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SOCRATIC SEDUCTION

An Interpretation of Plato's Theages

by

Lorna M. Dawson

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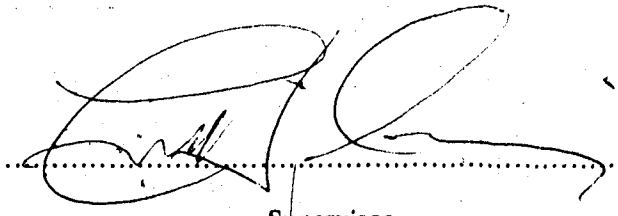
An Interpretation of Plato's Theages

submitted by Lorna M. Dawson in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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To my parents

Abstract

Plato's Theages is subtitled "On Wisdom." It thus claims to be about the virtue of a philosopher, or "lover of wisdom." The discussion is premised upon Socrates' examination of a young boy who desires "to become wise," yet it is, paradoxically, the work which provides the most coherent account of Socrates' mysterious daimonic voice in the Platonic corpus, and in which the philosopher professes absolute ignorance about everything noble and blessed except for his expertise in erotika, or love matters. This commentary attempts to explicate Socrates' profession to know only erotika, and to consider why a philosopher would claim to have a daimon. Finally, it is an attempt to determine what, precisely, constitutes Socrates' wisdom, and how it is revealed in this discussion with Theages.

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I. Introduction

The Republic is a dialogue in which Socrates discusses justice with two brothers who, in the course of the discussion, reveal themselves to possess considerable aptitude for philosophic inquiry. After his strange claim that justice requires the rule of philosophers in the city[1], Socrates is called upon to defend philosophers against the charge raised by Adeimantus, the more politically sensitive of the two

> ...someone might say that in speech he can't contradict you at each particular thing asked, but in deed he sees that all those who start out on philosophy--not those who take it up for the sake of getting educated when they are young and then drop it, but those who linger in it for a longer time--most become quite queer, not to say completely vicious; while the ones who seem perfectly decent, do nevertheless suffer at least one consequence of the practise you are praising--they become completely useless to the cities. (487c-d)

Thus begins an examination into the philosophic nature, from which it is concluded that the difference between philosophic and non-philosophic natures is vast and of considerable significance. Their discussion leads Socrates to conclude

> Then it's a very small group, Adeimantus...which remains to keep company with philosophy in a way that's worthy; perhaps either a noble and well-reared disposition, held in check by exile, remains by her side consistent with nature, for want of corruptors; or when a great soul grows up in a little city, despises the business of the city and looks out beyond; and, perhaps, a very few men from another art, who justly despise it because they have good natures, might come to her. And the bridle of our comrade Theages might be such as to restrain him. For in Theages' case all the other conditions for an exile from philosophy were present, but the sickliness[2] of his body, shutting him out of politics, restrains him. My case--the demonic sign--isn't worth mentioning, for it has perhaps occurred in some one other man, or no other, before. (496a-c)

Socrates identifies five particular kinds of circumstances in which philosophy proves, in comparison with the other available pursuits, attractive enough to lure some suitable young men to her. Of these five cases, three are general descriptions of the types of souls who would philosophize; only Theages and Socrates himself are presented as specific members of this

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[1]As Socrates says, "unless...the philosophers rule as kings or those now called kings and chiefs genuinely and adequately philosophize, and political power and philosophy coincide in the same place...there is no rest from ills for the cities,...nor I think for human kind...." The Republic of Plato, 473d. Translated, with Notes and an Interpretive Essay, by Allan Bloom. (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1968.)

[2]As Bloom notes, "The accent in this word is on the care of ills, perhaps on the overattentiveneness to them (cf.407b)." The Republic of Plato. Translated, with Notes and an Interpretive Essay, by Allan Bloom. (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1968.)

"very small group" who are suited to pursue wisdom in a way that is "worthy." This same young man is also one of the seven cited, along with Plato himself, as associates of Socrates in The Apology of Socrates (33e), where no hint is given of their having been corrupted by this association.

Thus, on the testimony of the most famous of the Platonic writings we should approach the Theages predisposed to consider as important its portrayal of this first encounter between Socrates and Theages, a prejudice reinforced by the dialogue's traditional subtitle, "On Wisdom."[3] A dialogue between the philosopher (from philos and sophos; literally a lover of wisdom, as distinct from a wise man) and a young boy [4] elsewhere memorialized as one of a small group properly saved for philosophy, which professes to be about wisdom, the virtue of a philosopher, cannot help but entice a student of philosophy. And yet the Theages, far from initially rewarding such trust, hides its treasure behind a veil of strangeness. It is a very short dialogue, and quite why or how it justifies the claim to be about wisdom is far from clear. The ending is ambiguous, and along the way the reader is asked to suffer a number of puzzling shifts in the discussion; and yet it is only by confronting the more bizarre aspects of the Theages that one can begin to penetrate the "wisdom" incorporated in it.

The dialogue is Plato's portrayal of a discussion involving Socrates, a wealthy Athenian farmer named Demodocus, and his son, Theages. The father and son have just come into Athens from the farm in order to place Theages with someone who will satisfy the boy's professed desire "to become wise," and yet assuage (or at least not aggravate) the fears that such a desire has engendered in Demodocus.

Demodocus initiates the discussion, drawing an analogy between his work tending plants and his nurture of Theages. As the preparation for planting and the actual planting of

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[3]For a discussion of the alleged spuriousness of the Theages, see the editor's introduction to The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues. Translated, with Interpretive Studies. Edited by Thomas L. Pangle. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987.)

[4]From the dramatic action and Theages' answers to Socrates' questions, it seems that Theages is probably about twelve or thirteen years old at the time of this discussion. As Pangle notes (p. 144, note 20), the dramatic date of the dialogue seems to be 409BC. Theages is mentioned in the Apology as already dead by the time of Socrates' trial in 399BC. See Apology, 33e.

seeds is relatively simple compared to the tending of the plants as they grow, so the child-begetting resulting in his son was "the easiest of all things," while his upbringing "has been vexatious and has made me anxious, with constant fear concerning him." His perplexity about Theages' nurture leads him to request Socrates' counsel, which leads in turn to the philosopher's examination of Theages. He ascertains that the education typically afforded the sons of Athenian gentlemen is insufficient to satisify the boy, and through dialogue attempts to come to a common conclusion with Theages about what this "wisdom" is that he supposedly desires.

Socrates leads Theages to consider a number of examples to help him determine what the wisdom is which the boy says he lacks. The pilot does his work through the wisdom of the piloting art, "by which we have knowledge of how to rule ships." Similarly, the charioteer's art, that wisdom used to pilot chariots, can be further defined as the wisdom "by which we have knowledge of how to rule a team of horses." On the basis of these examples, Socrates asks Theages to define the wisdom which he desires, suggestively identifying it as that "by which we have knowledge of how to rule what?" Theages obligingly replies that he desires the wisdom by which he would know how to rule "human beings." Socrates, professing uncertainty as to who these people would actually be, points out to Theages that he cannot mean the sick, because they are ruled through the medical art; he cannot mean the singers in choruses, for they are ruled through the musical art; and the gymnastic art provides "knowledge of how to rule those who are exercising." Theages, at Socrates' urging, makes a spirited endeavour to clarify which people he meant, explaining that they are "those in the city," both the sick and "also of the rest." Socrates concludes that Theages means not only the reapers and harvesters and planters and sowers and threshers, who are ruled through the farming art, nor only the sawyers and borers and planers and turners, who are ruled by the art of carpentry. Rather, Socrates suggests, Theages is speaking of that art

> by which we have knowledge of how to rule all these, as well as the farmers, and the carpenters, and all the public craftsmen, and the private noncraftsmen, both women and men--this perhaps is the wisdom of which you're speaking. (124b)

Theages emphatically affirms Socrates' conclusion, telling him that "this...is what for a long

time I've wanted to say." The boy's desire to become wise has been persistently interpreted by the philosopher as a desire to rule, an interpretation which the boy himself finally confirms.

Having come to a common conclusion about who the subjects of the rule would be, Socrates cites a number of men who apparently possessed the art which provided this knowledge, and who thereby ruled over all their people. Theages agrees that Aegisthus, Peleus, Periander, Archelaus and Hippias ruled "over the public craftsmen and the private noncraftsmen, both men and women, all together..." in Argos, Phthia, Corinth, Macedonia and Athens, respectively. On account of the character of their rule, Hippias and Periander at least are commonly called tyrants. Socrates concludes that "he who desires to rule over all the human beings in the city desire[s] the same rule as these--the tyrannical and to be a tyrant." He solicits from the boy the admission that he did indeed desire to rule over these and determines that what Theages desires is not so much wisdom for its own sake, but to exercise tyrannical rule. Curiously, he then chastizes both the boy for having the desire he admits to having, and Demodocus for not helping Theages fulfil this desire.

Thoroughly worried now, Demodocus agrees to deliberate in common with the philosopher about "whom he should send him to and by means of whose company he might become a wise tyrant." Yet again Socrates foregoes a discussion with Demodocus in favour of questioning Theages directly. Socrates invokes a line of poetry he attributes to Euripides to assist them in their enquiry into the subject in which a tyrant would be wise. Farmers are wise through keeping company with the wise in the things of the art of farming; cooks are wise through keeping company with those who are wise in what belongs to cooks; wrestlers are wise through keeping company with the wise in what belongs to wrestling; Socrates accordingly asks Theages to tell him what those who are wise are wise in, through intercourse with whom he could himself become wise, in the way he desires.

Theages acknowledges that he does not know, leading Socrates to clarify that the things in question are what "Anacreon declared that Callicrite knew," that is, "the things of the tyrannic art," suggesting that Theages' desire can be fulfilled if he is willing to apprentice with a tyrant. At this suggestion the boy openly rebels, and accuses Socrates of mocking and

joking with him. As he says,

> for my part I would pray, I suppose, to become tyrant--preferably over all human beings and, if not, over as many as possible, and so would you, I suppose, and all other human beings--or, moreover, probably rather to become a god. But this is not what I said I desire. (125d-126a)

Theages claims that while he did desire to rule the citizens, he wanted to rule "[n]ot by violence, or as the tyrants do, but over those who are willing, in the manner of the other men in the city who are in good repute." His desire to become wise has thus been revealed to be consequent to a desire for political power and rule, something he never explicitly mentioned until subjected to Socratic questioning.

Theages' restatement of his ambition to become not a tyrant, but an Athenian statesman leads Socrates to point out the obvious course of action. Those who desire to become wise in the things that pertain to the art of horsemanship go to learn from those versed in the art of horsemanship, those who are wondrously adept (deinos) and who own and use horses all the time, both their own and ones belonging to others. Those desiring to become wise in the things that pertain to the art of javelin throwing go to learn from those versed in the art of javelin throwing, those who are wondrously adept in these things and who own and use javelins all the time, again both their own and those of others. Therefore, if Theages desires to become wise in the things that pertain to the art of politics, he should go to "these very men who are wonderously adept in the things that pertain to the art of politics and who all the time use their own city and many others, carrying on business with both Greek and barbarian cities...." Theages, however, questions the reasonableness of Socrates' advice, claiming that he regards as true the statement which he had heard attributed to Socrates that "the sons of these men versed in the political art are no better than the sons of shoemakers...," and further observes that if they cannot even benefit their own sons, it is unlikely that they can benefit him. Theages is unwilling to apprentice with some man who is unable to benefit his own son.

Having, it seems, attempted to convince the boy that he could best gain proficiency in the political art through studying with an Athenian gentleman versed in that art, Socrates asks him to try to sympathize with his father's problem. Theages agrees that he too would be at a

loss if he had a son who wished to be a painter, an aulist, or a citharist, and yet refused to study with the very men versed in these arts. In response to the philosopher's suggestion that he thus study with an Athenian gentleman, Theages retorts that, as Socrates is one of these gentlemen, he would like to be with the philosopher. Socrates' apparent attempt to deflect the boy's desire to become "wise" through studying with a sophist, and to make him content with learning politics from some man similar to his father has apparently redounded to Socrates' disadvantage: he now finds himself--much to his professed surprise--the object of the boy's desires. His father commends Theages on his desire, and echoes the boy in entreating Socrates to take Theages on as a student, complicating the philosopher's apparent embarrassment even more.

Faced with this request, Socrates attempts to dissuade Demodocus from this proposal, telling him that Theages would benefit more in his aim of becoming a good citizen through having intercourse with Demodocus himself, an elder and leading citizen who is well-regarded, and who has at least had experience in ruling in Athens. Or, if he refuses the company of men versed in the art of politics, he could still seek out one of those he originally intended, and who proclaim themselves capable of educating young persons, the sophists. Choosing intercourse with members of either of these two groups would be "reasonable" (eikos); but to insist on spending time with Socrates is not reasonable, for the philosopher professes absolute ignorance about anything blessed and noble, claiming only unparallelled cleverness in "a certain small subject of knowledge: what pertains to erotic love"(erotika). Apparently concerned that Theages remains determined to spend time with him, Socrates seems intent on trying to dissuade both father and son from soliciting his company. Faced with their persistence, he professes his inability to teach the boy anything due to his absolute ignorance about anything blessed and noble; all he knows about is love.

Theages, now sure that Socrates is jesting, nonetheless remains adamant in his wish and disregards the philosopher's expression of ignorance about the blessed and noble subjects which the boy desires to know. He testifies that he has seen boys who have become "manifestly superior to all those to whom they were previously inferior" because of the time

they spent with Socrates. Apparently concerned to convince Theages and Demodocus that he is truly unable himself to teach anything important, Socrates credits any benefit these youths have received to the power of a daimon, which takes control of his relations with his students. The philosopher gives an account of the daimonic voice which has followed upon him since he was a child, and which prohibits him, and even some of his friends, from certain actions. Socrates tells stories about Charmides, about Timarchus and Philemon, about the Sicilian expedition, and about Sannion who is currently engaged in the Ephesus campaign, ostensibly in order to show Theages and Demodocus how his actions and those of his friends are governed by the occurence of the daimonic sign. Furthermore, Socrates claims that this daimon is also "all-powerful when it comes to the intercourse of those who spend time" with him. The daimon judges all prospective companions of Socrates, and those whose intercourse it opposes are unable to be benefitted by spending time with him. There are some whose intercourse the daimon does not prevent, but who nonetheless are also unable to benefit by it. The boys whom Theages has noticed are "those whose intercourse the power of the demonic thing contributes to," the ones who make rapid progress but who in truth learn nothing from the philosopher. Yet, Socrates continues, not all those who so progress retain the benefit they have received, for some make progress when with Socrates, but when they leave him, "are once again no different from anyone." As an example of this sort of student, Socrates recounts a discussion with Aristides, the son of Lysimachus, who acknowledged that he benefitted enormously from his intercourse with Socrates--although he learned nothing from him--only to have all the benefit melt away when he had to go on a military expedition and thus be separated from the philosopher.

Given that a student of his is so dependent upon the favour of the daimon, Socrates contends that Theages should consider whether it might not be safer for the boy "to be educated by one of those who are themselves in charge of the benefit by which they benefit human beings rather than, with me, to act according to what turns out by chance." Theages, however, responds that the best course of action would be to make trial of the daimon by keeping company with one another; if the daimon objects to this intercourse, they will

deliberate on what to do to placate the divine thing, or should that fail, they will make other arrangements. Demodocus admonishes Socrates not to oppose Theages any more and characterizes the boy's response as "well spoken." Bowing before their combined pressure, Socrates ends the dialogue with an ambivalent, ambiguous response. As he says, "...if it seems that that's the way it has to be done, then that's the way we'll do." The dialogue which begins with a profession by a boy that he desires to become wise ends with the lover of wisdom admitting his utter ignorance about everything except love matters and his complete subjection to a daimonic voice. Yet even such peculiar claims do not deter Theages from his desire to be with Socrates.

In the Apology, Socrates describes his life's work as "a performing of certain labours,"(22a) in a vain attempt to refute the saying of the oracle that no one was wiser than Socrates. He recounts his examinations of those reputed to be wise; in turn the politicians, the poets, and the manual artisans. Of the politicians he concluded that "it seemed to me that this man seemed to be wise, both to many other human beings and most of all to himself, but that he was not."(21c) Similarly, concerning the poets, almost anyone could better explain the meaning of their poems than they themselves; thus, Socrates says, "I soon recognized that they do not make what they make by wisdom, but by some sort of nature and while inspired, like the diviners and those who deliver oracles. For they too say many noble things, but they know nothing of what they speak."(22b-c) Finally, his examination of the manual artisans led him to conclude

> I was conscious that I had knowledge of nothing, so to speak, but I knew that I would discover that they, at least, had knowledge of many noble things. And I was not played false about this: they did have knowledge of things which I did not have knowledge of, and in this way they were wiser than I. But, men of Athens, the good craftsmen also seemed to me to go wrong in the same way as the poets: because he performed his art nobly, each one deemed himself wisest also in the other things, the greatest things--and this discordant note of theirs seemed to hide that wisdom. (22c-d)

From his examination Socrates concludes that, because he is self-conscious of his own ignorance and does not profess knowledge of things he does not know, he is "a little bit wiser" than those who suppose themselves wise. His examination of the "wisdom" of the politicians, poets and artisans elevates him to a state of "Socratic ignorance," which he

subsequently equates with "human wisdom." (23a)

Socrates' account of his own labours is helpful to one approaching the Theages, for it casts a special illumination on the philosopher's discussion with the boy. Socrates begins his examination of Theages with a series of questions which lead the boy to both consider wisdom as a techne[5] and to realize that technical knowledge cannot be wisdom simply. Yet the knowledge gained from this discussion propels the two into a consideration of where Theages could get the wisdom which he professes to desire, and for help in this matter the two turn to the poets, both Euripides and Anacreon. An examination of the poets' expressions (albeit interpreted by Socrates) leads to the conclusion that if Theages desires political wisdom, he should study with the men of Athens who are versed in the political art. Yet it is precisely because Theages does not believe that he will learn what he desires to learn from these men that he demanded that his father place him with a sophist. But without any actual examination of the knowledge possessed by these men conventionally deemed wise ("sophists"), Theages suppresses his original desire in favour of studying with Socrates himself, despite what appears to be great reluctance on the philosopher's part to take Theages on as a student. The progression of the dialogue from a discussion of wisdom, to a discussion of rule, to an impassioned plea by a would-be tyrant to study with an ignorant--but erotic and daimon-ridden--philosopher leaves the reader wondering where in all this the Theages earns the subtitle "On Wisdom," and why the boy portrayed herein deserves to be memorialized along with Socrates as he is in Republic and the Apology. Only a closer examination of the dialogue will prove that this is indeed a dialogue on wisdom, and further that it is truly a Socratic seduction, a manifestation in deed of the special wisdom he claims in speech: erotika.

[5]The word is roughly translatable as "art" in the older sense of "artisan." Our "technique" and "technical" come from the same word and incorporate to some extent its original meaning.

II. Demodocus' Problem (121a-122d)

Theages and his father Demodocus come across Socrates by the portico of Zeus the Liberator, the patron god of Greek liberty. Demodocus asks Socrates whether the philosopher is at leisure, and requests that even if he is not, Socrates should make time for Demodocus if his own business is not too important. Socrates' response to Demodocus reveals a peculiar courtesy. He is "at leisure in any case," yet for Demodocus he is "very much so." Socrates' answer to Demodocus is a model of graciousness. He is not now busy, but it seems that he is more than willing to make time to speak with the elder farmer who so urgently requests his attention, and he invites Demodocus to explain what it is he would like to discuss. Demodocus takes up Socrates' invitation to speak, but not before reiterating his desire for a private conversation, suggesting that they go "out of the way, into the portico of Zeus the Liberator." Thus, the entire discussion of the proper nurture of an ambitious young man takes place in the portico of a temple dedicated to the patron god of liberty. The discussion will reveal Theages' desire--not for freedom, but to rule as a tyrant. Yet this desire is not at the forefront of Theages' unexamined desires; it is, like the temple itself, "out of the way," and separated from his more immediate concerns.

The move to the temple liberates Demodocus enough to allow him to state his worry in what he seems to regard as a suitably comprehensive way. As the preparations for planting are easier than tending the growing shoots, so the child-begetting of Theages was "the easiest of all things," compared to his upbringing. The farmer, faced with a stubborn and insistent son, explains his problem in light of what he knows; his knowledge provides the basis for his attempts to understand what he does not know. Yet although Demodocus uses his expertise in farming to "draw inferences about the rest," he nevertheless reveals that farming cannot provide the basis for comprehensive wisdom. He is unable to deal with Theages precisely because his understanding of things is not complete, and his very presence before Socrates is testimony that he does not regard himself as self-sufficiently wise. The conversation between Demodocus and Socrates is thus a discussion between one who believes he understands

nature,[6] and one who professes to understand what he characterizes as a "small subject" of knowledge--the erotic aspect of human nature, if not of nature as a whole. Demodocus asserts clearly enough his view that man is part of the natural world, along with plants and animals. Yet he clearly believes that there is a better and a worse way for his son to be raised, and he believes that, with the philosopher's help, he can influence the type of man his son is to become. Compared to plants, however, the tending of sons is infinitely more difficult. Demodocus' problem lies in finding a teacher for Theages who will educate the boy in a manner which is aimed at fulfilling his nature. The farmer's concern that Theages may be corrupted reveals his belief that some things the boy could be taught by the sophists could be "unnatural," and could cause him harm.

The desire which is now in Theages has engendered fear in his father.[7] Theages' upbringing has been a source of worry to Demodocus, apparently for some time and for a variety of reasons; now, however, he is particularly worried by the boy's desire "to become wise." Demodocus' wholehearted fear is curious, for at first thought, a son whose primary desire is to become wise would seem to be little trouble for a parent. Yet Demodocus characterizes this desire neither as good nor as bad, but simply as "risky," and admits that it is "not ignoble" (ouk agennes). Perhaps Demodocus is afraid that the education offered

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[6]It is interesting that in this dialogue (which brings forth a farmer to talk about the nurture of his son by means of an analogy to plants), the word "nature" (phusis) does not appear. Neither, surprisingly, does the word "soul" (psyche).

[7]See Strepsiades' fears in Aristophanes' Clouds. As Pangle notes,

> Through his choice of characters and situation, Plato presents in the Theages his most direct dramatic reply to the Clouds. Plato here seems to portray a situation which comes as close as "realistically" possible (in his eyes) to Aristophanes' extravagant situation, and then seems, in effect, to invite the reader to compare the two dramas in order to see just how wrong Aristophanes was about both the circumstances in which Socrates was likely to come into contact with rural fathers and the way he handled such contacts.

(Pangle, p.152.) Strepsiades' fears of Pheidippides--that he will cause him financial ruin--are the primary motivation for his visit to Socrates and his attempts to get Pheidippides to go to Socrates' thinkery. These fears are soon supplanted, however, by even greater fear after the boy visits Socrates--fear that what he has learned threatens the standard of justice and convention upon which the family rests. Pheidippides' new learning, which threatens Strepsiades and his wife, is the cause of the father's fears. Demodocus, in comparison, seems to believe that sending Theages to Socrates rather than to a sophist will relieve him of many fearful doubts.

Theages by the sophists may undermine his conventional respect for justice and the other virtues, and may be aimed at producing a boy who, through "tricky speech" can evade the laws of Athens;[8] or perhaps Demodocus is simply frightened by his loss of control over his son. Given that Theages says his father knows what he desires--for they have apparently argued repeatedly over the boy's desire "to become wise"--he may have good reason to fear.

The source of Theages' desire, according to his father, is the boy's envy of those youths of his own age and deme who have gone down into the city, and who now recount to Theages certain discussions in which they have engaged, or which they have heard. Demodocus would thus seem to be one of the stricter fathers in the deme, and Theages' resentment of his father may be partially due to his being forbidden--or "held back with placating talk"-- to visit the city, as well as his envy of the activities which he has missed. The boy apparently believes that he is missing out on something very important because of his father's recalcitrance. Theages' spirit moves him to attempt to emulate those whom he envies. The other lucky youths are allowed to go down into the city, and come back up, appearing far wiser to those who have not journeyed down, exciting envy and causing trouble in the family. The relative status of farm life and city life, as well as the process of "becoming wise," thus become problematic.

Demodocus defends his reluctance to place Theages with a sophist, but not on the basis of their cost. He is wealthy enough, as he makes clear to Socrates, that the cost of the sophists would not be "such a concern." Yet it is, apparently, enough of a concern for him to mention it.[9] Rather, Demodocus contends, he is worried about some unspecified danger into which Theages may be entering. Demodocus cannot sustain his objection to Theages' professed desire except with the recognition that the wisdom his son seeks is somehow potentially more dangerous than simply learning to farm properly, or learning how to be an

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[8]It is reasonable to assume that given his experience in civic matters, Demodocus would be well aware of the dubious reputation of the sophists.

[9]The cost of a sophist does not, however, seem to be the primary consideration, for in order to entice Socrates into taking Theages on, Demodocus is willing to place at the philosopher's disposal "both myself and whatever I have that is most my own--for whatever you might need, in brief--if you welcome this Theages here and do him good in whatever way you can." (127d)

excellent carpenter. Given Theages' subsequent revelation that he regards the ability to win arguments as the natural indication of wisdom, and political rule of some sort as the best employment of this wisdom, it seems that his father considers this potentially dangerous--or at least risky--though not necessarily "ignoble." Perhaps he speaks from experience.

Demodocus laments that at one time he could hold Theages back with placating talk, but that he cannot any longer. He is not able simply to forbid Theages to go, at least not indefinitely, nor can he insulate the youth from others who have been to the city. Life on the farm, it seems, cannot remain wholly removed from the perhaps corrupting influence of the city; and it seems the unfamiliar commonly entices the young. Theages cannot be forced to suppress his desire. Demodocus' claim to rule has thus become questionable to his son, and his lessening parental authority over Theages necessitates that he have recourse to logos, in order to attempt to convince his son with reasons instead of simply commanding him as parent to child. However, Theages has reached the age when the father's rule invites rebellion, and he does not regard his father's logos as convincing. In danger of being altogether supplanted, therefore, Demodocus asserts a modest enough demand to make his surrender to his son's desires dignified and minimally hazardous: he will go to the city with Theages, to seek out someone who will attend to the boy's education, subject to Demodocus' approval.

It is in this troubled condition that father and son have happened upon Socrates, whom Demodocus says he "would especially like to take counsel with when I am actually going to do something about such matters." It is not clear whether Demodocus and Theages have simply happened upon Socrates, or if they were actually hoping to meet up with him. In any case, it will soon be evident that father and son do not speak with one voice on the matter of Theages' education (123a). Neither Theages nor his father profess any doubt that, should they find the appropriate companion, Theages' desire "to become wise" will be met. Demodocus apparently hopes that, under his supervision, a teacher can be found who will fulfill the part of Theages' desire which is "not ignoble," and yet save the boy from the risks attendant upon such a desire--whatever these are. Demodocus is apparently aware of the

dubious reputation of sophists[10], and hopes to mitigate the dangerous influence such men are reputed to have on impressionable youths. Yet to be capable of making such a judgement--to know whether the boy was being corrupted or educated--would require an understanding of what human virtue is, and how it is acquired. Lacking this, Demodocus is dependent upon conventional standards. He must look for someone who will teach the boy things that are held to be conventionally decent, and which conform to the standards of good politics and good morals which the city sets. Yet not being personally acquainted with these problematic teachers, he is not at all sure of his ability to safeguard Theages from the potentially pernicious effects of a poor one. Thus, Demodocus welcomes the philosopher, requesting that if he has some counsel to give about what he has just heard, he "may, and ought, to give it."

Socrates counters Demodocus' speech with the reply that "counsel is a sacred thing." The philosopher does not attribute these words to anyone in particular, noting simply that this is something that is said. However, this maxim poses a number of questions. Obviously, all counsel cannot be sacred: for both the topic upon which advice is being proferred, and the competence of the counsellor to give such advice must be considered, as, ultimately, must the advice itself. Socrates addresses the question of the topic upon which the advice is given, but not his own competence to give counsel upon such a matter. Demodocus treats Socrates as though he were some sort of expert on the subject of education, or at least one whose opinion is worth considering, and Socrates enters into the discussion without questioning the trust which Demodocus places in him. Socrates seems to conclude that the issue of whether or not advice is ever sacred is to be judged on the basis of the subject upon which counsel is given, rather than on the basis of who is giving the counsel. It must be remembered, however, that Socrates is not above manipulating maxims for his own end.[11] Yet Socrates may be referring to something even more important: the responsibility of giving advice to someone. The philosopher may be reassuring the farmer that he is aware of the importance of the matter

[10]For a summary of the charges often levied against sophists, see The Apology of Plato in Four Texts on Socrates. Edited and translated by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1984).
[11]Cf.125b ff.

upon which his counsel is sought, and that he will consider carefully any advice he gives Demodocus. His recognition of the trust Demodocus is placing in him, and of the gravity of the matter on which his advice is being sought, should reassure Demodocus that Socrates will provide the best advice he can.

Socrates' comment on this maxim implicitly raises the question of its soundness: for he notes "if indeed it is ever sacred, it would be in the case concerning the matter on which you are taking counsel."(122b; cf.127d) Socrates' later claim to speak the wishes of his daimon would lead one to consider carefully whether this explains why the counsel he is giving Demodocus is so sacred, rather than simply because of the topic on which they are conferring. If the subject is sacred, the man who has given over his life to determining the best way to perform pious acts of reverence to such a thing would likely also be sacred--perhaps even the mouthpiece of a god--and even a suitable object of admiration for one who is denominated "god-revering" or "god-envying."

In stating his claim, Socrates points out that "a human being could not take counsel about anything more divine than about education, both for himself and for those who belong to him."(122b) Socrates may be implicitly directing this comment as much to Theages, who is so far a silent listener; for it is his education which they will discuss, and on which he should want to be counselled. While education presumes incompleteness and the need for improvement, it also assumes the possibility of becoming more perfect--ultimately, perhaps more god-like. Socrates, like an oracle, pronounces upon the correctness of Demodocus' request.[12]

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[12]See Xenophon, Memorabilia, I,i,6-8.

> Another way he had of dealing with intimate friends was this: if there was no room for doubt, he advised them to act as they thought best; but if the consequences could not be foreseen, he sent them to the oracle to inquire whether the thing ought to be done. Those who intended to control a house or a city, he said, needed the help of divination. For the craft of carpenter, smith, farmer or ruler, and the theory of such crafts, and arithmetic and economics and generalship might be learned and mastered by the application of human powers; but the deepest secrets of these matters the gods reserved to themselves; they were dark to men.

Before the discussion can actually begin, Socrates points out, the two men must "come to an agreement as to whatever this may be about which we are taking counsel." Yet this is never explicitly done, for the philosopher almost immediately refines his proposition to include Theages, and the dialogue subsequently progresses as a discussion between Theages and Socrates on this very point: attempting to determine what, substantively, the boy considers wisdom to be. The most correct procedure, which Socrates and Demodocus agree to employ, is "to begin with this youth himself, thoroughly inquiring into just what it is he desires." Yet before this examination can begin, Socrates asks Demodocus "what is the noble name of the youth? How shall we address him?"(122d) Demodocus answers simply, affirming that "his name is Theages, Socrates."

Socrates commends Demodocus, stating that Theages' name is not only "noble" (kalos), but also "befitting what is sacred."[13] By distinguishing between the boy's name and how he shall be addressed, Socrates draws the reader's attention to a distinction which will bear particularly heavily upon the rest of the dialogue. Socrates requires a name (which may or may not differ from how he is to address the boy) before he can proceed with the inquiry into what Theages desires and how his soul is constituted.[14]

Socrates lays down a condition which must necessarily be fulfilled if the dialogue is to be useful: all partners must come to an agreement at the beginning about the subject on which they are taking counsel.[15] His insistence on following the correct procedure in the ensuing examination of the matter also focusses the discussion almost exclusively on Theages. With the procedure agreed to by Demodocus, he can hardly object to Socrates' turning to examine Theages as he does, nor indeed is there any evidence that he is inclined to. Socrates indirectly counsels Demodocus through a discussion with Theages to which Demodocus is an almost silent witness. Socrates' insistence upon arriving at a true understanding of "whatever

[13]There appears to be a typographical error in the translation which appears in The Roots of Political Philosophy: "benefitting" should be "befitting."
[14]There may be a difference between the name and the correct way of addressing someone; and this distinction, as Theages will later implicitly recognize in his reluctance to be called a "tyrant," has profound political consequences.
[15]See also the discussion of dialectic presented in Republic (533b-e).

this may be about which we are taking counsel"(122b-c) summarizes his questioning of Theages, and results in a number of surprising revelations by the boy--surprising, perhaps, even to himself. For it seems that the philosopher may be right in his understanding that "this youth may desire not this thing that we suppose him to desire but something else."(122d) It is only through Socrates' questions, and the boy's answers, that this can be proved or disproved. This decided, Socrates turns to an examination of the youth's understanding of his desires.

III. The Examination of Theages: Wisdom as Ruling (122e-125a)

In order to avoid doing something absurd, Socrates and Demodocus make a slight change in the order of their inquiry. Assuming that Theages would best be able to explicate what he desires, Socrates suggests to Demodocus that their inquiry should "begin with the youth himself, thoroughly inquiring into just what it is he desires."(122d) Having secured Demodocus' agreement upon the proper method of inquiry, the philosopher now turns to examining first hand what the boy wants. The dramatic context changes from a discussion between two older men, in the presence of a silent son, to a dialogue between an older man and a youth, in the presence of his largely quiet--but not completely restrained--father. As in Republic, the philosopher passes over an opportunity to enter into a prolonged discussion with an older man in the presence of his offspring, in order to engage them directly. However, whereas Socrates skillfully ensures Cephalus' early departure in that dialogue,[16] in Theages Demodocus is made witness to the discussion, and through the philosopher's logos is eventually united with his son and pleading with Socrates to consider favourably their request.

Demodocus' acceptance of Socrates' plan reveals his willingness to stand aside and, in being advised, to be ruled by the philosopher. Demodocus is to act as overseer in his son's pursuit of a good which the father does not know. Lacking a guide by which to judge the sophist's education of his son, how can Demodocus ensure that he is not simply an unwitting agent in the boy's corruption? Thus, Socrates, the man who proves himself capable of divining the boy's deeper desires,[17] takes over the job for which Demodocus, by his own tacit admission, is ill-suited. Demodocus' initial proposal--that he receive counsel from Socrates--was first altered into an agreement that they pursue the truth together, but this is supplanted immediately by a plan to examine Theages directly, which in actuality turns out to be conducted entirely by the philosopher. This transfer of authority from parent to teacher is

[16]Cf. Republic, 329e-331d. Note that Socrates' questions, while not entirely rude, are nonetheless designed to cause Cephalus discomfort. See Leon H. Craig, An Introduction to Plato's Republic. (Edmonton: printed and bound by the University of Alberta, 1977.) pp. 40-60.

[17]Due, presumably, to his knowledge of erotika.

necessary, then, for the youth's education to begin. Demodocus must recognize and defer to Socrates' wisdom if Theages is to be benefitted by the discussion. Demodocus may also be at a disadvantage in attempting to convince his son that he knows best how the boy's education should progress, if for no other reason than that he is his father. The tensions typical between father and son no doubt complicate any attempt at a reasonable discussion between them, and may necessitate intervention by a friend who is trustworthy to both sides. But whereas Demodocus has an antecedent trust of Socrates, the philosopher must still prove himself to Theages.

Socrates begins his examination of Theages with two questions: "tell us, Theages, do you affirm that you desire to become wise, and are you asking your father here to search out the company of some man such as will make you wise?"(122e). Socrates asks Theages to declare, before both the philosopher and his father, the ends of his desire, and his preferred means of meeting those ends. Socrates subtly changes Theages' demand of his father to a more polite request, beginning his work of mending the rift between them. Socrates' two-part question clarifies Demodocus' problem: Theages' desire may be high, yet he may nonetheless be in error about the correct way to satisfy that desire. The means employed must fit not only the desired end, but also the soul of the student. Demodocus is asking Socrates for advice on how to fulfil these desires. Socrates, a self-proclaimed expert on erotika--and thus, it would seem, on desires--and himself a lover of wisdom, proceeds to examine Theages' desires; there is no suggestion at the outset that he himself take on the task of making Theages wise.

Theages answers the philosopher's first question in the affirmative, preparing the stage for what might logically seem the next question. Theages is confident that if he could only find a teacher, he could be made wise. Socrates thus asks him something which might seem strikingly simple: "which do you call 'wise': the ones who know, concerning the matter (whatever it may be) about which they are knowers, or the ones who don't?" The boy answers readily, "the ones who are knowers, I say."[11] The philosopher's opening question

[11]Theages' response is far from unusual; indeed, it would be most everyone's. Yet the discussion of wisdom which ensues from this question lacks any consideration of a wisdom characterized by Socrates as self-conscious ignorance. Consider his Apology, where he says

suggests that wisdom is directly linked to a subject, that the wise are the ones who know about a matter. He asks Theages to agree that those who know, concerning "matters" indiscriminately, are to be called wise. No regard is given initially to differentiating among the subjects of, or various types of knowledge. All types of knowledge are provisionally regarded as "wisdom."

Having Theages commit himself to the view that the wise are the knowers of some more-or-less particular subject, Socrates points out that, having been educated in various topics, Theages himself must be considered "wise" by his own definition. Socrates chooses as examples of Theages' wisdom the subjects suitable to a gentlemanly education: letters, cithara playing, wrestling and other kinds of contests. The examples Socrates uses are noteworthy for a number of reasons, not least because they are characterized as "kinds of contests."[19] Proof that one has been well-instructed in cithara playing and wrestling is usually evaluated in the demonstrated ability to play more beautifully than another, or to beat another in a wrestling match. Knowledge of these subjects is thus manifested in the ability to exhibit knowledge in some manner recognizable as expertise to almost everyone. Implied in these pursuits is the ability for most people to judge the proficiency of those who practise them. Thus, the difficulty of recognizing a bad teacher of such subjects is mitigated, if not obviated.

Theages may admit that his father has fulfilled his obligation to a son, yet he argues that this conventional, gentlemanly education is insufficient for him. Theages does not seem to denigrate such an education simply, but only for himself, or for a select few like him. That

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[11](cont'd)

> For my part, as I went away, I reasoned with regard to myself: "I am wiser than this human being. For probably neither of us knows anything noble and good, but he supposes he knows something when he does not, while I, just as I do not know, do not even suppose that I do. I am likely to be a little bit wiser than he in this very thing: that whatever I do not know, I do not even suppose I know."(21d)

Pangle, p. 153.

[19]It is unclear whether Socrates is characterizing letters, cithara playing and wrestling as kinds of contest, or whether the "other kinds of contest" refers only to other activities such as wrestling. What is clear is that Socrates characterizes at least some aspect of a gentlemanly education as essentially competitive. His identification of this lends credence to the view that Theages is highly spirited and competitive, and that Demodocus' opinion that Theages was envious of the other boys is likely true. See also 128c.

is, he does not seem to doubt the suitability of this traditional nurture for most Athenian youths, but he desires more. It is necessary to recall that Theages was spurred on in his desire by the tales of those others of his own age and deme (those who can claim in some sense both a natural and a conventional kinship to Theages) who had progressed beyond the accomplishments of the traditional education. He must implicitly recognize a hierarchy of knowledge, and apparently would contend that knowing these matters does not constitute wisdom; as he later makes clear enough, he believes that the wise are those who can win at arguments. Agreeing with the philosopher's suggestion that the wise are simply "those who know" has blurred a distinction between subjects whose mastery would properly earn one the title "wise," and other subjects, which a person may know, but which no one would regard as wisdom. Thus, Theages has unwittingly agreed to something which his very actions argue he does not believe: for he does recognize that knowledge of some things--beginning with those he already knows--may be insufficient as a basis upon which to claim the title of "wise."

Socrates' implicit compliment to Demodocus that he taught and educated Theages well meets with a spirited response from the boy when the philosopher questions him as to whether he thinks that he is lacking in some knowledge which his father should look to on his behalf, and asks what this is. He seems to suggest to the boy that his request will not be refused, if the philosopher could only determine precisely what the boy wants: indeed, father and philosopher would be only too happy to gratify Theages. Theages, however, charges his father with being willfully obtuse, both about what he understands the boy to desire, and about how to satisfy it. According to Theages, Demodocus knows perfectly well what his son desires, and merely pretends that he doesn't. Yet while Demodocus may know what Theages desires, that the boy wants to study with some sophist, he may nonetheless be confused about why Theages desires this. The boy's desire "to become wise" appears to be alien to his father, and this may account, in part, for Demodocus' fears.

Hearing the lad's indignant sally against his father, the philosopher notes that what Theages really needs is a witness, and offers to serve the boy in that capacity. Socrates pulls the charges out of the intimate, private sphere, and invites Theages to adopt legalistic--that

is, political--terms and procedures as a means of seeking redress. But whereas Socrates assured the boy that he would act as his witness, he in truth becomes his cross-examiner. The private conversation in which Theages presumably remonstrated with his father over his refusal to look toward his son's education has been transformed into an examination of the accuser, in an effort to reveal whether he adequately understands the charges which he has laid.[20] But by claiming to be Theages' witness, a kind of ally, Socrates may better win the boy's trust, in fact through the course of the dialogue he carefully manipulates the boy's allegiance. With the boy originally estranged from his father, Socrates implies that he will side with Theages against Demodocus, at least to the extent of providing the boy an impartial witness.

Against the background of this "alliance," Socrates proceeds to question Theages about the wisdom which he professes to desire. Led by Socrates, the boy initially attempts to define wisdom through comparing it to various technical, practical arts. Socrates' examples of various types of "wisdom" provide Theages exclusively with models of steering, and thus, of "ruling." Socrates asks Theages if he "were desiring the wisdom by which human beings pilot ships," for what lack of wisdom would he blame his father who was unwilling to adequately care for his education? The obvious answer, the philosopher suggests, would be a lack of the piloting art.[21] Similarly, should the boy become aware of an ignorance as to how to pilot chariots, he would believe himself to be lacking the charioteer's art. Socrates uses these two examples as the basis from which to draw forth Theages' own understanding of the wisdom which he lacks. The pilot's art involves one man capable of guiding a craft by his knowledge towards some goal, following a path not clear to all. The pilot's art involves guiding those who trust him, because they are aware of his superior knowledge. His claim to rule is based on his knowledge of sea and seasons, winds and stars, and on his ability to get the ship safely through the perils of the sea toward his goal. The pilot's well-being is intimately connected

[20]The drama here is similar in this respect to Socrates' cross-examination of Meletus in Plato's Apology 24d-28a.

[21]Socrates' somewhat ambiguous locution raises the possibility that Theages' blaming his father could be one aspect of his lack of wisdom; that the wisdom which he lacks could consist in part of prudence, a proper respect for tradition, piety, etc.

with the well-being of the ship he pilots. His skill, while perhaps difficult to recognize immediately, is nonetheless very real, and is informed by a similarity between his own interest and that of those sailors whom he rules. His knowledge is not easily accessible to the ruled, yet they are dependent upon it. They can be reassured, however, by the evident common interest of ruler and ruled.

Socrates' initial model must be further refined, prior to soliciting from Theages the boy's own understanding of wisdom. The philosopher leads the boy, through roughly parallel examples, to accept "the wisdom by which they pilot chariots" as "the charioteer's art." By using language which tends to conflate the two technae, the philosopher mutes the essential differences between the arts. The charioteer commands beasts to obey him, as he pushes them on towards a goal which benefits him, but not necessarily the animals. The common interest between the ruler and ruled, the prominent characteristic of the pilot's art, is missing in the charioteer's art.[22] The charioteer benefits through actively directing and ruling the beasts towards a goal which he alone pursues. The horses, unlike the sailors, are simply a means by which the "pilot" of the chariot pursues his own end. However, the charioteer must emphasize his ability to extract the most speed and power from the horses, and to this extent is not indifferent to the welfare of the beasts. His goal is not simply reaching the end of his journey: it is beating other charioteers. The charioteer's art is necessarily competitive, for he races his chariot against others, or uses it in perhaps the most competitive realm of all: war.

Having led the boy this far, and having supplied him with two arts, each characterized as "wisdom", which serve as examples of how the inquiry should proceed, the philosopher requests Theages to come forth and state clearly what he now happens to be desiring. Socrates expands upon his question, asking the boy "is it something nameless, or does it have a name?"[23] Theages answers that he supposes it does. Socrates asks "then do you know of it but not the name or also the name?"[24] Socrates asks the boy whether he knows the name, or what

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[22]Unless, as is suggested in the Phaedrus (246a-249d) the driver, the chariot and the team are, taken together, an image of the soul; while nothing in Theages directly suggests such an interpretation, neither does anything in the dialogue preclude it.
[23]Socrates asks the boy a question similar to that posed to Demodocus at 122d.
[24]The importance of names, and the ability to provide both the "name" of

the thing he desires is, to which Theages replies that he knows the name of what he desires. With peculiar vehemence, Socrates commands Theages to speak, and in some apparent bewilderment, the boy wonders, "what else, Socrates, would anyone declare its name to be other than wisdom?"

The philosopher points out the apparent difficulty with Theages' understanding of wisdom. As he tells the boy, neither the charioteer's art nor the piloting art would be characterized as ignorance; according to the definition posed, they must both be wisdom. Contrasting wisdom with ignorance, Socrates and Theages ignore the problem of differentiating kinds of knowledge. The charioteer's art proceeds by way of a kind of knowledge, but this proficiency in a technical art is not wisdom, nor is it what Theages believes he will learn from study with the sophists. Through his examples Socrates reveals the confusion in Theages.

In pointing out Theages' error, Socrates elaborates upon the metaphors used earlier. The charioteer's art is here described as both "wisdom" and "the charioteer's art." It is further characterized as the wisdom "by which we have knowledge of how to rule a team of horses." Earlier, however, the charioteer's art was elaborated as "the wisdom by which they pilot chariots."(123b) The image of the skilled charioteer as a pilot of chariots has been replaced by an understanding of the charioteer's art as a knowledge of how to rule animals. The more ambiguous "wisdom" of piloting a chariot has been interpreted as the more specific "wisdom" of ruling a team of horses, pointing more decidedly to the need for an understanding of the nature of horses. The image has become overtly political, dealing not with guiding or piloting, but with ruling.

Similarly, Socrates characterizes the piloting art now as wisdom "by which we have knowledge of how to rule ships," making explicit an aspect of this art implicit in the earlier description. Theages agrees with the philosopher's understanding of the techne. The piloting art involves knowledge both of guiding ships to their destinations, and of ruling the men on the ships. The technical expertise of charting a route and keeping the ship on course is not

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[24](cont'd) something and an account of it is a problem which Socrates subtly emphasizes throughout the dialogue.

enough; the true pilot must be able to rule men to the extent necessary for his technical knowledge and skill to be recognized and implemented.[25] The pilot's art requires an understanding of human nature in order to be properly practised. In both cases now, wisdom is seen as that by which one has knowledge of how to rule; essential to both is an understanding of the nature of that which is being ruled.

Having thus identified wisdom as "that by which we have knowledge of how to rule" something, Socrates asks Theages "what is the wisdom which you desire? That by which we have knowledge of how to rule what?" This provisional definition links wisdom with ruling of all sorts, and most especially with political rule, steering the conversation to a subject which will dominate the next part of the dialogue. Socrates, it seems, has somehow divined that Theages' desire "to become wise" is practically linked to his desire for political rule; indeed, as he will later make clear, the boy regards political rule as the highest kind of knowledge, and thus deserving of the name "wisdom." Perhaps true wisdom is the knowledge of how things are ruled.

The wisdom which Theages desires, he declares, is that by which he would have knowledge of how to rule human beings.(123e) Socrates immediately challenges this response: Theages surely does not mean he wants to rule the sick, because that is properly the domain of the medical art. He cannot mean rule of the singers in choruses, because that is the musical art; and, finally, he cannot mean knowledge of how to rule those who are exercising, because that is the gymnastic art. Socrates prompts the boy to continue with what he has begun, and to "make a spirited endeavor" to identify those whom he would consider wise by virtue of their rule over human beings. At this point, there could seem little for Theages to say: he has already agreed that wisdom is the knowledge of how to rule, and he has followed Socrates' lead in equating the ruling of something (or someone) with the practise of an art. He can respond only with the unsurprising assertion that he desires the wisdom by which he would have the knowledge of how to rule "those in the city," what might be called the political art. Through his use of various techne as a model for wisdom, Socrates allows Theages to assume

[25]For an elucidation of the problem, and a look at the consequences of unrecognized rule, see The Tempest, Act I, Scene i.

that, like the medical art, like the musical art, and like the gymnastic art, this comprehensive art of ruling everyone in the political association can be taught, at least to those with some aptitude for the art. By likening it to an art, the philosopher invites the conclusion that expertise in ruling can be gained simply through the understanding and application of rational principles.

Socrates immediately forces Theages to begin refining his answer, wondering whether he also includes the sick city-dwellers as ones he would rule. Thus, the philosopher draws our attention to a major difficulty in understanding wisdom as technical knowledge. The sick city-dweller is ruled by at least two men, the doctor and the ruler of the city. He is, furthermore, ruled as at least two subjects, as a sick man and as a citizen. Yet the doctor, a ruler in one sense, is himself--along with all other artisans and non-artisans--ruled by the political ruler. The doctor's claim to rule the body, supported by his technical knowledge, is circumscribed by the polis, and by the political rule exerted by its legislator. He is ruled as both a citizen, and as a practitioner of an art, through any laws governing him or his practice. Thus, the implicit need to hierarchically organize the technae, and perhaps also to rank them according to their value to the polis, begins to surface. The one who rules the city rules all practitioners of all the arts, according to a hierarchy of good, although he may lack the special expertise necessary to the various practitioners of the arts over which he rules.

Theages insists that he is speaking not only of ruling the sick men qua sick men, but also of ruling all the rest in the city, effectively preempting Socrates' questioning him in a similar manner about "the singers in choruses" and "those who are exercising." Socrates asks if he now understands the art which Theages is speaking of, and suggests an art which seems to parallel what Theages wants.

> Now, then, do I understand which art you're speaking of? For you seem to me to be speaking not of that by which we have knowledge of how to rule reapers and harvesters and planters and sowers and threshers, because that's the farming art, by which we rule these, isn't it? (124a)

The philosopher identifies five technae, all of which are superintended by the farming art, which orders and otherwise oversees the subsidiary arts. Thus, farming appears as both technical knowledge and as a ruling art which is able to hierarchically organize the subsidiary

technae which it superintends. The good farmer is one who is best able to oversee these subsidiary technae in such a manner as to produce the best end: the good farmer produces good crops through his knowledge. Thus, he is evaluated by his ability to order the subsidiary technae in a manner which best effects his desired end. His rule is only intelligible in light of this end.

Socrates further elaborates this point, turning to the art of carpentry[26] and the arts it governs, until he finally puts forth a proposal which satisfies Theages. Following the philosopher's questions has brought the boy to a definition of the sort of wisdom which he claims to desire. It is, according to Socrates' formulation

> that by which we have knowledge of how to rule all these, as well as the farmers, and the carpenters, and all the public craftsmen, and the private noncraftsmen, both women and men...."(124b)

Theages assures the philosopher that "this, Socrates, is what for a long time I've wanted to say." Having arrived at a provisional definition and understanding of what Theages believes he desires, the pair must now set about refining and evaluating this understanding.

Socrates' examples of superintending and yet still subordinate technae point still further, however, to the need for a single overall superintending art: the political art. This techne must order the others according to a hierarchy established in light of what is good for the polis, understood either as something natural (thus with a natural telos, or purpose), or as something artificial (thus purposefully constructed for some use.) Inherent in Socrates' examples is the assumption that the most expert practitioner of an art is one who orders the elements of it to produce the best end, that which defines the techne itself. Thus, the most able practitioner of an art is the one who rules towards the end of producing the best product; he is not defined, that is, as the one who rules to serve his own good. As the able farmer rules the subsidiary arts to produce the best crop, and as the able carpenter rules the subsidiary arts to produce the best house, the political art would seem to be that which rules all arts with a view to producing the best polis. Thus, the problem of determining the true

[26] As Pangle notes, Socrates identifies both an art which deals with the proper cultivation of organic growth (which implies an appreciation of the telos of such plants), and a constructive art (whose products follow no such natural standard, but rather that of perceived human utility.) Pangle, p. 157.

character and purpose of the polis is raised.

Socrates attempts to refine further his understanding of Theages' professed desire by examining figures who apparently conform to the criterion which has been articulated. Socrates recalls for the boy the rule of Aegisthus in Argos, Peleus in Phthia, Periander in Corinth, Archelaus in Macedonia, and Hippias in Athens. Socrates points out their unifying feature: all have ruled "over the public craftsmen and the private noncraftsmen, both men and women, all together," thus apparently satisfying the criteria of being men who possess the wisdom which Theages desires. According to this understanding of wisdom, all these men are wise, and all rule as an expression of their wisdom. Having followed the philosopher's use of these examples, Theages understandably appears rather puzzled when the philosopher asks him to identify the appellation given to "Bacis and Sibyl, and our countryman Amphilytus..."(124d). Socrates lists two foreign soothsayers, and one who is "our countryman." Given this apparently simple task, Theages, expressing some puzzlement, identifies the three as "soothsayers." Socrates commends Theages on his answer, and bids him answer in the same way--that is, by giving one name for a number of similar things--the philosopher's next question. "What appellation do Hippias and Periander have on account of their identical rule?" Theages answers that they are called tyrants, eliciting from Socrates the rejoinder "then does he who desires to rule over all the human beings in the city desire the same rule as these--the tyrannical and to be a tyrant?"(124e). Theages answers reluctantly in the affirmative, and the philosopher reminds the boy that this is indeed what he affirmed he desired, asking Theages to acknowledge the conclusion of the argument: he desires the tyrannical rule and to be a tyrant. Socrates has divined that the wisdom which Theages professes to desire is the wisdom of how to rule all those in the city. Yet in support of this, and through an examination of examples adduced ostensibly in accord with this understanding of wisdom, Socrates has "proved" that what Theages desires is not "wisdom," but "to be a tyrant."

Theages' affirmation of his desire to be a tyrant elicits a peculiar response from the philosopher. He appears scandalized, and blames the boy for having deceived his father about

his desires. Yet he then turns to Demodocus, and berates the father, for despite "knowing for a long time what this youth desires, and having a place where you could send him to make him a public craftsman in the wisdom which he desires," he yet "begrudge[d] it to him," and was "unwilling to send him." Socrates castigates both father and son, stating that they performed something shameful. Yet, it seems that they cannot both be guilty: if Theages' desire is shameful, then Demodocus should be praised for not helping to fulfil it. And if Demodocus' action is blameworthy, then it is implied that Theages' desire is not. Socrates thus incidentally raises the question of what is truly shameful. And having arrived at a conclusion about what the boy desires, Socrates now turns back to Demodocus, initiating a dialogue ostensibly aimed at determining how to ensure not only the fulfillment of Theages' desire to become a tyrant, but also that he will be a wise tyrant.

IV. The Education of Theages: Finding a Teacher (125b-127a)

Having revealed what it is that Theages believes he desires, thereby formulating more clearly his accusation against Demodocus, the philosopher and the father agree to deliberate in common about "whom we should send him to and by means of whose company he might become a wise tyrant."(125a) Socrates, earlier only too willing to offer himself as a witness for Theages against his father (123b), now accepts the boy's charges and allies himself with Demodocus to work out a suitable arrangement whereby the "guilty" father will make restitution to the boy. Socrates subtly and most carefully changes the focus of the inquiry. This discussion was initiated by Theages' desire to become wise, which was then shown to be motivated by nothing less than the desire to be a tyrant. Yet Socrates proposes that he and Demodocus deliberate about the means by which Theages could become a wise tyrant; even tyrants, it seems, can be more or less wise.

Demodocus enthusiastically agrees to enter into the common inquiry, pronouncing the dialogue's first oath,[27] apparently because he is aghast at Theages professed desire, and because he recognizes that inquiry into this matter requires extraordinary deliberation. Socrates placates the elder man, reminding him, as he did earlier, of the proper procedure which must be employed. The first step to finding out how to make Theages a wise tyrant is to begin with the boy himself, identifying more clearly what he believes he needs. The inquiry, it seems, must proceed from an adequate understanding of the student.[28]

Demodocus recognizes that a thorough examination of the boy is necessary, yet refrains from actively participating in it, for he seems to appreciate his relative ineffectiveness beside Socrates. He has seen the philosopher conduct the inquiry which preceded, and he

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[27]Both Demodocus and Theages swear by Zeus throughout the course of the dialogue. It is important to recall that this whole conversation takes place in the portico of Zeus the Liberator, the patron god of Greek liberty. It is fitting that Demodocus, upon finding out his son's desire to be a tyrant, would swear by Zeus, and ironic that Theages would also.

[28]It is interesting that throughout the dialogue Demodocus and Theages treat the problem as one of finding an adequate teacher for the boy, whereas Socrates' procedure is precisely the opposite. He, apparently, believes that the student's nature is what must be examined.

appears willing to let him continue as he sees best. The education of his son requires that Demodocus recognize his impotence, and willingly hand over the task to a man who has demonstrated some skill in the work, especially as his son's desire is apparently worse than he feared. Demodocus will henceforth appear only to confirm his own desire that the philosopher continue the work which he has begun, and to give his unqualified approval of the teacher.

Socrates begins his inquiry into where Theages should be sent in order to become a wise tyrant by invoking Euripides, representative of a class of men conventionally believed to be wise. According to the line Socrates quotes, Euripides seems to ratify the notion of a "wise tyrant." Yet Demodocus is still scandalized by what he has heard, despite the air of authority lent to such an idea by a poet like Euripides. Demodocus' commonsense, practical view that it is shameful to desire to be a tyrant--whether a wise one or not--has persisted despite such poetry.[29] Socrates apparently assumes that an appeal to so eminent an authority cannot help but impress Theages; the poet's reputation for wisdom cannot easily be disregarded by the boy.

Socrates asks him

> What, then, if we invoke Euripides, Theages? For Euripides declares somewhere: "Tyrants are wise through keeping company with the wise." Now suppose someone were to ask Euripides: "Euripides, through keeping company with the wise in <u>what</u>, do you declare that tyrants are wise?"

This question is never answered explicitly, nor is Theages given any chance to respond. Instead, Socrates provides the boy with a series of models, designed to guide him through the problem in a certain direction. If one were to state the claim about farmers, Socrates says, the poet's obvious answer to the question would be "in the things of the art of farming." Similarly, by keeping company with those who are wise "in what belongs to cooks," cooks would become wise. Wrestlers too would become wise by keeping company with those who are wise "in what belongs to wrestling."[30] The examples descend to the depths of absurdity as

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[29]It is interesting to note in this regard the view that Euripides was one of the "new" poets whose works were essentially antagonistic to those of the traditional poets such as Aeschylus; he was thus much more controversial than the traditional poets. As an innovator and experimentor, Euripides could be expected to appeal to Theages more than to Demodocus.

[30]The examples used seem to allow for increasing idiosyncracy in their performance.

Euripides, as interpreted by Socrates, assumes that this is a simple matter of apprenticeship. Using these as examples, Socrates asks the boy,

> but since he said: Tyrants are wise through keeping company with the wise, and we are asking, "the wise in what are you speaking of Euripides?"--what would he say? What sort of things would he say these are?(125d)

Theages, in exasperation, declares himself unable to follow Socrates' lead in providing a satisfactory name for this wisdom.

Socrates' examples are marked by an assymetry, and lack the sort of clarity which could assist Theages. Socrates would have Euripides answer, "in the things of the art of farming;" or "in what belongs to cooks;" or "in what belongs to wrestling." Theages' obvious answer, on behalf of Euripides, could be either "in the things of the art of tyranny," or "in what belongs to tyrants." Yet Socrates effectively preempts the first answer with an unprecedented third question--asking Theages "what sort of things would he say these are?"--which helps him to bypass a discussion of one of the two likely "answers." With his further demand that the boy identify "what sort of things" these would be, Socrates ensures that Theages cannot simply say "in the things of the art of tyranny." It is because this question is not addressed in Socrates' examples that they fail to give the boy any real indication of how he is to proceed in the inquiry. Socrates asks the boy to give not some vague answer, but the actual things, the subjects, in which the tyrant is wise. He has altered his earlier procedure whereby he attempted to have Theages understand wisdom as that by which an art proceeded. This discussion guides Theages into examining what, substantively, this wisdom is by which the arts proceed. The boy, preempted from giving the most straightforward but actually tautological answer, "in what belongs to tyrants," and apparently unwilling to give the puzzling answer which gave rise to the subject in the first place, "in the ruling of human beings," swears to the philosopher "But by Zeus, I don't know!"

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[30](cont'd) The procedures employed by a good farmer may be more standard than for those employed by a good cook, who can, to some extent, shape the standards of what is considered good cookery by his work. Wrestling may be the most idiosyncratic, for to win consistently one must match the strategy employed to the particular opponent every fight.

Theages' irritation with this line of questioning, and his apparent recognition of the circularity of the argument into which he is being led prompts Socrates to tell him the answer to the question, declaring that the substance of the wisdom of tyrants is "the things Anacreon declared that Callicrite knew;" that is, presumably, the still unspecified things of the tyrannic art. Socrates' jesting question of the boy, to which he takes some offence, reiterates the philosopher's earlier accusation against Theages, yet this time it is more of a question than an assertion. He asks the boy:

> "What then? Do you too desire company of such a sort with some man who happens to have the same art as Callicrite the daughter of Cyane and who "knows the things of the tyrannic art" as the poet declares she did--so that you too may become tyrant over us and the city?"(125e)[31]

At this strange suggestion the boy rebels, and charges Socrates with mocking and joking with him. In apparent surprise, the philosopher recapitulates the argument which led to his conclusion, asking the boy "didn't you desire this wisdom, by which you might rule over all the citizens? If you did thus, would you be anything other than a tyrant?"

The philosopher's conclusion that Theages does indeed desire to be tyrant prompts a spirited rebuttal by the boy. Theages' irritation leads him to make several startling assertions and bold pronouncements. As he caustically asserts

> For my part I would pray, I suppose, to become tyrant--preferably over all human beings and, if not, over as many as possible, and so would you, I suppose, and all other human beings--or, moreover, probably rather to become a god. But this is not what I said I desire.(125e-126a)

The boy distinguishes clearly between gods and tyrants, yet seems to suggest a conceptual link between them. It is unclear, however, whether he sees one as the fulfillment of the other or whether one is an imperfect attempt to emulate the other. That is, Theages' assertion leaves it unclear whether gods are to be regarded as perfect tyrants, or whether tyrants are the product of the desire to behave like a god. Theages asserts that this desire to become tyrant is not at all surprising or unusual: indeed, he expressly "supposes" that it is something which Socrates

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[31]Theages, at least as Socrates professes to understand him, desires the company of a man from whom to learn. He, unlike the philosopher, will not learn from a woman.(See Symposium, 201d.) Socrates suggests that Theages could learn "the things of the tyrannic art" from a woman, perhaps thereby subtly suggesting that women are, if not by nature tyrannical, at least the best teachers of the tyrannic art.

himself would desire, as would "all other human beings." Yet despite this, Theages is careful to point out that he did not actually voice this desire. Either something has held him back and made him refrain from stating openly his intention to act on this "normal" desire to become tyrant, with its "natural" culmination, the desire to become like a god; or he is realistic enough to realize the impracticality of trying to be a tyrant in Athens. Theages' adamant assertion that this was not what he said he desired may conceal a grudging admiration for the man who was able to divine what he truly wants and to lead him to articulate it.

The philosopher does not dispute the boy's observation, asking innocently, "but whatever is it that you do desire? Didn't you assert that you desire to rule over the citizens?" Socrates has modulated Theages' desire for "this wisdom, by which you might rule over all the citizens," to a simple "desire to rule over the citizens." The change is apparently unnoticed by Theages, yet with it the philosopher has subtly shifted the main question of the inquiry from "what is wisdom?" to a discussion of how to rule. As was noted, the link between the two questions is established clearly in the first part of the dialogue. Yet it is this explicit change in focus which will now guide the discussion, and which must be fully explained in order to comprehend this dialogue on wisdom.

The boy explains his objection to the preceding argument. He does desire to rule (although this is not what he initially claimed), but he distinguishes between ruling "by violence, or as the tyrants do," and ruling over willing subjects, characterizing the first as tyranny and the second as, presumably, statesmanlike or political rule His obvious distaste at the notion of being called a tyrant, and his preference for exercising rule over willing subjects is interesting, for one could not determine that from anything he has said about wisdom.

Apparently seeking clarification, Socrates asks if Theages has in mind the manner of rule practised by such men as Themistocles, ar Pericles and Cimon and whoever has become "wondrously adept (deinos) in the things that pertain to the art of politics." Whereas the tyrants named earlier were for the most part foreigners, all these now named as politically adept are Athenians; it is noteworthy that Socrates does not call them wise, merely proficient in an art. Theages is visibly pleased that he has at last been clearly understood, and

enthusiastically affirms what Socrates has suggested; he wants the political art, not the tyrannic art.

The examples which the philosopher employs are revealing. All three men were influential in Greece, yet their popularity did not prevent them from becoming the objects of the peoples' wrath, and both Cimon and Themistocles were ostracized. Further, all three men were involved with each other's misfortune. They were indeed wondrously adept at the things of the art of politics, yet this provided no common interest between them, nor did it provide the means for them to maintain power or guarantee perpetual political success. While all professed to be serving for the good of Athens, their lack of unanimity about that good caused them to be in competition with one another.[32] Perhaps, unlike being wise, being "wondrously clever" did not provide them with a clearly defined end towards which they ruled.

Having more clearly determined what Theages really wants to know, the partners now take up the question of where this political wisdom is to be found. Socrates examines the arts of horsemanship and javelin throwing, leading the boy to the apparently reasonable conclusion that one who would learn an art would be most benefitted by studying with an experienced and adept practitioner of that art. "What then?" asks Socrates. "If you happened to desire to become wise in the things that pertain to the art of horsemanship, to which persons would you suppose you would have to go to become a wondrously adept horseman? Would it be any others except those versed in the art of horsemanship?" Unlike his later examples, Socrates seems to deny the possibility of becoming wise in the art of horsemanship, for the highest praise he bestows on those adept horseman is that they are "wondrously clever" (deinos)--like Pericles and Themistocles and Cimon.

According to the philosopher's argument, to become wondrously adept in the things that pertain to such an art one must frequent those men who are versed in the art of

[32]It is interesting to note Thucydides' description of the men whom Socrates adduces as examples for the boy. On Themistocles see Book I, 138, and on Pericles, Book II, 65, for Thucydides' character sketches of these men. Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, The Crawley Translation. (New York: Random House Inc., 1982.)

horsemanship, "who own horses, and who use them all the time--both their own and many belonging to others."(126b) It seems that owning horses is practically a prerequisite to knowing the art of horsemanship. Socrates leaves implicit the problem of evaluating the relative cleverness of one who knows all about horses, and uses them, but due to the vicissitudes of fortune, does not own them; and he leaves unaddressed the problem of one who does not own the horses, but who uses others' horses to such an extent that he becomes their effectual master. A jockey may be more master of a horse than its wealthy owner. Ownership of a horse would seem to provide simply the opportunity for a man to become an adept horseman; it by no means guarantees it. The use of the horse would seem to be a more important variable, and one who can use another's horse better than the owner may be its actual ruler, while nonetheless leaving it to its nominal owner.

Theages, however, responds to the philosopher that his argument is clear, and Socrates presents another straightforward example. He characterizes javelin throwing as an art in which one can become, through patient apprenticeship, not only "wondrously adept," but also "wise." Wisdom in the things that pertain to the art of javelin throwing is to be attained, again, by "going to those versed in the art of javelin throwing--those to whom javelins belong and who use javelins all the time, both many belonging to others and their own." Again, Theages overlooks a difficulty with the philosopher's example: people usually own javelins in order to use them, simply owning javelins would seem scant guarantee that the owner uses them properly: use of the weapon would seem to define expertise in the art. The student must go to "those who own horses" and "those to whom javelins belong." Ownership of something may imply a vested interest in the proper use of a thing, but it certainly does not guarantee it. Furthermore, these practitioners do not use only their own horses and javelins. The philosopher makes it quite clear that such expert practitioners--the wondrously clever and the wise--habitually use the horses and javelins of others to perfect their skill, perhaps saving their own implements to be used once they have perfected the arts. In any case, to be considered either "wise" or "wondrously adept" in the arts of either horsemanship or javelin throwing requires a comparative familiarity with more than just

one's own particular horse or javelin, a familiarity which entails using a variety of these things. As Socrates will suggest, this presents a crucial problem when comparing these arts to the political art.

Using the examples he has, Socrates takes the argument to its logical conclusion. He puts the question to Theages

> So tell me: since indeed, you wish to become wise in the things that pertain to the art of politics, do you suppose that you will be wise by arriving at any other men except those versed in the art of politics--these very men who are wondrously adept in the things that pertain to the art of politics and who all the time use their own city and many others, carrying on business with both Greek and barbarian cities? Or is it your opinion that you will be wise, in these matters which these men practice by having intercourse with certain others rather than with these men themselves?(126c)

Theages' desire "to become wise," having been revealed through the philosopher's questioning to be actually a desire "to become wise in the things that pertain to the art of politics," allows Socrates to recommend to Theages that he apprentice himself to some politician. From Socrates' suggestive examples, Theages is invited to assume that one could become wise in the things that pertain to the art of politics by keeping company with one who actually used his "own" city, and the cities of others--whatever that might mean. The possibility of gaining a profound understanding of politics from one who is not politically active appears to be ignored. There thus arises a quesion which Theages does not consider: namely, the problem of assuming as a measure of knowledge the actual practise of an art. We are invited to consider the possibility of a doctor who does not practise medicine, and the pilot who does not pilot ships, and to see the difference between arts such as these--in which one could not be adept without some considerable practise--and the political art.

Socrates' model of the activities of those versed in the art of politics is noteworthy for a number of reasons. Expertise in both horsemanship and javelin throwing is associated with both ownership of the objects of the art, and use of them: however, no mention is made of ownership of cities. The sole criterion Socrates marshals for this example is the use of cities, yet this is expanded into using not only your own city but also many others, "carrying on business with both Greek and Barbarian cities." Socrates characterizes the political art as one in which expertise implies the use of many cities, and as such, many kinds of regimes,

requiring an understanding of various modes of ruling. Yet the politicians to whom Socrates would send Theages are clearly Athenian; their knowledge is circumscribed by the polis in which they live, for they do not actually use any city but their own. The political practitioners, Socrates suggests, are limited in their knowledge by the very nature of their practise, for their knowledge is specific to the polis that they rule.[33]

But Theages proves himself sufficiently familiar with Socrates' arguments to attempt to refute the philosopher by pointing out the contradiction between what he says now, and what he has supposedly said at other times, and on other occasions. Theages recounts for the philosopher the saying attributed to him: "Well, I have heard, Socrates, the arguments they assert you present, to the effect that the sons of these men versed in the political art are in no way better than the sons of shoemakers...." He adds that this judgement squares with his own observations, indicating that Theages does not simply believe all that he hears but that he attempts to find independent corroboration of these things. Theages' complaint is not necessarily that the politicians are unwise, but rather that they are either unable or unwilling to bestow the benefit of their wisdom on their sons. Thus, Theages argues, it seems likely that they are in fact unable to benefit anyone. Theages thus makes apparent his recognition of the discrepancy between facility at an art, and the ability to teach the art, which he earlier neglected to mention when asked. Yet there is another possibility which has not been examined; that inasmuch as proficiency in an art entails the understanding of the rational principles which underly the art, the art should, in principle, be teachable by one who is truly "wise" in the art. The politicians' inability to do this could stem from their actually lacking a rational comprehension of the art which they practise, or it could stem from the fact that the political art is in some crucial respects different from arts such as horsemanship and javelin throwing.

Theages' condemnation of the political men is at once a reiteration of his charge against his father, and a redefinition of it. Demodocus has not fulfilled Theages' desire, but

[33]This stands in contrast to the sophists, who were clearly cosmopolitan and who taught that their "wisdom" was applicable in most, if not all, places, although they were especially "at home" in democracies.

because he cannot, not necessarily because he would not. Theages' dissatisfaction with his earlier education is a dissatisfaction with his father's inability to teach him what he desires to know, and a dissatisfaction with his father's unwillingness to accept his own inadequacy and make provisions for his son to overcome it. Theages' recognition that love of one's own would cause a man to care more for the education of his own son than of anyone else must make both his resentment toward Demodocus--and his fascination with Socrates--that much stronger. Theages seems to recognize that, in this case at least, wisdom alone is not sufficient to guarantee proficiency as a teacher, for he does say "--if he were able to bestow any benefit, regarding these matters, on any human being."(my emphasis) Yet Theages' observation raises the question of whether the politicians' inability to benefit their sons reflects on their ability as politicians and teachers, or whether Socrates' statement was meant to refer to the relation between fathers and sons. The inability of such men to benefit their sons could reflect more on the difficulties which typically attend the relationship between fathers and sons than on the knowledge they possess.

Socrates asks the boy to attempt to respond as though he were a father, and to tell the philosopher what he would do if faced with the same problem. Through this powerful didactic technique, Socrates furthers his work of reconciling father and son. As noted before, his eventual success is manifested in the combined efforts of Demodocus and Theages to entice Socrates into accepting Theages as a student, a compromise which is highly acceptable to both. That he manages this may well be a most important demonstration of the philosopher's special wisdom.

To assist the boy in this endeavor, Socrates gives him as examples to consider the case of someone wishing to become a painter, an aulist, and a citharist, who was yet unwilling to study with those men proficient in these things. In stating his examples, Socrates mentions only the hypothetical father's reluctance as being due to the cost of enlisting a teacher; he says nothing about any fear for the hypothetical son's well-being. As he asks Theages

> How then, best of men, would you comport yourself, supposing you had a son and he were to give you trouble along such lines, declaring that he desired to become a good painter and blaming you the father because you were unwilling to spend the money on him for these things--and yet holding in disesteem the public craftsmen of

> this very thing, the painters, and not wishing to study with them? Or treating in the same fashion the aulists while wishing to become an aulist? Or the citharists? Would you have an idea what to do with him and where else to send him, since he was unwilling to study with these? (126d-e)

The hypothetical son in Socrates' example is motivated by a desire to be a good painter, and holds in disesteem the established painters. Thus, the problem may lie in finding a teacher who is a good enough painter to satisfy the boy. Socrates subtly raises the question of the proportional importance of nurture compared to nature, and it is significant that the examples which he chooses are activities in which natural talent plays a large part. Questions of the nature of a student, so long ignored by both Theages and Demodocus, are thus once again silently raised.

Yet a more profound difficulty is also introduced. On what basis could a potential student judge a potential teacher as not qualified to teach him? Such a judgement would require an understanding of the end to be achieved through the education. This requirement is easily met in the case of some of the arts. A carpenter, charioteer, doctor, farmer and javelin thrower can be fairly readily evaluated as to whether or not they are able practitioners of their art, and the ability to display qualified artisans among their students bespeaks their ability as teachers. However, the case becomes more difficult when evaluating painters, citharists, and aulists. The distinction between good and bad art, while perhaps no less real than the distinction between health and disease, is commonly acknowledged to be a good deal less obvious. There is usually no shortage of exemplification of the standard of good bodily health in light of which a physician's ability may be judged. The standard of beauty according to which the painter, aulist, and citharist work is more equivocal, resulting in both greater disagreement as to its nature, and correspondingly fewer people who know it.[34] The difficulty is further compounded when wisdom is the end to be attained, for to make such a judgement itself requires a certain amount of wisdom. Like painting, it may require a certain natural ability to apprehend enough of the end to be able to judge between satisfactory and unsatisfactory teachers.

[34]Thus, the merit of understanding artists technically as skilled imitators--rather than knowers--becomes apparent.

Theages cannot answer the philosopher's questions about his hypothetical son. Rather, he is adamant about not knowing what he would do with such a one. Socrates now chastises the boy, asking him if he is amazed, and if he blames his father for being at a loss as to what to do and where to send Theages to get what he desires. Demodocus' culpability, the philosopher seems to suggest, lies in his not surprising inability to determine how to satisfy Theages' desire, rather than in a wish to deny its fulfillment. Allying himself now with Demodocus against the son's unjust accusation, Socrates proposes a solution. Apparently recanting his earlier reported condemnation of the political men as teachers, and disregarding Theages' opinions of them, Socrates reassures the boy that "we will place you with whomever you might wish of the gentlemen--Athenian at least--versed in the things that pertain to the political art, who will keep company with you gratis."(127a)

Socrates enhances his proposal by pointing out that, with his plan, the boy can expect both to save money, and to gain a better reputation among the people than if he kept company with another. He does not explicitly address Demodocus' worries, yet judging by the father's eagerness for the boy to study with Socrates, something in either Socrates' proposal or in Theages' interpretation of it has quelled his fears. Socrates' appeal to the boy is on the basis of cost and reputation, and as the boy would not seem primarily worried by the cost of his education (which would be borne by Demodocus), the degree to which Theages is motivated by a love of honor must be asked. Theages is certainly not oblivious to the question of his reputation, yet he accepts Socrates' proposal in a way that suggests that he is not motivated primarily by his desire for honor, for Theages asks the philosopher "[l]ook here, Socrates: aren't you one of the gentlemen? Because if you would be willing to keep company with me, that will suffice and I will seek no one else." While it is unlikely that Theages would gain the sort of reputation which would assist him in political life from Socrates,[35] and despite the apparent surprise which Theages' response elicits from the philosopher, his "reckless" proposal to place the boy with "whomever [he] might wish" has been accepted, and it now falls to Socrates to frame a suitable response.

[35]See, for example, the connections between Socrates and Alcibiades, and between Socrates and Charmides, and their respective censure by the Athenians.

V. The Seduction of Theages: Wisdom as Erotika (127b-128c)

Theages' counterproposal, and the apparent surprise with which Socrates responds to it induces Demodocus to break his silence and to come to his son's aid with a fervent request of the philosopher. Demodocus importunes Socrates, arguing that what Theages says is not bad, and that it would gratify the old man; indeed, he would consider nothing "a greater godsend than if this boy were satisfied with your company and you were willing to keep company with this boy." Plato portrays the union of Theages and Socrates--of one who is denominated god-revering or god-envying, and one who claims possession by a demonic thing--as a gift of the gods. Through association with the philosopher, perhaps, Theages can come closer to the aim of perfect wisdom. Demodocus admits that he is "even ashamed to say how intensely" he wishes for Theages and Socrates to be willing to keep company with each other. It is unclear whether Demodocus is ashamed of the intensity of his wish, of the wish itself, or of speaking about it before Socrates.

Demodocus ends his plea by assuring the philosopher that, should he take Theages on as a student, Demodocus will be relieved of many of the fearful thoughts which have been plaguing him. Theages assures his father that if he could only persuade Socrates,[36] he would have no more reasons to fear on Theages' account. Yet earlier, it had seemed that Demodocus had many things to fear on Theages' behalf (121c), only one of which was his desire to become wise. Father and son seem to imply that if Theages' desire to become wise is properly fulfilled--if Socrates agrees to oversee Theages' education--then any other desires which are pr[illegible]matic, and which cause Demodocus fear, would be mitigated. Both father and son now seem to have some appreciation, however dim, that this desire "to become wise" exemplifies, or is at the heart of, the other desires which cause Demodocus fear.

[36]Theages seems to understand that what he says would be insufficient to convince Socrates. He is thus dependent upon his father for assistance in this important matter. Father and son are now united in their quest, and Demodocus is clearly dominant, thus reasserting his authority over Theages, even if only to delegate it to Socrates.

Demodocus describes Theages' speech as noble, perhaps because of the boy's evident interest in trying to resolve the conflict in a way which will relieve Demodocus of his constant fears. He then turns to the philosopher, noting "Socrates, the discourse that comes next at this point would be addressed to you." He makes his proposal to the philosopher, obliquely referring to his own brevity. He is, he says,

> "ready to put at your disposal...both myself and whatever I have that is most my own--for whatever you might need, in brief--if you welcome this Theages here and do him good in whatever way you can."(127c-d)

Demodocus' offer, while "brief," is complete. Whatever is meant by the suggestions that Demodocus is worried over the cost of retaining a teacher for Theages (121e;126e), he seems here to be confident enough of Socrates to offer him virtually everything he owns, if Socrates would only welcome Theages and do him good. No doubt Demodocus is well enough acquainted with Socrates to realize that the philosopher is not likely to take up the "material" aspect of his rural friend's offer. Demodocus is in the akward position of desiring Socrates' intercourse with Theages so strongly that he must offer everything he has to someone whom he knows does not desire such things. Demodocus is willing to give Socrates a "free hand" to do good to his son, but he has not yet shown himself to have any clear idea about what such a good would be. Implicit in his offer is an assumption that the good which Socrates does to Theages would be recognizable as such to Demodocus.

Socrates answers Demodocus' brief request with a lengthy speech apparently intended to convince the older man that he, Socrates, would <u>not</u> be the best teacher of the boy, and to show that he is undeserving of the farmer's offer. He claims not to be surprised by Demodocus' earnestness, perhaps reassuring Demodocus that he need not be ashamed of the intensity of his wish. The philosopher commends Demodocus, saying that he does not know "what someone of intelligence might be more earnest about than that his son be the best possible."(127d) Socrates commends Demodocus on his love for Theages, and for his desire to give the boy the best education possible. His praise is justified. Demodocus perhaps realizes that if he does what is best for the boy--if he places him with Socrates, who will oversee Theages' education--he risks losing some of his son's affection to the philosopher.

Demodocus' nobility is evident in his decision to place his son with a man with whom he will prosper, despite the risk to himself that is attendant upon the fulfillment of this "not ignoble" desire. Socrates praises Demodocus for his desire that Theages be the best possible, not simply the best. While it is not within Demodocus' power to ensure that his son's education makes Theages the best in the city, he is to be commended for his efforts to guarantee a tutor who will help the boy fulfill his natural potential.

While Socrates admits that he is not at all surprised by Demodocus' aim to make his son the best possible, he nonetheless admits to being made to wonder at both the farmer's and his son's opinions as to how this end could be brought about, and subtly changes the ends toward which Theages' education is aimed even as he attempts to elevate the father in the son's eyes. He wonders of Demodocus

> ...where you came by this opinion that I especially, rather than yourself, would be able to benefit your son with a view to his becoming a good citizen and where this youth came by the supposition that I rather than you might benefit him...

Socrates here characterizes Demodocus' understanding of the end toward which such an education should be aimed as that of becoming a good citizen, whereas Theages' original explicit claim had been that he was looking for a teacher who could assist him in his desire "to become wise." Theages' overtly political understanding of "wisdom" has allowed the philosopher now to speak of civic virtue, and in a way that Demodocus would heartily approve. By subtly modifying the ends of Theages' desire, Socrates reminds Demodocus of what he once no doubt took for granted: having a son who is a good citizen, even if he is not particularly wise.

Socrates' response to Demodocus' request provides the father with two possible alternative methods of educating Theages: a political apprenticeship, superintended by Demodocus or some other man experienced in the art of politics, or an education by the sophists.[37] Socrates argues that if Theages desires a political education, then Demodocus would seem to be a more competent teacher, judged by all conventional standards. If Theages

[37]As evidenced by Theages' understanding wisdom as the ability to win arguments, the boy lacks any notion of "sophistry": to Theages, winning arguments is the practical manifestation of wisdom. Men who are not wise would simply not be able to win the arguments. He clearly has much still to learn.

"looks down on the company of men versed in the art of politics," then the sophists would be able to provide him what he apparently wants: skill in argument.

In support of his claim that Demodocus would provide Theages with the most benefit "with a view to his becoming a good citizen," Socrates alludes to three points: Demodocus is older than Socrates; he has actually ruled "in many great offices for the Athenians;" and he is held in high esteem, both by his closest demesmen, and also by the rest of the city. Socrates, however, has none of these attributes, and thus he would seem to be an inferior teacher of the boy. Were Theages to be given the best civic nurture possible--if the aim is that he become a good citizen--then the conditions which Socrates lists may be the most pertinent. Age, experience and reputation may provide the best practical means of judging a person's civic virtue, at least for someone lacking in wisdom.[31] They provide a practical way of determining who is living a decent life and who is not, according to the standards of the polis, although only the truly wise man can determine whether civic virtue is in any particular case coincident with human virtue. While these three criteria are useful, however, they are also problematic in certain respects.

As far as actual civic rule, history has proven the value of looking to age as a practical indicator of wisdom. The rule by elders, while not simply equivalent to the rule of the wise, is nonetheless a workable approximation for a city. While clearly not a sufficient condition for wisdom, it may be argued that age is nonetheless a necessary condition. And experience, while it requires reflection in order to provide knowledge, at least furnishes a base from which, given sufficient contemplation, one may learn. Reputation, Socrates' third criteria, presents problems for one judging civic virtue because of its implicit reliance upon appearance. The degree to which one's reputation allows an evaluation by others of civic virtue is necessarily limited by the extent to which that reputation is based upon what one really is, as well as by the quality of popular judgements of "excellence."

Socrates' third reason for Theages to prefer the education he will receive from Demodocus is that Demodocus' reputation far exceeds Socrates'. Demodocus is "held in high

[31]However, an ability to teach would presumably also be useful, and we have been reminded of the difficulty between fathers and sons.

esteem by the Anagyrasian demesmen and no less by the rest of the city," while of Socrates, "neither of you sees in me any of these things." The philosopher thus raises the crux of the problem. Demodocus has a good reputation, presumably on the basis of his past performance, especially his apparently good rule in many great offices for the Athenians. Demodocus has a good reputation because he has done good for the polis. Socrates claims that he has no such reputation, lacking the experience as a ruler in the "great offices" of the Athenians.[39] The philosopher contends that with no other basis upon which to regard Socrates as the proper teacher for Theages--that is, lacking the knowledge to be reasonably sure that the philosopher is both wise and a good teacher--it would seem more sensible for Demodocus and Theages to rely mainly upon the conventionally recognized signs of merit: of age, experience and reputation. He thus attempts to recall to them the conventional standards by which they would ordinarily judge people, ignoring the fact that what they have just seen has persuaded them that he would be the best teacher. Socrates, it seems, would according to these conventional criteria be no better as a teacher than most people, and considerably inferior to many, including Demodocus himself. In short, it does not seem reasonable for father and son to be seeking the company of Socrates.

Yet despite Socrates' arguments, both Demodocus and Theages fervently desire the philosopher to keep company with the boy and to benefit him in whatever way possible. Given the zeal with which both of them pronounce their desire, it seems unlikely that Socrates' reasons will persuade them to recant on their offer. Doubtless he counts on this in seeming to press upon them certain "more suitable" alternatives. But his displayed proficiency in arguments make him a satisfactory choice for Theages; and Demodocus' trust in the philosopher, a friend and fellow citizen from whom he willingly takes counsel, make him equally acceptable to Demodocus. Socrates' attempt to convince the pair that they really

[39]Socrates was not wholly uninitiated in the offices of Athenian government. See Apology, 32a-e. The major difference seems to be that Demodocus ruled in the "great" offices and that he gained a good reputation as a ruler, something Socrates did not--indeed, quite the opposite: according to his own account he acquired odium, at least in the eyes of many. But again, the question of who learned more from their experience, Socrates or Demodocus, must be asked.

should look to someone else has exactly the opposite effect. For he shows Demodocus that he is perfectly aware of, and respectful towards, the conventional claims to authority made by the politicians; and the philosopher's apparent reluctance--his playing "hard to get"--only whets Theages' desire, making him even more eager to spend time with Socrates.

Yet Socrates continues in his coyness, claiming that this is not the only possible solution to the boy's problem. For

> ...if Theages here looks down on the company of men versed in the art of politics and seeks certain others who proclaim themselves capable of educating young persons, there are here Prodicus of Ceos, and Gorgias of Leontini, and Polus of Agrigentum, and many others, who are so wise that they go into the cities and persuade the most well born and richest among the young--who may keep company with any of the citizens they wish, for nothing--to leave the company of those others and to keep company with themselves and to lay down in addition a great deal of money as a fee while feeling gratitude.(127e-128a)

If the youth scorns the company of the men versed in the art of politics--of whom Demodocus is the most obvious representative[40]--there is a second type of educator which may suit him. Unlike education by his father, which Socrates claims is aimed at Theages' "becoming a good citizen," the sophist's education is aimed at no such clear end. The sophists would educate him in a manner different than and perhaps even contrary in some respects to that in which his father would. While the end towards which they claim to be educating is not clearly stated by the philosopher, his account of their actions implies that they would hardly be promoting the parochial civic virtue of their students. The sophists are cosmopolitan, for they go into cities other than their own, and lure the city's "most well-born and richest" away from the citizens. Their appeal is that they are foreign, and that they claim to teach things that the best citizens of the city cannot. They charge money of their students, and are thus liable to become the flatterers of the rich rather than the educators of the promising. So Socrates suggests this second alternative: that Demodocus and Theages look to a sophist for the education which the boy proclaims to desire, seeming to recall Demodocus' statement at the beginning of the discussion that he has now "come for this very purpose: to place this boy with one of those who are reputed to be 'sophists'."[41] But having in the meantime

[40]Providing evidence that in this case at least the saying attributed to Socrates that these men are unable to benefit their own sons to any great extent is true.

[41]While the sophists might seem to provide a mean between the civic education

convinced Theages through their discussion that Socrates would in fact provide the boy with a better education than the sophists, the philosopher can now safely suggest once again that Theages pursue his original plan, confident of the boy's rejection of it. And, in fact, the suggestion is summarily dismissed by the boy, for now he wants Socrates.

Despite--or rather, because--it is only too clear that he has solidly "hooked" both the boy and his father, Socrates suggests they consider once again whether they wish him to take on Theages, or whether they wouldn't prefer to go through with their earlier (but conflicting) desires. Socrates asks them to consider the civic education desired for Theages by Demodocus, and education by the sophists which the boy himself had so strongly demanded. The philosopher praises both types of education lavishly, deferring to Demodocus' preference, but noting in turn that Theages too had a good idea, and that the sophists also "proclaim themselves capable of educating young persons." Socrates tests their commitment to enlisting him as a teacher by praising their earlier options; neither Demodocus nor Theages, however, are any longer interested in what they once wanted. They remain firmly allied in their desire to seduce Socrates.

Socrates argues that, for the reasons he has marshalled in support of the politicians and sophists,

> It would be reasonable for your son and you yourself to choose some of these, but to choose me is not reasonable. For I know none of these blessed and noble subjects of knowledge--I wish I did. Rather I always say, surely, that I happen to know, so to speak nothing, except a certain small subject of knowledge: what pertains to erotic love. As regards this subject of knowledge, to be sure, I rank myself as wonderously clever beyond anyone, whether human beings of the past or of the present.(128b)

So bizarre is Socrates' excuse for his inability to teach the boy that Theages again assumes that Socrates is jesting with them. Yet Socrates' excuse is ostensibly meant to convince the pair that he would be an unsuitable teacher for Theages. With its further elucidation at 128d, and the vignettes which Socrates uses to "prove" his claim, we get the philosopher's most extended account of how he benefits those with whom he has intercourse, and of his

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[41](cont'd) offered by the political men such as Demodocus, and a philosophical education offered by Socrates, Demodocus understands Socrates to exemplify a mean between what he fears and what Theages desires, and thus to be the perfect compromise.

judgement as to the type of education most suitable to Theages. Socrates' version of what he knows--erotika--must somehow explain not only all the things that he seems to know about in the dialogue, but also his relations with all the characters about whom he subsequently recounts cautionary stories. Only when all this is fully understood can the philosopher's paradoxical claim be assessed.

Socrates claims that all he knows is that he knows "so to speak, nothing," except erotika. Yet throughout the dialogue, Socrates remarks with authority on a number of things, including: counsel is sacred, and especially divine when it concerns education (122b); pursuing a discussion without mutual agreement as to the subject is laughable (122c); the most correct procedure is to begin with Theages himself (122d); Theages' name is both noble (kalos) and befitting what is sacred (122e); the subjects in which the sons of gentlemen are educated (122e); various ways of understanding both the pilot's and the charioteer's arts (123c-d); an understanding of the medical, musical and gymnastic arts (123e); the various technae superintended by the farmer's and carpenter's arts, and, implicitly, the hierarchical order of all the technae (124a,b); that Hippias and Periander exercised identical rule (124e); Euripides' account of the education of a wise tyrant (125b); that Anacreon declared that Callicrite the daughter of Cyane knew the things of the tyrannic art (125d-e); Themistocles, Pericles and Cimon are regarded as "wondrously adept" (126a); keeping company with an Athenian gentleman will give Theages a better reputation "among the mass of human beings" than keeping company with someone else (127a); who certain well-known sophists are, how they operate, and to what extent, (or when) it is reasonable to choose them as teachers (127e); and that the daimon is in charge of any benefit he may bestow upon his students (129e). Now if Socrates does know about erotic love, it is at least not a "certain small subject of knowledge." To be truly wise in erotic matters--in the mysterious forces which cause the various attractions and repulsion in people, ranging in intensity from mild to the intense, and which include all their deepest loves and longings, everything from the purely physical desires to the desire to be god-like--would seem to necessitate a complete understanding of the human psyche in all its diverse manifestations. Properly understood, it could be argued that to

understand erotics would be to understand human nature.[42] In this subject, the philosopher ranks himself foremost among anyone else of past or present. He does not preclude the possibility that his wisdom could be overshadowed by one to come later, perhaps indicating that his own understanding, while extensive, is not complete.[43]

Despite the philosopher's startling claim to know, of all topics, only about love matters, Theages does not seem persuaded of his seriousness.[44] Theages presumes he is being toyed with, and tells of the boys he knows who have, thanks to their association with Socrates, "become manifestly superior to all those to whom they were previously inferior."[45] We are led to identify these boys with those others of Theages' own age and deme, whose tales of the discussions which they [illegible] in the city initiated Theages' envy and resulted in Demodocus' fear.

Now that Theages has revealed to the philosopher that he is familiar with some of the youths Socrates has influenced, Socrates asks the boy if he can explain "what sort of thing this is." Theages swears by Zeus that he can; his reply suggests that what he has just witnessed reveals that Socrates has the power to make anyone superior, if only he will consent to spend time with them. If only Socrates is willing to spend time with Theages, he too will become "manifestly superior" to all those to whom he is now inferior. Theages does not doubt that any wisdom he could gain from Socrates would be recognizable as such to those lacking such wisdom. He seems confident that he will be able to convince many that he is their superior. The envious Theages is about to exact his revenge on those who made him feel

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[42]Whether a knowledge of erotics would constitute a complete understanding of non-human nature as well as human nature is not altogether clear, but it seems that an understanding of human nature would necessarily be grounded in an understanding of nature as such.

[43]Since Socrates is surely not advancing this claim on the basis of empirical research, it can be taken as indicating that Socrates knows the parameters which would limit the possible contenders for such a title. What these would be, however, remains unclear.

[44]The fact that Theages ignores almost completely the philosopher's provocative claim to a be an expert on such a tantalizing subject may indicate that he is still a fairly young boy. He is more interested in Socrates' ability to teach him how to win arguments, it seems, than in anything the philosopher may know about erotika.

[45]Theages' observation at least raises the possibility that Demodocus and his son did not happen upon Socrates entirely by accident, but that they came to town with the express purpose of finding the philosopher.

inferior, if only he can convince Socrates to spend time with him. Socrates, however, must correct his faulty understanding of the cause of these amazing things; and to do so, he must introduce Theages to the philosopher's daimon.

VI. Socrates' Daimon (128d-131a)

The philosopher's account of the daimon follows his puzzling statement that all he knows are love matters, which was part of his ostensible attempt to convince Theages that he would be unable to teach the boy what he desires to know. In response to Socrates' question about whether the boy knows "what sort of thing this is," Theages assumes the philosopher to be referring to these boys who have been made manifestly superior through intercourse with Socrates. Yet the reference is unclear; Socrates may in fact be referring back to these erotic matters which constitute his 'expertise.' His explanation of the former point would lead directly to his elaborate accounts of the daimon. Yet ironically, in talking of the daimon, he may also be explaining his erotic expertise. So, while Theages seems to assume that these stories are intended to explain how some boys were made superior, they may rather, or also, be the philosopher's elaboration of his claim to know only erotika.

Despite its apparent concern for the well-being of Socrates' friends, the actual manifestations of his daimon are purely private. Thus we--like Demodocus and Theages and all the other Athenians--are dependent upon Socrates' account of it. The philosopher begins his tale with a general description of what it is that possesses him, explaining that

> ...there is something demonic which, by divine dispensation, has followed upon me beginning from childhood. This is a voice which, when it comes, always signals me to turn away from what I am going to do but never urges on, and if one of my friends consults with me, and the voice comes, it's the same--it turns away, and will not allow, the action.(128d)

Socrates' description of the daimon shows it to have both a private and a public function. It is a "sterile" power, as it disallows some of his actions, but does not initiate any. Yet, as he tells it, it also performs a curiously public action: its power extends to Socrates' friends also, for it can interdict their actions if one of them consults with the philosopher and takes his advice, and it can even pronounce on policies of the entire city.[46] As a means of explaining to father and son his ability to make boys appear "manifestly superior to all those

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[46]As Socrates describes his attitude toward enquiry in the Memorabilia

> In short, what the gods have granted us to do by help of learning, we must learn; what is hidden from mortals we should try to find out from the gods by divination: for to him that is in their grace the gods grant a sign. (Memorabilia, I,i,9.)

to whom they were previously inferior," despite knowing "none of these blessed and noble subjects of knowledge," Socrates tells of his daimon and of its power over his friends and his students. Socrates seeks to convince Theages and Demodocus of his relative helplessness by relating to them accounts of the power of the daimon over his friends; that is, of Socrates claiming intervention by the daimon and warning his friends not to do something.[47] The philosopher furnishes Theages and Demodocus with "proof" of his claims in the form of vignettes about Socrates' relations with his friends as they are affected by the daimon. He does not tell of any of his own actions which were interdicted by the daimon.

Socrates' stories appear to be aimed at convincing both Demodocus and Theages of his own absolute dependence upon, and subjection to, the power of the daimon. It is portrayed as an asolute authority which never provides reasons for its pronouncements, yet which must not be denied; those who disregard its warnings do so at their own peril. Yet this account comes up only after Demodocus and Theages have professed their determination to enlist Socrates as a teacher for Theages, and after Socrates has them reaffirm this determination. Socrates' stories of the daimon are told to a boy who is attracted by the idea of studying with Socrates and to a father who wholeheartedly supports this endeavour. Theages' education, it seems, is beginning with a lesson on the importance of obeying absolutely his teacher's daimon. Thus, the education of this boy (who earlier had himself confessed to tyrannical longings) apparently requires absolute and unquestioning obedience to the daimon.

According to both Theages' explicit definitions and Socrates' implicit definitions of tyrannic rule and statesmanlike rule, the philosopher's "rule" over the boy would be the

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[47]This account of the daimon should be compared to Xenophon's account, in both The Apology of Socrates and in the Memorabilia. Xenophon also says that Socrates' daimon was used to give counsel to his friends (Memorabilia, I,i,4-5.) But according to Xenophon, it is checked with reason, not trusted implicitly: see Apology 5, where Socrates tells that he tried twice to meditate on his defence, but the daimon interposed, evidence perhaps that Socrates either did not try to reason through the warning the first time, or that he could not do so. In any case, he is convinced that the daimon is right. It appears to come uninvited, and it always halts or forbids an action. See also Plato's Apology of Socrates, where Socrates explains that the daimon was right in prohibiting his entry into politics. (31d; cf. 40b)

furthest removed from tyranny. Theages and Demodocus are attempting to enlist Socrates as a ruler who rules with the consent of the ruled, and in the interest of the ruled. Yet even in this instance, apparently, the ruler must have recourse to an essentially tyrannic and absolute power to assist him, at least in the beginning. Socrates' accounts of the daimon may reveal why this is so.

The Story of Charmides

Socrates' first story concerns the daimon's advice to Charmides, the son of Glaucon, and his training for the Nemean games. Upon hearing of Charmides' intention to train for the games, Socrates says, the voice came to him. He duly imparted the warning to Charmides, who, with a blithe rationalization, disregarded it. Even those who know the philosopher fairly well, it seems, do not heed Socrates' daimon, especially if it forbids them to do something which they desire to do.[48]

Charmides told Socrates that he was planning to train, and as Socrates heard him tell of his plans, the daimon supposedly manifested itself. Thus, the daimon seems linked to the philosopher's conscious knowledge of what is happening;[49] he acts as intermediary in both "directions." The daimon apparently requires antecedent reports in order to function. The work of the daimon, then, seems limited by the philosopher's knowledge, appearing in this story to be less a case of someone divinely inspired uttering prophetic warnings which he may not understand, and which make sense only to someone who by chance hears them, than a more controlled manifestation of something which requires foreknowledge of its own significance.[50]

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[48]This is not altogether surprising, given that according to Xenophon, even Socrates disregarded it twice, in the matter of his own trial, before he found a way to rationalize the daimon's warning.

[49]See Pangle, p.169.

[50]It is necessary to presume that the daimon is not simply a manifestation of the supernatural in order to learn anything about it. The premise that the daimon can be rationally explained is a necessary premise for any serious study of it; and it could only finally be decided that it is unexplainable--that is, divine or supernatural--after all attempts to rationally explain it have failed.

According to Socrates' story, when the voice came, he "opposed him [Charmides] and said, 'As you were speaking the voice came to me, that of the demonic thing: just don't train.'" Socrates' warning to Charmides goes unheeded, for Charmides answers the philosopher with his own interpretation of the sign's meaning. "Probably," he said, "it signals to you that I shall not win; but even if I am not going to win, if I exercise during this time, I shall be benefitted." Charmides does not seem too intent on winning the games; he is training, he claims, for the benefit of his body, rather than for the honor he will win if victorious at the games. Charmides' response is odd, given that Socrates' admonition was clearly that he not train. Charmides' attempt to provide a rational interpretation of the daimon's injunction is noteworthy for its failure to solicit from Socrates a corresponding rational argument as to why the daimon should be obeyed. Socrates' story reveals to Theages the mysterious and awesome force of the daimon, and the peril which may befall those who disregard it. Socrates does not give reasons why the daimon would have opposed Charmides; if anything, he emphasizes instead the utter mysteriousness of the prophetic voice.

Socrates' curiously ambiguous ending to his story about Charmides leaves Theages presumably as puzzled as us, in awe of a force which foretells the doom which may accompany even seemingly innocuous events. The intelligence of the daimon is something which can be questioned, and its announcements may appear unreasonable. It must nonetheless be obeyed. The philosopher leaves the end result of Charmides' ignoring the prohibition somewhat of a mystery (while also implying that certain bad things befell the youth), and the curiously ambiguous ending of this story leads Socrates to next recount the tale of Timarchus and Philemon.

The Story of Timarchus and Philemon

Socrates' second story concerns once again the daimon being disregarded, this time with more obviously detrimental effects for those whom the philosopher's voice tried to help. Socrates interprets Cleitomachus' account of a somewhat cryptic statement made by his

brother Timarchus as he was being taken away to his execution after plotting successfully to murder a certain Nicias, son of Heroskamandrus. Socrates invites Demodocus and Theages to ask Cleitomachus for an account of Timarchus' testimonial, but there would seem little need, or at least little incentive for them do so, as Socrates provides them with an account of his own. The philosopher elaborates upon Timarchus' testimony to Cleitomachus, linking it back to an earlier incident with his daimon, something Timarchus did not mention to Cleitomachus at all.

Timarchus' apparently straightforward statement--that "I am now going to my death because I wasn't willing to heed Socrates"--is interpreted by the philosopher as a reference to Timarchus' disregard of the daimon. Timarchus could have many reasons for saying such a thing, and the profound effect on Cleitomachus could be at least one reason for making these his last words to his brother. Timarchus, especially if he had been a close associate of the philosopher, could have meant that he had not heeded Socrates' advice on practising virtue; on being just; on obeying the laws of the polis, or any other elements of the philosopher's "teaching." Yet Socrates does not mention any of these things as possibilities. He seems to be committed to this particular interpretation of Timarchus' statement, as part of his efforts to elucidate his account of the daimon for Theages and Demodocus. Wondering about this makes one suspect that he is primarily intent on convincing Theages that the absolute rule to which he must subject himself is not really Socrates himself, but that of some "higher power" which rules the philosopher as well.

While not telling Socrates of his plan, Timarchus' action is nevertheless interdicted by the daimon, which somehow "divined" his intentions. The daimon seems to come only in response to Timarchus' question "what do you say, Socrates? You people go on drinking, but I need to get up and go somewhere; I'll be back a little later, if I'm lucky." Socrates' sign did not specifically prohibit the plot, of which the philosopher was ostensibly ignorant at the time, but simply advised Timarchus not to leave the party. Unlike Charmides, it seems neither Timarchus nor Philemon told Socrates of their plan. However, this time the daimon spoke to Socrates without his foreknowledge of its significance, making Socrates appear more

prophetic. Ostensibly knowing nothing of the plot, the philosopher was yet possessed by the daimon which attempted to stop it. Socrates'--or rather, the daimon's--ability to divine must appear fantastic to Theages.

Yet Timarchus, unlike Charmides, is willing to listen to Socrates, at least for a time. Given the philosopher's terse and utterly opaque admonition not to leave, he does not argue, and he does not question. Unlike Charmides' quick disregard of the daimon, Timarchus seems undecided as to whether to listen to it or not. Timarchus' acquiescence, however, is only temporary. After some time had passed, he again tested the matter, expressing again his desire to leave. The voice came again, and Timarchus once more allowed himself to be temporarily ruled. Yet he seems to have been determined to leave, for a third time he had apparently made up his mind to escape regardless. He waited until the philosopher's attention was engaged elsewhere. He escaped from the philosopher, only to commit murder and be in turn executed himself, along with his loyal friend who was implicated.

A number of features of Socrates' account are curious. He apparently needed to see or hear of Timarchus' intentions to do something before his daimonic voice would speak to him. Yet although he professed to not know why Timarchus was so intent on leaving, he did not ask; he simply conveyed to Timarchus the daimon's prohibition. As well, although this young man seemed to give more regard to the daimon than did Charmides, Timarchus nonetheless ultimately ignores the philosopher's warnings, even though Socrates told him at least once that his leaving was opposed by the sign. Had Timarchus sufficient respect for the power of the daimon to protect him from evil, it is unlikely that he would have ignored its warnings, especially in a life and death matter such as this. Yet because Timarchus ignored the daimon's proscription, he was executed. The awesome power of the daimon to predict mens' fate, and to assist those who are obedient to its absolute rule, is becoming even more impressive.[51]

[51]It is noticeable too that disobeying the daimon has become more costly, not only to Timarchus, but also to his true friend Philemon, whose apparent trust in Timarchus was betrayed.

About The Sicilian Expedititon

Socrates' next proof of the power of the daimon concerns his prophecy about the disastrous failure of the Sicilian expedition. Socrates' friends now seem to include all the citizens of Athens; he apparently would have Theages and Demodocus believe that the daimon attends not only the private fortunes of close friends, but also the public fortunes of the whole city. The philosopher's stories show a progression from a recounting of Charmides' bad but not fatal misfortunes, to a discussion of the fatal consequences of Timarchus' disregard of the daimon. And from this story of a man whose private interest conflicts sharply with the interest of the polis, and whose disobedience was fatal to both himself and his friend,[52] we progress to the story of the Sicilian expedition, in which Socrates pronounces on a horrific disaster for the whole city.

The most interesting feature of Socrates' third story is that whatever is rhetorically implied, it actually makes no mention of the daimon. Socrates says simply, "moreover, concerning the numbers who were in Sicily, you will hear from many the things I said about the destruction of the expedition,"(my emphasis) which he implies, but does not expressly attribute to daimonic inspiration. Socrates thus subtly suggests that he may have a certain understanding of political matters, and therewith an ability to assess the damage to the polis of certain proposals and policies. Socrates' advice was this time given widely, to "many," rather than to one particular friend. As well, it seems as though the philosopher was more vehement in his opposition to the expedition than he was to either Charmides or Timarchus. The vehemence of Socrates' widespread advice on the folly of the Sicilian expedition contrasts with his relatively weak opposition to Charmides when provided with Charmides' reinterpretation of the daimon's message--as does the respective gravity of the outcomes.

It is interesting that Socrates' most bold pronouncement is on the episode with perhaps the most significance for the city, and the only one for which he does not credit the

[52]While this case could be more convincingly made if some information on Nicias and Timarchus was available, it is nonetheless certain that murder, for whatever reason, is generally considered to be contrary to the laws of the polis.

daimon. Socrates, if we attend carefully to his actual words, has taken credit for political prudence, and for a certain amount of knowledge about political matters. Despite his earlier ostensible attempt to dissuade Theages from studying with him, his "evidence" now that he anticipated the destruction of the Sicilian expedition and was confident enough to speak widely of the error of launching such an expedition hardly seems likely to deter the boy: rather, it seems a most effective enticement to Theages, for Socrates appears to possess precisely the type of knowledge that Theages professes to desire--or at least is in "contact" with something that does.

About Sannion and the Ephesus Campaign

Socrates prefaces his next story with the statement that the things which he has spoken of so far can be checked by Theages and Demodocus, for if they do not believe Socrates, they can "hear from those who know." But, says Socrates, they can also see whether the sign is reliable themselves by checking whether the doom which it forecast to Sannion will be realized. Socrates does not limit his proof to things over and done with.

Socrates was visited by the daimon when the beautiful (or noble: kalos) Sannion went out on the Ephesus campaign. The daimon was activated by "the beautiful Sannion," yet its warning, Socrates contends, was pertinent to the whole army. Both Sannion and Charmides are described by Socrates as beautiful or noble (kalos), thus linking them to Theages, whose name Socrates said, was "noble indeed." Socrates characterizes Theages' name as noble or beautiful even before he converses with the boy. The noble or beautiful part of Theages may be his potential, symbolized by his father's aspirations in naming his son. As the boy is drawn to wisdom by its name, and as he desires it without a clear substantive understanding of what it may be, he is attractive to the philosopher even before his nature is revealed as properly attractive to Socrates. The philosopher's comment upon the boy's name mirrors Theages' apprehension of wisdom; it is noble or beautiful, and attractive even to one who lacks a complete understanding of it.

Charmides' and Sannion's private warnings from Socrates' daimon seem to be linked to their beauty, unlike the more public warning to the Sicilian expedition which may not have come from Socrates' daimon, but rather from the philosopher's reason and political sagacity. Socrates' daimon does not seem to be clearly allied with the polis, but neither does it appear to act contrary to the interests of the polis in advocating the pursuit of the private good of one citizen over the general good, at least as Sannion here describes it.

Socrates and his Students

Socrates' four vignettes were told to Theages and Demodocus, he says, "because this power of this demonic thing is also all-powerful when it comes to the intercourse of those who spend time with me." Its power is prophetic, and while it does not command absolutely in the sense of making something physically impossible, it does rule tyrannically in that it gives no reasons. But it always rules in the students' good. Socrates' stories have shown that the daimon is to be simply obeyed by anyone concerned about his own welfare, and about the welfare of those he cares about.

Those students who spend time with Socrates, he says, are easily divisable into three groups: those whose intercourse the daimon opposes, and who consequently can obtain no benefit from Socrates; those whose intercourse the daimon does not interdict, but who nonetheless obtain no benefit from Socrates; and "those whose intercourse the power of the demonic thing contributes to," those who consequently make rapid progress. But these who progress are further subdivided into those who "retain the benefit in a firm and lasting way," and those others who "for as long a time as they spend with me, make amazing progress, but when they go away from me, are once again no different from anyone."(130a) Success in pursuing wisdom, it seems, comes only with the contribution of the daimon's power, yet while this is a necessary condition, it is not sufficient. The favour of the daimon seems utterly mysterious.

Those students least able to benefit from the philosopher are those whose study is opposed by the daimon, for it is "impossible" for Socrates to spend time with them, since he, unlike some of his friends, professes to submit absolutely to its rule.[53] Perhaps opposition by the daimon is a mark of these people's inability to learn. But Socrates does not suggest that they are unable to learn from someone else; if they are opposed by the daimon, it is impossible for them to be benefitted by spending time with him. The philosopher is prevented by something "demonic" from spending his time with those who will not be benefitted by such attention. Alternatively, someone without any respect for the supernatural might say that the teacher is erotic, and is attracted by some students and not by others. The attention which the teacher pays to the students is crucial to the students' learning. Ideally, perhaps justly, those who are the best students of Socrates should also be the most attractive to the teacher.

The second category of students Socrates claims to have had experience with are those whose intercourse the daimon does not prohibit, but who gain no benefit from the time they spend with him. Socrates does not comment on whether he can or cannot spend time with these students. They are presumably those on whom the daimon does not pass judgement, perhaps indicating that their potential for philosophic inquiry simply cannot be determined in advance. They are not clearly hopeless, but neither will they necessarily benefit. It is difficult to discern what it is in a student that the daimon reacts to. It is clearly not just intelligence, nor is it a comprehensive aptitude for philosophic inquiry, since those whose study the daimon does not oppose often turn out to receive only the most transient or "dependent" benefit from Socrates. The daimon would seem to provide a means of making an assesment of a student on the basis of something non-rational or intuitive. Both Socrates' attractions and repulsions are erotically grounded, but perhaps only his repulsions are given the name of his daimon. As Leo Strauss concludes,

> The daimonion is the forbidding, the denying aspect of Socrates' nature, of his natural inclinations; its full or true aspect is his eros as explained in the Symposium: eros is daimonic, not divine."[54]

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[53]Unlike its opposition to Charmides' plan of action, or Timarchus', or Sannion's, its opposition to Socrates means that he cannot perform the intended action.

[54]Strauss, Leo."On Plato's Apology of Socrates and Crito" in Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983.) p.47.

The question thus arises why a philosopher--a lover of wisdom committed to a life of reason--would need recourse to a daimon when speaking to such people as Charmides, Timarchus, the Athenian people, Sannion, Demodocus and Theages. It seems even the "least tyrannical"--in the sense of "least violent"--rule needs recourse to absolute, unquestioned authority when the end of the rule is not clearly perceived as good by the ruled. Because rule in the interest of the ruled may not always be apparent as such, involving as it often does temporary discomfort for eventual gain, recourse to absolute and unquestioned authority may be needed. Precisely because such people as Charmides, Timarchus and Theages do not know their own good--precisely because they lack the philosopher's wisdom--obedience to the daimon is needed in order to avoid a tragic fate, at least in the beginning, and until they have acquired their own wisdom.

Finally, Socrates speaks of the third type of student with whom he has associated: "those whose intercourse the power of the demonic thing contributes to...." Socrates earlier characterized his daimon as a sterile voice in that it is something "which, when it comes, always signals me to turn away from what I am going to do but never urges on...." Yet now the philosopher contends that the daimon's power is not simply negating; its "contribution" allows certain students to make immediate and rapid progress. Those to whom the philosopher is attracted may flourish. Yet of those, some are permanently transformed by their experience with Socrates--they retain the benefit-- but many excel under the philosopher's guidance only so long as they are actually with Socrates. Whatever progress they make, and whatever "benefit" they receive is not sufficient to allow them to flourish independently of the philosopher; they are dependent upon him for the benefit which they believe themselves to be getting, a benefit which they find attractive. The ones for whom Socrates' benefit is limited to the time the students actually spend in the philosopher's proximity seem to outnumber those whose time with Socrates gives them benefit which they retain "in a firm and lasting way." It seems that endorsement by the daimon does not guarantee either the efficacy or the longevity of the philosopher's teaching. The contribution of the daimon to the students' efforts is necessary if he is to learn anything from Socrates, yet the ultimate worth of the teaching is

dependent on more than the daimon's endorsement. Rather, it is dependent upon the student's nature, something which Socrates has apparently taken pains to determine in Theages' case throughout the course of their discussion. It is these last two cases--those who "succeed" with the philosopher's attentions and those who do not "succeed", despite his instruction--that reveal the most interesting features of Socrates as a teacher. And it is of these last two types of student that Socrates' next story speaks.

Aristides and Thucydides

Aristides, the son of Lysimachus, is adduced by Socrates as an example of one of those who make amazing progress when they are with him, but when they leave become indistinguishable from others. Socrates recounts a testimonial which he says was given by Aristides after he saw the way Thucydides was behaving towards Socrates.[55] Aristides' study with Socrates was interrupted by the demands of the city, and although he made rapid progress while studying with Socrates, after he returned from battle he found that all he had learned had slipped away. The cost to him of his service to the city was not only the studying time which he lost; it was a loss of all that he had learned up to that point.[56]

And so we are reminded that the young men drawn to study with Socrates are the same youths as are needed by the city. Socrates says that Aristides returned to find Thucydides spending time with Socrates. What he does not say explicitly, yet what may reasonably be inferred, is that Aristides was envious of Thucydides because of this. Aristides' envy of Thucydides, and its influence on his dialogue with Socrates, should not be underestimated, especially given his description of the time he spent studying with Socrates.[57] As Socrates recounts the story, Aristides blamed Thucydides to Socrates for two things: that

[55]Crucial to an understanding of what Aristides meant, then, would be an understanding of the issue that prompted his reflections to the philosopher, and of its significance to Aristides.

[56]This contrasts with the philosopher himself, who fulfilled his military service without much apparent cost to his philosophizing. See the beginning of Charmides.

[57]Recall also Demodocus' initial characterization of Theages' motivation for becoming wise.

he bore himself in a solemn manner toward Socrates, and that he complained, "as if he were somebody." Thucydides, Aristides may be suggesting, is too enamoured of himself and his pride is interfering with his education. As Aristides says, "What? Doesn't he know...what sort of a slave he was, before he was in your company?" Socrates swears by the gods that "it seems not."[58] Aristides contrasts slavery with the ability to "converse with any person whatsoever, and appear inferior to none in arguments," enabling one to have intercourse with the most refined, and not appear vulgar. That is, he seems to judge wisdom, and the freedom it entails, in much the same way as does Theages.

Aristides does not say that he has become slave-like through losing the benefit of Socrates' company. Rather, he admits that he too--like Thucydides, it seems--is laughable, but for different reasons, and in the eyes of different people. Thucydides' misapprehension of himself is laughable to Aristides and Socrates because he underestimates the difference in importance between himself and Socrates, and because he fails to appreciate the source of his assumed "superiority." Yet Aristides' complaint is that he finds himself laughable to those who are refined, and whom he perceives to be educated. Aristides is laughable because he has lost the ability to win arguments.[59] Aristides' understanding of the end towards which his education was aimed appears to be the ability to "converse with any person whatsoever and appear inferior to none in arguments," and its consequence is that he "sought out the intercourse of the most refined." It does not seem aimed at producing what we have come to call "Socratic humility" or "Socratic ignorance."

In response to Aristides' account, Socrates asks Aristides about the rate at which the power left him, and how he acquired it, soliciting from Aristides a testimonial of sorts about Socrates' powers. Aristides says he lost the power little by little, through a process of attrition, resulting, apparently, from a lack of intercourse with Socrates. Yet Aristides also

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[58]Such a comment argues persuasively that Socrates, far from attempting to dissuade Theages, is actually intent on enticing the boy with his stories.

[59]Aristides is rendered laughable because of his inability to excel in speech. Demodocus and Socrates had to refine their method of inquiry so that they would not be laughable on account of bad reasoning. It seems that in some cases laughter may be the proper response to bad argument.

claims he never learned anything from Socrates; he somehow progressed only by "being with" the philosopher, not from any actual instruction from Socrates. Aristides, it seems, would no more be able to substantively define "wisdom" than could young Theages. Socrates, by this account, is able to effect some transient change upon those with whom he has intercourse only as long as they are with him, under his direct supervision--and the most a student can hope for according to Aristides (and in contrast to Socrates' account of the best students) is that they, like Aristides, will not learn anything from the philosopher, but will nonetheless somehow acquire some argumentative power. The benefit is slowly lost once the union is broken, and, again according to Aristides' account, the benefit gained from Socrates is dependent neither upon any explicit instruction from the philosopher, nor on any conscious effort by the student, but somehow--mysteriously--on simple physical proximity. The rate at which the student progresses seems dependent only upon his "closeness" to Socrates. If Theages truly desires to benefit from intercourse with Socrates, he must realize that it requires a close, personal devotion, and that if he leaves the philosopher's company before he is ready, any good he has been done will "melt away," leaving him no better than he is now.

Socrates and Theages

Socrates' account of the activities of the daimon furnishes him with the basis for a likely comparison to Theages' prospects as a student. As the philosopher says,

> Therefore, Theages, such is our intercourse: if it should be dear to the god, you will make very great and rapid progress, but if not, not so. Consider then, whether it would not be safer for you to be educated by one of those who are themselves in charge of the benefit by which they benefit human beings rather than, with me, to act according to what turns out by chance.(130e)

According to the philosopher's account, he has no power over the intellectual progress of those who are with him. He is simply the means by which the god makes known his will. Yet throughout Socrates' accounts of the effects of the daimon upon his friends, the ambiguity posed by his account of the daimon remained. It is something which, although wholly private to the philosopher, is nonetheless made public through his accounts of it. If Socrates had

found Theages, in the course of the dialogue, to be wholly lacking in the nature suited for serious philosophic inquiry, it would have posed little difficulty for him to "interpret" his daimon to warn Theages of the uselessness of intercourse with Socrates. Had this been his aim, and his path, there is little doubt that Demodocus' piety would have ensured his withdrawal of an offer opposed by the god.

Yet Socrates does not claim that the daimon opposes Theages' study. Rather, he asks Theages to consider carefully his own safety; whether he would be safer being educated by one in charge of the benefit he bestows, or whether, with Socrates, to act "according to chance," (since the silence of the daimon is ambiguous). It appears now that the crucial consideration is not whether the intercourse is dear to the god, but whether Theages is willing to take risks.

Theages' response to Socrates' plan reveals that the philosopher's decision not to have the daimon refuse Theages was correct. Theages answers that Socrates and he should make trial of the daimon by keeping company with each other. If the daimon does not prohibit their intercourse, this will be best, but if it does,

> then at that time we shall immediately deliberate on what we ought to do--whether we shall keep company with someone else, or whether we will placate the divine thing that comes to you with prayers, and sacrifices, and in whatever other way the diviners prescribe.(131a)

Theages' response indicates that he has understood something about the daimon, and about education. His response is reminiscent of Socrates' response to the daimon: if it opposes them, they will deliberate about what to do, whether to obey it straightaway, or try to placate it with various remedies conventionally held to be pious and fitting to a god. The boy who had earlier professed his desire to be a tyrant has been educated to a point where he willingly subjects himself to a demonic power which will rule his intercourse with Socrates in an absolutely tyrannical way--this is the most visible result of his having heard, in great detail, of the power of the daimon. Demodocus is reassured, and commands Socrates not to oppose the boy any longer, assuring the philosopher that what the boy says is "well-spoken." Socrates, apparently unwilling to "resist" any longer the combined efforts of father and son, answers simply "if it seems that's the way it has to be done, then that's the way we'll do."

VII. A Final Word

The Theages is throughout a manifestation of Socrates' wisdom, of his claim that all he knows is erotika. It is in defense of his claim to possess only a "certain small subject of knowledge" that Socrates initiates what is arguably the most detailed report of his daimon in the Platonic corpus, although it is an account designed for the special purpose of introducing a promising student to the disciplin of study with the philosopher. The dialogue thus reveals both Socrates' methods of examining a potential student and his terms of acceptance. In the course of the discussion we are made witness to Socrates' extraordinarily politic manner of dealing with the troubled relationship of love, and to his uncanny ability to divine both the nature of a young boy, and the cause of his father's anxiety.

Through examination of Theages, in response to his father's concern about his "not ignoble" but nonetheless "risky" desire, Socrates discerns that Theages' desire "to become wise" is, practically speaking, a desire to rule. His handling of Theages shows him able to discern precisely what the boy wants behind his vaguely expressed desire "to become wise," and to temper that desire into a politically salutary force. The various kinds of rule identified point to a type of rule desired by Theages by the time their discussion concludes--that is, rule by the philosopher. It is, according to both Theages and Socrates' understandings of politics, the furthest removed from tyranny: for Socrates will rule over a willing subject, and he will rule in Theages' best interest. Theages, a boy who desired to study with the sophists, is impressed enough with what he has seen of Socrates to subsequently desire only that he be allowed to study with the philosopher. Socrates plays upon the boy's ardour, tantalizing him and testing him to see just how strongly Theages is attracted. Through his masterful seduction Socrates reconciles father and son, providing both with a satisfactory resolution to their conflict.

Yet although the philosopher's rule of Theages would seem furthest removed from tyranny, Socrates relates a series of incidents designed to convince Theages that if he desires to study with the philosopher he must willingly submit himself to the absolute--not to say

tyrannical--authority of Socrates' daimon, and that if he hopes to retain the benefit this association offers him he must be prepared to stay with Socrates for as long as the daimon deems necessary. Nonetheless, so impressive is the philosopher's ability to divine what Theages truly wants, and so effective is his elucidation of these desires, so impressive is the philosopher's skill in argument, and so securely does he capture Theages' fancy that the boy disavows any interest in studying with anyone other than Socrates, despite the fact that this young would-be tyrant originally wanted only to learn skill in argument from a sophist.

Socrates' accounts of the power of the daimon are apparently meant to elaborate his claim that all he knows is erotiká. This knowledge, presumably grounded in whatever understanding of his own erotic nature he enjoys, is not discussed in rational terms, but rather is captured in the image of a daimonic force, and is on display throughout the dialogue. It is perhaps not possible, even were it desirable, for Socrates to give a reasoned account of his loves and hates to those who wish to be with him. Yet Socrates' tales of the daimonic power may be more than simply his poetic justifications for his actions, conveniently rendering them unquestionable. He may, ultimately, himself lack a reasoned account of his own eros, finding it every bit as mysterious as others find his accounts of the daimon.

Yet while Socrates does not elaborate a reasoned account of his erotic knowledge, emphasizing instead the comprehensive power of his daimonic voice, his handling of Theages throughout the dialogue reveals his professed expertise. He is apparently able to discern both surely and quickly what Theages truly desires, and to gauge the initial strength of these desires. Yet, even more, through his coyness he is able to heighten Theages' desire to study with him, to the point where the boy professes disinterest in any other companion. By understanding the power of love, and by divining the particular nature of each person's loves, the philosopher proves himself capable of ruling absolutely those who love him. And this is done, mysteriously, through his daimon, the manifestation of his erotic knowledge. This, then, is the "small subject of knowledge" which constitutes the philosopher's wisdom.

Socrates claims in the Republic that he was saved for philosophy by the daimonic sign which he alone--or perhaps one other--can claim.[60] This claim is strangely similar to his professed expertise in matters of erotic love, for as he claims, he knows more about this than anyone who ever has lived or is living now. His unparallelled wisdom in erotika, it seems, may reasonably be linked with his peculiarly personal daimonic voice. It is the amazing force of his eroticism, of the strength of his own loves and hates, and his understanding of this power--which may, in the final analysis, be an understanding of the manifestations of love, rather than a comprehensive account of the nature of eros itself--which together constitute his wisdom, and which is manifested in his recourse to a daimon that prohibits and warns, and that forbids and denies what he does not love. This, it seems, is the philosopher's wisdom.

[60]Thus, it seems the daimon is not to be understood simply as a mysterious "power" which accrues as one philosophizes, or that all who philosophize more or less successfully possess, to a greater or lesser extent, their own daimon.

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