are assured that this is not the case. It must be some other failure on the part of either Hippias or Sparta. In order to unravel this 'mystery,' Socrates 'innocently' introduces other standards of the good, for it seems that a conflict of goods must be involved.

He first examines more closely the 'goods' that Hippias claims to offer. Although he had ignored the question earlier, now Socrates refers to what this elusive 'art of the sophist' offers in return for the money and reputation it seeks for itself, asking: "Isn't your wisdom the sort that makes those who associate with it and learn it better in regard to virtue?" (283c).[14] Not surprisingly, Hippias agrees that his wisdom is of this kind. He is able to offer a universal human good (virtue) in return for the most conventional one (money).[15] And as Hippias' following responses suggest, *everyone* formally desires to

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[14] This 'move' on Socrates' part leaves Hippias hopelessly compromised. He obviously cannot deny that he teaches virtue, but given the types of things he *does* teach (cf. 285cd, 287b, and LH 303b), this is probably not how he would define the education he provides. Protagoras is placed in a similar position throughout the dialogue bearing his name, and such an argument is the source of Thrasymachus' blushing at *Republic* 350d.

[15] One might still wonder, how so. Is Hippias' art like Daedalus' art of sculpting, seeking to produce beautiful men, just as sculptors produce beautiful form out of stone? Or is it more akin to the next expertise that Socrates mentions—the skill of "those who know how to hand down horsemanship" (284a). Does

become better—including the Spartans—although we might add that people by no means substantively agree on what they mean by 'better.' Moreover, Hippias also agrees that the Spartans have good laws precisely because they give so much honor to virtue (283e). Why, then, do they still refuse to pay Hippias?

Socrates delicately suggests that in some way Hippias may be at fault for this predicament, although the content of his teachings is clearly not to blame. Perhaps, despite its being good, the education Hippias provides is still not *as* good as the teachings offered by the Spartans themselves. Or, perhaps Hippias was simply unable to persuade either the Spartan youths or their fathers that what he had to offer was better.[16] Hippias rejects the former suggestion outright. "In no way whatsoever" are the Lacedaemonians better able to educate their own children; indeed, he "among human beings knows how to hand this [virtue] down to someone else most beautifully" (284a). The second suggestion, that Hippias is in some way lacking the power of persuasion with respect to the Spartans, is never taken up, though this would seem to be the most embarrassing prospect insofar as powerful speech, or rhetoric, is one of his *fortes*. Hippias does, however, implicitly admit that in Sparta he encounters a force that is beyond the reach of his rhetorical powers: the Law, backed up as it is by ancestral tradition. Hippias tells us:

> It is not lawful for them to employ a foreign education. For know well, if anyone else had ever received money there for an education, I would have received by far the most—at least they enjoy listening to me, and they praise me—but as I say, that is not the law. (284c)

And so we learn that it is the Spartan laws (the same laws he has just agreed are good) that are to blame for this 'wondrous' and 'marvelous' situation wherein Hippias is

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Hippias know best how to make men better like an expert horse-trainers make horses better—that is, more useful?

[16] We see in the *Theages* that Socrates is able thus to persuade some Athenian youths *and their fathers*, apparently without making any overt efforts to that end.

prepared to provide the greatest of goods, but is refused the opportunity to do so, and consequently must forego monetary recompense.

According to Hippias' own account, the Spartan laws are good and do honor virtue, but also prevent his *teaching* virtue. Hippias is capable of providing the Spartans great goods, but they will not allow it because of ancestral tradition, which thereby "prevents them from acting correctly rather than making mistakes" (284c). But the tradition must be 'incorrect' in light of something, something higher and more authoritative than mere tradition and positive law. As soon becomes clear, Plato leads us away from Hippias' conventional standards of his own private good towards the loftiest standards of the public good. For the moment at least, we will no longer be examining Hippias in light of other men, but the Spartan regime in light of 'natural law.' And although Hippias was not open to the implicit suggestion that his activities and motives might not be the highest, he will very easily acquiesce in an argument that treats the whole Spartan way of life with the utmost flippancy. As we soon see, he will more willingly agree that the most famously law-abiding people in Greece are a nation of lawbreakers than even begin to consider his own shortcomings.

Supposedly in an effort to gain an understanding of these perplexing Spartan laws, Socrates begins by asking the obvious: is law harmful to a city or helpful? Hippias obligingly answers that it is set down for the sake of helping, but is sometimes harmful if it is set down badly. Socrates asks "whenever those who undertake to set down the laws mistake what is good, do they mistake what is lawful and law?" (284d). Hippias concedes that this is so 'in precise speech,' but points out that 'Human beings are not accustomed to use words this way.' It is here that Socrates unveils two important (and

seemingly interrelated) aspects of Hippias' character: his disdain for the many, matched with a professed preference for 'knowers,' and the truth. Socrates asks who it is that do not use words precisely, those who know or those who do not? Because Hippias himself answers rather imprecisely that it is 'the many,' Socrates has to inquire further as which who he means—are the many those who know the truth? Here Hippias responds emphatically with 'of course not.' But as Socrates' questioning has made so abundantly clear, Hippias derives great satisfaction from the honor he receives from 'the many.' He also tends to agree with them, at least according to Socrates, in several judgments of the utmost importance.[17] A profound inconsistency in his life is hereby revealed. At the same time, Hippias acknowledges that there is a standard against which common opinions should be tested—namely, the truth, and the consistency that the truth necessarily involves. So, in the dialogic exchange where truth is emphasized more than anywhere else in the dialogue (284e), Socrates is able to unveil clearly the inconsistency of Hippias' way of life: his relishing the honor he receives from those whom he despises.

With respect to this particular argument, the 'truth' happens to be advantageous to him—or so he thinks. In quick succession, he is led to a conception of the lawful, however, that is so 'idealistic' as to pertain only to 'cities in speech.' For he agrees that "those who know consider that, in truth, for all human beings, the more helpful is more lawful than the less helpful" (284e).[18] Notice, this is true for all humans, those who know and (equally) those who do not: what is more *helpful* for them is 'by nature' more

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[17] Most notably, he agrees with the conventional opinion that the mark of wisdom is whoever has made the most money (cf. 304b).

[18] The word translated 'helpful' here is *ōphelimon*. Sweet uses 'beneficial' here, which conveys the meaning well. Generally, however, he uses 'helpful,' and as such I have chosen to do so here and throughout. It is the same word as is used as a definition of the beautiful at 296de, as well as that used for 'helpful pleasure' at 303e.

lawful—not, that is, what is more *truthful* is more lawful.[19] Using this standard, combined with the assumption that Hippias' teachings are more helpful than the traditional Spartan education, Socrates attributes to Hippias the view that "the Lacedaemonians break the law by not giving you gold and turning over their own sons to you."[20] Thus, they are found to be "lawbreakers, and to be so in the most important matters, though they seem to be the most law-abiding" (285b). The definition of the lawful they have arrived at is perfectly uncompromising. It requires perfect knowledge of the good, or more precisely of "the greatest good for a city" (cf. 284d). Only what is perfectly helpful to the city in light of such knowledge would be fully lawful, and anything that is not most helpful is 'less lawful'—whatever in practice that might mean. Against this standard, Spartan positive law is easily shown to be defective, as would any actual or particular set of laws. And the Spartans themselves, in following their own laws (however scrupulously) become 'lawbreakers' by this specious interpretation of 'natural law.' Hippias, however, is quite easily reconciled to these 'perfect' laws that would make him that much more affluent: "I concede this, for you seem to me to be stating the argument to my advantage" (285b). With this, we may suspect that he reveals his *real* standard for argumentation. He has professed in this very section that he aligns himself with the few who know the truth, and here we get an indication that Hippias judges the truth very much in terms relative to his own advantage. Perhaps it is in this that we see his greatest kinship with the 'many' he has just ridiculed. Much as they allegedly fail to

[19] This truth, for example, could be devastating to wholesome political life. Natural law certainly informs everyday decisions about what is just and unjust, but self-conscious discussion about its essence cannot help but breed dissatisfaction with positive law. It may be very beautiful to try to understand the truth about natural law and justice, but it is also an inherently dangerous act. The same may be said for questions about Beauty.

[20] If the more helpful is more lawful, it does not necessarily follow that the less helpful is downright *unlawful*, rather than merely less lawful—hence the conclusion is based not only on false assumptions, but also on blatant errors in logic.

understand the law properly as being whatever is truly helpful (perhaps precisely because it so often does not seem to be to their advantage), Hippias fails to understand the truth—for the truth about the Spartans cannot be the one they have arrived at (i.e., that the Spartans are lawbreakers). Needless to say, the conclusion they have reached, based on questionable assumptions and logical errors, reflects adversely on Hippias as an educator.

Most obviously questionable is the assumption that Hippias' education in virtue would be most helpful for all the Spartans. In order to grant that his education would be helpful to anyone, a distinction would have to be drawn between the virtue of a citizen, and human virtue simply—though no regime would readily concede the pertinence of the distinction, and the Spartans least of all. It is *possible* that the 'wisdom' Hippias distributes in private could be helpful to human beings as such, irrespective of their regime, but it is also possible that it is nonetheless antithetical to civic virtue. And it is this latter possibility that seems more likely the root cause of Sparta's laws regarding education. These are strictly for the sake of public service: to turn youths into 'good Spartans,' something alien teachers could hardly do. This means that they forego promoting individual virtue for the sake of civic virtue. While components of the education Hippias offers in private might help a few Spartans attain a higher 'human virtue,' it most certainly would not be helpful to the Spartan regime.

In studying politics, we quickly learn that there are competing conceptions of what is 'most helpful'—and in part at least the differences may be rooted in competing conceptions of what is most beautiful (alluded to in this dialogue at 294d). The Spartan and Athenian examples are almost paradigmatic in this regard. The two regimes each honor distinct conceptions of virtue, and the educations provided in each differ

accordingly—arguably cultivating distinct conceptions of what makes for a beautiful human being. As we have seen, the Spartan education is directed almost uniformly towards making Good Spartan Citizens. The Athenian education, in contrast, also promotes 'gentlemanliness,' or human virtue, to the detriment, perhaps, of civic virtue. Whether any education exists that is capable of fully harmonizing *both* is a major practical and theoretical problem in politics. This, in turn, would seem to depend on whether there is a form of regime in which civic virtue fully comprehends human virtue.

In the present conversation, Hippias and Socrates collapse any and all distinctions (as well as possible tensions) between different types of virtues and their benefits.[21] The benefits rendered by the Spartan laws—that they prevent private corruption by foreign influence—are the most conspicuously neglected. This makes for a rather crude analysis of positive law and its relation to natural law, which is only heightened by the logical error in the conclusion of their analysis whereby they preclude any law that is not entirely helpful from even 'partaking' in the lawful. Judging from Socrates' argument here, there are no gradations of lawfulness, only perfect Justice or absolute lawlessness. The Spartans laws are (supposedly) unlawful because they are not helpful to Hippias' potential students, despite the acknowledgment that the Spartans seem to be the *most* lawful. And this 'seeming' is far from irrelevant. Is it not indicative of the fact that the Spartan laws, compared with those of other regimes, come closer to being helpful to most of its citizens, as suggested above? Even if they forego the potential benefits of a Hippias (or a Socrates), the laws of Sparta may be helpful to Sparta as a whole without maximally benefiting each individual. That the contrary conclusion is reached so easily is

[21] We should recall here that in the background of this conversation is the Peloponnesian war between Athens and Sparta.

surprising, given that Hippias has just conceded that "those who set down the law set it down as a very great good *for the city*" (284d). How could the Spartan lawgiver have been so misguided? As we have seen, it is more likely that the Spartan laws regarding education are the least misguided in Greece, in terms of the good they provide to the city *as a whole*.

In fact, the singularity of the Spartan example alerts us to some more radical questions we might ask about positive law and natural law. Insofar as the Spartan laws *do* seem to have been set down as "a very great good for the *city*" (emphasis added), they are distinguished by that fact. The positive law of most regimes stands in contrast to this; in them, it seems rather to be established by the ruling group for their own sake.[22] When Hippias agrees that those who set down the law set it down as a very great good for a *city*, one cannot help but think of Thrasymachus, Glaucon and Adeimantus, who so strenuously argue against this view in the *Republic*. They each present a related view that radically undermines the understanding of the laws that Socrates and Hippias have arrived at here. They suggest that the laws are *not* helpful to everyone. Rather, the laws are set down by the powerful primarily for their own sake, and may actually be harmful to the rest. This can mean that in a democracy, the laws are helpful collectively to the powerful many but harmful to the ambitious few whose very ambition the laws seek to moderate and restrain (the view with which Glaucon and Adeimantus challenge Socrates

[22] Hobbes would say that positive law as such is good for the city, ignoring the classical distinction that is so clear in Aristotle between right and wrong rule—the former being for the sake of the whole, the latter only for the sake of the rulers.

in Book II).[23] In this, they indicate a real problem with positive laws even such as those of the Spartans, which possibly neglect human virtue for the sake of civic virtue.

That Hippias neglects to consider this in the present context is not surprising. For, if he were to take this approach, he would have to acknowledge that the Spartan laws might be correct in disallowing his educating privately, insofar as he may have to acknowledge that his teachings are potentially harmful to the city—which is not something prudent to admit, regardless of where you are. A passage in the *Protagoras* suggests to us that Hippias had thought about alternate views of the laws, if not to the same degree of precision as a Glaucon. There he outlines what might be considered his actual view of what law is, for his remark is unsolicited. He says, "I believe we are all relatives and kin and [fellow] citizens, not by law but by nature. For by nature like is akin to like, whereas law, that tyrant of humanity, often compels things contrary to nature" (337c-d).[24] According to the Hippias of the *Protagoras*, there is no such thing as natural *law*—the very idea would be an oxymoron. He wants radically to separate nature from law (or convention)—making the one helpful and the other harmful. He will argue that law *as such* is harmful. But in order to do so, natural law *is* exactly what he appeals to, whether he is aware of it or not. For he is critiquing positive law in the name of what is natural, and in so doing he necessarily appeals to what is 'naturally lawful' (i.e., he does not refer to what is naturally random and cruel, but to what is properly ordered and helpful). Hippias is thus confused about his use of these words, and though he has a critique of the laws and lawfulness that he might pose, he does not level it against

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[23] Although it is clear that Glaucon may not have the final say in that discussion, the question is of utmost importance, leading as it does to the question of the role of the individual in relation to his polity, and the question of whether the polity exists for the individual or vice-versa.

[24] Perhaps it is no wonder that Hippias thinks of law as tyrannical, since he constantly has to adjust his teachings and 'research' to whatever laws are prevailing.

Socrates. It is possible—even likely—that Hippias does not raise the issue here because he simply does not think of it. Instead, the sophist's vanity has allowed him to be led very far away from his 'truth' and *the* truth. This shows us the extent of Hippias' manipulability; the rest of the dialogue will reveal the extent to which he resides in the realm of convention.

It is clear that Socrates and Hippias go astray in their discussion of the Spartan laws regarding education, for the reasons discussed above. This brief consideration of the questions that they overlook does more, however, than reveal Socrates' willingness to engage in 'sophistry' and Hippias' vulnerability to his own art. 'Activities,' 'pursuits' and 'lawful things' are important topics of the prologue, while also being important problems of the second part of the dialogue. Focusing on 'these things concerning laws and pursuits' is something that Socrates persuades Hippias to *avoid* towards the end of the dialogue—thus drawing attention to them—out of a concern that they might interfere with the definition of the Beautiful which they are then defending. He is particularly concerned about the laws, saying "let us be patient with the argument that the pleasant that comes through these [hearing and sight] is beautiful, without bringing the issue of the laws into the center" (298d). In the prologue, however, it seems that Plato has Socrates do just this. That is, he 'brings this issue of the laws to the center,' for the treatment of the Spartan laws is the central discussion of the prologue. Moreover, as we have seen, it is not just a discussion of the Spartan laws in general, but a discussion of the laws regarding 'educational *pursuits*' in particular.

Given the problems that arise when we begin to consider these laws more carefully, we begin to understand why Socrates decides to avoid the topic later on.

Merely recognizing the distinction that exists between positive law and anything that might reasonably be called 'natural law' makes an attempt to define their respective beauty or nobility that much more daunting. Recognizing the distinctions between public and private education and between civic and human virtue has a similar effect. Would 'beautiful laws' forsake the private and human virtue for the sake of the public and civic virtue? Is this precisely what beautiful laws do? The Spartan laws prevent private education by foreigners for the sake of, it would seem, civic virtue. It is quite plausible that their laws are the most helpful for all the Spartans *as a whole, as a polity*, if not optimally so for each and every individual Spartan. Are laws that 'protect' the polity from a Hippias (or a Socrates) for the sake of the whole most helpful? In short, do the laws necessarily forsake the truly beautiful human being for the sake of the beautiful regime? Or is there a *natural* law that would be helpful to all together and to each separately? Are these two kinds of benefits somehow reconciled in natural law? And why do we so easily speak of helpful laws, whereas the phrase 'beautiful laws' somehow seems strange to us? With such questions in mind, it is no wonder that Socrates sets 'law' aside in his later discussion with Hippias; Plato would not have his reader do the same.

Insofar as Socrates does not seriously engage Hippias in something even approaching the above discussion at any point in the dialogue, we are forewarned with respect to the difficulty of the substantive issues at hand. The discussion of the laws also, and more concretely, provides a helpful forewarning as to the difficulties involved in any formal effort to find definitions. As we have seen, in order to understand the Spartan laws, Socrates turns to a discussion of the nature of Law *per se*. This problem is implicit

in that of trying to understand particular laws in light of natural law. Hippias emphasizes the linguistic difficulties involved, pointing to the distinction between precise speech regarding what is lawful and the speech of the many, 'who are not used to using words in this [precise] way.'[25] Socrates will in turn emphasize the extent to which these linguistic problems reflect a more serious problem of the understanding. This problem of the understanding is the one which was asked in the first place: "Whenever, then, those who undertake to set down the laws mistake what is good, do they mistake what is lawful and law, or what do you mean?" (284d). Socrates draws out Hippias' assumption that the many he refers to use words imprecisely because they *do not know the truth*. They do not make merely a linguistic error, they make a mistake about reality: the semantic issue Hippias points to is reflective of more fundamental epistemological and ontological complexities. Despite the conclusion of the present argument, which suggests that the Spartan laws are actually not laws, it seems clear that the Spartan laws are still *something*. Moreover, their being called laws is not merely a wonderful linguistic coincidence—it seems that it is grounded in our *recognition* of an actual *relationship* between particular laws and 'the lawful' itself. A subtler definition would need to begin to account for these ontological and epistemological perplexities.

In searching for the definition of the lawful, Socrates and Hippias seem to agree with what Socrates' 'alias' will suggest later on in the dialogue—that the concern is not what *seems to be* to the many, but what *is* (cf. 299b). We are thereby forewarned that

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[25] Bacon's descriptions of the 'Idols of the Marketplace' in the *New Organon* outline this problem very clearly. In Aphorism 43 he writes:

> There are also illusions which seem to arise by agreement and from men's association with each other, which we call idols of the marketplace; we take the name from human exchange and community. Men associate through talk; and words are chosen to suit the understanding of the common people. And thus a poor and unskillful code of words incredibly obstructs the understanding...Plainly words do violence to the understanding, and confuse everything; and betray men into countless empty disputes and fictions.

this needs to be the goal of any search for definition.[26] But as the conclusion of their discussion of the laws shows us, any definition of the beautiful that they arrive at must account for the particulars, and for common opinion. The absurd treatment of the laws in the prologue illustrates how easy it is to be led astray by seemingly rational, purely formal propositions that ultimately do injustice to the phenomena.

Beautiful Pursuits (285b-286a)

Having discovered that the Spartans break the laws in not giving Hippias gold and turning their sons over to him to be educated, one further 'perplexity' remains for Socrates. What does Hippias' activity in Sparta actually entail? What mutually beneficial transaction occurs there? Hippias has already revealed the essence of this transaction, and the way in which their goods are reconciled: the Spartans enjoy listening to him, and in return they offer praise (284c). Socrates now inquires about Hippias' substantial contribution, asking him "What sorts of things *do* they praise you for and enjoy hearing?" (285b). This is the last topic they will discuss before Socrates turns their conversation to a focused consideration of the Beautiful. It is perhaps most remarkable in the way that it sets up a disjunction between different types of educational pursuits. We see Socrates, as if utterly naïve about Sparta, 'guessing' the types of things that Hippias must tell the Spartans about, with all of his guesses turning out to be utterly erroneous. Those things which Socrates pretends to assume would be most pleasant for Spartans to

[26] Although Socrates will make this explicit in their search for the beautiful, Hippias will have difficulty abiding by this distinction. He intuitively grasps the 'seemingly' beautiful, or beautiful particulars. Socrates' surrogate may suffer from the opposite difficulty: he is so consumed by the necessity of giving a rational account of the beautiful that he *seems* to deny the possibility of experiencing it without possessing such an account (cf. 304de).

hear are very different from the types of things they actually do enjoy hearing, and Hippias admits to being entirely ruled by their tastes (285e).

Socrates conjectures that the Spartans must most enjoy hearing those things about which Hippias knows 'most beautifully, the matters concerning the stars and events in the heavens' (285c).[27] Hippias is surprised at this suggestion, for the Spartans, he says, "don't even put up with" these things. Nor does he teach them geometry, or give exhibitions regarding calculations, which are Socrates' next guesses. The Spartans have no taste for these things. As Hippias explains, "many of them, so to speak, don't even know how to count" (ibid.). Could there be a more dismissive indication of their rusticity? Socrates is very far off the mark, and he tries again. Perhaps it is not Hippias' most *beautiful* knowledge that the Spartans enjoy hearing, but those things which he "among human beings knows how to *distinguish* most precisely—what pertains to the power of letters and syllables and rhythms and harmonies" (285d). This suggestion elicits amused exasperation from Hippias: "Harmonies and letters indeed, my good man!" (285d). Socrates' proposals strike Hippias as preposterous. He does not deny knowing about these things, but they are subjects about which the Spartans exhibit no interest. That Hippias' responses are so emphatic suggests that they may even be hostile towards these types of knowledge.

It is striking, therefore, that Socrates calls these subjects Hippias' most beautiful (*kalos)* and precise kinds of knowledge, and it is important to consider why this may be.[28]

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[27] The word translated here as 'matters' is actually *pathemeta*, which is a very important word in the dialogue. Thus Plato's use of the word *here* is conspicuous. It is the same word which is translated later on as 'affection,' and is similarly part of the locution 'being affected' (at 300b-301a, 302a-c). See Sweet, n42. Perhaps a more literal translation here would be 'the experiences concerning the stars and events of the heavens.'

[28] We might notice that Socrates does not say that astronomy is the most beautiful kind of learning, only that it is what *Hippias* knows most beautifully.

Given the theme of the dialogue, it is especially true with regards to the former descriptor, and indeed special attention must be given to all of the usages of the word *kalos* in the dialogue. Why does Socrates call astronomy Hippias' most beautiful knowledge? Perhaps astronomy is beautiful because the stars and events in the heavens are themselves such a pleasant sight, that the earth exists beneath a canopy of beauty. Perhaps this is because of the apparent orderliness of the heavens, and the supreme lawfulness the events there seem to manifest. One might presume that natural aesthetic assessments of the Heavens carry over as well to these studies, making Socrates' comments about their being beautiful things to know seem rather benign.

In the *Republic*, Glaucon suggests something along these lines with respect to the beauty of astronomy. Not only is knowledge about astronomy useful (cf. 527d), but it also "compels the soul to see what's above and leads it there away from the things here" (529a). Socrates' response to Glaucon's intuition, however, is (for most of us, I presume) quite unintuitive, and is revealing with regards to the philosopher's perspective on these matters. He scoffs at Glaucon's idea, suggesting rather that "as it is taken up now by those who lead men up to philosophy it has quite an effect in causing the soul to look downward" (529b). He goes on to describe what he means more precisely:

> In my opinion, it's no ignoble [*aggenōs*] conception you have for yourself of what the study of the things above is. Even if a man were to learn something by tilting his head back and looking at decorations on a ceiling, you would probably believe he contemplates with his intellect and not with his eyes. Perhaps your belief is a fine [*kalos*] one and mine naïve [*euethikos*]. I, for my part, am unable to hold that any study makes a soul look upward other than the one that concerns what *is* and is invisible. And if a man, gaping up or squinting down, attempts to learn something of sensible things, I would deny that he ever learns—for there is no knowledge of such things—or that his soul looks up rather than down even if he learns while floating on his back on land or sea... These decorations in the heaven, since they are embroidered on a visible ceiling, may be believed to be the fairest [*kallista*] and most precise of such things; but they fall far short of the true ones... (529bc).

Given Hippias' outlook through the rest of the dialogue, it does not seem unfair to assume that he would study Astronomy in the very way that Socrates decries in the *Republic*.

As such, it is likely that when Socrates calls Hippias' knowledge of Astronomy 'beautiful,' he is doing so ironically. Indeed, often throughout the dialogue Socrates will describe things as beautiful in a provocative way. The opening line of the dialogue, where he greets Hippias as the "beautiful and wise," attests to this. Earlier he had called Hippias' boasts about his earnings in Sicily and Inycum a 'beautiful proof' (283b); he will soon flatteringly tell Hippias 'clearly you know more beautifully' (288e); and later his 'surrogate' will 'say' that Hippias 'speaks beautifully' (299c). Such a usage reveals a possible ambiguity inherent in the Beautiful as we understand it and use the term. At the very least, it suggests a radical disjunction between the Beautiful and the True. Just as the laws of the Spartans are seen to be ambiguously lawful, perhaps any beautiful person or thing is only ambiguously so, and calling some*thing* beautiful is therefore necessarily 'imprecise speech.' That Socrates refers to Hippias himself as well as his knowledge and speech as beautiful points to a danger inherent in Beauty—that it can be so deceptive as to actually 'cause the soul to look downward.' That said, men like Glaucon may be educable, and their notions about beauty refined.

The discussion of Astronomy in the *Republic* takes place during a much longer treatment of what Socrates treats as the 'pre-philosophical education.' The whole of this long section of the *Republic* is relevant to the present passage of the *Greater Hippias* insofar as it deals with all the subjects that Socrates raises as he questions Hippias about his activity in Sparta. Taken together as they are presented in the *Republic*, these studies

are meant to be the pursuits undertaken in the City in Speech as a preparation for dialectics. If each these studies are engaged in properly, 'for the quest after the fair and the good,' they are beneficial (cf. 531c).[29] It is made clear throughout the discussion in the *Republic*, however, that, in each case, pursuit of the studies for any other reason is not *philosophically* beneficial.[30] As in the case of Astronomy wrongly pursued, they may even cause the soul to look downward, in the sense that they tie the soul to the perceptual realm of Becoming, rather than liberating it to contemplate Being.

Judging from his actual preparedness for the dialectical conversation that is to follow, we may conclude that Hippias' own 'pre-dialectical' education has been utterly lacking. Furthermore, we have already been given reasons seriously to doubt the legitimacy of Hippias' motivations in his 'pursuit of wisdom,' at least insofar as they compare with the reasons for study outlined by Socrates in the *Republic*. The end of the prologue shows us Hippias' motivations even more clearly. Socrates, having had little success discovering what it is that Hippias does in Sparta, finally asks him outright, and Hippias responds:

> What pleases them most, Socrates, is to hear about the generations of heroes and of human beings and the founding of cities, how in ancient times they were settled, and, in sum, the entire account of ancient things. Consequently, because of them I have been compelled to learn completely and to practice thoroughly all of these sorts of things. (286e)

Hippias thus reveals himself as being exceedingly malleable, a man whose own learning is dictated by his 'clientele.' He says that he has been *compelled* by the Spartans to learn

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[29] The culmination of these studies is described in the following way:

> If the inquiry into all the things we have gone through arrives at their community and relationship with one another, and draws conclusions as to how they are akin to one another, then the concern with them contributes something to what we want, and is not a labor without profit, but otherwise it is. (531d)

That is, the aim is to recognize their unifying basis.

[30] See, however, *Republic* 521d, where Socrates proclaims that their studies "must not be useless to warlike men."

all these many things; thus, he has not pursued them out of a genuine interest. Socrates will emphasize this in his caricature of Hippias' activity in Sparta: "the Lacedaemonians enjoy you because you know many things, and they use you as children use old women to tell them stories in a pleasant way" (286a). Hippias is simultaneously the perfect cosmopolitan and a through-going cave-dweller. It seems that he will do whatever it takes, wherever he is, for the sake of public praise.[31] What would he not do, then, for money?!

Here, then, at the end of the prologue, we are presented with a startling, albeit comic, contrast of types of educational pursuits. The contrast with which we are presented is meant to provoke our thinking about what is most worthy of study, and whether or not the two types are mutually exclusive. The one set of pursuits is concerned primarily with discovering the truth about nature and its laws—with the 'things aloft'—and reminds us of the pre-Socratics (the 'associates of Thales and all those down to Anaxagoras'). These are the kind of men who, according to Socrates, abstain from political things, presumably because their kind of knowledge is best pursued in private. For, as Socrates' *Apology* and Aristophanes' *Clouds* make so clear, it is the kind of

[31] Hippias also hereby seems to be an illustration of what Socrates suggests in the *Republic*:

> Each of the private wage earners whom these men call sophists and believe to be their rivals in art, educates in nothing other than these convictions of the many, which they opine when they are gathered together, and he calls this wisdom. It is just like the case of a man who learns by heart the angers and desires of a great, strong beast he is rearing, how it should be approached and how taken hold of, when—and as a result of what—it becomes most difficult or most gentle, and, particularly, under what conditions it is accustomed to utter its several sounds, and, in turn, what sort of sounds uttered by another make it tame and angry. When he has learned all this from associating and spending time with the beast, he calls it wisdom and, organizing it as an art, turns to teaching. Knowing nothing in truth about which of these convictions and desires is noble, or base, or good, or evil, or just, or unjust, he applies all these names following the great animal's opinions—calling what delights it good and what vexes it bad. He has no other argument about them but calls the necessary just and noble, neither having seen nor being able to show someone else how much the nature of the necessary and the good really differ. (492b-493b)

learning that potentially undermines civic virtue and the good of the city.[32] It is also a type of learning, however, that seems to be more closely related to *truth* than the other 'set' of educational pursuits—those that compose the musical part of the Spartan education. The Spartans enjoy the things the poets commonly speak of (cf. *Ion*, 531c), and which, in contrast to Socrates' list of subjects, are concerned with certain distinctly human things and actions. They are beautiful speeches and tales about beautiful men and actions which serve to educate citizens and preserve the laws, the kind that Socrates deals with so thoroughly in the reformation of the musical education in Book III of the *Republic*. But they are *tales*. And even 'well-born' tales do an injustice to what the philosopher is *primarily* concerned with: the truth.[33]

This may be what Socrates is alluding to in his next comment to Hippias, when he says that Hippias is "lucky that the Lacedaemonians do not enjoy it if someone lists for them our archons beginning from Solon. Otherwise you would have trouble learning them completely." When Hippias replies that he would have no trouble remembering the names, Socrates replies, quite strangely "What you say is true, but I was not thinking of the fact that you possess mnemonic skill." What was he thinking of, then? It seems likely that he is making a reference to the fact that it would be unpleasant for Hippias to have to tell the Spartans about the Athenian archons. This could be because the Athenians have (until the Peloponnesian War) recently been gaining influence in all of Greece, and listing the archons would be an affront to the Spartans. On the other hand, it

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[32] Anaxagoras, the last of Socrates' list of 'wise men of old whose names are said to be great in regard to wisdom,' fled Athens after being accused of impiety. Anaxagoras plays an important role in the *Phaedo*, where Socrates speaks of his youthful interest in natural philosophy, prior to his famous 'turn' towards human things and speeches (97c-98c).

[33] What category does inquiry into the 'beautiful itself' fall into? Is it a pursuit best relegated to natural philosophy, or to poetry? Could it be that Socrates' chosen activity somehow 'beautifully' combines both pursuits into one?

might also be something as simple as the fact that one Athenian archon (a famous tyrant) was named Hippias. Either way, Socrates' point seems to be that Hippias, in appeasing the Spartans, necessarily subordinates truthfulness to his personal conception of utility.

When Socrates likens Hippias to an tale-weaving old woman, and Hippias agrees enthusiastically that such a portrayal is accurate (285e), it is so ridiculous that we are also invited to consider the potential philosophic importance of humor to the dialogue. It is so pervasively funny that it is easy to lose sight of this as a question, but Plato has doubtless chosen this 'comedy' form with a specific purpose in mind. *Here*, at least, we can recognize that the humor of the exchange lies in the 'ugliness' of Plato's portrayal, combined with Hippias' happy corroboration. What man worthy of the name would agree to such an appraisal? It is an especially surprising (or 'unfitting') response coming from the likes of the *vain* Hippias.

Transition: Two Tall Tales (286a-287e)

Hippias' Story

In light of Socrates' denigration of the 'tales' Hippias tells, we are better prepared to assess Hippias' description of his most recent story-telling experience in Sparta—a description which will lead to the explicit discussion of 'the beautiful itself.' Hippias, having just characterized the types of things that the Spartans generally enjoy hearing about, is eager to report the particular speech he has recently given in Sparta. It is a speech for which he has "gained a great reputation there," and which, he now informs Socrates, he will soon be exhibiting in Athens. It is, according to the sophist, concerned

with "beautiful pursuits," and describes "in detail what a young man ought to pursue." Hippias proceeds to give a more substantial description of it with the following:

> I have an altogether beautifully constructed speech about these pursuits which is well composed in various ways, especially in its choice of words. The ostensible occasion for the speech and the beginning of it is something like this. When Troy was captured, the speech recounts how Neoptolemus asked Nestor what sorts of pursuits were beautiful pursuits that would make a young man who practiced them most highly reputed. After this Nestor speaks and proposes to him very many things that are lawful and altogether beautiful. (286b)

Hippias has thus gained a great reputation in Sparta by publicly presenting a beautiful speech about beautiful pursuits.[34] Several aspects of the description are noteworthy. Both the content of the speech itself and Hippias' description of its form are revealing, especially as both aspects of the description have a reflexive character. Is the content of Hippias' speech consistent with the 'reputable' form of his own life? Is his life filled with 'beautiful pursuits? Or, instead, does the form of his speech serve to mask the content of his living?

In order to address these questions, we might first wonder about the possibility of such a peculiar conversation between Nestor and Neoptolemus occurring at all. After all, Neoptolemus was the son of the most famously heroic man of ancient Greece—would this alone not give him adequate knowledge of the beautiful pursuits that would make one reputed? Furthermore, Hippias places their discussion *after* the Trojan war, although ancient accounts all seem to agree that Achilles' son would have already been famous by this time. The accounts do differ, however, with respect to the *kind* of fame they confer upon him—for he is characterized in one place as a bloodthirsty and ruthless killer, but as

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[34] Presumably Hippias believes that the speech will also be beneficial to his reputation in Athens, although in Athens he will exhibit it in the more private environment of a school, *along with* "many other things worth hearing" (286b). The Athenians too, he presumes, would *enjoy* using Hippias "as children use old women, to tell them stories in a pleasant way," but perhaps they would *benefit* more from those things Socrates had mentioned earlier, which Hippias also knows most beautifully and most precisely (such as astronomy, calculation, harmonics, and letters).

a courageous and loyal warrior in the next. Cyclic epics (of which only fragments remain) ascribed the killing of Priam to Neoptolemus, as well as the killing of the infant Astyanax (child of Hector and Andromache). Ibycus also makes him responsible for the sacrifice of Priam and Hecuba's last child, Polyxena, as does Euripides in his play *Hecuba.*[35] Only in Homer, it seems, is Neoptolemus accorded fame rather than infamy. And we might be wary of the circumstances under which such fame is imparted, for Homer speaks only as well of Achilles' son as Odysseus does, and Odysseus does so only when he encounters Achilles miserable in Hades.[36] Perhaps this is not the best time to describe his son's ruthless ignominy (especially if one is as unflinching a 'liar' as Odysseus is made out to be in the *Lesser Hippias*). If our suspicions about Neoptolemus are correct, then this might explain why he is in need of Nestor's advice: his reputation has been of the wrong sort.

We might next therefore wonder what it is precisely that the 'wise' Nestor recounts to Achilles' son, insofar as the most striking aspect of this summary is the way

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[35] Shakespeare vividly captures this interpretation of Achilles' son (in Latin, Pyrrhus) in the player king's speech of *Hamlet:*

> *The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,*
> *Black as his purpose, did the night resemble*
> *When he lay couched in the ominous horse,*
> *Hath now this dread and black complexion smear'd*
> *With heraldry more dismal. Head to foot*
> *Now is he total gules, horridly trick'd*
> *With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,*
> *Bak'd and impasted with the parching streets,*
> *That lend a tyrannous and a damned light*
> *To their lord's murder. Roasted in wrath and fire,*
> *And thus o'ersized with coagulate gore,*
> *With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus*
> *Old grandshire Priam seeks.*

Soon after, the speech refers to Pyrrhus' making "*malicious sport/ In mincing with his sword her [Hecuba's] husband's [Priam's] limbs*" (II.II).

[36] This is also the passage in which Achilles regrets his own choice to die young for immortal fame, and says:

> I would rather be on the soil, a serf to another,
> To a man without lot whose means of life are not great,
> Than rule over all the dead who have perished. (*Odyssey*, X. 489-491)

in which the response Nestor offered departs from the question asked.[37] Whereas Neoptolemus inquired in particular about beautiful pursuits that would make one highly *reputed*, Nestor's reply emphasized beautiful pursuits that are *lawful*. This subtle modification brings our attention to the relations amongst the beautiful, the reputable, and the lawful. It prompts us to reconsider the tension that Socrates seems to point to in the prologue—the tension that can arise between things which make one highly reputed, and the lawful things. Furthermore, each of these latter categories may include things in tension with 'beautiful pursuits.' For example, Socrates directs attention to how the Spartan laws, though proper in some ways, may nonetheless prevent the emergence of full human virtue (and thus full human beauty) by preventing any 'alien' source of education. Given the arguable propriety of Spartan laws, we might be skeptical that the *most* beautiful pursuits are necessarily always altogether lawful (in the 'imprecise' sense of lawful).[38] We notice that Hippias is perfectly willing to subordinate his actions and pursuits to the laws of whichever regime he is in, and his having Nestor replace the 'reputable' with the 'lawful' in his speech is perhaps reflective not only of his self-interest, but of a higher (political) necessity. Aware that his reputation—his appearance of beauty—depends at least in part on his law-abidingness, law-abidingness becomes of primary concern to Hippias. It is clear that the law circumscribes the range of reputable

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[37] In the *Lesser Hippias* we learn that Hippias considers Nestor to be the wisest man of those written of by Homer, Achilles to be the best (or bravest, *ariston*), and Odysseus to be the 'most wily,' or 'versatile' (364c)

[38] The rational study of the heavens—Hippias' 'most beautiful' source of knowing—is a paradigmatic example of the tension between a particular pursuit and the lawful. The trial of Galileo is perhaps the most powerful modern testament to this tension—it was not so long ago that Europe, if not the whole world, believed (much like the ancient Greeks) that the study of the 'things aloft' was a particularly dangerous activity. They outlawed such 'research' (or at least its public dissemination), fearing that the yet uncovered 'truths' of such sciences would undermine people's faith in the gods, if not their entire sense of personal significance. It is by no means clear that they were wrong to hold these fears, and thus enact these laws, despite their surely seeming naïve to any modern-day Hippias.

things to be pursued in any given regime, and in his travels Hippias has become adept in tailoring his activities according to various sets of positive law. In submitting to these political constraints for the sake of the 'reputable,' however, Hippias may ultimately neglect the most beautiful pursuits (pursuits which we might expect would or should make one reputable irrespective of one's regime or time in history).

We can see that the difficulty which Nestor seems to face in responding to Neoptolemus is reflective of the difficulty Hippias faces in Sparta. Hippias claims to have gained a great reputation there—the very thing Neoptolemus asks Nestor about—by means of his speech. And it seems clear that in this speech, he has Nestor ratify the beliefs of the city, which may be one reason the speech is popular. We learn that Nestor emphasizes the lawful amongst the beautiful things, and this will be persuasive to Spartans and Athenians alike to the extent that he does *not* emphasize what Socrates just has—that the positive laws of any given city are divergent from what is truly lawful by nature. It is unlikely that Nestor's response to Neoptolemus would eulogize certain aspects of, say, Achilles' manner of becoming highly reputed.[39] And insofar as Hippias' Nestor is silent about certain types of actions, we may presume that so too is Hippias himself. We can be sure that Nestor gives no account of Hippias' own sophistical activities to Neoptolemus, for this would most certainly not be amenable to Spartan tastes. Thus the reader may surmise the extent to which Hippias' salutary political teaching about 'beautiful pursuits' cloaks his own beliefs about these same things. He

[39] In the *Lesser Hippias*, we learn that Hippias nevertheless speaks very highly of Achilles, and so we might presume that his Nestor speaks well of him as well. But we might also surmise that Nestor's focusing on the lawful would most likely prohibit him from emphasizing, for example, Achilles' wrath, leading as it does to actions such as his temporarily abandoning the battle at Troy, and his terrible treatment of Hector's corpse (dragging Hector's body for eleven nights broke the code of honor among warriors). Almost surely Hippias does *not* have Nestor glorify the virtue of Odysseus to the Spartans, as Socrates seems to do in the *Lesser Hippias*.

has boasted that his speech has given him a great reputation, but doubtless the speech does not recommend that the Spartans seek a reputation on this same basis. His speech therefore necessarily contrasts with his deeds, and with the truth about what is beautiful and reputable in Hippias' own opinion and experience.[40]

These opinions are exemplified in what Hippias chooses to do, and also in the description he gives of what these deeds involve. His deeds consist of judging, reporting, and giving speeches. As is evident in the description of the speech he gives the Spartans, however, he emphasizes something besides its (rational) content—which is presumably the standard he would claim to use in judging the speeches of others. His speech, he tells us, is "beautifully constructed" and "well composed in various ways, especially in its choice of words" (286b). It is conceivable that having such rhetorical skill renders him less susceptible to the rhetoric of others, but his obtuseness to Socrates' irony leaves one doubtful that this is the case. The 'beautiful activities' Hippias himself engages in include composing beautiful speeches, and this particular 'beautiful speech' about beautiful pursuits also serves to mask the ambivalent nature of his own activity. We are hereby offered a vivid example of a disjunction between such 'public tales' and the truth. Just as Hippias would be inhibited from telling the Spartans about all of the Athenian Archons, so too is he inhibited from offering them a full account of his opinions about beautiful activities. There is no evidence, however, that Hippias is conscious of the disjunction between his speeches and his deeds, and in this we are offered an example of

[40] Hippias' experience tells him that his chosen types of activities are serviceable for gaining a great reputation (articulated at 304a): doubtless he nonetheless glorifies Achilles in his speech, and warlike activities that differ very much from his own.

one way in which someone might unwillingly err, and unwillingly lie, about the beautiful—both to himself and to others.[41]

Socrates' Story (286c-287e)

The duality of beauty that Hippias unconsciously broaches—beautiful pursuits beautifully presented (which tacitly raises the possibility of non-beautiful things being beautified by beautiful speech)—supplies the stimulus for Socrates' inquisition into the subject of the beautiful itself. It is unclear, however, what exactly Socrates is prompted by: Hippias' explicit focus on beautiful *deeds* (which he admits is something that is compelled by the Spartans, and which are probably not the types of deeds he himself engages in), or his implicit emphasis on the power of beautiful *speeches*. Perhaps it is the 'ugliness' (or humorousness?) of this apparent inconsistency. Perhaps it is the relationship between these two things—speeches and deeds—and the ambiguous nature of Hippias' *use* of beauty that prompts Socrates to inquire about the nature of the Beautiful itself, the adequate understanding of which should account for both usages.

Unlike Hippias, who implicitly suggests that he is a judge of both beautiful pursuits and beautiful speeches, Socrates professes at least partial ignorance with respect to the nature of the beautiful itself. Although he admits to censuring some things as ugly and praising others as beautiful (and has already done so repeatedly in his conversation with Hippias, and will continue to do so throughout), he also admits to experiencing persistent perplexity with regards to what exactly such praise and blame are concerned with. Socrates explains to Hippias that this perplexity is induced by 'someone' he knows

[41] Cf. 296c, and various statements in the *Lesser Hippias* suggesting that the willing liar is superior to the unwilling liar.

who makes a custom of challenging him to account for his use of the terms 'beautiful' and 'ugly' (287c). The philosopher claims to suffer embarrassment and frustration from not being able to do so, and he now questions Hippias about the beautiful in order that he may learn from him, with the hopes of eventually confronting this 'someone' more effectively.[42] Allegedly in order to learn *most* effectively, Socrates proposes that he himself might imitate this 'hubristic' fellow's mode of questioning, with the implication that Hippias will in turn take the place of Socrates in the discussion to follow.

Socrates' imitation of this 'someone' in the *Greater Hippias* is a rhetorical move that is unparalleled in the Platonic corpus.[43] We will see in the course of examining the remainder of the dialogue that it is an action that is as revealing as it is striking. As we witness Socrates, Hippias, and this 'phantom interlocutor' interact, significant dimensions of their respective characters are disclosed—dimensions which have implications for our understanding of the meaning and purpose of the dialogue, ostensibly focused as it is on 'the beautiful.' The balance of their conversation provides ample opportunity to consider the manifold elements of Socrates' strategy; at the outset it is sufficient to notice its conspicuousness.

The ploy Socrates engages in here would strike even those unfamiliar with the Socrates of Plato's other works as just that—a rhetorical ploy. But for those who are acquainted with the Platonic Socrates, the rhetorical effect here is complicated by the fact that Socrates, in describing this 'someone,' seems to be describing himself. Even within the parameters of what has ensued between the two men thus far, this identification is warranted. For the insolence of the character Socrates describes seems to be the

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[42] Cf. *Lesser Hippias*, 372b.

[43] Although Socrates himself frequently imitates others, this is the only dialogic occasion where he 'imitates' himself.

embodiment of the insolence that underlies Socrates' treatment of Hippias in the prologue, albeit in an ironic form (which seems lost on Hippias). Furthermore, the concerns of Socrates and his quarrelsome acquaintance seem similar. Underlying the questions that Socrates earlier asked Hippias about the law, for example, are more direct questions very much like those which he claims this 'someone' asks about the beautiful—namely the question of what it is.

In looking to the dialogue as a whole, the evidence to support this thesis—that in introducing this other 'someone' Socrates is actually invoking his own alter-ego—proliferates.[44] Since the plenitude of evidence supplied by the dialogue makes it clear that the 'someone' Socrates is impersonating is himself, it is hardly surprising that this 'alias' cares about nothing but the truth, and so comes across as vulgar, ignorant, and 'very captious' to a person such as Hippias. Whatever other psychological possibilities Socrates' actions here might reveal, his introduction of this 'surrogate' character initially seems simply a rhetorical ploy designed to disarm Hippias' vanity. He has introduced a 'devil's advocate' of sorts, and as in many such scenarios, we may suspect that his own

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[44] Commentators hesitate to make this claim outright. The following is a summary of some of this evidence, which should suffice to set the question aside.

Right away Socrates claims to have a lot of experience in objections, just like his 'alias' (287a). Another piece of evidence in this regard is the fact that Socrates seems to identify with the character to such an extent that later on in the argument he twice seems to take on his voice directly rather than speaking in a narrative mode (cf. 293e-298a, 300b-303e). After several pages of self-conscious impersonation, Socrates ostensibly 'becomes' this other man. That he does this so seamlessly indicates, in the very least, his close affiliation to the man. The most obvious pieces of evidence, however, occur towards the ending of the dialogue, when Socrates has reoccupied his 'own' voice, and again impersonates the other fellow. Hippias has become increasingly frustrated with Socrates' (their) questioning, and repeatedly inquires into the identity of the mysterious interlocutor. Socrates all but explicitly admits that the 'someone' is himself when he replies that the fellow is 'the son of Sophroniscus' (298b). Sophroniscus is the name of Socrates' father. Furthermore, at the very end of the dialogue, Socrates will say the following about the man: "he happens to be very closely related and to live in the same house" (304d).

The behavior and mannerisms of the man throughout betray him more than any specific statement could. Similarly, familiarity with other dialogues might sponsor greater perplexity regarding Socrates' actions than the *Greater Hippias* alone does. Is Socrates providing us with insight into some particular 'part' of his soul? Is the new interlocutor affiliated to his *daimon* in any way? Is there some relation between Socrates' truth-loving 'alias' and the 'interior' Socrates described by Alcibiades in the *Symposium*?

opinions align more closely with this 'advocate's' views than with any he would be willing (for whatever reason) to present in his own name. Socrates' masking himself serves doubly, of course, being also a device of politeness whereby to disarm Hippias' 'pride and prejudice,' either of which might preclude his submitting to interrogation by Socrates directly. By posing as someone who is ignorant, but eager to learn from 'the beautiful and wise' Hippias how to deal with the captious fellow, he ingratiates himself, rather than threatening or offending the sophist's vanity. It is the dramatic irony involved in the ploy, however, that lends it its conspicuousness, not the ploy itself. The strategy is conspicuous in its kinship to sophistry, a type of behavior that seems particularly unbecoming in a philosopher: that *Socrates* of all people is so willing to engage in this kind of 'cheap' trick, and do so unabashedly, is what is most striking. It is the (apparent) inconsistency with the 'dignity' we might regard as appropriate to the philosopher that makes the move so surprising, and so funny. But it is only a superficial inconsistency, for it is Socrates' surrogate who claims to care for *nothing* other than the truth, and he is clearly not the whole of Socrates. An appreciation for irony (and for that matter, an appreciation for beauty?) is not compatible with a pure 'unadulterated' love of truth.

It is with this understanding of the characters and their relationships that we turn back to the text and the question of Beauty, aware that Socrates' 'alias' is meant to represent only an aspect of himself. With that in mind, we can see some interesting details about Socrates emerge. As Socrates proceeds to explain the problem he encounters when he tries to "censure some things as ugly and praise others as beautiful," he also divulges notable information about himself and his chosen activity. He is often

thrown into perplexity by himself. His reaction to this is revealing insofar as it contrasts so markedly with what we learn of Hippias' tendencies:

> I was angry at myself and reproached myself, and I vowed that as soon as I chanced upon one of you wise men, after listening and learning and practicing thoroughly, I would go back to the one who asked the question to do battle again over the argument. (286d)

Thus, Socrates explains to Hippias how he would like to proceed in the argument. He will imitate the other fellow, soliciting a definition from Hippias which he will then attempt to provide objections to. He warns Hippias that he needs to be as precise as possible, so that he won't be "refuted a second time and again be laughed at" (ibid.). Apparently Socrates' reactions to himself consist in a medley of laughter, anger, and reproach. Furthermore, we see that some of his chosen activities are "listening, learning and practicing thoroughly," and "doing battle" over arguments, presumably for the sake of the victory of understanding.

From the outset of their discussion of the beautiful, Hippias demonstrates that he is very far removed from this experience of perplexity that Socrates describes. In contrast to Socrates' 'poverty,' Hippias is flush with confidence. He is certain that he will be able to teach Socrates how to refute the fellow—indeed he goes so far as to say that he could "teach [him] to answer things much more difficult than this so that no human being would have the power to refute [him]" (287b). The 'definitions' of the beautiful subsequently offered by Hippias, as the means to such a refutation, betray the vacuity of his claim. His 'definitions' are no such thing, each being merely examples of beauty—'particulars' of various kinds which he is unable to bring together under some over-arching conception of beauty.

Socrates seems to foresee this difficulty, and makes an effort to prevent Hippias' floundering from the beginning, an effort he will have to repeat painstakingly throughout

their conversation. Hippias needs to be shown again and again the basic premise of definition: that it needs to be some generalization that unites the particulars. Until Hippias grasps the possibility of such a unity existing, the dialectical inquiry into 'the beautiful itself' will prove very frustrating for him. This does not, however, preclude its being very revealing to us.

Having raised the subject of the beautiful, and having explained that his alias' interest is in the beautiful itself, Socrates continues to describe more precisely how the man would approach the discussion. Apparently, if he heard Hippias' Spartan speech about the beautiful pursuits, Socrates' acquaintance would "ask about *nothing else sooner* than about the beautiful—for this is a certain custom of his" (287a, emphasis added). This comment on Socrates' part is striking insofar as the next things his 'alias' actually asks about are Justice, Wisdom, and the Good. The purpose of this initial inquiry therefore seems to be to focus the task at hand: before they can proceed, they need to agree on certain preliminary matters, which presumably contribute to their discussion of the beautiful.[45] The questions the 'alias' asks seem aimed at establishing a 'causal' relationship between certain 'ideas' or 'forms' (these being Justice, Wisdom, and the Good) and their manifestations in the world (these being, respectively, 'just men' [*dikaioi*], 'wise men' [*sophoi*], and 'all good things' [*panta agatha*]. Each of the manifested attributes is, according to the argument, caused by its respective 'form.' Furthermore, in each case the next step is to ascertain whether these 'things' (Justice, Wisdom, and the Good) are things that exist. Having given these examples as paradigms, the surrogate finally proceeds to raise these same questions about Beauty, asking first

[45] We should not overlook the possibility that these other 'things'—Justice, Wisdom and the Good—are somehow related to, perhaps even preeminent examples of *the* Beautiful; and that the alias, in introducing them, is not therefore departing from the course of action Socrates 'anticipates.'

whether all beautiful things are beautiful 'by the beautiful,' gaining Hippias' agreement that it is 'by it' as something that exists.

Here, as is the case so often in the dialogue, Hippias' agreement about these matters seems premature. This brief passage may seem like a simple overview of the basic assumptions that would be undertaken in an examination of any concept, but this simplicity itself is all too beguiling. The questions posed here, and the basic assumptions that Hippias agrees to—about the existence of Justice, Wisdom, the Good, and the Beautiful, and the way in which these 'entities' interact with or relate to the perceptible world—may be true, but they are hardly immediately obvious. Hippias ostensibly seems willing to sanction what appears to be a 'Platonic' metaphysics without raising any questions, much less doubts about it—and his doing so preempts any explicit discussion that might take place about these most fundamental matters. It soon becomes clear that this presumption is unwarranted, and that Hippias ought to have paused and sought further clarification. But his vanity regarding his understanding of these matters precludes his doing so, and thus perhaps also prevents him from experiencing perplexity when it is most warranted.

The reader might find it particularly disappointing that Hippias does not think to clarify *how* these 'things' (Justice, Wisdom, the Good, and the Beautiful) relate to their respective 'instantiations' in the world, as well as to each other—for Plato has structured this discussion in such a way that these questions are not far beneath the surface. For example, Socrates ties Justice and Wisdom to their instantiations in just and wise *people*, whereas the Good is posited as the cause of 'all good things.' We might in turn consider how Beauty operates in this respect, and thereby notice that Beauty (like Justice and

Wisdom, but unlike the Good) seems to be an exclusively human phenomena in that it is only recognized by human beings, but that Beauty itself is much more pervasive than Justice and Wisdom; much like the Good, Beauty's presence spans the human and non-human worlds. It also, uniquely perhaps, is a 'phenomenon' that seems to span the 'visible' and 'intelligible' realms.

Taking up the 'causality' aspect of Socrates' formulation, different questions arise. In conceding that all good things are good by the Good, while at the same time supposing that the just and the wise are such by Justice and Wisdom, are the just and the wise precluded from necessarily being good as well? If each of these things *are* altogether independently of one another, then it is difficult to account for some of them also being qualities that *always* seem to 'overlap.' There seems to be implicit relationships amongst these 'forms,' including the 'form' of Beauty. Whether the *Greater Hippias*, taken on its own, supports a comprehensive examination of these relationships is doubtful. However, as we will see, the dialogue would certainly have us examine the question of how 'things' in general relate to one another. I might go so far as to say that introducing the reader to these issues is the main pedagogical purpose of the dialogue, insofar as Beauty is such a peculiar entity, and practically begs for ontological clarity. And the implications of that examination will bear on our understanding of *how* Justice, Wisdom, the Good, and the Beautiful are or are not interrelated.

Suffice it to say, the nature of such relationships is not self-evident. And whereas in other dialogues Socrates will arouse perplexity about such matters, here with Hippias he is content to base the ensuing conversation on unexamined assumptions. The issues will necessarily resurface, as their consideration will be critical to understanding the

beautiful, especially in its relation to the good. Later on, for example, they will explore the view that the beautiful is the cause of the good, and there Socrates emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between a cause and its effect (297a). They will conclude that the beautiful cannot be good, nor can the good be beautiful, because of the posited causal relationship between the two. Cause and effect, it is implied, must remain independent. This simultaneous independence and interdependence is another way of expressing the essence of what Socrates needs Hippias to understand in order to proceed; that is, that the particular *effects* of a "thing" are different from that thing itself. The beauty of all the beautiful things is an effect of the beautiful itself, which is the cause. Hippias, despite agreeing that "all beautiful things are beautiful by the beautiful," and this latter as something that exists, is unable to differentiate between the two. Hippias is determined to conflate beautiful things with the beautiful itself (287e). He seems to be fixed in the view that beauty does not exist apart from particulars as something in itself, and that it is merely something inherent to individual (primarily material) things. This of course precludes his grasping the essence of Socrates' intention. It may also prevent him from ever seeing the essence of the truly beautiful.

Part II: Hippias' 'beauties' (287e-293e)

Hippias' First Attempt: The Beautiful Maiden (287e-289d)

Hippias' first 'definition' perhaps best bespeaks the vain confidence he has in his rhetorical powers, for it is so blatantly contrary to the parameters Socrates has been trying to establish that it seems as if it must be uttered in jest. At the very least, he appears to be purposefully evading the question. Socrates has made it clear that what is being asked is not what is beautiful but what is *the* Beautiful, and Hippias replies that he will never be refuted if he declares that "a beautiful maiden is beautiful" (287e). Now, his statement may ironically be true (for who *would* deny such an obvious tautology?), but it does nothing to answer the question that was asked. That said, the 'truth' that a beautiful maiden is beautiful does contradict the (false) conclusion Socrates and Hippias reach in this section. Hippias asks Socrates at the outset whether his alias will attempt to refute him on the grounds that what is said is not beautiful, suggesting that if he does so, he will be ridiculous. Socrates replies that the fellow will certainly make the attempt, and that "the attempt itself will show whether he will be ridiculous" (288b). The section concludes with the alias' (supposed) laughing, and Hippias ostensibly agreeing that beautiful maidens are no more beautiful than ugly. Hippias is defeated, but in a way that does make the attempt somewhat ridiculous—he is made to contradict his (true) belief that beautiful maidens are beautiful. It is not that *what* is said to be beautiful (the maiden) is not in fact beautiful; it is that what *is said* is not beautiful, for saying that the beautiful maiden is beautiful does not answer the question.

Instead of proceeding to show Hippias why Beauty itself is not a beautiful maiden, Socrates ends up appearing to refute the claim that the beautiful maiden is

beautiful *at all* (which incidentally *does* serve to refute the idea that the beautiful *per se* is a beautiful maiden). However, his *alias* does not seem to have this as his intention. For he begins by having Hippias agree that there are many other beautiful things besides beautiful maidens, going so far as to attribute beauty to things which are not customarily thought to be particularly beautiful. Not only are some maidens beautiful, but so too are beautiful mares, beautiful lyres, and beautiful... pots.

Socrates' alias attributes the view that there are beautiful mares to the god. This rhetorical ploy is very effective against Hippias, who either is or appears to be very much unwilling to question anything that is said by or about the gods.[1] He is, however, more than willing to question whether or not there is such a thing as a beautiful pot:

> Socrates, who is the fellow? How uneducated he is who dares to use low words this way in a dignified business!

Socrates replies:

> Such he is, Hippias, not elegant but vulgar, taking thought for nothing else but the truth. Nonetheless, the man must be answered.

Hippias eventually concedes that certain kinds of pots that are beautiful, if beautifully made. And Socrates' description of the characteristics of this particular beautiful product of skilled craftsmanship might actually help to account for beauty—a beautiful pot would necessarily be molded by a good potter, be smooth and round and beautifully fired, as well as have two handles, and be large enough to hold 'six choes' (288d). At least we can glean from this that the pot being described is the best in its class, beautiful as a consequence of its size, shape, and texture, as well as useful.

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[1] It seems likely that his piety towards the god is about as sincere as the piety he professed to the dead at 282a. There Hippias admits the following: "I myself, however, am accustomed to praise the men of the past and our predecessors both sooner and more so than I do the men of today, since I take heed of the envy of the living and I fear the wrath of the dead." This occurs just after he has conceded that Daedalus would be ridiculous were he alive today. But as in all such cases, one must wonder whether he is actually aware of his contradictory views and behavior.

Hippias is willing to concede to the questioner that such a beautiful pot is beautiful, but he proceeds to defend the view that 'on the whole' it is not beautiful compared to a mare or a maiden. Here *Socrates* seems to indulge Hippias in finding a rather sophisticated way to refute his alias' 'beautiful pot' thesis:

> "O human being, you do not recognize that the saying of Heraclitus applies well here, that 'the most beautiful ape is ugly in comparison with the class of humans,' and the most beautiful pot is ugly in comparison with the class of maidens, as Hippias the wise asserts." (289a)

This view is an appealing one; Hippias asserts that it is correct. It introduces the notion that there are separate *classes* of things, which is itself a conceptual step away from particular things, and thus a step the implication of which may be difficult for Hippias fully to grasp. It also suggests that these classes can be neatly rank-ordered with respect to their beauty, such that no member of a subordinate class rivals any member in the higher class in this regard.

In discussing apes and humans, and pots and maidens, the thesis seems plausible enough. But these comparisons are somewhat misleading insofar as they make inter-class comparisons of beauty appear much less problematic than they are. If some of Socrates' earlier examples—of, say, the mare and lyre—are brought into the analysis, the 'permeability' of classes in this regard becomes more evident. It is conceivable that there might be a mare so ugly that it would not appear beautiful next to the cutest ape (or at least the most handsome donkey), and surely it is possible to have a lyre that is uglier than the most exquisite piece of pottery. Such exceptions illustrate the possible inappropriateness of attempting to rank whole classes in terms of their beauty. Beauty weaves its way in and out of the innumerable 'classes' of things—bypassing some (like the apes?) altogether. Though the (comparative) beauty within each class may be a fairly

straight-forward matter, the beauty of the world does not abide by strict class categories, and may not admit of such comparisons.[2] Indeed, in our actual aesthetic experience, often such inter-class comparisons seem rather arbitrary—certainly far more problematic than 'comparing apples and oranges,' which, after all, are both fruits. It may or may not be reasonable, for example, to compare the beauty of the night sky to the beauty of a poem. Then again, if the beautiful exists, presumably it also exists as a true standard of beauty by which to make such comparisons and judgments—which, though difficult, may prove very satisfying.

The next part of Socrates' and Hippias' discussion ultimately points to one significant way in which the seeming impossibility of inter-class comparisons does not hold, at least for human beings. Here, Socrates' alias takes Heraclitus and turns him against Hippias' original thesis that the maiden is beautiful. He notes that Heraclitus also says the following: "the wisest human being, in comparison with a god, will appear an ape both in wisdom and in beauty and in all other respects" (289a).[3] On that suspect basis, Socrates suggests that just as the class of pots appear ugly when compared to the class of maidens, so too do the class of maidens when compared to the gods. Socrates asks Hippias whether they should then agree that the most beautiful maiden is ugly in comparison with the class of gods, and the 'pious' sophist agrees, adding, "for who would contradict this?" Insofar as there is a problem with these types of inter-class comparisons with humans and animals, or with animals and instruments, there would be a

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[2] An implicit component of the conversation is the way in which we very easily make intra-class comparisons, and arrive at broad (if not perfect) agreement with respect to what makes for the most beautiful X within the class of Xs.

[3] What 'other respects' might Socrates have in mind here? Are we meant to consider the other ancient virtues, besides wisdom—piety, moderation, justice, and courage? Is it certainly appropriate to think of the Gods being wise and just, but what about moderate, pious, and courageous?

problem here as well. Consider, for example, the notoriously ugly Hephaestus, compared to Helen, the face that launched a thousand ships. But even this comparison is especially problematic, since unlike 'far-surpassing wisdom,' the beauty of the gods is impossible to imagine except in human form, or to judge, given that they are not actually visible.

This is perhaps just the point: that humans are necessarily the measure of all beauty—such that we find it difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a god that is more beautiful than the most beautiful human being. Indeed, this would be precisely the way in which we envision the gods. This fact—that we would 'anthropomorphize' the look of the *divine*—is also revealing with respect to how we judge the beauty of the rest of nature.[4] Inter-class comparisons, as we have seen, may be difficult to the point of seeming impossible, when, that is, the entities being judged are independent of the human things. But it seems that the *effect* on the human soul of the quasi-divine beauty of a beautiful human being (or more often, perhaps, of a beautiful human being of the opposite sex?) will always surpass the beauty of anything else in the visible world. And, the capacity to recognize beauty is an exclusively human power. That said, the beautiful things are not exclusive to the human realm, although its recognition and appreciation seems deeply rooted in our erotic nature, insofar as the beautiful is what we desire.[5] In this sense, 'beauty' expresses our differential response to the various 'objective' qualities of things. As human beings, we are particularly affected by the beauty of other people. Responses to the objective qualities of things thus seem to be informed by the

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[4] Certainly this is not the only respect in which we (or at least the Greeks) anthropomorphize the gods. In the *Republic*, Plato's treatment of the musical education illustrates the way in which actually 'perfecting' the gods necessarily involves *dehumanizing* them—and in particular removing their passions and willfulness.

[5] See Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*, Plato's dialogue on *eros*. Considering the significant role that Beauty plays in the *Symposium*, the dialogue on 'love,' it is striking that this dialogue, on Beauty, refers so seldom to *eros* explicitly—suggesting, perhaps, that when it is (however obliquely) referred to, it is particularly important.

'subjectivity' of our species, as well as the 'subjectivity' of each individual, not to mention the 'subjectivity' created and nourished by our differentiated 'caves' and the educations they provide.

Hippias' unwillingness to question conventional views about the gods (an unwillingness very much appropriate to the education he offers) leads him to agree that the beautiful maiden happens to be no more beautiful than ugly—which is an argument that precludes anything 'of this world' being beautiful (289c). In a way that mirrors their treatment of the Spartans and their laws, Socrates and Hippias have arrived at a conclusion which not only precludes anything but the highest class of beautiful things (i.e. divinities) from being truly beautiful, but (just as the Spartans were deemed downright unlawful) this argument would require the apparent beauty of lesser classes of things to be judged positively ugly. The word 'beauty' thus loses all of its meaning, and beauty itself loses its ontological weight. Nothing we would call beautiful actually *is* so (on this view)—it is all merely illusory, vanishing as a meaningful category (ironically enough) next to the perfect (albeit invisible, hence purely imaginary) beauty of the gods.[6] But if beauty *is* something, as Hippias admitted it is (287d), must it not *exist* irrespective of such comparisons? Surely the beauty we wish to understand—that which we experience—is not confined to the imperceptible realm of the gods.

Though Hippias has agreed that human beauty 'disappears' next to the gods, this counter-intuitive conclusion does not follow from what the phantom interlocutor has said. In contrast to Socrates, the surrogate emphasized the fact that the effect of beauty in an object can be diminished when it is next to something more beautiful (cf. 289a as

[6] Given Heraclitus' quote, it similarly has the effect of precluding any human being from being wise—and would perhaps actually make him as ignorant as the maiden is ugly. This would presumably not be a problem for the 'ever-ignorant' Socrates, although it might be deeply troubling for Hippias.

compared to 289b). He refers to the power the beautiful object exerts upon the observer, rather than the beauty of the object itself. A change in the power of the beautiful object in no way precludes its still actually being beautiful. In no way does it make the thing in question positively ugly. The presence of the gods may, in theory, diminish the *effect* of the beauty of a human being, but it will not eradicate the beauty itself; and as such, the ontological status of the beautiful (as something that simply *is*) is preserved. So too is the beauty of the beautiful maiden, although Hippias does not recognize this, and instead concedes that "in comparison with gods the human class is not beautiful" (289e). In so doing he proves himself to be ridiculous according to his own previously-established standards (at 287b, and reiterated at 290a).

Hippias' Second Attempt: Gold (289e-291c)

Having concluded that Hippias' first effort has not provided what is sought, Socrates now attempts to frame the question differently. He asks what he might have asked earlier in the conversation about the maiden, were he in a more straight-forward mood. For instead of arguing that the most beautiful maidens are in fact ugly, he might have simply asked what it is that is beautiful about beautiful maidens, or what it is that makes beautiful maidens beautiful. In reformulating the question, this is essentially what he asks: "Does it still seem to you that the beautiful itself, by which all other things are adorned and appear beautiful whenever this form becomes present, is a maiden or mare or lyre?" (289d).

Despite Socrates' insinuation that the beautiful involves the presence of a 'form,' or *eidos*, Hippias' next proposal is that "this beautiful" which the questioner is asking

about is (practically speaking) a formless substance, having been cued by Socrates' implying that Beauty is something that 'adorns.' He suggests that it is nothing other than gold, for once anything has been adorned with gold it will appear beautiful (289e). It is a fitting response from Hippias, whose materialism has already been hinted at by Socrates. It is also a response that would invoke increasing ridicule from his relentless questioner, for, according to Socrates, not only will he not accept this answer and attempt to refute it (as in the case of the maiden), but he will also openly mock Socrates for suggesting it (calling him 'deluded'). Socrates then proceeds to do both of these things in the questioner's name. He first demonstrates that gold is not the only beautiful substance (just as the maiden was not the only beautiful thing), then goes on to suggest that substances are only beautiful to the extent that they are also the most appropriate to a particular use.

In order to show that this latest thesis about the beautiful is absurd, the questioner (Socrates claims) will invoke Phidias, the most famous sculptor under the rule of Pericles. He would first have Hippias agree that Phidias was not a bad craftsman, but instead a good one, and then would ask "Do you suppose that Phidias did not recognize this 'beautiful' which you speak of?" (290b). Here Socrates does not allow Hippias to answer the hypothetical question, but pretends to answer himself, albeit with a question: why in particular is the questioner asking this? (290b).[7] The questioner 'responds' by pointing out that the eyes, face, hands and feet of Phidias' famous statue of Athena were not made out of gold, but rather of ivory. If the beautiful is gold, then was he mistaken in using ivory? Hippias readily concedes that Phidias made the statue correctly, since ivory too,

[7] Perhaps Socrates answers here to prevent Hippias from pointing out that the statue may not *all* be made of gold, but it was a statue adorned, and therefore beautified, by much gold. Phidias supposedly used over one ton of gold in making Athena's robes, headdress, and weaponry.

he supposes, is beautiful. He next concedes that stone too is beautiful, at least whenever it is fitting (290c).

The example of the statue of Athena is suggestive insofar as it invokes both Hippias' claim that the beautiful maiden is beautiful, and confirms the 'anthropomorphic' character of 'divine beauty.' In emphasizing the various materials used by Phidias, the questioner obviously undermines Hippias' thesis regarding gold as 'the beautiful,' since other substances contribute to the beauty of the statue. We are thus prompted to consider what exactly makes the statue a good, that is, beautiful, one. The discussion of the statue's material make-up shows us that ultimately the statue's beauty rests in its form—the idealized form of a beautiful maiden, but rendered larger than life-size. Gold, ivory and stone are all combined to make the statue look as much like this (human) form as possible, within certain parameters. There is a reason Phidias did not use clay the shade of skin and silks interwoven with gold, though these would have perhaps been more life-like. The purpose of the statue is not just to capture the fleeting form of the beauty of youth, but to capture the fleeting beauty in an *enduring* material (and hence enduring form).

The purpose of the statue—requiring that it be of durable beauty—sets the parameters for the materials of the sculptor. And Socrates' questioner might have us make the utilitarian condition of durability the only one. He seems to imply to Hippias that stone is equally beautiful to ivory and to gold, as well as is fig-wood. As we shortly see, he attempts to prove that beauty depends primarily, if not singularly, on the given function or use of the material, and its appropriateness to that given end. The beauty of gold, ivory, and stone is relative to their use—they are beautiful when fitting. He asks if

stone, and then ivory and gold, whenever fitting, make things appear beautiful, but whenever not, ugly (290c). Hippias does not wholly concede this, but only agrees that "whatever is fitting to each thing makes each thing beautiful" (290d). In order to illustrate some potential consequences of such a suggestion, Socrates' alias would ask the following: "Whenever someone boils the pot that we were just speaking—the beautiful one, full of *beautiful soup* [!]—which of the two is fitting for it, a ladle of gold or of fig wood?" If he can show that the fig-wood ladle is more fitting, then it would seem to follow from Hippias' earlier concession that it is *ipso facto* more beautiful.

As Socrates explains so persuasively, the fig-wood ladle is clearly more fitting to its purpose:

> For presumably it makes the soup more flavorful, and at the same time, comrade, you would not shatter the pot for us and spill the soup, extinguishing the fire and depriving those who are about to dine of a very fine (*kalon*) dish. But the golden ladle would do all of these things. (290e)

As a result of Socrates' 'fig-wood rhetoric,' Hippias will eventually grant that the fig-wood ladle is more fitting, *hence* more beautiful (291d). Why does Socrates' argument persuade Hippias? It seems that he does this by conflating the beautiful with other types of goods—such as the pleasure that comes through food. By calling the meal that is made 'beautiful,' Socrates begins to lead him astray. He is able to 'beautify' the soup, merely by calling it beautiful as a way of tacitly alluding to its tastiness, and so beautify the ladle by explaining how it improves the flavor of the soup. He also manipulates our view of the golden ladle by explaining how it would thwart the making of the beautiful soup, indeed ruin the whole feast. Socrates shows us the respective utility of the different ladles with respect to soup-making and equates this with their respective beauty. Because Socrates finesses any difference that might exist between utility and beauty (and the other

pleasures), Hippias is persuaded that the fig-wood ladle is more beautiful than the golden one.

But the relationship between the fitting and the beautiful has hardly been discussed at this stage in the dialogue, let alone firmly established on the basis of a thorough analysis; thus, Hippias' agreement here once again strikes the reader as premature. He is too easily convinced by Socrates' 'beautiful' speech regarding fig-wood, and indeed our refusal to accede to his agreement may provide an important insight for later in the dialogue, when they do directly discuss the possibility that the beautiful is the fitting. If anything, the argument regarding the fig-wood ladle illustrates how this is not the case—for despite our acknowledging that the fig-wood ladle is far more fitting in terms of utility, and our appreciating the beauty of Socrates' reasoning about the superiority of the fig-wood ladle *in its function as a ladle*, we must admit that we still think the golden ladle, taken on its own at least, is more beautiful. It seems that Beauty cannot simply be reduced to utilitarian 'fittingness.'

Despite its being detrimental with respect to flavorful soup-making, the golden soup ladle may nonetheless seem (and hence be?) more beautiful, merely because it is made of gold. And if we turn back to the statue example, we can recognize that there is a reason Phidias used gold, ivory, and gemstone for his statue rather than fig-wood. These substances are certainly fitting with regards to the 'utilitarian' requirement of the statue, this being durability. But the primary virtue of a statue is its beautiful form, and we need to consider what exactly makes these materials more fitting with respect to this aesthetic end. Why does he mostly make the statue of gold and ivory, with only a minimal amount of stone? It seems that inevitably we have to account for the seemingly *inherent* beauty

of ivory and gold.[8] Why do they strike us as beautiful? Their rarity might help explain the difference here, but many things are rare and still not considered beautiful (many other metals on the periodic table, for example, or rare insects).[9] What is it about how these materials *look* (looks that include texture, color and other qualities), that makes them so fitting for a statue of Athena? We might have to accede, despite its seeming naïveté, that these things are beautiful to us because we see in them a reflection of something inherently good, at least to human beings. Without indulging too much in poetics, we might say that gold, for example, is radiant and/or pleasing, like the sun, and ivory 'pure' like a maiden's skin.

Whether these appearances are related to something that actually *is* good—or, perhaps more precisely, the extent to which we can freely trust in such a parallel—is an entirely separate question. It is one, however, which the *Greater Hippias* seems very much preoccupied with, and in the course of the present discussion, we see some evidence of this. After Socrates has explained the superior 'fittingness' of the fig-wood ladle to Hippias, Hippias agrees with his analysis, but also adds that he "wouldn't converse with the fellow when he asks such things" (291a). It is notable that it is in response to the argument regarding the *fittingness* of the fig-wood, and not its beauty, that Socrates brings our attention to Hippias' beautiful appearance:

> Yes, that would be correct, my friend, since it wouldn't be fitting for you to be filled up with such words, you who are dressed so beautifully and wear such beautiful shoes and are so highly reputed for wisdom among all the Greeks. (291b)

Socrates suggests that it would not be fitting for Hippias to speak to the truth-loving questioner, because it follows from Hippias' beautiful appearance that he should,

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[8] I am hence arguing that these two things are ultimately valuable because they are beautiful, and not beautiful because they are valuable because rare.

[9] And many things in nature are not rare but still beautiful: landscapes, stars, trees.

presumably, only be seen speaking to comparable beauties (who would probably not be 'filled' with such 'vulgar' words). But as Hippias has just demonstrated, his preference for beautiful words would have him do an injustice to the truth—his preoccupation with beautifying adornment even makes him hesitant to agree to the utilitarian superiority of the fig-wood ladle.

It may be fitting, given his occupation, that the sophist does hesitate in this regard; but if it is fitting for him to ignore the questioner and his mode of speaking, is it thereby also beautiful? While it might be fitting in some way for Hippias to ignore Socrates' alias, we cannot concede that it is beautiful. In fact, we are more likely to see it as absurd—an indication not of Hippias' beauty, but of his ultimate ugliness of soul. The 'fittingness' of the sophist's disdain for the truth bespeaks a rather more important disjunction, or 'unfittingness,' between what he is and what he claims (and doubtless appears to many) to be. He is concerned only with the outer showings of beauty and wisdom, with no interest in their actual essence—and we recognize this overall disharmony as laughable and ugly. Plato's rendering of Hippias makes us self-conscious of the fact that we cannot think of Hippias as truly beautiful, despite his reputed good looks and his great reputation for wisdom. Granted, we are in the safe position of not being directly influenced by the charm of Hippias' noble appearance, but insofar as the dialogue itself is able to elicit judgments from us regarding the beautiful, we are forced to recognize that 'overall' beauty necessarily involves more than mere surfaces.

Hippias' Third Attempt: A Blessed Life (and Death, 291d-291e)

Plato has portrayed Hippias in a particularly unflattering manner. How, then, does his Socrates appear next to this 'ape' of a human being? Surprisingly, perhaps, the answer to this question is a complicated one—at least insofar as it pertains to the question of Beauty—owing to Socrates' own contentious behavior throughout the dialogue, masked though it is by his rhetorical trick of an alter-ego. From Hippias' perspective, and the perspective of those like him, this kind of aggression and rudeness (perhaps because they result in pain of some kind) seems to translate into ugliness *simpliciter*. Rationally accounting for Socrates' beauty—which is a beauty we may experience in our studying the dialogues—necessarily involves us in dealing with this apparent ugliness (whereas we can easily ignore his famously ugly physical appearance, not being exposed to it). In particular it demands that we seek to uncover Socrates' motivations for conversing with Hippias. Socrates' contentiousness is not wholly becoming, humorous and satisfying though it most certainly is.

The dramatic events surrounding Hippias' third attempt at definition are particularly striking in this regard. We see Hippias trying to evade the culminating refutation of his beautiful-is-gold thesis by suggesting that he has thought of something better (291b), whereupon Socrates obstinately refuses to hear him out until he explicitly ratifies the rejection of his previous definition (291c). After acknowledging the superior fittingness and beauty of the fig-wood ladle to the gold, Hippias proceeds to claim with respect to his next definition, that "if anyone is able to contradict this be sure to declare that I have no expertise in anything at all" (291d). Socrates' sharp and eager reply to this is, "Speak then, as quickly as possible, before the gods." When Hippias finally does

make his next 'irrefutable' suggestion as to what the beautiful is, Socrates (via his alias) berates Hippias and his answer in a singularly provoking manner (292a-d), which makes Hippias' subsequent persistence with his definition seem particularly obtuse (292e). Although Socrates may be 'in the right' in his treatment of Hippias, his behavior throughout this [central] section does not strike the reader as especially 'fine' or 'beautiful.'

Socrates' dramatic 'ugliness' throughout this part is ironic, given the direction in which the theoretical aspect of the conversation proceeds. As we have seen, by this point the philosopher has laboriously articulated his stipulations for what their definition ought to consist of—first saying they are looking for the beautiful itself, on account of which beautiful things are beautiful (286e-287d), then altering this formulation slightly by adding that it is that by which "all other things are adorned and appear beautiful whenever this form becomes present" (289d). Hippias now derives yet another interpretation of what they are looking for, traceable to Socrates' manner of refuting his previous attempts: "You seem to me to be seeking to answer that the beautiful is some sort of thing that will never appear ugly to anyone anywhere" (291d). Socrates responds "Certainly, Hippias, and now you comprehend beautifully." Given Socrates' own apparent 'ugliness' here and throughout (to Hippias, if not to us), we might suspect that what Hippias understands as a way of *defining* the beautiful—that it is some *thing* that will never appear ugly to anyone—is misconceived.[10] For we might know, based on our acquaintance with Socrates, that his appearing ugly or vulgar to some, does nothing to prevent his appearing beautiful or noble to others. As such, we might suspect that Socrates acknowledges Hippias' comprehension as beautiful, only with the awareness

[10] There are explicit indications to this effect throughout the dialogue.

that all beautiful *things* do not always appear beautiful to everyone and everywhere, even if the 'beautiful itself' would. Socrates' usage of 'understanding beautifully' tricks Hippias. The sophist believes he has finally understood what the discussion is about, whereas in reality the two men are discussing very different 'things,' according to very different aesthetic criteria.

Hippias will again give an example of something particular, as if determining the *most* beautiful thing is equivalent to defining the beautiful itself. His first such example was of a particular form, the beautiful maiden, and his second was a beautiful substance, gold. Now, Hippias will provide the example of a beautiful 'something' that is more difficult to characterize:

> I say, that always, for everyone and everywhere, it is most beautiful for a man who is wealthy, healthy, and honored by the Greeks, having arrived at old age and having celebrated beautifully the funeral of his parents after they have come to their end, to be beautifully and magnificently buried by his own offspring. (291e)

This is certainly a different type of 'beautiful thing' than those encountered previously. Despite its obviously being equally misguided as a definition of the beautiful—aside from its obvious question-begging character (since he repeatedly relies upon the very term in defining it), it could hardly, in its particularity, be used to explain *all* beauty—the description is somehow more powerful than the sophist's other two responses. The seeming triteness of the other examples doubtless contributes to the power of this otherwise ordinary conception of a blessed, and hence beautiful, life. Maidens and gold are rather lackluster as entities next to a description of a complete way of life and action.

But the third example is also powerful, in part at least, because of Hippias' emphasis on a 'beautiful' burial. This emphasis serves to emphasize the *wholeness* of the life he is describing, the *whole* beauty of which can only be affirmed after it has ended.

Thus the 'beautiful' and magnificent burial by one's children ratifies the life that has been lived. But the emphasis on the burial also, needless to say, reminds us of one of the 'ugliest' aspects of our existence—our mortality. The maidens and gold of Hippias' earlier examples thus seem especially commonplace (though not ugly) next to matters as significant to human beings as those underlying his third example: the question of how we ought to live, knowing that we are going to die. Perhaps nothing is so powerful in human beings as the awareness we have of our own mortality—with the possible exception of that which seeks to transcend mortality: the procreative power of *eros*. The latter power is acknowledged in Hippias' first definition, the former is hinted at here at the center of the dialogue.

Plato, it seems, would have us consider how our *eros* and mortality bear on our experience and understanding of beauty.[11] In this dialogue, however, he has Socrates perform a strange refutation of Hippias' example—a refutation that ultimately skirts the most obvious problems of the 'definition,' as well as the significant implications of the example having the power that it does. The theoretical problems with the example are not entirely ignored, however—for, prior to the refutation, Socrates will berate Hippias once again for the idiocy of his example. The scolding, however, hardly amounts to a 'constructive' theoretical critique.

[11] Cf. *Symposium*, 206e-207a.

Transition: The Absurd and the Intractable (291e-293e)

Socrates' Intervention (291e-292e)

Socrates briefly, albeit with evident irony, indulges Hippias—"How wonderfully and grandly and how worthily of yourself you have spoken" (291e)—before suggesting that the questioner (here 'the man,' *andros*) will laugh at this answer most of all. The questioner thus seems unaffected by the sentiments that might make one find Hippias' third example beautiful—and so (Socrates claims) would be only more aggravated by Hippias' latest failure to find a suitable *definition*. Hippias, convinced as he is of the superb beauty of his example, seems shocked, calling the questioner's laughter 'grievous' (or 'wicked,' 'painful'; *ponêros*) and suggesting that "when he has nothing he can say against this and yet laughs, he will laugh at himself and himself be laughed at by those present" (291e). Socrates concedes that Hippias may be right about the laughter (perhaps thereby conceding that there is something 'terribly' serious about the example that would make the laughter 'wicked'?), but then goes on to suggest that his giving this answer will also provoke the questioner's response again to escalate in its severity. He would move beyond mockery now to physical violence: "If he happens to have a staff and if I don't escape him by fleeing, he will very well try to land it on me" (292a).

The philosopher hears Hippias' most serious proposal and suggests that he should be beaten for it. He couches this amusing proposal in his alter-ego's voice, but it is obvious that Socrates agrees in *some* way with his alias' alleged response, and believes that it would be just for Hippias in *some* way to 'be beaten' (as well as laughed at, presumably—perhaps a more devastating form of 'abuse') for giving the answer he does. To the extent that this would mean a self-flagellating Socrates, we might reasonably not

take the proposal literally, but Hippias' credulity at this point is nevertheless almost unbelievable. As the following exchange makes clear, he fails to note the blatant reflexive consequences of the philosopher's claim:

> Hippias: Is the fellow some sort of master of yours, and if he does this, won't he be sorry and have to pay a penalty? Or isn't your city just? Does it instead allow the citizens to beat each other unjustly?
> Socrates: In no way does it allow this.
> Hippias: Then he will pay a penalty, at least if he beats you unjustly.
> Socrates: It doesn't seem unjust to me, Hippias, at least not if I give this answer, but just; so it seems to me at any rate.
> Hippias: Then it seems so to me as well, Socrates, if in fact you yourself suppose it is. (292a-b)

Hippias, oblivious to the reflexivity of the situation, seems to agree that *Socrates* deserves beating for agreeing with his vulgar companion. But notice: Socrates, for his part, has finally rejected Hippias' response (and deemed it worthy of corporal punishment) *in his own voice*. As Hippias looks increasingly idiotic, Socrates begins to look more and more like his 'captious' companion—and while his behavior may appear less and less 'gentlemanly' or fine, it also seems increasingly justified and even appropriate.

What is to be made of this strange notion of justice that would allow private citizens physically to punish others for even their private displays of stupidity? Plato has provided aids to our deciphering the passage, insofar as Socrates and Hippias have already agreed to an account of natural law that characterizes the lawful (and hence presumably the just) as that which is most helpful. This definition, combined with Plato's clear illustration of Hippias' dire need for assistance, would make Socrates' proposal here seem logically sound—while it would make even the Spartan laws seem mild and tolerant—*if* we could trust that the beating might result in better comprehension on Hippias' part (or be beneficial in any way: perhaps it would merely have the benefit of silencing him). Understanding the reasoning behind such an action does little, however,

to diminish our sense of its ultimate absurdity: for perhaps only Socrates' strange (and socially isolated?) phantom interlocutor would believe that Hippias' being beaten would result in an improvement of his mental faculties. The passage does remind us, however, that the helpful things (which include punitive and 'rehabilitative' justice) are not always 'pretty.'[12]

Presumably it is Socrates' superior understanding of improvement that prevents him from physically beating Hippias in the present circumstances (...or perhaps he simply doesn't have a stick handy?). Instead of flogging him, or even asking him to defend himself against such an attempt, Socrates asks Hippias to listen to his own account of why he himself supposes he would be justly beaten if he were to give this answer

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[12] The following passage from the *Gorgias* acts as a similar reminder, one that is particularly relevant given the trajectory that Socrates' refutation of Hippias is about to take. Socrates is speaking to Callicles:

> Now the proper office of punishment is twofold: he who is rightly punished ought either to become better and profit by it, or he ought to be made an example to his fellows, that they may see what he suffers, and fear and become better. Those who are improved when they are punished by gods and men, are those whose sins are curable; and they are improved, as in this world so also in another, by pain and suffering; for there is no other way in which they can be delivered from their evil. But they who have been guilty of the worst crimes, and are incurable by reason of their crimes, are made examples; for, as they are incurable, the time has passed at which they can receive any benefit. They get no good themselves, but others get good when they behold them enduring for ever the most terrible and painful and fearful sufferings as the penalty of their sins—there they are, hanging up as examples, in the prison-house of the world below, a spectacle and a warning to all unrighteous men who come thither. And among them, as I confidently affirm, will be found Archelaus, if Polus truly reports of him, and any other tyrant who is like him. Of these fearful examples, most, as I believe, are taken from the class of tyrants and kings and potentates and public men, for they are the authors of the greatest and most impious crimes, because they have the power. And Homer witnesses to the truth of this; for they are always kings and potentates whom he has described as suffering everlasting punishment in the world below: such were Tantalus and Sisyphus and Tityus. But no one ever described Thersites, or any private person who was a villain, as suffering everlasting punishment, or as incurable. For to commit the worst crimes, as I am inclined to think, was not in his power, and he was happier than those who had the power. No, Callicles, the very bad men come from the class of those who have power. And yet in that very class there may arise good men, and worthy of all admiration they are, for where there is great power to do wrong, to live and to die justly is a hard thing, and greatly to be praised, and few there are who attain to this. Such good and true men, however, there have been, and will be again, at Athens and in other states, who have fulfilled their trust righteously; and there is one who is quite famous all over Hellas, Aristeides, the son of Lysimachus. But, in general, great men are also bad, my friend. (525b-526b)

(292c). A reversal hereby occurs wherein the philosopher has to defend his own (potential) behavior to the sophist—i.e., explain why his apparently unjust/criminal behavior would actually be just. The passage wherein he does so spans the center of the dialogue:

> I shall tell you, in the same manner as I did just now, by imitating him, in order that I not use the sorts of expressions toward you that he will to me, ones both difficult and outlandish. For know well, he will say, "Tell me, Socrates, do you suppose that someone receives blows unjustly who, in singing such a dithyramb so unmusically, has sung very far away from the question?" "How so?" I shall say. "How?" he will say. "Aren't you able to remember that I was asking about the beautiful itself which inheres in everything in which it becomes present such that that thing is beautiful—stone and wood and human and god and every activity and all learning? For I am asking, human being, what beauty itself is, and I have no more power to make myself heard by you than if you were a stone sitting beside me, and a millstone at that, having neither ears nor brain." If, then, I took fright and said the following in response to these things, wouldn't you be irritated, Hippias? "But Hippias affirmed that this is the beautiful. And yet I was asking him, just as you are me, what is beautiful for all and always." What then do you say? Won't you be irritated if I say these things? (292c-e)

In this 'defense speech,' whereby Socrates ostensibly gives Hippias a verbal flogging (made milder, certainly, by his pretending to be himself the target thereof—but nonetheless indirectly characterizing Hippias as dense as a millstone!), the suggestion is that Hippias should receive blows for 'singing unmusically' (literally 'without the muses,' *amousôs*). The injustice Hippias has perpetrated, such that he could be *justly* beaten, is thus reducible to his having 'a bad ear,' and the seriousness of this flaw is thus the essence of Socrates' defense.

Presumably, then, the benefit that would ensue from Hippias' receiving blows is that his faculties might be developed such as to make him more 'musical.' The philosopher, contrary to all common sense, takes this matter of 'musicality' so seriously that he apparently would support punitive measures in its service. The ridiculousness of the proposal is obvious, but Plato has constructed the dialogue in such a way that it is easy to sympathize with the philosopher's supposed frustration—such that there is barely

any need even to reiterate the problem with Hippias. Socrates has made the point clearly enough: Hippias has shown no capacity to grasp the notion of the Beautiful itself, but apparently sees Beauty only in terms of its particular instantiations. *This*, then, is what the questioner deems unmusical: the discord of Hippias' responses with respect to the question being asked. It is not merely that Socrates and Hippias are conversing in 'different keys'—i.e., it is not a simple matter of semantics—but, rather, that Hippias is, as the questioner suggests, tone deaf and dumb. He is not really hearing Socrates, which, needless to say, would require not only the perception of the sound, but also the comprehension of the philosopher's words.

This 'deafness' may, while exonerating Hippias, also account for his apparent lack of *interest* in the truth about what Beauty *is*. The philosopher, by contrast, has already said about his alias that he cares about *nothing* but the truth, and in this (central) passage of the dialogue, where Socrates explicitly aligns himself with his truth-seeking companion by 'defending' him, we learn that his concern with truth is somewhat analogous to a concern with 'what is musical.' It seems that here we must pause to ask whether musicality can be determined on 'objective' grounds, rather than aesthetic ones, such that the questioner can claim to recognize Hippias' *bad* singing without making an aesthetic judgment (i.e., a judgment about the beautiful). For, in making such an assessment about 'what is *unmusical*,' would Socrates' alias not be open to a similar question as the one which he supposedly presents Socrates with—namely what the musical and unmusical are? How is it that he is able to judge 'musicality' independently of understanding (as opposed to simply experiencing) *beauty*? Does Socrates' alias have a muse of his own? The answer to this question is not far off, for upon consideration it is

clear that 'tunefulness' in question is not an aesthetic matter (i.e., people can generally recognize singing that is out of tune, irregardless of their having 'good taste,' or perfect pitch). The questioner can thus recognize the *unmusical* without his dealing in the 'subjectivity' of aesthetics—it is whatever is 'disharmonious,' that which 'clashes' (as do contradictions). His being able *fully* to appreciate the *musical* independently of his experiencing the Beautiful, however, is questionable: perhaps this added aesthetic sense is what distinguishes Socrates from his imaginary interlocutor.

Hippias' deafness to the 'unmusicality' he himself embodies is made evident once again in his response to Socrates' verbal assault. Socrates' alias has accused Hippias (via Socrates representing Hippias) of being like a deaf and dumb stone for saying that this [the burial] is beautiful, despite his being (allegedly) asked "what is beautiful for all and always" (292c). Here Socrates has deliberately provoked Hippias, who, failing to notice, simply persists in defending his declaration that his example is beautiful for all and always! He has not heard Socrates' insults, for the implications of the 'alias' words' never registered, nor has he noticed that he has just been lied to, for Socrates never asked what is beautiful for all and always. The philosopher acknowledged that the thing they are looking for could be *described* in this way (at 291d), but never claimed that this would be a 'defining characteristic' of what they are in search of: that was Hippias' doing. We here see that Hippias—the man most highly-regarded in Elis with respect to judging and reporting speeches—does not see (or hear) any difference between the two. When Socrates asks Hippias whether he would be irritated if he said these things, Hippias does not recognize that he is being manipulated to demonstrate his imperviousness to the truth.

Socrates' 'defense speech' is thus convincing to the extent that we continue to be frustrated at the phenomena Socrates describes therein—Hippias' obtuseness. Nevertheless, however much it might frustrate us, we are not surprised that the dialogue does not end here with Socrates' and Hippias' coming to blows, for Socrates' 'defense speech' may be *unconvincing* to the extent that we continue to be *amused* by the phenomena Socrates describes therein. Hippias' obtuseness is not a crime, it is a genetic joke—a joke, however, that may have serious political implications. In observing Socrates' behavior throughout the rest of the dialogue, we will discover what he sees the truth to be about making the sophist, and those like him, 'more musical.' The philosopher will change his approach, but prior to his doing so, he has to refute Hippias' latest example. For Hippias' vanity has been baited; he returns to his previous point, irritated not by Socrates' insults, nor this skewing of their conversation, but by the philosopher's apparent unwillingness to recognize the beauty of what he said about a particular type of life (and burial).

Hippias' Last Grasp (292e-293e)

As we have seen, Socrates does not have much respect for Hippias' answer. He tries to show the sophist why it is misconceived as a definition. When his harangue fails, it is perhaps strange that he does not try to explain more precisely how none of the sophist's examples would explain the beauty of everything (although this certainly has been implied), nor does he point out that Hippias has used the very term they are trying to define within his latest example. Instead of doing this, Socrates, in a manner reminiscent of his treatment of the sophist's other examples, quickly refutes Hippias' claim by

adducing a series of counter-examples. He does so by appealing once again to the gods—or more precisely (and more reasonably, given the substantive meaning of a beautiful *burial*), to the sons of the gods. The essence of the argument is that because it would not have been beautiful for men like Achilles and Heracles to be buried in the way Hippias describes—that is, only after they have buried their parents—this 'beautiful' is not beautiful for all and always (293a). Ever-pious Hippias seems offended at the questioner's suggestion that he would ever argue otherwise, and retorts that "I at least wasn't saying that it was so for the gods...[nor] for those at least who were children of the gods" (293b). This allows Socrates to conclude that "According to your argument again, as it appears, for Tantalus among the heroes and for Dardanus and for Zethus it is terrible and impious and ugly, but for Pelops and the others who were born this way it is beautiful." With Hippias agreeing to this analysis, Socrates proceeds to outline how it results in the refutation of the sophist's argument (293bc).

Needless to say, Socrates' approach to Hippias' 'most laughable' example is comical in its own right. Again, he refutes the example by 'showing' that it is not perfectly beautiful, rather than by showing that it is not a good definition of the beautiful. This seems to be the only effective approach to take with Hippias, which itself is ridiculous insofar as, even were his example 'perfectly' beautiful, it would not be so helpful in their search for the beautiful itself. Socrates doesn't merely provide a ridiculous refutation, however. He also rather comically shifts the emphasis away from the intention of Hippias' example. In order to refute the 'beautiful' *life* Hippias refers to, Socrates uses the immortality of the gods to show the 'ugliness' of their being buried. Socrates attacks the notion of the burial, leaving the life Hippias describes untouched—

which is the more humorous insofar as the life described by the sophist is hardly unassailable.

Hippias has described a man whose 'beauty' consists in being wealthy, healthy and honored by the Greeks, rather than a man whose life manifests the traditional virtues.[13] If Hippias had said "wise, just and courageous" rather than "wealthy, healthy and honored," Socrates' avoidance of the 'life' part of the description might make sense. As it stands, it seems strange that he focuses instead on the burial. Until, that is, we consider how closely Hippias' conception of the blessed and beautiful life aligns with his own way of living. Could it be that his refraining from criticizing the life described by Hippias is a mark of Socrates' gentlemanliness, insofar as such a critique would obviously undermine Hippias' whole way of life? Perhaps Socrates is kinder to Hippias than it seems on the surface: what appears to be a harsh refutation turns out in all its strangeness to be a gesture of remarkable delicacy. The philosopher's restraint here possibly points to the nobility of his intentions.

Plato's composing the refutation the way he does may serve another purpose as well. As noted, Hippias' description of a blessed life that includes the notion of a 'beautiful burial' invites us to consider our mortality; Socrates' manner of refuting the example underscores the need to do so. For Socrates does not necessarily use the superior *beauty* of the gods and heroes to debunk Hippias' argument, although the supposed superiority of the gods' and heroes' actions certainly play a role in our interpretation of the refutation. The 'beauty' of Achilles' actions, for example, is relevant in that these actions were the cause of his premature death (as is the case with so many heroes). But Socrates chooses not to focus on the qualities of the lives of the men he

[13] Might this be another indication of the increasing decadence of Greece?

mentions here, but rather on the simple fact that they were all unable to be buried later than their parents or forbears—even going so far as to mention as his examples men whose lives and actions were notoriously 'ugly' (we need think only of Tantalus, who supposedly incorporated his son into a not-so-beautiful soup he was preparing for the gods, and was punished accordingly). It is this 'simple' fact of the immortality of the gods that allows Socrates to make Hippias' suggestion appear ugly. Nevertheless, as Hippias himself argues, the description he gave did not concern the gods, or the children of the gods. He was referring to human beings. Who all, always and everywhere, die.

Just as Socrates used the 'beauty' of the gods to 'trump' the beauty of the beautiful maiden, here he uses the immortality of the gods to make the thought of certain supposedly 'beautiful' burials 'terrible and impious and ugly.' Was it necessary to refer to the immortal gods in order to do so? *Is* there such a thing as an altogether 'beautiful' burial? Socrates' manner of refuting Hippias' third example, if not the details of the example itself, lead us to consider the significance of mortality in relation to the Beautiful. Our serious efforts to beautify death may only be, upon consideration, a reflection of and a reaction to our ultimate weakness in the face of our 'ugly' mortality. It is difficult to beautify death. So difficult, in fact, that our gods, who perhaps above all else must be beautiful, are (for the most part) immortal ones. On the other hand, belief in the immortal gods may bespeak a deeply rooted willingness to accept such beautification. The task of beautifying death, then, (one accomplished to an extent, we might remember, by Hippias himself) may not be as daunting as it seems: our need for beauty of this kind may greatly surpass our need for the truth.

In the *Greater Hippias*, however, Plato amusingly shows us that there are exceptional perspectives on these matters of life and death. Socrates' questioner, after all, would unflinchingly describe the sophist's description of the beautiful life and burial as laughable. He does not seem to be affected by the power such a 'dithyramb' would exert on most of us, perhaps indicating that the philosopher is able somehow to reconcile the truth of human mortality with the human need for the beautiful. Needless to say, these formidable themes emerge elsewhere in Socrates' life and Plato's writing—it is enough here to note that Plato's Socrates has located our desire for the beautiful alongside our desire for the eternal. Or, perhaps more precisely, he has shown how our desire for the beautiful is also a desire for it to *be* eternal.[14]

[14] Consider also *Symposium*, 206e-207a, where Diotima suggests that *eros* is not only of the immortal, but of engendering as such, because:

> Engendering is born forever and is immortal as far as that can happen to a mortal being. From what has been agreed to, it is necessary to desire immortality with good, provided *eros* is of the good's always being one's own. So it is necessary from this argument that *eros* be of immortality too.

At 209b she speaks of the philosopher's seeking to engender the beautiful in particular.

Part III: Socrates' Utility (293e-297d)

Socrates' alias has dismissed Hippias' examples of beauty, supposedly arguing that none of them actually are truly beautiful. He has implied that they are at best only relatively beautiful (and may even actually be ugly), by showing how the examples Hippias provides will pale in comparison to the examples provided by the beautiful and immortal gods (not to mention useful fig-wood). Not surprisingly, given Hippias' prudential piety, the pair never explicitly discuss the significance of the gods' beauty and immortality; given his obvious vanity, an overt discussion of utility (something which the sophisticated Hippias probably thinks is utterly beneath him) will come about only as a result of Socrates' persistence. After the philosopher 'refutes' Hippias' last example, the conversation takes a turn in this latter direction. Between the point at which Hippias' offers his third suggestion, and the point of its being refuted by Socrates, the questioner has apparently been pacified considerably. Whereas he had earlier been willing to 'beat' Socrates for the answer Hippias gave, we now learn he is sometimes more compassionate (or should we say, more *overtly* merciful, insofar as Socrates has just delicately refrained from a wholesale critique of Hippias' conception of the blessed life?). He is, reportedly, sometimes willing to offer assistance to Socrates, much as the philosopher now does to Hippias—and this *despite* Hippias showing no awareness of how much he needs such assistance. Perhaps this is the very reason why the philosopher changes his tactics.

Definition 1: The Fitting and the Nature of the Fitting (293e-295a)

Socrates' assistance, however generous, comes with a denigrating justification for its being offered. As Socrates humbly explains:

> Now, for the most part, Hippias, he converses with me more or less in this way. But sometimes, as though pitying me for my inexperience and lack of education, he himself makes a suggestion for me by asking if the beautiful seems to me to be such and such a thing and so too as regards whatever else he happens to be inquiring about and which the argument concerns. (293d)

Hippias has already shown himself to be 'deaf' to how such a statement necessarily reflects back on him and his answers, and seems not even to understand what this change in interrogative approach signifies. He thus asks for further clarification. The philosopher responds by imitating more substantially—and disparagingly—what his companion would say:

> "O daemonic Socrates, stop giving these sorts of answers in this way—for they are exceedingly naïve and easily refuted—but consider whether some such thing as the following seems to you to be beautiful, which we even now caught hold of in your answer... Consider whether this very thing, the fitting and the nature of the fitting itself, happens to be the beautiful." (293e)

And so finally, courtesy the questioner's 'compassionate' (and more fitting?) generosity, Socrates and Hippias have a general hypothesis to test. It has been derived from their previous discussion, the inadequacies of which provide useful material for refuting the conclusions reached in the present section. The definition can be seen as arising naturally from Hippias' example of the 'fitting' funeral, but it also has origins in earlier examples.

At this point, still employing his wonderfully ironic humility, Socrates tells Hippias that he is always at a loss when he is presented with these suggestions by his companion. He says that he is "accustomed to assent every time," and, as the entire dialogue up to the point makes evident, it seems that Hippias suffers from the same problem. When he is asked by Socrates "if it seems to [him] that the fitting is beautiful," he immediately agrees that such is the case. In so doing he is answering *Socrates'* question, but in his eagerness to agree, he fails to note how it differed from the *alias'* question—which was not concerned with the beauty of the fitting, but rather with

whether "the fitting and the nature of the fitting itself happens to be *the* beautiful." These are in fact very different questions. Not only is the alias concerned with the *nature* of the fitting, he also more rigorously keeps in sight the object of their inquiry: the nature of *the* beautiful. When Socrates asks whether the fitting is beautiful, he seems to revert into Hippias' way of thinking—Hippias, who can only imagine the beautiful as being some (beautiful) thing. Something, for example, like gold, that shares the attribute it imparts to everything it 'adorns.' This assumption may prove problematic, if indeed the beautiful itself is something different from manifested beauty.

It is certainly problematic that Socrates and Hippias do not clarify the logic of their hypothesis more carefully upon its being proposed. The questioner, in mentioning the *nature* of the fitting in particular, would perhaps have us begin with a consideration of this, and it is conceivable that in thinking about the fitting 'itself,' we would conclude that it is relevant to the beautiful, but not identical to it. For example, it could be the case that whatever is fitting is beautiful, or even that whatever is beautiful is somehow fitting, without the beautiful and the fitting being the same thing. Perhaps the fitting is a subclass of the beautiful, or, alternatively a constituent of beauty. Furthermore, it is possible (though it seems unlikely) that beauty is a subclass or constituent of the fitting. Such a discovery would doubtless be helpful in understanding the beautiful, and merely having these possibilities in mind before proceeding in the analysis will prove helpful.

Socrates may be pointing to these problems when he reminds them that their agreement at this stage may be premature: perhaps they should "consider it so that [they] aren't deceived in some way" (293e). Again Hippias agrees. The 'agreeableness' of Hippias and the supposed 'agreeableness' of Socrates differ markedly from the

questioner's churlish skepticism. We might wonder what it is about agreement that is so seductive to these 'two.' Or, more generally, which is the more 'fitting' dialogic posture—accommodating or argumentative—and why do people differ in that which they prefer. Answering this question would directly involve us in considering the *nature* of the fitting—for, are there not many modes of speaking that would be variously 'fitting,' depending on the intentions and interests of the discussants? Fortunately for the sake of 'truth-finding,' Socrates has apparently learned something from his 'vulgar' and argumentative companion, and is curious enough to formulate questions of his own for them to consider. These questions are not exactly what we might expect, however, insofar as they do not deal explicitly with the problems just outlined. They do not discuss the logical possibilities of the proposition. And, most importantly, they fail to clarify 'the nature of the fitting itself.' What makes something fitting? Physical shape? Utility? Need? Politeness? Justice? Truth? Or, is there a distinctly aesthetic kind of fittingness?

Socrates proceeds in a very different manner, first asking, "Do we say the fitting is that which, when it becomes present makes each of those things in which it is present *appear* beautiful or that which makes them *be* so or neither of these?" (294a). Hippias strangely replies "to me at least it seems so" (hereby ridiculously agreeing to two things that have been presented as being mutually exclusive). Upon further questioning he states that the fitting is "that which makes them appear beautiful." The sophist's evidence is that "whenever someone puts on a cloak or sandals that are suitable [*harmottonta*, not *prepon*], even if he is laughable [or 'ridiculous'; *geloios*], he appears more beautiful." The irony of his suggestion is palpable—for the tawdry, unshod, and 'ugly' Socrates has already commented on 'beautiful' Hippias' own beautiful clothes and

shoes (291a). If it were not for this, we might wonder what exactly Hippias meant by 'fitting' clothes for a laughable human being. It is quite clear, however, that he simply means beautiful clothes: they are not 'fitting' primarily because they fit the body well—or are otherwise comfortable, useful, affordable, or appropriate—but because they appear beautiful, and make the wearer more beautiful. They even serve to mask someone's being laughable, by heightening the *disunity* between 'inner' and 'outer' qualities.[1] This would, of course, make them all the more laughable, once one has seen through the mask. The beautiful clothes are thus merely a useful deceit, and clearly the useful is only one dimension of the fitting. The dual-disjunction we perceive when we come to know Hippias and Socrates—both of whom have 'inner' qualities that do not seem to 'fit' with their appearance—shows us that the fitting and the beautiful cannot be identical things. The 'fitting' is far too vague a notion to identify completely with the beautiful.

Consideration of our interlocutors' respective 'inner' and 'outer' qualities leads naturally to a deliberation about 'appearance' and 'reality.' It does not, however, warrant the *radical* separation of these two things that Socrates seems to endorse in this passage. While we might readily concede that distinctions exist between 'visible' reality, otherwise 'perceptible' reality, and 'intelligible' reality (for example), Socrates' treatment of the problem here is rather simple-minded. Using Hippias' example of beautiful clothes, he suggests that if the fitting is merely that which makes things appear more beautiful, it would not be what they are seeking, for this necessarily has to be the cause of a thing's *being* beautiful (294a-b). Perhaps such a suggestion is politically legitimate,

[1] Here we are offered a glimpse of how the beautiful and the comical may be related: both apparently have much to do with what is or is not fitting, respectively.

insofar as Hippias, and people like him, would benefit from a theory that undermines their trust in visible appearances in such a straight-forward way.

That such a separation of the being and the appearance of the beautiful is not philosophically legitimate is perhaps indicated in the example he uses to 'explain' the distinction he is drawing: the example of 'largeness.' Socrates suggests that all large things are large by 'that which exceeds,' and also suggests that sometimes large things do not appear to be so, but *are* nevertheless 'in excess' (294b). This is a strange claim. If we recognize something as large, has it not *appeared* to us (in some way or another—be it to our eyes or our minds) as *being* so? Are these two things as easy to separate as Socrates suggests, or is Socrates inviting us to consider the different ways in which we understand what it means to 'appear'?

On the other hand, we can recognize what Socrates is referring to: the fact that the appearance of largeness can be misleading to the extent that size *is* something relative. The largest whale, for example, is still only an infinitesimal speck of the universe—its thus *being* large compared to a guppy, while at the same time small compared to the moon (despite appearances). Regardless of its relative size, however, we do at least *know* that the whale has *size*—its 'largeness' is real and definite—just as is the largeness of any material thing. The ontological presence of 'size' is thus clear to us even while we struggle with the epistemological problem of its relativity (how it appears to us). Could it be that beauty is similar to size in this way—i.e., that it is both relative and absolute at the same time? Its existence in the world being real and absolute, but our seeing it is in some way relative?

The ontological problems of size and (according to this analogical argument) beauty, are complicated considerably when we speak of 'intelligible things' like 'big ideas,' or the Aristotelian virtue of 'Magnanimity,' literally 'largeness of soul,' *megalopsuchia*. How are we to understand the size of these in relation to objects in the material world? Which is larger, or more *real*: the beauty of a beautiful body, or the beauty of a beautiful soul? The dialogue seems to offer a clear answer to the question—an answer that we arguably come to *know* somehow. By raising the problem of appearance versus reality, Socrates points to the relationship between epistemology and ontology: how do we know whether what *appears* to us actually *is* as it seems?

Perhaps more than any other phenomenon, Beauty demands that we address these issues, for in many ways it seems that the mere 'appearance' of beauty *is* the Beautiful. At the same time this 'Beauty' does seem to be something real in the world, something about which there is even widespread agreement (especially about visible and audible things, as opposed to, for example those things which are lawful and *kalos*). It seems that the beautiful *is* the 'appearance' *to us*, of something that *is* what it is independently of us. Defining the beautiful in the abstract relies upon the assumption that Beauty, even if its ontological status is more complicated than material 'largeness,' is at the very least grounded in what is real. Socrates undermines this assumption considerably when he suggests that there is very little agreement among human beings regarding 'what appears as' beautiful, and that appearances are therefore frequently deceiving, and inherently problematic for human beings. This suggestion is implicit in the following question:

> Then do we agree to this, Hippias, that all really beautiful things, both lawful things and pursuits, are both reputed to be beautiful and always appear to be so to everyone, or quite the contrary, aren't they unrecognized, and aren't strife and battle most of all about these things, both privately for individuals and publicly for cities? (294d)

Hippias 'agrees' that the latter is the case, and that the beautiful things are unrecognized by human beings, whereupon Socrates says "They wouldn't be unrecognized, at least if appearing beautiful were present in them." The philosopher also continues to speak as if this were merely a problem with the fitting, and not the beautiful itself. He seems to suggest that the beautiful they are seeking is something simple: it is what makes things *be* beautiful, and "the same thing never has the power to make things both appear and be either beautiful or anything else whatsoever" (294e). Does the beautiful not also necessarily make things appear beautiful? And if it is not the beautiful that does this, then what are they talking about?

The answer to this question is perhaps touched on in Socrates' above reference to politics. For things appear beautiful to human beings. In this sense, then, humans are responsible for 'making things appear' beautiful—i.e., for recognizing the 'beauty' of things: that constellation of qualities which excites admiring veneration, and which exist independently of the human mind. That is, the cause of their beauty exists independently of the human mind, but their being beautiful is tied to their being recognized as such, to their appearing so. And so, as human minds vary—evidenced by our discriminating reactions to the things of this world—so too does the perception of the beautiful. This is not to say, as Socrates would have Hippias do, that this variation is random, and that there is little agreement about what is beautiful. There may be great disputes about what is most beautiful, or really beautiful, without there being widespread disagreement (let alone strife and battle) about the beautiful in general, or at least the visibly beautiful in general. Variation may be due more to differing capacities of the senses—differing depths of 'vision' or 'aesthetic sensitivity'—than to differing 'sights.'

For indeed, there is widespread agreement about what sorts of things are beautiful. Strife and battle may seem to occur about different conceptions of the beautiful, but more often than not, they are based rather on a fundamental agreement about what is beautiful. There was no argument about the beauty of Helen at the beginning of the Trojan war, for example,[2] nor was there much dispute about Achilles' 'ugly' treatment of Hector's corpse at the war's end. Much of the power of the *Iliad* is due (for example) to the beauty everyone recognizes in Priam's supplication and Achilles' finally relenting. These things Homer describes affect most readers in a similar way, indicating that there is agreement about these beautiful things at least.[3] Hippias' answers also reflect this agreement. Beautiful maidens, gold, and the honor of a beautiful burial are all 'beautiful'; however, they are also recognized as exceptional.

Conflict thus arises not necessarily out of disagreement about the beautiful, but sometimes because people also concede that the agreed-upon Beauty is desirable, but not necessarily 'shareable'—i.e. not distributable in an altogether beautiful (or just) way. Envy is thus the source of conflict much more than disagreement about these beautiful things (cf. 282a). If these were the only types of beautiful things, it would lend credence to Hippias' later claim that 'in politics and in one's own city, the powerful is most beautiful of all, but the powerless most ugly of all" (295a). Power is, after all, what gives one access to these types of beautiful things. Moreover, people do find power and strength attractive, impotence and weakness not so. Power thus not only gives access to beautiful things, but also makes one beautiful. An enviable thing indeed! Nevertheless, the power to obtain certain 'beauties' is hardly the same as the power required even to

[2] That is, once it was decided she was more beautiful even than the gods.
[3] Though, as noted in the introduction, judgments about the respective beauty of Homer's two major works vary significantly, as Socrates demonstrates in the *Lesser Hippias*.

recognize the beauty of others (e.g., of the Spartan regime). And widespread agreement (and envy) with respect to certain beautiful things does not necessarily mean that there is widespread agreement (and envy) about all beautiful things, let alone beauty itself.

Socrates has nevertheless overstated the amount of disagreement that there is about what is beautiful, in order to make it seem like 'the appearance of the beautiful' is something altogether separate from what actually *is* beautiful. Thus, according to the argument, if the fitting is merely the cause of something's appearing beautiful, it cannot be the beautiful itself. Hippias nonetheless persists in his belief that the fitting is that which makes things appear beautiful, and they are thereby forced to abandon the argument. Their doing so is obviously problematic, partly because they have not adequately examined the relationship that does seem to exist between the fitting and the beautiful. What if Socrates were to re-examine Hippias' claim that the fitting is the cause of something both being and appearing beautiful, with the understanding reached above that the aesthetic effect of appearances are dependent on the observer more than the phenomenon? Would this be fruitful? Would it help explain, for example, the beauty of a maiden, or gold, or the beautiful burial? What about the laws and pursuits themselves?

If we briefly examine these 'things,' the fitting does seem at least relevant to their being beautiful. How is it, for example, that the fitting would make a beautiful maiden beautiful? Perhaps the statue of Athena is a better place to begin, insofar as the discussion of Phidias' statue seems to be the origin of this definition. Hippias says that the parts of the statue, and materials used for the different parts (including stone for the eyes) are beautiful because they are fitting. But we must then ask, what makes them fitting? As discussed earlier, it seems that they are good materials for statue-making

because they are enduring, as well as because they remind us of the beauty of the maiden—i.e., they themselves are inherently beautiful to us in somewhat the same way. In the case of any statue, however, it is the form that takes precedence. The fitting is relevant insofar as the materials used must be 'fitting,' *and* insofar as the different parts of the statue must exist 'in proportion' to each other. The parts each are 'fitting' with respect to the idealized and beautiful form of the goddess—a form derived from the form of a human being, which is something that is a natural whole, much more so than any statue.

This 'fittingness' of the parts and the materials out of which they are made, seems necessary to the beauty of the whole, but this nevertheless fails to account for it fully. Can we say that the statue is beautiful because it itself is somehow fitting? Perhaps it is fitting insofar as it contributes to the virtue of the city, by providing a monument of religiosity and a source of civic pride. But this fact of its fitting into the beauty of the city—and even contributing to this beauty—would not account for it itself being beautiful, any more than the 'fittingness' of its materials accounts for their respective and independent beauty. This reveals a significant difference between the beautiful and the fitting. For 'the nature of the fitting' is such as to be incomplete. There is no such thing as independent 'fittingness,' because its very essence is to describe a relationship between two or more things. The nature of the fitting itself is such that it *is* always with respect to something else, whereas beauty, despite its being relative in the same way as size is relative, nevertheless seems to *be* independently of other things.

The fitting may therefore somehow be a necessary part of beauty, but it—the fitting taken by itself—is not the beautiful. That said, one thing's being fitting with

respect to something else is neither necessary nor sufficient for its being beautiful. The maiden is not beautiful because she 'fits,' but because she is a beautiful whole form, whose parts 'fit together beautifully.' Nor is the fig-wood ladle beautiful, despite its being most fitting in relation to preparing a beautiful feast. This fittingness, despite being a good, does not fully constitute beauty. The golden ladle, in contrast, is 'beautiful' on its own, even though it is certainly not always most fitting for soup-making, just as the immortal gods are 'most beautiful' despite their not 'fitting' into a conception of the blessed life and death for a human being. Thus the fitting may be an intrinsic aspect of the beauty of any beautiful thing—if, that is, the beautiful thing is a composite, unlike gold or diamonds.[4] Beauty seems to *be* in the whole of a thing, whereas 'fittingness' describes the relationship between parts of a whole.

What, then, are we to say about the 'lawful things and pursuits'—'things' that figured so prominently in the prologue, and which Socrates has just referred to for the first time in relation to the beautiful (294d)? We can see in Hippias' example of the 'fitting funeral' that people naturally hope their actions will be perceived as good, and thus warrant a remembrance that accords with a life thus lived.[5] Here, Socrates has also implied that competing notions of the lawful things and pursuits create strife and battle "both privately for individuals and publicly for cities," and this may ultimately be true.

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[4] Gold and diamonds seem to be examples that show how the fitting is not a necessary part of Beauty, insofar as they do not seem to have parts. Science has shown that this is not the case, and so we could say that the fitting still plays a role at the elemental level. Regardless, we can also recognize that gold and diamonds seem to us to already be wholes in and of themselves, and so the fitting does not seem relevant. That said, gold is more beautiful after it has been formed, and diamonds are much more beautiful after they have been cut.

At the opposite 'end' of the visible realm, the beauty of the sky and landscapes may also seem problematic in this regard—insofar as it is hard to see in them the relevance of the fitting. Again, however, it may be that in a appreciating a beautiful landscape we are appreciating a natural whole, the beauty of which is also severely undermined with the presence of, say, a power-plant or telephone line.

[5] Woe to Hippias that Plato's works are his only major lasting memorials (although he is also credited historically with discovering a geometrical curve of some lasting interest).

But this is not to say that there are great public battles and disputes about their respective beauty. Such battles and disputes are more likely to revolve around competing notions of their utility or benefit—the two concepts that Socrates turns to next.

Definition 2: The Useful (295a-295e)

The tension between the 'beautiful lawful things' and 'beautiful pursuits' has been brought obliquely to the surface by Socrates in his refutation of the fitting as the beautiful. If we recall the Spartans and their treatment of some of Hippias' 'most beautiful' pursuits, as evidenced in the prologue, the point is made clearly enough. And if we recall that Plato is always writing of a Socrates that was lawfully put to death by Athens—Socrates, who was above all else a 'pursuer of *wisdom*'—the point is made chillingly enough. Disputes about the 'beautiful' lawful things and beautiful pursuits (or perhaps we should rather say, between the beautiful lawful pursuits and the most beautiful, but possibly unlawful, pursuits) do indeed cause strife and battle "both privately for individuals and publicly for cities." Although cities may not generally go to war over the question of what is best to pursue, this issue does determine the internal workings of any regime. And the question of what is beautiful (or noble) to pursue in relation to the law, can certainly cause tension between individuals (such as Socrates and Hippias), and even within the individual soul. Stated simply, since all the different human pursuits do not necessarily 'fit' nicely together within one regime (piety and religious obedience, for example, do not necessarily abide harmoniously with science) the regime has to choose amongst them—favoring some, discouraging if not forbidding others, and creating laws accordingly.

Given that it was a democracy that sentenced Socrates, it is perhaps the case that any set of laws—thus any polity—would chafe at the philosopher, whose pursuits are so far removed from the (mainly useful) ordinary ones as necessarily to seem not merely different but at odds with them.[6] It may be practically impossible radically to question the legitimacy of the laws, for example, without potentially undermining them, to say nothing of the radical inquiries concerning the "things in the heavens and beneath the earth." The apparent indifference, if not irreverence, of philosophers for popular conceptions of the good or beautiful is apt to make them the targets of suspicion, resentment, and envy. We are hereby reminded of "Pittacus and Bias, the associates of Thales the Milesian and those still later down to Anaxagoras"—those "men of the past whose names are said to be great in regard to wisdom," who "either all or most" apparently held themselves back from political activities. We are perhaps especially reminded of Anaxagoras, who Socrates singles out in the prologue for his lack of interest in money, and who was also sentenced to death by Athens—another man whose pursuits

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[6] Cf. *Apology*, 36bc, where Socrates describes precisely how his own activities differ from the ordinary ones:

> What am I worthy to suffer or to pay because I did not keep quiet during my life and did not care for the things that the many do—moneymaking and household management, and generalships, and popular oratory, and the other offices, and conspiracies and factions that come to be in the city—since I held that I myself was really too decent to survive if I went into these things? I did not go into matters, where if I did go, I was going to be of no benefit either to you or to myself; instead I went to each of you privately to perform the greatest benefaction, as *I* affirm, and I attempted to persuade each of you not to care for any of his own things until he cares for himself, how he will be the best and most prudent possible, nor to care for the things of the city until he cares for the city itself, and so to care for the other things in the same way.

And 37cd, where Socrates discusses exile as an alternative to the death sentence Meletus has proposed:

> Well, should I propose exile, then? For perhaps you would grant me this as my desert. I would certainly be possessed by much love of soul, men of Athens, if I were so unreasonable that I were not able to reason that you who are my fellow citizens were not able to bear my ways of spending time and my speeches, but that instead they have become quite grave and hateful to you, so that you are now seeking to be released from them: will others, then, bear them easily? Far from it, men of Athens. Noble indeed would life be for me, a human being of my age, to go into exile and to live exchanging one city for another, always being driven out! For I know well that wherever I go, the young will listen to me when I speak, just as they do here. And if I drive them away, they themselves will drive me out by persuading their elders. But if I do not drive them away, their fathers and families will drive me out because of these same ones.

did not 'fit' into the things deemed lawful by the city, but who, unlike Socrates, chose to flee Athens rather than face death.[7]

The life and death of Socrates exemplifies the tension between the laws and the most beautiful pursuits, and so serves as a reminder that politics and philosophy do not seem to be 'by nature' always harmoniously compatible. The dramatic interlude that follows the refutation of the fitting as the beautiful, however, may provide a reminder on a more prosaic level for why politics is nonetheless necessary to philosophy.[8] For here we are shown a Hippias who 'chafes' at Socrates' presence. The fitting has been 'most strangely refuted,' according to Hippias, and yet tireless Socrates is not discouraged, saying that he "still has some hope that whatever the beautiful is will become completely apparent" (295a). Hippias, for his part, agrees, suggesting, however, that *he* would be best served by some time away from Socrates' tiresome method: "I for my part know well that if I were to go into seclusion for a short time and consider it by myself, I could tell it to you more precisely than total precision." We know with certainty by now that such seclusion would not be beneficial to Hippias' inquiry, though it might put him at ease. We might wonder, however, whether Socrates and his 'imaginary friend' would not have more success apart from Hippias. Despite this possibility, he seems almost to implore that Hippias remain to continue the search:

> You, I suppose will find it easily when you are alone. But before the gods, find it in my presence. Or if you wish, seek it with me as we were doing just now, and if we find it, that will be most beautiful, but if not, I shall be content with my fortune, I suppose, and you will go away and find it easily. If we find it now, of course, I won't be an annoyance to you by inquiring what it was that you found out by yourself. So contemplate now what the beautiful seems to you to be. I say that it is—but be attentive to me and apply your mind completely so I won't babble. (295b)

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[7] Anaxagoras was also unlike Socrates, however, in that he was not a citizen of Athens.

[8] 'Love of wisdom' may be a necessary element of *good* politics, and it may *become* necessary once it has arisen, but insofar as politics as such can exist without philosophy, the two are not interdependent.

We are here confronted squarely with a question that has been hovering for some time: why *does* Socrates bother to continue this discussion at all?

Why is it that Socrates, who it seems would stand to benefit far less from the dialectical exchange, is nevertheless far more willing to continue than is Hippias? On the one hand we might take seriously Socrates' suggestion that the presence of other people in some way prevents his 'babbling.'[9] To this extent, other people are useful to him. But ever-agreeing Hippias does not seem very proficient in this particular role.[10] On the other hand, Socrates also suggests in the above passage that he would be 'content with his fortune' were he left alone. This points to the ultimate self-sufficiency of the philosopher. Recognizing this feature of his nature, we are obliged to consider the possibility that this self-sufficiency, comfortable though it may be, may not be 'the most beautiful thing' to the philosopher. According to the present passage, after all, the 'most beautiful thing' would be for him and Hippias to find the truth about the beautiful *together*. Why might this be? Does the fact that the truth is perfectly shareable, the paradigm 'common good,' make it beautiful? This may be the case. But Socrates seems to imply that the truth actually *becomes* more beautiful in its being shared—that it is not only better for more people to see it, but that there is something important, and qualitatively different, about people seeing it together. In acknowledging his desire for this 'most beautiful of things,' Socrates may acknowledge that his reliance on others is more than merely instrumental in nature. But to say this is to make assumptions about 'utility' that are unwarranted at present, given the course the inquiry is about to take. It is

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[9] After all, even when he is 'alone,' Socrates intimates that he himself operates as 'two' rather than 'one'—thereby pointing to the dialogical structure of thought, a structure which necessarily, it seems, has its origins in our political nature.

[10] When Hippias *does* accuse Socrates of 'engaging in babblings and drivel,' he then seems determined to halt the conversation, not facilitate it, and he succeeds (304b).

sufficient at this point to acknowledge that the philosopher seems to acknowledge a need for others—i.e., a need for a political setting.[11]

This desire for the 'most beautiful thing' does not account for Socrates' continuing to speak to *Hippias*, however, for it would seem that the philosopher should know by now that this beautiful event is not likely to occur in the sophist's company. He, after all, would prefer his solitude to Socrates' gadfly-like haranguing.[12] Nevertheless, perhaps in search of some other truth, Socrates now supplies another definition for their joint consideration: "Let this be beautiful for us: whatever is useful" (295c). This solution too is rooted in the previous discussion, and in some ways stems from the discussion of the fitting. Perhaps it is also related to Hippias' second definition—for gold certainly seems to be what Hippias thinks is most useful. Like the fitting, the useful is a relational property; just as something is only fitting in relation to something else, so too is something useful for the sake of something else. Often the two words are used interchangeably, as in the fig-wood ladle that is 'fitting' for making soup because it is more useful with respect to the flavor of the soup, the pot used, etc. The various senses of the word 'fitting' were not explicitly examined by Socrates and Hippias, however; hence its 'utilitarian' sense may be worthy of separate consideration, especially since the idea of 'form following function' seems a plausible explanation of 'natural beauty.' Do we think things are beautiful as a direct result of their being useful to us in some way?

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[11] Though Hippias poses as a cosmopolitan (especially in *Protagoras*, 337c-338b), his ability (or, rather, his willingness) to adapt to the common tastes of any multitude may indicate that he is quite the opposite.

[12] Perhaps Socrates proceeds based on some reason he does not mention. In the *Apology*, after all, Socrates claims to proffer the 'greatest benefactions' to the Athenians through private interactions of this kind (30e-31b, 36c). Does Socrates hope to help Hippias (or Athens) in some similar way?

The philosopher's particular manner of introducing beauty as 'the useful' is humorous, for although he provides 'evidence' for this new thesis, it is evidence that has already been refuted—by common sense first, but also by an earlier part of their conversation. More than anything, it points to a problem with the latest definition. Socrates suggests that "we maintain that eyes are beautiful, not those which seem to be such, yet do not have the power to see, but those which do have that power and are useful for seeing" (295c). Ought we be surprised that Hippias has so soon forgotten about Phidias' statue of Athena—the one whose eyes were so 'fittingly' fashioned of beautiful stone, as Socrates described for us in detail (290d)? If the statue's 'eyes' are truly beautiful, it is not because of their 'useful' power for seeing. This need not, however, preclude the 'stone eyes' being useful to Phidias, nor the whole statue's being useful in some way. But the example does forewarn us to keep an eye on Socrates' 'use' of the word 'useful' here and throughout this section. The beautiful may always be useful without the useful always being beautiful (here one may revive one's reservations about 'beautiful soup'). It is tempting to suggest that it would have been better, meaning 'more useful' *ergo* more beautiful, if Socrates and Hippias had clarified the logical possibilities of their proposal here at the outset.

Perhaps Hippias is suffering from mental fatigue, that he so readily agrees that eyes are beautiful because of their ability to see (their function), rather than for how they appear (their form).[13] If so, Socrates' next proclamation seems designed to exploit his condition:

> Then in this way we also say that the whole body is beautiful, one for running, another for wrestling, and so too all living things—a beautiful horse and cock and quail, and all utensils and vehicles, those on land and those on the sea, transport ships as well as

[13] The young Liz Taylor may have had 20/200 vision, but she still had beautiful 'violet eyes.'

> triremes, and all instruments, those in music and those in the other arts, and, if you wish, pursuits and laws. We call almost all of these beautiful for the same characteristic. Looking carefully at how each of them is by nature, how it is made, how it is established, we say that the useful one, for how it is useful, and in relation to what it is useful, and whenever it is useful, is beautiful, but the one that in all of these respects is useless we say is ugly. Does it not also seem so to you, Hippias? (295d-e)

Again Hippias agrees. It is not altogether clear what he agrees to, for Socrates has said many things about the useful, as well as about things in general. The philosopher listed things that come to be by nature (e.g., bodies, living things), things made by human artifice (utensils, vehicles, instruments), and others established by human convention (laws and various pursuits). He has also suggested that these are useful for and in relation to different things, at different times, and that these are *the* relevant factors in determining the useful thing's beauty. However, instead of "looking carefully at how each is" by nature, artifice, or convention, thereby seeing the precise way in which each is useful (and then considering whether each is beautiful as a consequence of its utility), Hippias accepts the whole package as showing the useful *as such* to be beautiful, and the completely useless ugly.

Among other implications, this means something is beautiful *only* when in use. The eyes of *Athena Parthenos* suggest otherwise (if Hippias' first example hadn't already). Indeed, Socrates' catalogue of some of the many useful things studiously omits all sorts of things that seem useful for little other than their beauty (e.g., so many 'parts' of nature, decorations, pieces of sculpture, music, etc., cf. 298a). And it includes several which might upon further 'careful consideration' seem more ugly than beautiful, despite their obvious utility (e.g., transport ships, some laws). It also includes one in particular that is beautiful very much *in spite of* its intended use (the trireme is most beautiful when not being used to destroy enemies). Initial reflection on the list indicates a major problem

with the thesis: is *anything* beautiful by virtue of its 'utility' alone? Or, does it seem rather that in the case of many beautiful things, we can only call them 'useful' as a direct result of their beauty? Is Socrates trying to show us that beauty itself is 'useful' in some way?

A truly 'careful consideration' of Socrates' suggestive summary would likely take the form of a treatise dealing with nature, artifice, and convention, as a place to start. It would involve a thorough study of the different forms of 'being,' and would have to include an analysis of 'the good' as such. There is no such appendix to the present commentary. It is one point in the dialogue where, the more one considers the matter, the more one sympathizes with Hippias' abstention. The following few remarks are aimed mostly, therefore, at illuminating why what Socrates has said and implied about utility and beauty is so *difficult* to unravel.

We might begin by suggesting that nothing that *is* by nature is 'useful' in *its own* nature. Nature, it seems, simply exists, and all the parts of nature simply exist. Indeed, the natural things seem to exist together in a complex ecosystem that ties them together via complex relationships. But we cannot say that any natural thing exists by *its own nature* for the sake of anything else. A bit of dirt may be 'useful' for a worm, but this is not its *nature*. A nut may be 'useful' for a squirrel, but this is not its *nature*. Even if we were to posit a perfect teleological order in nature—such that every 'lower' being ultimately exists, by nature, 'for the sake' of the higher (or the high*est*), and *is* thus *useful* to that end—each part of that teleological order would, it seems, nevertheless have a 'being' of its own, by nature, and independent of its 'higher purpose.' Another way of saying this is to say that nature seems to be composed of natural forms, natural wholes.

These depend upon other 'forms' for their own existence, but they each somehow also *exist* separately.[14]

Enter *Human* Being, reason, and the concept of utility, as well as the concept of beauty. We are the only beings that can recognize and thus call things 'useful,' and we especially do so with respect to such things as are useful for ourselves—for the perpetuation of our own existence, our own form, our own 'wholeness,' our own good.[15] What we call useful are the things which we affect such that they *become* primarily means to our ends. They also thus become 'unnatural'—they are the product of human artifice, and no longer exist strictly *by nature.* We do say that inanimate nature is useful, that "wood (but not a tree) is useful for building," or "metal is useful for agriculture," or "fire is useful for metallurgy." We do not say "that living branch is useful for my swing," though we might say "that branch has proven useful, or has become useful." We sometimes call domesticated animals useful, but not wild ones—unless these latter are dead, and then their bodies become useful to us. The useful things are things that become *parts* of *our* being; we seem to render them incomplete in their own nature. The concept 'useful,' like the concept 'fitting,' describes a state of incompleteness—useful things are useful for something else, just as fitting things 'fit with' something else.

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[14] There is, however, another element to nature, of course, and that is its *movement.* Socrates alludes to this when he refers to the things Hippias knows 'most beautifully'—the "matters [or *experiences, pathēmeta*] concerning the stars and events in the heavens" (285c). Socrates, somewhat strangely refers to these things as *pathēmeta,* which is a very important term in the dialogue, elsewhere translated as *affection,* in passages indicating the ways in which our souls are *affected* by beauty.

[15] Indeed, the way we speak of the useful indicates that we think of it as being closely related to intentionality. While we certainly understand and explain much of nature in terms of utility, we still hesitate to speak of the parts of nature as being themselves inherently 'useful.' We do not *say* "my, is that ever a useful nest that duck has made," though we understand it to be useful to the duck. We do not say "that forest fire was very useful to those trees," though we recognize that it may have had positive consequences for the forest. We especially hesitate when it comes to 'higher-order' natural things. We might say "my cat is so useful because she kills so many mice," or "that tree is so useful because it provides me with this useful shade," or "that was a very useful storm, for look at those useful crops grow"; but, although these phrases make some sense to us, they also strike us as a bit funny, a bit wrong. Utility is a concept that is closely related to conscious, human, intentionality.

The problem of beauty surfaces in this context when we begin to think about what we do with so many of our 'merely' useful things: we adorn them, we pay attention to their form. And in so doing, it seems that we try to make them into objects that are more complete in themselves. We carve vines in fig-wood chairs, we paint figures on pots, we make *golden* spoons. We give leather interiors to our cars, and decorate the outsides with little metallic jaguars that somehow correspond to the 'beautiful' form of the exterior. Often, only then do we call the useful things beautiful. Some useful things are beautiful without much 'adorning'—a beautifully-crafted new knife, a trireme, a skyscraper (is there something about largeness itself that we find beautiful?). But what impresses us about them is their form—tarnished knives cut effectively, but they are not beautiful. Craftsmen pay attention to form, not merely to make things more useful. Indeed, sometimes we 'succeed' in this to such an extent that we no longer *use* them at all for their intended purpose, but keep them on our shelves, or in our garages, to 'look at'—that is, enjoy their beauty. Indeed, sometimes it so happens that the more we have adorned and shaped things; i.e., the more beautiful they have been made, the more unlikely it is that we will use them at all, in the ordinary sense of the word 'use.' They thus lose some of their utilitarian 'incompleteness,' they seem to become something whole in the sense of an 'end in themselves'—in short, they become 'art.'

In this sense, such things do not lose their value in the process of becoming beautiful—hence do not cease being *beneficial,* insofar as humans are benefited by being in the presence of beauty. The become 'useful,' as it were, to a different end, being sources of aesthetic pleasure. In anticipation of what Socrates will later describe, we might say that they simply delight us. Some people dedicate their lives to creating these

delightful 'wholes': painters, sculptors, poets, and composers. Some of them create things that *are* 'only' beautiful—music being the paradigmatic example. The human world is inconceivable without this particular activity and its 'offspring.' Indeed, scarcely any human activity is altogether separable from aesthetic concerns—to the point, almost, of absurdity, especially in times such as ours (i.e., as wealthy as ours).[16]

How the artists 'create' beauty seems intimately connected to how they 'create' and use form. Or should we, how they *imitate* form. We might recall Daedalus, whose statues were such that they seemed *to move*—i.e., they seemed alive, they seemed *natural*, and they were probably more beautiful as a result. We are thus lead back to considering nature as such, now in relation to the beautiful. We do not generally call natural things useful, especially what I am calling 'higher-order' natural things, things with higher 'forms' of being. But do we call them beautiful? Of course we do in many—not all—cases, and in recognizing this, we recognize an interesting 'pattern' emerging. I began this 'tangent' by suggesting that nature is composed of wholes. We cannot help but recognize that nature is also a realm of outstanding beauty to human beings. Is this a coincidence?[17]

The preceding obviously leaves many questions about nature, artifice, convention, utility and beauty unanswered. Most obviously, we have very little to say about why

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[16] Needless to say, this is not always 'for the best,' and sometimes losing sight of something's intended purpose for the sake of its beauty can be a sign of something ugly. See Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, Book III, Chapter 10.

[17] If we try and systematize our thoughts on the matter of ugliness, it proves revealing, and sustains our thesis that beauty is intimately related to 'wholeness' and form. We find waste, destruction, disease and death ugly, and all of these are a rejection of form (or rejection *by* form, in the case of waste). More precisely, perhaps, these things represent the degeneration of higher forms—animate nature, for example—into lower. What is disease, after all, if not the predation of lower forms of life on higher? And what is more 'unnatural' than disease? But some forms of higher life are certainly ugly, someone might say. If we think of particular examples—crocodiles, camels, donkeys, hyenas, vultures, pigs, walruses, and hippopotamuses, to name a few—can we deny that their ugliness is related to their form? For a 'poetic' account of nature's ugliness, see the 'witches brew' scene in *Macbeth* (Act VI, Scene I).

some forms—the 'best' in each class of thing, for example—are so beautiful to us. If we admit that *everything* is formed, then how is it that we are so capable of differentiating between the different kinds of form and their particular kinds of perfection? And there are other, more basic questions—why, for example, do we enjoy some colors more than others? Can we deny that this must be related to some utilitarian considerations of our nature—that blue skies are so beautiful because they generally mean good weather, *for us*? How deeply are we influenced (or 'blinded') by our own particular nature in these matters? Does our recognition of so many beautiful things in nature that have no utility to us in any ordinary conception of utility—butterflies, birds, sunsets, dewdrops—suffice to quell the notion that the beautiful is the useful? I would argue that it certainly suffices to preserve and heighten the mystery of beauty.

'Definition 2,' continued: The Powerful, and The Helpful (295e-297d)

Despite Socrates' evocative list of the useful things, in light of which various kinds of utility can be differentiated and examined as to their respective beauty and lack of same, Hippias shows no interest in pursuing a 'careful' dialectical inquiry, and instead promptly agrees that they are correct in saying that "the useful, more than anything else, happens to be beautiful" (295e). The way in which Socrates proceeds in the conversation might thus be interpreted as an effort to define more rigorously the relationship between the beautiful and the useful—except for the fact that it more or less fails to do so, at least explicitly. Socrates' questions do move towards defining the useful more precisely in a way which is relevant to *our* inquiry, but not, apparently, to theirs. Socrates will shift their working definition of the beautiful from the useful to the helpful—but achieving this shift depends

on his first disabusing Hippias of his understanding of the relationship between beauty and two particularly useful things, which he especially regards as beautiful (as we may suspect Socrates does also): power and wisdom.[18]

He begins by equating the useful with the 'ability' or 'power' (*dunatos*) for producing things, saying that a thing with the power to produce something is also useful insofar as it has this power, but that a thing without such a power is useless. On the basis of Hippias agreeing, he goes on to suggest that power is beautiful and lack of power ugly. This allows us to consider the previously listed useful things from a new perspective—how are they powerful? In some cases, at least, might their power be in their beauty? Hippias interprets the shift Socrates initiates in strictly human terms (thereby denigrating the power of things external to us): "not only, Socrates, do other things bear witness for us that this is so [that power/ability is useful, lack of power ugly] but especially politics does. For in politics and in one's own city, the powerful is most beautiful of all, but the powerless most ugly of all" (296a). Socrates commends Hippias on this statement, before suggesting that this must mean that *sophia* is "most beautiful of all and ignorance most ugly of all"—especially to a *sophist*, we might add.

Socrates apparently borrows this equation from the beginning of their conversation, where Hippias said that the ancient wise men did not participate in politics due to their lack of power and prudence, implying that they were lacking in genuine wisdom. There, Socrates left the identity of power and wisdom alone, while subtly revealing the 'power' of Hippias' 'wisdom'—it being primarily useful for producing money. Here we see that Hippias is only too willing to equate power and wisdom,

[18] The word translated as helpful here and throughout is *ōphelimon* (and cognates). It can also be rendered as 'beneficial' (it is the same word that is used to describe 'natural law' at 284dff. as well as that used for 'helpful pleasure' 303e).

whereas Socrates, despite having been the one to raise the proposal, now backtracks, feigning fear at what they are saying. He asks Hippias: "Could anyone do something that he did not know how to do or did not at all have the power to do?" (296b). Hippias only explicitly responds to the latter question: "In no way. For how could he do what he did not have the power to do?" Hippias' equating power and knowledge prevents him from seeing the possibility that Socrates will now make explicit—that it is possible, if not normal, for people to have power despite their not having the knowledge or wisdom to use it beneficially (indeed, physical beauty may be one of these types of powers).[19] Socrates makes this point without referring again to wisdom or knowledge, saying merely that "all humans do many more bad things than good, starting from childhood, and they make mistakes involuntarily" (296c).[20] Hippias is unlikely to disagree with such a cynical comment, since he (as a 'wise one,' a 'sophist') professes to teach the wisdom by which one can avoid mistakes.

By dropping 'wisdom' from the argument temporarily, Socrates is able to deal with the fact that power is sometimes 'useful' for 'producing something bad'—the implication of this being that, apparently, the beautiful cannot be the powerful and useful simply. The assumption here (an assumption present from the beginning) is that the beautiful is necessarily something good, and as such productive of only good, an assumption that Socrates will make explicit momentarily. Before we proceed along with

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[19] This is not to say that wisdom is not power, and even the strongest of powers. Socrates' separating power from wisdom and knowledge may be as misleading a move as his separating appearance and reality with respect to beauty. For it may be that, as is suggested in the Prologue, the 'wise' choose not to use their powers in the ways that we normally associate with the word—that is, in the sense of political power.

[20] Since Socrates seems to exaggerate considerably here, we might ask how what he says might be true. Is it that everything is rightly done only so far as it produces and maintains virtue? This, of course, requires wisdom (or at least right opinion) as to both what virtue is and how it is cultivated, beginning with childhood. What does Socrates comment mean for the idea of 'opinion' generally—that by which most people make most of their decisions? He seems to be saying that most of it is simply wrong. Does his seemingly exaggerated comment leave room for the goodness of right opinion?

him, however, it may be useful to pause and re-examine some of the implications, and confusions, of this argument. For Socrates has advanced the various steps rather quickly, leaving much unsaid. By replacing 'the useful' with 'the powerful'—which Hippias predictably interprets in human terms, such that the *politically* powerful men are the most beautiful—Socrates actually suggests a new definition for the beautiful, one worth examining briefly, if only to understand some of the implications of the overall argument here. Can the beautiful simply *be* the powerful? Insofar as Socrates will explain that the powerful is not necessarily knowingly powerful—that power and knowledge, let alone power and wisdom, do not always coincide—he would appear to refute this argument by separating out the good and wise from the powerful (which *per* hypothesis would include the beautiful).

However, just as was the case with the fitting and the useful, it may be important to examine the logic here more carefully. We should note that while the beautiful need not be simply identical with the powerful, beauty could nonetheless be powerful. That is, by virtue of its effect on the human soul, beauty is a kind of power in its own right. Whether *this* power would be bad, good, or 'neutral' would then be the important question. Socrates' manner of refuting the idea that the powerful is the beautiful does invite this question, for his 'success' rests on the assumption that the beautiful would be good. The recognition that beauty *does* seem to have a power of its own invites us to question this assumption—can *all* powers, whether wielded consciously or not, be *used* for either good or ill? The refutation provides us a warning with respect to the power of beauty.

And there may be yet another way to consider the relationship between power, beauty, and wisdom. Socrates hinted at this in his description of the utility of eyes. He said that the beautiful ones are those which are useful because they have the power to see. This seems so absurd that we must presume Socrates had some ulterior reason for saying it. At the center of the dialogue, Socrates (*via* his alter ego) implied that Hippias has impoverished powers of hearing and understanding, and doubtless this impoverishment has seemed ugly. Here, then, could he be hinting at our differentiated ability to *recognize* beauty—in particular, intelligible beauty (and ugliness)? For this is certainly relevant to the question of power and wisdom. In some cases, beauty may exert a power that is directly proportional to one's own 'wisdom'—wisdom taken as a certain power for 'seeing' the beauty of intelligible but imperceptible things. This does not mean that wisdom is *the* beautiful; it means merely that different powers are necessary for our recognizing different kinds of beauty—and perhaps even necessary to the very *existence* of these different types of beauty. Power may thus be *part* of beauty in this sense as well.

Assisted by Hippias' presumption that beauty is good, Socrates succeeds in amending their conception of the useful as it relates to the beautiful: it is the useful and powerful for doing something good, which Socrates immediately suggests is equivalent to 'the helpful,' or the 'beneficial.'[21] In order to secure agreement to these amendments, Socrates reminds him that *power* is not necessarily connected to what is good, not being informed by knowledge of what is good. Now, proceeding upon the assumption that the beautiful *is* necessarily connected to what is good, Socrates proceeds to examine this relationship (between the beautiful and the good). He begins by clarifying the implications of 'the beautiful' being 'the helpful.' The helpful is, by definition, that

[21] Which would require not only knowledge of the good, but also 'good will.'

which does good. And because "that which does something is nothing other than the cause," the beautiful is necessarily the cause of the good (296e-297a). This seems like a natural enough possibility. Socrates, however, apparently unsatisfied with this account, takes the inquiry further, pointing out how the cause of something is different from that which it causes—i.e., cause and effect are different things. Again, this seems generally sound, as do Socrates' next prepositions: that "if the beautiful is a cause of good, the good would come into being because of the beautiful"; and, that "we are serious about prudence and about all the other beautiful things, because the product and offspring of them—namely the good—is worthy of seriousness" (297b).

It is only with Socrates' next move that the argument begins to lose its hold on us, as well as on Hippias and Socrates, apparently. For Socrates next proposes that "from what [they] are finding, the beautiful is in form [*idea*] a sort of father of the good," and that because "the father is not a son and the son is not a father," then it follows that "the beautiful is not good, nor is the good beautiful" (297b-c). Because this conclusion is deemed 'unsatisfying,' they abandon the argument wholesale. And indeed, this might be one of the most unsatisfying passages of the dialogue, though it is rather comical. They seem finally to have arrived at something that seems not only pertinent, but even crucial, only to abandon the argument as the result of what seems like a mere blunder. If we have learned one thing by now, it is that we should not be too eager to act like ever-agreeing Hippias, and should instead examine the source of the blunder. Doing so allows us to reconsider some previous 'errors' of the dialogue more profitably, especially the other passages that discuss causation. It will also provide us with the opportunity to consider briefly the *dramatic* reasoning behind all this comic blundering, and the possible

relationship between the comical and the beautiful. This exploration will provide a useful perspective from which to consider the remainder of the dialogue.

Transition: Causation Revisited

Socrates has suggested that the cause and its effect cause must be different things: thus, if the Beautiful is the cause of the Good, then "the Beautiful is not good, nor is the Good beautiful." This, however, need not follow. The actual implication of 'separating' the cause from the effect in this way is that "the Beautiful is not *the* Good, nor is the Good *the* Beautiful." When Socrates uses the two words in the attributive sense, he confuses matters considerably. It is possible for two things—whether they be cause and effect, or being and the appearance of being—to share attributes, attributes which show how they are intimately related (after all, we are speaking about these *most* immediate relations), without being the same thing. The father does not have to be his own son in order for them both to *be* sons (or both to be men, or 'Joneses'); the Good does not necessarily have to be *the* Beautiful in order still to be beautiful. And just as a maiden does not have to be *the* Beautiful in order for her to be considered a beautiful thing (beautiful being an 'incomplete' attribute, she is not *the* beautiful, and is not therefore 'perfectly, completely, and eternally beautiful'), the Beautiful does not have to be *the* good in order for it still to be considered *a* good thing.

If we look back to the outset of Socrates' and Hippias' discussion of Beauty, we can see that this problem of the relationship between the Beautiful and the Good was foreshadowed in the alias' questions. These questions broached the topic of causality, in order (apparently) to set up a framework for discussing the beautiful. There they

concluded that, just as all good things are good 'by the Good,' so too are all beautiful things beautiful 'by the Beautiful' (287c). These conclusions, from the perspective of the present argument about the Beautiful being the cause of the Good, are somewhat perplexing—and seemed so in our reading of that earlier passage. Clearly, if all good things are good 'by the Good,' then they are not also good 'by the Beautiful'—unless, that is, the Beautiful *is* the cause of the Good, which thereby becomes just one among the many 'beautiful things' caused by the Beautiful, albeit 'one' that itself comprises many things (including many that do not strike us as beautiful, e.g., surgery, garbage collecting). This seems paradoxical. Thus, this earlier passage would have us question the priority of the Beautiful over the Good, even if it does not answer the question for us. Granting that the Good and the Beautiful exist, and are somehow, perhaps even causally, related, the question becomes whether whatever is good is beautiful, or whether whatever is beautiful is good. The former posits the good as a 'subclass' of the beautiful, whereas the latter posits the beautiful as a 'subclass' of the good. But neither proposition squares with our experience of goodness and beauty: amputating a gangrenous limb may be a good thing, but not beautiful. And a beautiful person can nonetheless be evil.[22]

Although these passages that deal with causality do not formally answer this question, it may be that the dialogue as a whole provides indications as to how the matter ought to be considered. In many ways, Plato seems determined in this dialogue to set beauty apart from certain kinds of goods—at least insofar as Socrates' determined attempt to persuade Hippias to see Beauty as comprehending all kinds of good falls short of the truth. When Socrates implies, for example, that the fig-wood ladle, in all of its

[22] However, Beauty itself may be good without its 'causing' all beautiful things to be good. The beauty of an evil person is not the *cause* of his evilness, though it may facilitate his doing evil.

utilitarian 'fittingness,' is also more beautiful than the golden ladle, we are not convinced. When he suggests that the lawful, or 'helpful,' things are also beauties, we might be willing to entertain the possibility, until we consider Socrates' enactment of how the lawful things usually work: when he 'justly' berates Hippias at the center of the dialogue and defends the position that the sophist would be justly beaten for producing bad answers to his questions, we are reminded of the 'ugliness' of the laws, of punitive justice, which though largely beneficial, hardly seem beautiful in application.

In reviewing these passages, and their obvious problems, we are also reminded of how the dialogue invites us to consider humor in its relation to the beautiful and the good. All of this bad reasoning, the constant premature agreement and faulty refutations are not beautiful, but funny. And is the ridicule that the dialogue hereby throws on Hippias ("the beautiful and wise," 281a) itself *beautiful*? It does not seem so, though this does not seem to make our laughter a bad thing—and if the beautiful encompasses, or causes, the good, as is suggested by Socrates, then laughter's not being beautiful *would* prevent its being good. On the other hand, if the Good is the cause of the Beautiful, then something's being beautiful would also imply that it is good—and handsome, well-adorned Hippias himself seems to provide plenty of evidence to the contrary! How are we to make sense of his appearing beautiful, but also 'deaf and dumb,' or 'bad' in this way? Perhaps the answer is that Hippias is only good to the extent that he is beautiful, and that the effect of his visible beauty is undermined with every word he utters. As we come to know Hippias via Plato's portrayal, recognizing his blemishes of mind and spirit, we also see him as less and less beautiful. In this sense, then, his beauty does seem to be a consequence of his *overall* 'goodness,' or lack thereof, insofar as it becomes or is made

apparent to us. The 'comical' Hippias emerges when we begin to see the *disjunction* of his inner and outer qualities, a disjunction that is only compounded (and made funnier) by the gross (and unfitting) disproportion between his self-evaluation and his actual qualities of soul.

The realization that what is beautiful varies in conjunction with our recognition of something's being good (and hence more or less *wholly* good) leads us to consider one last discussion of causation that occurs in the dialogue. At the end of their treatment of 'the beautiful as the fitting,' our interlocutors make what seems to be another 'blunder.' Socrates tried there, without success, to make Hippias see that 'the beautiful they are seeking' is what makes things *be* beautiful, whereas Hippias insisted that the fitting merely makes things *appear* beautiful. Socrates concluded by explaining that "the same thing would never have the power to make things both appear and be either beautiful or *anything else whatever*" (294e). The question we are led to ask in the present context is whether 'anything else whatever' includes the Good. Can the same thing have to power to make things both appear and be Good? It seems that we been shown that Beauty is particularly 'bound up' with appearances, while we would have to concede that what we are calling 'the Good' must be somehow tied to 'being.' If the cause of the Good's 'being' and the cause of its 'appearing' are indeed different, then perhaps it makes sense to speak of Beauty as the appearance of the good.

Insofar as it would be difficult to characterize beauty in any other way, our 'discovery' of this way of understanding it may ultimately prove somewhat formalistic. Much like saying the lawful is the beneficial, such a characterization leaves many questions unanswered. However, at this stage of our analysis, we *are* in a position to

articulate many of these questions more clearly; we may even have some preliminary ideas with regards to their resolution. Each of the potential 'definitions' Socrates and his alias have provided have, upon further consideration, contributed to our understanding of the beautiful. We have seen how beautiful things (as opposed to comical things) seem necessarily to be whole things, made up of 'fitting' parts. This still leaves much room for our consideration of how this affects our understanding of the beauty of immaterial things, such as laws and pursuits (philosophy, or the pursuit of wisdom, in particular). Socrates' questioning of Hippias has also, however, allowed us to separate the merely utilitarian from the beautiful—but the question remains as to whether or not the beautiful itself is nonetheless somehow always helpful to us, and how this is. We have also come to examine the issue of power, and have elaborated various dimensions of the problem: what is the relationship between power and beauty in terms of the apparent beauty of power, the power of beauty, and the power required to 'see' beauty? And we have encountered the possibility of a simultaneous tension and unity between the good and the beautiful, very much related to this issue of power. If the beautiful is the result of our power of seeing coming together with what is good, then the nature of this 'coming together' needs to be further examined: what exactly is it we are seeing, and why does it delight us when we see it? These are some of the questions that remain as we turn to the final section of the dialogue.

Part IV: The Pleasures of Sight and Hearing (297d-304a)

With the 'unsatisfying' and 'laughable' failure of the useful, the powerful, and the helpful, as explanations of the beautiful, Socrates now professes that he "no longer has anywhere to turn, and is perplexed." He also claims to be unable to wait for Hippias—who, for his part, is still sure that, given sufficient time to consider the matter, he will "find it out" (297e). Socrates at once credits and blames his own 'desire to know' for his persistence with the argument and his impatience with Hippias, respectively, as he launches into the last attempt at definition in the *Greater Hippias*. The discussion prompted by Socrates' final suggestion is the lengthiest of all, and also, perhaps, the most perplexing in its presentation—for the strangeness of the discussion does not stem from the definition itself so much as from Socrates' rather bewildering mode of analyzing it.

If anything, the last definition *itself* is the most straight-forward and least perplexing of all. Like his and his alias' earlier gambits, Socrates' last effort to define the beautiful resonates with Hippias' earlier examples of beautiful things. We have seen how the questioner's first, rather abstract, suggestion was directly related to Hippias' summary of a 'blessed' life 'fittingly' crowned with a beautiful ceremonious burial. Similarly, the 'useful,' 'powerful,' and 'helpful' are all related to Hippias' more concrete conception of the utility, power, and benefits of gold (which are all somehow related to the beauty of gold, but do not fully account for it). Now Socrates proposes a definition that would directly apply to Hippias' first, and most concrete, or 'corporeal,' example, that of the beautiful maiden: "If we assert that whatever makes us delighted is beautiful—not all the pleasures, but that which comes through hearing and sight—how then would we fare in the contest?" (297e). It seems that upon having 'nowhere to turn' after the last refutation,

Socrates chooses, in effect, to 'turn downwards.' This last definition is, in Platonic terms, one that appears to be rooted in the 'visible realm,' or 'realm of becoming.' But, perhaps because of this very quality, this definition is also more immediately *intelligible* than the other two, insofar as it comports far more readily with our immediate experience of the beautiful.

If this answer 'rings true' in a way that the others did not, it nevertheless leaves most of our previous questions unanswered. By articulating an accurate description of some aspect at least of the phenomena of beauty—that it delights us in some way—Socrates at last clearly acknowledges the intimate relationship between beauty and perception that was underlying their previous discussion. It is a definition, too, which finally allows him to mention the types of things that we customarily think of as beautiful as his examples. The list contrasts conspicuously with the 'useful things' catalogued at 295d: "beautiful human beings [vs. bodies at 295d], all decorations and paintings and pieces of sculpture, [...] beautiful voices and music altogether and speeches and stories" (298a). It is, in a sense, a series of counter-examples to Socrates' previous definitions—some of which we indeed used to refute definitions as valid (while at the same time refining our understanding of their relevance). However, such examples, and, it seems, the latest definition itself, do not tell us very much about 'whatever' it actually *is* that has this delightful effect. And so, although the last definition is appealing, insofar as it is so obviously true in some way, it also has a vacuity of its own. Of course beautiful human beings, decorations, paintings, sculpture, beautiful voices, music, (some) speeches and stories delight us.[1] But what precisely *is* it about them that delights us? Recognizing the

[1] But of course the beauty of poetry and rhetoric is *not* (primarily) in the sound (unlike music), nor is the beauty/nobility of a courageous action simply in the *sight*—they both come *via* perception.

effect of beauty (delight) and some common particular 'causes' thereof, is a necessary point of departure, but this alone leaves us with nothing to say about *why* what 'strikes' us as beautiful does so.

Nor is Socrates willing to rest here, 'true to form' as he always is. Indeed, the 'refutation' of the last definition spans five Stephanus pages; it is an argument that is as long as the entire prologue and twice as long as any of the other refutations. Nevertheless, the logical trajectory of the last part of the dialogue is surprising, if not downright bizarre, at least upon a first reading. The discussion begins with Socrates' coming very close to contradicting himself in a matter which he has just imbued with great importance (questioning whether his proposed definition would fit laws and pursuits, 298d), after which he embarks on a drawn-out, and seemingly tangential, discussion of the way in which hearing and sight relate to each other and to beauty. The lengthy digression seems out of place largely because, as we will see, the question Socrates is explicitly concerned with was answered at the outset. The effect of this is that it seems as though Socrates takes a very simple matter and complicates it enormously merely to confuse Hippias (which, as we have seen, is not that difficult). We may discover, however, that what seems on the surface like mere sophistical banter on Socrates' part (as Hippias will claim at 304b, ultimately ending the dialogue) is actually the discussion of a matter of such philosophical importance that it not only serves to unveil the essence and implications of Hippias' (and any) materialism, but also offers a glimpse of what *precisely* it *is* we are seeing when we see beauty, and how.

Problems with the Pleasures (297d -299b)

Having listed several beautiful thus and pleasant sights and sounds, Socrates immediately follows them with what would seem to be counter-examples to his latest thesis. He does this by referring, once again, to seemingly very different, and more problematic, 'classes' of beautiful things. He asks the sophist: "Shall we indeed assert that beautiful pursuits and laws, Hippias, are beautiful by being pleasant through hearing or through sight, or do they have some other form [*eidos*]?" (298b). When Hippias suggests that "perhaps these might go unnoticed by the fellow," Socrates warns him that he would be particularly ashamed to make empty claims in front of this man in particular.[2] This, apparently, piques Hippias' curiosity slightly (he is perhaps incredulous that anyone would have so much respect for the *content* of anyone else's opinion), as he renews his inquiry into the man's identity. Socrates' (conclusive) reply is: "The son of Sophroniscus, who would no more permit me to say these things easily without their being examined than to say that I know what I do not know."[3] When Hippias, taking this as an encouragement to dissent, concedes that "it seems to me too that this matter concerning the laws is something different," the philosopher replies with yet another warning, "Softly, Hippias. For though we have fallen into the same perplexity concerning the beautiful which we were in just recently, we probably suppose that we have fallen into another solution" (298c). But Hippias has just expressed hesitancy with respect to aspects of the proposed solution! It is no wonder that he is puzzled and responds "What do you mean by that, Socrates?,"

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[2] Thus, Hippias, ever the sophist, suggests that Socrates might 'win his argument' despite its inadequacy. Sweet translates Hippias' line less literally, with "even if the fellow is unaware of it."

[3] *This*, then, is the "most ugly" thing to Socrates—intellectual vanity, and *not* ignorance (cf. 296a, where Hippias agrees when Socrates asks whether wisdom is most beautiful of all, and ignorance most ugly of all). Some manuscripts have Socrates name himself explicitly at this juncture, which seems to diminish the authenticity of Socrates' ploy—doubtless he is jesting when he speaks of his alias as someone else, but Hippias gives no indication that he is not fooled.

although he might as well have just said "As I was saying, Socrates, I think there *is* a problem here."[4]

Instead of taking up Hippias' objection (an objection which he himself introduced) in order that they not 'say these things easily without their being examined' and unwittingly 'fall' into another solution, Socrates does the very opposite of what we might expect. He avoids the problem raised altogether, entreating with Hippias that they should instead be patient with the argument (which contrasts directly with his earlier impatience with Hippias):

> I shall tell you what has become apparent to me, in case there is something in what I say, because these things concerning laws and pursuits might perhaps appear not to be outside the perception which happens to come to us through hearing and sight. But let us be patient with the argument that the pleasant that comes through these is beautiful, without bringing the issue of the laws into the center. (298d)

Socrates speaks as though the nature of Hippias' objection is clear—that Hippias thinks that "this matter of the laws is something different" by reason of their not being 'perceptible' in the same way that the other 'beautiful' things are. Socrates' reply may be fair if this *is* the complete version of Hippias' objection, though it would certainly warrant further inquiry.[5] However, it seems equally likely that Hippias objects with regards to the laws (and he does object *only* with regards to the laws, and not the pursuits, some aspects of which—e.g., reputation—would be 'formally' at least as 'invisible' as the laws) because of their not necessarily being pleasant or delightful.[6] And if this *is* the nature of Hippias' objection, then it would introduce a very important question

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[4] Hippias' mode of responding (his characteristic vagueness) indicates his unwillingness to 'hold on' to *any argument*—even his own legitimate one—in order to 'carefully examine it.'

[5] It would, after all, be wonderful to have an account of how Socrates thinks these other things are perceptible, and how the effect of our perceiving these things relates to beauty. Socrates may be indicating that speaking of laws as 'beautiful' is quasi-metaphoric, as are all uses of '*kalos*' as noble.

[6] If we recall his statement in the *Protagoras* with respect to the laws being a tyrant over nature (337cd), this seems like a plausible interpretation.

concerning *to kalon*: are 'beautiful' things always pleasant? Or, perhaps more precisely, are they always pleasant to *everyone*? At 294cd, after all, this question was raised explicitly, and Socrates suggested not only that the beautiful things are unrecognized, but also that "strife and battle most of all are about these things, both privately for individuals and publicly for cities." Hippias shows us precisely why this is the case with respect to the laws. The *judgment* of the beauty/nobility of laws is corrupted by ignorance and self-interest—and both of these 'causes' of corrupt judgment are, in Hippias' case at least, greatly abetted by his vanity.

Socrates may have this objection to the beauty of the laws (i.e., that they are not pleasant) in mind as he proceeds to deal with other possible 'doubts' with the argument. His first such query (still using the guise of the alias) is the following: "Why indeed, Hippias, and Socrates, have you divided up the pleasant, defining as beautiful the sort that is pleasant in the way that you say but claiming that the pleasant with respect to the other perceptions—of food and drink and sex and all the rest of this sort—is not beautiful?" (299e). As he proceeds to account for why these other 'pleasant things' should not be included in the class of beautiful things, we might also consider what the status of the sometimes 'unpleasant' things is. After all, Socrates' definition of beauty *implies* a definition of 'ugly' (i.e., 'the pain that comes through sight and hearing'). Do the laws belong in the class of ugly things? And do these two things—the beautiful and the ugly—account for all the ways in which the visual and audible phenomena please, or otherwise affect, us?

In defending the exclusion of the 'other pleasant things' from the class of beautiful things against the questioner, Socrates presents this rejoinder:

> There is no one who would not laugh at us if we should assert that it is not pleasant to eat but beautiful and that it is not pleasant to smell something pleasant but beautiful. And as for sex, presumably everyone would do battle with us and maintain that it is most pleasant but that if someone engages in it, he must do it in such a way that no one see, since it is most ugly to be seen. (299a)

The questioner's retort applies equally to pleasant and unpleasant things: "I too understand that for some time you have been ashamed to assert that these pleasures are beautiful because they do not seem so to human beings. But I was asking not what seems to the many to be beautiful but what is so." Just as Hippias' judgment regarding the laws seems to be mistaken, are 'the many's' judgment about eating, smelling, and sex similarly corrupt? Are they 'mistaken' in their laughter? Socrates and Hippias gingerly decide to maintain their position, despite the inherent logical weakness of the defense that has been proposed, and the corresponding logical strength of the surrogate's retort.

They might be forgiven insofar as the psychological aspects of the argument *are* fundamental, especially in a discussion about beauty, and, indeed, here Socrates comes closest to acknowledging the basic reliance on a psychological experience, or *pathēmeta*, for the sake of the argument itself. His argument is that everyone would laugh at the idea of eating, smelling, and sex being beautiful rather than pleasant. Interestingly, this argument relies on the idea that there is something about laughter—a rather unique psychological experience—in particular that can be used to argue against something's being beautiful. Does he not hereby indicate that there is another distinct category of 'pleasant things that come through sight and hearing'—namely the comical?[7] Nevertheless, his gaining Hippias' agreement in this way allows him to sidestep several important issues—there are the logical problems raised by the surrogate (among others),

[7] Which may, if we consider this possibility in the present context, or in light of Iago's 'beast with two backs,' or *Aristophanes* as a whole, suggest to us that the comical is related to the 'ugly,' just as tragedy to beauty and nobility?

as well this fact of differentiated responses within the domain of pleasant sights and sounds. Many sights and sounds may be pleasant—even pleasant to everyone—without thereby being beautiful (the comical things being the case in point).

The problem with their argument is partly exacerbated by the surrogate's reply. Again we see a willingness here to separate 'seeming' from 'being' that may not be entirely justified—especially insofar as the 'seeming' that they are referring to is limited in this passage to 'visible seeming,' even though this is only one of the five types of perception that are being scrutinized. It is evidently important to distinguish between different kinds and powers of perception in the context of the present discussion. Socrates, in his attempt to exclude the pleasant that comes from the other perceptions, has not kept them separate. With regards to the example of sex it is particularly clear: he uses the visible perception of the phenomenon—the 'ugliness' 'everyone' would agree to—to refute the possibility of 'the pleasant through touch' being perceived as beautiful. His retort is thus question-begging, and leads to the surrogate's separation of the 'visible seeming' from the 'being' of all of our senses, though in mentioning shame the questioner seems to be emphasizing our sense of touch, and the matter of sex in particular.[8]

Plato has made a glaring issue out of this 'vulgar' matter, presumably for some good reason. The example is interesting simply for the fact of the dichotomy alluded to here between the visible and otherwise 'perceptible' aspects of the phenomenon. If we concur with the 'everyone' Socrates speaks of that sex is visually 'ugly,' this presumably would do nothing to diminish people's judgment about the overall experience of it—

[8] There are problems with taste and smell as well in this regard. We may not describe food as tasting beautiful, but *often* it looks beautiful—which sometimes (though not always) means it looks tasty. And it seems that some smells (perfumes, flowers) are often described as beautiful.

especially its 'psychological' aspects. After all, the gentlemen of the *Symposium* were, presumably, not the first, nor the last, to speak of the '*erotic* things' and 'the beautiful' in the same breath. This matter of sex seems somehow to be at the origin of our finding the beautiful things enticing and desirable, although this is obviously not to say that sex comprehends what we desire, nor that *it* is necessarily beautiful.[9] But, indeed, we have already seen subtle indications in this dialogue, especially with the example of the beautiful maiden, of how closely *eros* and beauty *are* related. In finessing this relationship, Socrates and Hippias may be depriving themselves (or rather Socrates, the self-professed master of *erotics*, may be depriving Hippias and us) of key insights into the origin and nature of our appreciation of beauty.[10] No more will be said about this in the present thesis, but the complications it presents should be borne in mind in relation to what will be discussed.

Socrates and Hippias, too, leave these matters aside, and proceed with their discussion of the beautiful that comes through sight and hearing. Some remnant of the doubts raised—both Hippias' possible misgivings about the beauty of lawful things, and the questioner's hesitation with respect to the other pleasures—is perhaps implicit in Socrates' subtly referring now to 'the pleasant which comes into being in relation to sight and hearing' as being *kalon* rather than *to kalon*. Socrates is no longer, apparently, claiming that 'this' or, rather, 'these,' things are *the* beautiful, although he will seem to suggest that they are the only beautiful things, asking "If the pleasant through sight and hearing is beautiful, isn't it clear that whatever pleasant thing does not happen to be this

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[9] Consider all the metaphorical ways in which Socrates' uses 'erotic' speech in other dialogues—such as the *Republic* and the *Symposium* (see especially 208c-212a). Or consider Shakespeare's *Sonnets*.

[10] Again, considering the significant role that Beauty plays in the *Symposium*, the dialogue on 'love,' or *eros*, *eros* seems almost conspicuously absent from the *Greater Hippias*. Or perhaps we should say that Socrates' *eros* is conspicuously *stifled* by the presence of the 'beautiful and wise' Hippias?

would not be beautiful?" (299c). Hippias agrees at this point, although the logic of the claim does not stand (Socrates is affirming the consequent) *unless* the pleasant that comes through sight and hearing is/are *the* beautiful, rather than simply being beautiful. At this point this has hardly been proven—and so barring the other pleasant things, and even the 'unpleasant' things, from being beautiful is premature.

Considering Socrates' (bad) arguments also leads us to consider all that has been neglected with regards to the supposedly 'pleasant' sights and sound themselves. The more we look at these other possible logical implications, the more we are likely to notice that there is an enormous degree of divergence with respect to 'pleasant' or 'pleasing' sights and sounds compared to 'beautiful' or 'fine' sights and sounds. It is, after all, the case that a lot of people might find many sights pleasing that they would in no way argue are beautiful—the gladiatorial games, for example, or even a boxing match (not to mention that ever-proliferating industry of more lewd examples). These might include 'beautiful moves,' or 'beautiful sportsmanship,' but they might nevertheless be considered *ugly* sights by many. Others might find them downright disturbing to watch. The same is true of music—for, while a very few people might claim, for example, that ACDC makes 'beautiful' music, there would be many more who might grant that the music is pleasing in some way, but would then proceed to argue that it is far from being beautiful. Indeed, the pleasant is at least as 'differentiated' a phenomena among human beings as the beautiful. And all the comical things attest to this as well—for very seldom (if ever) do we call them beautiful.

These complexities are not discussed by Socrates and Hippias, although they should be kept in mind. For it is important to consider what it is that distinguishes the

beautiful from the other pleasant sights and sounds—what is it that we recognize when we call a song beautiful rather than 'rockin'? These are substantial differences, that reflect substantially different experiences in our souls. This difference is perhaps indicated when Socrates, very strangely, asks whether "any pleasant thing is different from any other pleasant thing in being pleasant—not insofar as any pleasure is greater or smaller or more or less, but different in this very respect, that one of the pleasures is a pleasure and another not a pleasure?" (299d). If our personal, *internal*, experience (and hence knowledge) of the pleasing and the beautiful are different, if the pleasure of beauty is distinct from other kinds of pleasure, what makes it distinctive? Obviously, simply identifying beauty with sight and hearing will not work. There is a flaw in the way that they have 'divided up the pleasant,' basing it not on an actual experience of the pleasant, but on the possibly irrelevant issue of the means through which it is perceived.[11] Finding the beautiful thus becomes more complicated, but recognizing that the experience of beauty (the *pathēmata*) is primary allows us to accommodate those things which are not strictly seen or heard, but rather 'intellected.'[12]

The One and The Two, Take 1 (299b- 302c)

If the balance of the dialogue is any indication, the thesis that the beautiful is 'the pleasant that comes through hearing and sight' is already complicated enough. As the questioner allegedly points out, it cannot be due to their being 'pleasures' that the pleasant through hearing and sight are beautiful, for this would result in the failure to separate them from the other pleasures . But the very formulation that Socrates has come

[11] This is not to say that making the 'proper' division would be easy.
[12] Thus accounting for Socrates' claim that "these things concerning laws and pursuits might perhaps appear not to be outside the perception which happens to come to us through hearing and sight" (298d).

up with demands that they be further distinguished in some way, for the beautiful has been presented as two things (pleasant through sight *and* hearing), and the very idea of definition demands that they be distinguished in some *one* way. This leads the questioner (supposedly) to raise the issue that will consume the remainder of Socrates' and Hippias' dialectical inquiry.

Ironically, when he first raises the question, it results in definitive agreement between Socrates and Hippias. He asks: "is the pleasant through sight pleasant through sight and hearing, or is the pleasant through hearing pleasant through hearing and through sight?" (299c). He is ostensibly asking whether one of these modes of perception takes priority over the other such that *it* is the necessary 'cause' of the beautiful. Hippias and Socrates agree *from the outset* that "In no way would that which is through either one be through both [...] but we were saying that not only is each of these pleasant things itself by itself beautiful but also both are." One may think of a beautiful maiden singing a beautiful song beautifully. The task therefore becomes the one which Socrates (in the questioner's name) alludes to shortly. After elaborating the previous, rather straight-forward, conclusion at some length—that both sights and sounds can be beautiful independently, and that therefore neither the pleasant through sight nor through hearing is the necessary and sufficient 'cause' of the beautiful (299e-300b)—the philosopher suggests that, since both are nevertheless beautiful "they have something the same which makes them be beautiful, something in common which exists for both of them in common and for each in particular" (300b). The task is to discover what it is that would bring these two things together so that the definition would be a *unified* definition: what is it about (certain) pleasant sights *and* pleasant sounds, both and each, that allows them

to be beautiful? What, besides their being pleasant, do they have in common that might make them each beautiful?

Socrates now asks Hippias a question in his own voice (300b).[13] It is a question that is apparently aimed at elucidating the nature of this 'thing' that would bind the pleasant through hearing and the pleasant through sight together: "If then both these pleasures are affected in some way, but each one is not, it would not be by *this* affection [*pathēmati*] at least that they are beautiful." Socrates is restating the earlier question in a different way, now using the locution 'affection' He is again asking about the independence of the two types of pleasant things, and implicitly suggesting that there might be some way in which they are 'affected' when they are found together, that they are not when experienced independently. Perhaps he means to say that something like a play (complete with sights and sounds—we might think of ballet or opera) is 'affected' differently than a painting or a song. But if he is doing so, clearly it is only in order to show that *if* this is the case—*if* there is something different about pleasant sights and sounds taken together—*this* 'different' thing that they share when they are both present is *not* the cause of their being beautiful.

Socrates' point here seems somewhat odd, for they have already more or less agreed that this type of 'thing' is not what they are looking for. His raising the question he does serves to elucidate what it is they are looking for, from a slightly different angle (it is not something that is only present when they both are, but something that is common to them both individually). Given what follows, however, it becomes plain that the only way to interpret his asking this question in particular is that he *knows* it will

[13] Indeed, he will 'lose' his alias until 303e.

inflame Hippias.[14] Our 'naïve' and 'ignorant' Socrates has, with this one simple question, masterfully goaded our oh-so-sophisticated Hippias into *finally* expressing his own opinion about something. Taking up what seems like a simple question about pleasant things, the philosopher has railed the sophist into a 'serious' dispute about one of the fundamental questions of metaphysics. It is only a 'serious' dispute from Hippias' standpoint; for Socrates this is an opportunity comically to uncover the sophist's 'serious' views for what they are (at least insofar as he himself understands them): empty dogmatic fluff, with enormous implications. Socrates is able to uncover the element of Hippias' beliefs that is the foundation of all of their previous misunderstandings: his materialism.[15]

Hippias responds to Socrates' suggestion (that pleasant sounds and sights taken together might be affected in a way that they are not individually, but that this is not relevant to what they are looking for) not by disagreeing with him outright, but by questioning the very possibility that is implicit in Socrates' question: "How could it be, Socrates, that, though neither is affected by any one of the things that are, both are affected by that which neither is affected?" (300b). Hippias' doubt may be appropriate given the present context of Socrates' suggestion—but that seems to be *Socrates'* point, one which he raised only to affirm that this was the case in the particular instance of sight and hearing coming together in both 'being beautiful,' either separately or together. In contrast, the sophist's assertion here is pointedly general: he doubts the possibility of two things together *ever* 'being affected' by the fact of their being together. He goes so far as

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[14] Although this is not to preclude the entire discussion having a much broader philosophic purpose—which Socrates could have made much plainer if he had chosen to. Might the *philosophical* point of the principle he establishes have nothing to do with sight and hearing, but be relevant to beauty itself?

[15] It is tempting to say that Socrates learns something from Hippias in this dialogue, in order to explain why he continues speaking to him. But considering how masterfully Socrates performs in this section (and the implicit indications that he is, in a sense, 'playing'), this seems unlikely. Perhaps he nevertheless learns something about Hippias.

to claim that if things *could* be affected in this way, not only would he be "very inexperienced in the nature of these things," but he would also be inexperienced in "the speaking of the present arguments" (300c). There are only two mentions of nature in the dialogue, and this is one of them. The other is when Socrates mentions the nature of the fitting (which did not seem to interest Hippias very much, but which requires very careful analysis). Whatever Hippias understands the nature of these things to be, it is clear that these (likely ill-informed) opinions have implications aside from metaphysics.

Socrates, doubtless aware of these implications, now prods Hippias further, by 'innocently' agreeing that "I probably seem to see something that holds so in just the way that you assert is impossible, and yet I see nothing" (300b). Hippias takes the bait, asserting snidely that "It's not that you 'probably' are seeing amiss, Socrates, but that you actually are." Socrates' choice of locution in this passage is important—by his speaking of 'seeming to see' things that Hippias asserts are impossible, he actually alludes to our differentiated abilities of intellection—of 'seeing' with the mind—and elliptically suggests that he is 'seeing' things that Hippias is incapable of seeing, or has chosen not to see.[16] The next remark Socrates makes is more striking still:

> And yet many such things are appearing before my soul, but I distrust them because they make themselves apparent not to you, a man who has earned the most money for wisdom among our contemporaries, but rather to me, who have never earned anything. And yet I am pondering, my comrade, whether you are playing with me and intentionally deceiving me, because so many things are appearing so forcefully to me. (300d)

The irony of Socrates' mischievous allegation against Hippias serves mainly to confirm our suspicions about what Socrates himself is up to—aggravating and 'intentionally deceiving' the sophist. Socrates' choice of locution here also reminds us of the extent to

[16] This intellectual seeing is what is involved in recognizing the beauty of proper laws and pursuits, as of beautiful souls. People's different abilities for seeing such beauty goes some way towards explaining why they are controversial (294cd).

which our *soul* is involved in seeing—and, perhaps, in hearing? For surely we have to *understand* beautiful speech. His statement also perfectly summarizes the two men's contrasting characteristics: the one is wealthy in gold, but cannot 'see' properly, while the other is rich in those things which "appear to the soul," but has never earned any money.[17]

We might say that 'wisdom' for Hippias is instrumental—it has no wholeness, or status of its own as an *end-in-itself*—and hence it also has no beauty to the sophist, except insofar as it is '(most) powerful' (296a). The things that 'appear' to *his* 'soul' as beautiful are those which are perceptible in the most conventional sense—material things—whereas the soul of Socrates seems to experience 'sights' and 'sounds' (and people) Hippias can not even imagine existing. Nevertheless, it is interesting that, for either man, it makes sense to speak of these things as 'appearing before the soul,' and soon Socrates will ask Hippias to "hear more plainly what [he] wishes to say" (300e).[18] Certainly we would not normally speak of the soul's tasting or smelling anything (though we do speak of our soul's 'feeling' things, or being 'touched'). Might this have something to with how the pleasant that comes through sight and hearing are united? And does this also say something about how these things are beneficial to human beings?

Socrates and Hippias continue to debate over whether it is possible for any two things to be affected such that they both 'are that thing' and yet neither by itself 'is' (yet another interesting locution, 300e). The conversation becomes less abstract when a clearly irritated Hippias beings to berate Socrates, saying, "It will become apparent that

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[17] In setting up the parallel the way he does, is Socrates suggesting that these two things are more than coincidentally related, such that Hippias' love of money interferes with (or negates) any genuine concern with wisdom?

[18] Though Hippias understands Socrates' locution, it seems impossible that he could rationally defend the use of metaphor.

there is nothing in what you say, because you'll never find that we both are affected by that by which neither I nor you is affected" (300d). When Socrates disagrees, contending that they could both be affected in a way neither individually is and vice versa, Hippias becomes increasingly insistent:

> Again, Socrates, you are like someone whose answers are even greater marvels than your earlier answers. For consider, if both of us are just, wouldn't each of us also be just? Or if each is unjust, wouldn't both be so too? Or if both are healthy, wouldn't each be so too? Or if each of us were at all weary or wounded or beaten or affected in any other way, wouldn't both of us also be affected in this way? Furthermore, if both of us happened to be golden or silver or ivory or, if you wish, noble or wise or honored or old or young or whatever else you wish that is found among human beings, wouldn't there be a great necessity that each of us also be this? (300e-301a)

When Socrates agrees that 'by all means' this is true—and, one should add, seems to fit what they have agreed is the case with beauty—Hippias rebukes him with *ad hominem* arguments that reveal significant details about his metaphysical (and general philosophical) stance. It is necessary to quote the entire passage largely because it does not intuitively make much sense, and is therefore difficult to paraphrase or summarize:

> Yes, but you, Socrates, do not consider the wholes of things, and neither do those with whom you are accustomed to converse, but you test the beautiful by setting it apart and by cutting up in the arguments each of the things that are. Because of this you do not notice the naturally large and continuous bodies of being. And you have failed now to notice this to such an extent that you suppose there is something, either being affected or being, which exists in relation to these 'boths' together but not in relation to 'each,' or again, that exists in relation to 'each' but not in relation to 'both.' So illogical is your condition, and so unreflective and naïve and unintelligent! (301bc)

It seems that Socrates has struck a nerve.

And Hippias has finally offered an explanation of sorts for his behavior throughout this conversation. His conception of 'naturally large and continuous bodies of being' at first seems sufficiently vague to encompass any number of metaphysical stances. We might initially even suppose that he has something like 'Platonic' forms in mind. Until, that is, we consider how the beautiful 'fits' into his 'theory.' Hippias

accuses Socrates of "setting apart" the beautiful by "cutting up in the arguments each of the things that are." What does he mean by this? Presumably he means that Socrates is 'cutting up' things like maidens, gold, and ways of living—*these* types of 'continuous *bodies* of being'—in order to try and abstract a definition (or 'being') of the beautiful. Hippias hereby gives priority to the material world: things like maidens and gold have more natural integrity than any idea ever will. The 'things that are' are natural *bodies*, wholes that exist independently of one another, much like the 'things' that make up the visible (and especially the *natural* visible) world seem to be.[19] Indeed, the visible material world is clearly Hippias' model for understanding in general—which is doubtless an appealing and common way of approaching such problems, insofar as the material world is so much more 'tangible' to us. As a consequence of his doing so, however, it is doubtful that he (or most people) could or would defend the *existence* of some of the examples of things he lists just prior to expounding his theory, such as justice, health, weariness, nobility, wisdom, or honor.[20] For Hippias, gold *is* more of a whole than any of these other things that he *says* exist, but should not actually *believe* 'are' in any real sense. The 'wholes' that Hippias perceives are not the same as the ones Socrates 'intellects,' which, to Hippias, can only exist as incidental parts of each of 'the things that are,' and have no unified 'form' or status of their own.

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[19] Of course, there is still that exception that was noted in the section on 'the useful.' When Socrates referred earlier to things Hippias 'knows most beautifully'—he strangely refers to the 'matters,' or '*experiences*,' *pathēmeta* concerning the stars and the events of the heavens. How does Hippias' account of 'continuous bodies of being' deal with the fact that nature is *in motion*? And then, how would he account for the fact that the way in which our souls respond to beauty *also* seems to be in motion (or *emotion*)—that we are moved by art, by music, by tragedy? And do our *desires* not also move our souls in some way?

[20] His 'abstract' example of the beauty of the blessed life and burial is also problematic on his materialist conception of the world. Perhaps in having him include the 'beautiful funeral' in his description, Plato is subtly hinting at this materialist view?

The particular philosophical problem with Hippias' materialist conception of the world will be made more clear by Socrates (albeit in a still confusing manner), but other aspects of the problem are already evident upon consideration of the examples Hippias has given. As already mentioned, the ontological status of the things he mentions is called into question with his claim about the 'naturally large and continuous bodies of being' that do not include beauty, but do include beautiful things. Would Hippias not hereby have to renege upon his initial agreement—agreement that helped establish the assumptions of the entire discussion—that the Just are just by Justice as something that exists, and likewise with Wisdom and the Good (288cd)? Hippias agrees at the beginning that these things exist, and that the beautiful exists as well, but perhaps only because he does not know what else to say. After all, he agrees that all beautiful things are beautiful by the beautiful as something that exists (presumably by *nature*), but adds "for what else is it going to be?" From the outset, Hippias' materialism has made him hesitant with respect to Socrates' manner and purpose of inquiry. For he does not believe that abstract things like beauty are any more than incidental 'qualities' of the 'continuous bodies' he does believe in.[21] He may believe we *call* various particular things 'beautiful' because the sight and/or sound of them *pleases*, but cannot actually account for whatever 'commonality' they have that does so.

When we look at what precisely Hippias says here about these immaterial 'objects,' further complexities and questions arise. Hippias claims, for example, that if two people are just, then each of them must also be so. This seems reasonable enough. But *does* it make sense to speak of a person who is just or unjust in isolation? Does not

[21] As such, when Hippias fails to take up the questioner's emphasis on the nature of the fitting, it is representative of a wholesale failure on the sophist's part to undertake a serious examination of nature at all.

the very concept of justice presume a community of more than one—within the political regime *or* the 'regime' of the soul? What about beauty and wisdom and honor? The honor Hippias enjoys is bestowed by other people.[22] These things may very well exist within, or be possessed by, individual people such that what Hippias says about them is true. But this does not account for the fact that in many instances, these qualities' affecting or arising in people may be a direct result of our political nature. After all, we do not each exist merely as separate 'continuous *bodies* of being,' but we also, by nature, associate and interact with one another—even the 'wisest' of hermits has to learn language before retreating from society. While it is possible to imagine our each being healthy, or weary, or wounded, or beaten, or old, or young, as separate bodies (or as pre-political animals), the coming into being of the other (all-important) qualities Hippias mentions seems to depend upon our associating with each other as conscious political beings.

Excepting, that is, three of Hippias' examples, which together may foreshadow, in a concrete way, the particular problem Socrates will shortly make so much of. What are we to make of Hippias' asking, "if both of us happened to be golden or silver or ivory, [...] wouldn't there be a great necessity that each of us also be this?" Here, perhaps, we have an example of Hippias' precision in speech, for what he suggests is unarguably true, but only because of the careful manner in which he phrases the question. His examples, however, come perilously close to suggesting a powerful counter-example to the materialist's claim that it is impossible for two things together to be affected differently than they are when taken separately. Has Hippias never heard of an alloy? If he had

[22] And whereas wisdom may be possessed privately, beauty requires an observer (even if only oneself looking in the mirror).

asked "if both of us were electrum (a gold-silver alloy), or bronze (compounded of copper and tin), or any number of other composite 'things' (including, perhaps, immaterial composites as well), wouldn't there be a great necessity that each of us also be this?," the answer would in an important sense be no. It is clearly possible for things to come together to 'form' something that is 'affected' differently, or *is* different from the 'materials' that constitute it.[23]

Hippias' false confidence in his claims about all of the examples he mentions indicates that he has not thought about these matters very carefully. His examples are each of particular material individuals being affected in a certain way (being wise, honored, weary, just and so on), but not surprisingly he does not offer any examples that treat the types of 'beings' which Socrates is so often concerned with. He never says "if both of us were Justice," as he does with the metals, presumably because he does not think Justice *is* in this same way. As we have seen, the metals could cause significant problems for Hippias' simplistic doctrine regarding the material world; is it any wonder that he does not want to consider abstract composites (such as Justice, Wisdom, Beauty, the Soul, or any idea whatsoever?) as things that exist? It would be so complicated.

Given Hippias' intellectual laziness, his *ad hominem* critique of Socrates at this point in the dialogue seems particularly inappropriate and ridiculous. The philosopher, for his part, continues to 'play' with Hippias, 'humbly' responding to the critique with what is perhaps the most ironic line in the dialogue: "Our affairs, Hippias, accord not with what one wishes, as humans say on occasion, speaking proverbially, but with the

[23] Indeed, it seems that almost *everything* is thus composed. The ancients might have excluded the 'elements,' but we cannot, recognizing that they too have their 'parts.' At some point it seems likely that we would have to assume some sort of elementary matter, but the problem of how *it* then becomes formed, would presumably remain intact.

power one has" (301c). He then suggests, strangely speaking in the first person plural, that Hippias helps 'us' with his admonishments. He offers to indulge Hippias further by showing him still more plainly how "naïve our condition was just now" by telling him what 'our' thoughts were concerning these things.

Socrates' thoughts about these things are somewhat more involved than *ours* were, as outlined above. Instead of citing some composite such as a metallic alloy to prove that two things together may differ from each singly, Socrates turns to the example of number. Although number eventually serves as a somewhat straightforward example (if, as far as Hippias is concerned, abstract and thus irrelevant), the philosopher's manner of first introducing his example is not so easy to follow. Perhaps his choosing such a convoluted manner of 'explanation' is a direct result of Hippias' conceited claim to be someone who knows "the condition of each person who is concerned with arguments" (301d). Much that is said by Socrates in the balance of their conversation seems intended primarily at confusing and provoking the sophist.[24] Is the act of confounding Hippias precisely that which he finds so pleasant at this juncture (301d)? We have to wonder whether, if Socrates' purpose is even partly pedagogical (for the sake of his or Hippias' education), this is the most appropriate manner of proceeding.[25]

Socrates continues to speak in the first person plural as he explains his simple-minded condition:

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[24] It is difficult to think of a reason for Socrates' proceeding in the manner he does, for it has already become clear, it seems, that Hippias, even if he feels perplexed, is not going to admit to any kind of significant defeat. We can see how this conversation's being in private may harm Socrates' ability to corner Hippias—without the shame and the judgment of others, Hippias is free to 'laugh off' Socrates in scorn without facing any personal consequences. But their being in private may also greatly contribute to Socrates' being willing to proceed in the somewhat ruthless manner that he does.

[25] The question still remains as to whether Socrates learns something in this exchange—something *about* Hippias that is of general importance, if not from him.

> Before you said these things, best of men, we were so silly as to hold the opinion concerning me and you that each of us is one but that both of us are not what each of us is—for we are not one but two—so naïve were we. But by now we have been retaught by you that, if both of us are two, it is also necessary that each of us be two, and if each is one, it is also necessary that both be one. For by the continuous account of being, according to Hippias, it cannot be otherwise: whatever both are, each is too, and what each is, both are. Now that I have been persuaded by you, this is my position. (301de)

Doubtless Hippias would find such an argument particularly annoying, insofar as Socrates is probably the last person on earth he would want to be closely associated with, even if only in speech. When Socrates concludes his statement by asking Hippias to 'remind' him whether "we are one, I and you, or are you two and I two?," the sophist's response ("what are you saying, Socrates?) apparently reveals his frustration, for Socrates explicitly alludes to the anger he senses in Hippias. He traces the source of the sophist's anger to his believing that there is "something in what [he] is saying." I.e., Hippias is angered because one of his precious opinions is being directly undermined—not by some imaginary friend of Socrates, but by the 'vulgar' man himself. And whereas Socrates considers such admonishment helpful (301c), Hippias takes it as a personal affront. Perhaps the sophist takes his 'self' (an entity whose ontological integrity has, after all, just been brought into question) far too seriously. Socrates' persistent awareness of his 'ignorance' and 'poverty' (*aporia*, 'perplexity' and desire), makes him ever-willing to learn. Whereas Hippias, believing that he is already '*one* who knows,' makes the process of learning (whereby a person either incorporates something new into his 'one-ness,' or uncovers some previously unknown 'part' of himself—) all the more painful, if not impossible.

Nevertheless, Socrates now tries to make his point more obvious to Hippias. Referring here more directly to the issue of number (but still using human beings as his working example), Socrates asks, "Isn't each of us one and affected so as to be one"

(302a). The question is not a simple one, given the dramatic events of the *Greater Hippias*, but it nonetheless seems reasonable, and so Hippias answers with "certainly." We each do experience ourselves as one person, an 'individual.'[26] The material world and the individuation of our bodies is certainly such that, by all appearances, we are all each 'one' in some way. It would nevertheless be surprising that Hippias, who is supposedly an expert in calculation, does not foresee the direction that the conversation is heading. When it does arrive at its conclusion, however, the sophist does not seem to be affected by its implications. Hippias' confidence remains unshaken when Socrates, turning to an attribute of one-ness, the odd, proves how there are indeed things which are affected differently when they are together: for each of them [Socrates and Hippias] are one and odd, whereas taken together they are two and even (such 'togetherness' being linguistically indicated by terms such as 'couple,' 'pair,' 'brace,' and so on). As such, as Socrates affirms, "there is not every necessity, as you [Hippias] were saying just now, that whatever both of us are, each also is, and whatever each is, both also are" (302b). Hippias answers "not in these respects, but in those which I was speaking of earlier." He hereby concedes that Socrates is right about his abstract principle, while at the same time implying that he, for one, believes the philosopher's argument to be irrelevant. It certainly does not seem to be an exiting new idea that he desires to incorporate into his entire soul!

Apparently, to Hippias, this small quirk regarding number has nothing to do with their conversation about beauty, or anything else of importance. Upon agreeing that two odd 'ones' come together and make an even 'two,' some materialists would probably

[26] Although some—namely the so-called 'romantics'—might suggest that it is possible to escape this 'individuality' to *some* degree.

argue that our speaking as if 'two' and two 'ones' are different things is a mere semantic issue, that two is not different from two 'ones,' even if it is called something else, *and* has a different attribute, namely 'even-ness.' According to such an argument, two is simply one more than one: there *is* no such thing as 'two-ness' such that it also is one thing. Perhaps this is presuming too much on our particular materialists' part, however. For even to articulate the semantic issue is perhaps to recognize the broader philosophical problem that grounds the semantic one: the problem of unity and individuation. How is it that there are things, things as 'simple' as the number two, that have a wholeness of their own while also being composite entities? And if this is a problem for entities as individualized as numbers are (indeed, numbers are the perfect abstraction of our idea of individuation) what are the implications for the rest of the things that exist? It is no wonder that the pre-Socratics were more or less 'divided' over the issue of 'everything' being one, bound up in a perpetual flux, or (instead) a fixed order of discrete things, each with its persistent identity (sameness). Trying to understand the cosmos in terms of both motion and rest at the same time is hard; one suspects that actually arriving at such understanding would make one quasi-divine.[27] Hippias, at the opposite end of the spectrum of souls, however, fails to recognize the problem as having any significance whatsoever.

Socrates doubtless has not made it easy for Hippias to see the relevance of the problem within the present discussion. For this entire matter of 'each' and 'both' has seemingly been tangential, taken up only, as it were, to 'clarify' the fact that the

[27] This is doubtless far too rough an analysis and presentation of the philosophical problem, as well as an inadequate interpretation of the work of the Pre-Socratics, who were probably much more aware of the intricacies of this problem than I ever will be. That said, it seems to be generally agreed upon that Plato (and Aristotle) had insight into nature that is different from their predecessors precisely in its ability (or at least its very noble attempt) fully to account for this problem of individuation.

relationship between sight and hearing (insofar as it pertains to beauty) is *not* of the mysterious kind that has been uncovered. Socrates too is satisfied or 'contented' to have shown that "some things are so, while others are not" (302c), but now seemingly desires to turn back to the issue at hand:

> For I was also saying, if you remember where this argument started, that pleasures through sight and hearing were beautiful not by that thing by which each of them happened to be so affected as to be, but not both, or both but not each, but by that by which both and each were affected. I said so because you conceded that they both and each are beautiful. For this reason I was supposing that, if both are beautiful, they must be beautiful by that being which accompanies them both and not by that which is absent in them taken separately. And I still suppose so now. (302c)

Socrates emphasizes the fact that they reached agreement early on about this particular issue, and we would assume that his having clarified the problem to the extent that he has would, if anything, serve to solidify this agreement. They are looking for something that unites sight and hearing logically, without uniting them in actuality, such that they might get closer to defining what it is that makes these two pleasant things beautiful, and the other pleasant things not so. This is not to say, however, that finding this one thing that they have in common would fully account for our delighting in particular sights and sounds, or would lead us closer to understanding the objective quality in the world that we find beautiful...

The One and The Two, Take 2 (302c-304a)

Socrates does not turn back to these questions, here or at any stage in their conversation. Instead, despite his having (repeatedly) gained Hippias' agreement regarding the independent beauty of sights and sounds, he still, apparently, needs *more* agreement. Perhaps all this time with a materialist is affecting Socrates in strange ways! *Again*, he asks the question: "Tell me, as though from the beginning, if pleasure through sight and

that through hearing are both and each beautiful, does not that which makes them beautiful accompany not only both of them but also each?" (302cd). Hippias agrees, and Socrates painstakingly, and now for the second time, clarifies what they mean by this—that the pleasant through sight and sound is beautiful (and *not* the other pleasures, 302d), and that this state of being affected accompanies both and each of the senses (302e). Again, Hippias agrees.

And, again, Socrates asks: "Then, at any rate, it is not by that which does not accompany each that each of them is beautiful, for "both" does not accompany each, so that it is possible according to the hypothesis to assert that they both are beautiful, but it is not possible to assert that each is. Or how shall we say it? Isn't this necessary?" (303a). If we had earlier suspicions that Socrates is intending to confuse Hippias, here we are given some concrete evidence. Socrates manipulates the question such that it would require Hippias to disagree (for the question no longer makes sense), and the sophist fails. In so doing, he now contradicts an argument which he has already conceded at least three times. His agreeing to the strange concoction of a theory that Socrates has newly articulated (a theory which goes against everything Hippias stands for metaphysically) leads to his conceding that "both are beautiful, and yet each is not." The sophist cannot see anything that would prevent their asserting such a thing (303a)! Apparently he is no less 'deaf and dumb' than he was at the start.

'Patient' Socrates will try once more to explain to Hippias what it is that prevents their asserting that both hearing and sight are beautiful but each is not. He summarizes their formal thesis with the following:

> There were for us presumably some things that pertained to individual things in such a way that if they pertained to both, they also did to each, and if to each, also to both—all

> those things which you [Hippias] went through [...] But not those which I went through, among which were 'each' itself and 'both.' (303a)

Now he asks Hippias outright which sort of thing the beautiful seems to him to be. He does so, however, in such a manner that the original question, regarding the role of sight and hearing, is lost.

> Is it the sort which you were just speaking about—if I am strong and you are, we both are too, and if I am just and you are, we both are too, and if both, also each, and similarly, if I am beautiful and you are, we both are too, and if both, also each? Or does nothing prevent the beautiful from being of the other sort, such as when certain composites are even in number, their components are each perhaps odd, perhaps even, or again when the components are each irrational, the composites are perhaps rational, perhaps irrational, and countless other such things which I asserted were also appearing before me? Among which of these two sorts do you set the beautiful? Or is what has become apparent to me concerning it also apparent to you? For it seems to me to be very illogical that we both are beautiful but not each, or each is, but not both, or anything else of this sort. Do you choose in this way, as I do, or in that way? (303bc)

The argument is no longer about sight and hearing, but gains Hippias' agreement based on another (logically similar) example of two beautiful 'things'—our two interlocutors. After all, he begins and ends this 'long speech' by referring to the beauty of himself and Hippias (using 'beautiful' in the attributive sense). But it should be evident by now that discussing beautiful things as if they were the beautiful itself is problematic, and surely Hippias and Socrates do not themselves constitute Beauty. The argument is dismissed on the basis of their each being beautiful, the consequence of this being that the beautiful is the kind of thing whose composite 'parts' are the same. Socrates has (Hippias-like) conflated beautiful particulars with the beautiful itself, and concluded that the beautiful itself must come together in a way that parallels the coming-together of beautiful 'things.'

But in the midst of this 'long' speech, Socrates does present an alternative account. He 'frames' this account with the references to beautiful things, but he does suggest that the beautiful may be constituted of different things—things such as the

components of odd, even, 'irrational' and 'rational' numbers.[28] He is finally asking about the constitution of the beautiful itself, rather than about the relationship between the pleasant through sight and the pleasant through hearing. Could beauty itself also somehow be composed of several components? If, as we suggested after our analysis of the causation arguments of the dialogue, the beautiful consists of the appearance of something in the world *to us*, then this seems like a definite possibility.

Socrates and Hippias do not examine this possibility. Indeed, the entire argument regarding the beautiful being that which delights us through sight and hearing is unraveled as soon as Hippias agrees with Socrates (that it seems very illogical that they would both be beautiful, and not each also, or each be beautiful but not both, 303c). Socrates summarizes with the following:

> You do well, Hippias, so that we may also be released from more searching. For if the beautiful is among these things, the pleasant through sight and hearing would no longer be beautiful, because the expression "through sight and hearing" makes both beautiful but not each. But this was impossible, as I and you agree, Hippias. (303d)

Indeed, the whole argument falls apart due to a semantic quibble, the essence of which their conversation has *long* been focused on undermining.

Transition: The One and The Two, Take 3

While Socrates and Hippias have been released from more searching, perhaps it is fitting for 'us' to undertake a digression of our own. For surely we are invited to ask, why has Socrates taken Hippias on this extensive search, the ostensible answer to which was already clear to both of them, only to have the agreement they did share undermined?

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[28] Sweet uses 'rational' and 'irrational' for the first time here in his translation—the words, however, are the same as those which are used at 302a-b, where he spoke only of 'even' and 'odd.' There are four Greek words being used—*amphoteros* and *artios* for even, and *hekataros* and *perissos* for odd.

Has the argument been as irrelevant as it first appeared? Or can the problem it has uncovered help us in understanding the beautiful? Unless we believe Plato has merely been trying to annoy us as much as Socrates is annoying Hippias, we must presume the latter.

In order to ground our discussion, we might first review some of the questions that remained throughout this last part of their discussion. First, it is notable that Socrates and Hippias never arrive at a point in their discussion where they are able actually to search for that 'unifying' thing that may be 'the cause' (or a type of cause) of the beautiful. What *do* the pleasures of sight and hearing have in common? Second, upon reflection we see that Socrates' final proposition—that the beautiful is the pleasant that comes through sight and hearing—can, at best, only effect a partial account of Beauty. Even if our interlocutors had found that thing which the pleasant through sight and hearing have in common, such that they are united in one definition, we would still be faced with the all-important question of what it *is* that delights us: what objective quality in the world *is* it that causes us delight when we perceive it, *and* differentiates it from other things that do not elicit delight, or which produces delight of a different sort (e.g., laughter)? And finally, there is the over-arching question regarding the constitution of the beautiful itself (which may ultimately be the question of how these two other issues relate to one another).

The first question is perhaps the easiest, for Socrates has been hinting at an answer throughout his conversation with Hippias. In the central passage of the dialogue, for example, we see him (or rather, his alias) accuse Hippias of having neither ears *nor*

brain (292d).[29] Socrates then takes us through a discussion that requires us to consider carefully the way in which things appear to us. When he suggests that there is a radical divide between appearances and reality (or being), we have to refine our understanding of our perceptions, and recognize that these involve more than sight and hearing. Some other 'faculty' works in conjunction with these, allowing us to see beauty that exists apart from visible reality.

Socrates' manner of speaking, and choice of locutions, throughout the dialogue is also striking. He constantly speaks 'metaphorically'—using the terminology of sight and hearing beyond its literal meaning, as we all quite readily do. For example, he speaks of his hope that 'whatever the beautiful is' will become 'perfectly *apparent*' (295a), and later claims that "probably for us it isn't the case, as it just appeared to be, that the most beautiful of the arguments is that the helpful and useful and the powerful to do some good are beautiful" (297d, cf. also 282b, 285c, 288e, 297a, 298d, 300c). He also refers here to beautiful speech, which is not merely *heard* by the ears, as so much beautiful sound (again at 299c). Such language is so natural that it seems inane to list these instances (and indeed, even Hippias speaks this way, 282d, 297c), but it is made conspicuous throughout the dialogue.[30] This is especially true with respect to two instances in particular, where Socrates mentions the soul (unlike the questioner who only mentions the brain). At 296d he asks Hippias if "this is what our soul wanted to say," and at 300c describes how "many such things are appearing before [his] soul."

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[29] In choosing the term 'brain' (*enkephalon*) here, rather than, say, mind, is Socrates' questioner perhaps making reference 'early on' to Hippias' materialism?

[30] The fact that Hippias uses the word to describe abstract things as well ("You know none of the beautiful things about this" at 282d, and at 297c, referring to Socrates' beautiful speeches), but cannot account for the beauty of these things may give us some insight into the questioner's concern that we be able rationally to account for the words we use.

It should be fairly plain to 'our soul' at this point that the soul is the 'thing' that sight and hearing (as well as the other faculties of perception and intellection) have in common, such that it separates these from the merely 'bodily' pleasures. It is the soul, after all, that is *affected* by beauty, that experiences the *pathos* associated with the beautiful.[31] Our eyes and ears do not delight in pleasant sights and sounds, *we* do. And to the extent that we have different souls, we have differentiated reactions to the world around us. Indeed, if Hippias and Socrates are any indication, some 'souls' have far better 'powers of perception' than others (and this may ultimately result in different drives or desires). Beauty, then, depends upon the soul for its existence, even if the form of the beautiful does not—i.e., presumably the truth about Beauty would exist whether or not there are beings in existence who desire to think about it.[32] The truth, after all, is *defined* by its being something—perhaps the *one* thing—eternal and unchanging. And it is the one thing that Socrates' soul is most desiring of. When we consider this, especially when we see him placed next to the 'apish' Hippias, we, in turn, cannot help but be affected by the fact. It seems that some souls, as well as having the power to perceive beauty of all kinds, also possess a beauty of their own (if, that is, there are others present with the powers required to 'see' it). Which brings us to our second question: why *do* the so-called 'beautiful things,' 'strike our souls' as beautiful?

If one's soul is that which is affected a certain way—being 'delighted'—via its 'seeing and hearing,' (or otherwise perceiving or 'intellecting'), then we have in hand the

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[31] Though it is important to note that the soul's 'being affected' by beautiful (or comical) sights and sounds (or the other perceptible/intelligible things) often has a relative *effect* on the body—such that we can be 'moved' to laughter, tears, or 'shivers.'

[32] That said, the truth about beauty would not itself *be beautiful* independently of our seeing it. Is there nevertheless still something particularly *good* about its being seen, and thus its becoming *beautiful* as well as being the truth?

long sought-after refinement of Socrates' last definition. We are able now to distinguish the merely 'bodily pleasures' from the 'pleasures of the soul.' But 'the pleasant that affects our soul through its perceptions' is still a rather vacuous definition for the beautiful—if, that is, the beautiful is anything more than our own idiosyncratic and completely subjective, response to the world around us. What is it in the *objective* world that causes us not only pleasure but *delight*? And what is it that distinguishes the beautiful things from the comical things? Ironically, it is in the last part of Hippias' and Socrates' discussion—the part that seems the most ridiculous and sophistical—that we may be given a more precise indication and explanation of what it is that we are actually *seeing* when we experience the beautiful. While Socrates seems busy confounding Hippias, he is also calling our attention to the way in which things 'come' together to create higher wholes or forms.

This too has been foreshadowed, to the extent that we were led early-on to consider the useful, as well as the fitting and the nature of the fitting. Our 'careful consideration' of the beautiful as the useful revealed, more than anything, a *disjunction* between these two qualities. It seems that our using things in some way renders them incomplete 'in and of themselves,' such that they no longer possess the beauty they may have had as natural, whole 'bodies.' It seems to be our love of beauty, and not utility, that impels us to make the things we use more 'whole,' through adornment and attention to form—sometimes even depreciating their 'usefulness' in the process. The ways in which we do so are deeply mysterious. How do we contribute to the 'wholeness' or 'form' of things that already *have* form, as everything that exists necessarily does? How do we impart better, more 'beautiful,' forms?

Reconsidering the fitting, and the *nature* of the fitting, in light of these problems, may at least provide us with a word to describe this perplexity. We considered how the fitting seemed to be a part of (most) beautiful things, but that it could not be considered the beautiful itself, since not everything 'fitting' strikes us as beautiful. The fitting, like the useful, is a relational quality between two or more parts, whereas, as we said then, the beautiful seems to be in the whole of a thing—and this applies to everything from diamonds and landscapes, to bodies and souls. But the fitting describes a particular kind of relationship that the useful does not. For, whereas the useful seems to imply will and intentionality—it implies something's being an active *means* to something else—the fitting can also describe a more natural kind of relationship or 'togetherness.' The wholes that compose nature 'fit together' naturally to form higher-order beings. And through artifice we are able to imitate nature, and create wholes that strike us as similarly (or even more) complete, or natural.[33] To the extent that we do not understand how precisely this is done, it may be necessary to concede that there is a peculiar phenomena that we might describe as 'aesthetic' fittingness, that is very much related to the 'perfection' of form.

Socrates' long digression at the end of the dialogue forces us to consider how it is that various parts ever come together to make some other kind of thing or form. He focuses mainly on things that are the *same* coming together—such as two just men, or one and one—but the phenomenon he is primarily concerned with is the fact of their coming together to make something *different*, as one and one come together to make an even, and somehow 'whole' two. But two different things can certainly be joined in a similar way: hearing and sight are sometimes thus united—as in an opera, or ballet,

[33] Indeed, we may in our artifice be imitating wholes that are not 'natural' in the ordinary sense, but *are* natural insofar as they are intelligible to us.

neither of which are 'whole' (or as beautiful) in their sight or sounds alone. Indeed, when Socrates says that 'many such things are appearing before [his] soul,' he is surely not exaggerating. Nature *in general* does not seem to be made up of mere matter, but in-*formed* matter. A better understanding of the 'nature' of the various wholes that exist—that is, a better understanding of *the* ontological question—would likely lead to a much more substantial account of the hierarchy of these things with respect to their beauty.[34]

But all the perplexities of ontology—or of the different orders of being—do not bewilder us utterly. Doubtless our power to recognize 'beautiful forms' is in part a function of our own individual natures, and the nature of our own (human) form of being—as such, we do not find all 'whole things' to be equally beautiful. We are certainly affected, it seems, by the things in nature that are particularly good for *us*. This 'differentiation' may not be due only to the subjectivity of human nature, however. Indeed, it seems that our capacity to recognize form in this way, and to be so affected by it, is evidence of how *objective* we can be in this regard. Our nature, it seems, does not completely blind us with regard to the 'objective hierarchy' of wholes. Even if no one regards the alligator as beautiful, almost everyone would agree that the lion is more beautiful than the ant. And few people, having read the present dialogue, would consider Hippias to be, 'on the whole,' more beautiful than Socrates. Our own self-interest certainly informs our sense of the beautiful, but it does not over-run it entirely. For what we perceive as beautiful exists independently of our souls, and it seems to exist in a hierarchical order that we can recognize—more or less clearly. Insofar as Socrates' soul

[34] If we even cursorily summon the imagery Socrates' uses in the *Republic*, we can gain a sense of this. For he likens everything in the 'realm of appearances' to mere shadows and images on the cave wall. Only in the 'intelligible realm' do things exist in a real sense. We might surmise, then, that the beauty of these intelligible things (or 'wholes') is more 'real' as well.

is, objectively, 'bigger,' more 'real,' and more *whole*, than Hippias' body, it is also more beautiful.[35] And it seems that it is this hierarchy of wholes (or of forms, or being) that we refer to when we delight in beauty.[36]

The materialist has to deny that such 'formation'—or natural unity between separate parts—is at all possible, much like Hippias tries to do. If he can see that such a problem exists in the realm of numbers, he will nevertheless insist that such abstractions have nothing to do with the rest of nature. He is thus far from seeing any relationship between this abstract idea and beauty. The philosopher, on the other hand, has not only implied that such relationships exist, but the context and manner in which he does so invites us to consider what such relationships, and their resulting 'unities,' have to do with beauty. In light of our analysis of the fitting and the useful, we can see that the relationship Socrates describes—and the 'wholes' or entities that result from these 'fitting' or 'harmonious' combinations of things, such that they become 'more than the sum of their parts'—underlies all beauty.[37]

If we have now traced out tentative suggestions with regards to our first two questions, one task nevertheless remains. What is the actual composition of the beautiful itself—especially if it *too* is a form of some kind? This question has obviously been implicit through the entire conversation, but, as we noted earlier, it is crystallized by Socrates in his final posing of his favorite question to Hippias. They have thus far been

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[35] And Hippias' beauty thus becomes all the more laughable.

[36] The fact that recognizing beautiful forms causes us delight is our best indication that these wholes are also inherently good, and not merely subjectively good *for us* (though they may be this too). For there seems to be no other 'purpose' to our recognizing beauty than that it is delightful, and in some way 'good for the soul.' Perhaps the hierarchy of beautiful things inspires us to make our souls into ever higher-level wholes?

[37] Perhaps the more our 'artifices' approximate these 'wholes,' the more they come to be *natural*—it may even be the natural activity of men to try and re-create, or reflect, such natural wholeness around and within ourselves.

discussing the relationship between hearing and sight with respect to Beauty, but here Socrates asks about the form of the beautiful itself: is it something that comes to be through a quantitative amalgamation of things, or is it itself the unity of different components? (Cf. 303c).

An answer may be present in the very form of our questioning thus far. For, in trying to establish the 'being' of the beautiful, we have had to contend with two very different aspects of the one phenomenon: its 'subjective' and 'objective' components. We have explored the possibility that it is ultimately the soul that perceives beauty—uniting our various capacities to perceive and intellect. We have also explored the possibility that the objective component of beauty is bound up in the idea of significant form—such that what we perceive when we perceive beauty is the coming together of different 'parts,' in a peculiarly 'fitting' manner, to form a greater whole. The beautiful seems to be an entity whose very existence depends on both some objective presence in the world, and our own all-too-human power of perceiving this presence. Could it be that the form of the beautiful is the result of the coming-together of these two things?

The *Greater Hippias* seems to lead us to this conclusion. The dialogue engages us in a dialectical process that allows us to see the 'parts' of beauty separately, in order that we may see 'the beautiful' as the 'whole' resulting from the relationship between them. The one part of beauty is thus the ontological component, which seems to be so intimately related to 'fittingness' and 'form.' The other is the psychological aspect—our souls perceiving these (peculiarly splendid) 'fitting forms.' And Socrates spends the last quarter of the dialogue explaining how different things—which do not preclude 'things' such as our souls—come together to create higher-order form. In so doing, he is

explaining not only a fundamental aspect of all the 'wholes' that we find beautiful, but also the nature of the whole that is the beautiful.[38] *If* 'that thing' is also good, then its corresponding with our delight seems only fitting. It seems, however, that the goodness of the beautiful may depend upon our *powers* of perceiving it. The remainder of the dialogue invites us to consider how this may be the case.

[38] By the (unconscious, natural) act of our perceiving these things (with the highest part of our being), we are also, it seems, (again, unconsciously, naturally) engaged in *constituting* a being (i.e., beauty). Perhaps this adds a new dimension to Socrates' unusual idiom, "to be affected by something such as to be that thing" (300e, 302a, c).

Conclusion: The Bad, The Good, and The Beautiful (304a-e)

Socrates and Hippias have abandoned the proposition that the pleasant through sight and hearing are beautiful, since "in becoming beautiful, it presents one of the things that are impossible" (303d). The failure of this definitional attempt is due to the supposedly unequivocal nature of the expression "through sight and hearing." It is due, that is, to the supposed failure of speech to account for the agreed upon reality. Although Socrates has suggested that they will now be released from more searching (surely thus contributing to Hippias' agreeableness at this juncture), as it so happens his 'alias' is apparently not so easily satisfied. 'He' somewhat generously offers to take up the conversation again 'from the beginning,' since Socrates and Hippias have "missed it entirely." The questioner's last interjection is brief, leading as it does to Hippias' final outburst of frustration against Socrates, but it does perhaps offer a glimpse as to how the philosopher would have renewed the dialectical inquiry into the beautiful. It seems that he would have us look more closely at how Beauty is, and/or is not, good.

The questioner will once again ask what *he* has been asking all along, before Socrates 'took over' (at 300b): "What do you assert that this 'beautiful' is, the one that pertains to both of the pleasures and on account of which you honored these pleasures before the others and named them beautiful?" (303e). Socrates, who so recently seemed willing to be released from further arguments, now proposes that it is necessary to say that these are "the most harmless of the pleasures, and the best, both and each." He quite comically answers 'doubly' once again, failing to find *one* thing that unites them—unless, that is, being the most harmless pleasures and the best pleasures are identical. Based on Hippias' partial agreement that "really, they are best," the questioner will

provide what seems to be the required synthesis, asking whether what they mean is that the beautiful is "helpful pleasure." But this definition suffers from the same problem that the helpful alone did: if the beautiful is helpful pleasure, then it is that which *does* good, and hence cannot itself be good. Cause and effect, we recall, must remain altogether separate.

Hippias has been given plenty of ammunition against this argument since it first arose in the context of the beautiful as the helpful, though he proves he has not had the power to see it. Socrates has just spent a significant amount of time showing him how some things are related in such a way that they share attributes without being the same thing. The good may be related to the beautiful without being the beautiful, or vice-versa, just as one is related to two without being two. But the questioner, doubtless aware of this possibility from the outset, has also added a 'psychological twist' in suggesting that the beautiful is helpful pleasure. Although we may concede that the beautiful is in some way a cause of good, it is hard to posit *helpful pleasure* as *the* cause of the good. It is difficult not to recognize these pleasures as the effect (a seemingly good effect), rather than the cause, of beauty itself.

The questioner's formulation invites us, then, to clarify how it is that the beautiful is good. We might say that Beauty is the cause of the 'good' in our souls—that is, the delight we feel. This delight is therefore something like the capstone of the synthesis of 'our seeing' and 'the (beautiful) thing.' But, of course, we also want to call the beautiful things *themselves* good—not just the delight they cause—and even somehow inherently good, insofar as beautiful, even if only superficially. We recognize that there is a problem here, a disjunction that is obvious given our experience with Hippias (and

doubtless others from our own 'real' lives): we *know* the delight that arises in the presence of is good, but we do not know that *what* we are seeing truly *is* good. As such, we might wonder whether the effect of pleasure is always strictly helpful: the pleasure may be what we *know* to be good, whereas the causes themselves—i.e., the beautiful things—remain somewhat of a mystery to us. Is Socrates' synthesis of 'most harmless and best' into 'the helpful' fully warranted?

It seems that the *Greater Hippias* wants to tell us otherwise. Plato has made the character Hippias a constant reminder of both the sometimes superficial nature of beauty, and our sometimes superficial powers of perception. If the dialogue has shown us that these powers, however flawed, are nevertheless part of Beauty, then we can see how positing beauty as universally helpful is problematic. It is much more accurate to say what Socrates said—that these are "the most harmless of the pleasures and the best, both and each" (303e). The dialectical process of the dialogue has shown us the 'human, all too human' element in the very *being* of Beauty, if not the 'form' of the beautiful itself. Beauty spans the perceptible and intelligible realms. If some people are, like Hippias (and perhaps all those who do "far more bad than good") lacking proper 'ears and brains,' such that they naturally grant priority especially to what is visible, then the beautiful they see must not be considered best, though it may indeed be the 'most harmless' of the pleasures.[1] To call something 'most harmless,' however, is of course not to preclude its being harmful. The 'visual' pleasures are surely more akin to the bodily ones than the

[1] And, of course, many people may be affected much more by other pleasures than they are by beauty.

'intelligible' pleasures are, although to recognize the dangers of such pleasures is not stoically to decree that they (or any pleasures) are harmful as such.[2]

The ambiguity with which the pleasures through sight and hearing are treated in this last argument mirrors Socrates' ambiguous praise of Hippias at the beginning of the dialogue. There, Socrates pointed to Hippias' private capacity to give "still more help" than the money he receives, and his public ability to benefit his city "as one ought if he is not to be looked down on but is to be highly reputed among the many" (281bc). Now, perhaps, we see the origin of the limit implied by Socrates: it is doubtful that Hippias can benefit others any more than he himself is benefited by the pleasures of sight and hearing, or anything else (consider how little he has benefited from Socrates!). Hippias himself shortly reveals precisely how these pleasures have affected, and possibly harmed, him.

After Socrates reiterates the problem with the beautiful being helpful pleasure, and hence the cause of the good, he exhorts Hippias to agree with his analysis, saying that

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[2] Cf. *Phaedo*, 65b, where Socrates, having suggested that the philosopher is "beyond other human things in releasing the soul from communion with the body as much as possible," describes the problem with sight and hearing:

> And what about the very attainment of thoughtfulness? Is the body an impediment or not when somebody takes it along as a companion in his search? Here's the sort of thing I mean. Do sight and hearing possess any truth for human beings, or is it the case that we neither hear nor see anything precise—the sort of thing even the poets are always babbling about to us? And yet if among the bodily senses seeing and hearing are neither precise nor clear, the rest scarcely are, for I suppose, these are all inferior. Or don't they seem so to you?

We should note that despite his general hesitancy regarding sights and sounds, Socrates nevertheless *asks* whether the body is an impediment—he does not say that it is. Cf. also 115a, where Socrates says the following:

> A man should be confident on behalf of his own soul—the man, that is, who in his life bade farewell to the other, body-related pleasures and ornaments as something alien to him, considering them more likely to do harm than good, and who seriously pursued the learning-related pleasures, and who, having adorned his soul not with something alien but with the soul's own adornment—moderation and justice and courage and freedom and truth—awaits the journey to Hades like one who means to journey whenever fate should call.

The extent to which a person takes Socrates' exhortations in these passages as serious stoic doctrines 'against the body' may depend upon one's opinions regarding Socrates' seriousness with respect to the soul's immortality. I would contend that even in these passages of the *Phaedo*, where Socrates is most extreme in his denigration of the body, he nevertheless equivocates with respect to its overall harmfulness. That sight and hearing are not precise, and are more *likely* to do harm than good, does not by any means imply that they are universally harmful.

"presumably it is not sanctioned not to agree with one who speaks correctly" (304a). As discussed above, there are problems with the analysis in question, such that arguably no one should agree that it is spoken correctly. Hippias, however, far from disagreeing on rational grounds, responds with a revealing outburst against the philosopher:

> But, Socrates, what do you suppose all these things together are? They are scrapings and clippings of speeches, as I was just saying, divided up into bits. But the alternative is both beautiful and worth much—to be able to compose a speech well and beautifully in a law court or council chamber or in any other ruling group to which the speech is addressed and to go away having persuaded them and taking off not the littlest but the largest of prizes, the salvation of oneself and one's money and friends. So one ought to cling to these things, bidding good-bye to those little speeches, in order that one not seem to be exceedingly unintelligent by engaging in babblings and drivel, as we were just now. (304ab)

These are Hippias' last words of the dialogue. Prompted by Socrates' somewhat sophistical manipulation (for he is making some very weak arguments), the real sophist again reveals some of his 'real' opinions. They are opinions which he would only be likely to express in private, and they expose the extent to which Hippias' tastes are corrupt.

Perhaps more than anything, Hippias' words express the limited role he concedes to speech. Having no understanding of dialectical argument as the means of pursuing the truth about human things, he accuses Socrates of dividing speeches up into bits, just as he previously accused him of "cutting up in the arguments each of the things that are" (301b). It seems that words, ideas, and arguments do not correspond to 'each of the things that are' to Hippias. Rather, according to his account, what *do* correspond to the real "large and continuous bodies of being" are his 'whole' speeches, for these are what he presents as *the* alternative to Socrates' 'scrapings and bits.' Ironically, it is the 'whole' of this little speech that divulges the superficiality of this opinion. For, despite their apparently having all the integrity of a 'large and continuous body of being,' Hippias'

speeches are merely ill-sorted but convenient means towards those other, essentially selfish, ends: himself, his money, and his friends (in that order). Speech and language are not tools whereby we might, say, compose texts that foster human virtue, much less the primary means through which we may "together" investigate these virtues, and nature as such. It seems that, according to Hippias, it is not sanctioned not to agree with someone who speaks correctly, largely because it is impossible to be wrong. This, after all, is the ultimate consequence of speeches not representing reality at all. Today we might call such a stance 'relativism.'[3]

Hippias' lack of vision makes him superficial in the extreme, and his honest version of what makes for 'beautiful pursuits' is, not surprisingly, rather mundane—though perhaps universally appealing, especially insofar as these things are easy to grasp, and easy to 'cling to.' But the opinion he has disclosed is also, needless to say, politically pernicious. Look out for yourself, your money and your friends, says Hippias the beautiful and wise. The first and last of these ends might be somewhat defensible, insofar as polities themselves are based on a related 'non-cosmopolitan' idea, but it is evident that Hippias is only genuinely concerned with appearances and reputation. He, needless to say, is not concerned with fostering civic virtue, let alone encouraging his friends to become better human beings. Insofar as money and honor are merely divisible, not truly sharable, publicly promoting *his* chosen pursuits would be equivalent to endorsing 'state of nature' domestic strife; privately advising towards these ends is equivalent to advocating the corruption of all things political. Hippias may not do either openly (or

[3] Hippias' avoidance of the question of what is truly lawful (as opposed to what people *call* lawful) indicates this problem early on (284de). The sophist Protagoras was famous for his saying that "Man is the Measure."

self-consciously), though it *does* seem likely that in private he teaches how to get the better of others in speech, given what he has just revealed.[4]

The sophist's teaching is the culmination of his limited power, and the attractiveness inherent in such a view is traceable to similar insufficiencies in others. It is a view that is nevertheless steered by an appreciation, however simple and superficial, of beauty. Indeed, the beautiful pursuits that Hippias praises may be harmful precisely because they are the easiest for human beings to appreciate. Without the intervention of the laws, some might eagerly take this teaching to its tyrannical extreme—the most physically powerful man coveting all of the non-sharable goods. In Sparta, the laws forbade private teaching of any kind, especially by foreigners, and as a result such views exercised less power there.[5] What had *more* power there than anywhere else was the virtue of the citizen, and the honor it naturally brought—including, perhaps most importantly, courage, something manifested not in a person's appearance, but his soul.[6] Needless to say, the cultivation of this kind of virtue is not nearly so pleasant a thing as composing pleasing speeches. The laws and discipline necessary to such a nurture are not generally pleasant—as the questioner's feigning of a judicious thrashing at the center of the dialogue reminded us—but if they are truly 'beneficial' laws, they will make us better (i.e., with respect to virtue). The beautiful things, in contrast, do not always make one better—indeed, the pleasures of seeing and hearing beautiful things may even

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[4] And recall his comment at 298b. wherein he suggests that Socrates might win his argument despite its inadequacy (according to the more literal translation, noted previously: "perhaps these [problems] might go unnoticed by the fellow").

[5] Hippias indicates earlier that the Spartans nevertheless had a *lot* of money, indicating perhaps that by this time they were becoming less 'Spartan' in their tastes—which would indicate that these types of Beauties *are* universally appealing and powerful. See also *Republic* 548a-c.

[6] And we might note that courage is conspicuously absent in the *Greater Hippias*.

naturally tend to 'lead the soul downwards,' especially where there is no serious public cultivation of 'tastes,' or 'powers of perception.'

Given Hippias' hyperbole about the Spartans' inability to count, it seems likely that, despite their different perspectives on how best to live, they would share Hippias' opinion about *Socrates'* manner of living, and speaking. They apparently enjoy Hippias' long speeches. And although the Spartans themselves are famous for their short, pithy, 'laconic' speech (cf., *Protagoras*, 342aff.), they too would probably agree that "one ought to cling to these [other] things [such as honor and courage], bidding good-bye to those little [dialectical] speeches, in order that one not seem to be exceedingly unintelligent by engaging in babblings and drivel." They too would probably 'bespatter' Socrates in (perhaps somewhat 'pithier') speech, were he to exhibit his perplexity to them, saying of him that he "practices things that are silly and little and worth nothing" (as Socrates claims all 'wise ones' like Hippias do, 304d). But would they get angry, as Hippias does? Or would they merely laugh?[7] Hippias does not laugh at all in this dialogue. And if Socrates merely appeared unintelligent (i.e., ugly, according to the 'wise one'), would this not be reason for laughter, rather than ire? Of course, Hippias' objection is not simply that Socrates appears unintelligent when he 'engages in babblings and drivel.' What he actually admits is that they *both* appeared (to him) exceedingly unintelligent. He has been made to appear ugly, and this is why the vain sophist is angered. And, as we know, Hippias' ugliness has not only been 'apparent' ugliness. His anger may even reveal some vague awareness that it is only he who actually *is* exceedingly unintelligent in this context; if Socrates had proven to be exceedingly unintelligent, Hippias would not be angry: he would be delighted.

[7] Of course, it is unlikely that Socrates would treat a man with *real* courage as blithely as he does Hippias.

Socrates appears ugly to Hippias, and would probably appear so to the Spartans as well. But his appearing ugly to Hippias is rooted not only in Hippias' obvious ignorance, but also, if not more so, in his fear of appearing ignorant. If Socrates seemed *merely* ugly to Hippias, he would merely appear comical, much as Hippias does to us. He would not provoke anger, which arguably arises in Hippias because he recognizes, but will not 'admit to himself,' his own ignorance and inferiority. He will only admit that he knows how ugly they together in the midst of these conversations appear to others—and this is what Hippias fears most, even if the 'others' in question have no more knowledge of what is beautiful than Hippias himself does. When asked whether it is sanctioned not to agree with someone who speaks correctly, Hippias in effect responds 'it is surely sanctioned if to agree would make you look bad, to anyone whatsoever.' And there are many people to whom 'correct speaking' is not beautiful.

Furthermore, and more importantly, it is impossible to agree *or* disagree correctly without understanding. To disagree in these circumstances obviously makes a vain person particularly vulnerable—for then, obviously enough, they will be asked to defend their position. When they cannot do so, they will look ridiculous, and they will have no one else to blame. Hence Hippias' general reluctance to disagree with Socrates. If he agrees, then he can always blame Socrates for not making himself clear. His problem, then, is not that he fails to agree with those who speak correctly, it is that he cannot tell the difference. Hippias' failure to disagree with Socrates' incorrect speaking (and agree with the correct) reveals his ignorance; his failure to ask for clarification reveals his vanity. And in this context, vanity comes to light as 'ignorance squared'—for it is ordinary ignorance, combined with ignorance regarding one's self—that is, ignorance

regarding one's own ignorance: if ordinary ignorance is ugly, then this is revolting. And, ironically, the phenomena seems to be rooted in one's desire to be seen as beautiful, and fear of apparent ugliness, or ridiculousness. As Hippias himself asserts, when a person has "nothing to say and yet laughs, he will laugh at himself and be laughed at by those present"—and this is a toilsome (or wicked, *poneros*) thing (291e). So, we see yet another way in which the pleasures of beauty—in this case, of being (apparently) beautiful oneself—can lead one downwards, and may thus be harmful.

One has the sense that in persisting, Socrates could inflame Hippias much more, especially were he more willing to engage in Hippias' type of *ad hominem* game. This might be enjoyable in some way (or so some of us would imagine), but would not, it seems, serve any other purpose, and may indeed prove harmful. It likely would only add to the sophist's disdain and resentment, and this would not make him better. It would surely be an audacious way to treat this most highly respected citizen and ambassador of Elis. Socrates has, in some ways, exercised great moderation in this conversation. It is a prudent Socrates, then, who tells Hippias "you are blessed because you know what a human being ought to pursue, and you have pursued it ably, as you assert" (304c). And it is a prudent Socrates that speaks of his own 'daemonic fate' that causes him to vacillate and always be in perplexity. Instead of causing Hippias to lose his temper, Socrates prudently appeases him.

But surely prudence alone does not account adequately for the philosopher's 'daemonic fate.' There is, after all, a pervasive irony in his behavior towards Hippias throughout the dialogue, as well as in the account of himself that he tenders at the end. The 'alias ruse' has been more than merely prudential (and comical), and his declaration

of perplexity is more than a shrewd façade. Socrates' wily manipulation of Hippias' demonstrates that he is not as divided or confused as he pretends to be, but it is nonetheless the philosopher's good-natured 'humility' that most obviously distinguishes him from the sophist. His response to Hippias takes the form of an account of his 'ordinary' activities. It is the longest speech in the dialogue, and thus seems to refute Hippias' specific allegation.[8] The first part consists of the following:

> Yet whenever I have been persuaded by you people and say just what you do—that it is much the best to be able to succeed in the courtroom or in any other assembly by composing a speech well and beautifully—then I am called all sorts of bad things by some others here and by this fellow who always refutes me. For he happens to be very closely related and to live in the same house. Consequently, whenever I go home into my own house and he hears me saying these things, he asks me if I am not ashamed at daring to converse about the beautiful pursuits when I am so manifestly refuted concerning the beautiful because I do not even know what it itself is. "And yet how will you know," he says, "whether anyone composes a speech beautifully or not, or any other activity whatsoever, if you do not recognize the beautiful? And when this is your condition, do you suppose that it is better for you to live rather than to be dead?" The result indeed for me is, as I say, to be reproached and to be badly spoken of by you people and badly by him. (304de)

The speech is obviously not a mere assortment of 'bits and scrapings,' as Hippias has charged. And it is more than a prudential gloss intended to restore Hippias' 'self-confidence.' His longer speech corresponds to a more complete man, a man who experiences perplexity. What seems (perhaps only to Hippias) like a description of a rather exasperating household is actually the description of a rather peculiar soul—a soul that admonishes and refutes itself, constantly. And while the tenacious questioner he has been 'imitating' seems to embody Socrates' famous ignorance, it is clear this deconstructive element does not comprehend the whole. As such, the perplexity Socrates experiences is not merely negative bewilderment, but rather a tension between (at least)

[8] Moreover, Socrates has been using 'long' speeches against Hippias all through their conversation, especially in relation to Hippias' own short concurrences.

two parts: his reason's inability to provide a clear account of what his spirit feels, its delight in beauty.

Socrates' strange treatment of Hippias, as well as his description of himself here, are bound to strike us as comical. Imagining Socrates in private conversation with himself is comical, just as *anyone's* 'talking' to themselves is comical. Even on stage, where there is an obvious dramatic purpose to voicing one's ruminations, a character's doing so—say, in a soliloquy—often bespeaks a state of bewilderment, or even mild disequilibrium! Why is this? It is clear enough that our thoughts take on this dialectical form. Why, then, is it that the very idea of our *voicing* these thoughts should be so funny? Perhaps it is that the act of thinking is the most private search for clarity, whereas speaking is necessarily a public, or political action. Conversing with oneself aloud, then, essentially becomes public evidence of one's private search for intellectual clarity—born of confusion, or a kind of *incompleteness*. In short, it is a sign of one's inner lack of beauty.[9] When Socrates describes himself laughing at himself (289c, 291d), the comedy is only compounded. What a madman!

As we have seen, this at least must be how Hippias sees him, or would if he had understood. And Hippias' soul is presented as *the* alternative in this dialogue—a man who claims two days later in the *Lesser Hippias* that he has never met anyone better than himself at anything (363b); a man who believes that he is already wise, already whole, and already beautiful.[10] And he has a device that helps him sustain this illusion—his relativism. By ignoring the law of non-contradiction, Hippias has chosen never to recognize anyone as better. Just as he would disagree with someone who spoke correctly

[9] Though, as we have suggested, this is not nearly so ugly (if it is ugly at all) as any dogmatic proclamation.
[10] Cf. *Symposium*, where Diotima suggests that "he who does not believe that he is in need does not desire that which he does not believe he needs" (204a).

if it made him look better to others, it seems that he also unwittingly disagrees with himself if it makes him feel better. His views are full of internal contradictions, and they do not coincide with his actions, and yet he speaks without equivocation, with all the confidence of 'one who knows.' Unlike Socrates, who spends his day conversing, and then returns home to carry on in private, Hippias is incapable of serious deliberation, because he is fearful of appearing laughable. He lacks the philosopher's courage. He would scarce be caught thinking, let alone thinking aloud. His love of his own superficial beauty—the beauty that appeals to others as tasteless as he is—ultimately prevents his becoming more genuinely beautiful.

Socrates, too, it seems, is motivated by a desire for the beautiful. As his final words of the *Greater Hippias* illustrate, this creates a paradox that seems to trouble him. Part of him claims to recognize beauty without knowing what 'it itself' is, while the other suggests that it is impossible to *know* what is beautiful without "recognizing *the* beautiful," that is, without knowing, or 'intellecting,' what the beautiful itself is. The all-important epistemological question of how we know anything lurks in the background, acting like a barrier between these two parts of Socrates' soul—the one part which sees, and experiences Beauty, the other which intellects, and *mistrusts* his senses. We know which part we sympathize with *most*—for we experience beauty every day without understanding what it is, and do so without experiencing an epistemological crisis. Indeed, we spend much of our time trying to recreate these moments—whether this means earning more gold, in Hippias' case, listening to symphonies, or redecorating one's 'home.' It is only when we try rationally to defend (or promote) our choices that we face the problem Socrates makes so plain.

Socrates' questioning alter ego adds a somber element to the problem, but this same somber element may also divulge his own aesthetic sense. He implies, after all, that one who cannot recognize the beautiful is better off dead. If we can assume that being dead is bad (as surely he intends to imply, though knowledge that this is the case brings in epistemological problems of its own), then his doing so suggests that even *he* recognizes the beautiful to be good. We might be misled to conclude that the only form of beauty he recognizes is the beauty of knowing. For he implies early on that in order to know the beautiful, one must be able to say what it is (286d). But, if we reconsider the passage, we notice that this was framed as a question. In the present passage, he says that recognizing the beautiful is what makes life worth living. We are likely to think that his 'recognizing the beautiful' necessarily refers to *recognizing the form of the beautiful.* But insofar as 'all beautiful things are beautiful by the beautiful,' this is simply not the case—the implication being that whenever we recognize beauty, we recognize the beautiful as well. His somber remark also suggests that our recognition of the beautiful is akin to the recognition of the Good.

Socrates' most 'rational faculty' recognizes that a life devoid of the experience of beauty is not worth living. Surely we would agree. He also seems to imply that what is *most* beautiful is the most 'lucid' form of recognition: that is, *knowing.* Indeed, Socrates' rational and spirited soul may be in perfect agreement on this one matter.[11] And, after all, if what is knowable consists of intelligible forms, the 'highest' forms in existence, then it seems natural that these would also be the most beautiful, and hence desirable things, well worthy of human pursuit. The *Greater Hippias* also teaches us, rather humorously, to recognize the variable beauty of another kind of 'intelligible' form—the form of the

[11] Or two—they seem also to share an assumption about living.

human soul. Indeed, it seems that Plato's dialogue facilitates our experiencing the intelligible beauty of Socrates' soul (so vividly juxtaposed with Hippias'). Presumably, our recognizing *his* Beauty, to the extent that we are able, has the effect of enticing our own perceptive (and procreative?) powers *away* from what is visible.[12] It is in this way, then, that the delight caused by the beautiful is not merely 'least harmful,' but also best.

The *Greater Hippias* makes it clear that knowing the truth—about the reputedly wise men of the past, the laws, the beautiful 'pursuits,' or oneself—is not the most beautiful thing to everyone. Socrates, delighting in that other 'pleasure through sight and hearing,' the comical, has made some of these aesthetic differences quite plain throughout this conversation. And yet he claims in the end that 'he seems to himself' to have been benefited by his association with Hippias. Are the aesthetic differences he has comically brought to the surface news to him? Has he learned for the first time the power of superficial beauty to some people relative to what he finds most beautiful—the beauty of knowing the truth? Has he learned that, for some, knowing is not always pleasant, insofar as it requires acknowledging that comical division in the soul that admits of ignorance and ugliness, even while aspiring for knowledge and beauty? Has he learned that some people get angry when they are asked to defend their opinions, such that sometimes it may be more beneficial to dissemble, even if it means sacrificing the truth?[13] Given the dramatic quirks of the dialogue, these suggestions are simply naïve.

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[12] The beauty of this arrangement thus lies not in its actual completeness, but in its genuine openness to the truth of the whole, and its being 'harmoniously' arranged to suit this end. That the whole is both mysterious and knowable is mirrored (both comically and beautifully) in the soul of the lover of wisdom.

[13] Socrates and Glaucon speak to the distinction between lovers of opinion and lovers of wisdom at the end of Book V of the *Republic* (no mention is made of lovers of truth). The passage is very *apropos*:

> "And, as for those who observe many fair things but don't see the fair itself and aren't even able to follow another who leads them to it, and many just things but not the just itself, and so on with all the rest, we'll assert that they opine all these things but know nothing of what they opine."
>
> "Necessarily," he said.

Although it is possible that Hippias has helped Socrates ratify some of his own 'opinions,' it is unlikely, given his masterful dissembling throughout, that Socrates did not already know all this from the outset. Why then does he speak to Hippias for any time at all? Perhaps his approaching Hippias is an indication of the philosopher's nobility of spirit—his willingness to engage *anyone* in conversation an indication of the positive assumptions he makes about them *a priori*. Perhaps, he had hoped to learn something from Hippias, or about Hippias, although it seems unlikely that this occurred. Perhaps he had hoped (gadfly-like) to benefit Hippias in some way, but this has not occurred either. It seems that we are left to suggest that perhaps the philosopher simply believes that laughter too can be good for the soul, or, if merely pleasant, then among the 'least harmful' of the pleasures, and he enjoys Hippias' company mostly for this reason, if only for a short while.[14]

Socrates completes his final speech by honoring Hippias, himself, and the wisdom of the ancients: "So, Hippias, I seem to myself to have been helped by my association with both of you [Hippias and the questioner]. For I seem to myself to know what the

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"And what about those who look at each thing itself—at the things that are always the same in all respects? Won't we say that they know and don't opine?"

"That too is necessary."

"Won't we assert that these men delight in and love that on which knowledge depends, and the others that on which opinion depends? Or don't we remember that we were saying that they love and observe fair sounds and colors and such things but can't even endure the fact that the fair itself is something?"

"Yes, we do remember."

"So, will we strike a false note in calling them lovers of opinion rather than lovers of wisdom? And will they be very angry with us if we speak this way?"

"No," he said, "that is, if they are persuaded by me. For it's not meet to be harsh with what's true."

"Must we, therefore, call philosophers rather than lovers of opinion those who delight in each thing that is itself?"

"That's entirely Certain."

Perhaps Plato wrote the *Hippias* dialogues (which together might be called "On the Beauty of the Lie"?) to help out his brother.

[14] If the conversation depicted in the *Lesser Hippias* two days later is any indication, Socrates' treatment of Hippias has not harmed (*or* helped) him in any way. He is willing to speak to Socrates (though he does not himself ask for Socrates' opinion about his speech), and he is at least as arrogant as before.

proverb means that says, 'The beautiful things are difficult'" (304e).[15] The proverb can be variously interpreted in this context. It seems to be a summary comment regarding what he has learned from these several associates. Hippias, Socrates ironically suggests, has shown Socrates just *how* difficult the most beautiful things are for some to see. Similarly, Socrates may gain insight from Hippias as to how hard the beautiful things are to teach. Presumably, however, it is his own 'questioner' that 'teaches' Socrates about the difficulties of knowing in general. And, as we have seen, if all knowing is difficult, then gaining knowledge of 'the beautiful' is *ipso facto* difficult as well. Considering the ease with which the philosopher has masterfully ruled over Hippias, it seems doubtful that this particular lesson occurred during the present conversation. Socrates seems to know far more about Beauty in general than he openly admits, since the arguments he does present, considered more carefully, prove fruitful. Moreover, we may see for ourselves that he and his way of life are themselves beautiful.[16] Doubtless acquiring what he regards as the most beautiful things (i.e., truths) must be difficult for the philosopher, and it seems likely that this includes the truth about the beautiful itself.

Whether gaining knowledge of Beauty is difficult, is not, however, a lingering question for most of us, especially having read Plato's dialogue addressing the subject. *We* can certainly corroborate that ancient proverb. While the 'longer path' that 'adorns' the *Greater Hippias* branches out towards some beautiful solid gems (part of me opines), a whole harvest of perplexities is gathered *en route* (the other part knows). I seem to myself still to enjoy sufficient vanity not to provide a final catalogue of these, my own 'ridiculous' failures. That the divine Plato, with his "secret and sphinx nature," wrote 35

[15] For other references to this saying, see *Republic* (435c, 497d) and *Cratylus* (384a-b). See also *Protagoras* (342ff.).
[16] For surely knowing what beauty is, even partially, helps one become more beautiful oneself.

dialogues, suggests to me that such perplexities are plentiful enough to sustain the most beautiful of pursuits without my help, for all and always, everywhere.

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