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THE DISQUIETING ABSENCE
or How to Turn an Epicurean into a Full-blown Socratic

Recife
2022

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Dissertação apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia da Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, como requisito parcial para a obtenção do título de mestre em Filosofia.

Área de concentração: Ciências Humanas.

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Não tenho pressa. Pressa de quê?
Não têm pressa o sol e a lua: estão certos.
Ter pressa é crer que a gente passa adiante das pernas,
Ou que, dando um pulo, salta por cima da sombra.
Não; não sei ter pressa.
Se estendo o braço, chego exatamente aonde o meu braço chega —
Nem um centímetro mais longe.
Toco só onde toco, não aonde penso.
Só me posso sentar aonde estou.
E isto faz rir como todas as verdades absolutamente verdadeiras,
Mas o que faz rir a valer é que nós pensamos sempre noutra coisa,
E vivemos vadios da nossa realidade.
E estamos sempre fora dela porque estamos aqui.
(CAEIRO, 1919)

RESUMO

Nesta dissertação dou conta do meu trajeto ao longo duma pesquisa que começou com Lucrécio e terminou em Sócrates. Nela conto a estória da minha acidental descoberta duma ausência inquietante no seio do epicurismo. Infelizmente, Epicuro oferece certezas onde claramente deviam estar dúvidas. Para testar se será assim ou não, leio e comento então a famosa Carta a Meneceu. O meu objetivo aí é retirar dela o que Epicuro pensa sobre a filosofia enquanto tal. Depois, para contrastar e contra-evidenciar com outra forma de pensar filosofia, conto de seguida a minha descoberta do Sócrates platônico enquanto personagem modelo duma filosofia acima de tudo performática. Para tal, leio e comento a *Apologia de Sócrates*, retirando dela aquelas que me parecem ser as grandes lições socráticas do seu modo de fazer filosofia. Segue-se então uma apresentação mais detalhada e técnica do método socrático, mostrando como funciona na prática. Por fim, conto de como encontrei paz na filosofia performática do Sócrates personagem, pondo assim um ponto final à minha inquietação inicial.

Palavras chave: Epicuro; Lucrécio; Sócrates; Platão; filosofia performática.

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I try to make sense of a research project that started with Lucretius and ended up with Socrates. In it, I tell the story of my accidental discovery of a disquieting absence within Epicureanism. To my dismay, Epicurus offers certainties where there clearly ought to be doubts. So in order to uproot the problem, I then read and offer my comment on Epicurus' famous *Letter to Menoeceus*. At this point, my objective is to extract from this letter what Epicurus thinks about philosophy as such. Then, as counter-evidence of another way of thinking about philosophy, I tell about my discovery of the Platonic Socrates as a model-character of a philosophy that is above all performative. To accomplish this, I then read and offer my comments on Plato's *Apology*, extracting from it those that seem to me to be the great Socratic lessons of his way of doing philosophy. This is then followed by a more detailed and technical presentation of the Socratic method, showing how it works in practice. Finally, I finish my tale telling about how I found peace in Socrates' performative philosophy, thus putting an end to my initial disquietness.

Keywords: Epicurus; Lucretius; Socrates; Plato; performative philosophy.

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1 INTRO: THE WHY AND HOW

'Unusual'. Yes. 'Unexpected'. Probably. 'Unprecedented'. Not quite. Yes, this is not the typical *run-of-the-mill* dissertation. Yes, it is not true to form, so it is very likely to break some expectations. And yet, it is still a way. Maybe not *the right way*, but certainly *my way*. So before we start our conversation, allow me some words on *the why* and *how* this is written.

Howard S. Becker, on *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*, breaking down the many difficulties you may have to face when putting your thoughts to paper, says that "[w]hen you can't find the One Right Way to say [whatever you have to say], talk about why you can't" (2007, p. 65). And he even quotes someone[1] doing precisely that. So, even though unusual, unexpected, this is clearly not unprecedented. Moreover, and for reasons that will be explained later, this is also what happened to me. Suffice to say that I had a hint of what I was looking for, but no complete picture to make it a neat round story where everything ties together as whole. So this is *the why*.

As for *the how*, here's the interesting part. I confess I feel a bit out of place in the academy. I don't feel I quite belong, as people there often seem to be striving for a kind of thoroughness that always eludes me. For instance, when I read what many academics write, their texts often sound foreign, even cryptic. Not as failure, rather as an aesthetic. So I'm not playing the contrarian card against that kind of writing, just acknowledging it doesn't fit me. Look, I can even fathom why many end up expressing themselves like that. There are subjects where the level of analysis required to dive into them in all their complexity demands an attention to detail where no amount of caution seems enough to provide the much-needed but never fulfilled careful comprehensiveness that such subjects require. My point being that it is a worthy approach, with its own strengths and applications. Where appropriate, suited to the subject or the people discussing it, it's definitely the best approach and the One Right Way that should be followed. Nevertheless, it does not suit me. It never feels right.

Maybe I'm not cut from the same mold as most academics. But, hey, I'm not saying this to imply I'm somewhat unique, more deserving, and thus special. Nothing of the sort. More in the sense of not being properly suited to a certain task, like me not being cut from the same mold as most professional basketball players are. For the most part, the best in court are usually

1 Bennett Berger, on *The Survival of a Counterculture* (1981).

tall, well-built, strong. Taking these as models, then I'm simply not as gifted. This being true for basketball, probably the same reasoning applies to the academy. 'Oh, poor me…' No, no, no, no. I'm not playing the victim; just acknowledging my limitations.

For instance, I have a terrible memory. I may read one thing, connect it with another, even think 'oh, this is important', jotting down further connections and their implications. But however hard I try to enlarge the scope of my understanding, I always end up short on thoroughness. Inevitably, little by little, at a steady pace, all details gradually fade into a blissful forgetfulness. Part of me thinks that if philosophy were like Basketball in being a game, Socrates would probably cut me from the all-stars roster for not having what it takes to win[2]. Anyway, I joke because I've long made peace with my shortcomings. Like Fernando Sabino, the Brazilian novelist, I try to make a dance move out of my tumbling, a ladder out of my fears, and a meaningful encounter out of everything I'm trying to reach[3] (2006, p. 200). But I digress. What were we talking about? Oh, right, my limitations.

The point I'm trying to make is actually rather simple. Though I admire and respect my academic peers, I'm not like them, and I'm ok with that. I'm aware of own shortcomings, so I can't and won't pretend I can punch above my weight. For this reason, you won't see me here trying to look smarter, putting on a façade of intellectual refinement that I clearly do not possess. This is *ground zero* for me. So what you'll find ahead it's just me playing my part as I take upon myself the challenge to be true to my craft, a craft I can only master by directly practicing it. How? Doing precisely this, telling the tale of what I learned about my craft while practicing the craft of telling that tale.

Luckily, I actually love to write. Like a child playing with building blocks, I find joy in tinkering with words, trying them out in different sentences until I find the right combination to say the things I want. So despite the little I may have to say, I'm a sucker for knowing the best way to say it. My running joke with myself is that if had anything to say, any thoughts of my own, perhaps I could even consider a career as a writer. As it stands, I use this passion instead to kindle the same joy in the hearts of others. I teach writing to those who have more to say, but can't overcome on their own whatever prevents them to do so. And as a writing tutor, I have

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2 Cf. *Republic VI*, 494b, "good memory […] belong[s] to the philosophic nature" (PLATO, 1997a, p. 1116).

3 "Fazer da queda um passo de dança, do medo uma escada, […] da procura um encontro", in *O Encontro Marcado*.

grown more and more concerned about the way things are said. Because of this, as I learn different approaches and techniques, I then try to integrate them into my own writing.

So what I'm saying is that I also want to turn this dissertation into a much-needed proof of concept of my own writing concerns. I want to write it well in the sense that I'm not only accurate, but also clear. Because of this, I have designed my text in such a way that before you can enjoy it fully, I have to explain how things are set. Thus my need to tell you about *the how*. So here's how.

My dissertation has two layers. One is the main story, where most of the philosophical action occurs. In this layer, I'm having this conversation with someone a bit like me, curious, but not particularly knowledgeable. Together we try to learn more about the issues at hand. So this text is mostly directed to the general public. And then there is another, underlying layer, which is placed as footnotes to add the much necessary dissertative rigor. Here is where I talk directly to the professors, explaining why I'm justified in putting forth whatever I have said above.

Now think with me. Footnotes, as well as endnotes, by definition are clearly second-rate citizens in that particular textual universe. After all, they are annotations at the bottom of the page, chapter, or even book. They clearly have been relegated to that spot for a reason. Or, to put it the other way around, they're not in the main text for a reason. They are maybe like an afterthought, perhaps a reminder to prevent possible misreadings. They may represent a last-minute addition providing the missing details that didn't, or couldn't, find their way onto the primary text. Or they may contain the kind of encyclopedic information you may want to check from time to time to feel assured you are not being deceived[4]. Be it as it may, I suggest that you take them for what they are, leaving them for later, after you have done reading the main story[5]. Otherwise, you may end up losing the main thrust, sacrificing readability for pseudo-thoroughness. But never mind what I think. If reading the footnotes on the spot is your thing, please go ahead and do as you please. In the end, whatever path you take, I hope everything ties up together.

Anyway, the *how* wouldn't be complete without this last bit. Once, in a previous life of mine, before studying philosophy at the university, I held a position as a translator, and I was

4 Sometimes I myself wonder how can I be so sure about some of the things I write. When that happens, in my mind's eye I see xkcd's comic character Cueball, as the *Wikipedian Protester*, holding on a sign with the telling words "Citation Needed" ("Wikipedian Protester", 2007). I then add the details accordingly.

5 Unless something bothers you at the precise moment you notice those little nasty numbers. If that's why you followed me here, you now know exactly what I mean.

very serious about it. As I'm no different from my fellow translators, I'm pretty confident in their work. I take it to be not just as good, but oftentimes even better than mine. This I think is justified, taking it to be true on very pragmatic grounds.

The thing is, I'm not well-versed in the ancient languages, neither Greek nor Latin. I have at most an instrumental knowledge of them, but no more. And as you probably agree, there's no way I can fake it until I make it just to look better in the picture. Actually, I would merely be fooling myself if I thought I could go by with just a cursory knowledge of each. Because, truth is, to properly translate something you have to have a more than okay knowledge of the languages you're translating to and from. So even though I may know my whereabouts in this particular field, I'm not properly equipped to translate it from either Greek or Latin. All in all, what I'm saying is that I prefer to trust the work of those whose knowledge and experience makes them more suited than I to do a proper translation. Therefore, I have no qualms in using the translations of others, taking them as good representatives of the original texts I'm quoting. If lucky, having several to choose from, I even allow myself to pick the bits of each that sound better to my ears. Because, in the end, I'm not here to discuss neither the quality of these translations nor their accuracy. It's not my goal to be splitting hairs with regards to this or that choice of words. I'm happy *to get the gist of it*, as all that matters to me is the main direction to where the text is pointing.

So not as a philologist, but simply as a *wannabe* philosopher, I'm here to share my journey. I want to tell you how I stumbled upon a problem, and what I found about it. But aside from that, one thing's for sure: it won't be a smooth ride. Since I only have a general direction as to where I'm heading, I'll probably make a lot of mistakes. They are expected. And that is ok. After all, it's no secret that while learning a craft, failure is an important part of the process. And I'm here not as an expert, only as an apprentice. What I have is but a wish, that of mastering philosophy. Take that into account from here on when you think about *the how* and *why*.

2 THE DISQUIETING ABSENCE

Come, sit here by my side. Lend me an ear, for I want to share with you something. It has been bothering me for quite a while. Hear me out, for maybe you can help. I'm about to tell you a story, one that I hope will shed some light on why I'm worried.

The thing is: when I started my research project, I was excited with the idea of diving into Lucretius and Epicureanism. By extension, I would also dip my feet onto Hellenistic philosophy as a whole. I had the perfect plan. Or so I thought.

Though a bit naive at the time, my idea then was to try to pull Lucretius under the massive weight of Epicurus. My philosophical task would be that of lending him a much-needed scholarly hand to make him stand on his own. For I was pretty confident he deserved greater intellectual respect, being more than simply Epicurus' understudy.

Thus motivated, on the following months I tried to read everything I could get my hands on regarding the topic. I knew I had to if I were to make the best possible scholarly case for my *thesis*. And if *thesis* sounds a bit too grandiose, that was really my thinking at the time. I recognize now that I was being if not too idealistic at least a bit hasty. But *naïveté* also has its charms. In any case, one thing was certain: I had to read, and to read a lot, in order to truly understand the problem. So I brazenly pushed forward. And *voilà*! Soon enough I felt I had made considerable progress. I was hopeful, for it seemed to me I had now a much more solid case for what started as a mere intuition.

But then reality caught on. Something unusual happened. To further my knowledge, and even experience of Epicureanism, I decided to start a study group on the topic. It would be completely focused on reading and discussing all of Epicurus' extant writings. This group, however, would have a wonderful tiny extra. You see, since at the time I was living in Recife, where it's always sunny, I imagined we would hold our meetings on a charming little garden, one out of many throughout the campus. Excited with the prospect of experiencing Epicureanism in its most natural setting, i.e., a garden, I even pictured having bread and water[1] to accompany our sessions. Brilliant! I was thrilled.

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1 This would be a kind of proverbial *cherry on top* to our meetings. We could then put to the test Epicurus' claim that "bread and water confer the highest possible pleasure when brought to hungry lips" (1925, p. 657).

So after putting the whole thing together on the following days, I scheduled the first meeting and made it known to the world[2]. Delighted, I eagerly looked forward for our first meeting. At last, the long awaited day finally arrived. I woke up all pumped up, going through the *to-do* list for the meeting, printing several copies of Epicurus' maxims. With a big bottle of water under my arm, I headed to the bakery. Everything checked. Finally ready, I headed to the appointed meeting place. *I was happy as a clam*[3].

There at last, I took a long deep breath, and finally relaxed. Since I was in a garden and the invitation was to come in peace to make peace with nature, I happily awaited for my fellow Epicureans. The garden was blooming, so I was surrounded by that kind of beauty only nature knows how to provide. The sights, the scents, even the sounds, all seemed perfect. But then minutes begot hours. Suddenly, a whole afternoon had passed and no one showed up. In an Epicurean mood, I optimistically assumed that maybe I wasn't very effective in getting the word out.

Back to the drawing board I did. I rewrote the invitation, made a nicer a poster, and spread the word once more. Accepting whatever fate had in store, I awaited. The next meeting day arrived, and I once more went through the previous to-do list. I got there again, still excited — and again nothing changed. This kept happening week after week, throughout the rest of the semester. But hey, it wasn't that bad. At least I got to enjoy a whole string of beautiful afternoons, studying by myself while contemplating the beautiful spectacle of nature. That, however, was not my original intention.

As you by now might expect, I was not particularly happy with this outcome. In truth, I felt a bit disappointed even. One thing led to the other and that got me thinking, "what on earth happened?" I'm fully aware that I'm not by no means a popular person, but I'm also not that unpopular either — at least not to the extent of making every single one of my colleagues refuse such a friendly invitation. In any case, by then I was starting to question if I was really the one to blame for all these lonely meetings. Maybe, just maybe, some other piece of the puzzle was missing. Then at last it hit me, as I finally crossed that philosophically troubling *Rubicon*. "Yeah", I ended up telling myself. "Perhaps the fault lies on Epicureanism"[4].

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2 I shared the idea between my colleagues, and mailed a colorful poster through my department's newsletter.

3 Cf. Roger Crisp's *Haydn and the Oyster* (2009, pp. 24–25).

4 To be completely honest, I cannot really know *why* my colleagues ignored my invitation. I have no way to tell if it had to do with whatever they think about Epicureanism, or if it was just a generalized indifference to whatever was happening on campus. Be it as it may, it really doesn't matter, for that's beside the point. Because even if based on actual events, this story is mostly a literary device to cast a light on some of my own doubts on Epicureanism. Truth is, I'm not comfortable with it. I have serious doubts anyone can become better at philosophy

2.1 SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE GARDEN?

Before you even ask, let me tell you what this whole tale has been about. No, these are not the ramblings of a once happy but now disgruntled Epicurean. Actually, if anything, I've now grown more respect for Epicurus and his doctrine. Not only he managed to get a lot of people onboard his ideas, as he also founded a school that lasted for centuries[5]. Most of us would be happy for a small fraction of such an achievement. Nevertheless, I won't let myself become so intoxicated with admiration that I will turn a blind eye to its most glaring philosophical problems. Something feels weird with Epicurus' garden. So what seems to be the trouble?

Is it because its philosophical tradition was broken? After all, it's no secret that there are no living Epicureans today, at least not as part of an uninterrupted tradition that really dates back to Epicurus. As such, its teachings and practices were lost, and with it most of what truly made it fascinating and compelling. This, however, cannot be the reason. If it were, other similarly broken traditions, such as Platonism, or even Aristotelianism, would also experience a similar fate. But no, theirs still attract plenty of interest, even among youngsters. So it must be something else entirely.

Is it the lack of foundational texts? It's also no secret that most of what was written by Epicurus is now completely lost. And he loved to write[6]! Anyway, when all there is left is but 3 letters, 2 sets of maxims, and his last will, maybe there's just too little to excite our contemporary unquenchable thirst for novelty. Yet again this cannot be the reason. By that token, the same would happen to all so-called Presocratic philosophers. Their known body of work is in

---

just by learning it from Epicurus. So, if this story is like a finger pointing towards something, I invite you to look beyond the finger. Now that you know *the gist of it*, take my words as you would these from Fernando Pessoa, and imagine that "Everything that I dream of or go through, / Whatever fails or in me finishes, / It's like a veranda / Over still some other thing. / *That thing* is what is beautiful" (1942, p. 236, my translation and emphasis). So, if to you this connection is unclear or even dubious, you're probably right. But since that is not the main point, take it instead as a crude but well-meaning attempt at creating a more compelling narrative.

5 Epicurus founded "his school in Athens in 306 BCE" (STARKSTEIN, 2018, p. 20). It was still growing in influence by the time of Lucretius in the first century BCE. After all, Epicureanism thrives better in an *end of days* scenario like the fall of the Roman Republic (or that of the subjugation of the Greek city-states at the hands of the Macedonians). And though losing much of its appeal after Augustus' rise to power and the establishment of the long lasting *Pax Augusta*, the "Epicureans continued [with their] model of the school as a lifelong brotherhood down until their disappearance about 200 C.E." (COLLINS, 2000, p. 216). All in all, Epicureanism "was popular in ancient times for at least six hundred years" (BINMORE, 2020, p. 6). Quite a feat.

6 "In Raphael's famous fresco *The School of Athens*, Epicurus is depicted […] with his head bowed over a book, in the act of writing. Tradition recognizes him as the father of 300 books" (SANTINI, 2020, n.p.). If so, that's a lot of writing.

most cases a literal fragment. But their thinking still commands much debate and interest. This is definitely not it.

So what is the problem really? Why is Epicureanism so unappealing today? I have no definite answer yet. If anything, I have a hazy feeling as if Epicurus' teachings, clever as they are, lack an important *something*. The exact what is still unclear, but if I was hard-pressed to guess what that something is I would be very tempted to say that *philosophy* is what seems to be missing. Yes, you heard it right. For despite its many qualities, Epicurus' sayings are not truly philosophical. They are interesting for sure, either for practical or historical reasons. After all, there are still many readers today who identify themselves if not with its wholesale doctrine, at least with some part of it.

Be it for its wholly materialistic approach, its highly critical attitude against religion, its emphasis on friendship bonding for community building purposes, there is at least something there that will still resonate with someone's convictions today. Nevertheless, it's important to keep in mind that the problem I have identified only concerns a very particular set of readers. More specifically, those who are mostly interested in philosophy for philosophy's sake. And these readers are usually very picky, especially when it comes to choosing a text for its philosophical content.

This then is what brought me here, this is where I stand. As of now, I want to try to find a satisfying answer as to why Epicureanism fails to excite philosophy students today. If this is indeed the case[7], in order to find the best explanation for why such thing happens, I must check directly with Epicurus. Which means I must read from him so I can try to find out what his actual doctrine is. For solely at that stage will I know directly what his claims are, hopefully ending up closer to his own understanding, and with it a step closer in identifying the source for this particular problem. In practice, this simply means I have to dissect his sayings, putting these under the proverbial *acid test*[8] to weight its proper value[9]. Only then will I be able to assess if Epicurus' teachings are indeed somewhat philosophically lacking. That however is just half way traversed.

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7 It seems safe to assume that it is so, leastwise judging by the low count of specialists working with Epicureanism today. They're so few and far between that you can almost name them all worldwide. That's enough to raise an eyebrow or two.

8 From "the use of nitric acid to determine the gold content of jewelry", this idiom simply means "a severe or crucial test" ("Definition of ACID TEST", 2021)

9 In the *Gorgias*, at 486d, Socrates asks Callicles if, having a soul made of gold, he shouldn't "put that gold to the test". The same reasoning applies to Epicurus' sayings. Though renowned for centuries, they should still be put to the test.

Why? Because first I need to grasp what it means to be *being philosophically lacking*. Only then can I gauge how philosophically lacking it truly is. Which means I need to contrast Epicurus' teachings with someone else's, someone who is universally acclaimed as undeniably philosophical. And for that I won't I have to go far from Epicurus' own garden. All I have to do is to roll back a few years, going back in time just enough to find what I'm looking for. It's as simple as calling to the stand he who by most accounts is the embodiment of philosophy itself—the tirelessly questioning ever-ignorant Socrates. What else could be more philosophical than his own attitude? But never mind that now. As I said, *only if I'm correct in my assumption*. Truth is, I'm not there yet.

Well, enough is enough. As of now both you and I are still here, at the so to say *entrance hall* of our conversation. For now this will have to do. True, as a map for what's to come it's still rather rough and way too sketchy. Nevertheless, one thing's for sure: I won't pretend knowing now more than I actually do. Yes, I'm assuming a lot, following what amounts to nothing more than a mere intuition. But, hey, if philosophy is a craft, and a craft I very much want to master[10], intuitions are part and parcel of its practice. They may prove themselves valuable starting points for further developments. They may; or may not. Because, truth is, intuitions are just that, intuitions. They can also amount to no more than smoke and mirrors. So, who knows, maybe I misinterpreted all. Perhaps my invitation to a pleasant Epicurean afternoon failed because *I* was indeed the problem. Who knows?

Anyway, if you're interested in knowing how the whole thing unfolds, come and follow me. It's about time to hear what Epicurus has to say for himself, now that I have philosophically called his teachings into question. After all, if I'm to be proven wrong[11], Epicurus will definitely have to have a say. So, with that out of the way, allow me one last request. Enjoy yourself. YOLO[12]. I'm certain Epicurus would agree.

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10 As this is to be my master's dissertation on philosophy, I hope to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that I've truly mastered its craft.

11 Out of sympathy for the Epicureans, part of me wants to be wrong. And if that turns out to be the case, I will still be rather happy with myself. By now I have been doing this long enough to know that, with the right frame of mind, being wrong is actually quite good. Success without failure is just luck. Only those who go wrong and acknowledge it end up getting things right knowing why they are right.

12 YOLO stands for *You Only Live Once*.

3 ACCORDING TO EPICURUS

So here starts my quest for answers. Before me there are already some disquieting questions. What makes Epicurean philosophy so unappealing nowadays? Is there something missing? What for Epicurus is philosophy anyway? The shortest path to the answers I'm seeking is to ask him directly. So in order to do just that, I will have to quote from him, checking with him his actual teachings. After all, I can only in good conscience say that *according to Epicurus* the answer is such and such if, well, such an answer is indeed in accordance with his sayings. You get the point, right?

Anyways, this being the goal, there's no better way to accomplish my quest than to probe his *Letter to Menoeceus*. Why a letter and not some other more lengthy treatise on the subject? Well, for practical reasons only. As I have mentioned before, not much survived that we can call Epicurus' own. So I'm choosing this particular letter for no other reason than knowing that from the remaining authoritative texts, this is the best suited to answer the questions at hand. In the end, it's just a very pragmatic choice. In any event, and putting aside any such limitation, if little is all I have, I'll have to do with the little I was given. And that's precisely what I'll do. So with that out of the way, it's about time we start our journey. So forgive me the pun, but let's *scroll* together through his letter. Let us check what Epicurus has to say. Let us find what for him *philosophy* has to offer.

3.1 'THIS, MENOECEUS, IS WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO'

3.1.1 Philosophy as the way, happiness the goal

Right at the outset of this famous *Letter to Menoeceus*[1], Epicurus, after greeting[2] he whom most probably was a disciple of his[3], makes a bold claim about philosophy: it has *to be practiced*. In his words:

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1 Sometimes more liberally titled as *Letter on Happiness*.

2 "Epicurus to Menoeceus, greetings" (1994, p. 28).

3 Most sources I had access to refer to him only as Epicurus' disciple. Some go as far as saying he was young (*St. Paul and Epicurus*, 1954; *When You Kant Figure It Out, Ask a Philosopher: Timeless Wisdom for Modern Dilemmas*, 2019). Nevertheless, while it's safe to assume that Menoeceus was indeed Epicurus' disciple, not much more can be said about him. Young or old, it really doesn't matter anyway.

> Let no one delay the study of philosophy while young nor weary of it when old. For no one is either too young or too old for the health of the soul (1994, p. 28).

So its study, he says, should neither be delayed when one is young nor be thought of as a burden when one is old. After all, everyone, young or old, needs a healthy mind. We're only three lines in, and already Epicurus has linked philosophy with mental well-being. But there's more.

His next step is to again imply a similar causal connection, establishing now a link between philosophy and happiness. So, to Epicurus, someone

> who says either that the time for philosophy has not yet come or that it has [already] passed is like someone who says that [either] the time for happiness has not yet come or that it has [already] passed (1994, p. 28).

What this means is that just as foolish as it is to think we're no longer or not yet suited to be happy, it's equally foolish to likewise think about philosophy. Which sounds pretty straightforward and seemingly uncontroversial.

But think about it. What has been said so far is no doubt appealing—at least for philosophy nerds. However, the implied connection between philosophy and those positive outcomes is not that obvious. Taken by themselves, both assertions are simply strong claims. As X is to Y, Y is to Z. So, without letting Epicurus' powerful rhetoric[4] cloud our judgment, let us now pause for a moment and take a brief look onto the way he is actually arguing.

First, notice that he simply presents two successive claims, both following the same pattern. These, in turn, become connected, mostly by their shared nature of being of similar construction and in succession. For this is almost a study-case of parallel construction. Thus they become connected, thereby both conveying a powerful idea. Together they loosely translate to

4 There can be no doubt that Epicurus was a powerful rhetorician, as "the evidence [for it] is excellent" (DEWITT, 1954, p. 46). For according to tradition, in his younger years "[h]e was enrolled as a student of the Platonist Pamphilus" (1954, p. 45), so "it is impossible that Epicurus could have escaped an introduction to this study" (1954, p. 46). It's also known that later he was also a student of Nausiphanes of Teos, who, "though a Democritean, made a specialty of rhetoric" (1954, p. 46). It's even said that Epicurus may have once been "a teacher of rhetoric for a time" as an easy way to make a living, probably during his stay at Colophon (1954, p. 47). Nevertheless, if these were not enough to prove this point, the definitive evidence of Epicurus' masterful skill in rhetoric is this very same *Letter to Menoeceus*. For according to the much revered Epicurean scholar Hermann Usener, in it Epicurus shows a tight command of the language he is using, closely following none other than Isocrates' model rhetoric (2010, p. xli)! DeWitt, another important Epicurean scholar, even adds that this letter "deserves a place among the minor treatises of Greek literature because of the grace and limpidity of the composition" (1954, p. 46). All in all, what this shows is that Epicurus did indeed knew how to entice his listeners through the power of his words.

something like ‘philosophy is everyone’s way to a healthy and happy mind’. For just as no one’s neither too young nor too old to take good care of their soul, neither are they too young nor too old to strive for their own happiness. Which in a way seems to make perfect sense. But does it really?

Fortunately for us, Epicurus, as if intuitively recognizing the need to clarify this connection, adds *the why* for his assumption. So, to him,

> both when young and old a man must study philosophy, that as he grows old he may be young in blessings through the grateful recollection of what has been, and that in youth he may be old as well, since he will know no fear of what is to come (1926, p. 83).

So let’s break this apart. The reason is thus twofold. And to make this twofold connection clearer, consider the following two concrete examples. (1) First imagine an old someone that had always practiced philosophy. If philosophy is truly what best guides us to a healthy and happy mind, by putting it to practice it would naturally follow that this old someone would by now have been well acquainted with making the healthier and happiest choices in life. Hence, this one’s life would thus comprise so many good memories, these becoming then an important source of happy and healthy remembrances. Because of this, this person would retain a youthful character, still looking forward towards whatever their life had in store. Which seems reasonable, right?

Now imagine the opposite. (2) A young another who somehow had already met philosophy. Notice that regardless of her or his lack of experience, philosophy would still prove useful to them. In their case by providing a reliable roadmap to happier choices in life. So from this it follows that it also pays to study philosophy when young. Again, reasonable enough.

All in all, (2) young or (1) old, either by keeping one’s youth when already old or by making another seemingly older when still young in years, both end up happy by putting philosophy into practice. Hence philosophy is indeed the way, as it guides both to happiness. And with this the link between both has now been established. Satisfied? Even if you are, I’m not. Well, not entirely, not yet at least. And you know why?

Because the above also implies that happiness is the ultimate guiding principle for all action. But is it really? Is happiness really the goal? No doubt, thinks Epicurus. And the reason why is painfully obvious. We just have to notice that “if [happiness] is present we have every-

thing and if it is absent we do everything in order to have it" back (1994, p. 28). Now, if we are generous with Epicurus' way of thinking, this seems plausible enough.

Ask yourself: what else would you need if you were genuinely happy? I mean, to be happy presupposes a fulfillment, the satisfaction of whatever need you have. Because if you have a need, you are not really happy. Remember: to be happy you have to be fulfilled. Conversely, if not fulfilled, you cannot be happy. So, if happiness in that sense is a state of being where one has satisfied all needs, logically the truly happy person no longer has any need. Well, at least within that state of happiness. Ok, at face value, that kind of works. It is tight enough.

But what if you were to add that no one would really be in such a state unless they were also sure about their future happiness? Well, even then the same reason would still stand. For either way, happy now or assured of still being happy in the future, in both cases one would still be driven by happiness. Again, tight enough.

Now imagine the opposite. What would happen if you lived a life of misery? What would happen if your life was always far from happy? Wouldn't you try everything in your power to get out of that state of misery, and be at least somewhat happier? If you asked me, I most certainly would. And I'm not alone. In a way, this is as natural as being alive. Anyway, this just means that happiness is still the main drive for action. And, as before, this example also spells out what Epicurus wants to convey, i.e., that happiness is indeed the goal. As of now, everything kind of makes sense. But Epicurus is just starting. We have only read this letter's first paragraph.

3.1.1.1 What is philosophy doing here?

Before moving on and following on Epicurus' actual footsteps[5], let's first consider the kind of work this bit of text is here doing. At first, it's tempting to take it as a mere introduction. But that's not exactly what's happening. In a way, this whole paragraph is more like an *abstract*. That is, instead of just preparing for what will come next, Epicurus is actually mapping out his whole project. The idea is to first establish the grounds for what will come next, namely Epicu-

5 This is a passing reference to Lucretius' opening of Book III of *De Rerum Natura*. There, in a beautiful demonstration of true reverence for his master's teachings, he says that "in [Epicurus'] *footsteps* [he will] now tread boldly" (2001a, p. 68, my emphasis). So, like Lucretius, I want us to closely tread the actual path lay down on this letter, rigorously following what Epicurus truly says and means.

rus' very own fourfold guide to the undisturbed[6] and happy life. But precisely because this whole thing acts as an abstract, some brief remarks are in order. So let's now turn our attention to what has been claimed so far.

In a way, everything seems pretty much uncontroversial. Many of us, especially those who are committed to studying philosophy, don't even blink upon hearing Epicurus' suggestion that philosophy is pretty much a synonym to mental health. But upon further inspection, one starts to wonder. Is this all philosophy is really about? Just a tool for a healthy and happy mind?

Wait. Don't yet rush to conclusions. I'm not trying to downplay the importance of happiness. I'm actually very partial to Epicurus' argument that happiness is the main drive for action. After all, who of us would like to live a life without the promise of any happy experience? But at the same time I also feel there's something awkward in that assumption. I mean, does my practicing philosophy makes me happy, or am I happy because I practice philosophy?[7] As of now, I'm in no position to argue for one or the other, though I confess I'm somewhat fond of the latter. Anyway, this is still a discussion to come. For now, let us at least keep this on the back of our minds. Who knows? Maybe it will prove insightful later. That being said, let us now return to Epicurus.

3.1.2 The path: learning the disease, applying the cure

Having identified happiness as the highest goal, and taking this to be self-evident, Epicurus wastes no time and immediately assumes his role of a schoolmaster[8]. He urges his reader to keep in mind those "things which [he] used unceasingly to commend", for these, he adds, should be considered "the first principles of the good life" (1926, p. 83). What is stated here cannot be in any way downplayed. For here he is laying out the ground for what will come next, that is, that he will now put forward the fundamental tenets that cannot but lead to the best of lives. Yet

6 Ataraxia (*ἀταραξία*). More on that later.

7 This is no mere play on words. The first half corresponds to what Epicurus argues, i.e., that the practice of philosophy makes way for what provides happiness. Which is to say that philosophy, by mapping out the true causes for happiness, allows one to make wiser and thus happier choices. But notice that philosophy itself is not a cause for happiness. And that is precisely what the second half tries to convey, i.e., the viewpoint that philosophical practice is in itself *the* cause for happiness. Perhaps I could make here an appeal to Aristotle, as what's troubling me is precisely Epicurus' apparent obliviousness to this distinction, thus making philosophy an efficient rather than a final cause. That however is not fair to Epicurus. At this point in the text, that kind of conclusion would just feel rushed.

8 "According to Hermippus [of Smyrna], […] [Epicurus] started as a schoolmaster, but on coming across the works of Democritus turned eagerly to philosophy" (LAERTIUS; EPICURUS, 1925, p. 531).

it's also insinuated here that these principles are not to be taken as mere thoughts on the subject. In truth, they are practical instructions of such an importance that Epicurus even points out that he time and again have entrusted these to his students. Like a hammer hammering in, nailing by repetition, Epicurus hammers these teachings into his students' minds[9]. But I digress.

Anyhow, Epicurus immediately follows this admonition to practice discussing those that would later be known as *the four remedies*[10]. These, as best summed up by Philodemus[11], are:

> Don't fear god,
> Don't worry about death;
> What is good is easy to get, and
> What is terrible is easy to endure[12] (1994, p. vi).

These four are then ways to address four distinct fears that cannot but prevent us from being truly happy. Which again is reasonable enough. For ultimately we cannot truly enjoy life's pleasures if we're always either anxious or dreadful about what's to come. Be it (1) by being frightened by gods' arbitrary punishments, or (2) by life's eventual demise; or even fearful of (3) not being able to sustain oneself, or of (4) not being brave enough to face life's harsh but unavoidable miseries, it's painfully obvious that one cannot be happy if plagued by such worrying fears. And this is why Epicurus here dives deeply into each of these four remedies, as he regards each as providing the perfect cure to its corresponding fear. But don't take my word for it. Let us check them in Epicurus' letter.

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9 "Indeed it is necessary to go back on the main principles, and constantly to fix in one's memory enough to give one the most essential comprehension of the truth"; "But peace of mind is […] having a constant memory of the general and most essential principles" (EPICURUS, 1926, pp. 19 and 53). These two passages from Epicurus' *Letter to Herodotus* clearly show how much stress he puts on the necessity for his students to know by heart Epicurus' teachings. Only then could they both reach 'the most essential comprehension of the truth', and attain 'peace of mind'.

10 In Greek *τετραφάρμακος*, or *tetrapharmakos*. This was how later Epicureans would refer to the four major *Κύριαι Δόξαι*, or *Kuriai Dóxai*, the *Principal Doctrines*. Apparently, it was called as such by Roman Epicureans, as they drew a clever parallel with an ancient Greek remedy with the same name, a compound of wax, pine resin, pitch and animal fat. To them, as the latter cured the body, the former cured the soul.

11 Philodemus of Gadara (ca. 110–ca. 30 BCE), a student of Zeno of Sidon (ca. 150–ca. 75 BCE) at Athens, "was an Epicurean philosopher and epigrammatist" who later moved to Italy. "A self-proclaimed interpreter of Epicurus" (BLANK, 2019) who described himself as an "orthodox Epicurean", he "wrote on a wide range of topics, including epistemology, ethics, theology, aesthetics, logic and science, and the history of philosophy". Curiously enough, and contrary to Lucretius, he left no writings on physics (WURSTER, [s.d.]).

12 Ἄφοβον ὁ θεός,
ἀνύποπτον ὁ θάνατος
καὶ τἀγαθὸν μὲν εὔκτητον,
τὸ δὲ δεινὸν εὐεκκαρτέρητον (Herculaneum Papyrus, 1005, 4.9-14).

3.1.2.1 Don't fear god

So, why would anyone fear the gods in the first place? Well, according to Epicurus, mostly by ignorance, really. For the gods "are not such as the many believe them to be" (1926, p. 83). These people assume true the "false suppositions" that "the greatest misfortunes befall the wicked and the greatest blessings [the good] by *the gift* of the gods" (1926, p. 85, my emphasis). Which is just a fancy way of saying that most folks imagine the gods as heavenly rulers, tasked with judging everyone's behavior. They either punish or favor people in accordance with how bad or good they judge them to be. But this is plainly wrong, thinks Epicurus. Since the gods are by nature "immortal and blessed" (1926, p. 85), they neither have fears nor needs. Lacking nothing, they absolutely have no needs. As such, they know "no trouble [themselves] nor [cause] trouble to any other [being]" (1926, p. 95). Which ultimately means that they are "not affected by feelings of anger or gratitude", as these are just "a sign of weakness" (HUTCHINSON, 1994, p. 32).

So, according to Epicurus, since the gods live in a state of ultimate bliss, it's unimaginable "that they concern themselves about human beings and their behavior" (KONSTAN, 2018). Thus, it's pointless to either fear them or their judgment. Which is brilliant, really. They are not denied *existence*, but they exist in such a way that they really don't matter anyway. And with such an elegant and simple logical twist, Epicurus both avoided getting in trouble with the religious elite[13], and neutralized the first of the four fears. So having ¼ of the way to a peaceful soul already mapped out, we're now one step closer to happiness.

3.1.2.2 Don't worry about death

Then comes the fear of fears, death anxiety[14], which grabs us by the core, what "the many […] shun […] as the greatest of evils" (EPICURUS, 1926, p. 85). The problem is so ob-

13 "The Stoic Posidonius objected that Epicurus didn't really believe in the gods in the first place". To him, "his theological statements were merely an attempt to prevent persecution" (THORSRUD, 2020, p. 273). It's telling that such an ancient source (c. 135 – c. 51 BC) considers such a possibility in light of the view Epicurus himself held about the gods. But that is probably a very ungenerous take on what Epicurus really meant. It's seems more probable, in light of what's stated in this *Letter*, that he truly believed the gods existed in some way. In any case, his true intentions are irrelevant here, because his reasoning still stands.

14 "Death anxiety refers the fear of and anxiety related to the anticipation, and awareness, of dying, death, and nonexistence" (BARRETT, 2013, p. 541). Though obviously a modern concept, Epicurus seemed to have had the right intuition in identifying death as a major cause for anxiety.

vious, the dread so common, that Epicurus not even wastes ink or paper mentioning it. His solution is simply to

> Become accustomed to the belief that *death is nothing to us*. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that *death is nothing to us* makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality. For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living (1926, p. 85, my emphases).

See? Easy-peasy. Simply internalize that *death in not an actual experience*, it's not a state of being for any living creature as such. Which means that those who are dead make no distinction between good or evil. And you know why? Because that distinction depends on one having sensations in the first place. And since dead creatures are, well, dead, and thus no sensation, they have no experience, and thus not even need to make such judgments. In short, they are neither happy nor unhappy, they neither enjoy nor suffer from experience. In a sense, they are even beyond happiness[15]. So, if the problem was how to make death anxiety go away, Epicurus' solution couldn't be simpler: death, to us, *is not even a problem*. It concerns us not. We don't have to worry. So forget all about it, and simply move on.

Thinking like this is actually very liberating — perhaps necessary even. At least Epicurus thinks so. He reasons that by internalizing that '*death is [really] nothing to us*', one even starts to have more joy in one's own mortality. Just think about it. What's best? 'Craving for immortality', when deep in our hearts we know it impossible? Or to simply accept death as certain, not even troubling oneself with finding a way to achieve immortality? In other words, if immortality is completely out of the question, better forget about it and simply ignore it. So, why even bother? Problem solved.

'But wait', you ask. 'How will that be of any help? What I fear in death', you argue, 'is not that I'll die. I'm well aware of being mortal. What I fear', you add, 'is not that "it will be painful when it comes" (EPICURUS, 1926, p. 85). Eventually, even that pain will cease. What's painful is knowing death will happen'. To you, the message is clear: 'death "is painful in anticipation" (1926, p. 85)'.

Fortunately, good ol' Epicurus has that already covered. For him, it is painfully obvious that if something cannot give you any trouble "when it comes, [it also] is but an empty pain in

15 This simply to mean that under that condition it's not even possible to apply such qualifications.

anticipation" (1926, p. 85). Meaning that you don't have to be anxious about what's not even a problem when it finally happens. Better still, and now putting it as a question: if death is painless to those who are dead, why go through the pains of fearing it while you are still alive? Why even bother? Again, problem solved.

So, by now, having covered at least some of the possible angles on why anyone would fear death, Epicurus is pretty confident he has satisfactorily shown how pointless fearing death is. In other words, you should not go through the pains of fearing what's not to be feared. This is best captured by Epicurus himself, when he explains that

> *death*, the most terrifying of ills, *is nothing to us*, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not then concern either the living or the dead, since for the former it is not, and the latter are no more (1926, p. 85, my emphasis).

All in all, this simply amounts to saying that it's actually rather silly to consider death as fear inducing. It all becomes quite obvious the more you think about it. The reasoning is thus. In order to be alive to even have death as a concern, you cannot at the same time actually *be dead* to experience such fear. That is, and notwithstanding the now proverbial cat[16], it's impossible *to be* alive and dead at the same time. Concurrently, the opposite is equally true. When death finally arrives, you are no longer. Dead as a doornail is not something you can ever claim yourself to be. For there's no present tense to death. It's not a state of being. Fearing death is thus senseless. So why even bother?

But here you again sense something is amiss. 'Ok', you think, 'death may not be a problem, for the dead don't suffer anyway. But if death silences it all, why not, if things go south, just skip life altogether, and quickly put it down, choosing death "as a [quick] relief from the [remaining] bad things in" store (HUTCHINSON, 1994, p. 29)?' Ever the pragmatic[17], Epicurus quickly solves the puzzle, pointing out that

> the wise man neither rejects life nor fears death. For living does not offend him, nor does he believe not living to be something bad. And just as he does not unconditionally choose the largest amount of food but the most pleasant

16 Passing reference to Erwin Schrödinger's (1887-1961) famous thought experiment popularly simply known as *Schrödinger's cat* (1935) (BERNSTEIN, 2021).

17 DeWitt, while describing Epicureanism, says that it "is patently suggestive of modern […] humanism or *pragmatism*" (1954, p. 30, my emphasis). He later depicts Epicurus "as a natural *pragmatist*, impatient of all knowledge that lacks relevance to action" (1954, p. 67, my emphasis). Leaving aside any fear of anachronism, and in line with DeWitt, it seems to me very apt to characterize him as *pragmatic*.

> food, so he savours not the longest time but the most pleasant (HUTCHINSON, 1994, p. 29).

It all seems rather obvious once you digest it. At least if you consider the problem from the perspective of the person who knows best how to solve it. Who? The wise man, naturally. Consider the following: there's no doubt that we would call wise the person who knew exactly life's best course of action. So, in this particular case of having to decide between living or dying, if that person actually knew why it was choosing this rather than that, it would be fair to call that person wise. So if we were to ask what this wise person would do, what do you think he'd choose? Stayin' alive for another Saturday, or simply "trust / In [his] self-righteous suicide" (SYSTEM OF A DOWN, 2009)? Would he rather bravely plow forth in spite of all troubles, or, alternatively, "tired of life, and hunted by pain and misery, bravely overcom[e] all the natural terrors of death, and [thus] mak[ing] his escape from this cruel scene" (DAVID HUME, 1998, pp. 99–100)?

Without a hint of doubt, and probably speaking from experience[18], Epicurus replies, in no uncertain terms, that "the wise man neither rejects life nor fears death" (1994, p. 29). Why? "For living does not offend him, nor does he believe not living to be something bad" (1994, p. 29). Which is just another way of saying that neither option would trouble him, as he's not afraid either of dying or living. Which makes sense, right? At least if we followed Epicurus' rationale thus far.

From this he reasons that the same wise man would indeed choose to savor "not the longest time[,] but the most pleasant" (1994, p. 29). 'How come', you ask. Well, because, in the know of all this, the wise man behaves just like someone at an open buffet who, upon being shown the door because the premises are now closing, still gets to pick one last item on offer. Happy go lucky, that person "does not unconditionally choose the largest amount of food[,] but the most pleasant" (1994, p. 29). Quality over quantity, is what the wise recommend. Suicide, you say? No way, declares Epicurus.

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18 It is believed that "Epicurus died […] from urinary calculus after having bravely suffered [from it] for a long time" (BITSORI; GALANAKIS, 2004, p. 466). This is most probably true, as "Epicurus's dedicated friend Metrodorus [wrote] the nowadays lost book entitled '*About Epicurus' disease*'" (BITSORI; GALANAKIS, 2004, p. 468). So it's fair to say that in regards to coping with pain, Epicurus had plenty of first-hand experience.

For even if, as a somewhat misguided Buddhist, you were to argue that *life is but suffering*[19], and as such, poetically, claim "that it is good not to be born, '*but when born to pass through the gates of Hades as quickly as possible*'[20]" (THEOGNIS apud HUTCHINSON, 1994, p. 29, my emphasis), then it would be up to you, who argued for such drastic measures, to prove it. How? Simple. Just do it. Kill yourself. If you truly believe that life is to be cut short as soon as possible, why delay it? Make it happen. Stick your neck out there — and cut it. Otherwise, Epicurus says, if you're just babbling it out, you're merely "joking, […] wasting [your] time among men who don't welcome" such foolishness (1994, p. 29). Got it? Be serious; and you already have the answer. In any case, suicide is never a problem. Death nothing to fear. Two out of four already out of the way.

3.1.2.3 What is good is easy to get

We all have desires, as sure as we also have needs. Actually, it's because we have needs that we end up having desires. And the more basic the need, the more necessary its corresponding desire. This, in a nutshell, is how Epicurus understands the link between desires and needs. Nevertheless, not all desires are grounded in actual needs. Here's his short version of the whole thing:

> of desires some are natural, some groundless; and of the natural desires some are necessary and some merely natural; and of the necessary, some are necessary for happiness and some for freeing the body from troubles and some for life itself[21] (1994, pp. 29–30).

Let's break this down a bit. Schematically, this is how Epicurus organizes desires according to their function. Of desires,

1. there are those that are *natural*,

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19 In the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, the *Book of Kindred Sayings*, the Buddha says that his first noble truth is that everything is suffering (*dukkha*). "Birth is suffering; old age is suffering; illness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow and grief, physical and mental suffering, and disturbance is suffering. Association with things not liked is suffering, separation from desired things is suffering; not getting what one wants is suffering" (apud ANDERSON, C. S., 2005, p. 296).

20 On the footnote of *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*, this passage is attributed to Theognis (1994, p. 29). Apparently from Megara, he was an elegiac poet who flourished in the 6th century BCE (THE EDITORS OF ENCYCLOPAEDIA, 2021).

21 Epicurus presents a similar distinction in one of his *Sovran Maxims,* also known as *Principal Doctrines*. There he says that "[o]f our desires some are natural and necessary; others are natural, but not necessary; others, again, are neither natural nor necessary, but are due to illusory opinion" (1925, p. 673)

2. and those that have *no natural grounds*.

Already implicit here is a value judgment, that if a desire is not natural it is not really needed[22]. Regardless, of those that are (1) *natural*, there are

1.1 those that are indeed *necessary*,

1.2 and those that are merely *natural*.

Again, a similar value judgment here. If merely *natural*, a desire is not really needed. Hence not necessary.

Anyhow, of the (1.1) *necessary*, there are those that are needed either

1.1.1 for *happiness* itself,

1.1.2 for *comfort*,

1.1.3 or for *survival*.

As you can see, this is a well-thought-out map. 'Ok', you say. 'But why are they organized thus?'

Well, instead of taking it merely as a description of Epicurus' beliefs on desire, *the why* becomes clearer if we try to connect this with the problem he is trying to solve. Remember that he wants to prove that *what is good is easy to get*. This means that to do so, he first has to show what he means by *good*. Only then can he weigh how much of that good is truly needed. As a hedonist[23], the good for Epicurus is obviously pleasure, and pleasure is what we desire the most.

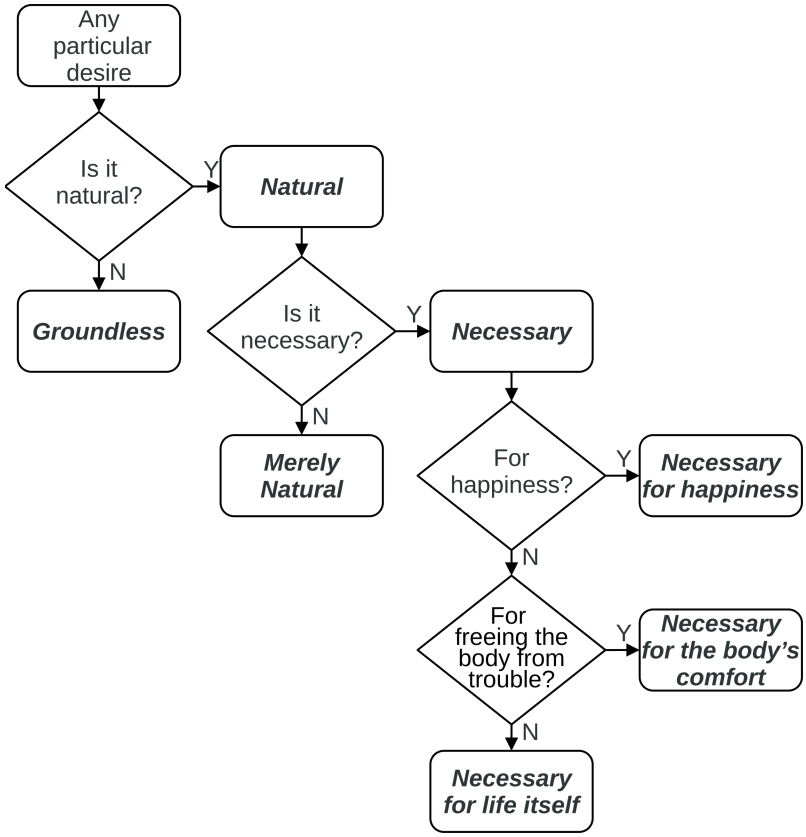
So if what's good in life is pleasure, knowing that not all desires are born equal, Epicurus first has to sort them out according to the role they play in providing us with that pleasurable good. How? By questioning the nature of each desire in what could loosely be called *Epicurus' Razor*[24]. This is basically a procedure to determine "what will happen to me if the object of my

22 This is a very condensed form of how Epicurus thinks desires. The thing is, desire has a function. A desire is a desire for something that gives us pleasure. And even though pleasure is good, there's no greater pleasure than that of having no needs. So in order to achieve the highest of pleasures, one only has to take into account those that are truly necessary. Consequently, of these, only the natural are truly necessary.

23 This is to be taken literally. "Epicurus was [indeed] a hedonist". Why? Because "his writings, meager though they are, leave no doubt that he advanced the thesis that *obtaining pleasure* and *avoiding pain* are *the sole ultimate grounds on which anything is rationally pursued and desired*, or *rationally rejected*". In other words, he is a hedonist because he takes pleasure and pain as "the sole ultimate values for a human being" (COOPER, 1999, p. 485, my emphases).

24 The analogy I'm using here "is that of the '*razor*'. The principle — *entia non sunt multiplicanda* — commonly associated with the medieval philosopher William of Ockham, [that] has been used as a philosophical razor to cut out what are thought to be redundant concepts, often in practice concepts in ordinary moral and political thinking which cannot be analysed in terms of sense-experience" (DOWNIE, 1989, p. 213). By extension any such reasoning that *cuts through* what's redundant.

desire is [fulfilled] and what if it is not" (EPICURUS, 1926, p. 117). We can also conceive it as an algorithm of sorts to weed out irrelevant desires. Its procedure can be best understood when mapped out as a flowchart that looks like this:



What stands out from this test is how at each step Epicurus gradually weeds out more and more desires, ending up, by the end, with just a handful. These, the necessary, are fortunately few, thus proving his point that *what's really good it's also really easy to get*. But what does this mean in practice? Let me now try to show you a few instances of each.

The first desires to be weeded out are the *groundless.* Epicurus is here referring to desires such as yearning for power, honor, and the like.[25] They are groundless in that they are not based in any actual need. Then, in sequence, come those desires that are *just natural*. And these are the kind of desires for novel, more refined pleasures, such as having a meal at an expensive

25 Diogenes Laertius points out that "by the *neither natural nor necessary* [Epicurus] means desires for crowns and the erection of statues in one's honour" (1925, p. 673, my emphasis).

restaurant[26]. Finally, of the remaining, i.e., those desires that are truly *necessary*, these can be further distinguished into those that are *necessary for happiness*, those *necessary for freeing the body from troubles*, and those *necessary for life itself*.

The first, the *necessary for happiness*, concern things needed "for the pleasant life, defined [in] Epicurus' way[:] a life without bodily pain and mental disturbance". Think of the desire for friends, for example, as friends are "absolutely necessary if anyone is to attain *true happiness*" (1999, p. 501, my emphasis).

Then come those that are *necessary for freeing the body from troubles*. These refer to "the instinctive desire to withdraw from what is causing us acute bodily pain", that is, to move away from the kind of things that hurt us. Think here of the "naturally arising desires to get out of the heat and cold" (1999, p. 501), or that of having to move our bodies if we stay long enough on the same spot.

Lastly come the self-explanatory *necessary for life itself*. These desires include the few that if not continuously satisfied put life itself at risk, like the "naturally occurring desires for food and drink[27]" (1999, p. 501). And these are necessary in two important ways. For not only are they necessary "to have, [but also] to satisfy, […] or else we will [simply] die" (1999, p. 501). Anyway, what all the above examples make crystal clear is that Epicurus really wants to narrow down the desires to those we cannot truly live without.

Here it's also interesting to note that most of Epicurus' answers follow a rather similar pattern. Each issue at hand is quickly remedied without breaking much sweat. Which if we think about it makes perfect sense, as for Epicurus *good* and *easy* come hand in hand. Because if there's something which Epicureans are really good at is at not troubling themselves too much. After all, if what's good is easy to get, there's little point in putting more effort than that which is strictly needed. But that's just an aside.

What truly matters is that by now Epicurus has laid down a good map of the desires that should be ignored, and those that cannot ever be avoided. And this is of particular importance for what will come next. Because once we realize that "[t]he motive of all action is desire" (BAILEY, 1926, p. 334), one also understands that

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26 By "*natural and not necessary* [Epicurus] means those which merely diversify the pleasure without removing the pain, as e.g. costly viands" (1925, p. 673, my emphasis).

27 In Diogenes formulation, these desires are those that "bring relief from pain, as e.g. drink when we are thirsty" (LAERTIUS, 1925, p. 673).

> [t]he unwavering contemplation of these enables one to refer every choice and avoidance to the health of the body and the freedom of the soul from disturbance, since this is the goal of a blessed life. For we do everything for the sake of being neither in pain nor in terror. As soon as we achieve this state every storm in the soul is dispelled, since the animal is not in a position to go after some need nor to seek something else to complete the good of the body and the soul. For we are in need of pleasure only when we are in pain because of the absence of pleasure, and when we are not in pain, then we no longer need pleasure (HUTCHINSON, 1994, p. 30).

The straightforward reading here is that since we all are moved by desires we cannot but first learn how to distinguish them if we are really set out to make the best possible choice for each. But this presupposes the question: what then is the best choice? Should I act or not upon that particular desire? Epicurus' reply is simply that the best choice is none other than that which ultimately frees us from all sorts of bodily pains and mental fears. That, after all, is our goal anyways. At least Epicurus thinks so.

The thing is, since we really do everything for the sake of pleasure, all our actions can be translated as nothing but an attempt to either put our bodies or minds at ease. This is something that can be taken quite literally[28], because as soon as we achieve either one or the other, all our troubles disappear. The reason why is fairly obvious. In Epicurus' own words, because then "the living creature has [no longer] to wander as though in search of something that is missing" (1926, p. 87). And if nothing is missing, no longer has 'the animal' to search in vain "for some other thing by which he can fulfill [both] the good of the soul and the good of the body" (1926, p. 85). All very natural; all very clear. Do you know why?

Just imagine. What would happen if you had no desire at all? What would move you to do anything, what would drive you to seek the satisfaction of your most basic needs? As we saw above, there is at least some needs that we cannot at all avoid, as these are needed for life itself. What this means is that, for Epicurus, pleasure is nothing but a necessity. One might even say that pleasure is a kind of autonomous mechanism of sorts, one whose function is to ultimately compel every living creature into seeking the fulfillment of their most fundamental needs. So, to Epicurus, pleasure is function-bound, and should be treated as such. We just have to observe what happens "when we feel pain owing to the absence of pleasure", and what happens "when

28 Taking Epicurus' words to convey what is ultimately true about the universe, Lucretius, in trying to explain in Epicurean terms the whole of nature, opens his great poem with a call to the *goddess of pleasure*, Venus. Describing her as the "power of *life*" itself, he then adds that "[t]o [her] *every kind* of *living creature* owes its conception and first glimpse of […] light" (2001a, p. 41, my emphases).

we do not feel [any] pain" (1926, p. 87). What changes? As soon as the need is fulfilled, "we no longer [have any] need [whatsoever for] pleasure" (1926, p. 87).

This then is the reason why Epicurus "call[s] pleasure the beginning and end of the blessed life" (1926, p. 87). This is also why he takes "pleasure as the first good *innate*[29] in us", pleasure being our main drive to "begin every act of choice and avoidance" (1926, p. 87). So pleasure is the greatest good, and "to pleasure we return again [and again], using [this] feeling as the standard by which we judge every good" (1926, p. 87).

Again, let me remind you what Epicurus is trying to accomplish here. His claim is that what's good is also easy to get, as he wants to free us from its corresponding fear. And this he does by showing that you don't need much to be happy. From this follows that there's absolutely no need to get all upset about what lies in the future[30]. And the best part is, the more self-reliant we are, the less we have to worry. Which sounds great, right?

'Not exactly', you say. 'Unless you don't mind ending up a hobo[31]. Because all this talk about how great it is to know how little one truly needs only sounds good to the ears of the lowest of the low. In fact', you are careful to add, 'any normal human being wants more than just to get rid of their basic needs'. A fair point if you ask me, but one Epicurus himself was perfectly aware of. So much so that, in mentioning how "self-sufficiency is a great good" (1994, p. 30), he is careful to point out that he's not advocating for such an autonomy

> in order that we might make do with few things under all circumstances, but so that if we do not have a lot we can make do with few, being genuinely convinced that those who least need extravagance enjoy it most (1994, p. 30).

So no, when Epicurus advocates for self-sufficiency, he is not saying that we, as Epicureans, are now doomed to live like hobos, always having to make do with little. Rather, he is just

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29 We are born with it, hence being natural to us.

30 Just before facing head on this third fear, Epicurus was careful to remark that we "must [first] remember that what will happen [in the future] is neither unconditionally within our power nor unconditionally outside [it]" (1994, p. 29). The importance of this cannot be overstated, as choice is to some extent within our power. As this will prevent us to neither fall victim of unreasonable expectations nor to despair thinking future good is impossible. Either way, we still have some leeway. We're thus realistically empowered to seek the best possible outcome for what we will end up choosing.

31 Writing on Epicureanism in *Philosophy Now*, Brian Dougall proposes what he calls "a modern day acceptability test". Which is actually a neat idea, especially if "we find ourselves [so] enamored with a philosopher's argument" that we start to think we could become one of their followers. When that happens, it's time to ask: *Is this philosophy going to make me into a hobo*?". In this particular case, "Will I become a hobo if I accept Epicureanism"? Brian ends up concluding that "Epicureanism [fails] the hobo test" (2013). But that's probably because he didn't get the memo — or missed the next bit on Epicurus' letter. Regardless, before you start wondering where I'm aiming at, maybe it's about time to return to the main text. You'll eventually find out why.

making sure that even if we end up as hobos, we can still be happy. As a bonus, if we really learn to do well with little, there's little doubt that we'll be the ones most delighted by whatever luxury we may experience. After all, since we know we don't need such an extravagance to be truly happy, we simply enjoy it fully, without ever becoming attached to it. The pleasure it provides is not tainted with any anxiety whatsoever, for we are not worried of not being able to find a similar luxury in the future. But is that so?

Just imagine. If, by happenstance, we were invited to an open buffet to freely enjoy whatever we fancied there, what would happen to us there? As Epicureans, though having now the opportunity to eat to our hearts (stomachs?) content, we would still know we need little. So instead of getting all attached to this one lucky event, thus falling into the trap of worrying about not having the same fortune in the future, we would simply enjoy ourselves. No worries attached. So here's why those who know they need little are also the ones who delight the most.

Now, if on the one hand it is true that "everything that is natural is easy to obtain", on the other it is also true that "whatever is groundless is hard" to come by (1994, p. 30). From this follows that simple pleasures are ultimately more pleasurable than any sophisticated extravagance. Because not only are these pleasures what the body really requires, the satisfaction of which "makes one completely healthy", as they also "provide the highest pleasure when someone in want takes them" (1994, p. 30). Which is just another way of saying that the simplest of pleasures are both more healthy and pleasant than all other pleasures. Thereby, Epicurus insists, we should become one with living modestly, as the benefits are fourfold. It

> makes one completely healthy, makes man unhesitant in the face of life's necessary duties, puts us in a better condition for the times of extravagance which occasionally come along, and makes us fearless in the face of chance. (1994, p. 30).

In other words, the humble life provides (1) health, (2) leisure, (3) contentment, and (4) courage. And it all boils down to how Epicurus understands pleasure. That is, "the lack of pain in the body and [the lack of] disturbance in the soul"[32] (1994, pp. 30–31). To put it simply, Epicurean pleasure equates to a body and mind at peace. Hence him saying that

32 Two things are being referred here: "the lack of pain in the body—*aponia*—and the non-disturbance of the soul, a state Epicurus called the tranquillity of the mind—ataraxia" (BERGSMA; POOT; LIEFBROER, 2008, p. 4).

> it is not [splendorous luxury] which produce the pleasant life, but [rather] sober calculation which searches out the reasons for every choice and avoidance[,] and drives out the opinions which are the source of the greatest turmoil for men's souls (1994, p. 31).

This is just his more technical way of saying that philosophy leads to the most pleasurable of lives. Why? Because this pleasant life is the mere outcome of a rational calculus[33], a weighing of reasons for and against any potential doing. And this is where philosophy shines. Not only provides the finest ethical roadmap, but also the best safeguard against the groundless desires of the many. So here's Epicurus' philosophy in a nutshell: *the provider of reasons for what we should or should not do*. Which is good thing, right? But not the greatest thing. Not for Epicurus, at least. In his words,

> [of] all this *the beginning and the greatest good is prudence*[34]. Wherefore *prudence is a more precious thing even than philosophy*: for from prudence are sprung all the other virtues, and it teaches us that it is not possible to live pleasantly without living prudently and honourably and justly, (nor, again, to live a life of prudence, honour, and justice) without living pleasantly (1926, p. 91, my emphases).

So what does he mean exactly? Well, simply this: from all the above, it's now possible for him to finally claim that, on the grand scheme of things[35], philosophy is not the ultimate tool for happiness. After all, providing reasons to do or not do something can only go so far. Which in turn is just another way of saying that philosophy is a step too short to the actual doing. The safest bet is actually *prudence*. And this is why he thinks that "*prudence is* a more valuable thing than *philosophy*" (1994, p. 31, my emphases).

Now, do you remember when a while ago I described Epicurus as a practical person? So, here's this characteristic of his making again an appearance, and once more for the same reason: to ultimately appeal to the practical character of his doctrine[36]. Ever the pragmatic, Epicurus un-

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33 This would later be called "*hedonic calculus*, or *calculus of pleasures*", being "the set of principles which would govern any system claiming that pleasures can be measured, added and, in general, systematically compared" (PROUDFOOT; LACEY, 2009, p. 52, my emphases). Apparently it was Jeremy Bentham that first "attempted to formulate such a calculus, which he calls '*the felicific calculus*', which compares the total amount of pleasure produced by an action" (2009, p. 52, my emphasis).

34 *Φρόνησις*, *phrónēsis*, in Greek.

35 Epicurus understanding of *physis*, phy*sics*. Cf. *Letter to Herodotus*, and Lucretius' own *De Rerum Natura*.

36 On fragment 54 of what is now known as *The Vatican Collection of Epicurean Sayings*, Epicurus states very clearly that "[o]ne must not pretend to philosophize, but [to] philosophize in reality. For we do not need the semblance of health[,] but true health" (1994, p. 39). Which is just his way of saying that a fake philosophy won't make the cut. That is, philosophy only becomes true if it's really *true in practice*. This, he adds, is very similar to what happens in medicine. For it's not enough for medicine to only promise health, but to actually

derstands that *acting prudently* is ultimately what finally works. In his understanding, *prudence* is a better guide for action.

Please keep in mind that he is still trying to show that happiness is not only possible, but very much within our grasp. Again, and in Philodemus' words, 'what is good is easy to get'[37]. This is why, he argues, prudence is more valuable than philosophy. For ultimately only by acting prudently can one's life become pleasurable. Or, if you rather prefer, only by choosing wisely can someone actually live a happy life. Which then in more Epicurean terms can be better translated as: only a life in accordance to virtue is conducive to happiness.

This then is why he makes *prudence* the mother of all virtuous action. Because if you are careful to make the right choices, you'll naturally end up displaying all other virtues, thus leading a happy life. He sums it up by saying that only by being prudent, honorable, and just can one's life be truly pleasurable. And here, once again, there's another call to practice. As he himself said in the beginning, "[d]o and practise what I constantly told you to do to" (1994, p. 28). Because who, asks Epicurus,

> is better than a man who has pious opinions about the gods, is always fearless about death, has reasoned out the natural goal of life and understands that the limit of good things is easy to achieve completely and easy to provide, and that the limit of bad things either has a short duration or causes little trouble? (1994, p. 31).

In other words, this rhetorical question is just another way of claiming that only the sage is truly free from the four fears. So the conclusion is pretty straightforward: be wise. For only the wise are truly happy. And with this he already cleared another quarter of the way. We're finally set for the final round.

3.1.2.4 What is terrible is easy to endure

Here's at last the fourth cure. It cures the fear of pain itself. How? Well, unfortunately this letter don't provide much to work upon. We are simply left with that bold claim quoted above, namely "that the limit of bad things either has a short duration or causes little trouble"

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make health happen. It's only medicine if it genuinely cures. All in all, this all boils down to the old opposition a*ppearance vs. reality*, and this measured through actual practice.

37 From the *tetrapharmakos*. See the Four Remedies above.

(1994, p. 31). But from this we learn two things about pain: when it is excruciating it doesn't last long, and when it lasts long, it is not that painful[38].

But despite being overlooked here, this point is better developed elsewhere. For instance, on the fourth of his *Sovran Maxims*[39], we read that

> [p]ain does not last continuously in the flesh, but the acutest pain is there for a very short time, and even that which just exceeds the pleasure in the flesh does not continue for many days at once. But chronic illnesses [still allow] a predominance of pleasure over [the] pain in the flesh. (1926, p. 95).

So here we have the long form of what was so concisely expressed in the passage quoted above. Pain is either intense or chronic. If intense, it won't last long. If it lasts, it is not that intense. But the interesting bit here is what he says about chronic pain. It is not intense because it registers below an arbitrary threshold on some pain index. What makes it tolerable is that those who suffer from it still experience more pleasure than pain. Which, at first glance, sounds too good to be true. Wishful thinking, maybe?

Not really. If pleasure, as we saw above, is the fulfillment of some underlying need, those who suffer from chronic pain still have to continuously satisfy many necessary needs. So whenever those sufferers eat, drink, sleep, wear a coat, or find a shade under a tree, the amount of pleasure is bit by bit always building up. Or if they happen to have friends, or any other loved ones with them to either share a laugh or a story from times past, the pleasure finally accrued is by far larger than the pain they are continually under. All in all, Epicurus' assumption is not far-fetched as it first sounds. But do not take my word for it.

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38 Modern understanding of pain confirms this is actually the case. For instance, "[s]hort-lived pain may be excruciating, but it is better tolerated and causes less suffering because it's finite and may be necessary to attain a valuable goal". These goals may include things like "childbirth, healing, or [even] athletic achievement". On the other hand, those who suffer from chronic pain can find it tolerable "because [their] anxiety is reduced" once "the source of [that] pain is understood, pain is no longer a threat, or effective treatment is known to be at hand" (BALLANTYNE, J. C.; SULLIVAN, 2015, pp. 2098–2099).

39 According to Hicks, this collection "may have been put together by a faithful disciple" (1925, p. 662). In any case, it's also true that "Epicurus laid great stress […] on epitomes of his doctrine being committed to memory", so much so "that his passion for personal direction and supervision of the studies of his pupils *may have induced him to furnish them with such an indispensable catechism*" (1925, pp. 662–663, my emphasis). What this actually means is that it's also possible that these are actually his words. This same idea is conveyed by Cyril Bailey, stating that "[m]odern critics have […] been inclined to treat [this collection] with less respect" (1926, p. 344). However, he's more inclined to give credit to those that think that there's "no sound reason for doubting that it is the work of Epicurus himself" (1926, p. 347). So to him, the "picture of the 'true Epicurean', which [these maxims] represents is consistent with what we learn from other sources" (1926, p. 347). All in all, the take away from these opinions is that the Sovran Maxims seem to be faithful to the spirit of Epicurus' teachings.

On the introduction to *Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia* there's this interesting passage on Epicurus' fourth remedy. In it, we learn that although

> illness and pain are disagreeable, […] nature has so constituted us that we need not suffer very much from them. Sickness is either brief or chronic, and either mild or intense, but discomfort that is both chronic and intense is very unusual; so there is no need to be concerned about the prospect of suffering (HUTCHINSON, 1994, p. viii).

What this means is that, on average, we are not by nature that prone to suffer. Our bodily constitution makes it highly unlikely that we ever have to face an intense pain for long. Which in turn means that even if chronically diseased our pains are nonetheless still tolerable. But this then begs the question: on what grounds is any of this true?

Well, hard to say for sure. According to Hutchinson, this is actually "a difficult teaching to accept" (1994, p. viii). But he's also careful to add that the truth of it becomes more apparent as we grow old, because life ends up teaching us "in putting up with suffering" (1994, p. viii). He gives two concrete examples of people who embodied this learning:

> the Roman philosopher Seneca, whose health was anything but strong[; and] Epicurus himself [who] died in excruciating pain, from kidney failure after two weeks of pain caused by kidney stones (1994, p. viii).

In Seneca's case, in his *Moral Letters to Lucilius* he examines disease and its grievances, reassuring his reader that any disease's

> suffering [...] is [still] rendered endurable by interruptions; for the strain of extreme pain must come to an end. No man can suffer both severely and for a long time; Nature, who loves us most tenderly, has so constituted us as to make pain either endurable or short (SENECA, [w.d.]).

So Seneca also agrees with Epicurus[40]. As for Epicurus, having suffered himself at the hands of a painful disease, he still

> died cheerfully […] because he kept in mind the memory of his friends and the agreeable experiences and conversations they had had together. [And] [m]ental suffering, unlike physical suffering, is agony to endure, but once you grasp the Epicurean philosophy you won't need to face it again (1994, p. viii).

40 On a footnote to the passage quoted above, the editor references fragment 446 on Usener's compilation *Epicurea*, where one reads Cicero saying almost the exact same thing as Seneca, and attributing it to Epicurus. So maybe they are all rehashing Epicurus experience all along.

This passage is self-explanatory. Epicurus personified his doctrine, embodying his therapy. He not only preached, but practiced what he was preaching. He took his own medicine, and for this reason he died happily. He practiced his philosophy of remembrance, bringing to mind all his friends. And by rejoicing on their wonderful shared experiences, he felt great joy. At peace with his mind, he had no fears, and thus no bodily pains. Smiles overcoming tears. The philosophical mind overpowering the body. 4 out of 4. No more fears.

3.1.3 Knowing the way, it's up to us to practice it

Now that we know the cure, we are almost ready to leave the doctor's office. Almost. Because there's still time for some last minute advice before we go. Prescription in hand, we now are reminded that it's up to us to put it to practice. After all, as doctor Epicurus is careful to add, we are at least partially responsible for what will happen to us in the future. Once we realize that in the Epicurean universe there is no such thing as destiny, blaming fate for whatever happens is just silly. Epicurus himself explains better saying

> that some things happen of necessity […], others by chance, and others by our own agency, and [as such we should understand] that necessity is not answerable [to anyone], that chance is unstable, while what occurs by our own agency is autonomous, and that it is to this that praise and blame are attached (1994, p. 31).

In short, there's only three ways for anything to happen. Either because

1. it simply has to happen, as all its pieces are in place being thus unavoidable; or
2. it happens simply, being nothing but a mere accident of nature; or, finally,
3. it happens by choice, being a product of our own volition.

Now the obvious. Since we cannot do anything about the first two, we can only praise or blame the third, our own choice. After all, whatever the universe throws our way, ultimately it's up to us to choose what to do with the conditions we were given. 'But hey', you say, 'perhaps we don't have that much choice, free will being just an illusion'. Perhaps.

But to Epicurus, those who claim there's no true volition, are nothing but slaves "to the fate of the natural philosophers" (1994, p. 31). To him, they are not really thinking straight, as they end up painting themselves into a very tricky corner. By rejecting the power of choice, these people are denying themselves any freedom of action. Better than thinking like this, the

ever down-to-earth Epicurus deems more reasonable to simply "follow the stories told about the gods". These at least "suggest a hope of escaping bad things" (1994, p. 31). You see, to Epicurus, it's better to live under a useful fiction than to be chained to a hopeless deterministic yoke. In any case, the wise man

> believes that chance is not a god, as the many think, for nothing is done in a disorderly way by god; nor that [fate is from] an uncertain cause (1994, p. 31).

So, though it is wiser to believe on religious grounds that we at least have some say on what ultimately happens, what is completely unacceptable is to think that fate is actually a god. That cannot happen. Why? We just have to remember how Epicurus conceives a divine being, and we immediately find the answer. The gods are by nature blessed and free. As such, it's against their nature to act in a messy way. The gods are not playing dice with the universe[41].

But there's more. Not only is this faith unacceptable, it is also completely unacceptable to think that things happen for no reason. His point is again very practical. Just think. Believing things to happen for no reason makes us neglect our obvious role in choosing. Bad choices become more common. Bad actions, worse outcomes. So, for Epicurus, it's far wiser to think good actions lead to better outcomes than to just call it quits and throw all care to the wind. On the contrary, the wise Epicurean, recognizing his part in what happens, chooses and acts wisely. This, in turn, leads him to happier outcomes. In Epicurus' own words, the wise man

> does not think that anything good or bad with respect to living blessedly is given by chance to men[; rather] it does provide the starting points of great good and bad things [to come]. And he thinks it better to be unlucky in a rational way than lucky in a senseless way; for it is better for a good decision not to turn out right in action than for a bad decision to turn out right because of chance. (1994, p. 31).

So, to the wise, choices matter. There is right and wrong, and their corresponding good or bad outcomes. To the wise Epicurean, what happens to them is not really an accident. The wise Epicurean strives to make good things happen. After all, what's best? To aim at a good outcome, increasing the probability of that actually happening, or to simply stumble upon it by sheer luck, having no idea of why it happened? The first gives you confidence, and puts you in charge. As for the other, though sweet at first, ultimately ends up increasing our fears, for just as

41 A play on the famous quote "God does not play dice with the universe". Though attributed to Albert Einstein as-is, it's actually a paraphrase of something he wrote in a letter. The actual passage reads, "I, at any rate, am convinced that *He* is not playing at dice" (1971, p. 91).

chance giveth, chance may well taketh away. Therefore, thinks Epicurus, go with the best, be wise, and act prudently. Because only the prudent are wise, and only the wise happy.

3.1.4 A god among men

Having filled-in the prescription, knowing his patient is now both fully aware of the disease, and how to cure it, Doctor Epicurus wraps it all up as he acknowledges it's time to go. However, since he knows that his prescribed four-part medicine is only effective if taken regularly, he makes another plea to practice. After all, though it may demand a good amount of effort on the part of the patient, the end-goal is totally worth it. In his words, because by practicing

> these and the related precepts day and night, by [himself] and with a like-minded friend, [he] will never be disturbed either when awake or in sleep, and [he] will live as *a god among men*. For a man who lives among immortal goods is in no respect like a mere mortal animal (1994, p. 31, my emphasis).

What a beautiful exhortation, so uplifting. It's as if Epicurus is saying, 'Go, do as I say, resolutely, and you simply cannot fail. In the company of good, trustworthy friends, you will live without any fear, enjoying a life that is *as blessed as that of a god*'. But aside how beautiful this exhortation is, it's also interesting to note how Epicurus does not simply ask to take these words of his word as an article of faith. He's not asking his follower to simply believe him just because. To Epicurus, this is not an empty promise. For him, the result does not lie somewhere in the distant future. On the contrary.

If anything, the result is actually something that any follower of his can experience right here, right now, every single day of their lives. Knowing how little they need to be truly happy, by living every single day like this, the Epicurean good and trouble-free life becomes reality. Living cheerfully, without worries, knowing there is nothing to fear, their lives become no different from that of a god.

3.1.4.1 What is philosophy doing here anyway?

Having finished reading from Epicurus' letter, it's again time for some thoughts on his claims about philosophy. At this point it's unmistakable that Epicurus do indeed think philosophy as 'the provider of reasons for what one should or should not do'. Philosophy for him is no doubt important, for it plays an unmistakable role in helping to make one's life pleasurable. But what ultimately matters to him is another, more loftier goal, namely that of *the virtuous life of a happy man*. Philosophy in comparison is just a means to that much nobler end.

Again, let me remind you that I'm not trying to belittle happiness. Far from it. But it do bothers me a little to see philosophy being made a mere tool for a higher purpose, and then calling this doing *philosophy*. For it seems to me there's quite a difference between using something as a means to an end, and having that something as an end in itself. We just have to question ourselves this. Is Epicurus here doing philosophy, or is he rather doing something else other than philosophy? What is philosophy doing here anyway? Keep these questions in mind as I proceed.

Imagine now that instead of happiness we were to address a different topic—say, writing a dissertation. In this purely hypothetical example we would also have to make use of some tool to make that dissertation happen. What tool? Maybe a text processor running on a computer. Now suppose that our opening lines end up saying something like this:

> Let no one delay *the use of his text processor* while young nor grow weary of it when old. For no one is either too young or too old *to write*. He who says either that the time for *playing around with writing apps* has not yet come or that it has already passed is like someone who says that the time for *writing a dissertation* has not yet come or that it has already passed.

You get the picture, right? To make your dissertation real, you will have to hurry up and get acquainted with your favorite writing app. For what you really want is a dissertation. But to get there you'll have to type. Now you tell me. Once your dissertation is over, once the goal has been reached, are you to be known as an expert in your field or simply a typist? Well, I think it is fair to say that *typist* is not the title you are aiming at. For though true that you've typed your way through all your dissertation, it's also true that you've accomplished all that for a different purpose. You wrote to discuss some topic—and not simply to make yourself skilled at typing. Do you see now what I mean?

Now apply the same reasoning to Epicurus. Even when acknowledging that a letter[42] is not really a dissertation[43], we end up reaching a similar conclusion. If he uses philosophy to argue for his view of the happy life, he's not necessarily an expert in philosophy. He's rather an expert in the field of using philosophy to make people[44] happy, not necessarily an expert in philosophy. He who hammers a lot may know a lot about hammering. That, however, won't make him an expert in coming up with hammers.

So with that being said, knowing now where Epicurus stands in regards to philosophy, it's time to move on our next Epicurean source. It's now time to hear Lucretius.

3.2 THE GODLIKE MAN

So, why Lucretius? Well, aside from the little that has come down to us from Epicurus himself, he's the next best thing we have that we can confidently call as true to Epicureanism. Thanks to him, an important part of the Epicurean canon was fortunately[45] preserved. The current consensus today is that his sole surviving work, the great epic poem *De Rerum Natura*[46], is very faithful to Epicurus' understanding of physics.[47]

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42 Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus* is roughly 1800 words, or approximately 4 pages long. It is also interesting to note that even introductions are usually longer than that. So for the sake of fairness we can agree that this much is objectively not enough to deal with such a rich and controversial topic as what philosophy is. But, again, we have to do with the little we were given.

43 Dissertations are usually much, much longer. If, say, you wrote some 30000 words on your topic, that would take up roughly 100 pages. So, a *huge* difference.

44 I take people here to mean actual humans, as Epicurus' doctrine is indeed human centered. Lucretius will later make it more inclusive, extending it to animals, and even of life itself. Cf. *De Rerum Natura* (2.352-370), (5.783-924), (5.1297-1349), for passages where Lucretius identifies similarities between us and other animals, even questioning how we treat them; also (1.1-43) for his praise to Venus' as the bountiful giver of all life.

45 "The survival of [Epicurus'] disciple's once celebrated poem *was left to fortune*. *It was by chance* that a copy of *On the Nature of Things* made it into the library of a handful of monasteries, places that had buried, seemingly forever, the Epicurean pursuit of pleasure. *It was by chance* that a monk laboring in a *scriptorium* somewhere or other in the ninth century copied the poem before it moldered away forever. And *it was by chance* that this copy escaped fire and flood and the teeth of time for some five hundred years until, one day in 1417, it came into the hands of the humanist [...] Poggio the Florentine" (GREENBLATT, 2011, n.p., ênfases minhas).

46 It is worth noting that though known since modernity by this title, "there is no evidence that antiquity recognized Lucretius' poem as *De rerum natura*". In truth, "[f]or Lucretius' first reader […] it is likely that the poem [simply] began with its beginning" lines. However, because *De Rerum Natura* is indeed "the natural description of Lucretius' argument" (CLAY, 1969, p. 31), being the "natural title for a work of Lucretius' genre [that] can be regarded as a translation of [the] Greek *Περὶ φύσεως*" (BUTTERFIELD, 2013, p. 1), we can safely regard it as such.

47 David Sedley, in his seminal work *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*, argues that "Lucretius' sole Epicurean source […] was Epicurus' *On nature*", and, as such, "he followed its sequence of topics very closely, indeed almost mechanically" (2004, p. 134). And in spite of Lucretius having "done much to develop, illustrate, expand and sharpen the arguments as he found them" on Epicurus' book, "the bare bones of the exposition […] were lifted, more or less in their entirety, from [Epicurus'] *On nature* books I-XV" (2004, p.

Be it as it may, what's undeniable is that his powerful rhetoric and poetic imagination makes Epicureanism an enticing doctrine. That is to say, Lucretius turns Epicurus' somewhat dry and jargon-laden style of his technical treatise *On Nature* into something much more colorful and immediately relatable. But none of this really matters. We are not here to discuss Epicurus' teachings on physics. Rather, we're here to dive deeper into what philosophy means to his followers. So, let us keep this in mind while we now try to make some sense of Lucretius' own attitude towards Epicurus.

But first things first. Who was Lucretius? Well, the current best guess describes him as a highly praised Roman poet[48] that happened to be a stout[49] Epicurean. And, believe it or not, that's pretty much all of it[50]. Those acquainted with the period won't find this at all surprising. Given how much literature was lost by late antiquity[51], and how little is now known about most of the major intellectual figures of the period, Lucretius is no exception to this unfortunate rule. But I digress. The takeaway is simply this: little is known about Lucretius.

135, my emphasis). All in all, it is safe to assume that Lucretius' poem is indeed a faithful reproduction of Epicurus' understanding of physics.

48 Apparently, Lucretius' poem was an immediate success among the Roman *literati*. For "[t]here is no doubt that Lucretius' work was freely available to Roman poets in the immediate wake of his death: Horace, Virgil, Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid, Manilius, […] Catullus […], among other more minor figures, all offered clear echoes and/or responses to the poem" (BUTTERFIELD, 2013, pp. 47–48). But not only poets knew him well, as, according to the same source, "[i]t is highly probable […] that Cicero knew the poem in full, [as it is] possible that [even] Caesar had read it" (2013, pp. 48–49). Probably because of this reception, Lucretius was still being quoted "over one hundred years after [his] death" (2013, p. 49). For instance, Seneca the Younger (ca. 3 BCE–65 CE) "explicitly quoted six passages […] from at least two books of *DRN*". These, however, have a "few divergences from the Lucretian tradition", which suggest "that he knew certain passages of Lucretius relatively well and could quote [him] from memory. But details aside, what this makes clear is that Lucretius was indeed celebrated as a consummated poet.

49 David Sedley describes the overall Lucretian attitude towards Epicurus as akin to that of a religious fundamentalist (2004, pp. 62–91). But more on that later.

50 Not much is known about Lucretius the individual. And despite the many attempts throughout the centuries to establish some plausible data about him, truth is that "[v]irtually no facts about Lucretius' life have been determined by modern scholarship, beyond a consensus *that it was spent mainly if not entirely in Italy*, and *that it terminated in the 50s BC*" (SEDLEY, D. N., 2004, p. 62, my emphases). Which is just another way of saying that little is known, and what is known is almost meaningless. Apparently he having died by the mid first century BCE, not having seen much of the world.

51 For instance, Pierre Hadot in an inaugural lecture in front of his peers, stated that "il faut bien reconnaître tout d'abord que presque toute la littérature hellénistique, principalement la production philosophique, est disparue" (1999, p. 19). This is a huge problem for anyone who becomes deeply invested in correctly interpreting ancient texts. Often overlooked, this paucity of reliable sources usually results in very imaginative speculations becoming standard interpretations that end up being taken as *gospel*. In practice, "[m]uch of classical studies consists of constructing complex hypotheses from scattered bits of evidence". So "where modern historians suffer from a superabundance of data, and must dig through huge heaps of ore to find the important bits, classicists enjoy a severe lack of data, *and can rearrange their very few building blocks with much more freedom — maybe too much freedom*" (HENDRY, 2000, p. 1, my emphases). So there's that. Anyway, I digress. However, the point still stands: primary sources are scarce and, because of that, not much can be known about the authors of this period with a good degree of certainty.

Yet, the good news is that what is known for sure is that his famous poem *on nature*[52] is truly his and has come down to us mostly complete[53]. Composed to mimic the great poetic works of previous Greek philosophers[54], it stands out as an inspired though somewhat anachronistic attempt to restore life to a dying philosophical tradition[55]. But this work alone is also enough to allow some learned guesses about who Lucretius was. So here's a small list of some of these conjectures.

For instance, we know he was possibly educated on a wealthy environment, having access to both the best of Greek and Roman literature.[56] His acquaintance with the life of the very rich allow some to speculate he had some good connections to the Roman Elite. And his dedication of the work to a certain Gaius Memmius[57] puts him in touch with the prominent few. Lucretius, as sources testify, had good connections with those in power[58].

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52 As mentioned on footnote 57 above, Lucretius' title evokes the Greek *Peri Physeos*. This is important, because "by signaling its argument as *de rerum natura*", or *on nature*, Lucretius' argument "aligns itself directly with Empedocles, Epicurus, and the whole of Greek physiology" (CLAY, 1969, p. 32)..

53 Though "[t]here is no extant direct witness of *DRN* from the first 850 years of its transmission" (BUTTERFIELD, 2013, p. 5), it is also "beyond doubt that the transmission of Lucretius' *DRN* is among the more narrow and 'closed' manuscripts traditions of classical Latin poets" (2013, p. 46).

54 "Lucretius is the servant of two masters. Epicurus is the founder of his philosophy; Empedocles is the father of his genre" (SEDLEY, D., 2013, p. 34). Cf. footnote 63 above.

55 That of the Greek physiologists. Cf. footnote 63 above.

56 On the foreword to Lucretius' translation *On the Nature of the Universe*, one reads: "The gens Lucretia was aristocratic, and [Lucretius] was probably a member of it. His poem shows familiarity with the luxurious lifestyle of great houses in Rome, and his deep feeling for the countryside and its people and animals invites one to imagine that his family owned country estates. *Certainly he was expensively educated*, and apart from being a master of Latin he acquired a deep knowledge of the Greek language, its literature and philosophy" (2008, n.p., my emphasis), none of which was cheap.

57 This is one of those rabbit holes in which one inevitably falls. Lucretius' poem is presented in the form of a teaching addressed to someone he simply calls Memmius. However, the tone Lucretius uses while addressing this Memmius somewhat suggests this Memmius had some ascendancy over Lucretius. Because of this, many think that Lucretius' addressee is none other than "Gaius Memmius, a member of a senatorial family and the husband of Sulla's daughter Fausta until he divorced her in 55" BCE. He "had been tribune, perhaps in 62" BCE. Later, "he became praetor in 58[,] and governor of the province of Bithynia in northwest Asia Minor in 57" BCE. Next, "in 54[,] he stood for the consulship but was unsuccessful". Finally, "in 52, after being found guilty of using bribery in the elections of 54, [he] went into exile in Greece, where […] *he showed himself to be no friend of the Epicureans*" (SMITH, 2011, p. xiii, my emphasis). Apparently, "in the summer of 51, [this] Gaius Memmius attempted to destroy the ruins of the Epicurus' house" (HENDRY, 2000, p. 2), such that "Cicero [himself] had to intervene on behalf of one of his clients, asking Memmius not to destroy the house and garden of Epicurus" (MARKOVIC, 2008, p. 7). So, was this really the Memmius Lucretius chose to address? No one knows for sure.

58 In a letter to his brother Quintus, Cicero, writing in February 54 BCE, says: "Lucreti poemata, ut scribis, ita sunt, multis luminibus ingeni, multae tamen artis" (1980, p. 50). This roughly translates to something like 'Lucretius' poems, as you've pointed out, have many flashes of genius, though being very technical'. As mentioned above, Lucretius was known and read by influential people such as Cicero.

But whoever he may have been, for certain we can only now know this: he was an earnest Epicurean, pious in his devotion[59] to Epicurus. We also know that his goal was not to break new grounds, to carve for himself a name as an original thinker. He simply wanted to make the Epicurean doctrine an easier pill to swallow. He wanted to render Epicurus' bitter remedy a bit more palatable. For just as

> [d]octors who try to give children foul-tasting wormwood first coat the rim of the cup with the sweet juice of golden honey; their intention [being] that the children, unwary at their tender age, will be tricked into applying their lips to the cup and at the same time will drain the bitter draught of wormwood […], since by this means they recover strength and health[, he too has] a similar intention now: since this philosophy of [Epicurus] often appears somewhat off-putting to those who have not experienced it, and most people recoil back from it, [he has] preferred to expound it to [us] in harmonious Pierian poetry and, so to speak, coat it with the sweet honey of the Muses. [His hopes have] been that by this means [he] might perhaps succeed in holding [our] attention concentrated on [his] verses, while [we] fathom the nature of the universe and the form of its structure (2001a, p. 67).[60]

So just like any doctor of his day, he too wishes to sweeten an unpleasant but necessary medicine. He, however, will coat the rim of his medicinal cup not with honey, but with poetry. The goal is to kindle his reader's attention while he explains the inner workings of nature. After all, his cure is that of Epicurus. For

> as soon as [Epicurus'] philosophy, springing from [his] godlike soul, begins to proclaim aloud the nature of things, the terrors of the mind flyaway, the walls of the world part asunder (1910, p. 106).[61]

What Lucretius means is that there's nothing to fear for those who are fortunate enough in learning from Epicurus' *divine* wisdom. Once touched by his philosophy, there's no room either for anxiety or ignorance.

At this point, it worth reminding that Lucretius here is almost saying something similar to Epicurus' *Letter to Menoeceus.* That is, Epicurean philosophy cures, as true knowledge frees from all fear. But here we also get a glimpse on how first century BCE Roman Epicurean devotees thought about their teacher — a larger than life *godlike* figure. Lucretius goes as far as calling him as their

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59 Lucretius is always very open in how much he admires Epicurus. Cf. Proems to Book I, III, V, and VI.
60 1.935-950.
61 3.14-17.

> father and the *discoverer of truth*: [for Epicurus] suppl[ies] [them] with fatherly precepts; and from [his] pages […] [they] feed on each golden saying—golden and ever most worthy of eternal life (2001a, p. 68, my emphasis).[62]

Aside the eloquent grandiosity that is in display here, something sounds a bit off. It's odd how these words almost seem an utterance of a religious zealot[63]. But these become stranger still when we take into account the Epicurean supposed commitment to philosophy. Anyhow, what those words show beyond any reasonable doubt is how devoted an Epicurean Lucretius really was. For there we read that Epicurus was for him a wise fatherly figure. Knower of truths, he had the best *dicta* on how to live properly. And for this reason, his sayings were not only precious, but even deserving of everlasting praise[64]. Why? Because

> nothing is more blissful than to occupy the heights effectively fortified by the teaching of the wise, [to abide the] tranquil sanctuaries from which you can look down upon others and see them wandering everywhere in their random search for *the way of life* (2001a, p. 36, my emphasis).[65]

In other words, none but Epicurus' wisdom can keep us from harm. As for those who fail to recognize its worth, they end up without a path, roaming aimlessly throughout life. Be it as it may, what stands out most noticeably here is how certain Lucretius is that this is indeed the way.[66] Epicurus got it right, seeing right through everything there is.

Keep in mind this: Lucretius is always thinking big. Things are the way they are for this is how nature works. And *nature* is huge. It contains everything, and in infinite amounts[67]. Fortunately, there's room for the whole thing, as space[68] has no limits, spreading endlessly in all directions[69]. What has no room here is doubt. Lucretius is certain. This is simply how the universe is.

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62 3.9-13.

63 According to David Sedley, this is not far from the truth. For "it is Lucretius himself who, in his proems to books III and V, *declares the religious nature of his devotion*: Epicurus, whose divinely conceived philosophy is Lucretius' own inspiration and guide, was himself a god, indeed a god who eclipsed the traditional Olympian deities in the importance of his benefactions to mankind" (2004, p. 72).

64 In a way, Lucretius was right. Thanks in great part to him, and to how sweet he made Epicurus' doctrine, we still keep thinking about Epicurus' legacy and how inspiring his example was. Nevertheless, and in another way, Lucretius' wish did not come to pass. For no amount of Lucretian honey was able to ultimately keep Epicureanism alive.

65 2.1-13.

66 This conviction derives from the Lucretian certainty that "Epicurus had discovered the truth and the whole truth" (SMITH, 2011, p. xii).

67 1.996-1061, 2.1047-1094.

68 Lucretius, like most atomists of that era, calls it *void*. This void is not a kind of nothingness, but empty space, an emptiness that is the mirror image of matter. Cf. Parmenides' being and non-being, from which Leucippus and/or Democritus derived this fundamental ontological duality at the bottom of all things.

69 1.959-999.

Lucretius is bold. He's so much of an Epicurean that he even emulates Epicurus' powerful rhetoric. After all, they both know the truth. Lucretius, similarly to Epicurus, can explain why all things happen. And they happened not because some god willed them this way. In truth, things are the way they are just because — they simply happened[70]. And he knows all this thanks to how true Epicurus' core *physiological* principles[71] are. It's this certainty that allows for such an epistemic audacity.

These principles are so unequivocally true that this knowledge alone is enough to grant further truths. It all naturally springs forth from knowing them. Lucretius says it best, when he sings Epicurus' never ending epistemological success. In his words, once you understand these basic truths,

> you will [thus naturally] gain knowledge, […] / For one thing will illuminate the next, and blinding night / Won't steal [away] your way; [for] all secrets will be opened to your sight, / One truth illuminat[ing] another, as light kindles light (2007, p. 28).[72]

What Lucretius eloquently says is simply that these fundamental Epicurean truths will put an end to the crippling ignorance that fills our hearts with so much dread. This, he says, is akin to sharing a flame of light, sparking more and more light along the way from just that single original flame. This can also be understood as the Lucretian way of saying that *knowledge begets knowledge*. However, it is not just any knowledge that will put this kindling in motion. It has to be that of Epicurus' teachings. After all, as a devoted Epicurean[73], none is wiser, none more perfect. Hence, in a way, if one were to

> speak as befits the majesty of the truth [made] known to [the Epicureans], then [Epicurus himself] *was a god*, yea *a god*, […] who first found out that principle of life, which is called wisdom (1910, p. 186, my emphasis).[74]

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70 2. 216–224, the infamous *clinamen*, or swerve, an unpredictable deflection on the atoms trajectory that throw them off their course.

71 In 1.419-421, Lucretius says that "the universe in its essential nature is composed of two things, namely matter and the void in which matter is located and moves in every direction" (2001a, p. 14).

72 1.1114-1117.

73 On this, Sedley points out that as "Philodemus' writings make [abundantly] clear, *it was normal for contemporary Epicureans to assign virtually biblical status* not to the writings of Epicurus alone, but jointly *to those of the foursome known simply as οἱ ἄνδρες, 'the Great Men'* (2004, p. 67, my emphases). So, even if Lucretius was a bit of an outlier in conferring solely to Epicurus a godly status, while other Epicureans did the same to all four founding fathers of Epicureanism. These were, respectively, Epicurus, Metrodorus, Hermarchus, and Polyaenus. Cf. Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers, Volume II: Books 6-10* (1925).

74 5.7-10.

Poetic hyperboles aside, what is noticeable here is this running theme of equating Epicurus to the gods[75]. There is no better way to describe Epicurus' achievements. But even this is not enough. After all, Epicurus' wisdom *surpassed* even that of the actual gods. He is wiser. Here's how Lucretius puts it. Even if

> Ceres, according to legend, introduced corn to mortals, and Liber the liquor made from the juice of the grape; [...] these things are not [really] essential to life[76] […]. But *a good life* could not be lived without a pure mind, and so we have the more justification for deifying the author of the sweet consolations of life that, disseminated throughout mighty nations, even now *are soothing people's minds* (2001a, p. 137, my emphases).[77]

So, contrary to popular myths on the origins of the so-called good things the gods granted, Epicurus' teachings are *the real thing*. Only these address what is actually beneficial, what makes life truly happy. This is why Lucretius thinks Epicureans are more than justified in having such a reverence for their teacher. Which, given the time and place where all this is happening[78], in a way makes it not only understandable but even expected. But is it really? Because this very attitude comes from someone who is openly very critical of religion[79]. So this whole devotional display not only feels weird, but also somewhat unsettling. Is this even philosophical?

Here it's worth remembering that this foray into Lucretius had one purpose only. The goal was to dive deeper into what philosophy meant to Epicurus' followers. In a way, Lucretius acted here as an exemplary specimen of that by now long extinct *Homo Epicureus.*[80] To that end, I chose to focus on how he, and by extension his fellow Epicureans, regarded their founder and

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75 In his *Letter to Menoeceus,* Epicurus says that by following his precepts one "will live as a god among men" (1994, p. 31). As a god — not actually becoming one.

76 Cf. section 3.1.2.3 above.

77 5.14-21.

78 At the time Lucretius was writing, republican Rome was in constant upheaval, in what now can be understood as an extended period where a series of crises ultimately culminated with its actual demise (FLOWER, 2010). As mentioned on footnote 4 above, Epicureanism is much more appealing under such dire conditions. It promotes a kind of self-reliance that offers some semblance of security and predictability no longer available through institutional means. No wonder that Epicureans ended up becoming a bit too enthusiastic about their beliefs.

79 Cf. 1.80-101. There he poetically evokes Iphigenia's barbarous sacrifice at the hands of her father Agamemnon as the epitome of all that is wrong in religious thinking. For only under the spell of religion can a father think it is reasonable to trade the killing of his own daughter for favorable winds for the Greeks to sail to Troy.

80 It's worth remembering that Justinian's edict, formally closing down "the school of Athens in AD 529, […] has come to symbolize the dying of pagan philosophy in the late empire" (ADAMSON, 2015, p. 147). This was also the final blow to a tradition that was already on the wane. Hence no more Epicureans. No more living specimens of their actual practice.

his sayings. The resulting picture was slightly disconcerting. So it's about time to try to make some sense of all this. So here are some preliminary conclusions.

3.2.1.1 What's philosophy here anyway?

In 3.1 above, I tried to better determine how Epicurus understood philosophy, and what role it played within his thinking. I then tentatively summed it up as *the provider of reasons for what we should or should not do*. But now we also have Lucretius' understanding. So what is philosophy for him?

From the above, the picture we get is roughly this: from *the provider of reasons* it has become *a canonical set of truths*.[81] Little by little, Epicurus has become this larger than life figure who no longer is a mere mortal. So, from a handy tool in Epicurus' case, philosophy has become a credo by the time of Lucretius. Philosophy is now dogmatic.[82] Which is kind of weird, even if we take into account that, back then, "the Greek word *dogma*" meant something like "holding a commitment or doctrine" (ADAMSON, 2015, p. 111).

But if you are so committed to a doctrine that you cannot even question its core principles, is that any different from how we understand dogma today, i.e., holding a belief that cannot be challenged? And in that sense, does it even make sense to speak of a *dogmatic philosophy*? Isn't that like saying you are looking for your reading glasses while at the same time you already know you have them on the top of your head? Anyway, something seems definitely off.

The way I see it, from Epicurus to Lucretius philosophy does not become more open. It does not invite further questioning in order to deepen our understanding. On the contrary, it feels entrapping, claustrophobic even, like standing on a room where the walls are getting closer. Even if the Epicurean intention is good, and their heart is on the right place, I feel I'm being

81 Diskin Clay, paraphrasing Seneca, says that "to become free, Epicurus' disciple had to become *a slave to the true philosophy*" (1998, p. 24, my emphasis). Seneca may be a bit too unfriendly to the Epicureans at times. For instance, in his *Moral Epistles*, 2.5, while sharing a thought he learned from Epicurus, he adds that he is "wont to cross over *even to the enemy's camp*, — not as a deserter, but *as a scout*" (SENECA, 2014a, p. 904, my emphases). However, as a *scout,* he is nevertheless offering an outsider view on how others perceived the overall Epicurean attitude toward their master's teachings. So this is worth considering.

82 In *Epicurus and His Philosophy*, De Witt argues that since Epicurus' goal was to provide the actual way to the happy life, his philosophy *had to be* dogmatic. In his words, "his philosophy [had to be] useful for the increase of happiness; this, in turn, [was] impossible without faith, and faith [was] impossible without certainty. Therefore [Epicurean] philosophy [had to] be dogmatic" (1954, p. 20).

pushed into thinking in a certain way, and that way only. The way may be clear, but it doesn't feel *my way*. I'm being told what to think, and not *how to think by myself*.

So, with that being said, I think it's about time we move forward. We have seen enough of Epicureanism to know where it stands in regards to philosophy. And though it cures all ills, freeing us from all fears, it also seems somewhat philosophically crippling. So, how about trying to compare it with a different conception of philosophy? Maybe, just maybe, we'll get a better understanding of what the problem is. Is Epicureanism philosophy?

Let us wait a bit more for what is still to come. For I want to invite you now to leave Epicurus' flowery but rather empty *Garden* behind, and look for some livelier place. How about we take a stroll to the market square?[83] I know someone down there that I think you would be glad to meet. He's quite *a character*! And though in a way proud of his ignorance, I think he has a thing or two to show us on what philosophy is all about. Are you up to it? Come, follow me. For it is now time to hear Socrates. It's now time for his apology.

83 The *agora*.

4 ACCORDING TO SOCRATES

We are now on a different setting. Even though historically we've taken some steps back[1], I consider this move necessary in order to explore a radically different conception of philosophy. You see, If in Epicurus case I started out doubting if his thinking was even philosophical, with Socrates the reverse is true. Not only is his whole *shtick*[2] synonymous with philosophy proper, but he is even treated as a major turning point in the history of philosophy[3]. So if my original idea was to explore the depth of Epicurean philosophy, nothing could be better now than to compare it to a more solid standard. This then is the reason why I now invite you to come with me and pay a visit to Socrates.

But if with Epicurus, though we had little to work upon, at least we had that little, in Socrates case we have absolutely nothing[4]. The thing is, contrary to Epicurus, Socrates was not particularly fond of writing[5]. Knowing that, I will use here the Socrates that came down to us through Plato. Since I have no intention of diving into the Socratic problem[6], I don't really care if the Socrates I will be presenting here is accurate or not to the real thing[7]. I'm happy to take

1 Epicurus was born in 341 BCE. Plato, ca. 428 BCE, some 87 years before him. Socrates, in turn, was born ca. 470 BCE. This puts him about 129 years apart from Epicurus. On average, it's safe to assume a new generation every 20 years. So, from that perspective, Epicurus is almost 7 generations away from Socrates.

2 One to one direct dialectical engagement. The famous Socratic elenchus.

3 Once you start to turn the stones in order to understand the ground where the expression *Presocratic* stands, the more controversial it becomes. Nevertheless, and although "[t]he term 'Presocratic' is a modern creation" with its first attested use being "in a manual of the universal history of philosophy published in 1788 by J. A. Eberhard", it's also true that "the idea that there [was] a major caesura between Socrates and what preceded him goes back to Antiquity" (LAKS, 2019, p. 1). For this reason, "Socrates [has been] widely credited with turning philosophy from the study of nature to hard questions in ordinary life—to have made it, in other words, a fit subject of anyone's personal interest" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, p. 31). So, regardless of what we think about how appropriate this notion is of a Socratic turning point, one thing is undeniable: the idea has got such a foothold in our collective imagination that we are now stuck with it.

4 This is no secret. "Socrates, as we know, wrote nothing". Which means that "[h]is life and ideas are known to us [either] through direct accounts — writing either by contemporaries (Aristophanes) or disciples (Plato and Xenophon) — [or] through indirect accounts, the most important of which is the one written by Aristotle, who was born fifteen years after Socrates' death (399)" (DORION, 2011, p. 1).

5 Again, this is no secret. Whenever someone mentions Socrates' disapproval of writing, it is almost obligatory to quote Plato's Phaedrus 275a-b. There, Plato makes Socrates put into the mouth of the Egyptian god Ammon a harsh criticism of the then newly crafted art of writing. So now I have to write about an author that wrote about a teacher that called upon the authority of an Egyptian god to finally tell you that Socrates thought writing "will introduce forgetfulness into the soul of those who learn it" (PLATO, 2009, p. 551). Does this prove anything about Socrates and his relation to writing? I don't think so, but it's a good conversation starter anyway.

6 "The 'Socratic problem' refers to the historical and methodological problem that historians confront when they attempt to reconstruct the philosophical doctrines of the historical Socrates" (DORION, 2011, p. 1).

7 Some scholars question if Plato's Socrates can even be regarded as a reliable source for the supposed *historical Socrates*. Their beef is with the outrageous oracular revelation given to Chaerephon. So their reasoning goes something along the lines that, if there was a way to discover "that the oracle to Chaerephon is an invention by Plato", that would "no longer allows us to speak of Plato as a reliable Socratic source". In this case, "it [would]

him as philosophical character[8] that fulfills the role of telling us how someone other than Epicurus conceived philosophy. It is enough for the task at hand. So when I quote him in his Socratic role, I let him speak for himself as if what's being said is actually his own words.

With that out of the way, we're ready to start the second leg of our journey. Let us waste no more time and hear what Socrates in turn has to say. Let us try to find what for him philosophy is.

4.1 'THIS, ATHENIANS, IS WHAT I'LL NEVER FAIL TO DO'

4.1.1 Philosophy as the goal, questioning as the way?

Meeting Socrates immediately reminds us of how far we are from the *Garden*. The thing is, while Epicureans are certain their founder had nailed wisdom on his first try, Socrates, on the contrary, is "quite conscious of [his own] ignorance" (21d) (PLATO, 1961a, p. 8). If anything, Socrates is best known for his popular dictum, "I know one thing [only], that I know nothing"[9] (apud FINE, 2021, p. 34).

So on the Epicurean side we were introduced to this notion of philosophy as the practice that would ultimately make anyone wise. Epicurus in turn was the perfect embodiment of wisdom, being the role model to be followed. He not only knew *the way*, he also knew "what things can come about, and what cannot arise, / And what law limits the power of each" (LUCRETIUS CARUS, 2007, p. 3). In short, he was kind of a *know-it-all*[10].

not [be] possible […] to speak of Plato's Socrates as a 'interpretation' by Plato, because the Socratic 'reality' itself […] [would have] been deliberately altered by Plato at its very root" (MONTUORI, 1990, p. 257). As I'll show later, this interpretation is not unreasonable as it might now seem. To all matters and purposes, I'll go with it.

8 *Personnage conceptuel*, in Deleuze and Guattari's jargon, where he is named as such (DELEUZE; GUATTARI, 2005, p. 63). Moreover, even those who believe there's some truth to Plato's Socrates, especially "the Socrates we know from the early dialogues" agree that he's likely "a composite of Plato's imagination and memory, and probably more the former than the latter" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, p. 53). So unless we think of Plato as a chronicler, his Socrates cannot be but a character.

9 "Or so we are told". This is how Gail Fine starts to poke the problem of the origin of this *supposed* quote. As she explains, "I do not know when this claim was first attributed to Socrates. One early source often thought to do so is Cicero, *Academica* 1.16: *nihil se scire dicat nisi id ipsum".* She even considers "misleading to represent Socrates as saying that he knows that he knows nothing" (2021, p. 33). But Fine is questioning the claim on epistemological grounds, as this statement seemingly contains a contradiction. I have no dog on this fight. So regardless of who was the first to attach this dictum to Socrates, one thing's for sure: it was so brilliantly put that now virtually everyone knows it and quotes it as being Socrates'.

10 In his *Letter to Pythocles*, Epicurus goes to great lengths to offer many possible explanations to all sorts of things "concerning meteorological phenomena". These range from multiple "cosmoi", "the turnings of the sun and moon", and the origin of eclipses, to how "[c]louds come to be formed", what makes thunder, "lightening

But on the Socratic side we have the opposite. Socrates is the very first to deny having any wisdom, his role being not of the person who knows, but rather of that which helps others to know. If anything, he is kind of a *go-between*, the intermediary for the knowledge being sought and the one seeking it. His craft is actually closer to that of his mother[11]'s, being "like [a] midwife [in] that *[he] cannot [him]self give birth to wisdom*" (150c-d). And "though [he] question[s] others, [he] can [him]self bring nothing to light because there is no wisdom in [him]" (150c-d) (PLATO, 1961b, p. 855, my emphasis). So there's a marked contrast between him and Epicurus. For Socrates is quite sure he is in no position to tell others how things are. Rather, he simply wants to hear what they think about those things.

But what exactly is he trying to do? What is the connection between this Socratic attitude and philosophy proper? Well, that's what I'm here to try to find out. However, since to make Socrates the character speak I need someone else to lend him a voice, and since Plato is obviously the best man for that job, I'll go with him, and use his as Socrates' voice. And since *his*[12] Apology is definitely "[t]he best place to start if we want to [truly] understand Plato's Socrates" (ADAMSON, 2014, n. p.), I'll go with it. Let's see what *he* has to say.

4.1.2 Act one: apology

4.1.2.1 Socrates' crime

"Socrates is guilty of criminal meddling, in that he inquires into things below the earth and in the sky[13], and makes the weaker argument defeat the stronger, and teaches others to follow his example" (19b-c) (PLATO, 1961a, p. 5). This is the charge brought upon him by Meletus. Socrates obviously disagrees. Neither is he interested in that kind of knowledge nor does he "try to educate people and charge a fee" for it. "But what [exactly] is it that you do, Socrates?

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flashes", whirlwinds, and even "earthquakes occur" (1994, pp. 20–25).

11 In the Theaetetus, Socrates refers to his mother as "a fine buxom woman called Phaenarete" (PLATO, 1961b, p. 853) . She would have been married to Sophroniscus, Socrates's father. But discussing who they were and how accurate this information is goes beyond my purpose here. To know more, please check Debra Nails' *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics.*

12 The writing here is intentionally ambiguous. The work, *Apology*, is no doubt Plato's. But the apology of Socrates contained within is, obviously, that of Socrates'. And by Socrates here I mean *the character*. Cf. footnote 8 above.

13 It's worth noting that while Socrates says he knows nothing about those things, he is also careful to add that he "mean[s] no disrespect for such knowledge, if anyone *really is versed in it*" (19c-d) (PLATO, 1961a, p. 5, my emphasis). So though claiming ignorance in these issues, he is not implying that such knowledge is impossible.

How is it that you have been misrepresented like this?" (20c-d). As these are probably in everyone's minds, Socrates raises the questions himself in order "to explain [to the jury] what it is that has given [him] this false notoriety" (20d) (PLATO, 1961a, p. 6). We are on the right track.

Here is where things start to get interesting. Promising nothing but "the whole truth" (20d-e), he then starts telling he has "gained [that] reputation […] from nothing more or less than a kind of wisdom" (20d-e). Which, obviously, prompts the question, "What kind of wisdom" (20d-e)? Well, his is definitely "Human wisdom", making him "wise in this limited sense" (20d-e) only.

But as he is standing in a court of law, Socrates is also careful to back up his claim by appealing to "an unimpeachable authority", calling "as witness" the very own Apollo, "the god at Delphi[14]" (20e) (PLATO, 1961a, p. 6). What this means is that he is not pretending to be humble in order to score rhetorical points[15]. Having Apollo on his side adds to the truth of what he is saying.

4.1.2.2 The *origin story*

From here on, he starts telling the story of what made him the peculiar character that ultimately brought him to this trial, the reason why he chose to examine "those reputed wise" (21c) (PLATO, 1997b, p. 21). The tale goes likes this:

> You surely knew Chaerephon. He was my friend from youth, and a friend of your democratic majority. He went into exile with you, and with you he returned. And you know what kind of a man he was, how eager and impetuous in whatever he rushed into. Well, he once went to Delphi and boldly asked the oracle—as I say, Gentlemen, please do not make a disturbance—he asked whether anyone is wiser than I. Now, the Pythia replied that no one is wiser. And to this his brother here will testify, since Chaerephon is dead (21a-b) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 83).

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14 With "its constant intervention in matters of import not only for the state but for the individual", the oracle at Delphi, "at least in its better days", had "wondrous power […] to sway the peoples of the ancient world" (DEMPSEY, 1918, p. vii).

15 Right at the beginning, in 17b-c, Socrates says "that [he has] not the slightest skill as a speaker" (PLATO, 1961a, p. 4). Some think this passage "contains the most famous *captatio benevolentiae* in ancient rhetoric". What this means is that "[i]ts main component is the so-called *Bescheidenheitstopos*, or *topos of modesty*, with regard to the oratorical abilities of the speaker" (ANDERSEN, 2001, p. 4). Assuming that to be his intention at 17b-c, here, at 20d-e, Socrates is not playing again that rhetorical trump card.

Putting aside all the details, important as they definitely are, the basic plot is this: Chaerephon[16], an already deceased[17] old friend of Socrates, known by everyone for his impulsiveness, once took upon himself to go to Delphi to ask the Pythian oracle a very peculiar question. He wanted to know if Socrates was the wisest of men. Of all the things he could ask about himself, why did he choose to ask this,[18] that we are not told. But the priestess confirmed that Socrates was indeed the wisest. Obviously, this claim aroused the spirits of those in the jury, perhaps for sounding preposterous. But Socrates assures them that he is not making this up, appealing to Chaerephon's brother as witness.

Again, details aside, what matters is that Socrates has now established that he didn't exactly had a say into why he ended up acting the way he did. In a way, we're learning his *origin story*[19]. In other words, this is the Socratic equivalent to Peter Parker's being bitten by a radioactive spider[20]. I'm clearly side-tracking here, but bear with me for moment. I mean, if philosophy

16 Though "[e]veryone considers Chaerephon a follower of Socrates", there isn't much agreement on "[w]hat kind of follower" (MOORE, 2013, p. 284). Some, especially "contemporary commentators, […] take a dimmer view of the man […]. They call him impulsive, unrestrained, and tactless, an indifferent student, or an inept arguer" (MOORE, 2013, pp. 284–285). Which makes sense, as Socrates described him as *impetuous*. But then there are those who think "Chaerephon was not Socrates' student" at all. He "had a life distinct from [his]. He stayed in Athens when Socrates went to war; and he left Athens during the oligarchy when Socrates stayed home. He knew people Socrates did not know, and had qualities Socrates might not have had" (MOORE, 2013, p. 298). To me, none of this matters. I again remind you of what was mentioned in footnote 58 of the previous chapter. More often than not, classicists take too many liberties with their speculations.

17 At the time of these events, Chaerephon had "been dead for up to four years" (MOORE, 2013, p. 296).

18 Let's think about this for a moment. "So why did [Chaerephon] decide to do it?" Because "[d]espite [his] impetuous character, the long trip to Delphi, the high admission price, and [even] the tedious wait would seem to rule out a completely whimsical decision to go there", right? So why did he think it was a good idea "to ask the Oracle about his friend", spending money and risking "embarrassment in going [there] to ask his question?" These are good points that are worth considering. "One possibility is that Chaerephon [wanted] to spend time with the wisest person". So "[t]o make sure spending time with Socrates was spending his time with the wisest person, he went to the Oracle to get the truth" (MOORE, 2013, p. 297). And if that seems a stretch, some scholars even "suggest that Chaerephon could have [got the idea from] known[ing] the stories of people asking the Oracle about who was the wisest" (DE STRYCKER; SLINGS apud MOORE, 2013, p. 297). All this to say that, crazy as it might sound at first, perhaps Chaerephon's idea was not that crazy after all.

19 An *origin story* is "a bedrock account of the transformative events that set the protagonist apart from ordinary humanity". This is very evident here with Socrates' account. The *origin story* is very common in the superhero genre where it happens to be "a prominent and popular trope" (HATFIELD; HEER; WORCESTER, 2013, p. 3). It's interesting to note that the similarities between the superhero genre and Plato's work even go beyond this. They both kind of share the notion of a *fictional universe*, where the whole body of work is self-consistent, with its characters inhabiting the same world, where all their behaviors are not only plausible, but expected. Their stories, though self-contained, have a common background across works. They all roam about the same time and place, thus sharing a similar background, living under the same society with its own culture and history. In a way, we can talk about a Platonic fictional universe, where Socrates happens to be its superhero. That being so, Socrates' has arguably an *origin story* trope quality to it.

20 In the original magazine, Peter Parker, while attending a "Science Exhibit", goes to a laboratory where they are conducting open "experiments in radio-activity" (LEE; DITKO, 1962, p. 2). During the demonstration, and "as the experiment begins, no one notices a tiny spider, descending from the ceiling on an almost invisible strand of web". This unfortunate spider, "accidentally absorbing a fantastic amount of radioactivity, […] in sudden

as a craft is my goal here, I cannot ignore these sudden insights, as they may later prove themselves useful. Take this question, for instance: is philosophy mainly a written exercise, one where authors and readers alike engage in a slow and careful philosophical discussion that is mostly bound by the rules and conventions of writing? And if so, wouldn't philosophy, *this* philosophy at least, be closely tied to the craft of writing, taking from it its features and even character? Do I write like this because I'm a philosopher, or am I a philosopher because I write like this? In other words, isn't *the medium the message*[21]?

Are you lost? Let me try to help you, step by step. Socrates tells us his *origin story*. But Plato is writing it. And Plato is an author, meaning he writes the things we read. As a well-versed writer, Plato follows some narrative conventions, mostly as a shortcut to empower his message. What's also true is that Plato, much as like Shakespeare, is a dramatic genius who willingly opts out to have any say in what's being said in the narrative. Socrates, *his* Socrates, is a kind of philosophical superhero, one tailored to match exactly the qualities needed to the practice of that very peculiar craft.

Thus, Socrates, *this* Socrates, is even granted an *origin story*, one that empowers him even further. Socrates, *this* and *only this* Socrates, is a literary figure, moving about in a literary medium, one that is filled with conventions, ways of doing, tricks of the trade. And Plato, literary genius as he is, uses these conventions to perfection. Case-in-point? He's offering Socrates, *this* Socrates, a narrative *kick-start* of his own, one that is pure philosophical gold.

What made Socrates *Socrates* was a paradoxical oracle from the highest priestess voicing Apollo's judgment. Socrates is the wisest man of them all. So, to wrap this up, and return to the well-trodden path, if the *medium is indeed the massage*[22], the way we write philosophy matters.

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shock, bites the nearest living thing at the split second before life ebbs from its radioactive body". This nearest living thing is none other than Peter Parker, who, surprised, exclaims, "A-A spider! It bit me![…] Why is it ***glowing*** that way??" (LEE; DITKO, 1962, p. 3). To his question, we might perhaps answer, 'Well, Parker, because instead of dying of cancer, you now have a bad case of *spider sense*'.

21 *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (1967), Marshall McLuhan's seminal work on media.

22 Marshall McLuhan's original title explicitly contains this playful *double-entendre*. A stroke of genius? Well, no. "Actually, the title was a mistake. When the book came back from the typesetter's, it had on the cover 'Massage' as it still does. The title was supposed to have read 'The Medium is the Message' but the typesetter had made an error. When Marshall saw the typo he exclaimed, "Leave it alone! It's great, and right on target!". As it stands, "[n]ow there are four possible readings for the last word of the title, all of them accurate: 'Message' and 'Mess Age,' 'Massage' and 'Mass Age'" ("Commonly Asked Questions about McLuhan – The Estate of Marshall McLuhan", 2022).

Philosophy is ultimately, like it or not, a literary genre. One with very peculiar conventions, no doubt. But one that operates withing the bounds of *literature*[23].

Having said that, I finally excuse myself for this sudden turn, adding a polite, but now perfectly useless — 'but I digress'. So, where were we? Ah. At the junction where Socrates is. Here is how he reacted to that *absurd* oracular sentence[24]:

> when I heard it, I reflected: "What does the God mean? What is the sense of this riddling utterance? I know that I am not wise at all; what then does the God mean by saying I am wisest? Surely he does not speak falsehood; it is not permitted to him [to do so]." (21b) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 83).

Imagine for a moment that you happened to stumble upon the Evil Queen's *magical mirror*, you know, the one that belongs to Snow White's evil stepmother. Luckily, there's no one around, and in the spirit of transgression you decide to play dumb and repeat the famous words, "Magic mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?" ("Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", 1938). To your surprise, the mirror nonchalantly informs you that you are the prettiest of them all! Your mind would probably go blank in disbelief, right?

And if that sounds too delirious to produce the intended affection, imagine instead that an established authority in your line of work, out of the blue, openly told you that 'no one in this field is as knowledgeable as you'. You would then probably feel as Socrates did. Like you, deep inside he knows that can't really be true. But he also knows that the oracular mirror isn't playing a trick on him, as the gods cannot but speak the truth. Now the problem is, what will he do with that perplexing bit of information?

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23 Though many disagree with this definition, I'm partial to the understanding of literature as that which comprises "[w]ritten works of any kind — philosophy, history, theology, personal memoirs, diaries, biographies, essays". That these "could count as 'literary' under this conception" can be attested by the fact that "Bertrand Russell [...] received the Nobel Prize for Literature" (LAMARQUE, 2009, p. 29) in 1950, as did Henri Bergson in 1927, and Albert Camus in 1957. Cf. The official website of the Nobel Prize. **NobelPrize.org**, 2022. Available at: <https://www.nobelprize.org/>.

24 In its most literal sense, as a judgment passed upon.

4.1.2.2.1 Round one, the politicians

Well, he chooses to do the obvious — at least to someone as philosophically gifted[25] as he. Namely, "[a]fter puzzling about it for some time, [he] set [him]self at last[,] with considerable reluctance[,] to check the truth" behind this seemingly preposterous claim. How? "[I]n the following way" (21b-c) (PLATO, 1961a, p. 7):

> I went to someone with a reputation for wisdom, in the belief that there if anywhere I might test the meaning of the utterance and declare to the oracle that "this man is wiser than I am, and you said I was wisest." (21c) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 83).

Checking the truth of a claim is a staple of philosophical inquiry. Socrates, though famous for being the epitome of rationalism[26], is actually very pragmatical here. If, for instance, to your disagreement I were to tell everyone that I run faster than you, the quickest and surest way to settle the issue would be for us to set up a race where we could both prove our worth. In the same spirit, Socrates, being told he is the wisest, tries to measure his wisdom against those who everyone considers wise. Nevertheless, it's interesting to note that Socrates' intention here is in falsifying the god's claim.

The thing is, he is pretty sure he is not wise though the god claims he is. In a way, he's kind of personifying Popper's *falsificationism*[27], since he cannot prove the logical truth of what is claimed. Because to know for sure that "no one is wiser" (21a-b), he has to literally surpass in wisdom each individual in existence, a task that not even the ever-idle Socrates, with all the time

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25 This is another twist that makes this Socrates pure Platonic gold. So, he went about inquiring on the truth of the oracular claim because… of how preposterous was that claim? Or did he inquire it because he already had that inclination to start with? Was Peter Parker accidentally bitten by a radioactive spider, or was he bitten by that spider because he already had a kink for being bitten by spiders? To put it within context, did Socrates start questioning because of Apollo, or did his already noticeable habit of constant questioning trigger Chaerephon to go all the way to Delphi to ask the oracle that seeming absurd question? In simpler terms, did Socrates find his philosophical call because of the god, or was he already philosophically gifted? If this is an *origin story*, his runs deeper, and is more twisted. Cf. footnote 19 above.

26 "Socrates' philosophical reputation rests on his adherence to *the highest standards of rationality*", which, according to Mark L. McPherran, is "given its clearest expression in the *Crito*" (2011, p. 114, my emphasis). He then quotes the following passage from that dialogue, where Socrates says that, "[n]ot now for the first time, but always, I am the sort of man who is persuaded by nothing except the argument (tô logô) that seems best to me when I reason (logizomenô) about the matter (*Cri.* 46b4–6)" (PLATO apud MCPHERRAN, 2011, p. 114).

27 I know I'm playing loose with the terms here, but that's how my mind works. I'm not saying this is actually Popper's falsificationism, but only that Plato, yet again, makes everyone else a footnote to his philosophy. Cf. p. 39 of WHITEHEAD, A. N. **Process and reality an essay in cosmology: Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of Edinburgh During the Session 1927-28**. New York: The Free Press, 1978. Be it or not, this "is a strong and venerable view of the Socratic method", i.e., "the art of falsification" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, p. 159).

in the world to cross-examine everyone, could carry through. So the next best option is to do the exact opposite, that is, to falsify the claim. By this route, he just needs to find one instance where the claim does not hold true.

So in a move that would delight Popper, he does exactly that and cross-examines the so-called experts. One by one, until the claim is proven wrong. In Socrates words,

> I examined him—there is no need to mention a name, but it was someone in political life who produced this effect on me in discussion, Gentlemen of Athens—and I concluded that though he seemed wise to many other men, and most especially to himself, he was not (21c-d) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 83).

He first targets a politician[28]. Not only is he known for being wise, he is also sure of how wise he is. However, Socrates' cross-examination ends up revealing that though there was much smoke, there was no fire. No, this man was not as wise as he thought he was. The scoreboard now reads: Apollo 1, Socrates 0. But this failed attempt of his at falsifying the divine claim had also an extra and unexpected side-effect. Because, as he "tried to show him [his lack of wisdom]", the *not-so-tactful* Socrates also managed to get on the wrong side of very powerful people, "and thence [he] became hated, by [that politician] and by many who were [also] present" (21c-d) (PLATO, 1984a, pp. 83–84). So apparently, the whole thing was a failure. But was it?

Well, not for Socrates. Thanks to this meeting of uneven minds, he ended up

> thinking to [him]self, "I am wiser than that man. Probably neither of us knows anything worthwhile; but he thinks he does and does not, and I do not and do not think I do. So it seems at any rate that I am wiser in this one small respect: I do not think I know what I do not" (21d-e) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 84).

I cannot but smile upon reading this. The sheer simplicity of it can perhaps be taken as a demonstration of the infamous Socratic irony[29]. But drama-wise, I think it makes more sense to

28 Probably a sophist or someone who was taught by one. In any case, sophists are clearly part of the group of people he is now examining.

29 *Socratic irony* is "commonly understood to mean *dissembling* or *disingenuousness*", mostly "used in reference to Plato's character Socrates" (WOLFSDORF, 2007, p. 175). A cursory reading through this lens produces interpretations that imagine Socrates not really saying what he is saying. However, "[t]he concept of 'Socratic irony' has no basis in Plato's use of *eirōneia* with respect to Socrates" (LANE, 2006, p. 51). Those in the know will not be surprised by this, but the whole theme of Socratic irony has its own history and it's story is one of a misinterpretation that took a life of its own. Here's the short version. Tracing how "*εἰρωνεία* […] metastasized into irony", Gregory Vlastos identifies three main meanings in use by Socrates/Plato's time. The first, and more prevalent, implies "willful misrepresentation". The second stands for "mockery entirely devoid of any such connotation [with misrepresentation]". As for the third, it means "saying something while pretending […] not to say it or […] calling things by contrary names" (1987, p. 83). The running theme is *pretense*, and originally the word "had strongly unfavorable connotations". Then, throughout time, *eirōneia* eventually sheds "completely this disreputable past", finally coming "to express something contrary to what is said". Thanks to this, it be-

take Socrates' words at face-value given the situation he's in. On the one hand, he knows he's not wise by anyone's standards. On the other, he's being divinely told that he is not only wise, but the wisest of them all. And yes, he can try to disprove the wise, but that can only go so far. After all, just because he demonstrates someone is not as knowledgeable as they first pretend to be does not automatically mean he knows more than that particular someone. At least not in regard to the things that person said to be wise about.

Take the following as an example. Imagine I make you realize you are not as knowledgeable about your car as you first thought. Would that make me more of an expert in the inner workings of your car? Not at all. Not necessarily. I could be genuinely interested in knowing more about your car while being perfectly ignorant about how your car works. I think the same is happening here.

Socrates, with no ill-intent on his part, is genuinely inquiring onto the wisdom this guy has. It's through his questioning that he and the other guy come to realize that this guy is not as wise as he thinks. That however is not the problem. What is troubling is that this other guy not only fails to acknowledge his lack of knowledge, but even becomes angry at Socrates for putting his wisdom into question. With that in mind, Socrates' conclusion seems pretty legit: he is indeed wiser than that guy in that he at least acknowledges he's ignorant about the things he truly does not know. So he's not kidding.

Successfully unsuccessful, Socrates then, in yet another bout of Socratic tactfulness,

> then went to another man who was reputed to be even wiser, and the same thing seemed true again; there too [he] became hated, by him and by many others (21d-e) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 84).

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comes "the perfect medium for mockery innocent of deceit". But Vlastos, though not sure of "what made this [shift] happen", is positive that he at least "can say who made it happen: Socrates". How? Through "a new form of life realized in himself which was the very incarnation of *εἰρωνεία* in that second of its contemporary uses, as innocent of intentional deceit" (1987, p. 84). Vlastos adds that so important was Socrates is this shift in meaning that now, "centuries after his death, […] educated people [can] hardly be able to think of *ironia* without its bringing Socrates to mind" (1987, p. 85). What this means is that Socrates was such a key figure in changing *eirōneia*'s meaning that he became inextricably associated with it. Problem is that later authors, from Aristotle onwards, started to ascribe to Socrates a kind of irony that does not do justice to his *eirōneia* as presented in Plato. Truth is that though "this later tradition [gained] a life of its own", we must keep in mind that it "stem[s] not from Plato but from Aristotle, who […] made *eirōneia* mean 'irony' for his own rhetorical purposes rather than in consonance with any prior ascriptions of it to Socrates" (LANE, 2006, p. 51). Be as it may, all this to say that, even if argued that this moment in the text Socrates is being ironic in Vlastos' sense of being playful, my reading denies even that playfulness. Notwithstanding Socrates' day-to-day willingness to be playful, here, at this point, Socrates means exactly what he says. Or, to put it the other way around, he is not being *eironeic.*

Surprisingly unsurprising, Socrates yet again tries to falsify the god' claim, and yet again fails. And again fails twice as much. For yet again the other party gets very annoyed with Socrates. Most of us at this point would at least start questioning the safety, if not the sanity, of this whole project. But no, not Socrates, not *this* Socrates. He, on the other hand,

> [n]evertheless, [...] went on, perceiving with grief and fear that [he] was becoming hated[;] but still, it seemed [to him] necessary to put the God first—so [he] had to go on, examining what the oracle meant *by testing everyone* with *a reputation for knowledge* (21e-22a) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 84, my emphases).

Relentlessly driven, as only a true believer would do, Socrates keeps on examining, one by one, each and everyone — as long as they're reputed for being knowledgeable. And apparently always with the same result. Not only does he fail to find someone wiser than him, he also fails to make new friends with those getting debunked. In lay terms, he's getting on the wrong side of an increasing number of very powerful people. You know, politicians, who are really good at holding a grudge. Was this a good idea? Well, if one values one's own life, no. Case in point? Socrates being trialed under false charges. This his apology so far.

And now that we are about to close round one, the one where Socrates, the philosophical superhero, fought the politicians, it's about time to check the result so far. Here's Socrates' own tally:

> it seemed to me, as I carried on inquiry[ing] in behalf of the God, that those most highly esteemed for wisdom fell little short of being most deficient, and that others reputedly inferior were men of more discernment (22a-b) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 84).

To his amazement, the unexpected happened. The ones with a lesser claim to wisdom were indeed smarter than those boasting much stronger claims[30]. So it seems fair to conclude that the more pretentious the politician, the less this politician knows. And given how much love

30 This is the Socratic version of the famous (or to some infamous) cognitive bias known as the *Dunning-Kruger Effect*. This bias "asserts that the expertise needed to judge performance in many intellectual and social skill domains is exactly the same expertise necessary to produce good performance in the first place. Thus, those failing to achieve good performance are also those the least able to judge when it has been attained or avoided —and they will fail to recognize just how incompetent their performances are. More than that, because of their imperfect expertise, they are simply not in a position to recognize the depths of their deficiencies" (SCHLÖSSER *et al.*, 2013, p. 86). Or, to put it simply, those who are not very skilled at a certain craft do not have enough know-how to understand how little they know about what they're doing. Because of that, they tend to overestimate their abilities. Some even add that the reverse is also true, i.e., that those who are more skilled, because they have a better understanding of the kind of result that are expected from them, tend to underestimate their capabilities.

Socrates has been generating throughout this round, I think it's also fair to assume that the more pretentious the politician, the angrier this politician gets.

4.1.2.2.2 Round two, the poets

"From the politicians [Socrates] went to the poets" (22a-b). Why the poets? Because unlike politicians, who then and now need to oversell their ability to make informed decisions regarding everyone's future, the poets, *these poets*[31] at least, usually spoke from a place of higher wisdom[32]. Their works, especially those from the likes of Homer and Hesiod, were highly influential, constituting the very backbone of Greek culture[33]. Adding to this, there was also a religious significance to what they were doing. They were often taken as conduits for these special divine beings, the Muses[34], who in turn "could reveal the truth when they wished" (MURRAY, 1981, p. 91).

For instance, it was not uncommon for acclaimed poets like "Pindar [to insist] on the truth of what he ha[d] to say—an insistence which [was] all the stronger because he [was] acutely aware of the power of poetry to perpetrate falsehood". All in all, these poets, "as prophet[s] of the Muses, ha[d] access to knowledge which [was] hidden from ordinary mortals" (MURRAY, 1981, p. 92). Problem is that this too made them think of "themselves the wisest of men *in [all] other matters*" (22c-d). So in order "that [he] might not leave the oracle untested" (22a-b) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 84, my emphasis), Socrates now makes the poets his next target. Among such an illustrious company, he believed he could not fail to "discover [himself] manifestly less wise by comparison" (22b).

So how did he test them? Well, he "took up poems over which [he] thought they had taken special pains, and asked them what they meant, so as also at the same time to learn from

31 Ancient Greek poets usually start their works with invocations that "are essentially requests for information, which the muses, as daughters of Memory, provide" (MURRAY, 1981, p. 90).

32 In Plato's Ion, he has this character say that "by dispensation from above good poets convey to us these utterances of the gods" (534a) (1961c, p. 221).

33 "No one doubts the important influence of Homer and Hesiod on the traditional education of the Greeks". So much so that, according to Herodotus, "virtually everyone [at the time] was aware of their contents" (NADDAF, 2002, p. 343).

34 It's no secret that "[i]n early Greek poetry inspiration is, of course, characteristically expressed in terms of the Muses". They could "inspire the [poet] in two main ways: (a) they give him permanent poetic ability; (b) they provide him with temporary aid in composition". In practice, what this means is that "[t]he Muses' gift of permanent poetic ability corresponds to the explanation of creativity in terms of the poetic personality". As for "their temporary aid in composition[, this] corresponds to the explanation of creativity in terms of the poetic process" (MURRAY, 1981, p. 89).

them" (22-c). And what did he learn? That "[t]here was hardly anyone […] who could not give a better account than they of what they had themselves produced" (22b-c). And what did he conclude? "[T]hat poets too do not make what they make by wisdom, but by a kind of native disposition or divine inspiration, exactly like seers and prophets" (22c). Just like them, they may "utter fine things, but know nothing of the things they speak" (22c-d) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 84). So, no, they were not wiser than him, because though producing enticing works, the poets themselves could not account for any of that supposed knowledge contained within them. With this the scoreboard now reads: Apollo 2 – Socrates 0.

4.1.2.2.3 Round three, the artisans

From the above, it's easy to picture our man Socrates rising triumphantly at each of the however many individual matches he had to face on the previous rounds. But that also means that by now he has been fighting a lot. Normal humans, flesh and bone ones, would at this point apply a good ol' measure of inductive reasoning, concluding the god was right all along. But not our trusted philosophical hero. He still marches on, this time to face the artisans.

At this point, Socrates at least knows he is wiser than both the politicians and the poets. Problem is, that also means little, as he still knows "scarcely anything" (22d). But now he is confident he won't fail, as artisans definitely know "many fine things" (22d) (PLATO, 1984a, pp. 84–85). And, lo and behold, "[in] this [he] was not mistaken" (22d-e). They indeed "knew things that [he] did not" (22d-e), so "in that respect [they] were wiser" (22d-e). So Apollo 2 – Socrates 1?

Unfortunately for Socrates, no. Just like the poets, these "capable public craftsmen had exactly the same failing". They too, "because they practiced their own arts well, each deemed himself wise *in other things, things of great importance*" (22d-e) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 85, my emphasis). As such, "[t]his mistake quite obscured their wisdom" (22d-e). Unlike Socrates, they took their expertise and accompanying knowledge as indication that they were also knowledgeable enough to understand other unrelated things. With this they mixed "wisdom and folly together" (22e-23a), making Socrates the better man. So the god was right all along, thus scoring a perfect hat trick: Apollo 3 – Socrates 0.

4.1.2.3 What is philosophy doing here?

In line with what happened on the previous chapter, let's now take a small break to gather our thoughts in order to make some sense of what we've learned so far. It's important to keep in mind that we're both here in order to find out what for Socrates philosophy is. So up to this point what have we been his lessons? Here are the ones that to me stand out the most. Let me take you one by one in the order they appear.

First there's the unavoidable *origin story* that seems a lesson in itself. In a way, it's tempting to think that philosophy is a kind of gift. In Socrates' case, he seems naturally predisposed to it. Two things seem to point in this same direction. First there's his peculiar response to the oracular claim, namely the 'ok, let's test it' attitude with which he immediately greets it. Then there's also the implicit allusion to a pre-existing Socratic behavior, you know, the one that prompted Chaerephon to specifically ask the god if there was anyone wiser than his friend[35]. But is this really the lesson? I mean, that philosophy is gift? I don't think so.

What seems to me more striking is the whole Socratic attitude towards a huge claim about himself. It's not just the incredulity with which Socrates receives it. That is not only natural, but expected. What's interesting, if not subtle, is that he does not get full of himself for being made the top dog of wisdom by a deity. On the contrary. He is actually rather uncomfortable with the idea given how untrue that claim *feels* to him. For he is under no illusion of being more knowledgeable than he actually is — even if a god is saying the opposite. Or, to put it differently, where others would get intoxicated for being singled out by none other than a god, Socrates doubts the accuracy of what's being claimed.

35 Something must have triggered Chaerephon to take upon himself such a bizarre enterprise. Cf. footnote 25 above.

What this means is that, in a way, Socrates personifies here a kind of core epistemic modesty that philosophy cannot do without.[36] So to our purposes, the first practical lesson seems to be this: (1) *beware of how much you think you know*. After all, if philosophy is truly your thing, and you're eager to test any claim to knowledge, you have to first start with yourself, being honest about your own claims. It's as simple and straightforward as that. But there's more.

Then there's the obvious. (2) *Don't take any claim at face value*. Even if there's a consensus around its truth, put it to the test. Only then will you know for yourself how true that claim actually is. No surprise here, right? So why make it a lesson? Because some teachings, though self-evident when you think about them in a vacuum, are actually rather difficult to put in practice for countless reasons. Take the following two scenarios as examples of why this is indeed a worthy lesson.

First the obvious, that some lessons are really difficult to learn. Everyone knows they should not eat too much, or that they should not indulge in low quality food, as these are not good for their health. Nonetheless, most people find it difficult to keep an eye on how much they eat, or how bad their food choices actually are. Policy makers, aware of this problem, constantly try to promote a change in habits by repeating the same lesson on and on again. The same happens here. Though obvious, it's never too much to repeat this lesson over and over again.

But then there's also the fear of going against the grain. Think of academia, for instance. You attend a talk by some big shot everyone praises. And you're like me, a student, stuck at the bottom rungs of the knowledge ladder. Would you dare to put into question what this guy is saying? Or, to put it differently, while on the arena where people are tooth and claw fighting for knowledge, will you have the guts to be *that annoying guy* who puts into question what everyone else believes to be true? And this is just one example out of many. There are simply too many trappings making this a valuable though very simple lesson.

After that comes the lesson (3) *on philosophical bravery*, and this is an important one. Because even if your inquiry makes others angry, you shouldn't let fear get in philosophy's way.

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36 This is not an empty statement. Modesty is actually the necessary antidote to a certain attitude that runs against the acquisition of new, and probably contradictory, knowledge. I once heard from a Buddhist monk the following analogy. If, say, knowledge is like rain, pouring from above, an arrogant person full of oneself is like someone standing on top of a mountain trying to collect water. Said water main rain upon them, but most of it will naturally flow downhill, being more easily and abundantly collected by those who stay on the bottom. The moral of the story being that no true seeker of knowledge can do without intellectual modesty. The moment someone thinks they already know everything worth knowing, they become stuck in their own beliefs and simply stop learning.

Nevertheless, this is not to be taken as blank check to go around annoying other people, getting on their nerves, and making them uncomfortable just because. The point is rather that if you meet someone who is very sure about themselves and how much they know, making large assumptions about other things they cannot possibly know, then please go ahead and do your thing. But beware. More often than not, they'll get angry — especially if they are attached to their reputation, which most people are.

So keep in mind that philosophy, because it puts into question established assumptions, is not without its dangers. As shown by Socrates, you may even end up in a court of law for crimes you didn't commit. That, however, should not deter you. Keep calm and carry on[37]. On a more serious note though, this is a proper lesson, one all philosophers should take to heart. So if this is the craft of your choosing, you have to be prepared for the worst, making bravery part and parcel of this craft.

The next lesson is about the kind of wisdom a philosopher is after. The thing is, with the politicians, Socrates seems to be taking heads on the kind of people who claim to know about everything[38], but who cannot explain what exactly they know about[39]. The sophist Gorgias, at least *Plato's* Gorgias, comes to mind as a good example[40] of this. But then, with the poets, Socrates wants to probe the people who apparently produce knowledge without knowing how that knowledge came about. Akin to seers, the poets think of themselves as conduits of whoever speaks through them, producing impressive works that do give the impression of having something to show in terms of wisdom[41]. And because it's their work, the wisdom contained in them

37 A motivational phrase turned internet meme taken from a British propaganda poster from the Second World War. Cf. p. 6 of SLOCOMBE, R. **British posters of the Second World War**. London: Imperial War Museum, 2010.

38 If there's one thing politicians do well is to persuade others that theirs is the best decision. The problem is that their "art of persuasion […] is neutral regarding subject matter, can be mastered by itself, and is powerful enough to trump experts in any other field, even on the subjects of their expertise" (WOODRUFF, 1999, p. 294). So yes, they appear to know about everything, as they can persuade others they really do.

39 The thing is, "[t]hough thus refuting every definition offered in every dialogue of search, Socrates nevertheless makes it clear that he wants the experts *to try their hardest to find such definitions that will apply to all cases*". More often than not, "[t]he dialogue typically goes on, no satisfactory definition is found, and the subjects of Socrates' questioning are left frustrated and doubting their own knowledge" (MATSON; LEITE, 1991, p. 149, my emphasis).

40 In the similar named dialogue, when Gorgias is clearly asked what art is his and what's its scope, Gorgias successively attempts several definitions that are either too broad or downright vague. Yes, he's an accomplished rhetorician, and can teach others the *supposed* art of persuasion. But as Socrates is careful to demonstrate, persuasion is more akin to pastry-cooking (462d-e) being not a craft, but a *knack* (462c-d). He's good at pretending to know what he's talking about, maybe persuading himself he actually do know about such things. That, however, is just an elaborate illusion. Cf. footnote 37 above.

41 The character Ion is a good parody of taking the poets' works as being reliable sources of wisdom. When asked if he is "the ablest general […] in Greece", Ion proudly replies that Socrates can "be sure of it", as he "learned

in turn becomes associated with these poets and, by extension, starts to be taken as *their* wisdom.

Problem is that when Socrates examines these works, asking their authors what their works mean, they seem to be no better than anyone else in explaining their meaning. What this then shows is that these works seem at first to speak some kind of truth, and are thus revered as such, but that's not actually what's happening. Since the poets themselves cannot explain what is meant by their work, they don't really know what they are doing. So contrary to what one might at first think, their seeming knowledge is not real, as it is not really theirs. This in turn seems to imply that, as Socrates sees it, wisdom, true wisdom, is closely connected with actual know-how, i.e., having a technical knowledge of sorts.

This becomes even more apparent when he moves on to the artisans, the first group of people he concedes to be wiser than him, though not entirely. But why are they wiser? Because they are good at their craft, i.e., they not only know *what* they're doing, they also know *why* they are doing it. To help you understand what I mean, just Imagine a bicycle mechanic who is fixing, say, your bike. At a certain point s/he starts to unscrew something that seems unrelated to the problem your bicycle has. Intrigued, you ask her/him why. S/he immediately answers that s/he has to do that first in order to loosen another component, so s/he can then finally remove the broken part. This is the kind of wisdom artisans have, and Socrates duly acknowledges it.

So the wisdom the philosopher is after, at least *this* philosopher, is practical wisdom. (4) *The wiser the person, the more this person has the know-how pertaining what they claim to know*. Ironically, this is perfectly embodied in Socrates, as he seems to have the know-how to test the know-how of those who claim to know without knowing how. But jokes aside, this is interesting as it shows that philosophy here, *this* philosophy, is not just a certain body of knowledge[42] of who said what, when, and why[43]. It is rather more of a craft, one that seeks to understand how reliable are the people claiming to have any kind of knowledge. But this also shows that the philosopher, as we'll see later, it's actually a very down to earth a person, a crafter of sorts

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this also from Homer" (541b-c) (PLATO, 1961c, p. 227).

42 The Socratic method "requires no big theory and little philosophical or factual knowledge to use. It does take imagination and skill; you need to know how to listen and how to think of good questions. And you have to be able to see where a principle leads and where it will run into problems. But the materials for carrying out the method are all in your partner or within yourself, as the case may be" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, p. 180).

43 Philosophy as its history.

whose job is to provide an invaluable social service. That however is not the view of the majority. But that's also why philosophers need to be brave, as I've mentioned above.

Finally, as a bonus lesson, we have one regarding the scope of knowledge. This is also a lesson open to everyone, and not just philosophers. It goes something like this: (5) *just because you're good at something, it doesn't mean you're good at everything*. Pretty obvious, right? Well, it should be, but apparently it's not. Because just like the poets and artisans of Socrates' days, most of us alive today still miss it entirely. Just think.

How many of us today are truly justified in making the big assumptions we're making? True, we may have much knowledge in a certain area, feeling confident about the power such knowledge provides. Sure, we may even have a multidisciplinary understanding of how things work at large. But once things start to get really, really big, we cannot but second-guess the object about which we are talking. At that point, it's easy, tempting even, to take the leap and go beyond one's field of expertise[44]. In a way, it's is almost a feature. Case in point?

Just tune in to any morning show where *experts* are invited to talk about pretty much everything. Are they justified? Or are they second-guessing? Are they aware of how much are they justified in making their claims? Hmmmm. Probably not, or at least not as much as they think themselves justified. I'm tempted to say that, given its history, this is most probably a human trait[45]. And if that's the case, what this means is simply the obvious that no amount of lessons can really change this. Which, if you take a bit to think about it, is not a bad thing, not really. At least not for those who are looking forward to practice the Socratic arts. On the contrary. They praise Apollo instead, for they'll never run out of employment!

With that being said, it's now time to go back to where we left Socrates. But before that, allow me this last observation. Do you remember when I first asked what philosophy was doing in Epicurus' letter? Back then, I felt there was something awkward with his attitude of making

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44 This is a problem known by epistemologists as *epistemic trespassing*, which "occurs when experts pass judgment on questions in fields where they lack expertise" (DIPAOLO, 2022, p. 2). From a never-ending pool of possible examples, here's one worth mentioning. "Linus Pauling, the brilliant chemist and energetic proponent of peace, won two Nobel Prizes—one for his work in chemistry [(1954)], and another for his activism against atomic weapons [(1962)]. Later, Pauling asserted that mega-doses of vitamin C could effectively treat diseases such as cancer and cure ailments like the common cold. Pauling was roundly dismissed as a crackpot by the medical establishment after researchers ran studies and concluded that high-dose vitamin C therapies did not have the touted health effects. Pauling accused the establishment of fraud and careless science" (BALLANTYNE, 2019, p. 1).

45 Maybe this could be neatly presented under the guise of an adage or a law. Something akin to 'given enough time and exposure, any expert will end up passing judgments on things outside their field of expertise'. Perhaps we could even call it *Socrates' Law of Epistemic Hubris*.

philosophy *just a tool for a healthy and happy mind*. I could not exactly pinpoint the problem, but the feeling I had was that, in a way, philosophy was actually being left out of their grand picture. So why do I mention it now?

Because here I feel the exact opposite. In Socrates' speech up to this point there was not a single explicit mention to either philosophy or the happy life. But from the beginning, philosophy has been under the spotlight, taking center stage at each and every turn. So instead of awkward feelings, I'm all pumped up, eager for the next batch of lessons. And to me that is incomparably more fulfilling. May not sound much, but it's at least something to keep on the back of our minds. Regardless, with that out of the way, let us return to Socrates' trial.

4.1.2.4 Know thy ignorance and thou shall be wise

When we last left Socrates, he had finished his three rounds of inquiry. Obviously, this didn't help his reputation, as enemies started to pile up among those exposed for their ignorance. And if this was bad enough, to Socrates' dismay, word starts to spread out that he is achieving such a success because he is indeed wise. Why? Because those present [at the Socratic showdowns] think [him] wise in the things in which [he] test[s] others"[46] (23a-b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 85). Of course, Socrates knows this is not the case, but who could blame them? From their perspective, one thing does seem to follow from the other.

Socrates, however, has a different understanding of the whole thing. To him, "it is really the God who is wise". This, in turn, leads him to reinterpret Apollo's oracle as saying "that 'human nature is a thing of little worth, or none'" (23a-b). In what seems a twist of self-deprecatory judgment, Socrates explains why he thinks this is the correct interpretation.

Apollo is just using him as an example, as if saying that any Athenian will be the wisest if, *like Socrates*, "realizes that he is truly worth nothing in respect to wisdom" (23b). Self-deprecatory? Not really. This is actually Socrates laying the grounds to explain why he kept on doing what he was known to do, i.e., the Socratic method, one that by necessity demands such modesty. In his own words,

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46 Chaerephon, who, as friend, must have been present at many of these events, is probably a good example of those taking others' failure to back their claims to knowledge as validation of Socrates' wisdom on those matters.

> that is why I still go about even now on behalf of the God, searching and inquiring among both citizens and strangers, should I think some one of them is wise; and when it seems he is not, I help the God and prove it (23b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 85).

Doggedly committed to his cause, Socrates doesn't shy away from to his "service to God" (23c). With an attitude of leaving no stone unturned, Socrates ends us with "no leisure worth mentioning either for the affairs of the City or for [his] own estate" (23c). Which, though great for his legacy, must have been terrible for his family[47], as he ends up "dwell[ing] in utter poverty"[48] (23c). But that's really beyond the point. Drama-wise, what matters is that Socrates is just acting out the kind of commitment necessary to practice *this* way of doing philosophy. So, be warned. If you end up choosing this craft, two things you can certainly expect: a lot of work, and a terrible pay.

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47 In the dialogue *Phaedo*, we learn that Socrates had "two little sons and one big boy" (116b) (PLATO, 1961d, p. 96). The big boy was Sophroniscus, and his two youngest siblings were, respectively, Menexenus and Lamprocles. Plato also identifies a wife of his, the "mother of Socrates' three children" (D'ANGOUR, 2019, n. p.), Xanthippe. But, as always, things might have been a bit more complicated than this. The problem with this account is that "[b]oth Aristotle and his pupil Aristoxenus state that Socrates married [a woman called] Myrto and that they had two sons, Sophroniscus and Menexenus". And "Aristoxenus [even] goes on to say that Xanthippe, whom he describes as 'a citizen woman but of a commoner class', became involved with Socrates much later, and was the mother of their youngest son Lamprocles" (D'ANGOUR, 2019, n. p.). What is not clear though, is how much these two women overlap in Socrates' life. Because while some ancient sources, like "Aristotle and Aristoxenus […] record that the philosopher married twice", there are "others [who] even charged him with bigamy, claiming that a wife called Myrto lived together with him and Xanthippe" (D'ANGOUR, 2019, n. p.). Plato, again in the *Phaedo*, tells that just before Socrates is about to be put to death, they bring him his children "and *the women* of his household" (116b) (1961d, p. 96, my emphasis). All in all, what matters is that Socrates, though engaged in his god-driven search for the wisest, also had a family, with 3 children and how many wives he might have had. And they got the brunt of his search for wisdom.

48 How poor was Socrates? In Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, Socrates, *Xenophon's* Socrates, reports that "all [his] property including the house would very easily bring in five minae" (1994, pp. 111–133). And how much would that be today? Well, because "[a]ncient economies did not work like modern ones, and ancient writers, almost all slave-owning aristocrats who belonged to privileged elites, rarely wrote about the vulgar topic of money", it's difficult to say (MARKOWITZ, 2018). However, one way to roughly guesstimate their purchasing power is by calculating the rate of pay of a skilled worker at that time. For instance, "[a] worker in Athens could earn about two drachmas a day", while "[a]n unskilled worker would make around half of a drachma for one day's work" (RYMER, 2000). So, given that Brazil's current minimum wage is set at R$ 1212 per month (MELO, 2022), which is around $40 per day, we can use that number as reference to calculate how much would a *mina* be worth today. Given that 1 *mina* corresponded to 100 *drachmae* (RYMER, 2000), and that a *drachma* corresponded to around R$ 40, Socrates' 5 *minae* property would amount today to around R$ 20000. So how poor was Socrates? Having a family of 5, his household would clearly be rated as low income. But he was definitely not *dwelling in utter poverty*. Well, *Xenophon's* Socrates, that is.

4.1.2.4.1 Cleared from Meletus' charges

At this point, Socrates returns to the charge brought upon him on trial. Since, to him, as he has come clear as to why others think him weird, awkward at times, bothersome even, Socrates moves on to the next item brought upon him by Meletus.

So far, his apology answered two of the three initial charges. He promised to give them nothing but "the whole truth" (17b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 79), and by having given here this truthful account of his, he successfully cleared himself of all charges so far. But don't just take my word for it. Let's return to the original accusation.

"Socrates is guilty of criminal meddling, in"

1. "that he inquires into things below the earth and in the sky,"
   — cleared. Socrates was not interested in such knowledge;
2. he "makes the weaker argument defeat the stronger"
   — cleared. That is not his goal. He's just been solving Apollo's riddle[49];
3. "and [he] teaches others to follow his example" (19b-c) (PLATO, 1961a, p. 5)
   — uncleared so far.

So how is he cleared by the truth here? By stating he never had any intention to make "the young men follow" 23c-d) him. What happened was that, unfortunately for him, the youngsters, who are easier to impress, just like many others present at his showdowns, "rejoicing to hear men tested", oftentimes felt compelled to "imitate [him] and undertake to test others" (23c-d). Consequently, "those whom they test[ed] become angry" (23c-d) not with the young, but rather with Socrates. It's him, they say, who "is utterly polluted, and corrupts the youth" (23d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 85).

But they are wrong, Socrates thinks. This is nothing but misguided anger on their part. Others' ignorance at what they claim to know in the first place is what is at fault. Not Socrates for simply unveiling it. Socrates is thus justified in thinking himself cleared of the third charge

49 Is Apollo Socrates' Sphinx? If this sounds bold, consider how "Oedipus and Socrates bear striking resemblances". Just like Socrates, "Oedipus was subject to an oracle". "Both Oedipus and Socrates solved a riddle": "Oedipus solved the riddle of the Sphinx", "Socrates […] the riddle of the Delphic oracle about who was the wisest". Just as "Thebes was suffering a plague", "Athens was [also] suffering a moral plague" (HOLE, 2011, pp. 362–363).

Meletus brought upon him. But Socrates is still not done with him. Not yet at least. He wants to confirm with Meletus what he, Meletus, thinks.

This he does, directly cross-examining Meletus. With this, he now answers a second set of charges. Their indictment "runs something like this: […]

Socrates is guilty of"

1. "corrupting the youth",
2. "and of not acknowledging the gods the City acknowledges, but other new divinities" (24b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 86).

The subsequent dialogue between Socrates and Meletus is the Socratic test put into practice. It bears witness on how to make someone with a bold claim to knowledge prove themselves ignorant, in this case that Socrates is really guilty of the above two charges. And if they are ignorant, and still declare him guilty, they are actually the living proof that they have absolutely no idea of what they're talking about. And how is that proof achieved? Here, by showing how Meletus actually contradicts himself when he has to answer to Socrates' questions. The script goes a bit like this.

To refute charge number 1, Socrates makes him agree to the following claims:

(a) that "the young should be as good as possible" (24d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 86);
(b) that they are improved by everyone in Athens, except by Socrates (24e-25b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 87);
(c) that "wicked men do evil things to those around them", while "good men [do] good things" (25c-d);
(d) that no one "wishes to be harmed" (25d-e);
(e) that Socrates "corrupt[s] the youth intentionally" (25d-e) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 88).

From this Socrates concludes that, according to Meletus, he has gone mad in wanting to harm himself by doing "great evil intentionally" (25e-26a). That, however, as stated by what Meletus himself said above, is not possible. For starters, Socrates knows himself to be a good man, and (c) good men want to do good things for others. Moreover, like everyone else, Socrates (d) does not wish to be harmed, so how could he *intentionally* corrupt the youth, and thus choose to be harmed, with this only going against this most basic wish of his?

So it must be the case that "either [Socrates] do[es] not corrupt the youth, or if [he] do[es], [he] do[es] so unintentionally" (26a). If *he does not* corrupt the youth, what is claimed by (b) cannot be true. And if he ends up doing so *unintentionally*, then it's what's claimed by (e) which becomes an untrue statement. Or one; or the other. But both, as Meletus claims? That's impossible. That's nonsense. They cannot be true at the same time without one contradicting the other. Problem is that Meletus is claiming both to be true. Which, as shown, means that, "[i]n either case, [Meletus] lie[s]"[50] (26a) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 88). If he lies, Socrates is innocent. And if innocent, Socrates has been cleared from charge number 1.

As to charge number 2, Socrates now makes Meletus agree with the following claims:

(a) that Socrates corrupts the youth by teaching "them not to acknowledge the gods the City acknowledges, but other new divinities" (26b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 88);

(b) and that he also "acknowledge[s] no gods at all" (26c-d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 89);

That, however, is obviously preposterous. What Meletus is saying is that (b) "Socrates is guilty of not acknowledging gods", and, at the same time, of (a) acknowledging them by introducing the youths to new gods. Which, then, is just another way of saying that Socrates is both an atheist and a true believer. Crazy, right? That, to Socrates, is simply impossible.

So again Meletus must be lying, as "there is no way" "that one and the same man can believe that there are things pertaining to divinities and gods, and yet believe that there are neither divinities nor heroes" (27e-28a) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 90). If Meletus is lying, Socrates is again found not guilty of this charge.

4.1.2.4.2 Stationed at philosophy

A while ago, I mentioned the Socratic lesson on philosophical bravery. Character-wise, Socrates is the perfect embodiment of this kind of courage. For despite being on trial and "in danger of being put to death" (28b-c), Socrates doesn't even waver. To him, no man worthy of

50 Just a friendly reminder on "why Socrates thinks inconsistency is such a serious problem". Because "being inconsistent means being wrong", as "[y]ou find yourself holding two beliefs that are […] in undeniable conflict". But "they can't both be right". So either "you evidently believe something that is false, or your claim to believe them both is false" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, p. 182). Either way, you're wrong.

his name[51] "should take thought for danger in living or dying" (28b-c). On the contrary. It's not death such man should worry about. What he should worry is rather "whether what he does is just or unjust", if his actions are actually "the work of a good man or a bad one" (28b-c). In truth, much like Achilles[52], it's better to despise "danger instead of submitting to disgrace" (28c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 91). Case in point? Socrates himself, here, prepared to do the same.

So invoking an experience that like him many on the jury are also familiar with[53], Socrates compares his divine call to action to the attitude a warrior should have when facing danger. "[W]herever he is stationed by his commander, there he must […] remain and run the risks, giving thought to neither death nor any other thing except disgrace" (28d-e). The warrior, of course, is our philosopher — literally.

Because this was Socrates' own attitude when stationed in "Potidaea and Amphipolis and Delium", where "[he] remained [at his post] as others did, and ran the risk of death" (28e) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 91). So just like his good old hoplite self[54], Socrates here cannot abandon his philosophical post "through fear of death or any other thing", most especially "when the God stationed [him], […] obliging [him] to live in the pursuit of wisdom, examining [himself] and

51 This is a footnote to myself. Feel free to ignore it. It pertains to "the rites of passage known as the Amphidromia and *dekate* (naming day) that followed shortly after birth", which I find fascinating. In times of high rates of infant mortality, "[t]he Amphidromia was the first rite marking formal acceptance into the family, and it was here that the creation of a legal social identity took place". This "event marked the end not only of the period of greatest danger of death for the infant (Aristotle HA 7.588a 8–10) but probably also of the mother's period of pollution after giving birth". It usually took place before the *dekate*, which happened "on tenth day" (LISTON; ROTROFF, 2013, p. 77). As for "the tenth-day ceremony known as dekate or [simply] 'tenth'[,] the baby was given its name". In contrast to the *Amphidromia,* "[t]he dekate is likely to have been a more formal occasion […], since it was now that the father publicly acknowledged the new-born to be his legitimate offspring" (GARLAND, 2013, p. 209). All this adds an existential twist to the idiom *worthy of his/her name*, making it more meaningful.

52 This is a call back to the Homeric ethos, Achilles being the paradigmatic Homeric hero. According to E. R. Dodds, "Homeric man's highest good is the enjoyment of a quiet conscience, but the enjoyment of *tīmē*, public esteem". Because of this, "the strongest moral force which Homeric man knows is not the fear of god, but respect for public opinion, *aidōs*". (1951, pp. 17–18). So, what is this "Homeric ethos? The Homeric ethos is essentially un ethos of the action: we are what we do". However, "[t]his doing […] doesn't emerge […] in accordance or in contrast with a set of norms or imperatives. In the Homeric world there are no moral codes or institutions which regulate human life". On the contrary, "[t]he social space where the Homeric heroes express their virtue (*areté*) is, in truth, a complex system which proclaims their failures and their deeds". (RIBEIRO; LUCERO; GONTIJO, 2008, s. p., my translation). From all this becomes clear that within that frame of mind, Socrates injunction is a sting to stir the pride of those present at the trial. Like the Greeks of old, it's better to die than to be shameful.

53 "The total number of jurors" present at Socrates' trial "must have been 500 or 501" (BLAS, 2005, n. p.). These were all "Athenian citizens", meaning they were "men from free Athenian parents, and who had completed the military training of teenagers" (PETRATOS, 2022, p. 268). So in one way or another, they all knew well the reality of military duty and the accompanying warrior code.

54 Just for the record, "[c]ontemporary scholars often note that Socrates served as a hoplite". But did he? Yes, if you examine "Socrates as a literary figure", as "[t]he Socrates appearing in literature is often a hoplite" (ANDERSON, 2005, p. 273). So yes, *this* Socrates has had indeed an old hoplite self.

others" (28e-29a) (PLATO, 1984b, pp. 91–92). He will never abandon the pursuit God has given him. That is simply something that he will never do.

The way things are set, Socrates is telling the court that he will never quit philosophy. If his accusers thought they could frighten him into submission, they are in for a big surprise. Is death the best they can come up with to make him change his mind? No, not to Socrates. Because here, our philosophical hero again uses his superpower, by turning this seeming threat as an argument against them.

Death is only as powerful a threat as one feels threatened by death. So if they use that as a threat, it also means they themselves threatened by it, and thus it is they, not Socrates, who actually fear death. If they just think like Socrates, they'll come to realize that "to fear death […] is nothing but to think one is wise when one is not", thinking "one knows what one does not [really] know" (29a-b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 92).

Et voilà, even at his trial, Socrates cannot but answer Apollo's call. Remember what he said at 23b-c? Whenever he thinks someone is wise, he will inquire them. And when he thinks they are not, he will prove them wrong. Just as he is doing right here, right now.

Socrates' reasoning is pretty straightforward. "No man knows death" (29a-b). Which, when one thinks about it, is technically as true as it gets[55]. That in turn means that no man knows "whether [death] is not the greatest of all goods" (29b). Again which, not knowing what death is, is as sound a judgment as its opposite. Nevertheless, "men fear it as though they well knew it to be the worst of evils" (29b). But is it? Is it *really*? Does anyone even know it, like *really* knowing it?

No. No one knows it. Not as by having true first person experience of being dead, like in really being it. So Socrates is again technically right. And because he is right about this, when other people claim they know death to be an evil, they are actually pretending to know. And if they are pretending to know without really knowing it, they are lying, and thus must rather be reproached — like the god has told him to do so.

So using the previous criterion that wisest is he who acknowledges not knowing what one knows not, Socrates is perfectly justified in saying that he is "perhaps superior to most men

55 This brings to mind the Epicurean argument on death being nothing to us. Since no one can be alive and dead at the same time, no man alive knows death — not by direct experience. And since only through experience can then one claim to know what one's claiming; the only way to *know* what being dead is actually like is by experiencing being dead in the first place. Which, obviously, is simply impossible while living.

[there]" (29b-c) in just this. Contrary to them, he is wiser in that, since he has "no *satisfactory*[56] knowledge of things in the Place of the Dead", he is not going to pretend he does (29b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 92, my emphasis). Again, wiser for knowing what he knows not.

And here's the thing. He is not saying *he knows that he knows nothing*. So *this* Socrates is not Cicero's[57]. He's actually aware of the things he *satisfactorily* knows, as he must be using that knowledge of his to measure what he does not *satisfactorily* knows. Again, it seems that for him knowledge, *satisfactory knowledge* at least, has to be derived from firsthand experience. For instance, he surely knows some things about the Place of the Dead, at the very least whatever others say the gods say about that place. And Socrates, *this* Socrates, has enough piety in him to not put that into question. What he lacks regarding that place is just *satisfactory* knowledge. He knows he is *not qualified* to claim that as an actual knowledge of *his*.

That this is so becomes clear when he next explains why he won't ever run away. In his words, "as against evils *I know* to be evils, I shall never fear[,] or flee from things which for *aught I know* may be good" (29c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 92). Thus running away is out of the question. But the why is the juicy part.

He knows some things to be the things he knows them to be, i.e., evils. So in this case he bases his decision not to run away on something he *actually* knows. Yet he also knows that he knows nothing about what some other things are. Are they bad? Good? For all he can tell, they might be good. So in this other case he bases his decision not to flee from his *lack* of actual knowledge. Which, again, is a good representation of the kind of wisdom he is after. And if that sounds strange, just bear with me here for a moment, as I try to make better sense of what I just wrote.

What is the kind of wisdom Socrates is after? A while ago, I called it practical wisdom, linking it to the know-how that necessarily accompanies any claim to knowledge. But here yet another layer is unveiled as to how deeply practical this whole practical wisdom should be. In practice, what this means is that, when Socrates sees himself facing some claim he cannot satis-

56 I was really trying to avoid this kind of difficulties, but here I cannot. What here goes by as 'satisfactory knowledge', on other translations it becomes "real knowledge" (PLATO, 1961a, p. 15) or "adequate knowledge" (PLATO, 1997b, p. 27). In Greek, the word that respectively gets translated as *satisfactory*, *real*, *adequate* is *ἱκανός*. Perseus' *Greek Word Study Tool* offers as possible translations *sufficing*, *becoming*, *befitting*. Which is which? I cannot tell. But all translations point in the same direction, i.e., that of *having enough*, *proper* — or *satisfactory*, as in the translation I'm following. So I feel justified in going with that, and using it to argue whatever I will happen to argue. For Plato's original, cf. <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Plat.+Apol.+29b&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0169>.

57 Cf. footnote 9 above.

factorily test, his current know-how informs him to keep on doing what he's been doing so far. In this case, standing his ground for philosophy. But it could be something else entirely.

Let's imagine a more mundane example. You need to go somewhere you've never been, and the best way to get there is by train. You're not familiar with the route, so, from what you've been told, you need to jump off at a certain station. Unsure of the way, you try your best to keep an eye on everything around you so not to miss your destination. When you're almost there, you check with a fellow passenger if the next stop is the one you want. Alas, he tells you, 'no, you've missed it already'. What do you do then?

Well, one thing's for certain. You can't leave the train while the train is moving. You *know* that is a terrible idea. So even though you have no precise idea on what to do next, just like Socrates, at least you *know* something. In this case that jumping out of the train is definitely ~~evil~~ bad. Based on that, you decide that for the moment it's better to wait and to stand your ground on that train. And you do it because you have practical knowledge about *what not to do*.

The same goes for Socrates here, at this particular moment in his trial. Aware his accusers want to coax him into quitting whatever he has been doing so far, he translates for them their threat, voicing out in their name the following:

> 'Socrates, we shall not at this time be persuaded by Meletus, and we dismiss you. But [only] on this condition: that you no longer pass time in that inquiry of yours, *or pursue philosophy*. And if you are again taken doing it, you die' (29c-d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 92, my emphasis).

In short, either you choose to stop, or we will make that choice for you. Stop being annoying, and we'll be kind and forgiving. But vex us again, and we'll definitely kill you. Unfortunately for them, Socrates won't budge. So if those are their conditions, too bad for them. He may hold his fellow Athenians in high regard, but going against Apollo is not even on the table. Thus, "while [he] ha[s] breath and [is] able [he] shall not cease to pursue wisdom or to exhort [them]" (29d-e).

So, no way, that won't happen. Annoying Socrates is still the only available option. For his part, he will continue to encourage them into reflecting upon their actions, goading them into seeking "truth and understanding and the greatest possible excellence of [their] soul" (29e) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 92). And for that he

> "shall question [them] and examine [them] and test [them], and if [they do] not seem to [him] to possess virtue, and yet [say they do], [he] shall rebuke [them] for counting of more importance things which by comparison are worthless (29e-30a) (PLATO, 1984b, pp. 92–93).

So, like always, as ever, Socrates will be forever inquiring into their understanding. If they have more "care for […] money, and reputation, and public honor" (29e), Socrates will reproach them. So yet again, Socrates, *this* Socrates, also *knows* how to rank things in importance. The way he sees it, "virtue does not come from money, but money and all other human goods both public and private [come] from virtue" (30b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 93).

His then is a public service, one freely offered to everyone, be them "young and old, citizen and stranger" (30a-b), i.e., to whoever crosses his path. However, because he's still a human being, with a heart that beats faster for those "more nearly related to [him]", he "shall do it especially to [Athenian] citizens" (30a-b). As a public servant, he cannot but provide Athens with no "greater good than [his] service to the God" (30a-b). So if they want to kill him for his commitment to the greater good, that's their loss. Socrates "will not do otherwise, even if [he is] to die many times over" (30c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 93). Try as they might, he will never abandon his post, he won't quit philosophy.

4.1.2.4.3 The reason for his private public service

Fearless, Socrates makes it very clear that his accusers cannot in any way harm him. That "is not possible, for it does not […] accord with divine law that a better man should be harmed by a worse" (30d). If anything, the gods are on his side. So, by this reasoning, instead of being them bringing upon him a great evil, those prosecuting Socrates are the real evil-doers here for "attempting to kill a man unjustly" (30d-e). And with this, in yet another beautifully executed Socratic twist, the defendant becomes the prosecuter. For though he seems to be "making a defense for [his] own sake" (30e) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 94), Socrates is actually looking after the interests of his city. How come?

Because, as Socrates puts it,

> If [they] kill [him], [they] will not easily find such another man as [he], a man who […] has been fastened as it were to the City by the God as, so to speak, to a large and well-bred horse, a horse grown sluggish because of its size and in

> need of being roused by a kind of gadfly. Just so, […] the God has fastened [him] to the City (30e-31a) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 93).

So killing him would be a huge mistake, as Socrates is nearly irreplaceable. Just like a gadfly's stinging a horse rouses it from its lazy pace, annoying Socrates stirs his fellow citizens into action. With this he prevents them of becoming overly confident, and thus soft and reckless. This has been his divine mandate. And just like it happens with the gadfly, his task is dangerous, "as men roused from sleep are angry, and perhaps […] will swat [him]" (31a-b) (PLATO, 1984b, pp. 93–94). But is this what they really want? Do they really prefer to "continue to sleep out [their] lives", until "the god sends someone else to look after [them]" (30a-b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 94)? That's clearly the silliest option.

Now, that Socrates is a committed public servant can be recognized by his total dedication to his divine task to the detriment of everything else. So much so that, without a "thought for anything of [his] own, Socrates has "endure[d] the neglect of [his] house and its affairs"[58]. And his "poverty [is thus] witness to the truth of what [he] says"[59] (31c). But using poverty as a badge of honor can only go so far. Because, truth is, if he had so much love for the public cause, why didn't he simply "enter [their] Assembly in public to advise the City" (31c-d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 94)? That's surely wouldn't require of him the complete neglect of his belongings. So why didn't he?

Well, apparently for the strangest of reasons. The thing is Socrates, *this* Socrates, has been endowed from childhood with a special gift, his famous[60] *daemon*[61]. So maybe Socrates, *this* Socrates at least, is not so much a Peter Parker, but more of a crossbreeding between Superman and Pinocchio. Ok, I'm again digressing, but it has been quite a while since I last went a bit off the rails. So allow me to update my understanding of Socrates as Plato's superhero.

Why Superman and not Peter Parker? Well, because, apparently, just like the young Clark Kent[62], Socrates develops his superpower during childhood. And just like Superman, he's

58 Cf. footnote 48 above.

59 Cf. footnote 49 above.

60 Socrates' daemon needs no introduction. It is so famous that, in 1872, a scholar described the research around it thus: "[t]he Dæmon of Socrates has been treated so often, and by so many authors, historians, philosophers, and critics, both in classical and Christian times, that I, at least, cannot hope to say anything new upon it enough that whatever could have been said about it has already been said" (MANNING, 1872, p. 1). If that was true for him, it's even truer for me.

61 Daemon, or *daimonion*, corresponding to a "divinity inferior to a god (used of Socrates' 'divine or spiritual sign,'Ap. 31D) (NAILS, 2002, p. 371).

62 To those out of the loop, Clark Joseph Kent is Superman's secret identity. It's performing under this identity that he carries most of his day-to-day chores, like having a job as a reporter, paying taxes, and being a boring

not aware of his special status at first, only coming to grips with it at a later time. What about Pinocchio? Well, because just like the wooden puppet, Socrates has his own version of the *talking cricket*[63], though his speaks directly to him inside his own head. And just like Pinocchio, Socrates is also a kind of puppet to Apollo's wishes. But here I'm clearly getting way too far from the rails. So let's return to the text.

Interestingly, this inner voice[64] of Socrates is not always present. However, "when it comes, it always turns [him] away from what [he is] about to do, but never toward it" (31d-e). Which means this is a somewhat limited superpower, though one that's so well crafted that makes Socrates an even better character. Allow me some brief remarks on why I think this is the case.

First, it's not a positing gift, as it never tells Socrates what *he has to do*. This is literary gold, as it preserves Socrates' free will and agency. Whatever he does, it's always *his* doing. Then, as a negating gift, it has the power to save Socrates at just the right moment. So Plato, lit-

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person overall.

63 *Il Grillo Parlante*, in the original 1883 Italian version of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. While researching his role in the original story, I was surprised to learn that Pinocchio kills him in chapter IV. What happens is that The talking cricket, who is described as being "patient and a philosopher" (COLLODI, 2016, n. p., my translation), is telling Pinocchio he has to go to school. Pinocchio, who is a slacker, has none of it, and getting angry with his insistence, hits him in the head, instantly killing him. Ok, what has this to do with Socrates? The thing is, the talking cricket makes a sudden return in chapter XIII in the form of a ghost, speaking to Pinocchio "in a faint little voice, which seemed to come from the world beyond" (COLLODI, 2016, n. p., my translation). So apparently the talking cricket is more similar Socrates' daemon than even I at first imagined.

64 In footnote 61 above I said I had nothing to add on Socrates' daemon. However, since I like one interpretation in particular, I want to share it. Please bear in mind that I like it not because I think it's more plausible than any other, but just because I find it fascinating. This interpretation is the one presented in Julian Jaynes' seminal work *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976). In it, "Jaynes develops a hypothesis that consciousness is not an inherent and inevitable aspect of the evolutionary process". Is is rather "learnt through the development of metaphorical language" (LATTAS, 2019, p. 7). So, according to him, ancient peoples "were 'non-conscious'", i.e., "people spoke, learnt, wrote and problem-solved but were unable to conceive of themselves or their minds self-reflexively". To Jaynes, "what [these peoples] possessed before consciousness proper was a bicameral mind: a two chambered system, where the right hemisphere was the speaking or directing god-brain and the left hemisphere was the hearing and following man-brain" (LATTAS, 2019, p. 8). Meaning that ancient peoples would hear what we now take to be our inner voice as an external voice directing their actions, the voice of a god or a daemon. So, under this interpretation, Socrates is on the cusp of becoming self-aware. Socrates' daemon is just his inner voice being *heard* as being from someone else, the voice of his own rationality telling him what he should not do. After all, that's the role of reason, right? To curb the appetites and direct them to more favorable outcomes.

erary genius as he is, endows Socrates, *this* Socrates, with a special ethical *deus ex machina*[65] of his own. And with this, he is naturally safeguarded from ever going wrong.

The whole thing has such a degree of literary perfection that one cannot but wonder. Perhaps Plato is showcasing the whole Platonic universe as a big *what if*, a sandbox of sorts where philosophy can be tested and stretched to its limits. And if so, from a pure philosophical point of view, is it really important to go hunt for the real Plato?

Shouldn't we instead be doing what he so brilliantly show us doing, i.e., developing characters, settings, conflicts, and dramas where the resulting dialogues allow all philosophical tensions to play themselves out? This is at least something to consider, something I want to return to at later point. For now, let's go back to where we left off, when he was describing his inner voice.

So, it was his daemon "what opposed [his] entering the political life" (31d-e), thus *protecting him* from being destroyed — something that would inevitably happen "had [he] attempted to enter political affairs" (31d-e). Why? Because "[i]t is impossible for any man to be spared if he publicly opposes […] any democratic majority", as he tries to prevent "many unjust and illegal things from occurring in his city" (31e-32a). So if such a man wants to "fight for what is just", he "must of necessity live a private rather than a public life" (32a-b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 94). Just as Socrates'.

To further this point, and as an instance of how dangerous political affairs are, Socrates recounts to the jurors something that had happened to him during the rule of the Thirty Tyrants[66]. At that time, these Thirty wanted Socrates, and four others, to go to Salamis to capture a certain Leon "so that he might be executed" (32c-d). Socrates, however, in an act of defiance, refused to do so, as he didn't want to take part in any action he considered "unjust or un-

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65 This is the Latin version of the original Greek, *θεὸς ἀπὸ μηχανῆς*, which translates as *god from the machine*. "In the context of Athenian tragedy, this phrase refers to a formal and conventional scene-type, commonly utilized by Euripides in particular but also by other tragedians, in which a god appears suddenly above the stage at the end of a play and issues proclamations about the future, which was sometimes staged with the *mechane*, a crane of some kind used in the late-fifth-century theatre for lifting actors above the stage" (JOHNSTON, 2019, p. 125). However, in modern use, "the term refers to any artificial device for the easy resolution of all difficulties" (BECKSON; GANZ, 1960, p. 41). And though this is not exactly what Plato is doing here, I'm using it in this broader sense.

66 After the Athenian defeat to Sparta in the Peloponnesian war, "a group of thirty oligarchs assumed political control in Athens for a period of about eight months", from 404 to 403 BCE. This was a rough time for Athenians, as "[t]heir violent and autocratic manner of ruling the city earned them the title by which they are now commonly known: the Thirty Tyrants" (STEM, 2003, p. 18). Critias, Plato's second cousin from his mother side and who appears in the dialogue *Charmides*, was one of the leaders of the Thirty Tyrants.

holy" (32d-e). Fortunately to him, the oligarchs were soon overthrown, and thus he escaped their punishment. But had things turned out differently, he surely would "have been killed for that" (32e). Hence his point stands, i.e., that neither he nor "any other man" (33a) would "*have lived so many years if [they] had been in public life and acted in a manner worthy of a good man*" (32e-33a) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 95, my emphasis). So his daemon was right and "did well to oppose" (31d-e) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 94) his entrance into politics.

4.1.2.4.4 Socrates is not a teacher

Though a public servant in that, "to rich and poor alike", Socrates "offer[s] [him]self as a questioner" (33b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 96), never has he claimed to "have been a teacher to anyone" (33a-b). Yes, he's always available to those who wish to hear from him, but he never discusses "for a fee" (33a-b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 95). But because "[t]o none did [he] promise instruction, and [to] none did [he] teach" (33b-c), Socrates "cannot justly be held responsible" (33b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 96) if anyone discussing with him "becomes a good citizen or a bad one" (33b-c) (PLATO, 1961a, p. 19). Teaching them was never his intention.

But this raises the question. If he is providing a valuable service to the city in that he prevents everyone of becoming overconfident and thus reckless, how come is he now saying that he cannot be held responsible if people turn out good or bad citizens in the course of their discussions? Well, the thing is, contrary to someone like a sophist who promises to teach for a fee, Socrates makes no such promise nor demand. And herein lies the crucial difference between them. Let's break down the particulars.

Imagine I promise to teach you how to write a dissertation. My services are not free though, so I charge you the appropriate fee. So now you're thinking that you'll soon become a dissertation writer as you hired me to teach you. What do I do to teach you what I promised? Let's say that I make you write a lot of text under a certain structure properly named dissertative. As you're a good student, committed, you quickly become good at reproducing the structure, thus becoming good at writing a dissertation. Happy with the result, you pay what's due, and now everyone's happy. So there's no problem in making a promise to teach and charging for teaching, right? But think carefully.

What was Socrates' understanding of the oracle? *That the wisest is s/he who, like Socrates, understands how little s/he actually knows*. So let's apply this razor[67] to our example. Do you really know how to write a dissertation? A moment ago you thought you were wisest because you had learned from me how to write a dissertation; but now, thanks to Socrates, you're questioning it. What made you a better writer?

Even if you do not know the exact answer, at least now you know that you have been fooling yourself looking in the wrong place. Now you know that this is not the way to go, so it's time to abandon this teaching. Now, at the least, you know you don't know that much about writing a dissertation. And the best part? You owe nothing to Socrates. So now you get it, right? Socrates bettered you, without him even promising you any teaching. *Voilà*. That's the difference.

But if Socrates never teaches, "[w]hy is it, then, that some people enjoy spending so much time with [him]?" (33c). By now we already know the answer. "[B]ecause they enjoy hearing people tested who think they are wise when they are not. After all, when the little guy topples the seeming giant, it is never unamusing" (33c-d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 96). I don't know about you, but I'm totally with Socrates. Is there something more exciting, exhilarating even, than to watch the little guy beat the stronger? Apparently going against all odds? If that's exciting on TV, YouTube or whatever, imagine that *live*, in the *Agora*! So Socrates is right. They join him because it's fun to hang around him.

But not for him. Socrates is not doing it for fun. We already know why he's doing it, and that is because he has "been ordered to do this by God" (32c-d). And God really wants him to do it, because he keeps on telling him "in oracles, in dreams, in every way in which other divine apportionment orders a man to do anything" (32c-d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 96), that he has to keep on doing it. So Socrates is doing it as a divine mandate.

4.1.2.4.5 Testing the truth, calling forth witnesses

At this point, Socrates goes into full Socratic mode. So someone is making a claim? Let's test it. His accusers are saying he is "corrupting some of the youth, and have corrupted others" (33d-e). But if that's the case, "it must surely be that some among them, grown older,

67 Another philosophical razor. Cf. footnote 24 of the previous chapter.

[…] realize [now] that [Socrates] counseled them toward evil while [they were] young" (33d-e). So they must be willing "now [to] come forward to accuse [him] and exact a penalty" (33d-e). And if not, at least will "then some of their relatives—fathers, brothers, other kinsmen" (33d-e). For they surely want to do so, especially "if their own relatives suffered evil at [Socrates'] hands" (33d-e). (PLATO, 1984b, p. 96). So where are those angry with Socrates for his evil counsel?

Socrates, on the other hand, can easily call forth several people among those present to testify in his favor. His list contains folks such as Crito, Adeimantus, and even Plato. Plato?!? Yes, the one and only. So the author chooses here to make a rare[68] cameo appearance. But why? To point out that he was actually there? Possibly. It's as if he is applying Socrates' razor, saying that he's not pretending to know what have happened, but actually witnessed it firsthand. Or perhaps he's telling us he is one of the good guys, that he was part of the group who sided with Socrates.

But whatever his intention, one thing's for certain. By adding his own name to the list, Plato gives more power to Socrates' counterargument. After all, there's no better witness to how Socrates shapes other people's behavior than calling forth those who have been his closest associates. And of those, who better than Plato? And just like this, Plato provides Socrates with very powerful witnesses.

But what about Meletus? Where are his witnesses? Those corrupted must be angry, and thus demanding reparations. So where are they now? And here Socrates speaks what Meletus has in mind. 'Perhaps Socrates corrupted them in such a way that they "might perhaps have reason to help [him]"' (34b). Perhaps Meletus would say.

And if that's the case, and this is actually what Meletus thinks to be the case, he, Meletus, just has to call forth "their relatives" as his witnesses. They surely "are older men who have not been corrupted" (34b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 97), and thus must be calling for justice. All in all, it's up to Meletus now. Socrates even yields him the floor to no avail. He has no one, and no one is willing to bear witness to such a bogus charge.

68 Rare indeed. Of the 30 or so extant dialogues, those that are his and not spurious, Plato only features as being present in the action here, in the *Apology*. Some argue that he may also be present in the *Phaedo*, as the wording there is ambiguous: "Plato, I believe, was ill" (59c) (1997c, p. 51). Anyway, the point still stands. Plato is mostly absent, this dialogue being the exception.

4.1.2.4.6 Calling for a wise decision

From here on, Socrates makes his final remarks. He declares that, contrary to what has been custom at court, he won't beg the judges, he won't make a scene. Even if this angers some of the jurors, making them cast a vote against him, he won't budge. He "shall not beg [them] to acquit [him]" (34d-e). That won't happen.

But no, he's not stubborn. No, he means no disrespect. He just thinks that for someone like him that kind of behavior is unacceptable. After all, not only is he old, as he is also known "truly or falsely" as Socrates the wisest of men (35a) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 97).[69] And just like this, Socrates goads the whole court into carefully consider what will be their decision.

Will they "cast [their] vote against a man who stages [those] pitiful scenes" (35b-c), and doing it because they understand that such man puts the whole city to shame? Or will they "rather cast [their] vote […] against a man who shows quiet restraint"? (35b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 98). They decide. It's their call now.

As for Socrates, from here forth it's no longer in his own hands. It's not up to him to decide what fate awaits him. He cannot but accept whatever befalls him. For though he is being prosecuted for impiety, he believes "to be neither honorable nor just nor holy" (35d-e) to act in any other way. So now it's up to judges, "and to the God" (35d-e), to decide "whatever way will be best for [Socrates,] and also for [themselves]" (35d-e) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 98). With this ends act one, the one about *his* apology.

69 Achilles' honor personified.

4.1.3 Act two: sentence

4.1.3.1 The counterpenalty

Surprise, surprise, no surprise. Socrates is found guilty. He, however, is "not distressed, […] not angered that [they] cast [their] votes against [him]" (36a). In truth, he actually anticipated such an outcome. What he didn't expect was how narrow the voting was. From him we learn that, of the 501 jurors[70] present, only 280 chose to vote against him. So he observes he was only 30 votes short of being acquitted[71] (36a-b). Amazing, he thinks.

So in yet another Socratic twist, Socrates takes this unexpected outcome as a clear indication that he has been "more than acquitted" (36a-b). His reasoning? Because "if Anytus and Lycon", the other two accusers of his, "had not come forward to accuse [him], Meletus would have been fined […] for not obtaining a fifth part of the vote"[72] (36a-36b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 98). So what seems at first a defeat, the way Socrates sees it, is actually the proof of his innocence.

But Socratic twists aside, what matters is that now he has been found guilty, it's time to jurors to decide his penalty. The stakes are now higher than ever. Meletus, having won the case, is now demanding Socrates' death (36b). Again, no surprise here.

However, since the guilty party is allowed a counterpenalty[73], Socrates once more breaks everyone's expectations, asking for the unthinkable. Taking into account how poor he is, and judging how valuable his service to the city has been, Socrates asks for the obvious "public sub-

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70 The number of jurors varied from trial to trial. "Athens used very large numbers of jurors, from 500 to as many as 1501, in part as a protection against bribes". After all, "who could afford to bribe 500 people?" (LINDER, 2002).

71 If this tally is correct, Socrates received 221 votes out of 501, meaning he had 44% of the votes in his favor. So Socrates is right in that he was found guilty on a narrow margin. It's also interesting to note how divisive Socrates' trial must have been.

72 This was actually a thing. In order "to inhibit malicious prosecution", the accusation "was fined if [it] failed to obtain a fifth part of the vote" (ALLEN, 1980, p. 26). And this fine, according to Socrates, could amount to "a thousand drachmas" (36b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 98). So how much would that be today? Using the guesstimated values presented in footnote 49 above, given that a drachma could amount to R$ 40, in today's money, Meletus' fine would be around R$ 40000.

73 This was also a thing. "Athenian jury trials occurred in two stages. The first was the finding of guilt or innocence by majority vote […]. If the defendant was found guilty, the prosecuting party proposed a penalty, the *timesis* (τίμησις), and the defendant proposed a counterpenalty, the *antitimesis* (ἀντιτίμησις). The jury could not propose a penalty of its own or change the proposed penalties but [...] had to select either the prosecutor's proposal or the defendant's counterpenalty" (ROJCEWICZ, 2007, p. 184).

sistence in the Prytaneum"[74] (37a) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 99). Which is only fair, right? Well, regardless of how fair that actually is, one thing's for sure here. He's not making his life any easier now by asking for such a preposterous penalty. But he has his reasons to do so.

Problem is that he knows he's innocent. However, the way the court is set in Athens does little to help him. Contrary to other places, where "cases involving death [are] not […] decided in a single day" (37b), his left him with little time to persuade the jurors he did no wrong, he committed no crime. As such, "it is not easy [for him] in so short a time to do away with slanders [by now] grown so great" (37b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 99). So there's that. But this is not all.

Since he's sure he has "not intentionally wronged any man" (37a-b), how come can he now "claim that [he] deserve[s] some evil and propose any penalty of the kind" (37b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 100)? So once again, no, that won't happen. He won't claim a softer penalty. Besides, he has no fear, as whatever alternatives he might come up with to please them, be it a life in prison, a fine, or even exile, all are terrible. Between any of those, or being now put to death, Socrates chooses the latter. How come?

He reasons thus:

a. by choosing a life in prison, he is just accepting a life no different from that of a slave;
b. going for the fine he is simply choosing (a) by extra steps. Why? Because that would put him again in prison, as he has "no money to pay" (37c) such a fine;
c. as for choosing exile, well, that would just keep him "always moving from city to city, always driven out" (37d-e) by those already living there. Because no matter where he'd choose to go, the same thing would happen over and over again. As the youngsters would still flock to him, either he would end up accused of corrupting them and thus expelled, or, if he turned them away, "their fathers and relations [would] drive [him] out in their behalf" (37e), thus punishing him.

74 The Prytaneum was the "town hall of a Greek city-state, normally housing the chief magistrate and the common altar or hearth of the community". This was also the place where "distinguished foreigners, and citizens who had done signal service were entertained" (THE EDITORS OF ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA, 2022). It's also worth noting that "[p]ublic subsistence in the Prytaneum was a great honor, traditionally given to Olympic victors in major events" (ALLEN, 1984b, p. 99). In light of this, considering that, according to Socrates, he "has served the city well" (36d-e) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 99), his seems a reasonable request.

So, all things considered, he really has no choice. And having no choice is bad, right? No, not to *this* twisting Socrates. To him it's actually a good thing, because, to be perfectly honest, he does "not know whether [death] is good or evil" (37b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 100), so he also has no fear. So there's that for starters.

But, hey, isn't he overcomplicating things? "Would it not be possible for [him] to live in exile, […] if [he] silently kept quiet?" (37e) No, that can't be, and for two reasons. First there's the obvious:

- because "to do so would be to disobey the God, and therefore [he] cannot do it" (38a);
- then there's the problem that, for him, "the greatest good […] is to fashion arguments each day about virtue and the other things [they] hear [him] discussing when [he] examine[s] [him]self and others" (38a-b);
- moreover, he's pretty sure that "*the unexamined life is not […] worth living*" (38a-b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 100, my emphasis).

So no, he won't choose exile over death. That he won't do. Never would Socrates betray philosophy just so he could keep on living for yet another day. That is not a life worth living.

In light of all this, and because it's the least egregious of the three, the only acceptable counterpenalty he can come up with is "a fine as great as [he] could [actually] pay" (38b). And how much is that? Perhaps "a mina of silver" (38b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, pp. 100–101). It really doesn't matter. Even the thirty minae that Plato, Crito, Critobulus, and Apollodorus bid him to propose will never be enough to save him. Socrates made sure that will never happen.

4.1.4 Act three: prophecy

4.1.4.1 Socrates' divine eye

Unsurprisingly, the jurors vote for the death penalty. What they don't realize, or at least not yet, is how terrible a blunder their decision has been. Fortunately, Socrates is ready to make sure of telling they understand why. He reasons thus. By killing him, they gave "those who wish to reproach [them]" the best excuse "to revile [their] City" (38c). For now all that those willing to reproach have to do is to simply say 'the Athenians "killed Socrates, a wise man"', regardless

of how true is their claim[75]. And killed him for what? As Socrates is already an old man, "if [they] had only waited a little, [his death] would have come of its own initiative" (38c-d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 101). But no, they had to do it anyway. Their blunder. And why did they do such a blunder?

For the silliest of reasons. Just because Socrates chose not to bow to them, because he didn't "say the things [they] would find [pleasing] to hear" (38d-e). But what they have failed to understand is that Socrates "would far rather die [for his beliefs] than [to] live" (38e-39a) any minute longer having betrayed them. To escape death is easy, he says. But "it is [far] more difficult to escape wickedness, for wickedness runs faster than death" itself (39b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 101).

Again, Socrates, *this* Socrates, because he *knows* something, namely right from wrong, chooses death because he is not evil. But can the same be said about his accusers? No. Much to the contrary. If Socrates "take[s] [his] leave, sentenced by [them] to death", Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon, for their part "depart [guilty], convicted by Truth for injustice and wickedness" (39b-c). So, if anything, they're the ones doing misdeeds, and are nothing but the true villains.

By now, everything that had to be said has been said. But before bidding their goodbyes, Socrates, who is about to die[76], makes the following prophecy:

> to you who have decreed my death [I say] that to you there will come hard on my dying a punishment far more difficult to bear than the death you have visited upon me. You have done this thing in the belief that you would be released from submitting to [the] examination of your lives. I say that it will turn out quite otherwise. Those who come to examine you will be more numerous, and I have up to now restrained them, though you perceived it not. They will be more harsh in as much as they are younger, and you shall be the more troubled. If you think by killing to hold back the reproach due to you for not living rightly, you are profoundly mistaken. That release is neither possible nor honorable. The release which is both most honorable and most easy is not to cut down others, but to take proper care that you will be as good as possible. This I utter as prophecy to you who voted for my condemnation, and take my leave (39c-d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 102).

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75 Socrates is careful again remind them that he is not wise. So, from his perspective, the claim that the Athenians killed a wise man is not actually true — or at least not correct enough.

76 Socrates remarks that "men are especially prophetic […] when they are about to die" (39c-d). But why is that? Is it because, just like swans, they know they are about to die, and thus sing their last song? In the *Phaedo*, at 84e, Socrates seems to be implying such a connection when he says: "Evidently you think that I have less insight into the future than a swan; because when these birds feel that the time has come for them to die, they sing more loudly and sweetly than they have sung in all their lives before, for joy that they are going away into the presence of the god whose servants they are" (PLATO, 1961d, p. 67).

Isn't it amazing? It's as if Socrates knows exactly what will happen. We, privileged as we are to know how things unfolded after Socrates' death, can really appreciate how spot on is his entire prophecy. And the reason why his prediction is so accurate is that Socrates, *this* Socrates, has all the perks that come from being literally a literary character. Just think.

For not only was he

- afforded a perfectly tailored *origin story*;
- not only was he gifted with the perfect superpower, a sidekick of sorts that happens to live within him, and one who's responsible for stopping him from ever doing wrong;
- now he is being empowered by the author's actual knowledge of how things came to pass, which grants him, Socrates, at the place and time he occupies in the narrative, a kind of divine eye.

Socrates, *this* Socrates, is as perfect as a character as Plato needs him to be. And here, Socrates, *this* Socrates, needs to be the voice of Plato's reproach for what they have done to his mentor. And since Plato knows what happened after Socrates' death, this in a way is him giving way to a kind of *schadenfreude* of his. Ah, what a joy it must have been to be able to know that Socrates' accusers suffered dearly for the crime they committed against philosophy. But never mind that. Let's break it down a bit, checking with Socrates what was meant by his prophecy.

1. His accusers want to get rid of him so that nobody could question them. But that, unfortunately for them, will just go against their wishes, as that will only multiply those around questioning.

Check. It's no secret that "in the years following [Socrates'] death, the most diverse philosophers and schools could claim to be following in his footsteps" (GUTHRIE, 1971, p. 165).

2. Then there's the bit where he says that these followers will be harsher in their reproaches, since Socrates will no longer be there to curb their thrill in questioning them.

Check. Here we have to look no further than to this work only, where Plato, a much younger follower of Socrates, is making sure that we have nothing but contempt for the accusers.

3. Finally, there's their attempt to escape being punished for their misconduct.

Check. Apparently, the trio named here, Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon, soon after Socrates' trial actually ended up meeting what to the Greeks of old were very dishonorable fates. If Diogenes Laertius is to be believed[77], "the Athenians felt such remorse" for killing Socrates, that "[t]hey banished [Anytus and Lycon, and] put Meletus to death" (LAERTIUS, 1959, p. 173). So Plato style, three out of three have been fulfilled, thus making this the perfect prophecy.

4.1.4.2 A speech divinely sanctioned

At this point, drama-wise, the proceedings are through. So "while the authorities are busy" (39e-40a), Socrates uses the remainder of his time in court to speak to those "who voted for his acquittal" (39e). He wants to share with them "[a] remarkable thing that occurred" (40a-b). A curious thing happened. His *Jiminy Cricket*[78], who always opposed him "even in trivial matters if [he] was about to err" (40a-b), this time said nothing, it "did not oppose [him] […] at any point in [his] argument in anything [he] was about to say" (40b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 102).

So Socrates takes this to mean that "[v]ery likely what has fallen him is good, and [that] those among [them] who think that death is an evil are wrong" (40b-c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 103). Which is his way of saying that everything that has happened so far was divinely sanctioned, from his defense speech to the fate that has now befallen him. But he has more. And here things start to get really interesting.

Socrates actually has "high hope[s] that death is good" (40c-d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 103), and his reason is that

> Death is one of two things. Either to be dead is not to exist, to have no awareness at all, or it is, as the stories tell, a kind of alteration, a change of abode for the soul from this place to another (40c-d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 103).

Now, this is a pretty good summary of timeless problem. It is as true for the Greeks of old, as it is true for us nowadays. Death is the ultimate epistemic barrier. And the way you

77 In the Oxford Classical Dictionary, under the entry *Anytus*, it is stated that "there is no good reason to believe later reports that the repentant Athenians banished [Anytus] for the prosecution of Socrates" (HORNBLOWER; SPAWFORTH, 1999, p. 117). And it's true that Diogenes' narrative almost sounds too good to be true, which is usually a good sign that it probably is. But since in this regard his account of Socrates' trial is no different from Plato's, both are a good fit.

78 Disney's version of Pinocchio's *Talking Cricket*. Cf. footnote 63.

choose to think about it is intimately related to the core beliefs about who you are and what you are made of. Again, true for the Greeks of old, as it is true for us now. So the whole problem basically boils down to these two options, either death is nothing for us, an Epicurean favorite, or death is but a journey, the version that almost all religions under the Sun subscribe to. Either way, there's no other way[79]. Anyway, Socrates then goes a step further, and breaks down what follows from both outcomes. As for the first,

> if [death] is to have no awareness, like a sleep when the sleeper sees no dream, death would be a wonderful gain; for I suppose if someone had to pick out that night in which he slept and saw no dream, and put the other days and nights of his life beside it, and had to say after inspecting them how many days and nights he had lived in his life which were better and sweeter, I think that not only any ordinary person but even the Great King[80] himself would find them easily numbered in relation to other days, and other nights. If death is that, I say it is gain; for the whole of time then turns out to last no longer than a single night (40d-e) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 103).

With a poetic twist, Socrates elegantly sums up what is good about this first version. In it, death is the ultimate sleep, the end of all worries, all cares. And since we won't ever wake up from that dreamless sleep, even time will lose all meaning, and a single night will last for eternity. Hearing this, I'm reminded of the end of book 3 of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, when he says that

> however many generations your life may span, the same eternal death will still await you; and one who ended life with today's light will remain dead no less long than one who perished many months and years ago (3.1090-1094) (2001b, p. 98).

So if death is akin to the Socratic *dreamless sleep,* it doesn't really matter how long you you stay sleeping. There will never be an end to the darkness of Night. Death is absolute. So

79 Or is there? I mean, in the Phaedo, at 87a-88b, the character Cebes introduces what could be interpreted as half-way hypothesis. In this version, the soul outlives the body, migrating on and on to other bodies, each time wearing itself weaker and weaker until it finally expires. It's as if Pythagorean reincarnation and Epicurean death had a child, having a bit of both. But Cebes' hypothesis is only delaying the inevitable, thus just making that afterlife a subset of the finality of death. So, in the end, we're still back to square one. What about the *upload your mind to a computer* hypothesis? In it, your memories are copied into a computer that recreates your personality, thus granting you a kind of digital immortality of sorts. But in that scenario, the one original soul still dies. The you *you* is not the you that has been uploaded. The digital you outliving the original *you* is just a copy, a digital clone of sorts, who though bearing an almost exact resemblance to the original *you*, it's still not you. And in that sense, death is still final for the original *you*, while only delayed for the digital copy. Because heat death of the universe and everything. Anyway, we end up again back to square one. So perhaps Socrates is right after all. Or one or the other. Either way, there is no other way.

80 The *Great King* mentioned here is the King of Persia, "a proverbial symbol of wealth and power" (ALLLEN, 1984b, p. 103).

don't worry about it. In the same vein, Socrates also acknowledges there's something worthwhile in thinking like the later to be called Epicureans think. Death is nothing to us. 'Good work, Epicurus', approvingly says Socrates. And here they are *this* close. Socrates acknowledges merit where merit is due. But. And this *but* is crucial.

Because there's also merit in thinking otherwise, that is, that death is but a journey. In this version, you move out from where you are and you go somewhere else. Now, if that's what happens, of one thing we can be certain. That for sure "*all who have died are there*" (41a) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 103 my emphasis). And if that's the case, it's now Socrates' turn to ask:

> what greater good might there be, my Judges? For if a man once goes to the place of the dead, and takes leave of those who claim to be judges here, he will find the *true judges* who are said to sit in judgment there—Minos, Rhadamanthus, Aeacus, Triptolemus, and the other *demigods and heroes* who lived just lives. Would that journey be worthless? (41a-b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 103, my emphases).

If Socrates were asking me, my reply would be, 'No! Of course not! The journey would definitely be more than worthy!' So what Socrates is here saying is that, if we accept, and believe, the other possible outcome for death, i.e., that an afterlife is not only possible as it also has its perks, death actually becomes good, something to even hope for, to welcome. Do you know why? Because this means that by dying we will finally get to meet in person the greatest figures who have departed before us, and who are *there* already. And who are they?

First, there are those who like "demigods[81] and heroes[82]" (41a-b) managed to excel[83]. Are these meant to be the perfect politicians? Perhaps they are, given that the second batch is no doubt made out of excellent poets. These include such great characters as "Orpheus[84] and

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81 Why the demigods? My take: well, these are *there* because, though the tables of fortune were all tilted in such a way that they could not but excel, unlike to the gods, did not simply excel. They were not simply spoonfed greatness. They also did whatever was in their power to excel. In this sense, they are, so to speak, the *mythologization* of the qualities needed for the perfect outcome.

82 Why the heroes? My take: because these are *there* because, though being flesh and bone, at least originally, were able to overcome all difficulties. Against all odds, they beat all obstacles thrown at them. And contrary to the demigods, they manage to excel even if luck is not totally on their side. But like the demigods, they also do everything in the power to excel. In this sense, they are, so to speak, a literary idealization of one who overcomes all obstacles.

83 They try to go beyond any supposed difficulty — and they manage to overcome them.

84 Orpheus is a mythological hero "most famous for his virtuoso ability in playing the lyre". But not only that. He was also a renowned poet, [who] traveled with Jason and the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece, and even descended into the Underworld of Hades to recover his lost wife Eurydice" (CARTWRIGHT, 2020). Well, or so we are told.

Musaeus[85], Hesiod and Homer[86]" (41a-b). So, by dying, Socrates will finally get to know them, talk to them, learn from them. For such an honor, Socrates "would be willing to die many times over" — at least "if these things are true" (41b). If[87].

Aside from that, he would also "find a wonderful pursuit there" to meet "any […] among the ancients done to death by unjust verdicts", just like his. What thrill to be able to compare, like he did with the artisans, "[his] experiences with theirs" (41b)! That surely "would not […] be unamusing"[88] (41b) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 103)…

"But", obviously, "the greatest thing, surely, would be to test and question *there* as [he] did here" (41b-c). Obviously. This is, after all, the Socratic afterlife. This is the afterlife he is longing for now that it has been decided that he is to be expelled from the world of the living. So Socrates, *this* Socrates, having found himself barred from his god-driven search here, where he couldn't disprove the god, is longing for an afterlife where he will continue with his gadfly mission. He is eager to poke everyone who comes across him, "men *and women*" (41c) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 103, my emphasis) alike, asking himself the same question over and over again. "Who among them is wise? Who thinks [s/]he is and is not?" (41b-c). Well, at least "if the stories told are true" (41c-d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 104).

So in the end, elegantly as only Socrates, *this* Socrates, would be able to do, he again twists everything, turning what to most would seem the worst outcome into the best. And if there's anything, anything at all, that he can claim to know about living and dying is "that this one thing is true: there is not evil for a *good man* either in living or in dying" (41d). After all, "the gods do not neglect [their] affairs" (41d). This is his final message, one directed to those who sided with him, a message of "good hope concerning death" (41d) (PLATO, 1984b, p. 104, my emphasis).

And just like this comes "the hour of parting". Socrates "to die" — everyone else "to live" (42a). Which is best? To go on living? Or to die like Socrates? And in his final, parting

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85 Musaeus was "a mythical singer with a descriptive name ('He of the Muses')". It's also important to note that "[he] is closely connected with Orpheus, whom he follows together with Hesiod and Homer in a canonical list […] of the quintessential Greek poets" (HORNBLOWER; SPAWFORTH, 1999, p. 1001).

86 Cf. footnote 85, just above.

87 I want to stress here Plato's continuous hedging. This happens throughout his work, and should not be disregarded.

88 Cf. 33c, where Socrates says that the youngsters love to hear people being tested. Something he confesses to be "not unamusing" also.

twist, for the last time applying to himself the Socratic razor, Socrates declares nobody knows who is better off. Well, “anyone but God” (42a) (PLATO, 1961a, p. 26), obviously.

4.1.4.3 What is philosophy doing here anyway?

Now that are we are done with Socrates’ trial, it’s again time for some thoughts on what philosophy has been doing here so far. On my previous attempt I told about some lessons learned up to that point. What lessons were those? By the order they were presented, these were:

(1) beware of how much you think you know;
(2) don’t take any claim at face value;
(3) be brave in your philosophical pursuit;
(4) look for practical wisdom, as those who know have the know-how;
(5) just because you’re good at something, that doesn’t mean you know what is needed to be good at everything else.

These are valuable lessons for pretty much everyone, but especially so for any aspiring philosopher. Just these 5 would be enough to provide a lot to work upon for any aspiring practitioner of this craft. However, since then, a lot has happened. Socrates brought up many other important points that must also be considered. All in all, what this means is that we now have a lot to go through in order to extract the remainder Socratic nuggets awaiting for us. So without delay, let’s try to parse the rest of it.

The next lesson is an obvious one. Well, obvious if you have been following the whole thing all along. It’s none other than the *Socratic Razor*, or (6) *those who understand how little they know are the wisest*. However, and this is important, this is not an instruction directed to the philosopher *qua* philosopher. It’s a general purpose precept, useful for anyone aspiring to be the wisest at what they do. But to the philosopher, it’s more of a criterion.

As the name I’m suggesting implies, it’s a *razor* to help cut through all the fluff and direct the gaze to what really matters. So this is actually 2 lessons for the price of 1, which makes no difference since you’re not paying for these lessons anyway. Still, this is a very important lesson, one philosophers and non-philosophers alike should take to heart.

Then comes a really tough one to swallow. It goes something like this: once you're in, you're always in. Or, more specifically, (7) *once a philosopher, always a philosopher*. In practice, what this means is that, contrary to what happens to other crafts, there's no clear separation between being in and out of the workshop.

To understand what I mean, imagine now a shoemaker. During the day, s/he makes shoes. But when s/he closes the shop, s/he can stop thinking about her/his shoemaking craft if s/he is so wiling. Notice that I'm not saying that s/he stops being a shoemaker. Only that s/he can take some time out from her/his being a shoemaker. Of course, s/he can go home and try to learn new things about her/his craft, or meet other shoemakers to share their crafting experiences. But s/he doesn't have to. So to her/him, there's a clear separation from being in and out of the workshop. But that's not true for the philosopher.

The thing is, philosophy, *this* philosophy at least, is more akin to an attitude towards oneself than having a set of skills applied to the performance of a task. Yes, the philosopher also has their own set of skills. And yes, these can be applied to the performance of the philosophical task at hand, i.e., that of testing the wisdom of others. But since the philosopher is constantly monitoring their own wisdom alongside that of others, either alone or around other people, that means the philosopher is always performing as a philosopher. S/he is, so to speak, always in the workshop.

Of course, there's plenty more to say about this, but to delve further is beyond the scope here. Perhaps I'll revisit this on the next chapter. Perhaps. For now it's enough as a lesson to keep in mind that philosophy will take up all of your time, leaving you with "no leisure" for other things (23c) — as it did to Socrates. So if you're thinking about applying to this craft, think again. Lot's of work, a terrible pay, and no vacations.

Next comes a lesson that is closely related to lesson (3), on philosophical bravery. Simply put, it's (8) *never quit*. If what you're doing is just, and just what you should be doing, don't waver on your pursuit. Even if you have to put your life on the line, don't look back, stand your ground. True for everyone, truer still for the philosopher. Remember that (3) *once you're in, you're always in*. So, by the same token, once you're in, there's no going out. I mean, if going out means quitting, and quitting is out of the question, how can you stay within philosophy by quitting it?

The way I imagine is thus. Someone says s/he will stand their ground for something, say, a marriage. Then, at some point, for whatever reason, s/he decides to quit said marriage. If s/he quits, s/he's out of the marriage; and to be married s/he can't quit. Pretty straightforward. Of course, this example introduces new questions, such as those related to the possibility of mending a broken marriage. That, however, is not really a problem, as this is still addressed by the example. Think with me.

The thing is, when you quit a marriage, you break it. At that point, that marriage is like the proverbial *dead parrot*[89], being an ex-marriage. So even if later you decide to go back together with your ex-spouse, you're not returning to the previous marriage, but marrying for a second time — though with the same person. Meaning that, if someone asks you how many times you have been married, the correct answer is now 'two'.

In the same way, if you quit philosophy, *that* philosophy at least, you quit it for good. From that time on you'll be known as an ex-philosopher. Then, if you later return to your craft, you again become a philosopher, but this time espousing another philosophy. So, what is philosophy here anyway? A marriage of sorts to a belief of sorts? Maybe not a belief, but a program[90]. A program about knowledge. Perhaps.

But never mind that. Not now at least. Because I can assure you that here I'm clearly way over my head, trying to bite more than I can at this point chew. For the record, just keep in mind that if you still want to join the Guild of philosophers, joining it is a bit like joining the *mafia*[91]. So be warned. The job description is getting worse and worse.

The lesson that follows is about personal knowledge. (9) *Try to know how much you really know*. Notice this is not lesson (1). In that lesson you have to put into question how much

89 To those out of the loop, the *Dead Parrot* is an iconic sketch from the famous troupe Monty Python, featured in the first season of their series *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. In it, a customer wants to return a dead parrot which has been sold to him in a state less than alive, stuffed in a cage. The shop owner refuses to give a refund, never admitting that the parrot is already dead. After a few exchanges, the customer, in a fit of rage, finally shouts: "It's not pining, it's passed on! This parrot is no more! It has ceased to be! It's expired and gone to meet its maker! This is a late parrot! It's a stiff! Bereft of life, it rests in peace! If you hadn't nailed it to the perch, it would be pushing up the daisies! It's run down the curtain and joined the choir invisible! This is an ex-parrot!" ("Monty Python's Flying Circus", 2022).

90 Socrates program could perhaps be described thus: *I'll do this, to know that, so I can infer yet another thing, a thing that will allow me to disprove whatever made me do this in the first place*. So in a way, it's a almost like an algorithm, "a step-by-step procedure for solving a problem or accomplishing some end" ("Merriam-Webster", 2022).

91 In popular media, criminal organizations are a bit like a one-way street. You can join them, but you can never leave them. Which makes sense for very practical reasons. Once out, someone who is familiar with the ins-and-outs of such an organization can leak important data that has to be kept secret for security purposes. But I digress.

you *think* you know. Here though you try to really assert how much of your seeming knowledge is actually satisfactory knowledge. The point that makes this an important new lesson is that it provides you with the reasons why you shouldn't quit. It allows you to get both your proverbial feet on the *satisfactory knowledge* ground. Because even if it's true that you cannot know it all, at least you can satisfactorily know what you need to confidently remain firm at your post.

As for the next lesson, though a bit unsavory for some, *it is not unamusing*[92]. How shall I put it? How about (10) *politics and philosophy do not really get along*. To avoid misreadings, let me add a little something. And I really want to be generous here. What Socrates is saying is that politics is too dangerous for a path like his.

We have to keep in mind that the Socratic search is not just a hypothesis. It's rather a *demonstration*. It's a lived experience that demands from Socrates both commitment and time. So, if he had chosen the path of politics to carry out his examination, he would by now have long died in his pursuit. And if that had happened, he would certainly have died knowing much less than he now knows. Besides, the philosopher should be a philosopher for philosophy's sake, not for politics'. So, when everything's considered, this seems a wise lesson of his.

Then follows a lesson on teaching. A strange lesson at first. (11) *You can't teach philosophy*. *This* philosophy at least. Notice that Socrates is not saying that he does not wish to share his know-how. Nor is he saying that he does not wish to take part in the betterment of his fellow citizens. On the contrary, all he does is for the best of the City. What he's saying is that philosophy, *this* philosophy, is not teachable. His reasoning is actually pretty sound. Think with me.

Who knows more? Those who have the know-how. And who has the know-how? The artisans, the doers. Those who actually know what they are doing. And Socrates, *this* Socrates, is siding more closely with these doers. Which means that Socrates, *this* Socrates, like any other artisan, has no pupils, no students. He does not teach. Let's see why.

A craft by nature is knowledge of a certain know-how. You can only craft knowledgeably if you know what you have to do to craft the thing you want to do. And that can only be learned by personal experience. Which raises the question: can you know the doing by someone else's knowledge of that doing? You can't. This is why crafts have no teachers, since it's the learners' practice that does the actual teaching. If anything, crafts have only more experienced crafters helping others as their apprentices. But these crafters do no teaching, at most they only

92 Cf. 33c-d.

point the way. As for the apprentices, they cannot but do the doing. Such is the way for the crafts as it is for *this* philosophy. And this is why it can't be taught.

Finally, there's the lesson on making the best with whatever fate has in store for you. This is yet another which is directed at everyone, not just the philosopher. It can be rendered thus: (12) *when the odds are stacked against you, embrace whatever comes your way*. In Socrates' case, while being sentenced to death, he not only accepts his fate, he actually has high hopes for what is to come. But it's important to notice that he is not taking the easy way out just because. He is still very much sticking to his principles. For instance, notice that he embraces death as good based on what he can reason about it, not because he knows it to be true. After all, only those who have died — and *outlived* it — can know what death is like. Well, if death is a journey, that is.

Now that we are done with the lessons, allow me some final remarks to connect this with what was said in the previous chapter on Epicurus' claims about philosophy. To him, philosophy played an unmistakable role in making everyone's life pleasurable. But philosophy was never his true goal. More akin to Wittgenstein's ladder[93], or the Buddha's raft[94], once you reach what you were after, you can abandon it. Which makes sense, as philosophy for him is nothing but tool, a means to an end. And in this Epicurus is so radically different from Socrates. In the latter's case, when he is told he will be put to death, Socrates, *this* Socrates, does not put the tool back in the toolbox, as Epicurus would do. On the contrary, he says he's eager to die because he will continue to do what he has been passionately doing all along, using the tool, but now in the great beyond.

And herein lies the great difference between them. By what we've seen from Epicurus' letter, he really seems an expert in the craft of making people happy. Yes, he achieves his goal through philosophy, but that makes him at most an expert in using philosophy to *that* goal. One who hammers a lot may know a lot about hammering, but that by itself won't be making them

93 In proposition 6.54 of the *Tratactus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein declares that, "[his] propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands [him] eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, *throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it*.)" (2002, p. 89, my emphasis).

94 In his *Parable of the Raft*, Buddha tells a tale of man who fashions a raft to cross "a great stretch of water". Later, having crossed to the other side, this man notices "that the raft has been very useful and [so] he wonders if he ought to take it with him" to use it some other time. No, says the Buddha, now that "he has crossed over to the beyond he must leave the raft and proceed with his journey". Now, as the raft in this parable stands for Buddha's teachings, what he's saying is that his instructions are meant "for getting across, not for retaining" (KORNFIELD, 2004, p. 92) them.

an expert in the craft of making hammers. So bear with me a bit longer, while a try to stretch my analogy. If the hammer[95] is the stand-in for philosophy, perhaps Epicurus is more of a stone-mason than a tool maker.

But if that is so, what about Socrates? Is he a builder? *This* Socrates? No. At most he tries to chip away through an impossible problem. He makes his aim to disprove god's claim, an aim he repeatedly fails in name. But not only does he not quit, he takes that as a sign that he should keep on pursuing it, non-stop, for as long as he's living. He even hopes to continue pursuing it if an afterlife is what awaits him beyond.

This, while no doubt interesting, is only drama. This is passion, commitment, enthusiasm translated as a character. The juicy part that makes Socrates, *this* Socrates, so interesting, is his approach to dialogue with which he finds the answer. It's the procedure[96] which he learns from experience, what his actual practice teaches him. This procedure is his tool, the way he chips away through his never ending aim. The perfect tool for the job at hand. A job that was god-given. Socrates the toolmaker.

4.2 HIS MASTER'S VOICE

I smell trouble. Up until now, I have been playing a kind of double game by referring to Socrates as character only. Why double? Well, because the character only has the voice his author grants him. So when I speak of Socrates' character, I'm actually quoting the writer behind him. And the writer is none other than Plato. So far it has been tons of fun to dodge the bullet by stealing away Plato's words as belonging to someone else entirely. But now that push comes to shove, and Plato is bound to make an appearance, I have to put the house in order.

In the previous chapter, after finishing Epicurus' letter, I then brought Lucretius to the stage as the paradigmatic example of a follower of the Epicurean school. With him I wanted to show how Epicureans viewed their teacher centuries later, how they interpreted his ideas, and ultimately how throughout time these ideas philosophically developed. But I cannot do that with Plato. Not only was Socrates pretty much alive when he started following him, but also Plato

95 You may, if you so wish, think about Nietzsche's *hammer*.

96 This procedure is the Socratic Method of which "Socrates was of course a prominent user [...], if not its inventor. According to Plato, he had a very good reason for using the method, namely that he had no wisdom of his own to impart anyway" (ADAMSON, 2014, n. p.).

didn't just take him as a teacher *qua* teacher. So in this sense, Plato's relation to Socrates here is not that of Lucretius to Epicurus there. The parallel lies elsewhere.

In truth, Plato's juxtaposition to Lucretius only starts to make sense when we remember that both were remarkable writers. Both excelled at their craft, a craft that allowed them both to immortalize their heroes. And though Lucretius seems to be blissfully unaware of Plato's work, through his teacher he sometimes ends up engaging with some of Plato's ideas[97]. But that's where their similarities end. Because though true that both were outstanding writers, their approaches were completely at odds with one another.

For instance, Lucretius, or the character he performs[98] on *De Rerum Natura*, has throughout the work the same didactic attitude, that of someone who's always "providing earnest instruction" (MARKOVIC, 2008, p. 17). He acts as teacher and, subsequently, "imposes on his reader the role of child" (MARKOVIC, 2008, p. 30). His is a "rhetoric of explanation", one whose goal is "to change the life of the individual" (MARKOVIC, 2008, p. 148). In practice, he's always explaining, always telling how things are, in a pattern close to 'this is this because of that, and that is that because of this'. You know, the way a knower imparts their knowledge to those lacking it. So that is primarily Lucretius' voice.

But what about Plato's? Where's Plato's voice? It's probably Socrates', right? I mean, in most dialogues[99], he's the main character, so it's natural to assume that he's a kind of stand-in for Plato. But the truth of the matter is that this is not as simple or straightforward as it may at first appear. To make my point clear, let's think of another author. Let's say, Fernando Pessoa.

It's no secret that Pessoa had many *heteronyms*[100]. There's Alberto Caeiro. And then there's Ricardo Reis. Then there's Álvaro de Campos. And then[101]… you get the picture. My

97 Some scholars point out that since "Epicurus, and therefore Lucretius, could not ignore Plato's *Timaeus* and its influence in the Hellenistic period", Lucretius' *"De rerum natura* is in its turn partly an anti-Timaean polemic" (CAMPBELL, 2000, p. 145).

98 It has long been assumed that *De Rerum Natura*'s narrator, its main voice, is Lucretius himself. But how much of that voice is actual his or his poetic *persona*, that no one can tell. I like to think that the written voice always portrays a character, as "[w]riting is above all an act of pretense. We have to visualize ourselves in some kind of conversation, or correspondence, or oration, or soliloquy, and [then] put words into the mouth of the little avatar who represents us in this simulated world" (PINKER, 2015 n. p.).

99 In the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, Socrates is present but he's not the main character, playing only a minor role. In the *Laws* he is altogether absent.

100 "Pessoa referred to the many names under which he wrote prose and poetry as 'heteronyms' rather than pseudonyms, since they were not merely false names but belonged to invented others, to fictional writers with points of view and literary styles that were [very] different from Pessoa's" (ZENITH, 2002, n. p.).

101 Apart from those listed, there's also others that, though not as important, or productive, are still his heteronyms. These include Bernardo Soares, Alexander Search, Chevalier de Pas, Charles Robert Anon, and H. M. F. Lecher.

point is that when we think about the thinking of one of his heteronyms, say, Alberto Caeiro; do we think it as belonging to Caeiro, or to Pessoa? The bureaucrat in you might say that the thinking on paper attributed to Caeiro belongs to the individual who holds the CPF number of the person who wrote. All fine and dandy. Problem is that, Pessoa himself referred to Caeiro as appearing in himself as his master[102]. So now what? Do you know more than the author himself? Are you willing to bet your cards against his? I wouldn't. You may think me naive, but I rather believe the author. So when I quote Caeiro, it's Caeiro's voice who's speaking. Not Pessoa's. So when Plato names a voice as Socrates', is it Socrates' — or is it his? So... what voice is Plato's?

Let's quote Plato. Let's quote him saying something like 'I believe this to be that because of some other thing'. It shouldn't take long, especially now when we can *control+f* our way through the whole of the Platonic corpus. For instance, I have here *The Collected Dialogues including the letters*, an edition I'm particularly fond of for its practicality. Let's use it. Surprise, surprise, no surprise. Not a single instance. Not when I want to quote Plato in his own voice[103]. And this was intentional. Just think.

When so many authors around him published works under their own voice[104], why wouldn't Plato? Why did he choose to remain silent? For fear of persecution? Or had he a more sinister purpose[105]? What was his agenda? I couldn't care less. To me the only thing that matters is Plato's choice as an author. So like Pessoa, if he chose that someone else's voice in him was not his, but that person's, who am I to question him? "(What more do I know about God than God about himself?)" (CAEIRO, 1993).

To me the whole thing is simply fascinating. When I stop worrying about finding Plato, the *real* Plato hidden behind all the voices he wrote, and let the voices speak for themselves,

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102 In a letter to his friend Adolfo Casais Monteiro, Pessoa goes into some detail on how Alberto Caeiro came about. Describing the occasion, March 8 1914, as "the triumphant day of [his] life", Pessoa then describes his ecstatic feeling upon writing Alberto Caeiro's poems. Finally, recognizing how absurd might sound what he's about to say, he then adds: "it appeared in me my master" (PESSOA, 1986).

103 'What about the letters', you may ask. Well, first, in the past, "forgery of 'letters' was quite standard with famous figures". There's that. 'What about the famous *Letter VII*? Well, "the 'Seventh Letter' is so peculiar philosophically that it would be perverse to use it as a basis for interpreting the philosophy in the dialogues; and it is as a whole such an unconvincing production that its acceptance by many scholars is best seen as indicating the strength of their desire to find, behind the detachment of the dialogues, something, no matter what, to which Plato is straightforwardly committed". So, not even the letters.

104 Almost everyone else I can think of did so. From the top of my head: Parmenides, Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, the list goes on and on. Xenophon wrote Socratic dialogues also, but he has other works where his is the voice.

105 I'm thinking here of the infamous Popperian critique of Plato. Under a chapter suggestively named "Totalitarian Justice", Popper says that he "believe that Plato's political programme, far from being morally superior to totalitarianism, is fundamentally identical with it" (2013, p. 84).

granting them a life of their own, Plato's work is no longer Plato's. When I watch *Vertigo* (1958), I'm not looking at Hitchcock. Cameos aside[106], it's not he I see. What I see is the play of the characters on screen, I see their story play out before my very own eyes. I root for them, I side with them. It's *Vertigo*, the story, that moves me. Hitchcock at most is the excuse to talk about it. So, my relation to Plato is a bit like this. And please don't get me wrong. I love Plato! But what I love in Plato is not Plato's *Plato*. I love Plato's plays.

Perhaps this whole thing here is nothing but pure *fanboyism* on my part, me telling you why I love Plato. If before I appraised Lucretius, here I praise Plato. *Nobody writes philosophy as Plato*. Here, I said it. Nobody. And you know why? Because he managed the impossible, he twisted the threads of fate in such a way that we cannot now but remember him through his Socrates. We know Plato through a character. So, where's Plato? Perhaps "Plato was ill"[107] (59b-c) (PLATO, 1961d, p. 42).

And that's why I love him. I love him because he's absent. I love that he took himself out of the equation, rendering all search for him futile. What more do I know about Plato than Plato about himself? If that was his wish, why not grant him? His *philosophy* grows no little. I do not belittle Plato when I choose to ignore him. I simply pay due respect to his wishes, and as Caeiro to his God, "I obey him".

"Because if he made himself to be, so I could see him", Protagoras and Gorgias and Hippias and Thrasymachus and Euthydemus, "if he appears to me as being" Alcibiades and Critias and Callicles and Anytus and Meletus, "it's because he wants me to know him as" Theaetetus and Timaeus and Philebus and Zeno and Stranger. "I obey him living" his characters, "spontaneously, like someone opening their eyes and seeing, and I call him" Chaerephon and Crito and Adeimantus and Glaucon and Socrates, "and I love him without thinking about him"[108] (CAEIRO, 1993, my translation).

So now you tell me. Is this enough to put my house in order? Or does it seem to you that I'm just weaseling my way out of the problem? Well, I think I have done both. But not without

106 "Alfred Hitchcock is known for his frequent cameos in his movies" (WIKIPEDIA CONTRIBUTORS, 2022a).

107 Some creative psychoanalyst could interpret this illness as some illness of the mind. Perhaps he really heard voices in his head, like a Socrates on steroids. A bit pointless, if you ask me, but interesting nonetheless.

108 This whole passage minus the names is from Alberto Caeiro's poem *There's enough metaphysics in not thinking about anything*. In the original, Caeiro says: "Because, if [God] has made himself to be, so I could see him, / Sun and moonlight and flowers and trees and hills, / If he appears before me as trees and hills and moonlight and sun and flowers, / It's because he wants me to know him as trees and hills and flowers and moonlight and sun. […] / I obey him living, spontaneously, like someone opening their eyes and seeing, / And I call him moonlight and sun and flowers and trees and hills, / And I love him without thinking about him".

justification. Let's see. First, the house. Yes, I took Plato's Socrates, and ran away with it. I took his words as literally his, as they indeed are, as I consider him a character. And thanks to this I learned several important lessons that made me wiser regarding philosophy. But I also recognized that Plato is the author behind Socrates' voice. Not only that, I acknowledged Plato's willingness to stay out of his character's way, giving Socrates and not him a voice.

Then, taking that as being a teaching in itself, all I did was apply to Plato the newly learned lesson of the Socratic Razor. If I'm remembering correctly, it's something like <control+c> "the wisest is s/he who, like Socrates, understands how little they know". And what does that mean when applied to Plato? That I know too little about him. So while technically true that I don't know most of what has been written about Plato, by Socrates' standard, when I recognized this to be the case, I've actually become the wisest. Just like Socrates at his trial, I've twisted everything, turning what seemed the worst outcome into my best. All I did was to take more than two millennia of Platonic studies stacked against me as a proof of how little I know.

So, to wrap it all up, allow me a last call back to Lucretius and his voice. If with him the resulting Epicurean picture turned quite philosophically disconcerting, with Plato without a voice philosophy became outstanding. And in my last effort to *cosplay*[109] Socrates, I take my turn in giving credit to where credit is due. Good work, Plato. You've really nailed it.

4.2.1 What's philosophy here anyway?

Again mimicking the previous chapter, I present now some final thoughts on what I've learned about philosophy so far. Back then, while among the Epicureans, despite all the wonders I was taught about *life, the universe and everything*[110], there was always this nagging feeling that I had it all except philosophy. Yes, Epicurus made it a central part to his craft of making other people happy, turning philosophy into his *provider of reasons for what we should or should not do*. But as the twig is bent so is the tree inclined, Lucretius, and later Epicureans, had already turned that not particularly deep understanding of philosophy into *a mere canonical set of truths*.

109 For those out of the loop, cosplay is a word derived from 'costume play'. It refers to the practice of wearing the costumes and related gear of a specific character (WIKIPEDIA CONTRIBUTORS, 2022b).

110 This is the title of the third book on the famous series *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, by Douglas Adams. I'm using it as an apt summary of both Epicurus' *On Nature*, and Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*. Cf. ADAMS, D. **Life, the Universe and Everything**. New York: Ballantine Books, 1995.

Now contrast this with what we've learned here from Socrates. Going from one to the other feels a bit like, say, being trapped in a cave and then coming out to the sun. But never mind me telling you that. Let's put them side by side in order to determine the philosophical reach of both. Here I'm tempted to try a little experiment. Let's say we make Epicurus and the Epicureans answer a little Socratic questionnaire. That seems a nice idea. After all, Socrates himself is always eager to examine everyone else[111]. So let's give it a try.

(1) Given what Epicurus and the Epicureans claim to know, is there any core epistemological modesty guiding their thinking? No. On the contrary. They base their views on a number of basic premises that are never even put to question. Their materialistic assumption that nothing is but matter, for instance. Right or wrong, that is not the question here. What we are after is how certain they are in relation to their assumptions. And, boy, are they certain! So I give them a **fail** at this.

(2) Do they take any claim at face value? Kind of hard to say. Because, on the one hand, they seem to question some of the assumptions, as long as they fall under their major principles. For instance, both Epicurus and Lucretius propose multiple possible explanations to different phenomena. But, on the other hand, Epicureans at least take Epicurus' words as gospel. So… do they? Do they not? Both. Like I said, hard to say. They pass, and then **fail**.

(3) Are they brave in their philosophical pursuit? Here I would prefer to call them clever. Brave? Philosophically? From my experience as an Epicurean, the Epicureans do not really need to be brave. Do you remember what Epicurus cured us from? Fear! And that's the thing. Epicurus is so clever. He uses philosophy as a cure for our fears. So, the Epicureans are not philosophically brave, because they don't need to, as they are clever. That to me deserves a **pass**.

(4) Are they looking for practical wisdom, as they believe that those knowing have the know-how? Pass. Oh, boy, are they practical! If I remember correctly, I described Epicurus as *pragmatic*. Both Socrates and the Epicureans are naturally predisposed to greatly value practice. So that's why I vote to give them here a **pass**.

(5) Do they, knowing they are good at something, think themselves justified in knowing about everything else? Fail. Reason: Epicurus. Not long ago I likened him to a stonemason. Epicurus builds. He builds these cosmic wonders. My point is this: Epicurus fails at this because he

111 Here's a little list I compiled of instances where Socrates examines or proposes to examine others: *Apology* 21c, 29a, 29e, 33c, 38a, 41b-c; *Gorgias* 455c, 457e, 515a-b; *Protagoras* 311b; *Phaedrus* 258d-e; *Theaetetus* 145b-c, 151c; *Greater Hippias* 286e. Yes, examining others is pretty much *his* thing.

is clearly overstepping epistemic boundaries when he explains everything under the Sun and beyond. Because, boy, Epicurus covers a lot of ground[112]! But is he good at something? Clearly. Think of his understanding of desires and needs. Think of his razor. He clearly knows of what he's talking about. So, because he knows something, and then thinks he knows everything, I give Epicurus and the Epicureans here a **fail**.

(6) Was Epicurus or any of the Epicureans the wisest in that they understood how little they know? No comments. No, really. Epicurus, the *know-it-all*. And he, not Socrates, is their wisest. So, no comments. **Fail**.

(7) Did Epicurus ever stopped being a philosopher? I really don't know what to answer. Was he even a philosopher? Well, since he actually saw himself as a philosopher, and since he never quit that role, I vote to give him here a **pass**.

(8) Did Epicurus ever quit? C'mon… He died on the job. **Pass**.

(9) Did the Epicureans try to know how much they really know? Pass — within limits. Again, as in question (2), it's hard to say. They question and change many of their explanations. But, again, what does not change are the core beliefs. So they pass; and then **fail**.

(10) Do they think politics and philosophy do not really get along? Pass. Epicurus willingly abstained from talking about politics. He didn't propose ways to govern cities, he didn't write constitutions. He founded gardens and communities, known for centuries for their friendliness. The Epicureans stayed away from politics. Epicurus warned them against it. **Pass**.

(11) Do Epicureans think philosophy is teachable? I think they do. So much so that they give lectures, teachings, advice, support. They think philosophy teachable because they think philosophy is but a synonym to their thinking. And because of this I have to vote for a fail. They mix absolute certainties with philosophy proper. It doesn't fit. **Fail**.

(12) Do they embrace whatever comes their way when the odds are stacked against them? Oh yes! But not without first tweaking it. Again, the Epicureans are above all clever. They live preparing themselves for the worst while comfortably living with little. So when fate brings the worst, Epicureans are readily prepared to embrace it. Here I cannot but give them a **pass**, with distinction.

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112 *On Nature*. 37 volumes. Lectures.

At this point we just have to tally passes and fails. The result, surprisingly, reads: both **pass** and **fail**. 6 each. Out of 12 available Socratic criteria, Epicurus and the Epicureans just fit half. So now you tell me. Are they *philosophical*? Well, at least according to *this* measure, they are not; or at least not exactly. They are good people, likable; but they don't, as of yet, have what is needed to become a philosopher, or *this* philosopher at least. Which sounds fair, right?

With that out of the way, we can at least for now pretend for that we've taken Epicureanism out *this* philosophy's, way. And having done that, we are perhaps better prepared now to tackle the next question. How is *this* philosophy? Well, by now I know it goes by the name of *Socratic Method.* From the above, I also know it's an examination of sorts, one that relies heavily on one-on-one exchanges as it's by nature dialectical. But that's pretty much it for now.

So if you're like me and are eager to know more about it, join me in the next chapter as I try to make sense of it all. Or, to put into context, if before I invited you to follow me from the garden to the courtroom, I now entice you to join me at the proverbial *agora*. We're just a page away.

5 HOW IS *THIS* PHILOSOPHY?

Up until now, I was feeling rather confident, as I kind of *training-wheeled* my way through both Epicurus and Plato. I had them speaking, and me telling you what they each teach. Easy-peasy, I thought, as all I had to do was to read through, and then tell you. And in a way that was true. What you have been witnessing so far has been mostly that, and that's fine, thank you. But what about here? Who's going to guide me now and help me find my way through?

Well, I could yet again rely on Plato, as I would certainly be in the best of hands. However, since I want to focus on the more technical aspects of Socrates' craft, here instead I'll rely heavily on Ward Farnsworth's valuable *The Socratic Method: A Practitioner's Handbook* (2021). It seems the perfect fit, as, like Socrates, I'm siding with the artisans in thinking philosophy more of a craft. And what's the best teacher when it comes to crafts? Practice. And what's the best way to start a new practice? Either by getting the help of a more experienced crafter, or by following a handbook. Here, fortunately, we have both. Such being the case, as time is of the essence now, let's cut directly through the chase and grab the handbook. It concerns the more experienced crafter.

5.1 THE *SOCRATIC METHOD*

5.1.1 The Socratic Rules of Engagement

When I was growing up, bicycles were my thing. And while riding them was great, I soon started to find greater joy in tinkering with them. This quickly turned into an obsession, and at an age most aspiring philosophers are already plowing through the canonical great[1], I was simply learning to repair bicycles. Ok, 'good for you', you think, 'but what's your point exactly?'

1 Here I have in mind someone like John Stuart Mill. Ok, he's atypical in almost every sense, but he's at least the paradigmatic example of what someone can achieve if philosophically guided since early childhood. His father, the Scottish philosopher James Mill, "was an admirer of the Greek philosophers and in particular of the Socratics, and he used the maieutic method with his son" (HALÉVY, 1934, pp. 283–284). He wanted "to make his son follow the example of Bentham, who had begun his classical studies" (HALÉVY, 1934, p. 283) very early. Because of this, "Mill was taught Greek at the age of three. […] Mill read Plato in Greek by the age of seven; […] at the age of eight, he studied Latin; […] the classics of logic by twelve […]. At the age of fourteen, Mill was introduced to the writings of Jeremy Bentham, and this was soon followed, at age sixteen, by the philosophical works of Locke, Berkeley, Helvétius, and Condillac". And if that was not impressive already, "at the age of eight, Mill was reading Thucydides, Sophocles' *Electra*, Euripides' *Phoenisae*, Aristophanes' *Plutus* and the *Clouds*, and the *Philippics* of Demosthenes [—] in Greek" (CAPALDI, 2004, pp. 6–7). The list goes on and on.

Well, because just like in those days, I still pretty much have the same workshop mentality. Having ideas is great and all, but knowing how to put them into practice is what really counts. For instance, a bicycle doesn't get repaired by only thinking about it. At some point you have to do the deed and try a solution. I have the same feeling here when I think about the Socratic Method.

How much has been said so far about it? A quick search on *Google Scholar*[2] returns "About 111,000 results" ("Socratic Method - Google Scholar", 2022). That's quite a lot of scholarly info. If nothing else, I can start opening papers at random from that list, but how much of what has been written about it pertains actual practice? I have here in my digital library a book whose title reads, *Does Socrates Have a Method? Rethinking the Elenchus in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond* (2002). I have no doubt I can learn much from reading this book. It may even change the way I think about Socrates' method. But, and please bear with me, if I just want to know the basics so I can quickly put them into practice, this book won't help me much. I'm not in the business of rethinking. That's not my thing. My thing is knowing how to do the job so I can get it done, and move on with it. And this is where our handbook comes handy.

For instance, have you ever thought about the *Socratic Rules of Engagement*? I didn't, though I recognize now its usefulness. Fortunately for us, Farnsworth already did, and listed them. They are *"general rules of engagement*" in that they are "practical dos and don'ts" to keep conversations within clear Socratic boundaries. These, he says, "can have use in every sort of contentious conversation" (2021, n. p.). As such, it's a fitting tool for a demanding job. For we cannot ignore that Socratic examinations are usually rather contentious. After all, knowledge is a touchy subject when someone is putting it into question. So better be safe than sorry. For this reason, we can also think these rules as safety measures to keep alive the Socratic engagement.

With that being said, they are:

> 1. *The open table*. Everything is open for inquiry; no view is immune from questioning if someone wants to offer it (2021, n. p.).

This is as practical and personal as it gets. Nothing is beyond questioning. What this means is that, with the right Socratic attitude, we accept that everything may be put to question. In a way, it almost seems a callback to two of the lessons we learned on the previous chapter.

2 Cf. https://scholar.google.com/

These are lessons (1), on *epistemic modesty*, and (3), on *philosophical bravery*. And how is this rule helpful?

For instance, as a philosopher today graduating from a Brazilian university, what should be my attitude when facing conversations there and beyond? To those in the know that I'm a philosophy graduate, what attitude of mine should they expect from me when I'm faced with a *tough* question? Well; how about doing exactly this: if it comes into question, face it, and inquire it. It's a good Socratic tip to keep us Socratic.

> 2. *The purpose of inquiry*. The purpose of inquiry is to reach the truth or get closer to it. The purpose is not to say or prove whatever will advance a goal in the background, or to make the partners to the inquiry feel good, or to win an argument (2021, n. p.).

Once again a very personal rule. This is the same as saying that we have to take to heart the lesson (1), always *be wary of how much we think we know*. The thing is, a Socratic discussion is not a contest of sorts, so its purpose is not to take the trophy of winning it[3]. Rather, when we Socratically engage with someone in conversation, our goal is mainly to test any claim to knowledge. This is the so-called *truth* we want to reach or get closer to. With that in mind, we never lose track of the purpose of our Socratic conversation. Thanks to this awareness we avoid the common trappings of using our Socratic skills to either manipulate or take advantage of others. Socratic engagements have no room for hidden agendas. Socratically engaged, we are not there to praise or fight.

> 3. *Challenges wanted*. Questioning is the natural and welcome response to any position one might take. Attempts at refutation are the acts of a friend and are presumptively offered and received in that spirit, even if—especially if—the challenge is made to a strongly held view. You might be wrong, or (if not) there might still be a little something right in what your challenger says. *Being shown that you've erred or been imprecise is a favor*. Comfort in confessing error is a sign of health (2021, n. p., my emphasis).

Again, very practical. Suppose someone challenges you in that one thing you always knew you were right. And to make matters worse, add to that certainty of yours two more features. That you derived it yourself, and that you were by many considered an expert in that one

3 Most discussions end up being quarrels, not the logician's dream of an exchange of arguments. Now, "a quarrel [is but] the paradigm of eristic dialogue most familiar in everyday conversation, [where] the individual goal of each participant is to 'hit out' verbally at the other party" (WALTON, 1998, pp. 178–179). In other words, since, "[i]n a quarrel, the aim of each party is to defeat the other in an adversarial contest" (WALTON, 1998, p. 179), this is an approach completely at odds with the Socratic rules of engagement.

particular thing. Now you tell me. How would it feel to have holes poked into your certainty? How would you react if the immediate consequence of that poking around was a big blow to your reputation as an expert? Would you feel friendly, welcoming, embracing? Probably not. If like me, a flesh and bone human, you'd start to get very, very annoyed.

And this is why this rule is important. Before even letting ourselves be taken by such fiery emotions, we have to keep in mind that being shown wrong or inaccurate is actually a good thing. Our idea has holes? Great. Now we can start looking for what's missing. Are these holes critical? Well, if they are, even better. Now we can stop thinking about it, knowing it to be groundless. We are now one idea less wrong. Notice that this is also a callback of sorts to lesson (1), *perhaps we know less than we think*.

> 4. *Arguments met with arguments*. The Socratic approach doesn't say that certain arguments don't deserve a reply because they're contemptible and shouldn't have been made in the first place. If someone thinks something is so and is wrong, the appropriate response is to explain why it isn't so (2021, n. p.).

Say I start arguing that because my dissertation is elegant, or funny, or clever, it is above any critique. This is of course ridiculous, and very much wrong. However, the appropriate Socratic attitude would never be one of showing any disdain for my foolishness, or to say that what I claim is inappropriate. Socratically engaged, you would rather show me why I was wrong in the first place, or at least try. Arguments with arguments.

This is also a callback to lesson (7), *once a philosopher, always a philosopher*. Why? Because once we take upon ourselves the responsibility of keeping a conversation Socratic, there's no turning back. Just think. Socratic engagements don't just simply happen. They have to be intentionally sought for, constantly monitored, and carefully conducted. Otherwise they quickly become indistinguishable from any other discussion. So in order to prevent this from happening, once we start to play the Socratic role, we have treat all claims to knowledge as worthy. By virtue of our duty, they have to be respected and considered. This is at least the kind of attitude we should aspire.

> 5. *The priority of reason*. Arguments are judged on their merits—that is, on the quality of the evidence or reasoning that supports them, not on the identities of their makers. Claims that anyone's perspective is entitled to deference (or skepticism) are themselves judged on evidence and reasons—for example,

> reasons to believe that one person has access to evidence or experience that others don't, and that the answer to a question depends on it (2021, n. p.).

This is a very useful rule, especially when among academics. 'Plato said, "<out of context quote>", and that is why it is so'; 'So and so, teacher at <ivy league university>, has demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that all views other than theirs are nonsensical'; and so on. But we can also imagine this being equally useful in conversations with religious people. The point is, in a Socratic engagement, a mere appeal to authority won't do. In a way, if rule 4 was directed at those conversations with the less bright, rule 5 is directed at conversations with the true believers, academic or otherwise. Socratically engaged, we remember lesson (2), *that no claim should be taken at face value*, and we ask for reasons other than authority.

> 6. *Elenctic reasoning*. Inquiry is made, wherever possible, by finding common ground of agreement from which to begin. Then each side does the favor of trying to help the other see inconsistencies between that point of agreement and their position on whatever else is under discussion. Consistency is treated as an important test of a set of claims (2021, n. p.).

This is a juicy one, as there's a lot to unpack here. For starters, *elenctic reasoning* is just a fancy way of saying *thinking through the elenchus*. As for the elenchus, it's "Socrates' main instrument of philosophical investigation", as he uses it "for exposing inconsistency within the interlocutor's beliefs" (VLASTOS, 1982, p. 711). It has such a centrality in the Socratic dialogues that some scholars believe "the elenchus *is* the Socratic method" (2021, n. p.). But that aside, in practice the elenchus works like this:

> You make a claim. Socrates gets you to agree to some other proposition. Then he shows, sometimes surprisingly, that the new point to which you've agreed is inconsistent with what you said before. In short, he causes you to contradict yourself (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.).

Let's say I claim to know that Plato was in fact a woman. You, as my Socratic interlocutor, would then question me like this:

> You: Would you agree with me that Plato is never a speaking character in his dialogues?
>
> Me: I do.
>
> You: And aside from the dialogues, are there any other writings by Plato that are beyond doubt his?

> Me: No. Even the famous *VII* is problematic.
>
> You: So you believe that there are no known texts by Plato where he, Plato himself, speaks for himself, as Plato?
>
> Me: Yes, I do believe myself justified in saying that there are no known texts by Plato himself speaking as Plato. To me, that is beyond doubt.
>
> You: Are there any *reliable* writings about Plato, telling about him, what was he like, what kind of life was his, and so on?
>
> Me: No. There are no reliable sources describing him.
>
> You: So, you believe, at the same time, that you *know*, beyond doubt, that there are no known texts by Plato himself as Plato, nor about Plato as a person; and that you *know,* for a fact, that Plato was a woman. Is that what you *really* believe?
>
> Me: …

What you've just witnessed is a model elenchus. In this Socratic cookbook, so to speak, we find the following steps.

a) Someone makes a claim.
b) Next, the Socratic facilitator[4] advances a different claim, preferably one that both take for granted.
c) Then, little by little, the facilitator shows how the first interlocutor actually believes something and, at the same time, claims to believe its opposite.
d) Finally, this "means that at least one thing you've said has to go or be modified" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.).

This is also lesson (1) in practice. From our point of view as Socratic facilitators, what we try to do is to guide the other person so that s/he, that person, becomes aware that s/he perhaps doesn't know as much as s/he imagines. And, if all goes well, *voilà*, s/he actually acknowledges it. From the point of view of the other interlocutor, either s/he "abandons the [initial] claim" or starts "reconsidering the concession". Either way, the dialogue continues for as long as

4 I'm borrowing the term from Psychology, where "[f]acilitators are people with the skills to create conditions within which other human being can, so far as is possible, select and direct their own learning and development". In more practical terms, their "art is in drawing out the wisdom already embedded and lying dormant in the psyche of the learner" (GREGORY, 2002, p. 99). Which in philosophical terms simply means that facilitation is just another word for maieutics.

the initial claim to knowledge fails the Socratic test of consistency. And this is why "[c]onsistency [has to be] treated as an important test of a set of claims" (2021, n. p.).

But notice that all this can only happen if "Socrates' partner (often called his interlocutor)" agrees they "must answer every question according to [their] own beliefs". They also have to agree that the Socratic "partner (not the audience if there is one)" is the one who "judges the outcome" (WOODRUFF, 2020). So, before we get the *elenchus* going, we first have to try to make sure our interlocutor will be true with what s/he truly believes. Adding to our example before, the dialogue would start something like this:

> Me: Plato was a woman! I have no doubt about it.
>
> You: I would like to question you on that. Do you agree?
>
> Me: What a strange question. Why do you even ask?
>
> You: Well, because I know from experience that it's easy even for friends to get angry when deeply held beliefs are put into question. So, before starting what I wish will become our little Socratic dialogue, I would like your agreement to the following procedure:
>
> 1. every question must be answered;
> 2. in accordance to our own beliefs;
> 3. so that each claim will be judged by you alone, not other people around us.
>
> Do you agree with these?
>
> Me: I do.

Only then would our Socratic dialogue start. Only then would we be able to follow through with the elenchus. And this is the reason why the Socratic rule of engagement number 6 is necessary. Without it, there's no Socratic discussion.

> 7. *Self-skepticism*. One's own partisanship is distrusted. "Partisanship," for these purposes, means a strongly felt commitment to a certain set of beliefs that makes one want and expect inquiry to come out a certain way, and that makes people who challenge those beliefs seem to be enemies. It's easy to bend reasoning and find it convincing when it leads to results that you like, and it's hard to see this happening when you're the one who is doing it. Everyone stays conscious of this risk, and it's another reason why contradiction is welcome (2021, n. p.).

This is a rule especially useful for us as facilitators. We can imagine this answering the question, 'how should a Socratic facilitator behave toward their very own beliefs?' And here's the

answer. By applying lessons (1) and (2), or given that *perhaps we know less than we think*, we *shouldn't take any claim for granted*. Otherwise, we may fool ourselves into thinking we know more than we actually do. If that happens, we become unfit for our role as Socratic facilitators. In a way, we abandon our post, going against lesson (7), taking the role instead of the one needing the epistemic checkup. So, if we want to keep playing the Socratic part, we have at least to keep our beliefs in check.

> 8. *Group skepticism*. Popular opinion and easy consensus are likewise distrusted. A room full of people who all agree about something regarded as controversial outside the room, and especially a group feeling congratulatory about its agreement, is uncomfortable. It is too much like the Athenian jury with its hemlock. A group needs a gadfly (2021, n. p.).

Just as we cannot do without *self-skepticism*, we will be in deep trouble if we don't agree to a healthy dose of collective *self-doubt*. Which is another way of saying that both parties should agree to even doubt the so-called *collective wisdom*. Both should do their best to keep in mind lesson (2), *at face value, doubt every single claim*. Epistemic-check everything. Don't take any claim for granted. Pro-tip: watch out for the obvious. Otherwise group-think will swallow everything, and group-think is not known for being wise[5]. So, beware. Both facilitator and interlocutor.

> 9. *Manners*. Inquiry is expected to be rigorous, fierce, possibly relentless, *but always courteous*. Sarcasm and other forms of irony are principally directed at oneself and otherwise reserved for people who claim to have all the answers. There is no name-calling or denunciation. Nobody is shouted down. If someone insists on being wrong, their punishment is being wrong and perhaps having this understood by others. All parties observe the principle of charity in interpreting what others say, and prefer to take on objections in their strongest rather than their weakest form (2021, n. p., my emphasis).

Socratic debates can become rather intense, dangerous even. Lesson (3) comes to mind and the facilitator should at all times be *philosophically brave*. But that isn't the same as saying that you should treat all Socratic conversations as a soldier engaging in battle[6]. On the contrary,

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5 Here I have in mind Seneca's moral letter VII, *On Crowds*. Cf. SENECA, L. A. The Moral Epistles. **The complete works of Seneca the Younger, 4 BC-AD 65**. Trans. By Richard Mott Gummere. Hastings: Delphi Publishing, 2014, pp. 882–2083.

6 I'm here reminded of the beginning of the Gorgias, where the brilliant Callicles (who else?) entices Socrates to take part in their conversation with the provocative "'Too late for a share *in the fight*,' as the saying goes, Socrates" (447a) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 231, my emphasis).

we should welcome every conversation as we would greet an old acquaintance, happy[7], but respectfully. So if things start to toughen up, be kind in your toughness. Try not to lose your temper. Also, sarcasm and irony are only acceptable when directed at ourselves. So, while the following would be acceptable:

> Me: Do you agree that rain is always wet?
>
> You: *Of course I don't!*
> (laughing)

the one under wouldn't:

> You: Do you agree that wetness is a necessary feature of rain?
>
> Me: *Oh, aren't you soooooooooo clever*?!
> (snarky)

Being respectful also includes no insults, no accusations whatsoever. So, even if your interlocutor declares to side with the most hideous idea or faction, as Socratic facilitators we will never raise our voice to silence the other person. Because even if they are horrendously wrong, it's not up to us to pass judgment. We are, after all, just facilitating, *midwifing* other people's epistemic presumptions. All in all, be generous with the way you understand your interlocutor. Take them as being of sound reason, and respect them. Remember rule 4, and *face their claims with arguments*.

> 10. *Candor*. Partners in inquiry say what they really think. They are not punished for it. Saying something unpopular is, to the contrary, considered admirable; even if it's wrong, it is a service to the cause of getting closer to the truth. If someone is willing to incur a personal cost to put forward a perspective, that perspective is probably shared by others who do not want to bear the cost. It needs to be said so that it can be tested and determined to be true or false (2021, n. p.).

This is rule 1 in practice. For a good Socratic examination, both parties have to welcome whatever is brought to the table. Both parties have to be honest both with themselves and the other person. Whatever is being claimed, even if it seems outrageously wrong, is treated with fairness, as being worth considering. A good Socratic conversation demands truthful, even transparent, interlocutors. Because even if a claim is but an expression of some hidden pain, it takes

7 Following Callicles provocation (cf. footnote 6 above), Socrates, amusingly, replies: "Really, don't you rather mean too late *for the feast*?" (447a) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 231, my emphasis). This is a good tip for facilitators.

both courage and honesty to bring that pain into the open. Besides, perhaps this person is simply acting out things and feelings others may also be thinking and feeling. If that's the case, it's good to know about it. Only then can it be examined, tested, and perhaps shown inconsistent.

> 11. *Offense*. Everyone tries to make claims in ways that do not give personal offense to their partners. Everyone tries to receive claims in ways that do not take offense from their partners. The giving or taking of offense is understood to be a serious threat to the process of getting anywhere in inquiry (2021, n. p.).

This is rule 9 detailed. For a good Socratic examination, both parties should do their best in coming up with ways of making their claims as little offensive as possible. The ideas themselves might offend; but the way they are expressed, shouldn't. So while the following would be acceptable:

> You: From what I have seen so far from your no doubt impressive effort to write this dissertation, your skills at it are still somewhat lacking.
>
> Me: Ah, so you're saying my dissertation still needs work, but it's already showing promise. Is that it?
>
> You: Let's say that perhaps you should really pursue that career as a bicycle mechanic…

the one below would never:

> You: Though I appreciate your effort, I think your writing skills are subpar for what is usually acceptable for a post-graduate.
>
> Me: Are you serious?!? What a pompous snob you are! Why don't you go back to primary school to learn your ABCs? Because obviously you have no idea of what good writing is all about!…

Being rude is always a terrible idea, but rudeness is especially antithetical to the Socratic epistemic goal. Just think. How can you thoroughly test some claim to knowledge by making your interlocutor angry? At best, you shorten what could be a long and fruitful conversation. At worse, you risk getting into a physical fight. So beware of your role as Socratic facilitator, and do your best in avoiding being offensive.

> 12. *Humility*. Conclusions are provisional. They may seem very probable, so much so that they are well worth fighting for. But there is always a reserve of doubt, an awareness of one's own ignorance and blind spots, and a recollection that others have been equally sure and have been wrong, over and over again.

> The result of all this is an attitude of humility at all times about how much you know and how sure you should be about it (2021, n. p.).

Finally, at last the first lesson. (1) *Beware of what you think you know*. This is really important. Remember that what counts is practice. So, even if we, as Socratic facilitators, find ourselves continuously proving ourselves right, we should never let our epistemic guard down. The moment we start to think we're the wisest, we are no longer wise.

And why is this rule so important? Because it's easy to fall prey of epistemic *hubris*. It's easy to mistake success in applying the Socratic *elenchus* as being a clear demonstration of how much one really knows. The moment we think, '*that's obviously* <some conclusion>', we should take heed of what's happening within us, and remember to be humble. If anything, we can only take for granted the depths of our ignorance. So this is why humility has to be road where we walk the Socratic mile. Humility has to be ground where Socratic discussions may happen. Or, if you prefer the reverse, Socratic discussions are more common, and successful, if grounded on genuine epistemic humility.

But, hey, don't mistake having epistemic modesty with Cicero's '*I only know that I know not*'. It's more akin to '*perhaps I don't know as much as I think*'[8]. After all, Socratic success is not the same as proving your interlocutor is wrong. If anything, Socratic success is measured in how much we can get the person to doubt their own certainties. That is to say, as long as we can get them to doubt themselves, we're good.

In practice, while the following is perfectly acceptable:

> You: It's safe to assume that wetness is a feature of rain, as this is agreed upon by the vast majority. So we can *at least* know that much. Do you agree?
>
> Me: Ok, sounds reasonable.

but the following never:

> Me: I only know I know nothing! Of that I'm certain. All debates I have been a part of are sound proof of this. Nobody has ever proven me wrong, and nobody will, of that I'm positive, as you should too.
>
> You: …

8 Full skeptical certainty vs. a healthy dose of epistemic doubt.

Why is the latter unacceptable? Because there's no Socratic facilitation without genuine epistemic modesty. The reason is plain to see. The moment we think our assumptions are beyond questioning, at the outset we're excluding ourselves from playing the role of Socratic facilitators. Just imagine someone who is absolutely sure of what they know. Can this person willingly help someone else in becoming more aware of how little they truly know? If their whole attitude is one of certitude, how can they deliberately inspire others in seeking the opposite, i.e., of becoming themselves epistemically modest? So no, that won't do. In practice, the moment we break away from lesson (1), thinking we are really wise in what we think we know, we're no longer willing to seek the truth of what we're claiming. We start acting out more as a Callicles rather than a Socrates[9].

So, if our goal is to sincerely keep on playing the role of Socratic facilitators, we cannot do without genuine epistemic modesty. Or, to put it differently, the moment we violate the Socratic rule of engagement number 12, on being humble, we also break rule number 1, namely that everything is up to debate. Thus we step down from being practitioners of *this* philosophy, taking the role instead of the person who needs an urgent epistemic *intervention*[10].

And this is why this is such an important rule. Well, at least if our goal is really that of putting *this* philosophy to practice. If committed, ready to engage in it, taking to heart lesson (4), *those who know have the know-how*, it immediately becomes clear why these rules are so significant. Only then are we better philosophically equipped to deal with the Socratic challenge.

Just as having safety rules on a bicycle repair workshop protect mechanics in their doing, these 12 Socratic Rules of Engagement protect the Socratic facilitator from failing their role. They are above all practical. And this matters, because as I mentioned before, just like Socrates, *this* Socrates, I'm siding with the crafters. Those who know have the know-how. True for a bicycle mechanic; true for *this* kind of philosopher.

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9 I'm again reminded of Callicles's behavior during the *Gorgias*. Try as Socrates might, Callicles position is and always will be one of, 'I'll never let myself be persuaded by you — even if you're clearly right'. Cf. *Gorgias* (501c-d), "No, I [only] concur [...] in order that you may carry through your argument, and I may gratify Gorgias here" (PLATO, 1984a, p. 290).

10 I'm also borrowing this term from contemporary psychology. According to the *American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology*, intervention is "generally, any action intended to interfere with and stop or modify a process, as in treatment undertaken to halt, manage, or alter the course of the pathological process of a disease or disorder". It can also be any "action on the part of a psychotherapist to deal with the issues and problems of a client" ("Intervention - APA Dictionary of Psychology", 2022). So if we think the Socratic facilitator as an epistemic therapist of sorts, a Socratic intervention designates the actions taken by a Socratic facilitator in order to interfere with, and stop or modify the epistemic behavior of someone else.

5.1.2 The script

Ok, now we have rules of engagement. But what about conducting the examination? What are the steps we must follow? While discussing rule 6 above, I mentioned the Socratic *elenchus*. I also mentioned that many scholars think the Socratic method *is* the elenchus itself. The way I see it, these scholars are right, at least insofar as the elenchus concerns the way the examination is properly conducted. So what is the elenchus exactly?

Imagine it an actor's script. It contains your part[11], and your part only. Yes, there are other parts, but they are in the hands of other actors. Now imagine this script being read before someone directing a play. You do your part, others theirs. What are you doing while you act? Performing. Performing as? You, Socrates. The others, whoever else. That script you hold in your hands is the elenchus. It's the Socratic part you play during the Socratic engagement. That's to me how it's written by Plato.

But unless you know a lot of people going by the names of, say, Alcibiades, Critias, or Callicles, the way the elenchus is written by Plato is just that, *the way it was written by Plato*. Yes, it's very edifying to read directly from Plato, as his plays are both as much a source of erudite entertainment as of genuine philosophical inspiration. But once you're either entertained or inspired, what is the use of Plato's words besides being trivia[12]?

Well, it's true that knowing his words by heart is a great way to boost your academic weight, as you can quote them at length on the spot, winning arguments by sheer erudition. *Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas*. In the end, nothing but vanity. If philosophy is a mere display of how much you read and remember, why do we call it philosophy and not simply *ostentatious reading*? Whatever. In the end, reading just for reading is not what Plato's intention. Why?

Think with me. In the previous chapter, I mentioned how Plato went to great lengths to keep himself out of his plays way, having but just one silent cameo in the *Apology*. Now, if the

11 The *part* refers to the text that contains the prompts to that particular actor. I'm also thinking as the musician's orchestral part, i.e., the music that musician has to play as part of the bigger

12 I'm here reminded of section XIII of Seneca's *On the Shortness of Life*. There he lists a several bits of knowledge that though erudite have little existential value. They are but vanity by other means. He laments that his contemporary fellow Romans are now trying to match the Greek in this empty quest for knowledge. His words are pungent. "It was once a foible confined to the Greeks to inquire into what number of rowers Ulysses had, whether the Iliad or the Odyssey was written first, whether moreover they belong to the same author, and various other matters of this stamp, which, if you keep them to yourself, in no way pleasure your secret soul, and, if you publish them, make you seem more of a bore than a scholar" (2014b, n. p.). So, what's the use of knowing Plato word by word? What kind of game are we playing when we map out the whole of Plato? In the grand scheme of things, is it worth it? Or is it just another Greek foible?

author himself chose not to have a part on the play, but only to direct it; why do I have to keep bringing him to the fore? If he, as the writer of his plays, decided to stay backstage, watching the play from the viewpoint of the producer, isn't the teaching obvious? Is he telling me to follow him backstage? To look at him, praise him, and cult-follow him? No! He's telling me *to watch the play*. To let it *unfold*. To get *enamored* by it. To let the play do the teaching.

So the author in the backstage; the play before him. And where am I in that play? In the author's mind, reading it? No! That's simply impossible. I'm but a reader, staging his plays in my mind's *theater*. I'm watching them, thinking, 'it must be awesome to be Socrates!'. Childlike, I start imagining me not doing *that* Socrates as simply *cosplaying*[13] him. Rather, I take him as an invitation to act like him, to stage my own version of a real life Socrates. I learn not the lines, but the moves. Bit by bit, I start acting out more like a true to form Socrates — and not as Plato the director.[14] After all, Plato is but the teacher[15].

And what does he teach? Well, now you don't even have to guess. The way I see it, what he teaches is a performative philosophy[16] under the guise of the elenchus. So, according to this reading, the elenchus is but the actor's script for Socrates. However, the script does not simply contain Socrates' lines as they were written by Plato. To me, it's more like an improvisation guide on how to keep yourself in-character. It's, if you prefer, closer to a companion handbook, one that helps you stage your very-own Socrates. What this means is that the elenchus provides a range of ways on how to question whatever is being claimed. As for the actual lines, these are up to you to come up with, to improvise.

More specifically, what you are given are some boundaries within which you must operate, without ever crossing them. These are the Socratic boundaries for your character. And what

13 Cf. footnote 109 on the previous chapter.

14 I'm pretty confident I can interpret him like this. Because what matters in the end is not what I have to say, in the sense that my reading is the final one at the exclusion of all others. Much to the contrary. Mine's just different.

15 In a way, we can think Plato's *Republic* as the first treatise on the philosophy of education. Cf. Books 3-6. Something worthwhile thinking.

16 This is actually a thing. As the name implies, Performative Philosophy is "primarily concerned with the relationship between performance and philosophy" (GAUSS; FELGENHAUER, 2020, p. 289). Academically, "the term *Performative Philosophie* (Performative Philosophy) was probably first introduced in 2012 in the context of the second edition of the festival series [soundcheck philosophie]". The goal of this festival "was to bring together scholars and artists who were doing philosophy in certain explicitly performative ways, for instance, on stage, in artistic forms, addressing the public (as opposed to a purely academic audience) or with a particular connection to life experiences" (2020, p. 288). And this once more proves Whitehead's point, i.e., that philosophy-wise everyone else has just been adding footnotes to Plato's work.

are these boundaries? Broadly speaking, the lines the Socratic impersonator has to try to come up with have to

1. keep consistency in sight;
2. try to make analytical sense of what's being claimed;
3. resort to analogies whenever appropriate.

Ok, there are three boundaries. But what is the meaning of this in practice?

5.1.2.1 Keep consistency in sight

Above, while still discussing rule 6, I briefly mentioned why consistency matters. But here I'll try to get a bit deeper into it. Only then we can both understand the kind of consistency we are aiming at. It's important to keep in mind that

> [t]he Socratic method, in its classic form, consists of internal critique. It tests whether you're being consistent with yourself and believe all that you think you do. *Socrates doesn't tell you that you're wrong*; he shows you that *you think* you're wrong. This explains the value of the frequent stops Socrates makes to get his partner to say, "Agreed." Those pauses might seem pointless, but they aren't, because his eventual goal is to show that his partner doesn't agree with himself (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p., my emphases).

So, why do we engage in a Socratic discussion? Because we want to check how trustworthy is some claim to knowledge. For this we have to test how consistent that claim is when compared to what logically follows from it. This procedure allows us to finally identify two claims that can then be put side by side to be checked for their consistency. These correspond to the claimer's initial and resulting beliefs.

Having done that, we then get out of the way and let the other person do their thing. We let them decide for themselves how consistent they now think they are. Remember: it's not up to our Socratic character to evaluate how consistent other characters are. Wrong or right in what they're thinking, it's up to them to come up with their own evaluation. After all, drama-wise, it's not up to you to come up with *their* own lines. Their script is theirs only. Respecting that, you simply wait for *their* judgment.

Now you tell me. What do we have to do to help our interlocutor realize that the initial and final claims are both theirs? The usual Socratic approach to this is that of constantly ask for their agreement at each logical step taken. Because if our interlocutor willingly agrees at each

logical step with its consequences, the resulting final claim also belongs to them. Only then, when shown their "beliefs are in conflict with each other" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.), can our interlocutor come face to face with this troubling and rather uncomfortable truth. Apparently, they are holding two claims as being true while both contradict each other. This puts them in very awkward position. They now know themselves inconsistent, and, what feels worse, they can't even deny that to be the case as they themselves reached that disturbing conclusion. So this is reason why we have to keep consistency in sight.

Now, knowing that testing for consistency matters, it's paramount to constantly check for agreement at each of the analytical steps that end up being taken. Remember this: in the Socratic engagement there's no room for rhetorical questions[17]. So the agreement in a Socratic discussion is not merely imagined. It has to be stated, and openly stated by the one agreeing to it. Keep that in mind, and you're one step closer to becoming an effective Socratic performer.

Yes, true, such a practice sounds tiresome, both for you and especially for your interlocutor. Most people will quickly start getting bored with you, and with time they might even get annoyed. 'Go away, you nasty gadfly!', they may even think, as they look at you with contempt. But regardless of how tiresome or contempt inducing this practice is, like a true to life Socrates you follow lesson (8) and *quitting not*, you keep on checking. After all, you can only stay in-character if you keep yourself within this first Socratic boundary: that of always keeping consistency in sight.

5.1.2.2 Try to make analytical sense of what's being claimed

Now we get into the details on how to take any claim from beginning to end. We already know that each step requires agreement. But what happens at each particular step? Well, it depends on what has been claimed. Sometimes the claim is too narrow; other times too broad. Sometimes the claim is too vague; other times too complex. And when that happens, some techniques may come handy when you need to help other make analytical sense of what they've claimed. Here's a few.

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17 You know, those you ask seeking not approval, but the illusion of agreement. A bit like saying, 'Is rain wet? Of course it is, everyone and their dog knows it'. Nothing was questioned. So a rhetorical question is at best just a device to arouse the listener's attention. At worse is but a pretense, one of imposing upon the listener an imagined agreement.

5.1.2.2.1 Drawing together

Sometimes the other character comes up with a claim that is too narrow. The classic example is when Socrates asks for a universal definition of something only to have his interlocutor offer him instead a particular instance of that something. Problem is that such an instance is too particular to be of any use. Say Socrates asks what the beautiful is. Then, as reply, he's told that the beautiful is a specific beautiful item[18].

That's simply not good. Or at least not good enough. And if that keeps on happening, you, as the Socratic impersonator, have to try draw together each of those particular cases. In particular, "you have to look at every case and find words that cover them all", hence moving "from this or that particular case to a level of principle that accounts for all of them" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.). Thus *drawing together*. Or at least to give a try.

5.1.2.2.2 Separating

From time to time, the interlocutor will do the opposite from the previous example, i.e., they will come up with a claim which is simply too broad. A good example from Plato's plays is Gorgias' first definition of what Rhetoric is. When asked by Socrates on "what is [rhetoric] knowledge about", his answer is simply a wonderfully in-character[19], "speeches" (449d-e). And this definition is obviously too broad. Why? Because, as Socrates notes, there are many types of speech, and Rhetoric is not about "[t]he sort [of speech] that explain[s] to sick people the regimen they should follow to get well" (449e). So clearly "rhetoric isn't about all speeches" (449e) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 234).

Now imagine that while you're conducting a Socratic engagement someone comes up with a similar broad answer to your request for a definition. What should you do then? Obviously, since drawing together is now completely out of the question, at that moment what you have to do is the opposite, i.e., you should actually try split things apart. For instance, in-charac-

18 Cf. *Greater Hippias*, 287e. There, Hippias, when pressured by Socrates to tell him "not what is beautiful, but what the beautiful is" replies that "a beautiful maiden is beautiful" (PLATO, 2022).

19 A few lines before this, he had claimed that Socrates would "agree that [he] never heard anyone speak more briefly" than him (449c-d) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 233). And here he proves his point, demonstrating beyond doubt how good he is in following cues to come up with the right speech. It's also a paradigmatic example of Plato's mastery in building his characters, as this line perfectly captures Gorgias' self-awareness as a public persona. By saying little, he is totally consistent with his shallow initial claim.

ter your "Socrates [may say] this definition is [simply] too broad [as] it covers cases that it shouldn't" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.). So here you have it. When a claim is too broad, what you have to do is to try to split it into its constituent parts, *separating* the whole thing as much as possible. Or at least to give it a try.

5.1.2.2.3 Offering working definitions

While the above techniques are no doubt useful, they only cover the cases where the opposing character has at least some idea of their own about whatever they're claiming. But what are you to do when you face someone who cannot by themselves explain what they mean when they claim something? What if your antagonist tells you "you don't need to bother [about what X is] because you know it when you see it"? (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.).

Well, when that happens, it's up to *your* Socrates to come up with a working definition. This is important, because definitions "put us in the position of an expert", as only as an expert we are able to say what something truly is. So, aware that the one playing the other character may not be able to come up by themselves with "a working definition that seems right" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.), you help them find one with which they agree.

Sounds tough? Don't worry. If "we *can't* come up with an airtight definition of a concept, we *still can* earn *provisional* knowledge that one thing is an example of another" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p., my emphases). Which is another way of saying that when we find ourselves stuck without being able to come up on the spot with a working definition, we can still venture one, gradually, by invoking whatever many examples we may come up at that moment. Little by little. One little example at a time. Or at least to give it a try.

5.1.2.2.4 Collect and divide

Sometimes, the difficulty lies not in what you opposing character understands, rather on what they fail to grasp. So while the antagonist follows you through some of your logical steps, they lose track of you at others. Perhaps you've failed to provide the connecting steps between them; perhaps they fail to see how all the pieces fit together. Whatever the reason, what matters is that, in practice, this makes them a bit clueless as to where the conversation is taking them.

So when that happens, you again have to come to their aid. But this time, instead of coming up with a working definition, you attempt instead a categorization of sorts. With this you end up indirectly "defining the subject by putting it into one of two categories". Keeping these broad at first, you "then [subdivide each] category into more categories" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.), for as long as this helps your interlocutor understand the connections you're making. Or at least to give it a try.

Now, whatever the technique you end up using, remember this. In a Socratic engagement, *testing for consistency* is always the goal. What this means is that, in line with the previous Socratic boundary, here too you have to keep on checking for agreement at each step. Without this agreement, the antagonist cannot fully empathize with your consistency test. So, taking this as a craftsman warning, keep that in mind while you *try to make analytical sense of what's being claimed*. That's how you keep your Socratic self within this second boundary.

5.1.2.3 Resort to analogies whenever appropriate

So far we have seen how to come up with Socratic lines within two boundaries. Both are ways to help you *keep consistency in sight* while *trying to make analytical sense of what's being claimed*. But that still leaves a gap. What about those situations where what's being claimed is either too subtle or too abstract to become intelligible? Think like this.

Imagine you're back in your role as Socrates. During that particular Socratic engagement, your antagonist comes up with a claim which inevitably raises "large and abstract questions" such as, "What is the good life?", or "What is knowledge?", or even "What is justice?" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.). What do you do then?

Well, when that happens, to keep within the third Socratic boundary, you have to make a deliberate effort to avoid "talking about [such questions] in large and abstract terms". That would simply defeat your very own purposes, as by complicating things further you would only render them completely unintelligible. So in order to prevent this from happening, once you sense things are getting way too abstract for your interlocutor, try your best to do the exact opposite by making things as concrete as possible.

The good news is that you can achieve this easily by appealing to "simple examples to show how a claim works or fails". They are useful in that they "compare abstract problems to ordinary ones that seem more familiar". And this is where analogies come handy. They may not be arguments, but "they [still] suggest parallels" between seemingly different things[20]. These parallels in turn "can make arguments more convincing", thus making your "reasoning more clear" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.).

We all in one way or another have witnessed how effective analogies are. We probably have used them ourselves, knowing from first-hand experience they are indeed powerful. So it's safe to assume that we have no problem with their effectiveness. If anything, it's coming up with them, and coming up with them on the spot that gives us trouble.

So how can we overcome this difficulty? What do we have to do to come up with good analogies, the sort that makes our abstract thought more relatable, and thus understandable? Well, in order to overcome this difficulty, and help us keep within reasonable Socratic boundaries, here are a few of Socrates' favorite strategies to come up on the spot with a fitting analogy.

5.1.2.3.1 Trying to fill-in-the-blank

When things get a bit fuzzy, *your* Socrates may try "an incomplete analogy" to help "move a conversation forward". The strategy here is simple. You provide "the start of the analogy" in order to make your "partner's job […] to finish it" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.). The idea is to come up with a correspondence between a fairly mudane thing and the abstract concept in question.

Consider the following.

> In the Theaetetus, Socrates asks what knowledge means. He's told that it includes sciences such as geometry and crafts such as cobbling. Socrates says this is a bad answer; it's like saying that clay is something used by brickmakers and also by potters. A better answer would be that clay is moistened earth. What would be a comparable definition of knowledge? (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.)

20 They are seemingly different in that the connection between them is not obvious at first. But once you find the analogue in experience, the connection then becomes obvious.

In this telling example, Theaetetus makes the common mistake of confusing particular instances of something with what that something is. So in order to help him come up with a working definition for that something, Socrates resorts to an incomplete analogy.

Say that instead of knowledge they were trying to define clay. In that case, it would be of little help to simply say that clay is the raw material used in making bricks and pottery alike. Through this we may learn something about its uses, but it tells us nothing of what clay actually is. It would be far more instructive to say that clay is a kind of wet paste made out of soil. Bearing this in mind, all Theaetetus has to do is to come up with a similar answer for knowledge.

So, in essence, this technique works by appealing to a one to one correspondence between the procedure of defining a mundane thing, and that of defining the abstract concept. Once your interlocutor realizes the connection, it becomes easier for them provide an appropriate answer. Furthermore, just like when checking for agreement, when you ask your opponent to fill-in and complete the analogy, you also enable them to make the connection themselves. All in all, it's a simple albeit powerful strategy.

5.1.2.3.2 Trying to fill-in-the-blank question

Analogies can also be turned into questions, as they invite a deeper understanding of what's being questioned. The basic outline is something like this: as A is to B, C is to what? Imagine you're again playing Socrates. At that particular engagement, at the very moment you find yourself in, you need to guide another character in coming up with a good Socratic question. Say you need to do something like this.

> You: Go now. Ask me instead.
> Me: Ask you what?
> You: Who I am.
> Me: What do you mean?
> You: "Well, if [I] made shoes, for example, [I] would doubtless tell you [I] was a cobbler. Do you see what I mean?"
> Me: I do, and that's exactly what I'll do next (447c-d) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 232, my adaptation).

This is a bit taken from the *Gorgias*. Here, Socrates guides his interlocutor into coming up with the right kind of question. For that, he uses an analogy to invite the other party to understand on their own the fill-in-the-blank strategy outlined above. If you ask a cobbler who they

are, they will tell you they are cobblers. In a similar way, the other character has to ask someone else the same question. Now let's break this down from the point of view of *your* Socrates. What steps must you follow to come up with a similar elenchus?

First, always aim at a certain craft, the more mundane the better. This is important, as the idea is to make the topic more relatable. Then you imagine what that crafter would do, say, reply, or think under a situation similar to the one you're trying to compare it to. As a strategy, "[t]his style of inquiry is a good example of how [your] Socrates [should reason] about hard and unfamiliar things". The subtler the topic, the more you should start "with easy and familiar [examples]" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.). So here's another powerful yet simple strategy.

5.1.2.3.3 Trying to extend comparisons

So far, the analogies "have been simple: A is to B as C is to D". That however doesn't mean that all analogies must be this simple. What if *your* Socrates needs "to create more elaborate comparisons"? Say you need to "clarify an abstract idea by matching it to a concrete" example (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.). This time however, as the thing you're examining is way too abstract, you need to come up with an analogy that requires a longer chain of connections. Take a look at this example from 313c-e in the *Protagoras*.

> SOCRATES. Knowledge is the food of the soul; and we must take care, my friend, that the Sophist does not deceive us when he praises what he sells, like the dealers wholesale or retail who sell the food of the body; for they praise indiscriminately all their goods, without knowing what [is] really beneficial or hurtful: neither do their customers know, with the exception of any trainer or physician who may happen to buy [from] them. In like manner those who carry about the wares of knowledge, and make the round of the cities, and sell or retail them to any customer who is in want of them, praise them all alike; though I should not wonder, O my friend, if many of them were really ignorant of their effect upon the soul; and their customers [are] equally ignorant, unless he who buys [from] them happens to be a physician of the soul (PLATO apud FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.)

Here "Socrates maps the similarities between the two subjects", matching them "one by one, showing their sameness" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.). The script goes a bit like this: just like the body needs food, the soul needs knowledge. The analogue here is the relation of food to the body, as this allows Socrates to draw a similar connection between knowledge and the soul.

He then appeals to the mundane experience of buying food. It's easy to grasp that we have to be careful when buying food, as those trading it are usually more interested in selling their goods than in providing us with healthy food. Similarly, we should also be cautious when shopping around for knowledge. Just like people selling food, those trading in knowledge seem to be more interested in selling their goods than in providing us with the corresponding healthy options. So, *caveat emptor*! Beware before you buy.

Notice here how Socrates again appeals to a very mundane example. The body needs food. The base-outline for this strategy is still the simple parallel relation described above: A is to B as C is to D. However, the parallel here is extended further. The relation goes two steps deeper, nesting the same base-outline two more times under the first one in order to capture the longer chain of connections. A is to B as C is to D; and A is to B as C is to D; so A is to B as C is to D. Or, according to the example, the soul needs knowledge as the body needs food; and the soul needs healthy knowledge as the body needs healthy food; so we have to be just as careful when buying knowledge as we have to be careful when buying food.

As you see, the moves here are in themselves very simple. So simple in fact, that they can be stacked up, allowing you to extend the analogy at will. The longer the connection you need to establish, the more you repeat the base-pattern. However, since the goal is to enlighten other characters, don't overstretch your analogy. As always, try to keep things relatable, using as much common sense as needed. If you follow this advice, you can't go wrong. And with this you now know another strategy that can be really powerful once you understand its underlying simplicity.

5.1.2.3.4 Trying argumentative analogies

How is this even a thing? Didn't I make the claim above that an analogy is not really an argument? Then how can this be? Well, though technically true that an analogy "isn't [really] an argument" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.) *per se*, it still "can be used to express one". Just think. The best analogue is that which captures most faithfully the thing it corresponds to. So if the thing being captured is an argument, the most faithful analogy will be by necessity *argumentative*. But don't just take my word for it. Let's try an example.

There's a moment "in the *Gorgias*" where "the other characters […] ask Socrates what *he* thinks rhetoric is" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.). Socrates dismisses it entirely, as to him rhetoric is "no art at all but merely a knack and a trick" (453b-c) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 248). But the thing is, "he makes [this] claim by analogy" (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.), using pastry-cooking and cosmetics as analogues. Here's Socrates speaking:

> So I repeat: pastry-cooking is flattery disguised as medicine. In the same way, cosmetics is disguised gymnastic. Cosmetics is actually a fraudulent, baseborn, slavish knave; it tricks us with padding and makeup and polish and clothes, so that people carry around beauty not their own to the neglect of the beauty properly theirs through gymnastic. To avoid a lengthy speech, I will put it to you like a geometer, for at this point perhaps you may follow, Cosmetics is to gymnastic as pastry-cooking is to medicine. Furthermore, cosmetics is to gymnastic as sophistry is to law-giving; and pastry-cooking is to medicine as rhetoric is to corrective justice (465b-c) (PLATO, 1984a, pp. 249–250).

Look, says Socrates, rhetoric is as fake as pastry-cooking or cosmetics. Pastry-cooking pretends to be medicine in that it "know[s] what foods are best for the body" (464d-e) (PLATO, 1984a, p. 249), thus making unhealthy food desirable. As for cosmetics, this pretends to be gymnastics in that it makes an unhealthy body look healthy.

The outline is again simple. Socrates spells it out in the manner of geometry. As cosmetics is to gymnastics, so is pastry-cooking to medicine. It's again our already familiar A is to B as C is to D. But here he extends the relation further to include both sophistry and rhetoric. The relation now becomes: cosmetics is to gymnastics, as sophistry is to law-giving; pastry-cooking is to medicine, as rhetoric is to corrective justice. Or, A is to B, as E is to F; C is to D, as G is to H.

So here what steps must you follow to come up with a similar elenchus? Again, think of a mundane craft. Then ask yourself how that crafter would argue about their craft. Then translate that argument to the corresponding terms that match the thing you're trying to compare it to. The resulting argument will perhaps fit nicely into what you're trying to argue for. "60% of the time, it works every time"[21] ("Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy", 2004). I mean, it may be a bit harder to come up with a fitting argumentative analogy, but once you find it, it's actually really powerful.

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21 This is obviously a silly quote. However, the point is not as silly as it may at first appear. Comedy aside, this could easily be translated as, 'the technique to come up with an argumentative analogy doesn't work all the time, but when it does, the strategy works perfectly'.

Notice that "Socrates could have made his point without an analogy. He could have [simply] said that rhetoricians" flatter. However, by using this analogy, Socrates "adds force [to what he is arguing] because the parallel is [now] vivid and ties the abstract claim to things that everyone has experienced with the senses". In this way, the analogy "plays with the organs of perception rather than reason" alone (FARNSWORTH, 2021, n. p.). And because this, it's no longer just an argument.

By using the analogy, Socrates is also subtly making a direct appeal to intuition. With this, he helps his interlocutor connect at a deeper level with the point he's trying to make. So where appropriate, with enough training, this strategy may come handy. Now, is it powerful? Yes. Simple? Not really.

5.1.2.3.5 Trying a myth[22]

When all else fails, why not resort to a myth? And before you start to wonder, no, I'm not here to tell you that you must become a prophet to play Socrates. Making myth a Socratic strategy may sound strange at first, as "[f]or us a myth is something to be 'debunked'", being nothing but "a widespread, popular belief that is in fact false". But to an ancient Greek, a myth "was [actually] a true story, a story that unveil[ed] the true origin of the world and human beings" (PARTENIE, 2022). Astutely, Plato then converted myth into that which "expresses a synoptic view of reality" (MORGAN, 2004, p. 242), one that effectively "delivers the soul straight to the truth" (2004, p. 179).

So for our staging purposes, myth here must play a similar role to that of Plato's, having a comparable relation to truth. As a strategy, "just like an […] analogy", myth "may be a good teaching tool" to help us break away from a deadlock. For instance, "myth [may help] the less philosophically inclined [to] grasp the [discussion's] main point" (PARTENIE, 2022). Alternatively, myth can be the go-to strategy for "when the object of [our] analysis cannot (as yet) be verified" (MORGAN, 2004, p. 185), and we run out of options[23]. Either way, it has its uses.

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22 I owe the inclusion of this strategy to my colleague Ênio Roberto Bezerra Soares (http://lattes.cnpq.br/9140774907015497). His current research project deals with the parallel between Socrates and Er in the Republic, showcasing the collaboration between *logos* and *muthos*. So he's pretty aware of the instrumental role of myth in Plato's plays.

23 At the end of the *Gorgias*, Socrates announces that he will tell "a very beautiful story", one that Callicles "will consider a *myth*" while Socrates "a true account" (523a) (1984a, p. 312, my emphasis). However, he later adds that there's "nothing strange in despising [myths], if somehow *by searching* [they] might find a better, truer

You can also think of myth as any story[24], tale, parable, allegory, or even mental experiment. If it has a narrative of sorts, representing whatever point you need to make, just go ahead and put it to good use. Just keep in mind at all times that the goal is not to tell a tale simply because. Rather, the idea is to make more intelligible what at first was harder to grasp. As always throughout the elenchus, aim at simplicity. Make your myth relatable. Avoid being too cryptic. Remember: the less your myth stands out, the better. A good myth does not require explanation. It does its job, and moves out of the way.

That being said, there's only one problem. How do you come up with a myth? Are there any tricks? Well, it's always a good Socratic strategy to aim at the crafts. Make them as mundane as possible. Look for commonplaces, shared ideas, everyday symbols. Think of your interlocutor. Aim at their understanding. For instance, if talking to a child, use childlike imagery. If talking to a professor, write them a dissertation. In any case, build the narrative around the point you're trying to make. Give hints. Make it engaging. Once you get it right, you'll know it. So don't worry too much about it. After all, Socratically speaking, myths are last resort measures. If you've been playing *your* Socrates well, you won't need them that much. After all, although powerful when applied at the right moment, the use of myths is not a simple strategy.

This concludes *the script*. We now know why we have to come up with lines that keep consistency in sight. We also know how to make analytical sense of what's being claimed. And, best of all, we know when and how to use analogies. These are our three Socratic boundaries within which our character moves. We may push against them at our own peril. But one thing's for certain. Moving along those lines will make you a perfect fit for the character. Everything else is fair game. A young Socrates? Beautiful? Transgender? Of color? You name it. Everyone fits. We now have rules. It's up to us to engage.

Do you feel Socratic? Are you tempted? How about trying an elenchus? Remember: if it's written, it's on a handbook. If on a handbook, it's just theory. And those who know, have the know-how, right? So why don't you give it a try?

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story (527a-b) (1984a, p. 315, my emphasis). And with this Socrates gives away the trick. He's using myth at that point for lack of a more fitting strategy.

24 This is literal, as "'Mythos' in Plato can be any story, even a supposedly rational system to describe a physical or biological event, as Plato describes the act of seeing in the Theaetetus" (PINHEIRO, 2003, p. 127, my translation).

5.1.3 How is *this* not philosphy?

There's a typo in the title above. I wrote, first accidentally and then on purpose, the title with a typo. Why? Because it got me thinking. Upon noticing it, I first felt an urge to correct it. But then a voice in my head stopped me[25]. I couldn't really explain why, but I felt I had to work around it. And the more I thought about it, the more it made sense to keep it. Now it was no longer a typo. It was something else entirely. But what exactly?

You see, I've assumed from the very start I'm more of a crafter. From a kid fiddling with bicycles to a now would-be writer of sorts, I never really left the workshop. I love learning about tools, how to use them, getting my hands on them, and putting them to good use. So when I approach philosophy, I have the same mentality. I'm looking at it as an artisan would. I try to know my way around the workshop. I try to learn about the tools. I do my best to get my hands on them. And, most importantly of all, I try to put them to good use. So, the typo.

Do you know what also happens on a workshop? Accidents. You can't really avoid them as, you see, mistakes happen. Most of them are no doubt harmless, but danger is never far. So as an artisan, I quickly try to master the necessary skills to avoid being in harm's way. I do my best to learn the fundamentals to properly perform as, i.e., to get comfortable with whatever happens. My goal is to be enough of an expert to identify a good from a bad mistake. I want to be adequately confident to know when a misstep is actually a correction.

Just think. If until that moment I was following a procedure; and if, by mistake, I made the process simpler, my misstep was actually a blessing in disguise. I thought I knew the best way of doing something, but through that mistake I was proven wrong. In this sense, I was corrected. And you know what? That correction was actually necessary. For me, as an artisan, I want to know the best way of doing something. My goal in the workshop is to get the job done. I want to do whatever needs to be done, and move on to the next job. Ah, yes, the typo.

Is *philosphy* in need of fixing? Well, to a writer, yes — It misses a letter. But, awkwardly enough, not to a philosopher. I mean, I read over the missing letter, rolling through it as a tire would run over a small crack in the pavement. I know the meaning, and the meaning, not the letter, is what I can't miss. That being the case, now it's time to ask: do I even know what philosophy is? Can I tell you what I *really* think? (I'm eager, don't worry).

25 Yes, you guessed it right. This is a callback to Socrates' daemon. So now it's official. I'm philosophically *cosplaying* Socrates.

Philosophy, by now, is probably broken beyond repair. I mean, the word. Because even though the word still holds among intellectuals a certain *gravitas* that empowers, truth is that to most people philosophy is just a word for many other things. I'm tempted to diagnose the word *philosophy* as having a really bad case of *polysemy*. The way I hear it used around me is simply delirious. Just ask yourself. How do most people around you understand the word?

I've heard it used as a mere synonym to <opens thesaurus> *doctrine*, *thinking*, *reason*, *logic*, *idea*, *ideology*, *reasoning*, among many other things. It's not unamusing to read on the papers about some controversial figure figuring out that 2+2=5, and then calling it *philosophy*. I find especially funny when I hear people talking about *their* philosophy. It's a bit like Descartes' common sense, the most equitable thing there is. But then it strikes me. I'm a post-graduate student at a high-ranked Brazilian university, studying for many years now in its philosophy department. I know, or at least I should, that philosophy is not a kind of free-for-all knowledge anyone can claim for their own just because. Not if I think it about as an artisan would. Do I digress? The typo.

I think my *philosphy* was in bad need of repair. Not only was it missing something, but the whole was missing. You see, I become a bachelor in philosophy by authoring a translation[26]. I published in Portuguese an article by none other than... Konrad Lorenz[27]. '*What?*' Precisely. In my defense it's a paper on Kant. But from an ethologist none the less. So what was I doing then?

From memory, I remember reading a lot of texts. The texts themselves are mostly forgotten, but I remember interpreting them, writing about them, and even coming up with questions for them. But I was never sure of what I was really doing. Deep down, I was always bothered by some unmet need I couldn't even fathom. But then Epicurus happened. The fire was still on the low, but something was about to boil.

You see, I had a very superficial question. It was something like '*Is Lucretius a philosopher in his own right?*' I had recently been thunderstruck by his absolutely brilliant *De Rerum Natura*. I was clearly naive, but back then I was as a child learning to walk. But that was then. Fortunately for me, my childish question was actually what made me stumble into a very disqui-

26 Cf. MAIA, H. C. A Teoria de Kant do A Priori à Luz da Biologia Contemporânea. **Argumentos - Revista de Filosofia**, 3 Aug. 2020. n. 24, p. 192–211.

27 Konrad Zacharias Lorenz (1903–1989), an Austrian zoologist, by many considered the father of ethology. He was awarded the 1973's Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine "for [his] discoveries concerning organization and elicitation of individual and social behaviour patterns" ("The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 1973", 2018).

eting absence. Through Lucretius, I've found Epicurus. And through Epicurus, *philosphy*. I owe him that much. I owe him my doubt. In this sense he came to my rescue. You see, like a typo.

Let me remind you of what happened. While I was an inhabitant of the *Garden*, I was troubled. I had a longing, but no way of expressing it. Something was clearly lacking, and not just peers. The whole was missing. Let me help you understand what I mean through an example.

Think me not as a would-be philosopher, but now as a cobbler. In this example, I'm trying to get in the business of making shoes. So I join this workshop called *The Garden*, run by Epicurus. My intention is to work there until I improve my skills, becoming a cobbler by my own. Problem is, the more I work there, the more I understand I'm not actually learning how to make shoes. The more I stay there, the more it seems to me Epicurus is not really in the footwear business. True for Epicurean cobbling; true for Epicurean philosophy. But don't just take my word on it. Think with me.

When I finally left *The Garden* to meet Socrates on trial, I was still being driven by the same disquietness. But then what? Then *Plato* happened. Thanks to *his* work, *and through his character Socrates*, I finally found the thing I was looking for. Now I was learning lessons. Now learning rules. Now being given a procedure. Everything neatly packed in 30 or so plays under a pseudonym[28]. Philosophy was now a thing, not only unique, but uniquely practical.

Back to my cobbling example, it's as if I had finally stepped onto the perfect workshop. I knew the moment I got there. Everything was in its right place. There were not only tools, but instructions on how to use them. There were even safety measures, and what to do in case of an emergency. These guys were pros. True for Platonic cobbling; true for Socratic philosophy.

Let me give you three brief but powerful examples.

5.1.3.1 The tooling

There's no workshop without tools. The more specialized the workshop, the more it needs particular tools. A really good workshop even comes up with its own tools. This procedure is called *tooling*. Now think of Socrates and what he is doing. When he is first given the godly task, he has a calling, but no method. Then, little by little, he comes up with the elenchus,

28 Plato's *real* name was supposedly Aristocles. In that case, Plato is only a pseudonym.

the perfect tool for a very peculiar job. Yes, it takes Plato many plays to thoroughly map out the tooling process in its entirety. But each time Socrates helps his interlocutors find their way through his procedure, he's doing nothing but tooling. He's guiding others in how they can build a similar tool. Socrates, the toolmaker.

5.1.3.2 The handbooks

There's no workshop without tools being put to good use. The more specialized the workshop, and the more unique its tools, the more the workshop needs handbooks. A really good workshop even prints its own manuals. This procedure demands an expert who also happens to be a writer. Now think of Plato and what he is doing. He wrote 30 or so plays showing not only how the tool is developed, but also how to make the best of it, putting it to good service. And as a good handbook writer, he moves out of the way. He makes the manual not about him, but all about the tool. In this sense, he's doing nothing but writing handbooks. Plato, the handbook writer.

5.1.3.3 The standard

There's no workshop without the expectation of living up to some standard rate of success. The more specialized the workshop, the more demanding in its accuracy. A really good workshop even sets its own reliability standard. And this only happens if the expected results keep on coming. Now think of all the people that throughout the ages have been inspired by Plato's Socrates. Think how generation after generation people have been following *his* example, making the Socratic method a staple of Western philosophy. A tool precisely machined[29]. Socratic performative philosophy, setting the standard ever since.

Now I leave it to you to decide. Could this be anything *but* philosophy? And if philosophy is at least *this*, is philosophy in need of fixing? Not any longer. The typo is now gone. There is no more disquietness. I now have a sense of purpose. Now I have the tools. Now I even have

29 Cf. Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical abstract machines, chapter 2, example 4. DELEUZE, G.; GUATTARI, F. **Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?** Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2005.

the accompanying handbooks teaching me how to best use them. And, on top of all this, if I decide to write about it, I even have a model-script to follow. This then is how from an Epicurean I've grown full-blown Socratic.

6 OUTRO: THE COMFORTING ABSENCE

After all that was said and done, having found the missing piece, philosophy is no longer absent. If before I had a disquieting feeling for not really having a trade of my own, I now feel ready to start another leg of my journey for expertise. And you know what? I'm happy that this particular disquietness is gone. For in its place is now a very comforting absence. I'm happy performing as *this* philosopher. And for those already in this trade, judging me and my skills, I apply this dissertation as my way of displaying I have what it takes to join the guild. So now it's time to

6.1 ROLL THE CREDITS

Here's the real wizard behind the curtain. If I managed to enter Rome after crossing a troubling Rubicon, I owe that not to myself, but to all who believed in me. I owe this to those who were kind enough to guide me along the way, who were patient beyond measure with my naïveté and childlike ignorance. So if you think I was in any way successful, *they*, not me, should take the credit. As for the mistakes which I'm sure were plentiful, they're all mine, and mine only. For my part, I'm delighted to wear them as a well-deserved badge of honor. But never mind that. Since it's time to give credit to whom credit is long due, let me now roll out the credits, naming the cast & crew.

6.1.1 Cast & Crew

6.1.1.1 Cast

They are:

- my *alma mater*, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, for all institutional support;
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- Lucretius, Epicurus and the whole gang at *The Garden*, for their friendliness, inclusiveness, and, above all, for their commitment to free all others from the fears of being;
- Plato, for simply being the best. No one writes philosophy as Plato[1];
- everyone at Socratic Labs, for reliably setting the standard;
- Aristotle, for being the first footnote to his teacher[2];
- Deleuze & Guattari, for lending me their handbook[3];
- all the good guys at Hegel's corp., for showing me how deep the rabbit hole goes[4];
- Kant, the expert machinist, for showing me that good philosophers don't exactly need to be good writers;
- The Buddha, for providing all necessary tools to find peace within;
- Professor Ward Farnsworth, for his Practitioner's Handbook on the Socratic Method. Thanks to him, I've found the script;
- all professors out there, milling through papers, for providing so many thoughtful quotes;
- every single Wikipedia Contributor, for making if not the best at least the first entry point for so much subsequent research (wink, wink);
- to Alexandra Elbakyan, for tooling the best access to all research findings out there put behind a paywall (wink, wink);
- all librarians out there, for making virtually all books available (wink wink);

1 Though many have tried. I mean, pretending to write as Plato himself. The letters are a good evidence of this.
2 I was part of a weekly Aristotelian study group for the best part of two years.
3 For well over a year now, I have been part of a weekly study group on Deleuze & Guattari's *What is Philosophy?*.
4 Throughout this research, I've also took part on two weekly study groups on Hegel.

- all coders, in all corners of our very cornerless world, for both making and making available all the free, open source tools I've employed throughout[5].

6.1.1.2 Crew

They are:

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- Ênio Soares, for being the perfect Platonic embodiment of having true love for wisdom;
- Ana Malka, for her unique philosophical *eros*, but mostly for all her very own *deliria*;

5 All my work was conducted in a *Linux* environment. I've used *LibreOffice* to write, *Zotero* to cross-reference, and *Logseq* for taking notes. All papers and books were read on *Okular*, a universal document reader. I've used *Firefox* as my go-to browser.

- Igor Lustosa, for sharing with me his unmitigated love and commitment to Continental Philosophy as whole, but especially for his zeal bordering obsession with furthering the cause of post-modernism;
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