

# interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

September 1985    Volume 13 Number 3

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# interpretation

Volume 13 number 3

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Annual  
subscription rates individual \$13; institutional \$16; student (3-year limit) \$7. INTERPRETATION appears three times a year.

Address  
for correspondence INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367, U.S.A.

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# Socratic Teaching and Justice: Plato's *Clitophon*

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Clitophon raises a criticism of Socrates that many of Plato's readers no doubt share. While Socrates is excellent at urging men on to virtue, he is useless at teaching them what it is or how to attain it. Instead of leading men to virtue, his exhortations lead only to more exhortations. How, then, are we to understand them? Are we to suppose that this is all there will be to our life's work, to exhort those who have not been exhorted, and for them to exhort still others? Or is it possible to accomplish virtue in deed?

Whatever must finally be said in defense of Socrates' ability to teach, the dramatic situation of the *Clitophon* underscores Clitophon's criticism. Socrates has previously discussed justice with him, and those conversations have had two principal effects. They have aroused and confused Clitophon. Socrates first aroused his desire for virtue by convincing him that to become happy one must become virtuous, but then confused him by first telling him that justice consists in helping friends and harming enemies but later indicating that the just man never harms anyone but benefits everyone in everything. Similarly, Socrates initiates the present conversation with Clitophon and directly provokes his renewed request to be taught about justice, yet makes no attempt either to resolve his perplexity or to explain why he is unwilling or unable to do so. Remaining silent throughout all but the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates seems to go out of his way to incite Clitophon's criticism only to corroborate it by his silence. Could his refusal to teach Clitophon about justice be itself an act of justice?<sup>1</sup>

1. The *Clitophon* has languished in undeserved obscurity for a century and a half. Although the brief and brisk dialogue was traditionally considered the introduction to the *Republic* (see Diogenes Laertius, III.60; Proclus, *In Timaeum* i.7b), nearly all scholars since the early nineteenth century have either dismissed it as spurious—thereby defending Plato against the unanimous tradition of antiquity—or else defended it on the trivializing ground that it is a fragment or preliminary sketch of an unfinished Platonic work. The first group of scholars considers Clitophon's criticism of Socrates wholly unfounded; the second, easily refuted. Neither group sees anything fundamentally problematic in Socrates' teaching Clitophon justice, nor does either believe that Plato does. Both groups, it should be noted, agree with Clitophon that justice is a doctrine or a teaching.

Leading examples of scholars who regard the dialogue as spurious include Schleiermacher, *Introduction to the Dialogues of Plato* (1836) and W. A. Heidel, *Pseudo-Platonica* (1896); of those who consider it incomplete, George Grote, *Plato* (1865) and G. M. A. Grube, "The *Cleitophon* of Plato," *Classical Philology*, XXVI (1931). The dialogue is ignored by Jowett, Apelt and, more recently, Hamilton and Cairns in their translations of Plato, but included in The Loeb Classical Library, though not without a vigorous warning.

For a brief and depreciating treatment, see Paul Shorey, *What Plato Said* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933) p. 422; for an intelligent and informative treatment, see Clifford Orwin, "The Case against Socrates: Plato's *Cleitophon*," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, XV:4 (December, 1982), 741–53.

## I. THE PROLOGUE: TEACHING AND PRAISING (406a–407a)

The dialogue begins strangely and abruptly as Socrates reports what might seem to be mere gossip concerning himself and Clitophon. “About Clitophon, son of Aristonymus,” he tells Clitophon, “someone recently described to us that in a conversation with Lysias he found fault with spending time with Socrates but praised highly being together with Thrasymachus” (406a1–4). Socrates reports what some anonymous informant told him and unnamed others about what Clitophon had said to a mutual friend or companion behind his back. Yet he reports the gossip in a pointedly impersonal way. By referring to both himself and Clitophon—the only two men present—in the third person, he in effect separates what is being said from those discussing it. Speaking as though he were telling what some third person had said about a fourth, he manages to remove both the present speaker and listener from the subject matter of their conversation. Socrates, almost a parody of the just man, seems to have forgotten his own good in speech.

Clitophon replies confidently but cautiously. He is sure that Socrates is simply feigning indifference to his criticism and responding with a personal attack of his own. He therefore immediately tries to correct him. Whoever Socrates’ informant was, he explains, he did not correctly relate the conversation with Lysias, “for in some things indeed I did not praise you, but in others I did” (406a6–7). Whereas Socrates spoke of both Clitophon’s praise of Thrasymachus and his blame of Socrates, Clitophon speaks only of what he had said about Socrates. His remarks, in contrast to Socrates’, are entirely personal. And just as Clitophon replaces his reported praise of Thrasymachus with his unreported praise of Socrates, so, too, he suppresses the fact that he had criticized Socrates in anything, acknowledging only that he had not praised him in everything. He is careful to emphasize his praise and minimize his blame.<sup>2</sup> Saying frankly that Socrates is clearly rebuking him while pretending to be unconcerned, he eagerly offers to repeat the original conversation, especially since they are now alone. He hopes to convince Socrates that he does not hold so low an opinion of him and thus induce him to be more friendly in return.

Socrates readily accepts Clitophon’s offer, but not in the spirit in which it was made. Concluding the scene-setting prologue, he says it would be shameful of him not to bear with Clitophon when Clitophon is so eager to benefit him, for it is clear, Socrates says, that when his better and worse points have been made known to him, he will practice and pursue the one and avoid the other, according to his strength. Socrates thus places Clitophon in the position of his teacher. What matters to him is not whether Clitophon will praise him, but that he might

2. He does not explicitly acknowledge blaming Socrates until the very end of the dialogue (410e5).

improve him. Socrates, however, limits the possible benefits of Clitophon's teaching. He says he will practice and pursue his good points and avoid his bad ones, but not that he will develop any good points he does not already possess. The most he might learn from Clitophon that could cause him to change his actions is the need to practice greater self-restraint. But even this lesson's effect may be greatly limited inasmuch as Socrates promises to act to the full extent of his strength, not to the full extent of his knowledge. His strength may fail his knowledge. He may not always be able to act as he knows he should.

## II. CLITOPHON'S PRAISE: EDUCATION AND NEGLECT (407a–e)

Clitophon begins with his praise, the first half of which is a set-piece he has memorized<sup>3</sup> and which he introduces in a way that anticipates his central criticism. He says he was often amazed at hearing Socrates, who seemed to him to speak most nobly compared to other human beings, when, rebuking human beings, he sang his words like a god upon a tragic stage (407a8). In saying this Clitophon suggests that Socrates, at his best, resembles the tragic poets who, when faced with a difficulty, have recourse to a *deus ex machina*. Socrates appears at just the opportune moment to do what ordinary men cannot do, but then disappears again just as suddenly, without giving an adequate account of what he had said (cp. *Cratylus* 425d). His exhortations lack a grounding in reason.

Clitophon first quotes Socrates at length rebuking fathers for neglecting their sons' (and their own) education to justice. Are they ignorant, Socrates asks, that they do nothing they should? While devoting all their seriousness to the acquisition of wealth, the fathers neglect to see that their sons to whom they will leave it will know how to use it justly, and they do not find for them teachers of justice if indeed it can be learned, or those who can sufficiently practice and train them in justice if justice is a matter of training and practice. Socrates accuses the fathers of putting means before ends, of putting the acquisition of wealth before its just use. But he is indefinite as to what sort of education—teaching or training—is needed so the sons will know how to use wealth justly. Emphasizing the power of education while glossing over differences among the types of education, he seems to argue that as neglect leaves men unjust, so education can make them just. Just as education and neglect are opposites, so are their effects.

Rather than try to prove his point, Socrates appeals to something the fathers already believe. He says that they consider an education in grammar, music and gymnastics “the complete education in virtue” (407c2–3), and yet this education, he points out, makes neither them nor their sons any less vicious with respect to wealth. Why, then, do they not despise this traditional mode of educa-

3. Clitophon will in fact “go through” (*διεξέλθοιμι* [406a9]) his conversation with Lysias only in the broadest sense. Consider his performance in light of section VI, below, and *Phaedrus* 228a ff.

tion and seek after those who will put an end to this “lack of music” (407c6)? And yet it is because of this dissonance and easy spiritedness, he concludes, and not because the foot is out of time with the lyre, that brother with brother and city with city clash together without measure and harmony and are at strife, and in their warring commit and suffer the most extreme things. Socrates presumes the fathers mean by a “complete education in virtue” what he means by an “education to justice,” but they may mean nothing more than a so-called gentleman’s education, and in fact he acknowledges that the fathers deny that any sort of education can make men just. The unjust are unjust, they insist, not through lack of education or through ignorance, but willingly. They commit wrongdoing knowing it to be wrong. Faced with their strong resistance, Socrates tries to shame the fathers. He points out that while they argue that men are knowingly unjust, they also dare to say that injustice is shameful and hateful to the gods. How, then, could anyone choose such an evil? Anyone, they say, who is weaker than pleasure. But, Socrates rejoins, “Is not this involuntary, since victory is voluntary” (407d6–7)? Although the fathers are unmoved by pious shame, they are silenced by manly shame, allowing Socrates to conclude that the argument proves in every way that injustice is involuntary and every man (*ἄνδρα*) privately and every city publicly should pay more attention to this matter than they now do.

Socrates claims to have shown that education can make men just because no one is willingly unjust. His argument, however, rests on exactly the opposite premise. His conclusion that men are receptive to justice rests on the premise that men naturally resist justice. No man wishes to be ruled by pleasure because no man wishes to be ruled. To be ruled is to be mastered. Thus, just as Socrates began his rebuke by addressing the fathers contemptuously as “human beings” (407b1), so he ends it by challenging their manliness. Concern for manliness, not justice, silences them. Socrates’ treatment of the fathers seems to be the model for the education he means for their sons. It is not an education to knowledge but rather an habituation, a training or conditioning of the soul. It does not rest on knowledge of justice but on the opinions of others. The virtue it produces is merely a kind of duty based on manly shame.

Clitophon does not say that Socrates changed any of the fathers. What impressed him was not the effect so much as the godlike, censoring tone of Socrates’ speech. Socrates in his opening statement mentioned Clitophon’s high regard for Thrasymachus, and Clitophon in his closing statement will threaten to leave Socrates and join Thrasymachus, in whose company and defense he appears in the *Republic* (340a–b). In the *Phaedrus* (267d) Socrates describes Thrasymachus as being particularly strong at both attacking someone’s character and defending against such personal attacks. Recalling Clitophon’s interpretation of Socrates’ opening statement, we might surmise that at least part of what draws him to Socrates is what impresses him about Thrasymachus—the ability to attack people with words and to counter such attacks.

III. CLITOPHON'S PRAISE (*cont.*): KNOWING AND USING  
(407e–408b)

Clitophon extends his praise to a series of Socratic contentions, which he praises at least as highly as Socrates' rebuke of the fathers. No longer quoting him verbatim, he says that Socrates' next point is that those who train their bodies but neglect their soul do something else of this kind in neglecting what should rule but being serious about what should be ruled. He does not say in what way, or even whether, the higher should care for the lower or what obligations, if any, the ruler owes the ruled. Turning next to what he understands to be Socrates' major point, he says Socrates also argues that unless someone knows how to use something, it is better for him not to use it. Clitophon and Socrates agree that beneficial practice presupposes knowledge, but they seem to mean different sorts of knowledge. Whereas Socrates had spoken of knowing how to use wealth justly, Clitophon speaks only of knowing how to use something. He says nothing about knowing its just use. Where Socrates meant knowledge of the goodness of something's end, Clitophon seems to mean knowledge of its operations. The one seems concerned with knowing ends, the other with knowing means. The sequel will show, however, that Clitophon's silence about justice does not indicate an indifference to, but rather a particular understanding of, justice: justice is identical to art.

Clitophon gives three sets of examples of things, or types of things, one should know how to use. The list seems meant to be exhaustive. The first example concerns one's body and its parts, the second "any . . . instrument or possession whatever" (408a3–4), and the third one's soul. The first understands knowledge of use as knowledge of ends, as judgment rather than as technical competence. If someone does not know how to use his eyes or ears, Clitophon says, it is better for him not to hear or to see. In other words, one can use one's body without knowing how to do so: one can see without knowing what to see or hear without knowing what should be heard. The second example, which introduces art, confounds knowledge of ends and knowledge of means. What is true of the body, Clitophon continues, is also true of art, for it is evident, he says, that he who does not know how to use his own lyre will not know how to use another's, and he who does not know how to use another's will not know how to use his own, nor any other instrument or possession. "Use" here is equivocal. It may refer to operations or to ends. Someone may know how to play a lyre but not know how to judge the value of its end (407b8–d2) or how to judge its end but not how to play it (410b8–c4). Either way, he may know how to use it in one sense without knowing its use in the other. Art or *τέχνη*, which now becomes the leading theme of the dialogue, tends to obscure the distinction between the two sorts of knowledge. A physician or ship's captain knows both what needs to be

done and how to do it. His knowledge or art appears to contain both know-how and judgment.

Clitophon's model for reason is art. Art, he believes, embodies knowledge. Turning to the third and most important example, he says this argument of Socrates ends beautifully, that without knowledge of how to use one's soul it is better to be dead, and not to live, than to live and act according to whim. The possession of any good thing, including one's life or soul, is only conditionally good. It can be good only if the possessor knows how to use it or use it well. But, Clitophon continues, if it is necessary for a person ignorant of such knowledge to live, it is better for him to live as a slave than as a freeman, handing over the rudder of his thought, as it were of a ship, to someone who has learned the art of steering human beings, which art, he adds, Socrates often calls the political art, declaring it to be the same as that of judging and justice (cp. *Rep.* 590c8–d6). Living according to art, Clitophon believes, is the same as living according to reason. It is the opposite of living according to whim or necessity. To live according to art is to live a rational and hence a good life. Furthermore, a person able to rule himself is also best able to rule others. Just as someone who knows how to use his own lyre also knows how to use another's, so the person who knows how to use his own soul also knows how to guide others. Such knowledge is both a necessary and a sufficient claim to just rule. Conversely, the person who knows how to rule others also knows how to rule himself. Just as someone who knows how to play another's lyre knows how to play his own, so, too, someone who knows how to guide other men knows how to use his own soul. In Clitophon's view, the political art is ultimately identical to wisdom, and the just man to the statesman. Justice in the city is identical to justice in the soul.

Clitophon's emphasis on art causes him to exaggerate the power of reason or speech in politics. He understands guiding someone's thought to be the same as ruling him, and he never explains why anyone inclined to act according to whim and ruled by necessity would willingly obey reason's commands. Even as he emphasizes the difference between knowers and nonknowers, he minimizes the natural recalcitrance of most men to reason. In this respect, he is the direct opposite of the acquisitive fathers and close to the sophists who suppose that the art of rhetoric is identical to, or superior to, the political art.<sup>4</sup> Politics and education are ultimately the same, because men, being essentially reasonable and tractable, are easily governed by persuasion through speech. The art of rhetoric is the ruling art.

Clitophon's metaphor for the ruling art is the captain's art, for the captain's art clearly demonstrates that having knowledge means having the ability to command. The captain rules his ship because of what he knows. He is the authority because he is the expert. His knowledge gives him genuine authority over those who lack it. Yet, despite one's first impression, the captain's knowledge is ulti-

4. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1181<sup>a</sup>12–16.

mately concerned only with means and not with ends. While his art teaches him how to guide his ship safely to port, it does not teach him whether it is better or not for anyone to arrive there. That is something the art simply assumes. The same is true of every art. Just as medicine teaches physicians how to restore health but not why health is good, so every art ultimately takes the goodness of its own end for granted. Guided by some opinion or knowledge that lies beyond its particular sphere of competence, every art ultimately serves an end whose goodness it cannot explain. Its knowledge is retail, not wholesale.

Clitophon, too, takes the good for granted. While he agrees with Socrates that the good life is the life in accordance with reason, he never suggests that such a life is distinguished by its end. In his account, while only knowers can lead good or happy lives, their lives are not distinguished from the lives of nonknowers by the ends they pursue, but only by the means they possess. Their only differences are instrumental. Clitophon seems to recognize that teaching and justice are similar in that both are concerned with improvement. But he never supposes that education might turn someone's soul around (cp. *Rep.* 518b–c), only that it might improve his life in the conventional sense of providing him with the means to fulfill the ends he already pursues while at the same time justifying his claim to those means. The life of reason, as he understands it, is not the life devoted to, but the life served by, knowledge. Modeled after art, it takes the good for granted.

Clitophon's regard for art blinds him to nature and, particularly, to the natures of men. He speaks of soul, but never of souls<sup>5</sup> or types of souls, and he never distinguishes among the intellectual, spirited, and appetitive parts of the soul.<sup>6</sup> He regards the mind as the soul and hence art as virtue, and thus makes no distinction among men except for the arts they possess and the reputations they enjoy.<sup>7</sup> Instead of looking to the inner disposition of the parts of the soul and their ordering for his model of rule, he looks only to the soul's external relation to the body and thus reduces political rule to despotic rule. The rulers are masters; the ruled, willing slaves. Clitophon destroys politics by ignoring the middle or spirited part of the soul and the kind of understanding that corresponds to it, namely, opinion. He confuses knowledge and opinion (and philosophy and politics) because he sees nothing in between knowledge and ignorance, or reason and desire.

In the *Republic* (340a–b), Clitophon defends Thrasymachus' definition of justice—that justice is the advantage of the stronger—by arguing that Thrasymachus meant by advantage whatever the stronger believes it is, regardless of whether or not it is his true advantage. Just as this implies that the just is identical to the legal or the lawful, so it also shows, more broadly, that Clitophon is con-

5. Note 407e6.

6. Clitophon mentions "easy spiritedness" (*ῥαθυμίαν*) when quoting Socrates (407c6–7).

7. See esp. 408c5–7.

tent with apparent goods. What he says in defense of Thrasymachus confirms what he suggests in the *Clitophon* about himself: as the spokesman for art, he is above all the defender of convention.

#### IV. CLITOPHON'S BLAME: SPEECHES AND DEEDS (408b–409d)

Clitophon says that to these and many other very beautiful speeches, in which it is asserted that virtue is teachable and that a person should above all pay attention to himself,<sup>8</sup> he has hardly ever said a word in opposition, nor does he suppose he ever will, for he considers them most exhortatory and most useful, awakening us as if we were asleep. But, having been awakened, he is now unable to find anyone who can explain what comes next. He tells Socrates that he first went to “your contemporaries and fellow-desirers or comrades, or whatever one should name those so disposed to you” (408c5–7) and asked first of all those he says Socrates holds in especially high regard what the argument would be after this. Quoting himself at length as he had earlier quoted Socrates’ rebuke and saying that he questioned Socrates’ companions after Socrates’ own manner, he says he first asked them how we are now to accept Socrates’ exhortation to virtue. Do we regard this as all there is and “suppose it is not possible to accomplish it in practice and possess it completely” (408d4)? Is this all there will be to our life’s work (ἔργον) to exhort those who have not yet been exhorted, and for them to exhort still others? Or should we ask Socrates and one another what comes next? How should we begin the learning related to justice?

Although Clitophon complains about being entirely in the dark, he assumes that justice is an art similar to gymnastics and medicine. Comparing the predicament he and Socrates’ other companions are in to that of young boys, he says it is as though someone had exhorted them to care for the body, observing that they, like boys, had no notion that such care belongs to gymnastics and medicine, and afterwards rebuked them by saying it was shameful for them to care for food and drink and all the things we labor to acquire for the sake of the body, but not to seek an art or device to ensure that the body is in the best possible condition, even though such an art exists. The problem, he concludes, is to determine “what the art is that is related to the virtue of the soul” (409a3).

Clitophon takes for granted that this is a productive art. He reports that when the person reputed to be the strongest at answering such questions said this art is the very one Clitophon has heard Socrates mention, namely, justice, he immediately rejected the answer, demanding more than merely a name. Quoting himself again, he says he replied that there is an art called medicine by which two things

8. For the sort of virtue that Socrates may have considered teachable, see Xenophon, *Memorabilia* IV.6. For what he means by the assertion that one should above all pay attention to oneself, see *Republic* 443c9–444a2 and *Alcibiades Major* 130e ff. Clitophon’s understanding of these two assertions seems, characteristically, to ignore the inner disposition of the soul.

are accomplished. Physicians are always producing (*ἐξεργάζεσθαι*) both new physicians and health. “Of these,” he explained, “the latter is no longer an art, but the work (*ἔργον*) of that art which both teaches and is taught, which effect we call health” (409b3–5). Similarly, in carpentry, there is the house; which is the effect, and the art, which is the teaching (*τὸ μὲν ἔργον, τὸ δὲ διδασκαλία*). So, too, with justice, he argued: one part is to produce just men, as each of the other arts produces artisans; but what shall we say is its work or effect, “what can the just man do (*ποιεῖν*) for us” (409b8–c1)?

Two considerations, at least initially, make the productive arts a plausible model for justice. First, the productive arts seem to possess the disinterestedness usually associated with justice. The carpenter builds houses for others and only incidentally for himself; the physician qua physician treats his patients with a view to their benefit, not his own. Artisans as artisans seem to have a selfless concern for the welfare of others. Second, the productive arts seem to possess the sort of knowledge justice requires. For whether the good in question is that of others, of the community, or (as Thrasymachus argues in the *Republic*) of the ruler or artisan himself, justice is concerned with securing someone's good and not merely intending it; and while anyone might be disposed to give someone good things, artisans as artisans have the sort of technical knowledge that produces them. If knowledge is virtue (as Socrates sometimes suggests), art may be justice in deed.<sup>9</sup>

Clitophon wants to be told what justice accomplishes other than producing just men. He wants to know the counterpart in justice to health in medicine. He says the same companion who gave the previous answer said that the work of justice is the advantageous, another said it is the needful, a third the useful, and a fourth the profitable. But Clitophon objected that none of these answers distinguishes justice from the other arts. All the arts, he explained, act (*πράττειν*) correctly, profitably, usefully and the like, but all the others can say what it is toward which these tend, as carpentry, for example, will say that “the well,” “the beautiful,” “the needful” tend to the production of wooden things. While Socrates' companions spoke of what the art produces, Clitophon understands them to have described how it operates—its means, not its end. Insisting that justice must be a particular art, he fails to recognize his own assumption that art as art is just, that art as such is justice.

Despite his concern for possessing the art of steering men's thought, Clitophon subordinates education to its extrinsic effects. If the productive arts are the model for justice, justice could be considered identical to education, for an art is a “teaching” (409b6)—it “both teaches and is taught” (409b4)—but education or justice would then not be an end in itself. The development of a just man, like the development of new physicians, would serve some end outside itself. Education would then teach without benefitting and benefit without teaching. Its speech and deed—its *λόγος* and *ἔργον*—would be separate and perhaps even opposite.

9. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), p. 79.

Justice then would be “the art that is related to the virtue of the soul” (409a3), not in the sense that the soul is its beneficiary, but only in the sense that the soul is its tool. The goal of justice would not be to improve the soul, but to use it for the sake of something else. Contrary to what he supposes about himself, Clitophon neglects what he says should rule and is serious about what he says should be ruled (407e5–8, 410d5–e1). He may believe that knowledge can rule human affairs, but he does not believe that knowledge is the highest good or even an end in itself.

Clitophon’s general criticism of Socrates’ exhortations, which is of a piece with his general emphasis on the productive arts, follows the traditional or conventional Greek distinction between what exists in speech and what exists in deed.<sup>10</sup> Socrates would agree with Clitophon that speeches should lead to deeds, that exhortations cannot be an end in themselves. In fact, Clitophon’s criticism of Socrates resembles Socrates’ criticisms of the poets, who, he says, are unable to leave any true works behind because they are removed from what is most real (*Rep.* 599b). But Clitophon and Socrates disagree as to what is truly a deed. Whereas Socrates argues that speech can grasp truth more completely than can actions because to be means to be intelligible (*ibid.* 473a, 477a), Clitophon argues that to accomplish something completely—to possess or grasp it perfectly—means to do so in action or in practice. Doing is better than knowing because the real world is the world of bodies in action, not the world of the mind in thought: knowledge is derivative, not primary. Thus, whereas Clitophon understands speech and deeds as opposite sorts of things with the former subordinate to the latter, Socrates considers them ultimately the same, united in philosophical conversation. The city Socrates finds in the *Republic* exists in speech.<sup>11</sup> As a political community, it is obviously incomplete, as Socrates himself points out (473a). Yet insofar as he establishes an educational rather than a political community, it exists in deed as well as in speech. It exists in and among the souls of its members. The development of the just city in speech is Socrates’ education of his interlocutors—and Plato’s readers—in deed. Its development in speech constitutes his educational or dialogic community in deed.<sup>12</sup> Unlike any of the productive arts, what his speeches are, is what his speeches do. His speeches are at the same time deeds because their effects lie in the soul.

#### V. CLITOPHON’S BLAME (*cont.*): POLITICAL AND TRANSPOLITICAL JUSTICE (409d–410b)

Clitophon reports that at last one of Socrates’ companions, who seemed (or was reputed) to speak most elegantly, answered that the work which belongs to

10. See, e.g., *Republic* 382e8, 383a5, 498e4.

11. 369a5, c9, 472e1, 592a11.

12. Eva T. H. Brann, Introduction to *The Republic*, trans. and ed. Raymond Larson (Arlington Heights, Ill.: AHM Publishing Co., 1979), pp. xxxvi–xxxvii.

justice and to no other art is to produce friendship in the cities. The speaker meant the sort of friendship just suggested and not the sort Socrates indicated when he exhorted the fathers to seek an education that would put an end to strife and violence in the cities (407c6–d2). He meant philosophical, not political, friendship. When questioned, he said that friendship is good and never evil, and for that reason he also denied that the attachments of children and animals, which we call friendships, are friendships, since they are for the most part harmful rather than good. Friendship existing really and truly, he said, is most clearly a unanimity or agreement in mind (*ὁμόνοιαν*). But the agreement, he explained, is not in opinion (*ὁμοδοξίαν*), but rather in knowledge (*ἐπιστήμην*), for of necessity many agreements in opinion among people are harmful but friendship is wholly good and the work of justice. Political or civic friendship—the sort of friendship that holds the city together—is not true friendship. As friendship consists in shared knowledge concerning the good, only the wise can be friends.

Clitophon reports that when they reached this point in the argument those present, being perplexed, were ready to attack the speaker and cry that the argument had circled back to its starting point. For the medical art, he quotes them as saying, is a kind of agreement (*ὁμόνοια*), as are all the other arts, but, unlike what the speaker calls justice or unanimity (*ὁμόνοιαν*), the other arts can say what they deal with and what they produce. Clitophon does not say anyone suggested that the art of justice might be the art of conversation, that justice might be philosophy. Nor does he realize that the speaker's answer, rather than returning full circle, actually repudiates art as the model for justice, for whereas on the model of the arts justice would exist between knowers and nonknowers (for example, between physicians and patients), on the basis of what the speaker said it would exist only among knowers. Clitophon's model for justice is political; the speaker's is not. It is worth noting that, whereas Clitophon previously emphasized that it was he who questioned Socrates' companions, he does not say who cross-examined this speaker (cp. 408c4ff. and 409d2ff.). That friends must know what is good is precisely the suggestion Clitophon dismisses as unimportant in the *Republic*.

Clitophon says that when he finally put his questions to Socrates, Socrates only confused him. "You told me that it belongs to justice to injure one's enemies and do well to one's friends, but later on it appeared that the just man never injures anyone, for he acts to be useful to everyone in everything" (410a8–b3). Clitophon sees this as a contradiction, because he sees no difference between political and transpolitical justice. The first part of what Socrates told him is the most political definition of justice. The principle of helping friends and harming enemies is the basis of all civic virtue, for, as the *Republic* shows,<sup>13</sup> justice as the dedication to the city's common good entails the disinterested love of one's fellow citizens and the disinterested hatred of one's city's enemies. The second part of what he told him, on the other hand, pertains to transpolitical justice.

13. See esp. 414b ff.

While harming enemies is a necessary part of political life, the truly just man will not harm anyone, but will help everyone, or at least everyone with whom he has any dealings and who can be helped, for the goods he pursues do not require him to take anything from others against their will. Socrates' statements would be contradictory only if the just man were identical to the statesman, only if the philosopher were identical to the king.<sup>14</sup>

#### VI. THE CONCLUSION: LOVERS AND NONLOVERS (410b–d)

Clitophon is disheartened and disaffected. He complains that he endured such answers not only once, nor even twice, but for a long time, and was finally worn out by his perplexity. So after repeated questioning and getting nowhere, he finally gave up, concluding that although Socrates is most excellent at exhorting men to virtue, either of two things must be true. Either he is capable of only this and no more, as someone who is not a captain may praise the captain's art as being of great value to people, or else he is unwilling to share his knowledge with Clitophon. Clitophon has no doubt, however, that Socrates could teach him if he wanted to. He is sure that virtue is teachable and that Socrates knows what it is. So, after threatening to leave him and go to Thrasymachus and others, he gives Socrates one last chance to teach him and save his own reputation. Socrates, he says, should "suppose Clitophon agrees that it is ridiculous to care for other things but neglect the soul, for the sake of which we labor in other things; and suppose also that I have spoken in such a way on all the subsequent points which I have just now gone through" (410d5–e3). Clitophon does not say whether this agreement (*ὁμολογοῦντα*) is in knowledge or opinion. Just as he wants an answer he can memorize, so he sees no difference between knowing an argument in the sense of being able to repeat it and knowing it in the sense of understanding it or being able to explain it, let alone living by it. Indeed, he thinks it sufficient if Socrates merely supposes (*ἕξει*) that he agrees. His speech is several times removed from what exists in deed. As Clitophon lives fully in the realm of other men's opinions, his speech is entirely imitative and derivative, as his name suggests.<sup>15</sup>

Returning to the dialogue's beginning, Clitophon entreats Socrates to do as he asks, lest he praise him in some things but blame him in others to Lysias and the rest. For Clitophon will say that while Socrates is worth everything to someone who has not been exhorted, to someone who has he is almost a hindrance in the way of his reaching the goal of virtue and becoming happy. Socrates, in a word, is unjust.

14. Just as Clitophon fails to distinguish between politics and philosophy, so he also sees no difference between medicine's restoring health to unhealthy bodies and gymnastics' improving the health of healthy ones; see 408e–409a2. Consider in this connection "judging and justice" at 408b3–5.

15. Clitophon is also the only person in the dialogue identified by reference to his father; see 406a1–4.

Clitophon's exhortation has no effect on Socrates. Neither intimidated nor ashamed, he does nothing to resolve his perplexity. Whereas his initial exhortation worked like a gadfly to arouse Clitophon (*Apol.* 30e–31a), his subsequent discussions have had the opposite effect of a torpedo fish, leaving him tired as well as confused (*Meno* 80a–b).

Clitophon's fatigue is, among other things, a sign of his lack of love. He loves reputation, not wisdom; opinion, not knowledge. Both Socrates' opening and Clitophon's closing statements associate Clitophon with the orator Lysias as well as with the rhetorician Thrasymachus. Lysias is the audience or judge whose opinion Socrates is supposed to value. In the *Phaedrus* (227c, 228d, 230e ff.), Lysias argues for the superiority of the nonlover to the lover, praising the lover only for his utility to the unloving beloved. Like Socrates, he is a lover of speeches (228c, 236e), but, unlike Socrates, he reduces reason to selfish calculation (230e ff.). His understanding of love and speech implies the ascendancy of utility. It lacks a love of beauty. Socrates, by contrast, claims in the *Symposium* (177d–e) and the *Theages* (128b) to know only the erotic things. Because his pursuit of knowledge stems from a love of knowledge, reason and love converge for him in philosophy. Yet Socrates argues for the superiority of the nonlover to the lover in one major activity. Those who would be the best political rulers are those who would be the most reluctant to rule. Philosophers must be forced to return to the cave from the Isle of the Blessed, to the realm of appearance and opinion from the realm of being and truth. They must be forced to become kings, for political rule can be nothing more to them than a necessary burden or duty.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, what would be just for the city would be unjust for its rulers, for the descent to political rule cannot possibly improve a wise man's soul. In becoming a king, a philosopher would necessarily sacrifice his virtue to his duty, his own good and happiness to the common good of the city.<sup>17</sup>

Clitophon, who sees the only difference between a philosophical and nonphilosophical life as one of means, and who in fact never mentions philosophy, believes that what Socrates says about the prerogatives of wisdom—that knowledge is a necessary and sufficient claim to goods—applies directly and fully to political rule. The prerogatives of wisdom become the prerogatives of rule as the distinction between a theoretical and a practical life vanishes. An aspiring philosopher-king, Clitophon proves to be a would-be artisan-despot. His Aristophanic counterpart is Strepsiades (see *Clouds* 1276ff.). It is no real wonder that Socrates' exhortations lead, in his case, only to more exhortations. For exhortations cannot lead men to pursue things which are the objects of genuine love. Men can be exhorted to the sort of virtue that rests on shame (407b1–e2), but not to the sort that springs from a spontaneous desire. They can be exhorted to political justice or duty, but not to philosophy or wisdom.

Socrates' treatment of Clitophon gains added significance from the fact that Clitophon foreshadows the modern or contemporary view of scientific education.

16. *Republic* 519b ff., 539e ff.

17. *Ibid.* 519d8ff., and see Aristotle, *Politics* 1264<sup>b</sup>16ff.

Education, he believes, is concerned with communicating answers or imparting technical knowledge or know-how to those who lack it. Rather than turning the soul around so the mind's eye can contemplate the brightest part of what *is*, education is thought to put in the soul knowledge or skills that are not already there, like sight in blind eyes (*Rep.* 518b–c). It provides power, not direction. Clitophon thus sees education as “open-ended.” Destroying the distinction between liberal and illiberal education, he considers it technical and instrumental, serving ends outside itself. Education's purpose is not to master oneself, but outside things.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, his understanding of education ignores all but intellectual differences among men. It fails to consider the possibility that the sort of knowledge the just man must possess can be learned only by someone naturally gifted for it. What Clitophon ignores is exactly what causes Socrates not to answer him.

Socrates' silence is ambiguous, however. If to practice justice means to improve those with whom one has dealings, it is hard to see how telling Clitophon what he wants to hear would be just. Clitophon needs restraint, not encouragement. Yet Socrates will discuss justice in front of him, if not with him, in the *Republic*, and it is by no means clear that what Clitophon hears there will serve him any better than what he has already heard from Socrates. Clitophon is no Alcibiades, Critias or Charmides, but he is one of Socrates' failures. It is not clear that what he learns or hears from Socrates benefits him or his country in any way, and it may do both real harm.<sup>19</sup> At the end of the prologue, Socrates promised to avoid his bad points when they have been made known to him, “according to my strength” (407a4). His qualification may not have been simply ironical. Socrates may lack the ability to refrain from doing some of the things he knows he should not do. Where duty is concerned, his knowledge may not be identical to, or sufficient for, virtue. As Lysias suggests, a passionate man like Socrates may not always be in full control of himself. He is not likely always to perform his duty. The *Clitophon* is thus the proper introduction to the *Republic*, not only because Socrates discusses there what he does not discuss here, but also because the difference between what he does in the two dialogues reflects the difference and the tension between the two senses of justice or virtue. Socrates can easily carry out his duty in the *Clitophon* because its performance in no way goes against the grain; desire and duty coincide. In the *Republic*, on the other hand, duty toward men like Clitophon may demand one thing, but the desire to converse with others like Glaucon and Adeimantus demands another, and love, not duty, wins out.

18. It is not altogether misleading to associate Clitophon with technology. While, on the one hand, he is concerned with knowledge as a form of external mastery, on the other, he is close to the original sense of the term, for “technology” originally referred to the art of rhetoric—the art that spoke about the artful use of speech. It was at once the speech concerning art and the art concerning speech. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1354<sup>b</sup>17, 26, 1356<sup>a</sup>11.

19. For Clitophon's political career, see Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians* 29.3 and 34.3. Lysias and his family turned out to be victims of his political mistakes; see *ibid.* 35.1 and Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes* 4ff.