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AN INTRODUCTION TO THE READING OF
PLATO'S *LACHES*

MARK BLITZ

Plato's *Laches* is a discussion of courage, but the thematic discussion of courage does not begin until the dialogue is half over. It is named after the Athenian general Laches, one of the interlocutors, but why it is named after him and not after the other chief interlocutor, the Athenian general Nicias, is unclear. It is therefore necessary to attend carefully to the speeches and action of the dialogue from the very beginning in order to understand the significance of the long preparation for the arguments later conducted by Laches, Socrates, and Nicias, and it is necessary to attend to the whole dialogue in order to understand why the only word said by Plato in his own name, the title, is "Laches."

The *Laches* begins with a preface spoken by Lysimachus. He (with Melesias) has called Laches and Nicias to observe the display of a man fighting in armor, but he has not told them for the sake of what he has done so. But he will say now. He believes it is necessary to speak frankly to them. Some laugh at this, he says, and if someone asks their advice do not say what they think, but guess at the advisee and speak something against their own opinion. But he believes they know sufficiently and, knowing sufficiently, would tell their opinion simply; accordingly, he has taken them for the counseling about what is to be communicated.

The preface is a preface to communicating the reason for the advice, and its subject is the conditions of advice. The requirement of frank speech suggests the need to speak freely rather than dissembling the reason for the advice. The reason for the advice comprises both the conditions through which the advisee needs advice but cannot provide his own guidance and the subject for which he seeks advice. But the subject of a consultation usually appears to be the means discussed only for the sake of the end. When a man seeks a physician's advice on diet for the purpose of his health, that "for the sake of which" there is a consultation is basically health; proper diet may or may not be the sufficient means. But why does he wish health? Health is necessary for the things a man can do with a healthy body, for happiness. Therefore this happiness is the basic purpose for the advising, and health is the immediate purpose which may or may not be sufficiently useful in meeting this end. There is therefore a complicated relationship of means and end, of the useful, the beneficial, and the noble, in advising. But means and end is too strict a distinction because the same things are both means and ends. More fundamentally, the full discussion of

something as means, the contribution of health to happiness, for example, may be no different from a discussion of it as beneficial or as an end. Both discussions attempt to elucidate its power, its ability, its qualities; both discuss what it is. In this sense, the subject of the advising is the final purpose toward which the advisee's immediate wish points, since to discuss fully what is wished for as a means is also to discuss it in itself, i.e., as aid to, part of, or instance of the final purpose. But if such are the reasons for frank speech, it is possible that the advisee is partially ignorant of the subject for which he needs advice. This is especially true when we consider the possible apparent differences between what is wished for in advice and the final subject to which it may point only obscurely. And it is also possible that he cannot grasp or is ashamed of his true need for advice about a subject and his inability to provide his own guidance. Thus, to speak freely the advisee must know what he is speaking about, and this is a difficult requirement.

But even if the advisee can speak freely in this sense, his speech will be useless unless the advisor knows sufficiently. What he must know sufficiently is precisely what the advisee must know in order to speak his need knowingly, and, in addition to this, he must know whatever it is that the advisee does not know. But to know the reason for the advice sufficiently would be to know it fully, to know everything on which the reason or subject is dependent for being what it is, or to know it in its independence: to know the reason, the "for the sake of which," the subject sufficiently would be to know it in its self-sufficiency. Yet this is a requirement that may be difficult, if not impossible, to meet: who, after all, has sufficient knowledge of courage? Still, even if an advisor has sufficient knowledge, this does not guarantee that he will speak it simply to the advisee. He might "laugh" at him or "guess" at him and for these reasons speak duplicitously, for the advisor's intention may not be the same as the advisee's. The advisee therefore has reason to distrust; the grounds on which he could expect simple speech would need to be assured before his own speech could be altogether frank. Moreover, for a speech of advice to be "simple" even if the advisor wished to speak simply would require that it be about something itself simple, unchanging, single, undistorted, and incapable of being properly understood in more than one way, and that it be said in a context where it could not have more than one meaning for the advisee. But though a simple speech on the basis of sufficient knowledge seems so difficult, perhaps this is not so. Perhaps the speech can be simple praise or blame, assent or dissent; and perhaps it can be based upon mere observation. For by their deed Lysimachus and Melesias suggest that looking at Stesilaus' display, not hearing about it, is crucial. But even such observation is no guarantee of sufficient knowledge because it can be countered by other observations in other circumstances. Moreover, assent and dissent, whether or not based on

the observation of actions, of deeds, is ambiguous. Therefore, the problem of sufficient knowledge and simple speech, for the advisee as well as the advisor, is deepened, not solved, by the possibility that sufficient knowledge is of, or in, deeds, not speeches, and that the required simple speech need be nothing more than a vote, or word of praise.

After his preface, Lysimachus proceeds to tell Nicias and Laches the reason for the consultation. He and Melesias are concerned with caring for their sons Aristeides and Thucydides. They will not allow them to do what they wish, as the many allow their sons. They know that Nicias and Laches also have sons, and believe that they are concerned with how to train them to bring about the best. But if they have not paid attention to this they are to be reminded that it is necessary not to neglect it; they thus call them to care for the sons in common.

Lysimachus is concerned with how to train the sons to bring about the best. By best, here, Lysimachus means aristocratic, unlike the many; he reminds the company of his fine lineage. But he gives no indication of the content of the "best" ways, save to suggest that a youth could not become best by being allowed to do what he wants, since this is the way of the many. But why are Laches and Nicias called to advise? Lysimachus suggests that since they too have young sons they are likely to share his concern, but he reminds them that they need to pay attention to this subject whether or not they already have sons. He has therefore not yet shown that they know sufficiently; he even suggests that they do not. At most he has indicated why they can be trusted to speak simply: common need and common concern with what is best make possible a "community" in which there can be frank speech. But this could at best be partially true, for parents, especially such parents, are competitive. Lysimachus leaves unexplored the precise concern with what is better than the many and the precise common need of those with such concern.

Lysimachus continues. As he said at the beginning, he will speak frankly to them. He and Melesias each have tales about their own fathers to tell the boys, tales of noble deeds in war and peace when they managed the city's and the allies' affairs. But Lysimachus and Melesias have no deeds of their own; they are ashamed of this, Lysimachus continues, and blame their fathers, who allowed them to live luxuriously when they were young, while they did others' business. And they tell their sons, who are persuaded by them, that if they do not care for themselves they will become unhonored, but if they do care perhaps they could become worthy of their names. They are thus looking for those studies and practices by which the sons could become the best, and someone praised both this study, since it would be noble for young men to fight in armor, and the man whose demonstration they have just seen. And they opined it necessary to go and to take along Laches and Nicias as fellow spectators, advisors, and participants. Lysimachus concludes that they should now advise

whether they think this study is necessary to learn or whether they would praise some other; they are also to say what they will do about the community.

This section of the dialogue consists of Lysimachus' report of the conditions leading Melesias and him to seek advice. Lysimachus speaks frankly of these conditions, which means here that he says what one says only to a trustworthy man; he is incompetent to judge because his father educated him poorly. His speech in general reveals both the measure of his incompetence and his wiliness. His disparaging of his father would suggest that the generals Nicias and Laches would be unconcerned about their own sons, and therefore incompetent spectators. But unconcern does not necessarily mean incompetence; therefore, Lysimachus must force the generals to become concerned, and he achieves this. But their station does not guarantee competence either, and nowhere in the dialogue does Lysimachus tell why he thinks the generals know sufficiently. But Lysimachus does show here how he is influenced by praise, and Nicias and Laches are men with names, with reputations; therefore their own bestowing of praise is important. The question thus arises of the worth of praise and its connection to knowledge. But Lysimachus demonstrates his unclarity even more fundamentally. He uses the terms "noble," "worthy of one's name," and "best" interchangeably to designate what he has persuaded his son to become. But these are not obviously identical; to use them interchangeably is to be unconcerned with the distinction between merit and the reputation for it. This unclarity, too, is not set right by Lysimachus. Moreover, he sees no distinction between the immediate reason or condition for the advice and the final purpose. Does he seek advice on becoming the best in order that his son may perform nobly, or is the final subject of the advice—nobility, or a worthy name, or becoming the best—not different from the immediate subject about which he seeks advice? Finally, Lysimachus indicates that the subject of the advising is the usefulness of the art, the means, for meeting his wish for his son; that is, he does not indicate that he needs advice about that for the sake of which the advising is, but only about the studies and practices which might bring it about. But the interchangeable use of noble, best, and worthiness of name suggests that he lacks knowledge here as well; and his own story of his luxurious upbringing strengthens this suggestion.

The next part of the dialogue consists of Nicias, Laches, and Socrates entering Lysimachus' community. Nicias speaks first, praises Lysimachus' purpose, and readily joins. Laches then joins also, approving of Lysimachus' remark that men concerned with the public carelessly place apart what is private. But he wonders why Socrates was not invited to join, for he belongs to Lysimachus' deme and always spends his time in what he is searching for, a noble study or practice for youths. Nicias then adds his endorsement: Socrates has recommended

Damon as teacher for Nicias' son, and the graceful music teacher Damon has proved to be as valuable a companion as one could wish for. Lysimachus then apologizes for not knowing about Socrates. Age prevents him from knowing the younger men, he says, but it is necessary and just that good advisors advise their fellow demesman. Moreover, Socrates chances to be his friend because Lysimachus and Socrates' father Sophroniscus were friends and had no differences. And he must be that very Socrates whom the boys praise so vehemently at home when dialoguing with each other. Therefore, "by Hera," Socrates and Lysimachus must begin to be familiar. Laches then speaks again. Socrates must not be let go, he says, for he does right by the fatherland as well as the father. Laches has observed him in the flight from Delium; if others had been willing to be such as Socrates, the city would not have met disaster. Lysimachus then speaks again. He finds this praise to be noble, he says; it is praise from a man of trusted value and he is pleased by Socrates' good reputation. Socrates should justly have been frequenting his home, but at least from now on Socrates must do nothing but be with Lysimachus and Melesias, become acquainted with the youths, and preserve the friendship. He then asks Socrates his opinion about the study of fighting in armor: is it suitable for lads or not? Socrates then accepts Lysimachus' invitation, but, as we will see shortly, does not immediately give his advice.

This section of the dialogue concerns the necessary requirements to be met in order to trust an advisor. Lysimachus has invited Laches and Nicias into a community, a community based on common necessity. The bases for community and the problem of the relation between the city and the communities inferior to it therefore become the mode in which the question of trustworthy advisors is pursued. Nicias' statement following Laches' indicates the questionability of Lysimachus' and Laches' understanding of the separation of public and private. Nicias, the leading man in the city, found time to find a teacher and to learn from him himself. In fact, we see later that he has attempted to secure the services of Socrates, but Socrates refuses. The question of the grounds for the true separation of public and private is therefore raised, and it is raised in several other ways as well. Laches reminds Lysimachus that Socrates belongs to his deme, and Lysimachus takes this fact alone as constituting the justice of Socrates' advising him, if he has good advice. But why should fellow members of the deme have a justice among them, presumably differentiating them from fellow citizens? Lysimachus then reminds Socrates that he and his father were companions, but, even more, friends, a reminder which further differentiates him from other citizens as well as from fellow members of the deme. But Lysimachus is not likely to have been Sophroniscus' only friend, and he is no friend of Socrates, as his ignorance of him and his own need to remark that he and Sophroniscus did not part with differences suggest. He therefore further specifies Socrates' relationship to

what is Lysimachus' by mentioning the boys' praise of him. Finally, he swears the dialogue's first oath, the only one to Hera, an oath more appropriate to a woman than the usual "by Zeus" of a manly man, and invites Socrates into the closeness of the family.

Lysimachus' speech to Socrates indicates important grounds of trustworthiness. Socrates can be expected to speak simply because he belongs to Lysimachus' deme and because he would advise Lysimachus out of friendship, out of family ties, and not for another reason, such as money. But why could Socrates be expected to join the consultation at all? The others have a common necessity, but there is no indication that Socrates has a young son. Laches mentions Socrates' concern with education, and Nicias also testifies to it, but the grounds for Socrates' peculiar concern are not clear. But perhaps Socrates can be expected to join, to help, and not merely to refrain from hurting, because of friendship. Lysimachus expects this but is uncertain of it, or is uncertain of the friendship Socrates shares for him. He therefore mentions the boys' praise; Socrates will receive, and has been receiving, praise, something Lysimachus considers fine, and therefore something more than love of what is almost his own should motivate Socrates. But, then, Lysimachus once more suggests doing right by his father and reverence for Hera as what should motivate Socrates, and it is not clear whether these motivations are necessities or beautiful in themselves. Moreover, Lysimachus has just slandered his own father as the cause of something base, namely, Lysimachus, while at the same time revering him by seeking to make his son worthy of him. In general, then, while private familiarity is a guide to trustworthy advice it is an ambiguous guide because the private, one's own, is not identical with the noble or good.

Private familiarity is also no certain guide to knowledgeable advisors. Nothing said so far shows that Socrates knows sufficiently, though what Laches and Nicias have said suggests it. And Lysimachus' failure to recognize Socrates demonstrates Socrates' lack of public reputation, and, therefore, for Lysimachus, may well raise a question about Socrates' competence in the matter at hand. Therefore, Lysimachus does not ask Socrates for his advice until after Laches' interjection. Laches' praise for Socrates' actions on behalf of the city is sufficient to guarantee his reputation; it is therefore, for Lysimachus, apparently sufficient to guarantee his competence. Praise remains Lysimachus' guide, but not praise simply, for the sons' praise did not persuade Lysimachus to seek out Socrates; but Laches' praise is a noble praise, a praise for that same thing which makes Laches' value trustworthy. But it is unclear whether noble praise is distinguished from ordinary praise because of what is praised or because of who praises. It is also unclear whether Lysimachus believes there is or can be anything noble which lacks reputation. Thus, the grounds on which Lysimachus judges competence and the grounds and connection of the nobility, worthiness, and goodness he wants for his son remain unclear.

No distinctions among these qualities are suggested, and Lysimachus persists in identifying opinion and knowledge.

Laches' statement about the war and Lysimachus' mention of his trustworthiness also develop the theme of the connection between trustworthy advice and the division between public and private. Socrates' public trustworthiness is as necessary as his private trustworthiness: Lysimachus can hardly contain his pleasure at the news. But effort for the city may detract from concern for the private, and there is no reason to believe this is less true for Socrates than for Lysimachus' father. Lysimachus speaks of the justice of Socrates' behaving as kinsman to Lysimachus, but he nowhere speaks of the justice of Socrates' manly retreat in war, nor of the justice of his father Aristides' management of the affairs of the city. But the city is necessary to protect the family. Perhaps Lysimachus believes that from proper devotion to what is private a noble devotion to the city can emerge, though the reverse is not true. Something like this might appear to be the case with Nicias. But Socrates' place as an advisor, the status of his knowing and his motivation for simple speech, is especially ambiguous because his concern with the young is not a private concern and its connection to his willingness to retreat correctly for the city, an unusual act in the circumstances but no shining display of daring, is altogether unexplored.

Socrates has consented to try to help Lysimachus as far as he is able. But, he continues, in the next part of the dialogue, Laches and Nicias should speak first, for this would be just, and he who is younger and less experienced will learn from them. Only if he disagrees with them will he attempt to teach and persuade. He then asks Nicias that he or Laches speak.

Socrates here unobtrusively sets the terms of speech and order of the speakers. The advising will be by speeches, not question and answer; Nicias will speak first because Socrates manages it that way. Even less obtrusively, Socrates lays down conditions for knowledge. It is just that the older and more experienced speak first. Now, one might think that the claim to knowledge on the basis of age is no different from the claim based on experience; the older are more experienced, and if they are not, as they need not be, their claim is faulty. But the old might claim knowledge on the basis of greater acquaintance with ancient statesmen and events. In this sense, justice means deferring to claims of age, which, in the last analysis, are claims of knowledge. But age might be a detriment to genuine acquaintance; in particular, the old are forgetful. The claims of age therefore receive a silent disclaimer in the dialogue, and here it is primarily the claim of experience which is advanced. This claim is suggested in what Lysimachus says, but it is not identical with it since experience does not guarantee renown, but it is with renown that Lysimachus is primarily concerned. Yet while Socrates stresses this claim, he points to a rival. Socrates might disagree with Laches and Nicias, but if he does so intelligently it could

not be on the basis of greater experience since he is less experienced. Moreover, if he does disagree with what he has learned, he says he will attempt to teach and persuade. But persuasive speech is not identical to experience; experience is not sufficient for persuasive speech and may hardly be necessary. Moreover, persuasion itself is not identical to teaching; teaching may also involve force, the bodily, violence. But more than this, a teaching for which experience is at best necessary but not sufficient is possible even if we ignore rhetorical persuasion and habituation through punishment. Think, for example, of mathematics. Since the precise character of the present subject matter is unclear, the explicit claim to knowledge which Socrates sets up is immediately weakened by the implications of his passing remarks. This question of the connection between teaching and the claims to knowledge will become thematic later in the dialogue.

Nicias' and Laches' speeches in response to Socrates comprise the next part of the dialogue. Nicias' opinion is that this is a useful and noble study. It is useful for the young because by studying it they will not spend time in the other things young men love to do; they will have good bodies through it, as with other exercises, but this exercise is more fitted to free men because for the contest before them now and for athletic contests this training is a training in the instruments of war. The study is beneficial for fighting in the ranks, in order with many others, but its greatest use is when the ranks are broken and one fights alone with another, pursuing and fleeing. Whoever knows it would not suffer under one, or perhaps under many, but would hold more everywhere. Moreover, Nicias continues, this study invites us to desire other noble things. Learners here would desire to learn more about order, and loving honor in that would be inclined toward all things concerning generalship. Indeed, all studies and pursuits connected to this one are noble and valuable to the man who pursues this, and this study leads to them. In addition, this science would make each man in war more courageous and bolder than he is, making us well formed where we need to appear well formed, and at the same time appearing more terrible to the enemy. Therefore, Nicias concludes, it is his opinion that it is necessary to teach this; if Laches has another opinion it would be pleasant to hear it.

Nicias' speech divides roughly into four parts: a young man spends his leisure usefully with this study; it is useful in war in several ways; it leads men to desire what is noble; it increases courage. The center of the speech is the movement from what is useful to what is noble, and the first and fourth and second and third parts are parallel. The speech contains the dialogue's first mention of courage, but the fact that courage is useful for the city is hardly hinted at, let alone said. The speech contains a long discussion of war, but the fact that war is for the city is hardly hinted at, let alone said. While Laches immediately mentioned the battle of Delium in discussing Socrates, and while, as

we will soon see, he can hardly speak without mentioning Athens and Sparta, Nicias makes only an offhand reference to the present "contest" set before them. The stress in Nicias' speech is on distinguishing oneself individually, on forming one's own body, on fighting well when one is alone with another, on holding more everywhere, on loving generalship and all that is honorable and noble. None of this, even the last, is said to be done for the city; rather, it is done for a nobility which is equated with, perhaps even for the sake of, honor. The least important use of the study is fighting in the ranks; the finer use, and what is no longer called useful but merely fine, is concerned with individual distinction.

The form of Nicias' speech is also significant. He uses no specific examples. He points to no particular experience; his speech could have been made as easily by a man with little experience. In fact, his speech could as easily have been made about any number of studies: it is abstract—in this sense an imitation of philosophy—sophistic—and in this sense powerful. Nicias is a man who enjoys listening, a man who respects what is music; what he hears is more important than what he sees. Indeed, Nicias appears to think of the noble things as themselves subjects to learn: no example of what is noble is given that is not what Nicias now calls a "science" or a knowledge. And Nicias nowhere discusses the possibility that a man holding a science can fail to use it or use it basely; the sciences are noble, and to have them is to be noble. The reason for the consultation is thus further complicated, for this study is said to lead to all noble studies, and it is studies which are noble; they are at once ends and means. But what constitutes nobility? In particular, is the noble equivalent to the valuable and honorable, superior to them, or inferior? If, as Nicias says, we continue to desire the noble because we love honor, honor—individual honor—is the cause of noble learning. But honor is dependent upon those who grant it, perhaps even the many from whom Nicias, as well as Lysimachus and Laches, wishes to be separated; it cannot be obtained by our efforts alone. Nicias does not in any way discuss the status of this ultimate reason for studies in his speech. Yet, if he means desire for the noble and the love of honor to be equivalent, his understanding of both is unclear, not least because he would believe in their equivalence. Moreover, although Nicias seems to develop a hierarchy of noble studies, leading to generalship, he in fact speaks of none as nobler than the other, and he apparently reduces them to equivalence. His discussion thus raises the problem of the order of the noble studies, the relation of ends and means. It is a problem also suggested in his abstraction from the public basis of war and his emphasis on man-to-man fighting as opposed to fighting in ranks. Furthermore, Nicias' speech also raises problems concerning the question of sufficient knowledge. He explicitly calls the studies "sciences," but we are not told what knowledge is, as opposed to, say, opinion; and Nicias offers his own

speech as an opinion. Moreover, Socrates and presumably Laches performed well in retreat without having this art of fighting in armor. What, then, is the status of a science which is noble and sufficient for honor in various contests but is apparently not necessary? Nicias' speech does not deserve to win the day because it raises problems of which he seems not to be sufficiently aware. These very problems later prove to be a source of the difficulty in his argument about courage, and here as well his mention of courage and boldness is ambiguous. Courage is not itself called noble but is discussed as an addition after he speaks of what is noble; it is something this study could bring to every man in war, not merely the few. Furthermore, it is connected to the body, bringing us back to the lower considerations at the beginning of Nicias' speech. The science makes men more courageous than they are by giving them better bodies; they therefore appear more fearful to the enemy. Courage thus appears to exist at least partially in the realm of appearance: to appear fearful to enemies is to become more courageous to them. But the better body is real, and the science forming it is not a sham; Nicias intends no slight by connecting courage to education rather than nature. Yet Nicias does not call courage itself a science, and therefore does not, as later, call it knowledge of the terrible. It is decisively related to fear, however, and it is caused or enhanced by a science, and the better body the science gives us presumably could not make us more courageous if we did not see our better form and our enemies' increased fear of it. Still and all, Nicias does not say what courage is, its relationship to fear and science is only hinted at, and it is not itself the noble outcome of this science they are observing, although this science leads us to other noble things. Courage is not the theme of Nicias' speech but is an afterthought, whose relation to the theme is unclear.

Laches speaks next to this assembly. All knowledge is reputed good, and if this with arms is a study they need to learn it, but if its trustees deceive them and it is not a study, why learn it? If it is something, the Spartans would have noticed it since the Spartans' only care is searching for and practicing the studies which enable them to hold more than others in war. But if the Spartans have not noticed it, the art's teachers know that the Spartans are the most serious Greeks about this; to be honored by them would bring much money from the other Greeks just as it does for the tragic poets honored by Athenians. Therefore a tragedian who believes he poeticizes beautifully does not circle around Athens and display to the other cities, but goes straight to Athens to display. But, continues Laches, he sees that these armor-fighters believe Sparta to be an inviolable temple; they circle around it and display to all, chiefly to those who agree that many others are ahead of them in the things of war. And furthermore, Laches continues, he has been next to several of these men in the deeds themselves and has seen what they are. They can look and see that none of these men has be-

come renowned in war, but in all the other cases the celebrities come from among the practitioners. And he has observed Stesilaus himself—whom they have just observed displaying in the crowd and saying great things about himself—elsewhere, in truth, displaying truly where he was not willing. He was on a ship which struck a transport, holding his spear-scythe, a weapon which differed just as he differed from the others. As he was fighting with this “sophism” it became entangled in the transport. The results were ludicrous; those on the transport laughed at his figure, and, finally, those on his own ship could not restrain their own laughter. So, continues Laches, as he said from the beginning, it is not valuable to try to learn this study which is of little use, if not a pretense. Moreover, if a man who supposed he knew this were a coward he would become bolder, only bringing what he is to light; if he were courageous, men would watch him and slander him if he made the smallest mistake. The pretense to such knowledge is liable to envy, and if someone said he had this knowledge he could not escape ridicule unless he were wonderfully greater than the others in virtue. This is his opinion, Laches concludes, and it is now necessary for Socrates to give his advice.

Laches begins by questioning the worth of studies which are either pretenses or lack seriousness. He then gives a reason for doubting the seriousness of this study, namely, the Spartans' unconcern with it. He next shows us that it is a pretense by displaying the foolishness of its leading practitioner when practicing it. He then reminds us of what he said at the beginning, and ends with a speech about its connection to courage. What is immediately striking in Laches' speech is its contrast with that of Nicias. While Nicias did not mention a single name, other than that of Lysimachus, Laches mentions several names and several examples. The worth of an art is not determined in a general speech; it is found by looking at the authorities and at the practitioner's work in the field. All the speeches in the world could not change the foolishness of Stesilaus in action, performing his deeds. And all the speeches in the world could not change the significance of Sparta's silent rejection. The speeches must fit the deeds, not the deeds the speeches. One reason the dialogue is named after Laches is that Socrates' eventual opening of Laches to the genuine priority of speech is the central deed of the dialogue. It is Laches, not Nicias, who first wonders why Socrates has not been included, and it is Laches, not Nicias, who testifies to what appears to be Socrates' courage in action and for the city. But what Socrates' opening of Laches tells us about the problem of courage must be discussed later.

Laches understands learning as valuable only if it is useful, only if it is serious. He does not mention the nobility of study, and he unfavorably contrasts the Athens which welcomes tragedians and their beautiful poetry with Sparta, whose concern is war. In fact, he does not mention nobility or honor in this speech at all. His horizon appears to

be the public, the common good, what is useful for the city; we remember his approval of Lysimachus' remark about the private neglectfulness of the public man. But several things Laches says force us to doubt whether the city is his true horizon. His praise of Sparta clearly must have a basis other than love of Athens, and this is also true of his doubts about Athens' openness to sophists and poets. Moreover, he dislikes the many and can therefore be no partisan of Athenian democracy. Thus, it is not so much democratic Athens as Athens the fatherland which is his horizon, the traditional, the non-innovative. Yet even here there is a question, for Laches' own story points out the fact that not only poetry and science but laughter is trans-political, and one cannot always help laughing even at one's friends. Still, Laches fears laughter, fears ridicule. His virtue is not wonderfully greater than the others but is subject to the city's ridicule. We may say, provisionally, that Laches fails to give a proper place to what is universal, beyond the city, playful, because he is insufficiently concerned with standing alone, with the private. Still, he somehow recognizes that the city cannot be the final horizon. And as we see later, he is motivated by a love of victory, but this love of victory, rather than enabling him to withstand ridicule, is a cause of this fear.

Laches makes clear both the grounds on which he offers advice—the evidence of his own eyes—and the grounds of trustworthiness: is the advisor obviously authoritative, and has he proved himself in deed? Laches follows Socrates' criterion of experience. But perhaps Stesilaus' failure is due to chance; and perhaps his failure does not show his foolishness in every other martial art. Laches does not consider this; he does not show why Sparta's greater concern necessarily leads to greater competence; nor does he indicate who would be preferred if Sparta's authority and his own eyes had clashed. Moreover, the evidence of his own eyes is ambiguous, at least to the following extent: Laches relies upon the universal ridicule which Stesilaus generates rather than upon independent judgment, but we know that he could not believe all ridicule to be justified. For these reasons, then, the sufficiency of his knowledge and the trustworthiness of advice based at least partially on untrustworthy ridicule are questionable.

There are also problems with Laches' understanding of the precise purpose of the advice. Indeed, Laches is very vague. He tries to prove the art useless in war, but is success in war equivalent to value or nobility or being the best? He tries to show that the science makes the cowardly more obvious and the courageous more envied; it does not enhance virtue. But is becoming courageous the purpose of the advice? Lysimachus has not said so, and Nicias gave it a subordinate position. If Laches seeks to suggest that courage is the ultimate purpose, he has hidden his intention well; his remarks seem designed primarily to counter Nicias. Moreover, he is even less enlightening than Nicias about what courage is, though he suggests it is a virtue, as Nicias had

not. He nowhere indicates how one knows courage sufficiently; if becoming courageous is the goal of the advising, he has not suggested credentials for teaching it. In general, we might suspect that Laches could never say that courage is knowledge or that knowledge necessarily enhances it: whereas it is possible to mistake Nicias for a man who believes knowledge is noble, for its own sake, no one would so mistake Laches. Yet his criticism of this study centers on its being a sham study; whether or not a true study would necessarily be closed to cowards and would give no cause for ridicule by allowing no mistakes is an open question. Still, Laches explicitly divorces courage and virtue from genuine possession of that knowledge to which Stesilaus only pretends, for he can still speak even of the man who is wonderfully great in virtue as pretending to this knowledge. But if courage is not knowledge, or if knowledge is not even necessary in bringing it about, what sort of thing is it and with what does it deal? Laches' fear of envy and ridicule seems to be a form of cowardice, an inability to stand against common fears, though perhaps it is justified. And Laches' earlier speech and others' speeches as well have been filled with references to fleeing, separating, letting go, pointing to a possible connection between courage and proper division. Moreover, Laches' remark that Stesilaus displays himself in truth where he is not "willing," while Socrates earlier is differentiated from others in the flight from Delium who were not "willing" to do as he did, points to some unexplored connection among courage, knowledge, and consent. What courage is, therefore, remains uncertain, and Laches' understanding of the status of the purpose of the consultation remains obscure.

The next part of the dialogue begins with Lysimachus. He asks Socrates with whom he would vote; if Nicias and Laches had agreed, this would not be needed. Socrates asks Lysimachus whether he will do whatever most of them praise, and Lysimachus asks what else anyone can do. Socrates then turns to Melesias. He asks whether he would be persuaded by the many or whether he would be persuaded by someone educated and trained by a good gymnast if he were looking for necessary exercise for his son's contest. Melesias says he would be persuaded by the coach, but hesitates to say he would be more persuaded by the coach than by the four of them. Socrates then says, and Melesias agrees, that knowledge and not the greater number should judge if noble judgment is the expectation. They therefore need to look for someone artful concerning what is consulted about and must be persuaded by him even if he is alone, for Lysimachus and Melesias are venturing that possession which chances to be their greatest—the management of the house depends on whether the boys become useful or not, and they must give the matter much forethought. Melesias agrees, and agrees as well that to look for the most artistic concerning contests they should have looked for someone who has studied and practiced and been well taught.

This seventh part consists of the irresolution, the failure to solve the problem. It is then followed by seven more parts which parallel the first seven. Lysimachus cannot choose among the speeches because he is concerned not with their reasons but with their conclusions. The assembly's vote is tied, and Socrates must break the tie. It is entirely possible that Socrates would have been silent if Laches and Nicias had agreed; the disagreement of the experts is the opening through which Socrates the questioner enters. Lysimachus sees no way to decide other than by majority vote, which Socrates equates with the majority's praise: what Lysimachus had said at the beginning about sufficient knowledge proves to mean no more than the praise of the well reputed. Socrates therefore returns to the connection of advice and knowledge, in a new preface where Melesias replaces Lysimachus. But Socrates turns to Melesias not to show what knowledge is, nor yet to demonstrate that that they do not know the subject of the consultation, but simply to bring out the ordinary view that where an art is concerned the artisan, who is the knower, must be listened to, and not the persuasive many. Knowledgeable advice is the advice of the artisan, not the advice of the famous. From this point of view, everyone who is artless belongs to the many, and the reputation of Laches, Nicias, and Socrates and the friendship of Lysimachus count for nothing. Socrates achieves Melesias' agreement to this by abstracting from, looking away from, several problems. First, it has not been demonstrated that what they are searching for is a subject for an artisan. Nicias had indicated this, but Laches had indicated the opposite. Socrates covers this difficulty by acting as if they are concerned with "contests" at a crucial moment in the argument, shortly after he was won agreement that there is an artisan in gymnastic contests. But though contests have been mentioned, they have hardly been emphasized as the point of the consultation, and Lysimachus has not discussed them. Moreover, Socrates' next line of questioning concerns the very problem of the unclarity about the purpose of the consultation, and finally issues in a decision that courage, not contests, or even victory, is that purpose. But courage is not by any common view a subject of the arts; there is no obvious maker of courage and physician to the cowardly. The law appears to direct us toward courage and to punish cowardice; perhaps the gods do so too, but neither is obviously an artisan. Second, Socrates does not explicitly discuss the problem of the reliability of the artisan, his simple speech, but he hints at it. We are to be persuaded by the artisan, not the majority. That is, we are still to be persuaded because we are not skilled ourselves. But this makes possible the artisan's duplicity, and we could sketch reasons why he might indeed be duplicitous. Socrates' discussion of the management of the household suggests some of these reasons. The future of their sons may be Melesias' and Lysimachus' great concern, but it is not the artisan's great concern, since artisans have their own households; even the poets take payment.

And the use of the sons in managing the house may be Lysimachus' and Melesias' great concern for them, but it is not everyone's great concern for them. The law, or the artisan concerned with their performance in the city's contests, will direct them to the city's business, perhaps even to managing its affairs. Finally, Socrates for the moment ignores both the difficulty in a non-knower's knowing who an artisan is, and the distinguishing marks of knowledge or skill in and of themselves. He even treats them as the same. Presumably it will be easy enough to see who has studied, practiced, and been well taught. And presumably these three qualities comprise the basis of the artisan's skill; the example of the gymnastic coach could hardly make us doubt this. But whether these signs to the non-knower are always accurate or easily interpreted, and whether these qualities comprise knowledge, is a difficult matter, and the difficulties are more immediately before us if we think of courage as the subject under discussion. By abstracting from these problems Socrates has won agreement to his simple point.

But he does not now pursue them. Rather, he asks a different question of Melesias, a surprising one because Socrates' previous questions seemed to take its answer for granted. Before looking at which of them is skillful, Socrates says, what is it that they are searching for of the teachers? Melesias does not understand. Socrates then clarifies by offering his opinion that there was no agreement at the beginning about what they advise about and are looking for, no agreement about that for the sake of which one of them is artful and possesses teachers. Nicias asks whether they are not looking to see whether youths need to study fighting in armor. Socrates agrees. But, he asks, when someone asks whether a drug is needed for the eyes, is the consultation about the drug or about the eyes? Nicias says it is about the eyes, and similarly agrees about horses and their bridles. Therefore, Socrates concludes, in one speech, when someone looks at what is for the sake of something, the consultation is about that for the sake of which he looks, not the reverse. Nicias agrees, and he agrees to Socrates' further remarks that they are looking for an advisor skillful in treating that for the sake of which they are looking; in particular, they are looking at a study for the sake of the soul of a youth; they therefore are looking to see if one of them is artful about, and has come under good teachers concerning, treating the soul, and treating it nobly. Laches then asks Socrates if he has not seen some become more artful without teachers than with them. Socrates says he has; but one would not trust them merely because they claimed to be good craftsmen if they did not show some work of their art, worked well and often.

This part of the dialogue concerns the subject or reason for the consultation. Socrates replaces the vagueness we have noted all along with a specific question: what is it that they are searching for? And he provides and wins Nicias' agreement to an answer: they are searching for one who is skillful in treating the souls of youth; the consultation is

for the sake of young men's souls. Why Nicias agrees that this is the subject is unclear, for he himself had not believed it to be the subject, nor does he mention it once in the entire dialogue. Indeed, the soul is never discussed, and the specific difference between the souls of the old and the young is similarly shrouded. But the examples Socrates uses once more suggest the possibilities. An eye is part of the body, and therefore parallel to part of the soul, if the soul has parts, not to the whole soul. But the eye is treated by the same physician who treats the rest of the body. Is there, then, but one physician for the soul? Moreover, the physician is not the only one who deals with the body; the gymnastic trainer has already been discussed. Perhaps the trainer is concerned with the body's excellence, while the physician is a therapist who restores the body to its natural state. But the trainer too can be a therapist, and health itself might be the body's excellence. Moreover, the trainer brings about many excellences, not just one. In this he is similar to the bridle-maker, whose bridles would be adjusted not merely to the horse's nature but to the different uses to which the horse is put: a pack horse is not a fast horse and neither is necessarily the most fertile horse. But Socrates does not even mention the excellence of the eye or of the soul except to note that their search is for what treats the soul nobly. He will soon discuss the problem of the soul's excellence thematically, but never in a way which explicitly deals with the problems we have raised.

Socrates' discussion of artisans here is also problematic. He suggests that the test of an art is equally the production of results and the teaching of the art to others, to students. In fact, Socrates does not clearly differentiate the two; there is scarcely a hint that there can be one without the other. But a physician who restores health cannot necessarily teach his art; he cannot even necessarily teach his art to the same man he has restored to health. The two activities work with different materials. The same is true of the trainer. Moreover, the trainer who can prepare athletes cannot necessarily use his art to make himself outstanding if his gifts are limited. Even the physician cannot necessarily cure himself. There is therefore a difference between having and teaching the art and having or producing the good the art can bring. Socrates at best alludes to this distinction, but it is an important distinction for the subject they are beginning to discuss. For it is questionable whether anyone can care for the soul who does not have a soul. In particular, it is questionable whether a vicious man can teach or produce virtue, or a coward teach and produce courage. But men tend horses, our ophthalmologists always seem to wear glasses, and superstars are reputed to be poor managers. Therefore, the identification of the subject of their consultation with the product or object of an art and the identification of its teacher with an artisan cannot be as simple as Socrates is suggesting that it is. What he says is sound advice on the trustworthiness of advisors, but it continues to skirt the

problem of what knowledge is in and of itself, what it is insofar as it is originally discovered as such. In sum, the examples Socrates uses point to a number of questions about the precise status of the "for the sakes of which," the ends, and of the arts dealing with them, questions which must be continually raised in order to understand the rest of the dialogue.

Socrates has said what they are searching for. He now proceeds. Since they have been invited to advise, he says, they ought to display the goodness, successful treatment of souls, and teaching of the teachers they might say they have. If one of them says he has his own works, he is to show those Athenians, strangers, slaves, or free men who agree they have become good through this. Otherwise, they are to search for another to invite and not risk their comrades' accusation that they have corrupted their sons. He himself, Socrates continues, was not generated by a teacher in this; though he has desired it from youth, he has not had the money to pay the sophists, who alone claimed to be able to make him noble and good. And he has not yet discovered the art. But he would not wonder if Nicias or Laches had discovered it. Indeed, says Socrates, it is his opinion that they are able to educate human beings; they would not have let go so fearlessly about the needful practices and labors for the young if they did not trust that they knew sufficiently. He trusts them, he continues, yet he wonders that they differ. Therefore he is inviting Lysimachus not to let Laches and Nicias go, but to ask them, saying that Socrates says he does not profess the knowledge about the thing to be a sufficient judge of which of their claims is true. And Laches and Nicias are to tell who is the cleverest man they have known concerning the nurture of the young, whether they know from learning or discovering, and, if from learning, who the teacher and similar artisans are so that they can go to these if Laches and Nicias lack leisure because of the city's affairs. They are to persuade these with money and favors so that the boys disgrace neither themselves nor their ancestors. But if they are discoverers, they are to give an example of someone they have changed from base to noble and good; if this is their first educating they need to consider that they are risking their sons and their friends' boys, not some Carian.

This part of the dialogue consists of Socrates' claiming that and why he lacks the necessary knowledge, just as Lysimachus had done earlier. His discussion of his lack develops several of the problems we have been discussing. The teacher's goodness is to be displayed, with the implication that this goodness is something other than successful treatment of others but that both are always found together; the same is true of the teacher's teaching. Treatment of the soul is still discussed, but this treatment apparently is to make men noble and good, gentlemen. But if this is so, nobility and goodness, and not the soul, ought to be the subject under discussion. Moreover, if the art is therapeutic,

nobility and goodness would be a state as common as health, not a rare excellence. Socrates suggests this by speaking of the goodness of Athenians, strangers, free men, and slaves: the art's application is not restricted to the Athenian oligarch. He further suggests this by speaking of the education of "human beings," not the education of a manly man. But manly men have been the subject up to now. At the same time, he reminds us that wealth, or at least leisure, is necessary for education: how could a slave become a gentleman? Socrates' remarks therefore once more suggest the difficulties in the discussion of art and the problems in considering art alone to be the soul's therapy. Moreover, they suggest the necessity of clarifying what state the treatment of the soul seeks to generate in it. What is the connection of the noble and the good, what are they in themselves, and how are they related to the soul, whose treatment appears to bring them about?

Socrates' speech also develops the problems of trust and of the non-knower's recognition of the artisan. The advisee does not know, but he need not know in order to see that, when two advisors contradict, at least one cannot be a knower. Unfortunately, this does not tell him which one knows. But Socrates also suggests that the claimant to knowledge show his good works, and have them testified to. If a man can produce men whose eyes he has restored to health, and if they confirm him, this proves his skill. But this relies on our knowing what eyes, or good eyes, are; advisees are not always ignorant of what the art ought to produce even if they cannot produce it themselves. But is what a soul is, particularly a good and noble one, so obvious that the knowledge of who has one is common knowledge? Indeed, is it such that a man so easily knows he has one himself and therefore can testify for its producer? This becomes a decisive problem in what follows, and it is exacerbated by the fact that the distinction between a thing and its excellence, between sight and the eye, between the soul and the good and the beautiful soul, has not yet been explicitly made.

But even if the advisee can ultimately judge the outcome, it may be too late. It therefore remains necessary to make certain that the advisor is trustworthy. But the usual way of engaging advisors on these matters is to "persuade" them with money or gifts. This by its very nature cannot ensure perfect trustworthiness. And even friendship, as we have suggested, will not ensure simple speech where a common good is lacking. Socrates hints at a solution when he speaks of accusations of corrupting the young: the law is concerned with its citizens; education cannot be a private matter. This would imply that the law is the guide to what an uncorrupted or healthy or excellent soul is. But the law is made by assemblies such as their own, not by artisans as such. The law's accusations and penalties are therefore useful only if the law understands the soul and its nobility, but such an understanding would be accidental, if it existed at all, precisely because assemblies are not as such composed of the knowledgeable. Still, the law

is the great teacher and guide for the development of character. This whole problem of the law, knowledge, and the soul is never treated thematically in the *Laches*, but is hinted at in various places, and is of crucial importance the one time "law" is said. The abstraction from "regime," which is never mentioned, and "law," which is mentioned only once, governs the dialogue most clearly in the section where Nicias equates virtue with knowledge.

Lysimachus now speaks to Laches and Nicias. It would please him, he says, if they would demonstrate in speeches what Socrates would question. He invited them in the beginning because he believed they had or would have to care for their boys' education. If they do not differ they are to consider this question by speaking to each other in community with Socrates. Nicias then tells Lysimachus that it indeed is true that Lysimachus has not been with Socrates since he was a boy unless he followed him in the temple or was near him in some other gathering of the deme. For he does not know that whoever converses near Socrates necessarily converses about something other than that on which they first began, not stopping his speech until he gives a speech about how he himself passes his life. Once Socrates has burst in, he will not release him until he has tested this well and beautifully. Nicias continues that he knows that one necessarily experiences this with Socrates and that it pleases him to be near him; it is not bad to be reminded of what one has done or is doing that is not noble, and it is necessary to take much forethought in order not to be blameworthy for the life afterward. As Solon says, one must be willing to learn to think rightly as long as one lives. Indeed, says Nicias, he pretty much trusted that with Socrates present their speech would turn out to be about themselves, not the boys.

Laches then speaks. He is simple, he says, concerning speeches, or double, a lover and hater of speeches. He is supernaturally pleased when a man who is a man and worth the speech he speaks converses about virtue or wisdom or truth; for he observes whether the speech and the speaker fit and harmonize, and such a man in his opinion is the musical one who harmonizes beautiful harmonies, not on some childish instrument, but a harmonizing in life, a symphonizing of his speeches to the deeds of his own life, harmonizing in the only Greek manner—artlessly, Dorically, not Ionically, Phrygically, or Lydically. Anyone would opine him to be a lover of speech because he accepts what such men say so eagerly; but the opposite pains him more the better he speaks, and makes him seem a hater of speech. He has not experienced Socrates' words, but he has experienced his deeds and discovered him to be worth beautiful speech and completely frank. It would also please him to be examined by Socrates; he is also willing to be taught as he grows older, though only what is useful. But the teacher must be good, or he will appear to be a difficult learner, though he does not care if his teacher is younger or has little reputation. Socrates must

teach and question him, and also learn what he knows; in this way, Laches concludes, he has been disposed to Socrates from the day when Socrates was in great danger with him and gave proof of his virtue. Socrates replies that they cannot be accused of not being ready to advise and look, and Lysimachus then interjects. The deed belongs to all of them and Socrates is one of them; Socrates is to take his place and advise by conversing with them, for he forgets the questions he intends to put because of his great age, and if the speech becomes another one in the middle he does not remember at all. Therefore, they are to speak among themselves, and he and Melesias will do whatever they advise. Socrates then tells Nicias and Laches that they are to obey Lysimachus and Melesias.

This section of the dialogue is parallel to the section in the first part, where Nicias and Laches vouch for Socrates and all agree to advise Lysimachus. The change in the community in the second part is demonstrated by Lysimachus' asking Laches and Nicias to advise now by speaking in community with Socrates, answering his questions. But what Lysimachus says indicates that he does not fully understand the meaning of Socrates' process of replacing displays of presumed knowledge with a questioning search for knowledge. Yet Lysimachus knows his inability, and he therefore sees that he must be replaced; the best he can hope for is that this new search will bring some result. A search through questioning, through dialogue, makes greater demands than a consultation through speeches, and the greater the demands, the lesser the claims of age. If questioning and answering is *the* test of knowledge, then age, whose claim is based on memory of the oldest, fails this test. Questioning which, as such, opposes tradition points up age's failing in the faculty which is the basis of its claim, memory. Socrates' procedure dissolves the usual grounds of knowledge and reliability, age and reputation, as Laches himself sees. Only "experience" remains as a counterclaim to speech in dialogues.

Nicias' and Laches' speeches are about Socrates in relation to nobility and virtue. The guiding thought in Nicias' speech is that Socrates himself is a teacher of nobility and right thinking. The guiding thought in Laches' speech is that Socrates is virtuous and that therefore it is suitable that he speak about virtue. But neither of them has established that he himself knows what is noble or virtuous; therefore their testimony is no guarantee of the truth. Indeed, if one can learn or be helped in learning right thinking and noble deeds from Socrates then Socrates either has lied when he said he neither has learned nor discovered the art of treating souls, or he is silent about some third way of acquiring it. And if he is truly virtuous, as Laches suggests, then Socrates has either lied or become virtuous without the aid of a taught or discovered art. Moreover, the speeches of Laches and Nicias, particularly that of Laches, once more raise the question of whether the skilled artisan must himself possess the quality his art can produce. Laches in effect trans-

forms art to speech and forces speech to harmonize with deeds: virtue is at least a necessary, if not the necessary and sufficient, condition for fitting speeches about virtue and wisdom. This need not require that a virtuous man cannot attain his virtue through speeches, but the speeches must belong to a virtuous man: neither students nor a diploma, but whether you yourself possess what you are discussing, is central. Virtuous men can still learn things of use from each other's speeches, perhaps useful, though not novel, techniques, but speech is secondary: a musical man such as Nicias' teacher Damon is a discordant sophist.

Laches' speech reveals that Laches is hardly the bumpkin some take him for. He subtly suggests the inferiority of speech by reminding us of its duplicity, which contrasts unfavorably with the admirable simplicity of Socrates' deed. And he effectively contrasts his own view of harmony and learning with what he can guess comes from Nicias and his music teacher. Laches is revealed here as a man who cannot resist seeing Nicias as an opponent, and therefore deserving of defeat, as a man who can be quick to attack, and as a man who is hardly stupid. He continues to demonstrate his admiration for manly and Doric things and his concern for what is Greek. His horizon appears to be Greece and what is pre-eminent among the Greeks. It is therefore beyond the city but short of the universality of knowledge. Art is worth learning only if it is useful, and whether or not it is useful seems to depend on whether it contributes to the serious and manly Greek business, pre-eminence among the Greeks in war, victory for the sake of victory. Virtue itself, to judge from this example of a virtuous act, seems more useful than shining. For these reasons Laches can remain attached to the fatherland and fearful of men's envy and ridicule, for it is as a citizen that he participates in the greatest of Greek affairs, yet can criticize his city's legislator and the many who rule it, if not to their faces. Still, this remains only a provisional understanding of Laches because we do not yet possess all the evidence about his nature, his understanding of courage, and their connection.

Nicias' speech presents Socrates as a man who converses for the sake of the nobility of his partners; it tells us of Socrates the teacher of righteousness. To the extent that Socrates converses for the sake of wisdom, his own wisdom, Nicias' understanding of Socrates reveals Nicias' limits. He does not love knowledge for its own sake, but seeks it for the sake of the life afterward; forethought and what he learns from Socrates are necessary, but not fully beautiful in and of themselves. Yet, what Nicias had called noble earlier was hard to differentiate from knowledge, although love of honor appeared to be the cause of the desire for noble science. And he will soon say that virtue is a kind of knowledge, though courage earlier was among the useful, not the noble, things. Therefore we would be forced to say that if Nicias is concerned with knowledge for its own sake, it is in a way different from

the Socrates we see in this dialogue itself, who questions the interlocutors' opinions, not their lives. Somehow, even if knowledge is noble for Nicias it remains subordinate. One hint in the direction of a solution is offered by Nicias' ambiguous remark concerning the life afterward. This could mean the rest of his years or his life after death. If it means his life after death, then what is noble is primarily instrumental for what it can ensure, virtue is for the sake of obeying the gods, and the problems of knowledge, virtue, the city, nobility, and the soul, of whether the knower and teacher of souls is himself virtuous, are further complicated. Nicias is concerned for his private wellbeing, whatever this may be, and, unlike Laches, has nothing to say of Socrates' public service.

Socrates, Nicias, and Laches will obey Lysimachus and Melesias. It would not be bad, Socrates now continues, to examine who taught and educated them. But looking at something else would lead to the same, and be more nearly from the beginning. For if they chanced to know about this, what by being alongside would make what it is beside better, and if they could join this to that, they would clearly know how this could be best and most easily acquired for what they are advising about. If they chanced to know that sight makes the eyes it is beside better, and if they could join this to the eyes then they clearly know what sight itself is, and it is about how this could be most easily and best acquired that they have become advisors. If they did not know what sight or hearing is, they could hardly become advisors or physicians of valuable speeches about eyes and ears, about the noblest way of acquiring hearing or sight. Laches agrees. Therefore, Socrates says to Laches, they are invited to advise what way would bring virtue beside the souls of the sons to make them better, and they should begin by knowing what virtue is, for if they did not chance to know virtue, how could they become advisors about how to possess it nobly? Laches agrees. They therefore say that they know what virtue is; but of that which they have known they can doubtless say what it is. Laches agrees once more. But, Socrates continues, they should not look straightaway at the whole of virtue, but at some part, to see whether they have sufficient knowledge about it. And they should choose the part of virtue which fighting in armor seems to tend to, what the many opine to be courage. Laches agrees that many opine it to be this. Therefore, Socrates concludes, they must attend to saying what courage is and afterward look at the way the young can be brought beside it insofar as this can be done through studies and practices. He then asks Laches to say what courage is.

In this section Socrates sets the terms for the rest of the discussion. If they know what sight or virtue is, they can say what it is, and, presumably, if they cannot say they do not know. But Socrates gives no criteria of what an adequate definition would be, nor any other criteria for knowing virtue. Here there is no call to point to a teacher

in speech or to evidence of their own training of adequate definers. There is also no call to show that they are sighted or virtuous and no call to show their teachers in virtue. Adequate speech has replaced the other criteria; it is therefore possible for Laches to speak first here because reputation and experience are irrelevant. Laches agrees to this because of, not in spite of, his understanding of the superiority of deed to speech; there ought to be no difficulty in harmonizing speech to deed if the deeds are virtuous; and who, in any event, does not know what sight is?

Socrates' return to the primacy of the question of what is forces us to consider again the relationship between the final end of the advice and how the end is achieved. Originally, what they needed to know was the soul and how to treat it; now they need to know what virtue is. What is the connection between these two? Socrates at first makes it seem that the knowledge of what makes something better is no different from the knowledge of how the thing can actually acquire its perfection. He later distinguishes the two, and finally indicates that one is necessary, but not sufficient, for the other. If we do not know what virtue is we cannot advise about how to possess it nobly. The difficulty here concerns the intermediary: the need to know the eye or soul is passed over, but how can one know what makes the soul better unless one knows what the soul is? Perhaps knowledge of the soul is included in the knowledge of its perfection, or in the knowledge of how to bring it its perfection, or in some combination. Yet, in the earlier discussion, the eye or soul was the explicit end for the sake of which the consultation was taking place; an advisor who did not know it could not succeed. But this understanding collapsed into the discussion of therapists for the soul, a discussion in which the problem of the soul's nobility and goodness could not help arising. The issue is therefore confused; the inadequate discussion haunts the dialogue. In particular, although courage is only part of virtue, it is never connected to any part of the soul, which, indeed, is never said to have parts. The possibility that the parts of virtue may be differentiated in terms of their different objects is in effect abandoned by Socrates later in the dialogue. So, if the soul does not have parts, why does its perfection have parts? But sight is the perfection of the eyes, and as the perfection of part of the body it is only part of health. Socrates, of course, sometimes teaches that the soul has parts, notably in the *Republic*. But there is no mention of them as parts here. Indeed, there is no mention in the *Laches* of *thumos*; yet in the *Republic* courage was the virtue of *thumos*. We may also assume this abstraction to be deliberate because the disproportion between sight/eye:virtue/soul in the precise neighborhood of a discussion of virtue's parts is so obvious. But its meaning for the understanding of courage can, of course, not yet be clear.

The outstanding result of this section is the transformation of the discussion to an examination of virtue and, in particular, of courage.

This transformation is hardly obvious. Virtue has been mentioned, but so has nobility and goodness. Why, then, is the discussion not about this? Virtue will make souls "better" by being beside them and in this way substitutes for the goodness or becoming the "best" for which the interlocutors are searching. Virtue has primarily been understood as useful by Laches and Nicias in their earlier statements about it and about courage. And to compare virtue to sight is to imply once more that it is not so much an outstanding as an ordinary excellence. Laches himself had earlier distinguished between wonderful virtue and a not wonderful but still courageous man. Indeed, their very discrimination of courage is done with the help of the opinion of the many. All this suggests that the virtue Laches and Nicias will be discussing here is of a lower order, or that the relation of what is noble to virtue is problematic. Part of Socrates' refutation of Laches will depend on this difficulty. In any event, virtue is not the obvious topic for discussion. And, beyond this, Socrates' discussion here once more suggests difficulties in the relation between virtue and knowledge. The abandoned search for teachers is also an abandoned search for someone who has made them better; having the art is the same as having what the art brings. But this, as we have argued, is questionable. Yet virtue is a perfection of the soul, and knowledge itself appears to be a perfection or faculty of the soul. If this is so, then perhaps having knowledge and being virtuous are more intimately connected than being a physician and being healthy. Indeed, if the soul's virtue is itself some form of knowledge, then it is possible to understand how finding what virtue is can substitute for a search for what can bring it about: the knowledge that brings it may be the same as the knowledge which it is, and the knowledge which it is may be or may include knowledge of the soul. In fact, this search itself that they are about to conduct will reveal itself as an instance of virtue in action. The name for such possibilities would, to judge from the *Republic*, be philosophy. But philosophy is not mentioned, let alone discussed, in the *Laches*. The ensuing discussion with Laches leads up to, but falls short of, the explicit understanding of philosophy as the one thing needful.

Socrates' selection of courage is also not inevitable. There is a clear connection of courage to war, and both Laches and Nicias mentioned it in their speeches, but justice has also been mentioned by several speakers, and it too has an obvious connection with war. Wisdom or prudence is another candidate but less likely, it seems, to be accepted by Laches. Perhaps, then, the implication in the dialogue so far that virtue need not be out of the ordinary is particularly suitable to courage, though it is not clear why this should be. The fact that courage is introduced under the aegis of the many does not prove that there is no more outstanding courage; Laches' distinction in his speech of advice in fact appears to concern ordinary as opposed to wonderful cour-

age. Rather, courage is selected on account of a reason connected to this appearance of lowness: of all the virtues it is the one which seems least in need of wisdom or prudence or knowledge. For this reason Laches can be driven to a full dissociation of courage and prudence; genuine courage can plausibly appear to be the very opposite of knowing, but this is not as clear with the other virtues. The theme of the relation of searching and knowing to virtue and politics is therefore seen in a peculiarly fundamental or original light when courage is what is being discussed. The dialogue is therefore about courage for the same reason it is called *Laches*.¹

Socrates has asked Laches what courage is, and Laches replies that it is not difficult: if someone is willing to stay in the order to repel the enemy and not flee, one would know he is courageous. Socrates replies that his own unclarity may be the cause of Laches' having distinguished something other than what Socrates intended. He too could say that someone is somehow courageous who would stay in order fighting the enemy. But what of one who would fight the enemy fleeing? How fleeing, Laches asks? Just as the Scythians are said to fight, Socrates replies, not less fleeing than pursuing; and Homer praises Aeneas' horses for knowing how to pursue swiftly, and be afraid, and he speaks an encomium of Aeneas for his knowledge of fear and calls him the contriver of fear. And he spoke beautifully, Laches replies, for he spoke about chariots, and Socrates is speaking about Scythian horsemen; this is the way of fighting with horses, but the Greek way of fighting in arms is as he, Laches, says. Except for the Spartans, Socrates replies, who are said in Platea to have fled, not being willing to stay and fight the Persians in wicker shields; rather, they turned around and fought like cavalry and won victory in the fight. Laches agrees that this is true. Therefore, Socrates continues, he wished to hear not only about the courageous in arms, but also in horses, and in the whole class of war, and not only in war, but in relation to sea perils, illness, poverty, the political, and not only in relation to pain and fear but also about those who fight cleverly about desires and pleasures, standing or turning. For some are somehow courageous in all of this; some have acquired courage, some cowardice. Laches very much agrees to this. Socrates then asks him to say what courage is in all of this, but first helps Laches learn more clearly what was said. It is just as if Socrates had asked what quickness is, as it happens for us in running, harp playing, speaking, and many others, and is nearly the same possessed by arms, legs, mouth, and voice. If someone asked Socrates what it is which he says is named quickness in all of this he would answer: the power which in less time accomplishes much. Laches remarks that Socrates has spoken correctly; Socrates then asks Laches to try to tell

¹ Compare the number of uses of courage and its derivatives with the number of speeches made by Laches.

of courage in this way, what power it is which is the same in pleasure, pain, and all they spoke of and is therefore called courage. Laches replies that it seems to him to be some endurance of the soul, if he is to tell of the natural concerning courage through all. But, Socrates replies, he believes that all endurance cannot appear to Laches to be courage. For he almost knows that Laches believes courage to be among the noblest things. Among the noblest, Laches replies. And therefore, Socrates continues, endurance after prudence is noble and good, but after imprudence it is the opposite, harmful and mischievous, and thus Laches cannot say it is noble. But then he cannot agree that this endurance is courageous since it is not noble and courage is noble. Therefore, according to his speech, courage is prudent endurance. Laches agrees to each step, including the final one. But, then, Socrates continues, in what is it prudent, in all great and small? Would Laches call courageous one who endures in prudent spending, seeing that by spending he would possess more? Or is the physician courageous who endures and does not bend in not giving food or drink to his son or someone else who begs for it, but suffers from a lung inflammation? Laches would not, in either case. Would Laches say that when a man endures in war and is willing to fight, calculating prudently, knowing that others will assist him, that the other fighters are lesser and weaker, and that his position is better, he, enduring prudently and with equipment, is more courageous than the one in the opposite camp willing to stand and endure? No, says Laches, it is that one in the opposite camp. But he then agrees with Socrates that the endurance of the first is at least not more imprudent than that of the other. And he also agrees that he who endures in horsefighting knowing horses is less courageous than he who is without knowledge, and similarly with slinging, archery, or some other art. And he also agrees, reluctantly, that the many who would be willing to dive into a well and endure in this deed without being clever are more courageous than the clever, but that they are more imprudent than those who venture such a deed by art. Yet, continues Socrates, they had said that imprudent boldness and endurance are base and hurtful and that courage is something noble, but now they are saying that base imprudent endurance is courage. They are thus not speaking nobly; somehow they are not harmonized Dorically, the deeds not symphonizing with the words. For by their deeds it would likely be said that they participate in courage, but by their speech it would not, and it does not seem noble that they are disposed this way. Laches strongly agrees at each step. But perhaps, continues Socrates, they wish to be persuaded by the speech which commands endurance, at least to the extent that they will be persistent and enduring in the search in order that they not be laughed at by courage itself for not being courageous in their search for it, if mostly this endurance itself is courage. He is ready, Laches replies, not to desist. Yet he is not used to speech such as this. But some love of victory takes hold and he is truly

irritated that he is not saying what he understands. He is of the opinion that he understands what courage is, but does not know how it escaped just now so he could not grasp it and say it in speech. But the good hunter needs to chase after and not release, replies Socrates; therefore, he suggests, and Laches agrees, that they invite Nicias to the hunt if he has better resources.

Socrates' discussion of courage with Laches and Nicias comprises one part of the dialogue, parallel to the speeches of advice Nicias and Laches gave. Laches' first opinion reflects what he has said about Socrates' virtue: a courageous man is one who is willing to stand. Socrates shows the inadequacy of this opinion on the most narrow ground: those who turn around are also called courageous. And he later elicits Laches' acknowledgment that divers can be courageous—direction is irrelevant. Socrates' argument is immediately persuasive, but what is said by both Socrates and Laches must be discussed in more detail. First, Laches speaks of staying in order. But Socrates shows that infantry order is not the only order, and that the conventional order sometimes needs breaking. It needs breaking for the purpose of victory. What Laches forgets both here and in the ensuing argument is the relation of courage and order to victory. Laches proves to be a lover of victory, but the love of victory is at odds with an understanding of courage here and later which sees courage as dissociated from victory; the prudent general cannot be courageous. What courage is for, and therefore the full being of courage, is not understood. Second, Socrates uses examples drawn from Homer and the Spartans in this first section. Laches' distrust of tragedians does not extend to Homer; Homer is a traditional teacher. But Homer is insufficient; the example from Homer is not decisive for Laches and is valid because it harmonizes with Laches' own experience of cavalry. But the Spartan example clinches the argument. Yet, when we examine the content of this example, we see that it should have taught Laches that the Spartan victory was achieved through a reasonable flight, not blind determination, and through an innovative, not reckless, action. But Laches' final defeat is tied to his very inability to properly connect courage, caution, and boldness; the cause of this is his inability to fit courage and courageous actions into a whole, such as victory in war. Third, Laches' opinion is that courageous action is one in which there is no fleeing. Socrates shows that there can be flight. The flight Laches has in mind must be headlong disorder, since Socrates' virtue was displayed in what Laches calls a flight, a retreat. The connection of courage to proper or improper separation, letting go, flight, is therefore once more suggested, but it is not explicitly developed in the rest of Laches' argument with Socrates. Rather, flight and standing are absorbed in "endurance." Finally, Socrates connects courage to fear and knowledge of fear in the example from Homer. By implication, courage could neither be fearlessness nor action which is without knowledge

and contrivance. Laches will later founder on these points as well as on the others; how courage is to be connected to knowledge is something he cannot properly grasp, but that it somehow must be is what he is taught.

After Laches' first attempt, Socrates clarifies his intention. He broadens the field of objects of courage, as if Laches' narrow focus caused his difficulty. The objects appear to split into two types, pains and fears and desires and pleasures. The status of war is ambiguous. Socrates gives examples of the pains, but none of the pleasures, and he does not make up this defect in the later discussion. This forces us to question the precise status of desires and pleasures in relation to courage. Laches has spoken of a willing standing and will soon speak of endurance; it is therefore unclear how courage, given his understanding, can deal with desires and pleasures. Nicias' understanding also centers on the fearful; the things which can be dared, that about which we can be confident, are difficult to differentiate from what is merely not fearful. Perhaps courage deals with pleasures and desires by being the virtue displayed in giving up the ones we already have. In this way courage deals with desires and pleasures from the standpoint of fear or difficulty. But Socrates will soon teach Laches that courage deals with the search for courage itself; this search would appear to deal with a knowledge of courage that is worthwhile in itself. Provisionally, we may say that their understanding insufficiently grasps courage as itself noble or attractive, because it fails to fully account for the courage in seeking courage.

Socrates also introduces the word *eidos* in this section, but only for the things of war, not to designate his intention concerning courage itself. The effect of this is to separate war from politics, although both may be treated as painful or fearful. This separation is in accord with what we have seen before; although Laches is concerned with the city, war and its purpose is insufficiently connected to the city, and for this reason courage is not properly understood. Moreover, Socrates' grouping politics with sea perils, illness, and poverty accords with what we have seen of Laches' understanding of it. He fears ridicule and envy; he will soon guardedly approve sophistic twists in a law court which he cannot approve in a discussion such as this. Part of Laches' inability to connect war and the city properly is caused by the understanding of politics which Socrates suggests here. The victory he loves in it consequently is limited; Nicias later accuses him with reason of primarily wishing that he (Nicias) look as foolish as he has.

The second way in which Socrates helps Laches meet his intention is by giving him an example. Why, of all the possible examples, is this the example selected? Quickness is connected to courage because courage is related to boldness and decisiveness. Within this dialogue, rashness is for a moment understood by Laches as courage, and it is understood by Nicias as a defect which masks as courage. Courage thus has

two vices, cowardice and rashness, and one, if not both, concern speed. But if this is so, courage must account for the power which rashness exemplifies; it must be a form of daring quickness as well as stolid endurance. Socrates' example therefore points to what is missing in Laches' definition, but is somehow grasped in Laches' understanding. The example also suggests a way to remedy the defects in Nicias' understanding, which also does not appear to grasp the daring properly and which, in any event, says nothing about the soul or nature. Now, the definition itself speaks of accomplishing much in less time; that is, it does not account for the too quick and too slow, the quick measured by what is fitting; but a definition of quickness as such must account for this. It is as if quick harp playing could be measured completely without reference to the music it is producing, or as if quick speech could be measured completely without reference to what the speech understands and is trying to speak. Socrates' definition of quickness deliberately abstracts from this other measure, though the examples he gives suggest it. The abstraction would indicate that Laches' understanding of courage, if not Nicias' too, makes a similar abstraction, if unwittingly. Concretely, it means that courage is improperly connected to what is fitting in a particular time and place; courage as understood by Laches at first appears more useful than noble, but turns out to be less useful than calculation; the nobility which it then attains is thus very ambiguous because it, as imprudent, becomes dissociated from the other noble things, prudence and victory. Finally, Socrates understands quickness as if all that is quick participates in quickness equally. Whatever does more in less time is quick; the differences consist of having more and less of an equally divisible substance, but any instance of quickness could fully exemplify quickness. This also seems true of the relation of the *eidōs* of the things of war to its members as Socrates presents it. But not all members need participate in their class or definition in this way. Nicias' speech gave an example of participation through the progressive desire for what is noble; precisely what is lacking in nobility, the yearning for nobility, is the ground for the imperfect participation in it. But it did not seem that Nicias himself understood any of the noble studies as more perfectly noble than the others. What this means for the dialogue is that the proper way in which its members participate in courage, and in which courage itself is a participant, will be an unsolved problem in Laches' understanding and in Nicias' as well. We have already discussed this for Laches in terms of the improper union of war, courage, and victory. In the case of Nicias, his failure to properly discriminate courage as a part of virtue is decisive; the possibilities for such discrimination and therefore the meaning of Nicias' difficulty become more apparent when we consider this example than when we merely consider that section, or the first mention of the parts of virtue.

We can now turn to the definition which Laches offers and Socrates'

refutation of it. Laches is asked for the "power" which is the same in all: the "what" is a beginning and a power. But Laches also says that he is speaking of the natural concerning courage; he is giving its nature. Laches appears to mean by natural not only or primarily general but untaught, not artificial, for this is the kind of thing he takes endurance to be. Moreover, he later approves very strongly of a Socratic question to Nicias based on the natural animals: Laches and not Nicias is the one who speaks of nature and seeks to save it in his understanding of courage. Laches' definition also speaks of the soul: courage is a power of the soul; it is a power of the soul which is natural. Laches' understanding therefore points to the problem of the soul and its parts in relation to courage, but Laches does not develop this, and is not given the opportunity to develop it. But Nicias' understanding, which speaks of knowledge and the fearful, does not speak of the soul. Socrates' refutation of him is not explicitly based on this neglect, but centers on animal courage and the parts of virtue, i.e., it is connected to this problem. The proper understanding of courage would need to combine what is in Laches with what is in Nicias, but not in any simplistic way, for both Laches and Nicias are defective on their own grounds.

Laches' definition appears to be a generalization on the level of the soul of his opinion that a courageous man is willing to stand and fight. Just as fighting earlier was made a function of standing, so here quickness, aggressiveness, and their purpose are not mentioned. Socrates, however, chooses not to imitate his earlier refutation on this different level. Rather, he focuses on the question of prudence: what is the connection of courage to knowledge? In the course of his dialogue with Laches, Laches' failure to properly account for what is bold, and the connection of this to his insufficient reflection on the place of knowledge, becomes clear. But if the refutation of Laches is explicitly based on the element alien to Laches, knowledge or prudence, the key is Laches' agreement that prudent endurance is noble and that courage is noble. His agreement may seem strange. But the entire dialogue has moved unsystematically among what is good, valuable, and noble. Thus this is not a Platonic sleight of hand which makes Laches speak out of character. Courage is indeed noble and good by all common opinion; the question is whether Laches' understanding of its nobility in his definition rises above an ordinary understanding of nobility hard to distinguish from the "nobility" of sight or of health. It is likely, further, that it is from this vantage point that he considers the physician's and moneymaker's endurance not to be noble; the object of the endurance is too low, and the endurance is too petty or calculating. These grounds also lead him to agree that prudent endurance is noble; but beyond this, he can agree because prudence is necessary or useful to avoid ugly disaster, and victory is something he loves. This agreement nonetheless proves his downfall. This occurs because Socrates is able to identify prudence with calculating forethought; but calculating

forethought destroys the conditions of danger and difficulty which Laches apparently believes necessary for courage. Moreover, Socrates is then able to identify prudence with arts, but Laches thinks ill of artisans. Laches fails to see that his own example of courage, staying in the ranks, is worthy because it contributes to victory or prevents disastrous defeat; the activities of war have been separated from their end, and the things of war as a whole have been separated from their political purpose; he has failed to discriminate what is courageous in the light of what actions are for, and, therefore, any genuine grounds by which he could reject some difficulties as too petty to be courageously endured slip away. Yet, there is truth in his understanding: how could there be courage where there is no risk? But calculating forethought need not itself end the possibility of risk; it may uncover its necessity, or enable grander risks of the army as a whole. Still, a lack of prudence about troop strength and disposition does not itself appear to be a danger to the soul which one overcomes through calculation; and a general's imprudence might even expand the opportunities for courage in the face of disaster. In and of itself, such forethought does not appear courageous, for its thinking does not endure in what, as material for thought, is dangerous. Moreover, Laches' example in a sense saves the truth that if we are to see courage itself as a virtue in itself courageous things must somehow stand on their own. But the examples discussed in fact are always of actions dependent for their importance on the whole to which they contribute; not only has Laches forgotten this, but he has not attained the realm in which courage and being courageous need serve nothing else. But Socrates' discussion with Laches of what they might still be persuaded by in Laches' definition points to this realm. For the search for courage itself must be courageous. But this search is an attempt to say what courage is; it is a courageous activity directed to courage in itself as it stands above all, capable of laughter. But search itself seems to be a form of knowledge or of knowing; Laches does not "know" how courage escaped them. This suggests that courage, insofar as we are courageous in knowing it, is the limit which might replace the sources of the ridicule Laches fears as the final horizon; courage's ridicule is in this sense the source of "wonderful" virtue beyond the ordinary courage which bows before more ordinary ridicule, and courage's flight or escape is *the* thing to which we must be directed. Speech about courage replaces deeds of courage in grasping courage because it is the field of action most fully oriented to courage as the peak in itself. Saying what courage is therefore becomes the new object of Laches' love of victory, but for Laches it is victory over courage and it is fear of ridicule other than courage's own ridicule. It is only with Nicias that the possibility that courage *is* knowledge is developed.

Socrates asks Nicias to assist them, to say what courage is and set them free. Nicias replies that Socrates has not been separating courage

nobly, and has not been using a beautiful speech he has heard from him. For he has often heard Socrates say that each of us is good as he is wise and in what he is unlearned bad. Therefore, if the courageous is good clearly he is wise. Socrates says this is true; in his opinion Nicias says courage is some wisdom. But Laches asks what sort of wisdom; Socrates then asks Nicias what sort of wisdom courage would be according to his speech. Not that of flute, nor of harp playing, they agree. But what is this knowledge, or of what, Socrates asks, with Laches' approval? Nicias replies: it is the knowledge of the terrible and those to be dared in war and in all the others. Laches says this is strange, for surely wisdom is divided from courage; Nicias speaks nonsense. Socrates tells Laches not to abuse Nicias. Nicias replies that Laches desires to reveal him to speak the nothing he himself just appeared to speak. Laches replies that he will bring to light that Nicias has said nothing, for physicians know what is to be dreaded in diseases, but does Nicias opine that the courageous know this? Or does he call physicians courageous? Nicias replies that he does not. Nor, Laches continues, the farmer, yet he knows what is to be dreaded in farming, and all the other craftsmen see what is to be dreaded and dared in their arts, but they are not more courageous in this way. Nicias concedes that Laches says something but not that it is true, for Laches believes that physicians know something more about the sick than how to say what the healthful and diseased are. But does he believe that the physician knows whether health is more to be dreaded than sickness? Does he not believe that it is better for many not to arise from sickness; is it better for all to live and not better for many to be dead? Does he believe the same is to be dreaded by those who are to live as those who are for the death that is due? He does not, Laches replies. But, Nicias continues, does he give the physician or any other craftsman knowledge of this, except the knower of those dreaded or not dreaded, whom he, Nicias, calls courageous? Socrates asks if Laches understands. He does, Laches replies. Nicias calls the seers courageous, for what other knows who would be better alive than dead? But does Nicias agree to be a seer, or neither a seer nor courageous? Nicias replies that knowing the dreadful and the dareable belongs much more to the one he speaks of than to the seers, for the seer only judges the signs of what is to be, whether death, sickness, loss of money, victory, or less in war or another contest. But whether it is better to suffer or not suffer these does not belong more to a seer to judge than to another. Laches replies, to Socrates, that he is not learning what Nicias wishes to say, for Nicias shows that neither the seer nor the physician nor any other is the one he says is courageous, if it is not some god. And it appears to him that Nicias is not willing to agree that he is saying nothing but turns up and down to conceal his resourcelessness. But he and Socrates could have done this, and if they were speaking in court there would be an argument for doing this. But why would someone in a gathering such as this one speak emptily and

adorn himself this way? Socrates replies that they should see whether Nicias believes that he is saying something; if he clarifies his understanding and appears to say something they will separate with him, otherwise, they will teach him. Laches then agrees to question in community with Socrates, although he thinks he has asked sufficient questions. Socrates and Nicias then agree that Nicias says courage is knowledge of that to be dreaded and dared, that not all men know this since neither the physician nor seer knows this, nor are men courageous if they do not have this in addition to their other knowledge, and, that, as the proverb says, this is not what all pigs know and they would therefore not have become courageous. But then, Socrates continues, Nicias could not trust that the Crommoyonian sow could have become courageous; he does not say this playfully, but necessarily this is to say that no beast shows courage or that a beast is in some way wise where few men know because there is difficulty in knowing. Either Nicias is saying that lions, leopards, and boars know or one who places as Nicias places necessarily says lions, deer, bulls, and monkeys are all alike naturally with regard to courage. Laches swears by the gods that Socrates speaks well and asks Nicias to answer truthfully whether the beasts whom everyone admits are courageous are wiser than we or, whether, opposing all, he would boldly call them not courageous. Nicias replies that he does not call beasts or children who do not fear through mindlessness courageous but fearless and moronic, for the fearless and the courageous are not the same; very few participate in courage and forethought, but very many men, women, children, and beasts in rashness and boldness and fearlessness through lack of forethought. What Laches and the many would call courageous he calls rash while the courageous are prudent. Laches then tells Socrates to observe how well the speech adorns Nicias, who attempts to deprive of their honor those whom all admit to be courageous. Nicias tells Laches to be confident; if he and Lamachus and many other Athenians are courageous they are wise. Laches says he will not reply to this in order not to appear truly Aexonic. Socrates interjects that Laches has not perceived that their comrade has received this wisdom from Damon, who is near Prodicus, opined to be the noblest of the sophists in division of names. Laches replies that it is more fitting for a sophist to so adorn himself than a man valued by the city to command. Socrates replies that it is somehow fitting for the greatest commander to participate in the greatest prudence; Nicias seems to him worth looking at, and they will see where he places the name courage. He will not release Laches from their community in the speech, and Laches agrees, since Socrates opines it useful. Socrates and Nicias then agree that courage was looked at as part of virtue, according to the beginning of the speech they are looking at, that Nicias separated it as a part, there being other parts which are called virtue, moderation, justice, and others. Socrates and Nicias next agree that the terrible would be what produces terror, that

those of the daring would not produce fear, and that terror is not produced by the evils that have become or are becoming but by those expected; terror is thus the expectation of future evil; the fearful are the expected evils and the dareable the future goods and not evils. It is the knowledge of these, Socrates and Nicias agree, that Nicias would call courage. Socrates then continues. It seems to him, concerning how many knowledge is, that there is not one which, concerning what has become, is knowledge of how it became, another, concerning the becoming, of how it becomes, and another, concerning what is to become and has not become, of how it would most nobly become, but that these are the same. Concerning the healthy, in all times it is medicine that looks at the becoming and the having-become and the to-be-becoming, how it is to become, and it is the same in farming concerning the things growing from the earth. And, continues Socrates, Nicias would surely testify that concerning war generalship forecasts nobly and knows what is expected, knowing that it should be the ruler, not servant, of the seer's art since it more nobly knows what is becoming and what is to become in war. And the law orders that the seer does not rule the general but the general the seer. Nicias then agrees that the same knowledge concerns the same, professing to know the to-be, the happening, and the having-happened. But, continues Socrates, courage is knowledge of the terrible and dareable: they have agreed that what is to be dreaded and what is encouraging are future goods and evils, and that the same knowledge is of the same in the future and all. Therefore, courage is not only knowledge of the dreadful and dareable, but, just as the other knowledges, it professes to know of the happening and of the having-happened in all, not merely future goods and evils. Nicias has therefore separated only a third part of courage, not the whole, and his speech must be that courage is not only knowledge of the terrible and dareable but is almost something concerning all goods and evils in all. Nicias agrees to this change. But then, Socrates continues, is there something lacking in the virtue of one who knows all the goods and evils in their becoming, their to-be-becoming, and their having-become? Is one needy in moderation, justice, or holiness to whom belongs the careful guarding against what is and is not terrible concerning gods and men, and the provision of the goods, knowing the right association with them? But then, Socrates continues, what he is saying now would not be a part of virtue but all of it. Yet they said courage is one of the parts of virtue, and therefore they have not discovered what courage is.

Socrates' inviting Nicias to assist them gently teaches Laches that assistance, resources, and equipment need not detract from courage, for inviting Nicias' assistance is their immediate way of delaying Courage's ridicule for their insufficient courage in searching for him. Nicias comes to their assistance by reminding Socrates of one of his own beautiful speeches; Socrates has not been separating nobly. But this

suggests that separation or distinguishing can itself be noble; if there is courage in search this courage could be noble separation, or separation of what is noble. But the chief problem in Nicias' understanding is precisely that knowledge or wisdom is not for its own sake; virtue or courage might be knowledge, but this knowledge is not fully noble, or of what is noble. Therefore, he cannot completely grasp or overcome the paradoxical nature of the assertion that virtue is knowledge. Moreover, Nicias never precisely answers Socrates' question concerning what this knowledge is, but only of what; that is, Nicias does not tell us what knowledge is as opposed to opinion or ignorance, nor does he say how we might tell who has this knowledge. One way of determining this is to consider the difference between those with an art and those without it. But Nicias does not grant that any artisan has this knowledge which courage is. But if it is not the knowledge which artisans have, what kind of knowledge is it? Indeed, when Nicias discusses physicians it is unclear whether he wishes to say that physicians know as physicians what health and disease are, how to bring these about, or both. But almost everyone usually knows what health and disease are; this is the basis of their knowing when to consult physicians. Moreover, as the argument develops, it becomes less clear that the courageous man's knowledge is the final knowledge. If, for example, he knows whether death is to be dreaded when it is not always to be dreaded, he must know something other than death's fearfulness; he must know why or for the sake of what it is now fearful. But Nicias does not discuss of what this is knowledge or how it is attained. What precisely are the grounds on which death is or is not "due," and how are they known? What is the relation between what is to be feared or dared for the sake of one good and for the sake of another? Courage seems to be limited to the knowledge of what is to be dreaded and dared in the light of something which is not made clear. In this sense it is not fully noble or self-sufficient knowledge, but is also in the last analysis useful or beneficial. But if courage is this knowledge, then its objects and possibility have not been clarified. Moreover, Laches' guess that only a god could be courageous and Nicias' silence about this, combined with Laches' and Socrates' discussion of the seers, leads in this same direction. Not only a god but one who listens to the gods, a pious man, might know when death is due, or when defeat is preferable to victory. But how is this determination made: do the gods themselves know, or do they merely will? If the former, the courageous or pious man's knowledge is not the final knowledge nor the final blessing, but a secondary and useful knowledge, though the use is high. If the latter, knowledge and courage is not the noblest good, not the highest activity. Nicias' horizon is belief in the gods and concern with the afterlife, not love of wisdom, and therefore the nobility of courage as knowledge is provisional. Indeed, we have already seen that love of honor rather than the noble knowledges themselves would be the prime

mover in a young man's movement from Stesilaus' art to generalship. And Laches accuses Nicias of the wish to strip others of their honor here; he in effect accuses him of wanting all the honor for himself, just as he thinks Nicias claims the knowledge that only a god could have. It is as though he is accusing Nicias of wanting to be a god. But the reason behind Socrates' reminder to Nicias of the relative rank of seers and generals indicates rather that Nicias seeks to obey them. He wishes to receive the gods' praise or honor, or to have a good name in their eyes for doing what they know or will must be; knowledge or courage, therefore, is instrumental to this. This wish, moreover, is ultimately a private wish, a wish for himself, not his city—indeed, a wish in which political activity might not even be central. In spite of his love of the honor that comes from the public things, Nicias is therefore free from fear of ridicule in a way that the more public Laches, whose chief concern is victory, and who lacks the graces of a private education, is not. But Nicias' understanding of courage also prevents him from giving full due to the public. Socrates must remind him that the generals rule the seers and that the law commands this as well. But the law commands for the city, and the general should seek victory for the city. What Nicias is in danger of ignoring, then, is the good of the city; his courage is his knowledge of what is to be dreaded and dared, but this knowledge is most immediately for his fate, not the city's. Nicias has separated himself too drastically from the other Athenians, incorrectly understanding the fearfulness of this separation; his courage is lacking because in the last analysis it is too private.

Nicias also fails to consider the relation between the knowledge that courage is and the knowledge which he himself professes of what courage is. He has learned what courage is from Damon, but its status as knowledge is unclear, as unclear as Socrates himself leaves it. But Socrates indicates that such knowledge is discovered, which need not mean that it cannot be taught; they have failed, he says, to discover courage. Moreover, Socrates also indicates that the search for this courage is itself an act of courage, while Nicias does not discuss courage in knowing about courage at all; he will just return to Damon, who will set things right. This suggests that Nicias does not understand the unique status of courage itself as an object whose pursuit is the virtue perfecting the soul. This is developed in Socrates' discussion of knowledge. Socrates seeks to show that the knowledge of what has become, is becoming, and will become is the same and that therefore the knowledge of goods and evils as they will become is all knowledge of goods and evils in all. But he never speaks of knowledge of that which never becomes, which is always, which has no past, present, and future. He understands the knowledge of which Nicias speaks to be knowledge of what is changeable. But does courage itself change, or would not Nicias agree that everywhere and always it is knowledge of what is to be dreaded and dared? If courage is an object of a courage which is

knowledge, this knowledge would be a knowing or an attempt to know what never becomes because it always is. But then the goods with which courage deals at least in the most pure case can never change. This is what Nicias neglects. Moreover, even the things of which Socrates speaks, health and war, for example, belong to becoming only in a partial sense; what they are does not change. Yet what they are is not independent: the health of the body is impossible without the health of the soul; the healthy eye is for seeing, i.e., for knowing. And war is for the city; what it is, its purpose and order, is dependent on law, and law changes. Thus, what in its permanence governs what is good for itself may also be good for that on which it is dependent; but then, as Nicias suggests with health, its goodness is ambiguous or changeable. The good would need to be placed within an unchanging whole in order to be strictly good and an object of courage as simple and sufficient knowledge. Nicias does not see that knowledge is ultimately directed by what does not change, and he therefore does not clarify what it or courage is or the exact status of its objects. He even, at this point in the argument, concedes that generalship has the knowledge of what is good in war, while what he said earlier could not allow this to the general, who, as such, does not know whether defeat or victory is to be preferred or whether the war is to be fought at all. This belongs to the law, as Socrates indicates, but Nicias would not wish to say that the law is the knower of courage, or that we are courageous insofar as we know or make the law, because the knowledge that courage is belongs to very few. Yet his opinion could make the law courageous or, more precisely, could make the law that which determines the grounds on which one knows whether, say, death is to be dreaded or dared; his imprecision about what knowledge is and about the setting of limits within which courage knows opens this possibility. Yet, as we have said before, it is rarely clear to what degree the laws can reflect knowledge or furnish a stable horizon. The entire question of the regime or best regime is unmentioned in this dialogue because the proper relation of the parts of the city to the city and of the city to more permanent goods, to virtue which is knowledge, is not discussed, and it is not discussed because Laches and Nicias misunderstand the relation of their own virtue to politics. Nicias himself passes beyond the law to the gods who set the limits, but how they know or decide such things as when death is due, whether this is permanent or arbitrary, is, of course, unexplored. Nicias has failed to understand how courage can be knowledge of what does not change, for example, courage itself, and how necessary this is if there is to be knowledge at all of what is good. Otherwise, what is good is also not good.

That Nicias does not genuinely understand how virtue might be knowledge is also demonstrated in his mistaken partitioning of courage and his failure to account for the soul and its powers. Nicias' understanding of courage in fact makes courage indistinguishable from jus-

tice, moderation, and piety, not to say wisdom. One might say that this is a gain, not a loss, for we now know what all of virtue is, namely, knowledge of good and evil. But this is not so: we have seen that Nicias does not clearly say what this knowledge is, and exactly of what. Moreover, failure to know the parts as parts makes knowledge of the whole impossible. This need not be so if the whole is merely the addition of "parts" which are only artificially discriminated amounts of what is the same virtue, and Nicias' mistaken division of courage as a third of knowledge treats virtue as a whole of this type. Therefore we must assume that the parts of virtue are not of this type. But we cannot say whether they are like parts of the face or parts of the city or parts of "animal," or like the participants within each virtue itself. Moreover, we can see that the failure to discuss parts of the soul also hinders the discussion of the parts of virtue. For Nicias' understanding of courage as knowledge is hindered by the complete failure to account for virtue in its relation to the variety of activities of the soul, and Socrates' example of animal natures indicates the truth that remains in Laches' view. If courage is the virtue, the excellence, of the soul, we must understand how it can be the excellence of the powers of the soul. But reason is not the only power; souls do not obviously do nothing but know and err; if they did we could hardly understand animals to be gentle or fierce. If courage as knowledge is the soul's virtue, then this knowledge must perfect its powers. Knowledge or knowing must itself perfectly express endurance and quickness and not merely be added to them in such a way that what is the same enduring from the standpoint of the endurance itself is called virtuous or vicious merely in relation to what is prudent for the situation. Yet, since any enduring or fearing by a soul is what it is only within some more complete activity, its perfection must be similarly dependent, and it cannot be seen solely from within itself. In this sense, for example, endurance cannot be an excellence in war if it is not ordered and directed by its contribution to the excellence, the victory, of the whole. Such an ordering can be called prudent or knowing endurance, the more so the more the whole to which it contributes is itself a self-sufficient or independent good. In this way, the fullest expression of endurance or quickness can also be the most prudent if the greatest enterprises are also the least dependent, the ground by reference to which everything else is good. Socrates' suggestion that there is courage in searching for, in coming to know, courage precisely if courage is, in a way, endurance suggests the possibility of a knowing which is of the largest scope, which deals with the permanent goods and which is both the fullest expression and most perfect use of the soul's natural powers. But this can be so only if knowledge is the one thing needful and noble, and not if, as with Nicias, it remains subordinate. In any event, the suggestion and the questions it raises cannot be developed, for the dialogue does not systematically discuss the soul's powers and leads up to but does not mention philosophy.

Laches then tells Nicias that he thought Nicias would discover what courage is because he despised Laches' answers; he had great hopes that he would discover it by Damon's wisdom. Nicias replies that Laches thinks nothing of the fact that he was just shown to know nothing concerning courage, but looks only at Nicias' having also been shown to be this way; it makes no difference to Laches that neither knows what it is fitting for a man to know. In this Laches works the human being's thing, looking in relation to others, not himself. But he, Nicias, has spoken fairly, and if it is not sufficient he will correct it with Damon, whom he knows Laches laughs at without even having seen him. After it is settled he will teach Laches without envy, for Laches very much needs to know. Laches replies that Nicias is wise, but he still advises Lysimachus and Melesias to dismiss the two of them and not release Socrates, as he said from the beginning. He would do the same if his boys were of age. Nicias agrees that if Socrates were willing to care for the youths he would not search for another, but would be pleased to trust him with Niceratus if he were willing. Yet he is not willing, and always recommends another when Nicias reminds him. But perhaps he will listen more to Lysimachus. Lysimachus replies that that would be just because he would be willing to do much for Socrates that he would not be willing to do for many others. He then asks Socrates if he will listen together and venture about how the boys would become the best. Socrates replies that it would be terrible not to be willing to do this, and if in the dialogues just now he had been shown to know and the others not to know it would be most just for him to be invited to the deed. But they were all alike led into resourcelessness; why should one be chosen over another? But it is needful, Socrates continues, in a speech he says is not to be divulged, that they all in common are chiefly to search for a teacher who is best for themselves, and only later for the sons, and they are to spare neither money nor anything else. If someone laughs at them for going to school at their age, they are to put forward Homer, who says that shame is not good to be with for a needy man. They are to renounce what someone would say, and make a community in their own and the boys' care. Lysimachus replies that he is pleased by what is said and is willing to have studies such as these; as he is the eldest he is the most eager. Socrates is to come to his house at dawn and do no other so that they may consult about this. For now they can dissolve. Socrates replies that he will do this; he will come tomorrow if the god is willing.

This section concludes the dialogue. It consists of the irresolution—they do not know what courage is—and the proposal of a next step to meet the difficulty: they are to search for a teacher. The chief results of this section are the unique priority of Socrates and the victory of a certain type of privacy. All but Socrates agree that Socrates is the single indispensable man. But though the others see Socrates' priority, they fail to understand him because they do not clearly grasp the

meaning of his search for knowledge. For this reason, they also fail to grasp the reasons why he does or does not grant consent, why he is or is not willing. What will means is difficult to say from within the dialogue because there is no systematic discussion of it, but we can attempt to gather the evidence. To be willing is to assent or consent. In particular, it appears to be the assent to what is not rational. Lysimachus, for example, is pleased by what Socrates says, and therefore he is "willing." And Laches had talked of courage as willingness to stand before prudence entered the argument. But it also seems to concern circumstances which reflect our dependence. Stesilaus is shown in truth in circumstances which he did not desire, chance circumstances in war. Lysimachus defines justice as reciprocal willingness or mutual dependence. And Lysimachus, pleased by what the Socrates he needs has said, most likely because it means that Socrates will not pass him on immediately to Damon, is now "willing" to do what he ordinarily would not have wished to do. Socrates is willing to stand in battle; he must be willing or not willing to educate Nicias' son, and he will come tomorrow if the god is willing. We may say, then, that will is the assent of what is non-rational, the desiring or not fearing, in chance circumstances or circumstances in which we are dependent. Its exact relation to the rest of the soul is as unclear as the soul's structure is unclear; in Laches' definition, endurance appeared to replace both it and standing, yet Socrates spoke of willingness to endure. But it can be directed by what is rational, since consent can be prudent or not. Moreover, to judge from Socrates' remark in the speech before us, it can itself be an instance of the terrible and therefore an object of courage. The problem of consent brings us to the same problems we have dealt with before. In Socrates' case, his consent or lack of consent is mentioned in the context of war and education, education of those clearly not so attractive in themselves as to attract him. The problem of consent in Socrates' case therefore appears primarily to mean the problem of his dependence on the city and on friends, a dependence caused by what is not, as such, rational in him, and a dependence the honoring of which is not equivalent to the search for knowledge which is naturally attractive to him. The problem is therefore raised of the connection between the one who searches for knowledge and political life. Socrates himself suggests this problem here by suggesting that justice would require that the deed belong to the knower; this replaces Lysimachus' criterion based on consent. But Socrates himself says that the dialogue proved that he is not a knower. The disproportion between the inclination towards knowledge and political life is thus indicated by the importance of "consent" in this section, but it is not discussed. Nicias' and Lysimachus' difficulty in even beginning to understand Socrates' non-consent thus shows how far they remain from seeing what knowledge and the search for it mean. This is also shown by the fact that Nicias, who most persistently advances the claim of knowledge,

nonetheless still believes that Damon can set him right. Nicias' form of concern with knowing takes the shape of a wish to be near and to learn from the knowledgeable, rather than a wish to do the work of seeking to know himself. But Nicias' discussion here does suggest one more decisive aspect of knowledge: it can be shared without envy. Knowledge of the type we spoke of in the previous section is the only fully public good, the only good all could enjoy all of. At the same time, it is the most strictly private good because it is most fully pursued out of shame before one's own ignorance and out of fear before one's own mortality. This characteristic indicates once more how the pursuit of courage itself can be an unambiguously virtuous activity.

The second result of this section is the victory of what is private. Their search for a good teacher will be protected from ridicule by Homer's authority, but the grounding of this search in their need for what is best for themselves must be a secret. Laches is in this way taught, to the extent that he is teachable, that the priority of what is private is a protection against ridicule. Laches' natural love of victory has not issued in full courage because he understands courage incorrectly. His understanding chains him to the city and its needs, not to the good city, not even to the city in peace. He therefore cannot serve the city as it needs to be served by its generals, those who go beyond it in their judgment or hopes; he cannot properly credit the possibility and usefulness of the childish and playful. The inadequacy of his power to stand alone and develop his prudence, his aims, and his skills therefore deprives the city of the full use of his gifts. One might say in general both that he is unsuccessful in separating men from animals, in seeing their mere likeness to us, and in seeing our likeness to what is higher. But the priority of what is private, the shame before ignorance, is also that which is most fully public, that which is remedied by the most universal of goods, and this is what Nicias neglects. Nicias' shame is a shame remedied by what would be his alone, honor and the "life afterward." He almost seeks to be a god among men, and though he does not seek to replace the gods, he also does not indicate that they are wonderful or mysterious. Nicias rebukes Laches for doing what human beings do, and dissociates courage from children, animals, women, and almost all men. One might say that he is ashamed of being human, that he is too elevated, that he seeks to forget our kinship to the animals at the same time that he fails sufficiently to separate us from the gods. But for these same reasons, he does not grasp what fully stands alone, the full peculiarity of knowledge, or the full height of the human being.