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### Socrates the Expert

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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS  
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Socrates the Expert  
by  
Jeremy S. Henry

A dissertation presented to  
Washington University in St. Louis  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2023  
St. Louis, Missouri

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Jeremy S. Henry

*Washington University in St. Louis*

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Socrates the Expert

by

Jeremy S. Henry

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

Washington University in St. Louis, 2023

Professor Eric Brown, Chair

I argue that an account of recognizing experts can be drawn from the dialogues of Plato in which Socrates is engaged in the activities he describes in the *Apology*, that he is an expert in recognizing experts, and that this supports his argument that no one can be an expert in ethics. I also show that his account contains a decision procedure for recognizing experts and a view about the nature of expertise (from which that procedure is derived) that is very plausible for his purpose.

# Introduction

This dissertation is about how non-experts can identify experts. I shall be arguing that the eponymous character who animates Plato’s “Socratic” dialogues is an expert in recognizing experts. This means that he can correctly recognize who has expertise and who doesn’t in any domain—provided he has a certain amount of accurate information about that domain—even when he himself lacks expertise in that area. This claim has been made in several places, but nearly always in passing.<sup>1</sup> It has never been defended in adequate detail.<sup>2</sup> The claim is controversial, and significant if true.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Jörg Hardy (2010 p. 16) claims that Socrates’ human wisdom is identical to the “science of science” and lack of science described in the *Charmides*. This means that if Socrates possesses human wisdom, as he seems to think he does in the *Apology*, then he knows how to tell who has expert knowledge and who does not, i.e., has expertise in recognizing experts (cf. LaBarge 2005 p. 33). But Hardy does not discuss this implication of his view. (In later work, he defines human wisdom differently, such that it no longer has this implication (Hardy & Kaiser 2018 pp. 84-5), but again, the implication is not discussed.)

Woolf (2000) p. 21, n. 31, claims that Socrates has the political *technē* insofar as he is skilled in refuting others, writing that, “[Socrates] avows that he *does* have second-order knowledge (he is able to judge whether he and others do or do not know, and claims a certain wisdom in this regard: 21c-22e).” Yet it’s not clear how refutation could tell us positively that someone has knowledge.

Woodruff (1990) p. 66, n. 10, writes that “the *practice* of the *elenchus* [is] a *technē*,” and that “Socrates has a way of knowing whether or not one is an expert... Socrates’ test for expertise is evidently cross-examination.” As with Woolf, he does not elaborate on how such cross-examination could lead to *knowing* that someone is an expert. (Cf. Gentzler 1995, n. 15.)

Santas (1969) pp. 437-8, claims that Socrates is an expert in his own brand of inquiry, but the scope of Socrates’ skill is not discussed. We don’t know on the basis of Santas’ discussion whether the scope of Socrates’ skill extends beyond the moral sphere or not. We also don’t know if his methods of inquiry actually allow him to recognize somebody who has wisdom.

<sup>2</sup> One philosopher has argued that Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts as part of a book chapter on moral expertise (LaBarge 2005, pp. 32-4). His argument faces several difficulties. Two of those difficulties are with the argument itself and one is with his response to an objection to that argument.

The argument is that Socrates has a conception of expertise against which he tests others for expertise, and that this suffices for expertise in identifying experts (p. 33). One problem with this argument is that someone can have a conception of expertise against which to test others for expertise that is just incorrect. For the argument to work, it must show that Socrates’ conception of expertise is actually plausible. Furthermore, one can have the correct conception of expertise against which to test others for expertise and be poor at conducting the relevant tests. So, for the argument to go through, it must also show that Socrates is skilled at implementing such tests.

In addition to these worries, LaBarge does not deal adequately with the objection that the activity of identifying experts provides no benefit of its own (and thus fails to be a *technē*) because only experts in a domain can tell whether or not others are experts in that domain (*Chrm.* 174e-175a). LaBarge (2005 p. 33) points the reader to his 1997 paper, claiming to have dealt with this issue there. Yet he does not deal with this issue there, as he says explicitly in the earlier work (LaBarge 1997 p. 61, n. 16).

Here is some of the controversy. An expert in recognizing experts isn't just someone who can correctly judge whether or not someone has expertise. Most of us can correctly judge whether or not someone is an expert most of the time, usually by appealing to that person's credentials. Rather, what distinguishes an *expert* in recognizing experts from other people is that she is much more likely to make correct judgments about someone's expertise than the rest of us when judging correctly is *difficult*. Such is the case when trusted credentialing systems are in short supply, as in fifth-century B.C.E. Athens.<sup>3</sup> In addition, she will have much better reasons for her judgments than most of us do. She'll be able to explain not only why she *believes* or *does not believe* someone to be an expert, but also why someone *is* or *is not* an expert.<sup>4</sup> The question is whether this is possible without becoming an expert in the field oneself.

Suppose we find ourselves in an environment where we cannot rely on the testimony of experts we already trust to tell us whether or not some person is an expert in the field we're considering. How would we proceed? We could try to assess the truth of his assertions about the domain in which he claims expertise. In many cases, though, this will not be possible without mastering a technical vocabulary and learning how to perform the relevant tests for truth, such as laboratory experiments. This would seem to require mastering the field for oneself.<sup>5</sup> We could rely on the testimony of satisfied customers (where this is applicable), or look to see that

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<sup>3</sup> Public schools had begun to appear at the end of the sixth century B.C.E., but they were limited in scope, focusing mostly on poetry and sports (Murray 1986 pp. 269-70). No one had a "degree" to which they could point as evidence of their expertise in medicine or geometry. One might point out that there *were* ubiquitous credentialing systems: master-to-apprentice relationships with successful artisans. At the conclusion of such an apprenticeship one had what we would call "credentials". But no one had credentials in political science, public administration, moral philosophy, literature—the topics that concerned Socrates. Thanks to Allan Silverman for pressing me on this point.

<sup>4</sup> The *explanandum* for the expert judge of expertise is that such-and-such person is or is not an expert. The *explanandum* is not her belief that such-and-such a person is or is not an expert. Experts do not merely have better justifications for their beliefs about the topics of their expertise, they are able to explain why their judgments are correct.

<sup>5</sup> This is especially true in mathematics and the natural sciences. For example, the claim that there are elementary particles which can become entangled will be meaningless to one who has not mastered the relevant technical vocabulary, and impossible to verify directly for someone who does not know how to perform the relevant experiments. Cf. Goldman (2001) p. 93 and especially n. 10.

the individual has been successful in doing whatever it is he claims to be an expert in doing. Yet success is often difficult to assess in the absence of expert testimony: an oncologist does not need to save most or even half of her patients to be an expert at treating cancer. Why this should be so requires deference to expert testimony or understanding the relevant medical science for oneself. How, then, can someone go beyond a layperson's ability to assess expertise without being an expert in the relevant fields oneself? If possessing the relevant expertise is necessary, then expertise in recognizing experts will be impossible, since one cannot master every field.

That for experts, it may "take one to know<sup>6</sup> one", rendering expertise in recognizing experts impossible, is a concern that Plato's Socrates raises in the *Charmides* (170a-172a). Most scholars of Plato who have written on this subject think that his arguments are sound, or at any rate that Plato took them to be, and so Socrates could not have expertise in recognizing experts (e.g. McKim 1985; Gentzler 1995; Kahn 1988, 1996; Carone 1998<sup>7</sup> Benson 2003; Tsouna 1997, 2022).

The claim that Plato's Socrates in particular is an expert in recognizing experts faces another objection, one that is well-known to readers of Plato. Socrates makes sweeping disavowals of wisdom in the defense speech at his trial (*Ap.* 21b4-5 and 22c9-d1). There is an ancient tradition which reads his disavowals of wisdom and knowledge as ranging over *all* forms of expertise, and some scholars, such as Gail Fine (2008), still read his disavowals of knowledge

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<sup>6</sup> 'Know' does not just mean "recognize" here. We can recognize experts correctly by their credentials, but we do not thereby come to *know* that they are experts. This would require an account that explains why they are experts. That they have certain credentials does not make them experts; one earns credentials on the grounds that she has achieved a certain level of expertise, not the other way around.

<sup>7</sup> Those familiar with this literature may wonder why Carone's paper appears on this list, since she argues that the objections raised here are not a threat to the possibility of Socrates' mission in the *Apology*. Carone (1998 p. 280) appears on the list because she does not think that Socrates could identify an expert in human virtue if he met one, which means that he is not fully expert in recognizing experts. (She also thinks that this does not matter, because in the universe he inhabits, it turns out that there really are no such experts to be found. So, his conclusions that (1) there are no moral experts and that (2) the closest to one can get to wisdom is to realize that he is not wise, are safe. I will argue here in the introduction that to reach these conclusions safely, he ought to be able to recognize a "moral" expert when he meets one, even if there are none to meet.)

in this way. The objection cannot be met by arguing that Socrates has expertise in recognizing experts without realizing it, either, since if he were truly an expert in recognizing experts, he would not fail to recognize expertise that he himself possessed.

I shall argue that these objections can be met. One *can* gauge expertise correctly, and explain why someone does or doesn't have expertise in a domain without having expertise in that domain oneself. What one needs is to know what makes somebody an expert in general. This distinguishes the expert in recognizing experts from the layperson. The lay detective may be impressed by the delivery of someone's speech or by whatever the majority of other people think of the person in question, but the expert in expert recognition will know that these are irrelevant to assessing skill. The content of the arguments, or the quality of the account that explains how one succeeded in executing one's task skillfully, are. The degree to which these can be assessed *will* be hindered by the expert-recognizer's lack of familiarity with technical vocabulary, or by her inability to perform the relevant experiments, but it is the focus on these things that gives her the edge over the layperson in detecting experts. She isn't focused on the wrong things, as might in some sense be "natural".<sup>8</sup> Specialists will still be best at judging whether others are experts in the field in which they themselves have specialized, but the expert in recognizing experts will be better off in this regard than everyone else.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> There might be good evolutionary reasons for the bias to believe someone with a smooth, detailed delivery over someone's disjointed and unsophisticated delivery—recalling an event witnessed is easier than confabulating, for most people. Similarly for a bias towards harmony (deferring to the majority opinion); it avoids socially costly confrontations. This is why the expert in recognizing experts doesn't just know what makes somebody an expert. She is also skillful in testing for expertise given those criteria. If there are biases towards trusting elegant communicators and agreeing with the group, it would require training to keep these in check where appropriate.

<sup>9</sup> One might ask how there could be a class of people who are better at performing the central task of some field than the experts in that field. The answer is that this is a result of the field's breadth, and it is not unprecedented. A family doctor will be much better at treating the sick and injured than a layperson, but will be less effective at treating someone with a psychiatric disorder than a psychiatrist. Both are experts. One is an expert in treating illness and injury in general, the other psychiatric illness in particular. Similarly, an expert in recognizing experts is skilled at this activity in general, but there are others who are even more skillful at recognizing expertise in specific domains.

I shall also argue that Socrates' disavowals of wisdom do not range over all expert knowledge, which makes his having wisdom about recognizing experts compatible with his epistemic disavowals. However, answering this and the previous objection to my claim is not what makes it an interesting claim. It has independent significance. For one thing, we will uncover a method for identifying experts that is detailed and plausible. For another, Socrates needs something like expertise in recognizing experts to arrive at the substantive ethical conclusions that does, in the way that he does. He firmly believes that no one has expertise in human excellence or politics,<sup>10</sup> and furthermore that the closest a human being can get to achieving such expertise is to recognize that she does not have it (*Ap.* 22e-23b). He arrives at these conclusions in part by discovering that no one whom he has interviewed, whether reputedly wise or not, is in possession of wisdom about virtue. To be sure that he did not make a mistake in his judgments about others' wisdom, he will need to be sure that his conception of expertise is correct and that his methods of testing for it generate correct results, too. To be sure of this, he will need an account of why his conception is true and his tests are accurate. That is to say, Socrates will need more than true<sup>11</sup> beliefs about recognizing experts to reach his ethical conclusions without error.<sup>12</sup> He needs skills that by his own lights constitute something like expertise in recognizing experts. So, to show that Socrates has expertise in recognizing experts

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<sup>10</sup> Socrates thinks that no one can have expertise in what makes human beings excel in their proper qualities as human beings, i.e. in those qualities that make them good people—good members of their kind. In other words, no one can have expertise in human *aretē*, which I will translate as both “excellence” and “virtue”, as others have. According to Socrates, expertise in virtue just is expertise in politics, because genuine experts can teach their abilities (e.g. in being virtuous) to others (*Ap.* 20a-c), and politics is the art of making other people good (*cf. Grg.* 521d-e with Socrates' activities in the *Apology*). Being able to make others good also implies that you are yourself good. I will often refer to this skill as “expertise in human virtue”.

<sup>11</sup> Not all accounts of expertise say that being in possession of the truth (specifically, believing more truths about the matter than others and fewer falsehoods) makes someone an expert. According to some, what makes a person an expert is that her claims about the subject matter in question are better evidenced than everyone else, or that their cognitive abilities have reached a certain threshold (e.g. Watson 2019, *cf.* Goldman 2018 sec. 1.1). Socrates is in the former camp when it comes to what makes someone an expert.

<sup>12</sup> Gentzler (1995) and Carone (1998) disagree. Since there are no moral experts, Socrates only needs to be able to detect those who lack moral expertise, not those who have it. I shall argue shortly (and again later, pp. 19-20) that this is not the case.

is to make his ethical arguments that much more plausible. I shall elaborate on this point shortly, but before expanding further on the motivation for my thesis, let's look at the argument for that thesis.

Here is the most basic form of my argument.

- (i) Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to a plausible view about how to recognize experts (his own).
- (ii) If someone is an expert according to a plausible view about how to recognize experts, then plausibly, she is.
- (iii) Plausibly, Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts. (From (i) and (ii))

Most of what follows will be an argument for (i). Each step in that argument corresponds to a chapter (I, II, or III).

- 1. Socrates has a view about how laypeople should recognize experts. (I)
- 2. Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to that view. (II)
- 3. Socrates' view is plausible. (III)
- C. So, Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to a plausible view about how to recognize experts (his own). (= (i))

The second premise of the main argument, (ii), requires much less of a defense than the first. In fact, much of the work of defending (ii) is done indirectly by clarifying the notion of plausibility I have in mind in chapter three. For example, one might think that a merely *plausible* view about how to find experts does not secure the conclusion that any particular person is an expert, because plausible ways for laypeople to recognize experts include imperfect shortcuts (like certification, which can be faked). The objection is not that (ii) is false, but rather, that it is, along with the language about plausibility in (iii), too weak to show that Plato's Socrates has what I claim he needs: expertise in recognizing experts. To show that Socrates has what I say he needs, one would need to test his expertise with the *correct* view about what makes someone an expert and the *correct* view about how one can be sure.

As we shall see in the third chapter, plausibility is the only standard by which a revisionary view like Socrates' about what makes someone an expert *can* be assessed, and when it comes to assessing views about deciding who does and doesn't have expertise, plausibility and correctness do not come apart.

As I develop these and other arguments, I will be making certain assumptions. The Socrates I will be discussing is the character in Plato's Socratic dialogues. I define the Socratic dialogues as those in which Socrates appears to be engaged in the mission he describes in the defense speech at his trial. I assume that what this Socrates says in one Socratic dialogue can sometimes be attributed to him in another. Plato's Greek is sourced from the most recent Oxford Classical Texts, Xenophon's from volume IV of his works in the Loeb Classical Library (revised in 2013), and Diogenes Laertius' from the Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries series (Dorandi 2013). Translations from the Greek, where unattributed, are my own.

I will usually translate the word '*technē*' as "expertise", but 'mastery', 'skill', 'knowhow', 'craft', and 'art' will be used synonymously for the sake of variety. I will translate '*epistēmē*' as "knowledge" or "understanding" and use it interchangeably with '*technē*', as in the Greek. The word '*sophia*' will be translated uniformly as "wisdom", but as we shall see shortly, sometimes this will be synonymous with *technē*, and sometimes it will refer to a specific kind of *technē*, the *technē* of human virtue.

These assumptions and rules of thumb for translation apply not only to the main argument, but also to my argument that Socrates needs something like expertise in recognizing experts to arrive at the conclusion that there are no experts in human virtue. The rest of this introduction is dedicated to building this latter argument.



## Why Socrates Needs (Something Like) Expertise in Recognizing Experts

I claim that Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts. I've suggested that this claim is attractive because Socrates needs something like this expertise to arrive at the ethical conclusions he does. In the defense speech at his trial, Socrates tells the jury that human beings cannot be experts in human virtue. He also tells the jury that the closest a human being can get to attaining such expertise is recognizing that she does not have it (*Ap.* 23a5-b4). To see why he needs expertise in finding experts to reach these conclusions—or at any rate something well beyond a knack for finding experts—consider how he arrived them.

Socrates aspired to be a good human being from youth. He reasoned that to become good, he'd have to find a teacher who could make him good (*La.* 186b8-c2). Yet he could not afford to pay the people who claimed to be teachers of this art, so he tried to discover it for himself (*La.* 186c2-5), probably by talking to those around him about how one should lead one's life and how one should manage the affairs of the city. It was also probably from these discussions that Chaerephon, Socrates' friend from youth (*Ap.* 20e8-21a1), got the impression that he might be the wisest person in the world about such matters. So, during a trip to Delphi,<sup>13</sup> Chaerephon asked the oracle there—the Greeks' pipeline to Apollo—whether anyone was wiser than Socrates. The oracle replied that no one was wiser (*Ap.* 21a4-7).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> We do not know why Chaerephon went to Delphi. Some commentators (e.g. McPherran 1996, p. 215) assume that Chaerephon went to Delphi for the purpose of consulting the oracle. However, he may have gone to Delphi just to attend the Pythian Games. (Cf. Graham and Barney 2016, pp. 282-3—though they are not concerned with when Chaerephon *decided* to visit the oracle, just with when he did visit the oracle.) The decision to consult the oracle may have occurred to Chaerephon after his arrival in Delphi. It may have been suggested to him by someone there after he talked up the wisdom of his friend Socrates. We just don't know. Of note is the report at *Ap.* 21a4-5, which is reproduced uniformly in the extant manuscripts covered by the critical apparatus of the most recent OCT (Duke et al., eds., 1995): *καὶ δὴ ποτε καὶ εἰς Δελφοῦς ἐλθὼν ἐτόλμησε τοῦτο μαντεύσασθαι*. No purpose clause is used. Since *elthōn* is a participle, the phrase may be translated, "And of course, once he even dared to ask the oracle the following when he went to Delphi..." This doesn't tell us the purpose of his trip to Delphi.

<sup>14</sup> When someone is "wise" (*sophos*) without qualification, she is an expert at being good. She is a good human being. That is the sense of the word as it is used here at 21a4-7. When someone is *sophos* with qualification, that is, with respect to a particular domain, like shoemaking or housebuilding, she is an expert in that particular domain.

When Socrates learned of this, he was puzzled as to what the god meant by his response. The oracle literally said that no one was wiser than Socrates. This means that nobody surpasses Socrates in wisdom. There are a number of ways this could be true (though Socrates does not explicitly consider them all). First, Socrates might be wise and have the most wisdom. Second, it might be the case that nobody is wise, and everyone is equally distant from being wise. Third, it might be the case that nobody is wise, but that Socrates is closer to wisdom than everybody else. Socrates is puzzled as to what the oracle's claim means, because he is sure the first interpretation is incorrect, since he is convinced that he is not wise, and he is sure that the god cannot be saying anything false, too.<sup>15</sup>

For after I heard this [Chaerephon's story], I thought to myself, "What ever does the god mean, and what ever is he riddling at? For *I* am certainly aware that I am wise neither in a great way nor in a small one: so what ever does he mean when he claims that I am wisest?" For I suppose, of course, that he is not speaking *falsely*, since it is not lawful for him." (*Ap.* 21b2-7)

If the second and third interpretations had occurred to him by this point, he does not yet say so to the jury.

After continuing to be unsure of what the god meant for a long time, Socrates decided to try refuting the claim that no one is wiser than him, as he understood it, in order that he might come to understand what the god actually meant.<sup>16</sup>

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This is the sense in which the word is used later, when Socrates says that the manual workers were wiser than him with respect to their crafts (*Ap.* 22d2-4).

<sup>15</sup> Could the oracle have misreported the god's message, either intentionally or unintentionally? Probably not from the perspective of Apollo's devotees. When Apollo wants to communicate something through the oracle, he directly inspires or even takes possession of her to say what he wants to say (*cf. Ap.* 22b8-c3). So, everything the oracle communicates on behalf of Apollo is what Apollo wants to communicate. Since the god cannot say anything false, neither can the oracle. The oracle is more like the speaker on a telephone than an actual messenger, to put the matter somewhat crudely.

<sup>16</sup> For further textual evidence that Socrates thinks trying to refute the claim as he understands it will give him insight into what it really means, see *Ap.* 21e2-22a1. This passage is also noted by Reeve (1989) p. 23. McPherran (1996 p. 224) says that Socrates is "attempting to refute (*ἐλέγξων*) the *apparent meaning* of the oracular pronouncement taken at face value" (italics are McPherran's). But this is wrong. The apparent meaning of the oracular pronouncement, taken at face value, is that Socrates is both wise (inferred speaker's implicature) and

And for a long time I was at a loss as to what ever he [the god] meant: then, with much difficulty, I turned myself to an investigation of the following sort. I went to one of those who were thought to be wise on the grounds that there, if indeed it could be done anywhere (εἴπερ που),<sup>17</sup> I would refute the oracular response (ἐλέγξω τὸ μαντεῖον), and I would tell the oracle right out, “This fellow here is wiser than me, but *you* said I was wiser.” (*Ap.* 21b7-c2)

How, though, can Socrates learn what the oracle’s message means by attempting to refute his own understanding of what it means?

If Socrates finds someone he judges to be wiser than him, then he’ll know that he has either misunderstood what ‘no one is wiser than Socrates’ means (since it must be true) *or* that he hasn’t misunderstood its meaning, but has instead conducted the wrong tests for wisdom or the right tests poorly. So, the mere discovery of someone who is wiser than him does not tell

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unsurpassed in wisdom (what is actually said), and Socrates has already rejected this interpretation (*Ap.* 21b3-6). Since he is neither trying to refute its apparent meaning (because he already knows that is not its true meaning) nor the true meaning as intended by the god (because that cannot be falsified), he is trying to refute his own understanding of the claim to find out if it is the correct one.

<sup>17</sup> The enclitic particle ‘*per*’ strengthens the word to which it is suffixed. In this passage, ‘*per*’ is suffixed to the word ‘*ei*’ (which means “if”) and thus emphasizes the remoteness of the hypothetical situation being described from how matters actually stand. Socrates adds ‘*per*’ to ‘*ei*’ in order to express his doubt that the oracular response, as he understands it, could be refuted. Thus the unusually expansive translation of ‘*per*’ in ‘*eiper pou*’: “if indeed *it could be done* anywhere”, which includes the italicized verbs that are absent in the Greek.

Why is Socrates so confident that he will fail to refute his understanding of the oracle’s message? Because he does not think he is mistaken about what it would mean for someone to be wiser than him and for no one to be wiser than him. He is confident that he knows what it is that makes someone wiser or not wiser. This does not just mean that he understands that Chaerephon and the oracle are using ‘wiser’ as shorthand for ‘has more wisdom about how to be a good person’, but what it means to be wiser about being a good person. This suggests a great deal of confidence in his conception of wisdom generally, as it applies to any domain.

Why does he try to refute his understanding of what he thinks the oracle’s claim says if he’s so confident in his interpretation? For one thing, he wants to eliminate any possibility that he might be wrong about what it means. As we shall see in the main text, one way of testing for this, given certain other assumptions, is by trying to falsify the claim as he understands it. For another, Socrates doesn’t yet know *how* the claim could be true, even if he is confident that it is true under his own interpretation of what ‘wiser’ (*sophōteros*) means. He has rejected the first way in which it could be true—that he has wisdom and the most wisdom. He may already have considered the implication of accepting that no one is wiser than him and that he has no wisdom, which is that nobody has wisdom, but he does not explicitly say this. If he did consider that nobody’s being wise is the only way ‘no one is wiser than Socrates’ can be made consistent with ‘Socrates is not wise’, though, this would make sense of his attempts to find somebody with wisdom. This makes it likely that he attempts to falsify the claim that ‘no one is wiser than Socrates’ because doing so (again, under certain assumptions) confirms his suspicion as to how the claim could be true.

The particle ‘*per*’ that appears in this passage is usually left untranslated—e.g. by Fowler, in Lamb 1966; by Grube, in Cooper 1997; by Reeve 1989 p. 22; by McPherran 1996 p. 224, n. 199; by Carvalho 2014 p. 41; etc., probably because “if indeed anywhere” is not idiomatic English—but ‘*per*’ still means something significant that needs to show up in the translation, and as we have seen, it has a significant impact on how we interpret this passage. It shows us just how confident Socrates is in his interpretation of what the oracle’s claim literally means, and thus how much confidence he has that his own conception of wisdom is the correct one.

him whether he misunderstands the oracle's message and thus, does not tell him its meaning. Discovering someone who is wiser than him will furnish him with information about what the oracle's message means only if his tests for wisdom are correct and are correctly carried out. Therefore, Socrates needs to have the right tests for wisdom and the skill to carry out those tests properly.

For similar reasons, Socrates' understanding of wisdom (about human virtue) needs to be correct, too, in the sense that it matches the god's.<sup>18</sup> To see why, consider what Socrates might learn if he finds no one who is wise. This discovery all by itself will not show that he has understood the oracle correctly. Why? Because the god might have in mind a different conception of wisdom according to which many of Socrates' interviewees are wise and Socrates is even wiser than they are. Socrates' conception of wisdom might be too stringent and mark people as unwise when in fact they *are*. So, if Socrates finds no one who is wise, he has learned either that he understood what the oracle meant correctly, or that he didn't understand what the oracle meant correctly—because he has the wrong conception of wisdom. So, discovering no one who is wise does not by itself help him to understand what the oracle's message means. To conclude anything definitive about what the oracle meant via the discovery that no one has wisdom, Socrates would need to be sure that his conception of wisdom matched the god's. He needs to have the correct conception of wisdom about human virtue, in this sense, for the discovery that no one is wise to confirm that he has understood the oracle correctly.

With these points in mind, let's return to Socrates' story. Socrates has just told us that after he had been puzzled about what the oracle meant for a long time, he went to one of those who

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<sup>18</sup> Per my remarks on pp. 6-7, this is *not* to say that Socrates needs *the* correct conception of wisdom about human virtue. Socrates' conception of wisdom about human virtue is "correct" insofar as it matches the god's, so he is able to understand the god's response to Chaerephon, not because it matches the god's and the god's is the one true conception. As we shall see in the third chapter, it makes no sense to say that one's notion of what makes someone an expert is "correct" in this sense.

were thought to be wise to try to refute the oracle, so as to understand her meaning. He goes on to report his findings: this person was thought by himself and others to be wise, but was not. From this he surmised that he was at least wiser than this reputedly wise person, because unlike him, he didn't think he knew things that he didn't actually know. Then, Socrates tested someone with an even greater reputation for wisdom than his first interviewee. This person was not wise, either, though he, too, thought he was. After this, Socrates started to test everyone who was thought to know anything.

So then, after this I went to one person after another. Though I perceived and was aggrieved and afraid that I was becoming hated, nevertheless it seemed to be necessary to esteem the business of the god foremost. So, because I was looking into what the oracle meant, it was necessary for me to go to all the people who were thought to know anything. (*Ap.* 21e2-22a1)

His first two interviewees were politicians. He tested other politicians as well, with the same results. He interviewed the poets, who had a reputation for wisdom, and the craftspeople, who did not, and all lacked wisdom about human virtue; yet all of them thought they had this wisdom. Then, Socrates drew some conclusions from this investigation. He relates them to the jury:

And it is likely, gentlemen, that in reality the god is wise, and in this oracular response he meant the following: that human wisdom is worth something little, even nothing. And he appears to refer to this Socrates fellow, and in addition he has made use of my name, because he is making an example of me, as though he should say that, "This man among you, humans, is wisest, who like Socrates has recognized (*ἔγνωκεν*) that in truth, he is worth nothing when it comes to wisdom." (*Ap.* 23a5-b4)

By discovering that no one in his large sample had wisdom about human virtue, Socrates concluded that the closest one can get to such wisdom is recognizing that one does not have it. In other words, no one has wisdom about human virtue.

I've argued that to arrive at these conclusions and to understand the oracle's message, Socrates needs the correct conception of wisdom about human virtue, accurate tests for such wisdom, and skill in conducting those tests. Now, notice that Socrates tacitly expresses his

confidence that he has these things by telling us that he thinks he will discover what the god's message means by trying to refute it (*Ap.* 21b7-c2, 21e2-22a1). To be justified in his confidence that he will uncover the oracle's meaning via refutation and, after he concludes his investigation, that he has understood the oracle's meaning correctly, Socrates will need *good reasons* to believe that he has the right conception of wisdom, the right tests, and skill in conducting the tests. Without having good reasons to believe that he satisfies these prerequisites for investigating the oracle's message in the way that he does, his confidence that his method will work and his confidence in the results of that method would be unwarranted.

What follows from this? Socrates needs to have the right conception of wisdom and good reasons to believe that it is the correct one—the one the god had in mind. He needs to have the right methods for determining whether or not someone has wisdom of this sort, and good reasons to think that his methods are going to give him accurate results when carried out correctly. He needs to carry out his tests for wisdom correctly and good reasons to think that he *is* carrying them out correctly. This sounds like expert knowledge about recognizing experts in human virtue: true beliefs with an account that ties them down (*Men.* 97e-98a), such that he can tell whether anything is an instance of it (*Eu.* 6d-e).<sup>19</sup> What we've found, then, is that Socrates needs to be an expert in recognizing experts in human virtue—or something close to it—to conclude that there are no experts in human virtue and to understand the oracle's message.<sup>20</sup>

Recall, though, that according to my thesis, Socrates needs expertise in recognizing not just experts in human virtue, but experts in any domain. Why isn't expertise in finding experts in

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<sup>19</sup> Notice then that Socrates' conception of expertise is not purely propositional: having an ability of a certain kind is also part of what it means to be an expert. *Cf. Hi. Mi.* 375e ff.

<sup>20</sup> In the *Meno* (97e-98a), knowledge is distinguished from correct opinion. Knowledge is different from correct opinion in that it is "tied down" by an account that explains why it is correct. However, nowhere is it agreed that knowledge *just is* correct opinion tied down by an account. This is why needing correct opinions about expertise and an account of why they are correct may not be the same as needing expert knowledge about expertise—though the former need is closer to the latter than merely needing correct opinions about expertise.

human virtue enough? Because Socrates needs to be able to test for expertise in any domain that reputedly is, or is claimed to imply, expertise in human virtue, and in the universe he inhabits, this covers *most* domains. Socrates must be able to do this because he routinely tests the soundness of arguments that take this form: (1) the person in question has expertise in a certain area, (2) that expertise is, or implies expertise in human virtue, so, (3) this person is an expert in human virtue. He starts his investigations into others' wisdom by finding out whether the first premise is true. For example, the manual craftsmen believe that they are experts at manufacturing certain products and that this expertise implies expertise in human virtue. If the contents of their beliefs are true, then they are experts in human virtue. Socrates tests the soundness of the argument by testing the truth of its first premise (*Ap.* 22c9-d4). So, to test for expertise in human virtue in this way, he needs to be skilled at implementing general tests for expertise in the domain of various manual crafts.<sup>21</sup>

A similar story can be told for rhetoric, medicine and poetry. The orators claim to make others good (e.g. *Ap.* 20a-c, *Grg.* 459c-460c), i.e. that their expertise is identical to expertise in human virtue. Consequently, Socrates tests them for expertise in oratory. The most successful physicians attribute their achievements to the knowledge of making the soul healthy (by which they mean *sōphrōn*), since bodies can only be made well while the soul is in good condition (*Chrm.* 155c-157c). That is to say, the medical art implies some piece of the art of living well—the part having to do with restraint and self-command (*sōphrosunē*). Though we do not see Socrates testing physicians for expertise in medicine, he does claim at *Chrm.* 154d to have

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<sup>21</sup> He also needs a way of discovering whether a domain of expertise implies expertise in human virtue—which is precisely what he does by showing that the antecedent of the conditional in (2) is true and the consequent false.

One might object that at *Ap.* 21e5-22a1, Socrates claims that he needed to test everybody who was thought to know anything. This suggests that he is not just looking for people whose expertise is thought to be or to imply expertise in human virtue. One might reply, though, that he is running a “sanity check” on his conception of expertise. If *nobody* is an expert in *anything*, he is probably operating with the wrong conception of expertise—especially the paradigmatic *technikoi*, the manual craftsmen.

learned (*emathon*, *Chrm.* 156d4) some of his trade from one of them, at least when it comes to making others *sōphrōn*, which suggests he has vetted a physician for expertise in medicine insofar as it is a test for partial expertise in human virtue. The poets were thought to be messengers of wisdom about how to live a good life. Their tacit recommendations about living well were considered sound enough to make understanding them a normal part of Athenian education (Murray 1986, pp. 269 ff.). So, if expertise in poetry implies expertise in the content of the poems, the poets should be experts in human virtue. Since those with expertise in poetry should also be experts in human virtue, Socrates tests the poets for expertise in poetry (*Ap.* 22a8-c8). So, Socrates needs skill in implementing his tests across a very wide variety of domains.

It may be objected that, even acknowledging that the range of domains covered by the label *cheirotechnēs* is vast, not every domain is either reputed or claimed, to be or to imply, expertise in human virtue. So, Socrates does not need the ability to detect who has expertise and who doesn't in every domain to conclude that there are no experts in human virtue. (For example, nowhere is the study of nature or the then-existing branches of mathematics said to be or to imply the art of virtue.) This is to say that Socrates doesn't need *expertise* in recognizing experts, because, by his own lights, a true expert is knowledgeable about *all* areas covered by the relevant domain (*Ion* 532c). For example, an expert in poetry can't have a detailed understanding of one poet's *oeuvre* only. So, Socrates does not need to be an expert in recognizing experts to reach his ethical conclusions by his own lights.

The reply is that Socrates must have the ability to judge claims to expertise in any domain in virtue of the fact that he must be able to do this for any domain claimed to be or imply the *technē* or *aretē*. The conception of expertise to which he appeals when making judgments about others' expertise is fully general. He does not appeal only to ideas about what practices said to



be or imply expertise in human virtue look like. His tests are also fully general. They can be applied to any domain. And Socrates needs both of these things because that is the only way that he can test people for expertise in domains like poetry and housebuilding. And because the methods he uses need to be fully general, so do the skills in implementing them. So if Socrates needs expertise at recognizing who does and who doesn't have expertise in human virtue, he needs expertise in recognizing experts in general.

### **Transition, and Some Objections**

I've argued in this introduction that Socrates needs expertise in recognizing experts—or at any rate something close to it—to arrive at the conclusion that there are no experts in human virtue in the way that he describes in Plato's *Apology*. He needs the right conception of expertise, the right tests for expertise, and skill in implementing those tests across domains. I shall argue in the following chapters that Socrates satisfies this prerequisite for arriving at the conclusions he does in the *Apology*. To see why, we'll take a closer look at his views about expertise, and especially his views about how a layperson can recognize an expert.

Before doing this, however, there are two further objections to the argument I have made in the introduction that must be addressed to be fully convincing. Both are arguments against the claim that Socrates needs something like expertise in expertise to conclude that there are no experts in human virtue. The first objection goes: Socrates can infer that there are no experts in human virtue from two well-supported beliefs that he has: 'Socrates is not wise', (supported by decades of self-examination) and 'No one is wiser than Socrates' (proclaimed by the god of truth). So, he does not need expertise in expertise to reach his conclusion.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> This is a version of an objection from Nick Smith.

The reply is that Socrates does *not* feel confident that he can make the just-mentioned inference:

- (1) No one is wiser than Socrates.
- (2) Socrates is not wise. So,
- (3) No one is wise.

He does not feel confident that he understands (1) well enough to be sure that ‘wise’ in both (1) and (2) have the same meaning. However, he *can* be confident in (3) after his investigation, and in (2), *if* he is an expert in expertise. If he can be sure of (3) and (2), then he can get to (1) via inference to the best explanation: If his understanding of what the god was saying matched what the god actually said, and the notion of wisdom at play in (1) and (2) was therefore the same, this would make it much less surprising that he found no one who was wise (including himself). He can thereby infer that his interpretation of the oracle’s statement is correct and the two conceptions of wisdom match. However, Socrates could not make this inference without already being quite sure that (3) and (2) were true, and he could not be sure that (3) and (2) were true without expertise in recognizing experts. So, Socrates would not be able to interpret the oracle’s message to Chaerephon without expertise in recognizing experts. Furthermore, since he cannot arrive at the conclusion that there are no experts in human virtue by deduction (since he must make sure his conception of wisdom matches the god’s first), he needs expertise in recognizing experts to conclude that there are no experts in human virtue.

The second objection is that one does not need to know what members of a kind look like to be sure that one has never encountered any member of that kind. So one doesn’t need to know what members of a kind look like to be sure that there are none where one has looked. I do not, for example, need to know what Cabernet Blanc tastes like to know that none of the drinks in my fridge are Cabernet Blanc. For the same reasons, Socrates does not need to be able to recognize

who the experts in human virtue are to be sure that he has never encountered any, and that there were none in any of the places he searched.<sup>23</sup>

The reply is that the principle to which the objectors appeal is false. It is not uniformly true that one does not need to know what members of a kind look like to tell that one has never encountered any. Perhaps something like this is true, though: one doesn't need to know what members of a kind look like to be sure that there are none where one has looked *provided that all of the items one investigates are easily categorized as non-members*. It is easy to tell that there is no Cabernet Blanc in one's fridge if one knows that it is a wine and there is no wine in one's fridge. It is also easy to tell that there is no Carbernet Blanc in one's fridge if one knows that it is a white wine and that there is only Merlot in one's fridge. It is not easy to tell that there is no Cabernet Blanc in one's fridge if nestled on the door is an unmarked bottle of Sauvignon Blanc and one has never tasted either sort of wine or heard their tastes described. In this last case, one would not be able to say definitively that there is no Cabernet Blanc in the fridge unless one knew what it tasted like. Our question, then, is whether or not it is easy to categorize people who are inexpert at human virtue as inexpert in this domain. If it is, then Socrates does not need to be able to recognize experts in human virtue to conclude that there are none.

We have already seen what the answer is: it is *not* easy to tell that someone is not an expert in human excellence. Were it easy to tell when someone lacks this skill, Athens would not have a reputation for wisdom. Athens is teeming with people who have a reputation for wisdom (*cf. Ap.* 29d7-8), but who are nevertheless not wise. So the objection has not shown that Socrates doesn't need to be able to recognize experts in human virtue (and so does not need expertise in expertise generally), to conclude that there are no experts in human virtue.

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<sup>23</sup> This version of the objection, if I have understood the objectors correctly, is from Mason Westfall and Allan Hazlett—but see also p. 5, n. 12 above.

In reply, the objector might sharpen the original concern. The objector might concede the foregoing but point out that instead of being able to tell what an expert in human virtue would look like should he come across one, Socrates just needs to be sure about who isn't an expert in human virtue, always: if someone's not an expert in human virtue, he'll figure it out, *every time*. In an environment where no one is an expert in human virtue, that's all he'd actually need to tell that no one was wise.

The response here is that being a super-categorizer in this way requires having a lot of knowledge about what things *are* that will in fact give one the ability to recognize expertise in human virtue through process of elimination. If I know what every other white wine tastes like but Cabernet Blanc, and I can also recognize all of the wines that aren't Cabernet Blanc, I will be able to recognize Cabernet Blanc when I taste it simply by process of elimination. In this sense, I will be able to recognize Cabernet Blanc when I run across it. Similarly, if I can tell who the experts are in every other domain and who the non-experts are in every domain, I will be able to tell who the experts in human virtue are if I should run across them. So if one equips Socrates with a superhuman ability to detect lack of expertise in human virtue, he is going to be able to tell, since he can categorize every other person, which people have this expertise should he meet them. So, Socrates does need expertise in recognizing expertise to conclude that no one is an expert in human virtue whom he has interviewed, and so to conclude that there are no experts in human virtue.

Now let's take a look at Socrates' views about recognizing experts. From there, we will be able to show (in II) that he is an expert in recognizing experts according to those views, and then assess those views for their quality (III).

# Chapter I: Socrates' Views on Expertise

Socrates' views about expertise can be found throughout Plato's Socratic dialogues. His views about recognizing experts in particular can be found in the *Laches*. There, he considers three ways of finding experts. He and his interlocutors agree that the layperson has sufficient evidence for concluding that someone is an expert if the purported expert satisfies any of three conditions.

- (1) The purported expert has studied the area in which she claims expertise under the guidance of good teachers, and has continued to practice the *technē*.
- (2) The purported expert has a track record of success in the area in which she claims expertise.
- (3) The purported expert demonstrates that the domain in which she claims expertise constitutes a *technē* (by providing an account of its goals and what causes them to be achieved).

I'll begin by unpacking the text in which the first condition appears.

## 1.1 Certification

The first condition is found at 184d8-e4.

SO. ... And if there should be a council about your son's gymnastic exercise that concerned what kind he should practice, would you listen to the majority of us, or to that person who happens to have been educated under a good educator in gymnastics, and to have practiced? (...ἢ κείνῳ ὅστις τυγχάνει ὑπὸ παιδοτρίβῃ ἀγαθῷ πεπαιδευόμενος καὶ ἡσκηκώς;)

ME. Probably to the latter, Socrates.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> I read 'παιδοτρίβῃ ἀγαθῷ' as a dative of agent and the unusual 'ὑπὸ' as a preposition describing the mode of agency. We have a similar use of the preposition in English in phrases such as, 'under her tutelage'. Cf. Smyth (rev. Messing) 1956, sec. 1698.2.b, and contrast my translation with Sprague's (Cooper & Hutchinson (eds.) 1997, at p. 670): "...would you be persuaded by the greater number or by whoever has been educated and exercised under a good trainer?" In Sprague's translation, the prepositional phrase 'ὑπὸ παιδοτρίβῃ ἀγαθῷ' is construed with both perfect participles, πεπαιδευόμενος and ἡσκηκώς, instead of just the former, passive one. The significance is that on my reading, Socrates' view is more sophisticated than the alternative translation suggests: it's not merely one's intellectual pedigree that provides sufficient evidence of expertise to the layperson, but an unexpired pedigree—if someone remains an expert in her field, she will not have fallen out of practice. Cf. *Grg.* 514c, where Socrates is

The point is reiterated at 185b1-5.

SO. So, as I was saying just now, how would we investigate if we wanted to find out which of us was most expert in gymnastic exercise? Would he not be the man who had studied it and made it his business (ὁ μαθὼν καὶ ἐπιτηδεύσας), and who had had good teachers (διδάσκαλοι ἀγαθοὶ) in this very subject?

ME. So it seems to me, at any rate.<sup>25</sup>

The layperson can identify someone as an expert in a domain by finding out that she has studied the subject under good teachers, and by confirming that the would-be expert has remained in practice. The point of gathering evidence that the would-be expert has stayed in practice since receiving her training is, of course, to rule out the possibility that she has not since forgotten what she learned owing to a lack of practice. For ease of discussion, let's call this way of recognizing experts "pedigree", or "certification". This method requires the following of the layperson:

- (a) a pool of one or more people whom he correctly believes to be good teachers of the *technē*, and
- (b) ways of confirming that the would-be expert...
  - a. ...actually studied under one of those people whom he correctly believes to be good teachers of the *technē*,
  - b. ...actually studied under one of those teachers *long enough* to have mastered the field, and

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more explicit about the need for evidence that one has remained in practice after leaving the company of one's teachers.

The point, here, is not that one who can no longer practice, e.g. owing to age or disability, is no longer an expert (though it may be that Socrates views them as "less expert" than before, unless perhaps this leads them to focus more on teaching and to become better teachers, which thereby compensates in some way), but just that someone who fails to keep up after they have been taught and trained well lose their expertise. The gymnast can't retain his skills if he stops practicing immediately after he no longer requires an instructor. Thanks to Allan Silverman for pressing me on this point.

<sup>25</sup> ἐπιτηδεύω can mean "to make (something) one's business" in the sense of pursuing it and practicing it regularly, and thus with reference to persons can mean that they know some kind of art (they are "practiced" in the passive voice; LSJ, s.v. 'ἐπιτηδεύω'). The parallel at 184d8-e4 is 'ἡσκηκώς'.

- c. has continued to practice what she learned under those teachers *enough* to remain an expert at the present time.

The first of these requirements raises two questions. First, what makes a teacher of a *technē agathos*? Second, how can a layperson find out who the *didaskaloi agathoi* of a *technē* are?

Socrates' answer to these questions is that the *didaskaloi agathoi* of a *technē* just are the people who are *technikoi* in a *technē*. To ask, "Who are the good teachers of this art?" is just to ask, "Who are the experts in this art?" Socrates thinks that the way to tell whether or not someone is a good teacher of a *technē* is just to find out whether or not they are an expert, which (to avoid a regress of justification) one must do by a means other than pedigree, such as by tracking their success.

So, Laches and Nicias, we should also—since Lysimachus and Melesias called us in concerning their sons, eager that their souls become best—show them both teachers—if we have them—who are in the first place good themselves and have cared for the souls of many young people, and, in the second place, have clearly taught us... (*Laches* 186a3-b1)

Here, Socrates is reiterating the first result of their discussion: one way to find out if any of them is an expert in making young people good is to find out whether or not any of them has had good teachers in the art of human virtue. Moreover, he adds, the way to find out if their teachers are any good is to see whether or not they've been successful in their field, which in the case of virtue, is making other people virtuous.<sup>26</sup>

That the good teachers of a subject just are the experts on that subject is a substantive and controversial claim about expertise. An oft-cited counterexample to the identity claim is the

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<sup>26</sup> That other good people, rather than good deeds, are the *erga* of the *technē* of *aretē*, and that this is the means by which one would track success in the domain of virtue, is discussed further in Chapter II.

One might object that in the foregoing passage, Socrates says that to find good teachers, they should find people who are "in the first place good themselves and have cared for the souls of many young people". This could mean that Socrates treats "being good" as separable from "being able to make others good", which militates against my view that other good people are the *erga* of the *technē* of *aretē*. However, it does not follow that Socrates treats the two as being separate, because the *kai* could be epexegetical, and we have further reasons (discussed in the first half of Chapter II) to think that it is.

successful basketball coach who is not himself a skillful player. In the reverse direction: some brilliant mathematicians are ineffective teachers. Socrates, though, doesn't think these situations are possible for true *technikoi*. If he were confronted with these cases, he would deny that sports or the ability to do, but not teach mathematics constitute *technai*.<sup>27</sup> Basketball certainly requires practice, but success in the game is partly dependent on luck, and *technē* in the full sense of that term is not (cf. Reeve 1989, pp. 44-5, *Euthyd.* 280a6-8). Moreover, the standards of success are not clear and static, but are rather defined relative to the outcomes of other teams and players. Basketball coaches are not *didaskaloi agathoi*, either, for the very reason that success cannot be measured clearly, and so their guidance does not amount to the passing on of a *technē*.<sup>28</sup> The mathematician who cannot teach others how to perform as he does has talent, Socrates would say, as the poets do,<sup>29</sup> but not expertise, for if he actually understood what he was doing, then there would be an account of the things that he learned, and he would be able to replicate this account in his teachings to pass on the relevant information to his students.

In elucidating Socrates' views on these matters via the passage at 186a3-b1, one might object to my earlier reading of the passages at 184d8-e4 and 185b1-5 because in the passages at 186a3-b1, Socrates doesn't reiterate the point that the would be expert must have stayed in practice when he summarizes their findings. Perhaps this militates against my reading of the earlier passages and the scope of 'ὕπὸ παιδοτρύβη', because Socrates is not expounding on his own well-thought-out view of the matter, but is rather stating something obvious to any fifth

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<sup>27</sup> Indeed, his claim makes much more sense if one thinks that the paradigmatic *technai* concern, for example, the domains of housebuilding and Euclidean geometry. (On housebuilding, see the speculative etymology of '*technē*' in Roochnik 1996, p. 19.) In both cases, the biconditional between good teachers of the craft and experts in the craft is true.

<sup>28</sup> One might object that Socrates *does* think that sports are *technai*, since he thinks of gymnastics as a domain of expertise in the *Laches* (cf. *Ly.* 204a6-7). However, the goal of gymnastics is the care of the body via exercise (*Grg.* 464b ff.), whereas the goal of a sport is victory. Carrying out one's exercise regimen successfully is much less dependent on luck than succeeding (i.e. winning) in a basketball game.

<sup>29</sup> *Ap.* 22b8-c2.



century Athenian, as his interlocutors' ready agreement might indicate to us. (Laches objects that this doesn't cover all the cases, as when experts are self-taught, but neither does he deny that pedigree is one way of finding experts.) The component (b-c) above doesn't enter into the discussion, because Socrates isn't thinking and hasn't thought about the details too carefully.

The objection is worth considering because the passages from which I am extracting the Socratic view are quite thin on explication in the ones surrounding them—in elucidating them as I have, I run the risk of moving away from a reading of Plato's character to a rational reconstruction of Plato's character, a collection of statements he “should have” made. But the broader worry has no teeth as of yet. If I am right, Socrates is being very careful in the three passages just quoted. At 185b1-5, he is careful to echo what he has said at 184d8-e4 with respect to having practiced: the person one consults must not only have studied the relevant art (with good teachers), but to have made it his business (ἐπιτηδεύσας), the parallel of ἡσκηκώς at 184d8-e4. Moreover, at 186a3-b1, Socrates *adds* something to their discussion that wasn't stated before, which shows that he is thinking (or rather has already thought about) these issues, indicating that he is being quite careful about how they proceed. Recall that the crucial detail he added in this passage is that the way to find out who the good teachers of a *technē* are is to track their success in the field.

Furthermore, in the 186 passage, Socrates is prioritizing what needs to be discovered first, as he will later go on to do by switching the discussion away from methods for establishing expertise, and on to methods that check others for the necessary conditions on expertise. In this passage, 186a3-b1, he is simply saying that if someone wants to establish for the layperson that she is an expert in a field, then she can point to good teachers she has had, and that those good teachers we must antecedently have good reasons to believe are experts (e.g. that they are

successful in the field) and also that they have taught this person (a, and b-a above). Whether or not the person studied under them *enough* to become an expert and whether or not they have practiced enough to *remain* an expert is somewhat downstream of these prior concerns. Socrates is unlikely to make a foray into these questions when it comes to the question at issue, whether or not any of them has had teachers who could certify that they can teach young people to be good human beings, because it's going to be difficult to settle whether or not there are teachers of human virtue in the first place. We know he is worried about this in other dialogues, and that he is going to move the discussion into new territory soon, so it's not surprising that he doesn't reiterate every detail of the 184 and 185 passages again at 186. The takeaway: we have good evidence so far that Socrates has thought carefully about the issues, rather than evidence to the contrary.

Now that we've reviewed Socrates' answers to our questions about (a), let's turn to (b). Socrates does not say how the layperson can tell whether or not someone has had the teacher they claim to have had. Nor does he say how the layperson can tell whether or not the training the would-be expert received was sufficient to make them experts in their field, or how much practice is required to remain an expert, either. There are many reasons for this, some of them already familiar. First, Laches will immediately point out that we cannot rely on teachers only to find our expert, and Socrates will set aside the two methods of finding experts they initially discuss in favor of testing the two generals for the satisfaction of a condition necessary for expertise, instead of looking for evidence that would suffice for establishing their expertise. So the discussion simply takes a new turn in the *Laches*, and they do not dwell on this first method for finding experts for very long. Nor, when the issue is raised in the *Gorgias*, is any more time spent on the subject. The focus of the discussion there is on tracking another's success in the

field to determine expertise (and therefore, eligibility for working on public projects), rather than on one's pedigree (*Grg.* 514a-515c). Second, providing general answers to these questions is difficult and possibly not very illuminating. Time to mastery varies with discipline, for example, and what is required to keep up one's mastery varies, too. This means that general guidelines, especially with regard to (b-b) and (b-c), are unlikely to be of much use to the layperson. The layperson needs guidelines that are *technē*-specific. Third, these simply aren't the issues Socrates is concerned with in the *Laches* and *Gorgias*. Plato, or his character Socrates, at any rate, was much more interested in how one could track the success of a putative expert than check her pedigree. After all, the usefulness of tracking expertise via pedigree depends on there being another method of finding experts—the pool of antecedently trusted experts must themselves be vetted for expertise, and their teachers must be vetted, and so on—if we're going to fully justify our assertions about someone's status as an expert via pedigree. So, his silence on the issues isn't very surprising.

That isn't to say that there are no clues as to what Socrates thinks. When he uses the first method of finding experts to assert that Nicias has wisdom about how to carry on the sort of discussions Socrates thinks are necessary for living well, he points to a teacher with whom he is already personally acquainted, Damon, and then points again to a teacher with whom he is *also* personally acquainted, completing the justification by pointing to Prodicus's success in debate owing to his use of fine distinctions.

...you seem to me not at all to perceive that he has received this wisdom (ταύτην τὴν σοφίαν) from our friend Damon, and Damon associates much with Prodicus, who indeed seems to be the best among the sophists at distinguishing these kinds of expressions.  
(*Laches* 197d1-5)

“These kinds of expressions” refers to the moralistic ones with which they are concerned in the *Laches*, such as the difference between *andreia* (courage) on the one hand and *aphobia*

(fearlessness) on the other (197a6-8). The present point, though, is that one way of verifying who taught whom and whether the student ever achieved the mastery they claim to possess under that teacher's guidance is to consult the teachers themselves.

This doesn't help if the teachers are unknown to us or are inaccessible. Two things can be said, here, that would comport with what we get in the Socratic dialogues and with what we know about education in the fifth century. First, direct acquaintance with teachers is unnecessary if the institutions from which they learned their craft are believed to vet their teachers appropriately. (University professors and physicians working in hospitals, rather than physicians working in private practice, don't hang their credentials on the wall for a reason.) At least when it came to reading, writing, analysis of poetry, sports, playing musical instruments, and dancing, it was possible to learn these from teachers who belonged to the first public schools in fifth century Athens<sup>30</sup>—though some of these Socrates would not consider *technai*. Second, and more directly relevant to the dialogues, is the fact that Socrates routinely deals with people who claim expertise in something for which he suspects there are no teachers: the human and political *technē*. Such cases are sufficiently like those in which teachers are unknown to us or are not available to consult directly to merit switching strategies when it comes to ascertaining their epistemic status: don't go for pedigree, but rather, find out if they can state what it is they claim to be experts in. This is one of Socrates' standard strategies for investigating expertise in the Socratic dialogues, and is discussed with more care shortly.

Teachers cannot always be relied upon to tell whether or not their students have remained in practice, either, since they are likely as not to have stopped tracking their activities after they've established themselves. Two options have already presented themselves, however.

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<sup>30</sup> See Murray (1986 pp. 269-74 and references on p. 276) for more on early Greek schooling.

First, one can rely on the fact that they have remained gainfully employed by an organization that would not retain them if it they were not competent in their field (such as, for example, one of the public schools mentioned above). Second, one can rely on the testimony of others who have benefited from their services from roughly their time of certification to the time of the inquiry into her expertise—or at any rate the testimony of several people who have benefited from their services during that interval.

## 1.2 Success

The second way someone could prove to a layperson that she is an expert is to demonstrate her success in the field. Laches is quick to point out that unexpired certification may suffice, but is not necessary for establishing expertise, since some experts are self-taught. Socrates replies that the self-proclaimed expert who is self-taught had better be able to show the layperson a track record of success in her craft if she is to prove that she is what she claims to be.

LA. What do you mean, Socrates? Haven't you ever seen people who have become more expert in some matters without teachers than with teachers?

SO. I have indeed, Laches: *you* would not want to trust *them*, if they should claim to be good artisans, unless they should have some well-wrought work of their own expertise to show you, both the one and others besides (εἰ μὴ τί σοι τῆς αὐτῶν τέχνης ἔργον ἔχοιεν ἐπιδείξαι εὖ εἰργασμένον, καὶ ἔν καὶ πλείω).

LA.: Absolutely—that's the fact of the matter. (*Laches* 185e7-186a2)<sup>31</sup>

As Socrates goes on to indicate when he reiterates the results of their discussion, success is not merely necessary, but also sufficient evidence for concluding that someone is an expert. This is illustrated by the case of expertise in virtue.

So, Laches and Nicias, we should also—since Lysimachus and Melesias called us in concerning their sons, eager that their souls become best—show them both teachers—if we have them—who are in the first place good themselves and have cared for the souls of

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<sup>31</sup> The Greek 'εὖ εἰργασμένον' is appropriately ambiguous between product and activity, both of which may be the outcomes relevant for success. For example, the relevant outcomes in housebuilding are products external to the activity of housebuilding itself: houses, but in geometry, we judge success by the activity of doing the proofs (the way we get there matters as much as the conclusion reached). Cf. *Charmides* 165d-166a.

many young people, and, in the second place, have clearly taught us: or, if one of *us* does not claim that he has had a teacher himself, but then claims that he has works of his own to speak of, then we should also show them who among the Athenians or foreigners, whether slaves or free people, have by all accounts become good because of that man (δι' ἐκεῖνον ὁμολογουμένως ἀγαθοὶ γεγόνασιν)... (*Laches* 186a3-b5)

So an expert can also be recognized by a layperson by tracking her success in the field. In the case above, it is success in making other people good that marks one as an expert in human virtue.<sup>32</sup>

Looking carefully at the passages above, we can distinguish several components built into this method of demonstrating expertise. First, the *erga*, the deeds or products used as evidence of expertise, must be *hautōn tēs technēs*, that is, they must be of, as in related or belonging to, the expert's own craft. This has several implications. The first of these is that the *erga* used to prove expertise must be relevant to the domain in which someone claims to be *technikos*. Every *technē* has its own *ergon*, such as shoes in the case of cobblery and health in the case of medicine. So the *erga* shown to us by the self-proclaimed *technikos* must be relevant to that domain (*cf. Republic* I 345e-347a). When it comes to distinguishing the *erga* of shoemaking and medicine, the point seems obvious—of course expertise in the production of shoes does not make one an expert in the production of bodily health. However, this more general point is lost on many Athenians who possess *technai* when it comes to “the most important matters”, the ethical ones with which Socrates is principally concerned. Socrates recounts as much in his defense speech:

But, Athenian men, the good artisans (δημιουργοί) also seemed to me to have the very same fault which the poets did, too—each one deemed (ἕκαστος ἡξίου) that he was wisest in other, most important matters on account of plying his trade well (διὰ τὸ τὴν

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<sup>32</sup> *Cf. Gorgias* 514a-515b, where Socrates suggests that unexpired pedigree and success are at least jointly sufficient for establishing expertise (and perhaps, as in the *Laches*, individually sufficient, at 514d-e). At 514e, he suggests that they are disjunctively necessary: at least one of them must obtain to show proof of expertise.

τέχνην καλῶς ἐξεργάζεσθαι)—and this error of theirs seemed to me to hide away this wisdom.<sup>33</sup>

The artisans and the poets fail to recognize that success in one domain does not translate to success in another.

A second consequence of the *erga*'s having to be *hautōn tēs technēs* is that they must be *erga* of a *technē*. In other words: the area in which the would-be expert claims expertise must be an area in which one *can* be *technikos*. Not all domains of study qualify. *Technai* have characteristic products or activities that benefit others (*Chrm.* 165c-166a, *Rep.* I 345e-346c, *Grg.* 514a-515a).<sup>34</sup> The boundaries of their domain are clear (*Chrm.* 165c-166a, *Rep.* I 345e-347a).<sup>35</sup> Their practitioners can state what it is they are an expert in without contradiction (*Prot.* 311b-313c, *Eu.* 5c-6e, *La.* 190c), explain why they do what they do in the domain (*Grg.* 465a, 500e-501a), account for the nature of the beneficial objects they serve (e.g. health or housing, *Grg.*

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<sup>33</sup> *Apology* 22d4-e1. Though Socrates is comparing the fault of the artisans to the fault of the poets, he is not attributing a *technē* to the poets, whom he has just explained do not possess one (22a-c, esp. 22b9-c3), but rather he is saying that the poets attribute to themselves success in a *technē*. The scope of 'ἐκάστος ἡξίου' therefore ranges over 'διὰ τὸ τὴν τέχνην καλῶς ἐξεργάζεσθαι', but the verb indicating what matters seemed like to Socrates (ἔδοξεν) does not range over this clause (as the grammar in any case suggests, when it comes to the latter verb). The case of the artisans is comparable to the case of the poets insofar as they both think they are wisest in something that they are not because *they* think they have some other kind of wisdom, but the case of the artisans differs from the case of the poets insofar as the former actually possesses a kind of wisdom, while the latter do not. -- As the surrounding text suggests, the imperfect tense of 'ἡξίου' is appropriate, indicating that the artisans' attitude towards their own wisdom was ongoing, despite Socrates' attempts to show them that they were not wise (let alone wisest) in *ta alla ta megista*, the other, most important matters.

<sup>34</sup> This connotation of '*technē*' is very old, far predating Plato (Roochnik 1996, pp. 18-26). Kozey (2018), whose work is the latest on the question of whether *technai* are good-directed in Plato, argues to the contrary. However, she is considering the entire Platonic corpus as a unit, not those dialogues in which Socrates is engaged in the mission he describes in the *Apology*. If rhetoric, piracy and eristic are called *technai* in the *Sophist*, it doesn't bear on my question here. Kozey does argue that the famous passages at *Gorgias* 465a and 500a-501c do not make good-directedness a condition on being a *technē*. The distinction between practices that aim at what is best and those that aim at what is pleasant crosscuts the distinction between *technai* and *empeiriai*, the latter of which is distinguished only by the fact that the former and not the latter have accounts of what their aims are and how they achieve those aims. I am convinced by Kozey's argument, but it doesn't undercut the claim that *technai* are directed at some benefit according to Socrates. It only undercuts the claim that this is what the *Gorgias* passages suggest. The passages from the *Republic* I'm going to discuss below are not considered in the Kozey paper.

<sup>35</sup> Roochnik (1996) thinks this is really the core of *technē*, both in Plato and earlier authors, but as we've seen from the previous footnote, the notion of benefit may also be a core (and truly ancient) part of this concept. The Mandarin '专家' (zhuānjiā), "expert", "specialist", is closer to the mark. Its literal meaning is "specific house" or domain.

500e-501a),<sup>36</sup> and will have mastered all of the areas in that domain (*Ion* 532c). Finally, *technai* can be taught (*Meno* 87b-c), and their practitioners can teach them (*Grg.* 449b, *Ap.* 20a-c).

Weaving and cobblery are *technai* because they satisfy these conditions (*cf. Ap.* 22d-e). Oratory and poetry are not, as practitioners of neither can explain why they do what they do.<sup>37</sup>

Another consequence of the *erga*'s having to be *hautōn tēs technēs* is that the *erga* cannot have been brought about by someone else's efforts. Shoes manufactured by someone else, or a concerto played by another do not provide evidence of one's own abilities as a shoemaker or pianist. A fourth consequence: the *erga* must result from knowledge that belongs *to the would-be expert*, and not to someone else, as would be the case if she performed or produced well the relevant *erga* under the guidance of teachers or with the aid of written instructions (*cf. Ar. EN* II.4). Finally, the *erga* must result from knowledge that the would-be expert *now* possesses. We could hardly say that the *erga* were *erga tēs hautou technēs* or *hautēs technēs*, works of *his own* or *her own* craft, if the would-be expert were no longer in possession of the craft. Rather, they would be works of the craft the would-be expert *once had*. To be more concrete: decades-old gymnastics trophies are hardly sufficient evidence of expert ability in the present time.

A second major component of tracking success is the evaluation of the work for its quality. The *ergon* used as evidence for being *technikos* must be *eu eirgasmemon*, "well-

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<sup>36</sup> Another way of putting this point and the last is that experts can explain why they do what they do in the domain by appealing to final and efficient causes. The housebuilder can explain why he uses bricks and not wood for the foundation by appealing both to his purpose (getting a house built) and to why those materials are more appropriate (the wood could rot or break, whereas the brick is much sturdier).

There could be a tension between these features of *technai* and recognizing experts by tracking their success. What happens if someone produces several well-executed products of a *technē* and has studied and practiced that *technē*, but cannot explain why she took each step in the production of the products or the point of making them in the first place? I take it that Socrates believes a situation like this is not possible. In the *Euthydemus* (281a-b), he suggests that consistently correct use (e.g. making shoes well) *requires* wisdom. Since being wise implies the ability to provide the aforementioned accounts, problems like this will not appear (at least in his view). *Cf.* the discussion above concerning the identity of good teachers and experts.

<sup>37</sup> See *Grg.* 464b-465d (oratory), 500e-502d (oratory and poetry) and *Ap.* 22a-c and the *Ion* (the poets cannot offer any account of why they do what they do, suggesting theirs is not a craft, but owes itself to divine inspiration).



wrought”. This helps to distinguish someone who is truly *technikos* not just from laypeople, but from amateurs. The standards for what makes an *ergon eu eirgasmenon* will vary with the field, so making a generalization as to what counts as “well-wrought” is inapt. However, regardless of the standard, this method of finding experts makes the important (and contentious) assumption that the layperson will possess enough non-expert knowledge about the field to distinguish *erga* that are *eu* from those that are *kakōs eirgasmena*—i.e. that such standards will be readily accessible to the layperson, and works of the art will be readily assessable relative to this standard. We will return to the contentiousness of the issue momentarily.

A third component of tracking success is that the self-proclaimed expert must have *several* examples of well-wrought *erga* that proceed from her own *technē*, literally, “both one and more” (*kai hen kai pleiō*) well-wrought works of her own art. The threshold, if it makes sense to talk about one, again depends on the *technē*. The point of the provision is of course to rule out the possibility of mistaking a layperson or amateur enthusiast who gets lucky and makes an *eu eirgasmenon ergon* by chance from a true expert—a real expert will be able to replicate the results over and over. There is some question as to whether ‘*kai hen kai pleiō*’ means several tokens of the same type or several types of *erga* that all pertain to the same *technē*. It must be a *type* as the example of the *Ion* shows (532c): one cannot be merely an expert in Homer to claim expertise in (the analysis) of poetry. One must have mastered the poems of other poets, too. This at any rate matches well with several examples one can name—the expert in calculus can’t just be a master of derivation, the finance manager can’t only know how to deal with middle-income sums, physicians can’t know only how to deal with head colds, and so on.

Finally, it is necessary that the success be demonstrated *to you (soi)*, and not to some other. The point is that the success of the would-be expert must be assessable by you, the

layperson, and not through the means of an intermediary. One might judge some as experts owing to their success in the field indirectly by the intermediary of employer. The employer gauges potential employees' success in the field so far, as well as their promise of future success, and hires on this basis. So, one could think of testimony from the employer as a way of tracking success. This, though, is more like tracking pedigree, in that you must antecedently trust the employer to be a good judge of such matters, for which you need an independent line of evidence (like success). So this final component of the second way of finding experts distinguishes it more clearly from the first, in that the first requires intermediate testimony, whereas the second does not. That's the importance of 'soi' at 185e10, and of 'homologoumenōs' at 186b4. The lack of intermediary means that the standards of success in the field must be evident to the layperson himself, and that he himself must be able to assess the *erga* turned out by the would-be expert against that standard, without additional resources. If the paradigmatic *technai* are housebuilding and medicine this makes a certain amount of sense. It doesn't require expert knowledge to distinguish well-made from poorly-made shoes or healthy from sick people.<sup>38</sup> It's less clear how this will work in cases such as geometry or other fields of advanced mathematics, or, as we will see shortly, the broad *technē* of living a human life well.

I have laid out in detail what I take to be two methods of recognizing experts that Socrates endorses. Before considering the third, one might wonder why we should believe that Socrates endorses these methods, and hasn't merely assented to them for the sake of argument. He may sincerely want to help the boys find experts in virtue, and not yet have concluded that

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<sup>38</sup> This last assertion is difficult to maintain. The beginnings of dementia or colon cancer are not readily apparent even to the physician without diagnostic tests, much less the layperson or the one who will suffer from them. The same goes for asymptomatic carriers of a virus like HIV, which can lie dormant in the body for years. In all of these cases, assuming the individual doesn't have other medical issues, the person will appear healthy without being healthy. Socrates is aware of the general problem (*Grg.* 464a). The point here is that the standards of success in medicine are accessible to the layperson, not that they are *always* accessible to the layperson.

nobody can achieve human virtue, but this doesn't mean that he actually endorses everything he has assented to so far in the discussion. The best reply to this worry is that Socrates continues to use and endorse these methods of finding experts even after he begins pursuing another line of inquiry that doesn't require this earlier agreement at all—that is, when he tries to find out whether Nicias and Laches can state what courage is, and therefore satisfy a necessary condition for being experts in courage and virtue generally. This happens when Socrates raises an objection to Nicias' definition of courage as wisdom about what is to be feared and hoped for. Socrates says that many people think animals such as lions and boars are brave, but also that they are not wise. Nicias says they are neither wise nor brave but rash; Laches balks at what he considers meaningless wordplay on the part of Nicias in response to what he would like to believe is a devastating objection. Socrates replies:

*Do not even speak, Laches: for you seem to me not at all to perceive that he has received this wisdom (ταύτην τὴν σοφίαν) from our friend Damon, and Damon associates much with Prodicus, who indeed seems to be the best among the sophists at distinguishing these kinds of expressions. (Laches 197d1-5)*

Here, Socrates relies on certification to identify Nicias and Damon as experts in making fine distinctions, and Prodicus's track record of success to accord him the status of expert.<sup>39</sup> Here, we find good reasons to believe that Socrates endorses certification and tracking success as two methods of identifying experts beyond his merely assenting to them for the sake of discussion.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> It may be argued that by using the verb *δοκεῖ* (seems), Socrates is not committing himself to the claim that Prodicus has any wisdom that he could pass on to others, that Prodicus is certainly reputed (*δὴ δοκεῖ*) to have wisdom, but this doesn't mean he actually has any. But if Socrates did not think Prodicus had something valuable to pass on to him and to others, it would be strange for him to have spent so much time with Prodicus himself (see e.g. *Charmides* 163d), especially since Socrates likes to question those who have a reputation for wisdom to see if they aren't charlatans. It would also be strange for Socrates, in the context of teaching the young Clinias how to engage in a discussion and inquiry about serious matters, to cite Prodicus's dictum that one must first learn about how to use words properly if one is to inquire well (*Euthydemus* 277e).

<sup>40</sup> It isn't surprising, then, that Socrates recommends Damon as a teacher for Nicias's son, because Damon is an expert in the pursuit of wisdom, an expert in inquiry and the search for truth through argumentation (or at least has a skill that is necessary for this), and Socrates thinks this skill is necessary for living well ("the unexamined life is not worth living..."). He refuses to teach others because they ask him to make their children turn out well, but what

### 1.3 Proving the Domain is a *Technē*

Returning now to the main thread of the argument: the significance of Socrates' endorsement of these two methods of finding experts—checking for unexpired certification and tracking success in the field—lies in the fact that Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to the latter (as will be argued in the next chapter), but also in the fact that they provide a contrast to a third method of finding experts. Certification and success can be used to confirm that someone is an expert, but they can't always be used to confirm that someone is *not* an expert. For one, certification isn't necessary for confirming expertise. This means that someone who lacks certification can't be verified as a non-expert in this way. Success *is* necessary, but if someone claims success in a field when the layperson can't confirm this for himself, he won't be able to tell whether or not the person is an expert. The layperson could fail to track success for a number of familiar reasons: the activity or product that the *technē* aims to produce may not be producible on the spot, sufficient examples of the would-be expert's completed handiwork might not be available at the time the layperson is investigating, or perhaps the standards for success in the field are opaque without specialist training (*cf. Chrm.* 171a-172a). The upshot is that if the layperson can't prove that the would-be expert has unexpired certification, he can try to confirm or disconfirm success in the field as a means of confirming or disconfirming expertise, but if he can't track success, he will need to find another method to conclude definitively that someone lacks or possesses expertise.

In normal circumstances, where the usual range of tools and resources are available, a claimant to expertise who lacks unexpired credentials and whose success cannot be tracked by the layperson is unlikely to possess expertise. Systems of certification and standards for success

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they need is to learn to engage in inquiry for themselves (an example of how to do this properly is something Socrates tries to demonstrate for Laches' sake).

tend to grow up around stable bodies of knowledge, and self-taught cobblers *et al.* can demonstrate their skill when given the right materials. There is still a chance that someone like this is actually *technikos* after all, as we know from the case of pioneers, who have no teachers to whom they can point to verify that they know what they're talking about, and whose success may not be readily apparent to anyone but those in adjacent fields. So, a fuller guide to finding experts for the non-expert will go beyond certification and success for at least this reason. More to the point, Socrates needs this third method of recognizing experts to complete his investigation of the oracle's message. The standards of success in the human and political art are not readily apparent to the layperson, as Socrates emphasizes in other dialogues (e.g. *Euthyphro* 7b-d). Certification ultimately depends upon being able to track success, as we have seen, or on some other method of detecting expertise.<sup>41</sup> In the absence of another method, certification won't work when the standards for success in a field aren't clear enough to generate a pool of experts whose certification can be trusted. Yet to investigate the oracle's message to Chaerephon, Socrates needs to be able to tell whether claims to expertise to living well and virtuously are legitimate or not without recourse to certification or success, because he otherwise has no way of telling whether anybody's wiser than him or not. It makes sense, then, both for us and for Socrates, to find a different and more readily testable necessary condition on expertise when certification and success aren't available, as well as a condition that constitutes sufficient evidence of expertise for the layperson, should the necessary condition be fulfilled.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> One could also start an investigation by trying to track success, come up short, proceed to a different necessary condition, find that the would-be expert satisfies it, and then confirm their expertise by going to certification. This is possible when success can't be tracked for reasons other than the standards being unclear to the layperson. But there is a reason the discussion in the *Laches* starts out with certification and not success: the former is easier to track than the latter, so certification is a more natural starting point than success.

<sup>42</sup> In saying this, I am not yet committing myself to a view about which stage of his investigation Socrates is at in the *Laches*. Prior to receiving the oracle's message through Chaerephon, Socrates would not have *needed* to search for a third method for finding experts, but he may in any case have thought of one. For, as he says, he's been in pursuit of the art of human virtue from youth (186b8-c5), and will no doubt have realized quickly that the debate among

That's just what Socrates goes on to do in the *Laches*, starting with a new necessary condition.

So, the things which we attempted to investigate just now—which teachers we have had about this sort of education or which others we have made better—perhaps it would not be bad to question ourselves closely about these kinds of things, too. But I also think the following sort of investigation brings us to the same point, and would also be somewhat closer to the beginning. For if we happen to know, about anything whatsoever, that when it becomes present in the thing in which it becomes present, it makes that thing better, and moreover we are able to cause it to become present in that thing (καὶ προσέτι οἷοί τε ἔσμεν αὐτὸ ποιεῖν παραγίγνεσθαι ἐκείνῳ), it is clear that we know this *very* thing about which we might be advisors on whatever way one might acquire it most easily and best (δῆλον ὅτι αὐτὸ γε ἴσμεν τοῦτο οὐ̄ περί σύμβουλοι ἂν γενοίμεθα ὡς ἂν τις αὐτὸ ῥᾶστα καὶ ἄριστ' ἂν κτήσαιτο). (*Laches* 189d5-e7)

A claim to expertise in making items of a certain class better, say the F's, entails a claim to know which X's make them better when added. It also entails a claim to *be able* to add the X's to the F's. A claim to expertise in improving bodies (medicine) is a claim to know which things improve them (health) and a claim to be able to add health to bodies. Furthermore, if someone knows which X's improve F's when added and how to add X's to F's, then one knows *what* those X's are which improve them. Continuing with the medical example: someone who knows *that* health makes those bodies better to which it is added and is able to add health to bodies must also know *what* health is. Therefore, a necessary condition for being an expert in improving some class of items is to know *what* those X's are that improve the items one claims to be an expert in improving, not merely *that* they improve them. As they go on to agree, if one knows what an X is, one must be able to state what it is (190c6-7). So, a testable necessary condition

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Athenians as to whether it's teachable (Guthrie 1971 pp. 35-41) and that the lack of clarity about the standards for success (*Eu.* 7b-d) meant that the usual ways of confirming or denying expertise were unavailable.

It's just as well to remain neutral on this point. Although we do know that the dramatic date of the *Laches* lies between the retreat from Delium in 424 and Laches' death in 418, we don't know when Chaerephon went to Delphi. Graham and Barney (2016 p. 285) put the state of scholarship on this question well when, in reference to their own position, they remark, "The interpretation is underdetermined by the evidence."

for expertise in improving items of a certain class is being able to state what those X's are which improve them.

This way of attempting to debunk expertise is not fully general on the face of it. It tells the layperson what to do when certification and success won't offer guidance and the person in question claims expertise in *improving* some class of items, like bodies or souls. This is fine for Socrates' purposes both here and in his investigation of the oracle's message, since he thinks that if someone were wiser than him, then they'd have expertise in improving souls, not just any old expertise. This way of debunking expertise applies to all domains, however, if all domains aim at making something better.<sup>43</sup> In such a case, particle physicists aren't experts in elementary particles, but in improving our understanding of them, shoemakers aren't experts at making shoes, but in improving them (and existent shoes are better *qua* shoes than nonexistent shoes).<sup>44</sup>

Socrates makes such a move in the first book of the *Republic*, at 346a6-9 and 346e3-347a5.

And so, each [craft] provides us with a unique benefit (ὠφελίαν... ἰδίαν), but not one common [to them all]—medicine provides us with health, for example, while navigation provides us with safety in seafaring—and the other crafts provide for us in this way?

By all means. (*Rep.* I 346a6-9)

Each craft provides its own special benefit, such as health to bodies and safety to those aboard ships at sea. That is to say that each craft provides improvements to a certain class of items, bodies in the former case, by means of providing health, and to those aboard ships at sea in the

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<sup>43</sup> An alternative is that all domains for which certification and success won't work as means of tracking experts in them happen to be domains that aim at improving items of a certain class. I don't think Socrates considers this possibility, and at any rate it would be difficult to argue the point piecemeal, especially since some *technai* are yet to be invented.

<sup>44</sup> Thanks are due to Milo Crimi for suggesting (perhaps offhandedly) that manual crafts could be understood as expertise in making improvements of a certain kind. He may not endorse the ways I've expanded on this thought.

latter, by means of providing safety. The move from benefit to improvement becomes clearer in the second passage.

Well then, Thrasymachus, now this much is clear—that not one craft, nor even rulership provides a benefit to itself (ὅτι οὐδεμία τέχνη οὐδε ἀρχὴ το αὐτῆ ὠφέλιμον παρασκευάζει), but, as we’ve been saying for some time, it provides, and issues commands for the benefit of the thing ruled, and seeks out the advantage of that thing, since it is the weaker one—but not that of the stronger. Now because of these things, friend Thrasymachus, *I*, at least, used to say even before now that no one is willing to rule voluntarily and to manage and straighten up others’ sordid affairs, but instead he demands a wage, because the one who is going to ply his trade well never does nor commands what is best for himself, if he commands in accordance with his craft, but instead what is best for the one who is ruled: indeed, probably for these reasons, a wage must accrue to the one who will be willing to rule, either money or honor, or a penalty if he does not rule. (*Rep.* I 346e3-347a5)

In other words, *technai*, including the *archē technē*, the craft of rulership, aim at the advantage and improvement of the things over which they constitute a mastery rather than themselves.<sup>45</sup>

Wage-earning (*misthōtikē*, 346c9-11) and financial management (*chrēmatistikē*, *Grg.* 477e7-8), may not at first blush appear to fit the model because they do not aim at benefiting other people. This is to misunderstand the model. The aim of a craft *qua* craft is not the benefit of others, necessarily, but that of which it is a craft. Shoemakers aim to benefit not themselves or other people but the shoes they make by improving them—by causing them to exist (an existing shoe being better than a nonexistent one), to be sturdier, to be more comfortable. Those features of the shoe *do* benefit others, but that is not the goal of the shoemaker *qua* shoemaker. Housebuilding and the bridle-making may be similarly construed, along with moneymaking. Moneymakers, *qua* moneymakers, aim to benefit not themselves or other people but the money they make by improving it—by causing it to exist (some money being better than none), to be

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<sup>45</sup> In the *Hippias Minor*, the *Crito* (44d) and indeed in the first book of the *Republic* (333e-334b) Socrates suggests that *technikoi* can aim at what is bad, but this is no objection to the claim that *technai* aim at some advantage, insofar as the point of each is to achieve some benefit. Whether individual practitioners choose to achieve it or to do the opposite with their knowledge is a separate issue. Why in particular the *technikos* in virtue will never fail to aim at the goal of her craft (unlike *technikoi* in other domains) will be discussed further in connection with the *Charmides* and *Hippias Minor* in Chapter II.



sufficient (so as to avoid poverty, *Grg.* 477e7-8) , to be plentiful (as insurance against the disaster of poverty—the moneymaker’s or anybody else’s for that matter). Again, those features do benefit others (and likely not just the earner), but that is not the goal of the moneymaker *qua* moneymaker. These issues will appear again in Chapter II’s discussion of the *Charmides*, with more critical analysis in Chapter III. The upshot for our present discussion is that knowing what the X’s are which improve the F’s one claims expertise in improving isn’t just a necessary condition on expertise in improving something, but a necessary condition on expertise, period. Every *technē* aims at improving some class of items.

If somebody can pass this first test, Socrates tells us that the layperson can move on to investigate how the thing the claimant to expertise was able to define can be added to the thing she claims to be an expert in improving. If the expert in improving souls can state which things make them better and what they are, then the layperson can go on to ask how virtue can be added to the soul. In the case they’re discussing, the question is whether or not learning to fight in armor causes virtue to develop in the soul, and in particular, the virtue of courage, the virtue most closely associated with warfare.

Well then, let’s first try to state (εἰπεῖν) whatever courage is, Laches: then after this we shall also investigate (σκεψόμεθα καὶ) in what way it might become present in the young men, insofar as it can become present through pursuits and lessons. (*Laches* 190d7-e2) <sup>46</sup>

This is just about all the text in the *Laches* tells us about how this third method will work, as neither Nicias nor Laches can state what courage is to Socrates’ satisfaction. This leaves us with many questions about how the third method is supposed to work. What exactly does it mean to state what something is? When could the layperson say, definitively, that the person in question has failed to make a proper statement and is therefore not an expert (as Socrates concludes about

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<sup>46</sup> The question indirectly posed at the end is whether practice and training are sufficient to make someone virtuous. An ἐπιτήδευμα (“pursuit”) can mean a pursuit that one customarily or habitually undertakes, thus the sense of “making (some activity) one’s business” in its verbal form (ἐπιτηδεύω), and practicing.

Nicias and Laches with respect to the art of caring for the soul)? What does a *successful* statement of what something is look like, such that it “passes the test” and justifies moving on to an investigation of how (e.g.) virtue can be added to the soul? Finally, how would this latter investigation proceed, and under what conditions would it show that the interviewee is or isn’t an expert of the sort they claim to be?

Stating what X is means demonstrating to the layperson that you know what X is. In the *Laches*, as elsewhere, it quickly becomes evident that Socrates is looking for a statement from his interlocutor that doesn’t conflict with his interlocutor’s other, more deeply-held convictions (e.g. that foolish endurance in battle is sometimes courageous, though wise endurance was the definition of courage given). Knowledge requires belief, and one can’t be said to believe or know what one now rejects on reflection. One can at least be said to believe what one continues to endorse on reflection.

A statement of what X is must include a demonstration that the proposed definition is correct (*Eu.* 7a, 9e), i.e., an account. The statements set out in support of the proposed definition, which constitute the account, must be true (*Grg.* 523a, *cf.* *Ap.* 18a) and presumably, appropriately relevant to the conclusion,<sup>47</sup> rendering the account irrefutable (*Grg.* 473b). The account must allow the one who follows it to understand what *makes* each token x a member of its type (*Eu.* 6d-e, *cf.* 9e-11b), what makes each *instance* of courage an instance of *courage*. Thus, one’s proposed definition must apply to all and only tokens of the type, not just to some and not others (*La.* 190e-192c, *Eu.* 5d-6e). This makes the standards of success in the field known to the inquiring layperson (*Eu.* 5c-d, 6e), opening up this method of detecting expertise.

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<sup>47</sup> Whether the conclusion needs to be deductively entailed by the premises is unclear to me. Socrates is happy to use induction and inference to the best explanation when building his own arguments, such as those he builds in the *Apology*. But in the relevant passages, he is not trying to give an account of “human wisdom” or any other matter in which he claims expertise.

For example, in the present case, if Laches or Nicias can state what courage is, then they can present to Socrates examples of people whom they've made courageous, and Socrates can judge for himself whether or not this is the case. Finally, the account must act as a stabilizing force on the beliefs it supports (*Men.* 97e-98a; *cf. Eu.* 11b-e), meaning that the layperson won't be able to dislodge these beliefs from the claimant to expertise.

Failure to show that you have a stable belief that is true and backed up by a true account of why it's true suffices for the layperson to conclude that you cannot state what X is, and do not know what X is. Failure to show that you know what X is suffices for the layperson to conclude that you are not an expert in improving whatever F's you've claimed expertise in improving by adding X's to them. Successfully stating what X is and thereby showing that you know what X is means that a necessary condition for expertise is satisfied (189d-e), and a sufficient condition for expertise can now be tested (190d-e). The sufficient condition is that one knows how to add those X's to the F's one claims to be an expert in improving so as to improve them, and it is an investigation into whether or not this is the case that Socrates proposes to engage in if the necessary condition is met.

This investigation, e.g. into how courage can be added to the soul, will not just deal with particulars such as the question of whether or not learning to fight in armor is one way of adding courage to the soul. The investigation will also try to establish whether or not the interviewee knows how to do what she claims to be able to do in general, to make things of a certain kind better. One cannot claim expertise if one can only do this in a limited number of cases, as we have seen (*La.* 185e-186a, *Ion* 532c). Doing this means figuring out, first of all, whether or not what the would-be expert claims to know how to do is something that one *can know* how to do, i.e. whether or not the domain in which she claims expertise is in fact a *technē*. This means

providing an account not just of which things improve the things she claims to be an expert in improving, i.e. the goal of the *technē*'s characteristic activity, but an account of what causes such results to be brought about. This Socrates makes clear in two famous passages from the *Gorgias*.

In distinguishing flattery from the *technai* of body and soul, he remarks:

...τέχνην δὲ αὐτὴν οὐ φημι εἶναι ἀλλ' ἐμπειρίαν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔχει λόγον οὐδένα ᾧ προσφέρει ἢ προσφέρει ὅποι' ἅττα τὴν φύσιν ἐστίν, ὥστε τὴν αἰτίαν ἐκάστου μὴ ἔχειν εἰπεῖν.

...and I do not say that it [flattery] is a craft, but a knack, because it does not have any account by which it explains what kind of things the things it offers are in nature, the result being that it cannot state the cause of each. (*Gorgias* 465a2-5)<sup>48</sup>

Socrates reiterates this point again in the discussion with Callicles.

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<sup>48</sup> Here I've elected to follow the Greek given to us by most of the extant manuscripts. I've rendered the first and second instances of 'προσφέρει' differently. The notion of explanation that might be implied by the sense of "exhibit" or "declare" (LSJ, s.v. 'προσφέρει' C2,4) occurs in the middle voice, but the same notion may be implied by the sense of "offer" or "present" in the active voice (*ibid.* 3). In any case, it is clear that the first occurrence of the verb refers to the action of presenting an explanation, since the antecedent of the relative pronoun which precedes it is the noun 'λόγον', here understood as an account. The second occurrence of the verb refers to the action of bringing about the end at which the practice in question is directed (in the case of flattery, pleasure).

Many others modify the MSS before translating, e.g. Kozey (2018, p. 13), Hamilton and Emlyn-Jones (trs., 2004, p. 32), Nichols (tr., 1998, p. 48), Waterfield (tr., 1994, p. 32, *cf.* p. 2) and Irwin (1980, p.33). Most of them (all but Irwin in the foregoing list) accept Dodds' emendation. Dodds suggests (1959, pp. 93, 229-30) adding 'ἦ' between the first 'προσφέρει' and 'ἃ'. His conjecture is supported by three considerations: (1) a translation of the Greek we get in most manuscripts results in a clumsily-put-together sentence, (2) it would be very easy for an 'ἦ' to have dropped out of the MSS in copying, and (3) at 500e4-501a3, when Socrates refers back to what he said at 465a, he demands that a craft have an account of both the end it aims at and how to achieve it. Adding the 'ἦ', Dodds thinks, allows us to see more clearly that two accounts are being demanded in both passages. To that end, he equates 'ᾧ προσφέρει' and 'ἃ προσφέρει' at 465a4 with 'οὗ θεραπεύει' at 501a1 and 'ὧν πράττει' at 501a2, respectively.

I hope to have addressed (1) in my translation above and rendered the MSS better than Croiset (Dodds' target) and Zeyl (on whose translation more follows); (2) is an unnecessary consideration if the sentence can be rendered well without altering the Greek. Regarding (3): The sense of 465a2-5 without Dodds' emendation is that one must know what the goal of the craft is, which is specified by an account of what it is, before being able to specify what causes that goal to come to fruition. But an account of what the goal is (the "why") and account of its causes (the "how") are precisely the two things Socrates demands at 500e4-501a3. No addition needs to be made to the Greek to achieve the correlation.

Irwin (tr., 1980, p. 33) inserts an infinitive verb expressing purpose in English ('to say'), which would require a purpose clause in the Greek, so is even less likely to have dropped out of the manuscripts than Dodds' suggested "ἦ": "it has no rational account (*logos*) by which it applies the things it applies, to say what they are by nature..." (Compare the similar rendering in Irwin 1995, p. 142.) In any case, the addition is unnecessary.

Zeyl, like Croiset, follows the MSS, but translates each instance of 'προσφέρει' in the same way. He also states that no alteration of the MSS is necessary to give a clear translation (1987, n.14). I agree, but have always found Zeyl's translation difficult to parse: "it has no account of the nature of whatever things it applies by which it applies them" (Cooper & Hutchinson (eds.) 1995, pp. 808-9). I would still have trouble understanding the translation if another verb (e.g. 'offers', 'presents') were substituted for both occurrences of 'applies'.

ἔλεγον δέ που ὅτι ἡ μὲν ὀνοποικὴ οὐ μοι δοκεῖ τέχνη εἶναι ἀλλ' ἐμπειρία, ἡ δ' ἰατρικὴ, λέγων ὅτι ἡ μὲν τούτου οὐ θεραπεύει καὶ τὴν φύσιν ἔσκεπται καὶ τὴν αἰτίαν ὧν πράττει, καὶ λόγον ἔχει τούτων ἐκάστου δοῦναι, ἡ ἰατρικὴ.

But at some point I was saying that delicacy-making [a part of flattery] did not seem to me to be a craft, but a knack, whereas medicine was; I said that the one, medicine, had investigated the nature of both that which it serves and the cause of the things which it does, and it is able to provide an account of each of these things... (*Gorgias* 500e4-501a3)

Again, an account has to be true and demonstrate that the conclusion it reaches is true as well (*Grg.* 523a). What follows, given our discussion about statements and accounts above, is that providing an account of the goals and their causes is not just necessary, but sufficient for showing that one knows how to do what one claims, and is therefore an expert in doing so.

This means that identifying someone as an expert or non-expert when certification and success fail to generate a clear result requires, at least, that the layperson begin to learn enough about the craft to know what those things are which improve the things that domain aims to improve. This makes the standards of success in the field apparent to the layperson and makes assessing the success of the would-be expert possible, too. However, if there are no products to assess on hand or the would-be *technē*'s characteristic activity cannot be performed on the spot, one must learn even more about the craft—how it is that the products or activities are produced, step by step, so that a full account is given. An expert in recognizing experts, then, may have to resort to learning a new craft himself when certification and success don't work but there are other signs of expertise, an account of what those X's are which improve the F's the craft aims to improve.

The third method of finding experts therefore boils down to answering a small handful of questions. First, does the claimant to expertise *know* what those things are which improve the things that she claims to be an expert in improving? If not, she isn't an expert. If so, check a

sufficient condition. The sufficient condition is that she knows how to do what she claims to be an expert in doing, which means that she can demonstrate that her ability constitutes a *technē*. This means providing an account of the would-be *technē*'s goal and the things that bring about that goal. If the would-be expert cannot do this, she is not an expert. This completes the procedure that begins with checking for the availability of trusted certification that has yet to expire. Evaluating success is the next thing to try, learning about the standards of success (if unknown) is next, and as a last resort one can attempt to learn the craft oneself, during the process of which one will discover whether not the claimant to expertise actually has a *technē*.

How good is this procedure, though? It seems that “delicacy makers” can know which ingredients and cooking methods improve various dishes, in the sense of making the dishes better members of their kind, and how to add these ingredients and use these cooking methods. They can surely give an account of how this is to be done and about the goal, namely, making the dish taste and look a certain way. They can produce reliable results and teach others to do the same. Yet Socrates doesn't think they have such accounts in the *Gorgias*—so what are we to make of the claim that knowing which X's improve F's when added and how to add X's to F's makes one an expert in improving F's? Socrates does not provide an answer to that question himself, obviously. Otherwise it would not be worth raising. He would need to defend the claim that what the “delicacy makers” might call their “accounts” are really no accounts at all, because they aren't true. They aren't true because they are incomplete. They only explain how to make the dish taste and look a certain way, not how to produce the same pleasure through eating the dish every time, nor why such pleasures are good. However, if Socrates were to make such a move, he would leave himself open to the objection that moneymaking is not a *technē*, contrary to his own assertions. For moneymaking, too, produces less-than-perfectly reliable results.

Business is an unpredictable business. One might also ask why the goal of the moneymaking art is good, since, like the production of pleasure through eating, the making of money is sometimes good, and sometimes bad.

This aside, the third method seems objectionable for another very good reason. It merely pushes back the question we started with: how can someone identify an expert in a domain where he isn't an expert? The question has become: how can someone identify a domain of expertise when he isn't an expert in that domain himself? How will he be able to tell whether the accounts given of the would-be *technē* are true or false? Socrates does not give a clear answer to this question. We do not ever see Socrates get this far into an investigation of expertise. This means that any answer given on his behalf is very speculative.

One could say, for example, that if the account *seems* true—clear, detailed—one's credence will on balance favor that she is an expert, but final judgment will be suspended, since the truth of the matter when it comes to know-how is always in the doing. If you know how to do something, you will be able to demonstrate how you do it or how it was done in the past. This is just tracking success, though. As we've seen before, tracking success also implies that the layperson must find out whether the domain in question is a *technē* (if this is not antecedently known). Using success to establish that some practice is a *technē* and establishing that some practice is a *technē* using success could be viciously (because unhelpfully) circular.

The reply may be that the second method can be used if it is already known that the domain in question is a domain of expertise, whereas one must resort to the third method, of investigating its status as a *technē*, when gauging success is not possible. One would come armed with the hypothesis that the practice is a craft and not a knack, because one has heard what sounds like a convincing account. When one witnesses success while having the account of

how it was done in mind, one does not just see standards and outcomes that meet the standards, but that the standards were met in the right way, and that the reliability of success in meeting those standards stems from (apparently true) account-grounded beliefs about how the activity should be performed. The reliability can then be attributed to the truth of those beliefs and the account that makes them stable, signaling that the practice being witnessed is in fact a *technē*.

## 1.4 Transition

I have argued in this chapter that Socrates has an account of recognizing experts. In the next, I will argue that he is an expert in recognizing experts according to that account. I will then discuss objections to that claim which arise from the *Apology* and the *Charmides*. I have tried to cast as positive a light on Socrates' views about identifying experts as I could in the space of this chapter. However, as we began to see toward its close, questions and objections remain for which the Socratic dialogues may not provide a good answer. These lines of thought will be taken up again in Chapter III, and some of them in the chapter to follow.



## Chapter II: Socrates the Expert

In the previous chapter, I argued that Socrates has a view about how people who aren't experts in a domain can recognize those who are. That was the first premise, 1, of an argument for the first premise of this dissertation's main argument, (i).

- (i) Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to a plausible view about how to recognize experts (his own).
  - (ii) If someone is an expert according to a plausible view about how to recognize experts, then plausibly, she is.
  - (iii) Plausibly, Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts. (From (i) and (ii))
- 1. Socrates has a view about how laypeople should recognize experts. (I)
  - 2. Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to that view. (II)
  - 3. Socrates' view is plausible. (III)
  - C. So, Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to a plausible view about how to recognize experts (his own). (= (i))

In the present chapter, I argue that Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to this view, 2 in the second argument above.

Whereas the argument for 1 was abductive, the argument for 2 will be deductive.

- (1) According to Socrates' view about recognizing experts, if someone can show non-experts in a domain many well-wrought works of her own art in that domain, those non-experts should conclude that she is an expert in that domain.
- (2) Socrates can show us, people who are inexpert in recognizing experts, many well-wrought works of his own art from the domain of recognizing experts.
- (C) According to Socrates' view about recognizing experts, we should conclude that Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts.

The conclusion of this argument amounts to the claim that according to Socrates' view, he is an expert in recognizing experts, premise 2 in the argument for (i). I argued that Socrates believes that laypeople can find experts by tracking their success in Chapter I (i.e. for premise (1) in this chapter's argument) and unpacked exactly what that means. In what follows I will apply that fully-unpacked method of tracking experts to Socrates with respect to the *technē* of identifying who is *technikos* and who is *atechnos* in various domains. This will constitute the argument for

(2). I shall then answer the objection that he has contradictory views about what he knows, especially about human virtue, and the objection that denies the possibility of such expertise in the *Charmides*.

## 2.1 Socrates' Success

I claim that Socrates can demonstrate to us a track record of success in the field of recognizing experts. He has many well-wrought works, or *erga*, of his own art to show us. The *erga* characteristic of this *technē* are correct judgments about whether an individual is *technikos* or *atechnos* with respect to a particular domain (*Chrm.* 172d1-e7). My claim, then, is that Socrates has shown us that he has correctly judged the expert-status of others as a result of his craft, and that he has done this well and frequently with respect to many different kinds of expertise. I shall show that his judgments about who is and who is not an expert are *hautou tēs technēs* (2.1.2), *eu eirgasmenon* (2.1.3), many in kind<sup>49</sup> and shown to us without an intermediary (2.1.4). We'll begin with a review of Socrates' beliefs about who is and isn't an expert before evaluating those beliefs along the foregoing dimensions.

### 2.1.1 Who Socrates Thinks the Experts Are

We need to know what Socrates believes about others' expertise and his own, and how he arrived at those beliefs, in order to evaluate whether they are *hautou tēs technēs*, *eu eirgasmenon*, many in kind and shown to us without an intermediary. We'll review Socrates' beliefs, starting with those he holds about others and concluding with those he holds about himself. We will be focused on Socrates' beliefs about who has a *technē*, or *epistēmē*, and who doesn't. We will not

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<sup>49</sup> To claim that Socrates' knowledge about others' expertise is many in kind is not to claim that there are different senses of knowledge. The expert cobbler can make different kinds of shoes, and they are all *shoes*. So too with knowledge. Socrates can gain different kinds of knowledge, but they are all *knowledge*. The knowledge he has gained about others' expertise is different in kind because it is different in content. The propositions he knows are about different people and about different domains of expertise.

look at everything that Socrates believes about what he and others know and don't know, however, because although *technē* and *epistēmē* are used interchangeably in the dialogues, the verb *epistamai* can take a wider range of objects than *technai*, as examples from the *Apology* will attest (e.g. 20e8-21a2, 24a6-7, 37d6-7; cf. Reeve 1989, pp. 37-61, esp. pp. 54-5).<sup>50</sup>

### Others' Expertise

Now for what Socrates believes about others' expertise. Socrates believes that no one whom he has interviewed has expertise in human virtue (*Ap.* 21b1-23c1), in poetry (*Ap.* 22a8-c8, cf. *Grg.* 500e-502d and *Ion*), or in oratory. In the case of human virtue, his interviewees lacked an account of the nature of their discipline's goal. They provided contradictory answers as to what a particular virtue was, which is necessary for elucidating the goal of adding virtue to souls, (*La.* 189e3-190c7). The poets could not explain the meaning of the poems they had composed (*Ap.* 22a-c, *Ion* 530c ff.). The orators provided contradictory answers as to whether teaching virtue fell under the purview of their art (*Grg.* 458e-461b) and lacked accounts of what their purported art was supposed to achieve and how (*Grg.* 464b-466a, 500a-501c). Socrates denies expertise to many others besides these three groups, too, such as the cuisine-makers and beauticians, on the grounds that they lack a true account of the nature of their disciplines' goals (*Grg.* 464d ff.). We don't see him interview members of those particular groups in the dialogues, though, so we

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Brown (forthcoming) p. 7, n. 26. What about Socrates' apparent commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge (Geach 1966, Benson 2000, Wolfsdorf 2003)? Don't Socrates' claims to know that he makes people hate him (24a6-7) and that youths will follow him wherever he goes (37d6-7) necessitate knowing what animosity is and what the future will hold, making true *knowledge* about ordinary events just like expert knowledge? This would make all the objects of 'ἐπίσταμαι' *technai*, and thereby necessitate evaluating *all* of Socrates' knowledge claims, because they'd imply claims to expertise, and presumably, beliefs about his own expertise.

The answer is that the priority of definitional knowledge does not apply to all knowledge claims. The purpose of the priority of definitional knowledge is to ensure that someone who claims that something is pious or just knows the standard by which to judge whether or not things are pious and just, because such standards are not apparent (*Eu.* 7b6-d8). But such standards *are* apparent in the cases just mentioned. Definitional knowledge is unnecessary to make a knowledge claim about others' attitudes toward us. When many people dislike us, it is clear that they do not. Socrates' claim that he knows that young people will follow him wherever he goes and practices philosophy doesn't require the powers of a prophet, either. This prediction is based on a strong inductive inference, that whenever he practices philosophy, people like to listen: a crowd of people is usually listening to Socrates and his interlocutors. Definitional knowledge is not required to know that this will happen again, just experience.

cannot evaluate Socrates' activities in these domains to judge his expertise in recognizing experts.

By contrast, Socrates believes that many of the people called *cheirotechnai*, those who are skilled with their hands, did indeed have the *technai* suggested by their name.

Then, finally, I went to the handicraftsmen (χειροτέχνας): for I was aware that I knew practically nothing, but at least I knew that I would find that those men knew many fine things (τούτους δέ γ' ἤδη ὅτι εὐρήσοιμι πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ ἐπιστάμενους). And in this I was not deceived (καὶ τούτου μὲν ἐψεύσθη); rather, they knew things which I did not know, and in this way were wiser than me. (*Ap.* 22c9-d4).<sup>51</sup>

How he arrived at these conclusions about the craftsmen we can only guess, since unlike his investigations of others for wisdom about virtue, poetry, and oratory, his investigations of the craftsmen all occur off stage. The *Laches*, though, gives us a clue as to the steps Socrates is likely to have taken: first he'd check to see if they'd been taught by teachers whom he knew to be experts in the field already, and then for continued practice since they'd first struck out on their own. If no references were available, he'd check for success in the field. If success couldn't be tracked, he'd ask for an account of what those things are which improve the things they claimed to be experts in improving, and how those things could be added to what they are purported to improve.<sup>52</sup>

As we've seen already, Socrates also believes that Nicias, Damon, and Prodicus are skillful in making fine distinctions in ethical terms. He judged the first two to be experts by

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<sup>51</sup> When Socrates elaborates on why he was not mistaken, he explains that "they knew things which I did not know, and in this way were wiser than me". This suggests that even after an investigation of the handicraftsmen for wisdom about their crafts, he could have been wrong about his judgment as to their status as experts—and that he was not at that time an expert in recognizing experts. (Otherwise, mistakes would not have been possible, at any rate not on such a broad scale.) However, the antecedent of *toutou* is the judgment Socrates formed about the craftsmen, that what they knew was *kalon*. This means that when Socrates says, "rather (*all*), they knew things which I did not know", he is not suggesting that he could have been mistaken about his judgment that the craftsmen knew things that he didn't know. Rather, he is explaining why he doesn't think he was mistaken about his judgment that what the craftsmen knew was *kalon*. He wasn't mistaken because he came to have good evidence (and if I am right, came to know) that the craftsmen had knowledge, and in his estimation, knowledge is *kalon* (because knowledge implies true opinion, and true opinion is *kalon*, too—*Men.* 98a).

<sup>52</sup> See Ch. 1, p. 46.

finding that they had been trained by experts themselves, and the last by tracking his success in the field (*La.* 197d1-5). Socrates' evaluation of Prodicus's success occurs off stage, just as with the craftsmen, but again, the *Laches* has given us the details as to how Socrates would proceed: he would check the products of Prodicus's art for being *hautou tēs technēs, eu eirgasmenon*, many in kind, and shown to him directly, without an intermediary.

Socrates ascribes expertise to others as well. In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates attributes wisdom to the titular character and to his brother, Dionysodorus. The two men are skillful at trapping their interlocutors in contradictions. The evidence for this is their success, not only with easy targets like Clinias, who is young (275d2-277c7), but seasoned debaters like Socrates (301e1-303a9). Socrates also calls his old admirer, the gymnast Mikkos, *hikanōs sophistēs* in the *Lysis* (204a6-7). A σοφιστής can be a master at one's craft or one of the itinerant teachers by that name. Since Socrates views gymnastics as a *technē* (*La.* 185b) but not the practice of the itinerant teachers (*Grg.* 464a-465b), we can assume that Socrates has the former, not the latter meaning of *sophistēs* in mind. So, expertise is attributed to Mikkos by Socrates, here, since, as we have seen, Socrates thinks that a good teacher of a craft is also an expert in the craft (Ch. 1, pp. 18-21).

As with his recognition that others lack beliefs, Socrates affirms that many other sorts of people have expertise besides the handicraftsmen and the men just described. Astronomers, medical doctors, mathematicians, painters, sculptors and money-makers all have *technai* (*Grg.* 449c-451c, 477e7-8, *Rep.* I 346a-d). However, we never see him interview such people, at least

about these *technai*,<sup>53</sup> so we cannot use this information to evaluate Socrates' success in correctly identifying particular people as being experts or not.

Now we have seen what Socrates believes about others' expertise. Before moving forward to consider whether these beliefs were *hautou tēs technēs*, we must consider what Socrates believes about his own expertise.

### **His Own Expertise**

In this section I argue that Socrates does not disclaim all expert knowledge. I will not consider what expert knowledge he might claim to have. If my argument that he has expertise in expertise is sound, he possesses expertise, and in virtue of that expertise knows, and therefore believes that he does.

One might expect me to consider here the question of whether Socrates has contradictory beliefs about what he knows, in particular with respect to human virtue. This has been the focus of most of the scholarly debate on Socrates' beliefs about what he knows. There is little agreement about how to reconcile Socrates' occasional claims to know something about ethics with his disavowals of such knowledge and his apparent commitment to the priority of definitional knowledge.<sup>54</sup> We will discuss this issue in its own section after completing the initial argument for my claim in this chapter, that according to Socrates' own views about how to recognize experts, he is an expert in recognizing experts. That Socrates might have contradictory beliefs about what he knows is best seen as an objection to that claim. If Socrates has contradictory beliefs about what he knows, then my claim that he is an expert in recognizing

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<sup>53</sup> Hippias, who appears in *Protagoras* and in the two dialogues named after him, claims to be skilled in arithmetic, computation, geometry, astronomy, various handicrafts, poetry, remembering information, and orthography (*Hi. Mi.* 366c5-369a2). However, Socrates does not investigate these claims.

<sup>54</sup> McPartland (2013) and Wolfsdorf (2004) provide the most recent and extensive surveys of this literature.

experts is problematic, since, presumably, any such expert would be keenly aware of what he does and doesn't know.

Let's consider what Socrates says he does not know.

### ***What Socrates Does Not Know***

Socrates believes that he lacks expertise about living well and virtuously (*Ap.* 20a3-c3; *Men.* 71a, 80c-d), because he is only human and humans cannot attain such wisdom (*Ap.* 20d6-e3, 23a5-b4).<sup>55</sup> Nor, as we see in a wide range of other dialogues, does he believe he has expertise in any particular virtue (*Eu.* 15e-16a, *Chrm.* 165b-c, *Rep.* I 354c-d, *La.* 186b-e, *Hi Ma.* 286d, 304c-d) or about other matters relevant to leading a good human life, such as friendship (*Ly.* 212a, 223b). Socrates also believes that he lacks expertise in explaining the causes of natural phenomena (*Ap.* 19a8-20d7)<sup>56</sup> and expertise in various handicrafts (*Ap.* 22c9-d4).<sup>57</sup> He believes that he does not have expertise about what (if anything) happens to us after we die (*Ap.* 29a5-b6, 42a2-5),<sup>58</sup> and none about what causes others to be persuaded of falsehoods, since he (and everyone else, owing to oratory's not being a *technē*) lacks expertise in oratory (*Ap.* 17a1-b6). We can assume that

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<sup>55</sup> I side with Vlastos (1985) and the majority of scholars since who have argued that his disavowal of knowledge about virtue is sincere. See Senn (2013) for the most recent and sophisticated defense of the contrary view.

<sup>56</sup> One might ask why Plato has his Socrates deny having any knowledge about nature when (according to some reports) the historical Socrates studied with Anaxagoras and Archelaus (DL 2.19.14-17). My speculative answer is that the historical Socrates, though not entirely closed to the possibility, was skeptical that someone could possess such expertise (see Introduction, pp. 16-17). At *Ap.* 19c6-8, Plato's Socrates says by way of clarifying his dismissal of Aristophanes *et al.*'s claim that he is a student of nature, that he does "not speak so as to dishonor this kind of knowledge, if someone is wise about matters of this sort..." suggesting that he hasn't met anyone who had wisdom about natural science, which would of course include Anaxagoras and Archelaus if he had spent time studying with them. Cf. *Phd.* 96a-99d, Reeve 1989 pp. 14-19 and Graham 2008 (esp. p. 312).

<sup>57</sup> The historical Socrates may have been the son of a stone mason (a *lithourgos*) and worked as one himself until Crito removed him from his workshop and had him educated (DL 2.18-21). This may be why in Plato's *Apology*, Socrates only claims that the handicraftsmen "knew things which I did not know" (22d3-4), leaving it open that he knows some handicrafts, just not all of them. By contrast, he denies, without hedging, that he has any expertise about the workings of nature (19c6-d1) and virtue (20c1-3).

<sup>58</sup> What of Socrates' *logos* about what happens after we die in the *Gorgias* (523a-527e), which he says is true (523a1-3)? Socrates never claims to *know* that the story he tells is true, and is in fact open to the possibility that someone else could find one that is closer to the truth (527a5-b2). Socrates' views about what happens when we die are views, supported by the fact that no "better or truer" ones have come to light. They are not knowledge. Thanks to Doug Westfall for drawing my attention to these passages.

Socrates believes he has no expertise in any domain that he doesn't believe to be a *technē*, such as poetry (*Ap.* 22c), cosmetics, sophistry and cuisine-making (*Grg.* 464b-465d).

Socrates believes that he lacks wisdom about a wide range of matters. Does he believe that he lacks every kind of wisdom? He appears to have thought so when he learned of the oracle's message to Chaerephon.

For after I heard these things, I thought about them in this very way: “What ever does the god mean, and what ever is he riddling at? For *I* am certainly aware that I am wise neither in a great way nor in a small one (ἐγὼ γὰρ δὴ οὔτε μέγα οὔτε μικρὸν σύνοιδα ἐμαυτῷ σοφὸς εἶναι): so what ever does he mean when he claims that I am wisest?” (*Ap.* 21b2-6)<sup>59</sup>

Some have thought this passage to show that Socrates did not think he had any kind of wisdom when he heard about the oracle's response to Chaerephon (e.g. Fine 2008).<sup>60</sup> But Socrates is not denying possession of *sophia* generally in this passage. He rather denies possession of an antecedently-specified and implicitly-understood *kind* of *sophia*, namely, *sophia* about managing the affairs of cities and one's own conduct—expertise in virtue of the human and political sort.

We know this because Socrates' thought that he is neither in a great nor small way wise is triggered by a report given to him by Chaerephon. Chaerephon asked the oracle whether anyone was wiser than Socrates, and she said that no one was wiser. So the wisdom Socrates denies having is the wisdom he at first mistakenly believes the oracle to have affirmed his having, which in turn is the wisdom Chaerephon thought Socrates might possess.<sup>61</sup> It will be

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<sup>59</sup> The verb '*sunoida*' I have translated “I am aware” rather than “I know” so as not to invite further confusion. If '*suneidenai*' (the infinitive form of '*sunoida*') implied *echein epistēmēn* (having *epistēmē*) and if not being wise (*sophos*) implied not having *epistēmē*, then Socrates' statement here would be contradictory. Given his movement back and forth between possessing *epistēmē* and possessing *sophia* in the *Apology*, the best interpretation of the text is that *suneidenai* doesn't imply *echein epistēmēn*. Cf. Fine 2008, especially pp. 59-66, where she arrives at roughly the same conclusion.

<sup>60</sup> Socrates doesn't describe himself as needing to make special preparations to investigate the meaning of the oracle's message, so if he didn't have wisdom of any kind when he received the message, then he probably didn't have wisdom of any kind when he began to investigate, *contra* my thesis.

<sup>61</sup> It is possible that Chaerephon understood his question in one way, and the oracle another. Being a good Socratic in doctrine but an impetuous interlocutor, he may have asked if anyone was wiser than Socrates, by which he meant



remembered that Chaerephon didn't make any qualifications about what kind of wisdom he had in mind, at least according to Socrates.

And in fact, once he [Chaerephon] even dared to ask the oracle the following while he was at Delphi—and as I've been saying, do not make an uproar, gentlemen—for in fact, he asked if someone was wiser (σοφώτερος) than I was. (*Ap.* 21a4-6)

The Greek comparative '*sophōteros*' therefore had to be used in the ordinary sense of the word, so that the oracle would understand Chaerephon's question. The ordinary sense of the word, when used without qualification, does not denote any old skill or any old type of expert knowledge. Otherwise the handicraftsmen would not be reputedly worse off (*phauloteroi*) than the politicians and poets when it came to being wise (*pros to phronimōs echein*), for they certainly have expertise (*technai*), but these have not conferred on them a reputation for being wise (*sophoi*) (*Ap.* 22a1-6).<sup>62</sup> Indeed, if the *cheirotechnai* were deemed *sophoi*, then the oracle's affirmation that no one was wiser than Socrates would be straightforwardly false, because the handicraftsmen had expert knowledge that Socrates lacked (*Ap.* 22c9-d4). Even if we are to presume that Plato's Socrates is a stone mason because the historical Socrates was too (*DL* 2.18-21), we've no reason to believe that he was the next Pheidias: there were plenty of craftsmen who were "wiser" than him insofar as they had mastered working with a wider range of materials, and had worked on a wider range of construction projects and artistic works (Burford 1972 p. 86).

So, the wisdom Socrates denies having is not any old wisdom. It's whatever wisdom someone who is generally thought to be wise is thought to have. And the kind of wisdom this

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"more virtuous", whereas the oracle may have heard something different. We don't have any evidence that this is what happened, so I'm assuming here on grounds of charity to Chaerephon that he understood how the oracle would understand his question, and thus '*sophōteros*' in both the question he asked and in the oracle's reply would have the same denotation.

<sup>62</sup> On the reputation of the craftsmen in antiquity (in particular those who manufactured objects using durable materials and whose livelihood depended on such manufacture), see Burford 1972, esp. pp. 12-13, 25-6, 29 ff.

was, as Socrates tells us, was the kind the politicians and the poets were supposed to have—wisdom about governance and proper, aristocratic conduct—that is why he turns to the politicians and poets before moving on to interview the craftsmen.

I went to one of those who were thought to be wise (ἦλθον ἐπὶ τινα τῶν δοκούντων σοφῶν εἶναι) on the grounds that there, if indeed it could be done anywhere (εἴπερ που),<sup>63</sup> I would refute the oracular response, and I would tell the oracle right out, “This fellow here is wiser than me, but *you* said I was wiser.” So I examined this man through and through—[I say “this man”] because when it comes to his name, I don’t even need to mention it, seeing as he was one of the politicians—with whom, when I examined him, I experienced something of this sort... (*Ap.* 21b9-c5).

He goes on to say that he interviewed this politician and found that he lacked wisdom, and later, he describes his having gone to another who was thought to be even wiser than he and having come up short again. Both were politicians (*Ap.* 22a8-9). So, those reputed to be wise were evidently people who held political office. The poets were next in the pecking order when it came to a reputation for wisdom, and so he sought them out next (*loc. cit.*). What this means is that when someone is dubbed *sophos* without further explanation as to the nature of their *sophia*, the sort of *sophia* being attributed to them is of the political and ethical sort. So, when Chaerephon asked the oracle at Delphi whether anyone was *sophōteron* than Socrates, both he and the oracle would understand this to mean wiser in what we would call politics and ethics—and so too Socrates, when he denies being wise in the wisdom Chaerephon and the oracle (and supposedly Apollo) had in mind. Socrates denies being wise in political and ethical matters, not being wise in general.

More difficult for my thesis is 22c9-d4.

So finally I went to the handicraftsmen: for I was aware that I knew almost nothing at all, (ἐμαυτῷ γὰρ συνήδη οὐδὲν ἐπισταμένῳ ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν), but I knew I’d find that they, at least, knew many fine things. And I was not deceived about this; rather, they knew things which I did not know and were in this way wiser than I was. (*Ap.* 22c9-d4)

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<sup>63</sup> See Introduction pp. 9-10, n. 18.

Here Socrates does not just disavow wisdom of the sort that politicians and poets are reputed to have. He claims to have known almost nothing at all, a more sweeping disavowal of wisdom than the one at 21b4-5, inasmuch as its scope includes the knowledge the *cheirotechnai* possessed. The qualifier “almost” (*hōs epos eipein*) limits the scope of the disavowal, but to what extent is not made clear by the passage. He may only hedge here because clearly he does know some things, like his name and the charges against him. The implication may be that Socrates lacks any knowledge that’s out of the ordinary and uncommon—namely, expert knowledge.

This interpretation receives further support from the way Socrates hedges about the one sort of wisdom he does claim to possess—that which is appropriate, or which belongs to a human being (*anthrōpinē sophiā*).

Now listen. And perhaps I shall seem to some of you to be joking: know well, however, that I shall tell you the truth. For I, gentlemen-Athenians, have acquired this epithet [‘wise’] because of nothing other than a kind of wisdom. Now what sort of wisdom is this? Probably, the very wisdom that is appropriate for a human being (ἥπερ ἐστὶν ἕως ἀνθρωπίνῃ σοφία). For in reality I am likely to be wise in this (τῷ ὄντι γὰρ κινδυνεύω ταύτην εἶναι σοφός), while those [sophists] whom I just mentioned were wise in a kind of wisdom that is greater than what befits a human being, or else I do not know what I shall say: for I certainly do not know it—on the contrary, whoever says I do speaks falsely and means to slander me. And for my sake, gentlemen-Athenians, do not make an uproar, not even if I shall seem to you to be boasting: for I shall not give an account which I call my own; rather, I shall bring in a trustworthy speaker. For I shall provide you with a witness to my wisdom, if indeed it even is a kind of wisdom (εἰ δὴ τίς ἐστὶν σοφία καὶ οἷα)<sup>64</sup>: the god at Delphi. (*Ap.* 20d4-e8)

Socrates says that he probably has the sort of wisdom that is appropriate for a human being, but he expresses doubt about its really being a kind of wisdom. So in saying that he knows almost nothing at all later on, he probably means that he has no expert knowledge. Otherwise we would

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<sup>64</sup> Alternatively: “if indeed such kind of wisdom/any such wisdom even exists”, which casts doubt not just on Socrates’ possession of it, but on anybody’s possession of it.

expect him to say that his slanderous reputation for wisdom of the political and ethical sort is caused by the exercise of another kind of wisdom that he really does possess, and he would say this without expressing uncertainty as to whether it was a kind of wisdom.

However, as others have pointed out (e.g. recently, Smith 2018, McPartland 2013), Socrates hedges in the passage above simply because the kind of wisdom he is describing is wisdom of the political and ethical sort—he thinks he has it to the degree that humans can, but he does not have true wisdom about such matters, since this is in the exclusive possession of the gods. So he is not hedging about having wisdom in general, but about saying that he has as much “wisdom” about human virtue as is appropriate for a human being, which, as he goes on to say, is recognizing that one’s own epistemic attitudes about human virtue do not constitute true wisdom (23a-b).

As for 22c-d, Socrates limits the scope of his expertise disclaimer not just because he knows his own name, but because compared to the *cheirotechnai*, he doesn’t have much expert knowledge. Socrates, if I am right, has *one technē*. A typical *cheriotechnēs* had several (Burford 1972 p. 86). (Compare this to our notion of the handyman, who can pave, plumb, run electricity, repair furniture, and so forth.) When Socrates says that the *cheirotechnai* know many fine things, he does not just mean as a group, but individually. Each one has much more expert knowledge than Socrates does: compared to them, he knows almost nothing.

One should ask what tips the balance in favor of my interpretation apart from its mere plausibility: that he limits his disavowal with “*hōs epos eipein*” because he has *no* expert knowledge is just as plausible. The answer will be my argument that he has expertise in recognizing experts (2.1.2-2.1.4). Again, I will show that Socrates’ many judgments about who

has expertise and who doesn't demonstrate success in the art of coming to such judgments correctly.

To show us that he is successful in the art of recognizing experts, the deeds (*erga*) by which he shows us must be *hautou tēs technēs, eu eirgasmēna*, many in kind and shown to us without an intermediary.

### 2.1.2 Socrates' Judgments about Expertise are *Hautou Tēs Technēs*

Are Socrates' judgments about expertise the result of his own *technē* (*hautou tēs technēs*)?

Recall from Chapter 1 that this means the *erga* used to prove expertise must

- i. be relevant to the *technē* in question,
- ii. belong to an ability that really constitutes a *technē*,
- iii. not have been brought about by someone else's efforts,
- iv. result from the would-be expert's knowledge, not someone else's, and
- v. result from knowledge the would-be expert *now* possesses.

The *erga* we're considering are Socrates' judgments about others' expertise and his own. They are the ones relevant to the art of recognizing experts (i).<sup>65</sup> They were not brought about by someone else's efforts or knowledge (iii, iv). We're not looking at old trophies of Socrates, either. We're looking at *erga* as he produces them (v). What this leaves is whether or not Socrates' *erga* belong to an ability that really constitutes a *technē* (ii).

Recall that *technai* have characteristic products or activities that benefit what they aim to improve, have clear boundaries, consistent accounts of why and how things are done as they are in the domain, and can be taught. We could attempt to show that the ability to recognize experts meets each of these criteria individually, but that is unnecessary. It will be enough to show that Socrates has taught this art to others, since only knowledge can be taught (*Meno* 98d12-13).

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<sup>65</sup> Actually, the *erga* of this art are *true* judgments about whether or not someone is an expert. I assume that Plato has depicted Socrates' judgments as being accurate. One might object that Plato thinks otherwise: he has Socrates worry about being able to judge others' expertise without having their knowledge in the *Charmides*. See sec. 2.2 for my response to this worry.

First, we need to address the worry that Socrates claims to have been no one's teacher. In the *Apology*, he is adamant that this is the case.

And *I* have never yet been anyone's teacher: but if anyone desires to listen to me as I am talking and doing my own thing, whether younger or older, I have never yet begrudged this to anyone—and I do not converse when I receive money but not when I do not receive it. Rather, I am equally ready to question both the rich and the poor if<sup>66</sup> anyone wants to answer me and to hear what I have to say. And if anyone becomes good or not because of this, *I* am not justly held to be the reason, because I never, ever offered any lessons to anyone, nor did I teach anyone: and if anyone ever claims that he learned or heard something from me in private that all the others did not, know well that he does not speak the truth (*Ap.* 33a5-b8).

He notes, however, that his young followers often try to imitate him in examining others for wisdom, and not only do they *try* to imitate him, but they do so *successfully*. As he says at 23c6-8, "...I think they [the young men who follow him around] find a great abundance of people who think they know something when they know little or nothing." Moreover, he implies elsewhere that they have acquired skills like his own, and will continue to use them just as he has.

Addressing those who voted to have him executed, he prophesizes this:

...vengeance will come to you immediately after my death, one that is far harsher, by Zeus, than the sort by which you have killed me: for you did this now because you thought it freed you from giving an account of your life, but I say that much the opposite will happen to you. There will be more people to test you, whom I now held back, but you did not notice it: and they will be harsher to the degree that they are younger, and you will be angrier. For if you believe that by killing people, you will prevent anyone from reproaching you for not living in the right way, you are not thinking through the matter well... (*Ap.* 39c4-d5).

Here Socrates tells the jury that they will be forced to give an account of their lives and reproached for not living well,<sup>67</sup> despite his execution. The people of Athens will be tested in this way by those whom Socrates "held back". This strongly suggests that Socrates has trained some people to do what he can do—to examine others for wisdom—but, understandably, has

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<sup>66</sup> I followed codex V and the *Versio Armeniaca* rather than Duke *et al.* (1995 p. 51), who put a *kai* before the *ean*.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *Ap.* 29c-30b, 36c-d.

discouraged them from doing so, given the dangers (made all the more manifest by his trial) of embarrassing powerful men. Moreover, they will make those who voted to execute Socrates angrier, and this could only be the case if they were capable of soliciting accounts from the putatively wise at least as well as Socrates. Not every Athenian annoyed his fellow citizens so much as to have him put to death.<sup>68</sup>

Thus, the way to read Socrates' denial of having ever been anyone's teacher is in a qualified way. When Socrates denies being a teacher in the text quoted above, he is denying that he *teaches for a fee*, and is denying that he *offers private lessons*, individualized and purposeful instruction. He does not deny that he *teaches by example*; indeed, he tacitly acknowledges this at 33a-b. And although teaching by examples has its dangers—the apprentice rock climber who only learns by watching others may be liable to fall—Socrates has managed to pass on his ability nonetheless. Thus, Socrates shows us that he can, and does teach his facility for identifying experts to others, and since he teaches it, it constitutes an *epistēmē* and *technē* (*Meno* 98d12-13). The other conditions on Socrates' judgments' being *hautou tēs technēs* have been met, so this also shows that the *erga* being used to show that Socrates is an expert are products of his own art. What remains to be seen is whether or not they are well executed (*eu eirgasmenon*, 1.3), many in kind and shown to us without an intermediary (1.4).<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> One might object that the anger felt will be the result of the “harshness” of the youth, or simply because they have mastered the art of refutation and not the true tests for expertise I attribute to Socrates. What Socrates is saying, though, is that those who did not like Socrates' way of conversing would be *tested*, not simply given the rough treatment that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus give their interlocutors.

<sup>69</sup> One might say that the passages in the *Apology* where Socrates apparently succeeds in passing on his abilities are compatible with his having passed on a limited ability that isn't broad enough in scope to count as expertise. Perhaps Socrates' followers have only learned how to test for expertise in human virtue—and specifically how to tell that someone is *not* an expert in human virtue. My reply to this objection is that you need the whole art to succeed in showing that someone is not an expert in human virtue, as we saw in the Introduction: both how to know when someone has this expertise and how to know when someone is or isn't an expert in other domains.

The latter is needed because expertise in other domains tends to be confused with expertise in human virtue, such that many believe their expertise implies expertise in human virtue. This allows the investigator of

### 2.1.3 Socrates' Judgments about Expertise are *Eu Eirgasmemon*

Were Socrates' judgments about expertise "well-done" (*eu eirgasmema*)? Recall that the point of this element of tracking success is that with it one can distinguish experts from amateurs who are engaged in the same pursuits. I can execute groundstrokes in tennis and almost always succeed in putting it over the net and within the boundaries of my opponent's court, yet with little control over the ball's speed and direction beyond this. I can replace my car's headlights without instructions, but not deftly, with a good sense of how delicate the bulb, socket and fastenings are. A consistently controlled stroke or swift replacement is necessary (though of course not sufficient) to demonstrate expertise in tennis or car maintenance. Our question is whether or not Socrates has vetted others (and himself) for expertise well in this sense, one that would distinguish him from amateurs.

It is clear that he demonstrates others' *lack* of expertise well. He does not struggle and move slowly like the layperson replacing his headlight. He executes his cross-examinations with panache. We see the same fluidity when he investigates the poets and orators for expertise, and so too for expertise in particular human virtues. We have less evidence about whether he positively identifies experts in a way that is *eu eirgasmemon*. His interviews with the *cheirotechnai* occur off stage. He does, though, conclude that Prodicus (in the *Laches*), Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are experts in making distinctions so as to test others' claims and lead them into contradictions. He arrives at this conclusion (as we have seen in the case of

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expertise to see whether they even meet a necessary condition for expertise in human virtue on the basis of another expertise—namely whether or not they really have that other expertise.

The former, knowing how to identify who actually has expertise in human virtue, is necessary because without it, Socrates' students cannot be sure they've shown someone to be fraudulent unless they simply contradict themselves or change their answers, signaling they do not have an account, but if they pass this test, they will not know how to check for a sufficient condition on expertise—which would amount to knowing what would make someone an expert in human virtue. So if Socrates' students have been taught how to show someone is not an expert in human virtue, they've been taught to how to recognize that someone has this expertise, too, and how to do this for other domains as well.



Prodicus, *La.* 190d1-5) by observing their success at the craft. Though these sophists are clearly not experts in the subject matters they discuss, they are experts in refuting statements that others make by trapping them in contradictions. It is not hard for Socrates to see this, since Socrates is a sophisticated debater and gets trapped in a contradiction himself by Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, as we have seen. But this is after much wrangling and many pages of debate: he goes much further and tests their expertise much more extensively than most people, and most people cannot even debate Socrates for very long without landing in a contradiction.

Of the judgments that Socrates has made, then, we can see that they are *eu eirgasmena*.

#### **2.1.4 Socrates' Judgments about Expertise are Many in Kind and Shown to Us without an Intermediary**

Socrates' judgments about others' expertise are *hautou tēs technēs* and *eu eirgasmena*. They are also many in kind and shown to us without an intermediary. Socrates tests others for expertise not only in human virtues (piety in the *Euthyphro*, justice in the *Republic* and so forth), but in various manual crafts, poetry, oratory, and debate, making these tests and the resulting judgments many in kind. Socrates' success in making accurate judgments is also shown to us without an intermediary. Plato's reports are not accounts of real events, but dramatizations or inventions: our access to what Plato's Socrates said and did is given to us directly by the text. So, since Socrates' judgments about expertise are *hautou tēs technēs*, *eu eirgasmena*, many in kind and shown to us directly, he is successful in the field of recognizing experts (premise 2 of this chapter's argument). According to Socrates' own views about recognizing success in an art (in the foregoing sense) is enough to demonstrate expertise in that domain (premise 1 of this chapter's argument). So, according to Socrates' own views about recognizing experts, he is an expert in recognizing experts—what we set out to show in this chapter.

## 2.2 Objections

However, there are two serious objections to my argument that are rooted in the scholarly literature on Plato's Socratic dialogues. One is that Socrates has contradictory views about his own knowledge of human virtue, and so couldn't be an expert in recognizing experts. The other is that he objects to the possibility of expertise in recognizing experts in the *Charmides*, so he could not think himself an expert in this area. If he had this skill, then he would not fail to realize that he had it.

We'll start by examining whether or not Socrates is consistent in what he says he knows about human virtue.

### 2.2.1 Socrates has Contradictory Views about His Own Expertise

In the *Apology* and *Euthydemus*, Socrates claims to know some things about human virtue.<sup>70</sup>

...but doing wrong and disobeying one's superior, whether god or human, that I know to be bad and shameful. (*Ap.* 29b6-7; *cf.* 37b7-8).

“...how shall I say that I know the following, Euthydemus, that good men are unjust? Come, speak—do I know this or do I not know it?”

“You certainly know it,” he said.

And I said, “What?”

“That the good are not unjust.”

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<sup>70</sup> Wolfsdorf (2004 esp. pp. 100-102) argues that there are several other passages where Socrates claims knowledge about virtue. He is wrong in each case. He thinks that Socrates claims to know that the *cheirotechnai* know many fine things at *Apology* 22c9-d3. Socrates does not say this, though, but rather says that he knew *he'd find* that they knew many fine things. He says he knew what opinion he would form about the knowledge of the *cheirotechnai*, not that he knew what qualities their knowledge had. Wolfsdorf also thinks that at *Laches* 190b7-c5, Socrates claims that he and Laches know what virtue is, but this is clearly being stated for the sake of argument—a *reductio ad absurdum* of the claim that Laches has this knowledge. Wolfsdorf claims that at *Protagoras* 310d2-4, Socrates claims to know that Hippocrates has courage (*andreia*). This assumes, though, that the participle *gignōskōn* is being used in the sense of ‘know’, rather than ‘perceive’. In context, it is clear that the latter is meant: Socrates sees that Hippocrates is agitated about some wrong that has been done to him and that he wants to do something about it. He never asserts that he knows Hippocrates to have a courageous disposition, only that he is in a particular emotional state. Finally, Wolfsdorf claims that at *Gorgias* 521c8-d3, Socrates claims not to be a wrongdoer (*mē adikount*). In this context, where they are describing the possibility of his being prosecuted, he means doing wrong in the sense of doing something illegal. He is not making a claim about human virtue. It may be pointed out that in this passage, Socrates also claims, implicitly, to know that no decent person (*chrēstos*) would bring someone into court who has not done anything wrong (i.e. illegal). The word ‘*chrēstos*’, though, may be translated “honest”, as in fact Wolfsdorf does. It would not seem to require any special knowledge to know that an honest person does not lie—i.e., bring someone into court on false charges. It simply follows from what the word ‘honest’ means.

And I said, “Sure, [I’ve known that] for a long time. But I did not ask this, but rather where I learned that the good are unjust. (*Euthyd.* 296e3-297a2)

Socrates claims to know that doing wrong—specifically, disobeying one’s superior—is bad and shameful, and that the good are not unjust. These claims do not contradict his statements where he denies having expert knowledge of human virtue (e.g. *Ap.* 20a-c), but many have argued that Socrates is committed to a principle called the “priority of definitional knowledge”, or something close to it (e.g. Wolfsdorf 2003, Benson 2000).

(PD) If one does not know what F is, then one cannot know for any  $x$  whether  $x$  is F or for any ethically substantive property P whether F has P.<sup>71</sup>

It would follow that to make the claims that he does, Socrates would have to know what it is to be bad and what it is to be shameful, so that he can claim to know disobeying one’s superior is both of these things.<sup>72</sup> He would have to know what justice is to claim that good people exhibit the property of justice—assuming that ‘not unjust’ is equivalent to ‘just’. The former case is unproblematic: Socrates nowhere denies knowing what it is to be bad and shameful. Though he disclaims knowledge of human *virtue*, he does not claim that he knows nothing about human *vice*. By contrast, the passages in the *Euthydemus* are problematic if Socrates accepts (PD), because he denies knowing what justice is in the *Republic* (354b-c). Thus, he claims that he does not know what the just is, but claims to know that a certain class of people are just, which according to (PD) requires him to know what justice is. His views appear to entail a contradiction about what he knows. This militates against my thesis that he has mastered the art of recognizing expertise in himself and others.

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<sup>71</sup> Wolfsdorf adds the “ethically substantive” qualifier to rule out trivial things we might know about justice—e.g. that the thing we call justice is picked out by the word ‘justice’.

<sup>72</sup> He does not claim to know that it is wrong to disobey one’s superior, just that disobeying one’s superior, which he takes to be wrong, is bad and unjust. The ‘*kai*’ is epexegetical.

However, as we have seen (p. 50, n. 50), the point of (PD) is to force Socrates' interlocutors to clarify the standards by which one may judge whether an action or person is just or unjust, beautiful or ugly, and the like. These are the sources of intractable disagreement, owing to a lack of external standards by which to measure justice and beauty and notions like them (*Eu.* 7b6-d8). However, as this passage in the *Euthydemus* shows, there is *no* disagreement, even between eristical artists like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, on the one hand, and philosophers like Socrates on the other, about whether the good are just. It is *because* Socrates is aware of this agreement that he asks Euthydemus to clarify his position. It is because of this agreement that Euthydemus makes an error and claims that Socrates knows that the good are not unjust, when the question at issue is how Socrates could have learned that the good *are* unjust. Euthydemus's brother goes on to echo this confusion and betray their underlying agreement (*Euthyd.* 297a3). What this suggests is that though the standards for justice and goodness may not be clear, the fact that good people are not unjust *is* clear, perhaps in virtue of the meaning of the words 'agathoi' and 'dikaioi'. So, (PD) simply does not apply to this case, because there is no lack of clarity about the relationship between goodness and justice. This means that Socrates does not contradict himself about what he knows about human virtue in this passage. Nor, as we have seen, does he contradict himself in others.

Let's consider the other major objection to my thesis.

### **2.2.2 Socrates Objects to Expertise in Recognizing Experts in the *Charmides***

In the *Charmides*, Socrates says that he does not believe he can discern whether expertise in recognizing experts is possible (169a7-b1). If he is in earnest, he does not have expertise in recognizing experts, since any such expert would have no doubts about his own expertise. Furthermore, since expertise in recognizing expertise and its absence is being offered as a

definition of *sōphrosunē* and *sōphrosunē* is supposed to be something admirable (*kalon*), and therefore, beneficial (*Chrm.* 159d, 169b), Socrates also asks what benefit expertise in recognizing experts might have. He cannot see that it has any benefit at all by the end of the dialogue. This should make someone who believes my thesis wonder why, even if expertise in recognizing experts is possible, Socrates would cultivate such expertise when he believes that doing so is a waste of time.

I shall argue that Socrates is not in earnest when he says that he does not trust in his ability to determine whether expertise in expertise is possible, nor when he concludes that he cannot discover how it is beneficial. He is instead doing exactly what Critias accuses him of doing (*Chrm.* 166c3-6): refuting his interlocutor rather than pursuing the truth. This becomes evident when we see how easily the worries he raises are answered. The dialogue, I argue, should be read as an exhibition of precisely that skill the possibility of which Socrates questions: he shows Charmides (and us) that Critias does not know what it is to be *sōphrōn*. So, Socrates would not trust Critias to take care of those activities for which *sōphrosunē* is required—like running a city, perhaps. Showing that Socrates did not think Critias *sōphrōn*, coupled with the fact that Plato depicts Socrates' further association with Critias and Charmides as being forced upon him (176a-d), distances Socrates from members of the Thirty. It shows that he did not necessarily endorse their activities, despite his association with them and his anti-democratic views.

To begin, let's first consider Socrates' objections to the possibility of expertise in recognizing experts. We will quickly see that Socrates aims to show up Critias rather than pursue the truth. After Critias fails to defend his definition of *sōphrosunē* as "minding one's own business", he eventually agrees that he wants to define it as the doing of good deeds, or

perhaps the quality that has this result (*Chrm.* 163d7-e11). Socrates suggests that one can do good deeds without knowing that one is doing them. According to Critias's definition of *sōphrosunē*, then, one could be *sōphrōn* without knowing what one is doing, something Critias would like to deny. Critias could simply change the definition of *sōphrosunē* he gives to be a disposition to do good deeds *knowingly*. However, instead of adding to the definition of temperance so that it addresses the worry, he replaces his whole definition. Recognizing that doing good deeds while knowing what one is doing requires a certain amount of self-knowledge, he claims "...that temperance is pretty much (*schodon*) this very thing: knowing oneself..." (*Chrm.* 164d3-4).

Instead of showing Critias an obvious fix for his problem (even if it does create others), Socrates takes this to be Critias's new definition (despite '*schodon*', indicating that there is something more to Critias's definition). Socrates notes that the subject matter of every *epistēmē* is distinct from the *epistēmē* itself. Knowledge is distinct from what it is knowledge of. So, Socrates asks, what is the subject matter of the *epistēmē* in which temperance consists? The question seems misplaced, since Critias has just said that it is knowledge of oneself, and however you construe '*epistēmē*' here, as a field of study or a type of mental state, it will be distinct from the person who engages in the field of study or who has that kind of mental state. Yet Critias, instead of realizing this, is again led astray by the objection, further betraying his lack of understanding about what temperance is as well as Socrates' reluctance to pull him away from the most obvious mistakes. He changes the definition again, saying that it is knowledge of the other branches of knowledge and of itself (166b-e). He has once again changed the definition wholesale instead of giving a measured response. Critias could have said, "I see that to know oneself, one must know what one knows. To know what you know, you have to know that you

know what you know, and so on. But the object of knowledge is always distinct from the knowledge itself, as you point out, and so it is with self-knowledge: the self is distinct from self-knowledge. There is no problem, here.” Plato does not have him say anything like this. Nor does he have Socrates offer any help, despite his claim to be looking into the truth and to be purging himself of false beliefs (166c-d).

Socrates responds instead by asking whether he agrees to add to the definition (which Critias does): If there is a science of itself and the other sciences, then it will also be a science of the absence of science. And if that is the case, then somebody who has it (and is therefore is temperate), will have self-knowledge, be able to examine what he knows and does not know, and will be able to examine others to find out if they know what they know and think they know, or if they do not know what they think they know (*Chrm.* 166e5-167a8).<sup>73</sup> Socrates then begins harping on the same problem that he did before: how can knowledge take itself as an object (as temperance being ‘knowledge of itself, the other sciences, and the absence of science’ implies)? He shows that this cannot work for other capacities of the mind. The process of seeing does not take itself as an object, and it does not take other processes of seeing and the absence of them as its objects, either—but rather colors, shapes, or whatever you think the objects of this process are. Similarly for hearing, sensing of any kind, desiring, wishing, loving, fearing, opining.

Though Socrates admits that his argument does not warrant concluding that a science of science is impossible (168a10-11), he pursues his worry further. He and Critias go on to agree again that temperance is (a) knowledge *of* something, and (b) that it has a certain power

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<sup>73</sup> The reason Socrates says this is not given. The idea is probably that if you can detect knowledge and lack of it in yourself, then you must have some fully general method of doing so that you could apply to others. (So, Socrates rejects the view that what one knows and does not know is always transparent to oneself. After all, it’s clear that people make mistakes about this all the time. To have self-knowledge, then, you need a means of investigating yourself for knowledge. This means will allow you to investigate others for knowledge as well, since it does not rely on a special transparency that applies only to your own mind and not to the minds of others.)

(*dunamis*) which *causes* it to be of something (168b2-4). He points out that in other cases, it is impossible, or highly unlikely that one could apply the *dunamis* the thing in question has to itself. “The greater” has a *dunamis* whereby it is greater than something else—but the ‘greater than’ relation is not reflexive. Something cannot be greater than itself. Similarly for double, more, heavier, lighter, older. It’s highly implausible that there is a process of seeing that sees itself, other processes of seeing and lack of seeing, but not the objects of vision, like color and edges.

Again, though, this objection misses the mark. The science of science is a “science of itself” insofar as self-knowledge implies knowing what one knows. This will include the fact that one knows what one knows. However, this does not imply the claim that the science is reflexive like the ‘=’ in mathematics. The knowledge in question and its object are still distinct. The objection is just misplaced. This should be easy enough to see, but Critias is perplexed, and Socrates suggests they move on, rather than help him to see how the objection can be answered: he tests Critias, rather than the truth (169c-d). At 168e-169c, Socrates at last says that he is not competent to judge whether or not a science of science is really possible. As we have seen, though, he could easily have gotten to better answers if he were searching for the truth. An obvious explanation for the shallowness of his investigation is that he is testing Critias for expertise only—ironically doing the very thing he has gotten Critias to think might be impossible, and making him doubly a fool.

Socrates decides to let go of the question of whether a science of science is possible and moves on to the question of how self-knowledge can be the same as knowing what one knows and what one does not know (170a-172a). The former seems possible, but not the latter. The science of science and the absence of science is not the science of the science of justice and its



absence—that’s the art of politics. Similarly, it isn’t the science of the science of health and its absence—that’s the art of medicine. The science of science only tells us whether or not someone is an expert, not what they’re an expert in. To know *what* they’re an expert in, one has to possess that very expertise. We know that a doctor is an expert by the science of science, but an expert in medicine by the science of medicine. So, at best, self-knowledge amounts to knowing *that* one has knowledge or does not have knowledge, not knowing *what* one knows and does not know.

Socrates says that since this is the case, the person with the science of science will not be able to distinguish genuine from fraudulent doctors, because they could only tell whether or not someone had the science of medicine by having the science of medicine oneself.<sup>74</sup> However, we have already seen that Socrates offers a sophisticated account of how laypeople can find out whom they can trust to be experts in a field in the *Laches*. Furthermore, Socrates is no skeptic about our ability to ascribe expertise to others as laypeople: he does this with the *cheirotechnai* when investigating the meaning of the oracle’s claim that no one is wiser than Socrates (*Ap.* 22c-d). This suggests that it is a worry Socrates does not have, but it does test Critias.

To briefly recapitulate, Socrates has raised two concerns about the possibility of expertise in recognizing experts as a layperson. First, a thing’s *dunamis* cannot be applied to itself, which is what a “science of science” does. Second, someone with the science of science can only tell that someone has expert knowledge, not what his expert knowledge is about—medicine, housebuilding or what have you. We have seen that his worries can be easily answered, and that in the latter case, the answer is given by Socrates himself. This shows that he is not investigating these issues seriously, but is testing Critias.

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<sup>74</sup> In the reverse direction, a physician would not know that she had a science without the science of science (170e12-171a1).

Socrates is also concerned that expertise in recognizing experts is not beneficial, which makes it strange that Socrates should, as I have argued, develop this skill. As in the first half of this discussion, we will see that these worries have easy answers, and that he is not raising them in earnest. There are two concerns, here. First, if the science of science can only be knowing *that* you and others do or don't have knowledge, rather than knowing *what* in particular you and others know and don't know, then the benefits of being able to recognize experts do not accrue, since it is impossible to do this as a layperson (171d-172a). We have already seen that Socrates has an answer for this concern, and consequently this worry about the benefit of expertise in expertise should be taken with a grain of salt.

Socrates' other concern is that even if we define the science of science as knowing *what* you and others know and don't know, having this gets you all the right means to your own ends without telling you whether or not your ends, if fulfilled, are going to make your life go well. Since it does not do this, it is not clear how the science is beneficial (172b1-174d7). Critias protests that this science would "rule over" the other sciences, including that which tell us which ends *do* benefit us—the science of good and evil—allowing us to set the right ends. Socrates replies that even if this is so, the science of science does not actually do anything that benefits us—rather, it helps us accrue the beneficial products of other domains of expertise, like well-made shoes and homes. It has no benefit that is unique to it, and so it is not by itself beneficial. Critias agrees to this (174d8-175a8).

Socrates' response makes little sense, though. Critias has shown us what is beneficial about the science of science: it tell us whether or not anybody has the science of good and evil, which is precisely what Socrates is up to in the *Apology*. It tells us, in other words, whether or not there are any experts in human virtue. If there are, we will be able to defer to them to set our

ends, and live well. If there are none, this deference will not be possible, but at least we will *know* that there is no one to whom we can defer about these matters. We will know that which ends one should pursue to live well are a matter to be discussed with each other, since there are no experts to whom we can defer. Such discussions, Socrates says in the *Apology*, are the “greatest good” for a human being (*Ap.* 38a). So not only is Socrates not worried that expertise in expertise might not be beneficial, he is also giving us an explanation for why he would be interested in developing the skill of recognizing who has expertise and who does not. This skill has clear benefits, inasmuch as it gives us an accurate guide to how we should live our lives and live them well.

### **2.2.3 Transition**

I have argued in this chapter that Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to his own views about expertise. I defended this argument from the objection that he has contradictions in his views about what he knows, and so could not have such expertise, by showing that his claims about what he knows about human virtue are consistent. I have argued that the worries raised in the *Charmides* about the possibility and benefit of expertise in recognizing experts are not ones that Socrates takes seriously himself. In the next chapter, I shall argue that Socrates’ views about how to recognize experts are plausible. If his view is plausible, and if being an expert according to a plausible view about recognizing experts plausibly makes one an expert, then, since he is an expert in expertise according to this view, it is plausible that Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts.

# **Chapter III: The Plausibility of Socrates’ Views**

I have been arguing that the Socrates of Plato’s Socratic dialogues is an expert in recognizing expertise as a layperson. The argument for this claim has been that a plausible view about how laypeople should identify experts marks *him* as an expert in this area; if someone is categorized as an expert in a domain by such a view, then plausibly, that person possesses expertise in the domain. So, plausibly, Socrates has expertise in recognizing experts as a layperson. The view that marks Socrates as having expertise in expertise is Socrates’ own. I elucidated this view in Chapter 1. I argued that Socrates was an expert in recognizing experts according to that view in the second chapter. In this chapter, I shall argue that the view from which this result is generated is plausible. The view has two components: a definition of the category “*technikos*” and a set of methods for deciding whether or not individuals belong to the category so defined. Most of this chapter examines the divergent ways plausibility is assessed for each. Embedded within these discussions and afterward are answers to questions raised at the end of the first chapter about the viability of Socrates’ views. It will also become clear why “plausibility” is not a weak or vague standard of assessment, and why it is the only standard of assessment appropriate for the kinds of views that are being assessed.

To that end, I begin by saying what the standard of assessment could not be.

## **3.1 *Euprepeia* and *Alētheia***

The standard of assessment is not *euprepeia*. ‘*Euprepeia*’ can be translated “plausibility”<sup>75</sup> and refers to the quality of having a good appearance. Consequently, the word carries with it all of

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<sup>75</sup> As Sprague does in Cooper (1997), p. 744, from *Euthyd.* 305e5. Cf. LSJ s.v. εὐπρέπεια, II.

the negative connotations something that is apparently good can have when it is contrasted with something that is actually good. So in the *Euthydemus*, we see Plato's Socrates contrasting a *logos* that has *euprepeia* with one that has *alētheia* (truth), to the detriment of the former. A merely *euprepēs logos* results from trying to do serious work in more than one area at once. The result is that the outcomes in each domain are worse than they would have been with full attention to one discipline (*Euthyd.* 305e-306d). We know that the Socrates Plato gives us is focused on understanding what he can about human virtue. Activities that could appear tangential in isolation, like thinking about the nature of knowledge, are really in the service of this. So the standard of *euprepeia* won't do for two reasons. First, with a view that is only *euprepēs*, we couldn't be assured of correct answers to who was *technikos* and who wasn't. That would be the cost of caring only about appearances. Second, Plato does not depict Socrates as having more than one occupation that would give his views *euprepeia* only, rather than *alētheia*. So *euprepeia* will not be the standard of assessment for Socrates' views, despite its obvious connection to the English word I am choosing to describe our standards of assessment.

So, why not *alētheia*? Why not make *truth* the standard of assessment? Because this standard cannot be applied uniformly to the entire view. The standard of truth, or something like it (accuracy, correctness, correspondence) makes sense when used to assess Socrates' methods for finding experts, but not when used to assess his definition of expertise.

### **3.1 The Plausibility of Socrates' Definition**

There can be no view about how to locate members of a certain category without a rough idea of what makes someone a member. Socrates has more than a rough idea about what makes someone a member of the *technikos* category, as we saw in chapter one, and it is on this basis that he sorts people into *technikos* and *atechnos*. We saw this division between category and

method in the introduction and first chapter. We also saw that Socrates does not simply use the category as it is commonly understood. He has made revisions: those who are reputed to be wise he excludes from the category, like the politicians and poets. Those thought to have wisdom in something other than human virtue, like various kinds of artist (poets, pastry chefs and cosmetologists) are also excluded.

The revisionary nature of Socrates' definition is important. This is what gives us a target for assessment, in two respects. First, it gives us *some-or-other* target of assessment, as opposed to none. Assessing the quality of a definition, whether from natural language or theoretical discourse, does not make sense unless there is something one wants to do with it, like advance a legal argument or market a new product. So long as communication is smooth and we don't have other goals in mind, there is no need for evaluation. Once other goals are in play, we can ask how well one's chosen definition meets those goals, which is how we can assess the quality of the definition. This is the other respect in which the revisionary nature of Socrates' definition gives us a target for assessment. It gives us a *particular* target of evaluation, as opposed to others. Our particular target of evaluation will be how well Socrates' definition of '*technikos*' met the goals he had in mind when he re-defined the category. So, to assess the quality of Socrates' views, we need to figure out what Socrates' goals were when he defined '*technikos*' as he did. It will also be helpful to say what goals Socrates did not have.

An *alēthēs*, "true" or "accurate" definition, is not one of Socrates' goals. This sort of goal makes sense when one is trying to understand what the features of a sparrow or an orchid are, for example. The properties that make them the kinds of things they are occur bundled together regardless of what anyone says or thinks about them. Consequently, they belong to their respective classes regardless of what anyone says or thinks about them. Partly for this

reason, before any theoretical training, individual sparrows' and orchids' membership or non-membership in those classes are apparent to the observer once she has observed enough instances. One can begin forming definitions from there. The definitions can be refined by careful study of those who ostensibly belong to the category (and by careful study of those who ostensibly belong to related categories). In such cases, the goal of an *alēthēs*—true or accurate—definition makes sense, because such definitions can track the real features of the kind to a greater or lesser degree.

By contrast, the properties the group of individuals called “*technikoi*” have are not bundled together regardless of what anyone says or thinks about them. As a result, individuals do not belong to the class of *technikoi* regardless of what anyone says or thinks about them. In part because of this, membership in the *technikos* category is not apparent to the observer before being given a set of qualities to look for by someone who is interested in looking for those qualities. So, one cannot form definitions that try to capture the features of members of the mind-independent kind—because there is no mind-independent kind to be intuited by observation, as is the case with birds and flowers. Obviously, then, the definition of ‘*technikos*’ cannot be refined by careful study of those who ostensibly belong to the mind-independent category. ‘*Technikos*’ refers to a category that is partly of human construction. So to look for an *alēthēs*—true or accurate—definition of the category does not make sense. A definition for this category is not going to track some mind-independent features to some greater or lesser degree.

There is no mind-independent category corresponding to ‘*technikos*’ because ‘*technikos*’ never refers to features of the world only. ‘*Technikos*’ refers to people in the world who meet a *standard*. That standard is created by human interests. Whether or not someone meets the standard also depends on human interests. Remember that paradigmatic *technikoi* do not just

know how to do or to make something. They know how to do something *well* or to make something *of quality*. Poverty and the desire for safety may drive one to construct makeshift shoes for oneself regularly. The ability to do this does not make one *technikos* at shoemaking. One must in addition be able to make shoes of a certain quality. The quality of the shoes needs to reach a certain threshold, above which the shoes serve as evidence of a *technē*, and below which there is insufficient evidence to establish *technē*-possession. Where this threshold is set—how “good” the shoes one can make must be for one to count as *technikos*—depends on the interests of human beings.

The same is true of a different kind of *technikos*. Through careful study of the good resources at one’s disposal, one may be among the best-equipped to help others understand the principal causes of the American Revolution,<sup>76</sup> and yet fail to be an expert on the topic. That is because one may have more true beliefs and fewer false ones than do most people about the causes of the war—even more true beliefs and fewer false ones than do most credentialed experts in the field—and yet fail to have *good reasons* to support those beliefs. Suppose that the American Revolution was principally caused by a series of economic calculations made by politically-influential businessmen. Let’s say there is a particular individual who believes this is the case after reading a wide range of books on the topic. Suppose further that the individual has remembered all of the arguments professional historians have made and all of the evidence they brought to bear. This person might have the right beliefs but fail to be an expert, because he doesn’t have good reasons for his beliefs. For example, he might remember the arguments for the true conclusion so well not because he has made a careful study of all the evidence and of all the arguments for other conclusions, and not because he has considered the objections of other

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<sup>76</sup> Or the principal causes of the Peloponnesian War, or the causes of the Plague of Athens, etc.



historians to this explanation and found satisfying replies to them. He might remember the arguments for the true conclusion because he is attracted to explanations of historical events that appeal to the avarice of powerful men, because he distrusts historical explanations that appeal to noble intentions, and because he finds the attribution of such intentions to elite political figures to be incredible. This individual may also fail to understand properly the arguments he remembers in favor of the true explanation for the war. Such a person would lack *good reasons* for their conclusion about the causes of the American Revolution, then, even though they could function just as well as a genuine expert at helping a layperson grasp the truth.

These two examples illustrate the pragmatic interests at play in defining specific kinds of *technikoi*. They also illustrate the pragmatic interests at play in defining what a *technikos* is in general: it is someone who does what he does up to a certain standard, and who has good reasons for his beliefs. The standard, and what counts as a good reason, will depend on the interests of the individuals who are looking for a certain kind of service or information. This is why *alētheia* could not be the standard of assessment for Socrates' revision of '*technikos*'—there is no mind-independent kind against which to measure the accuracy of the definition. The kind is artificial, and the boundaries fluctuate with human interest.<sup>77</sup> As a consequence, a different standard of assessment is needed, and that standard is going to be how well or badly the definition does what it's supposed to do: how well or badly it achieves the goals of the person who is defining (or in Socrates' case, re-defining) the term. This standard of assessment is what I will call "plausibility", and what I will mean when I ask whether or not Socrates' definition of

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<sup>77</sup> Many positively-valenced words have this characteristic. The meaning of 'democracy', for example, has shifted in the contemporary Anglophone world to be much more egalitarian than it was in Socrates' time and place, or in the Anglophone world of a hundred years ago. The word has shifted in other parts of the world to have a much less egalitarian meaning, as in the "Democratic People's Republic of Korea", or in China, where the government has at times claimed that it governs via its own version of democracy (Bradsher and Myers, Dec. 8, 2021). Probably for similar reasons, nearly every country on the planet calls itself a Republic (Lye 2020).

'*technikos*' is plausible. With this in mind, let's look at what Socrates' positive goals are in revising the ordinary notion of '*technikos*', so we can see if he achieves the goals he set out for himself in revising the definition as he did.

Socrates' goals in modifying the existing notion of *technikos* are twofold. The first of these two goals is to communicate. The definition is for that reason constrained in large measure by ordinary uses of the relevant terms. This is just what we see with Socrates' re-definition: his ideas about what makes someone *technikos*, *sophos* and the like are revisionist, but not revolutionary. The sculptors and geometers remain *technikoi* (*Grg.* 350c10, d6-7) even though the politicians do not (*Ap.* 21b-e).

Pursuing the goal of communication places further constraints on Socrates' definition and also allows us to answer more decisively an objection to his view that we saw in the first chapter (p. 24). Recall that Socrates must have come to his investigation of the Delphic oracle's message with a worked-out notion of expertise in mind already. Remember, too, that before Chaerephon reported to him his interaction with the Delphic oracle, Socrates was looking for people who could make him *good*. He viewed the person who could make him good as the teacher of a *technē* (*La.* 186b8-c5) and believed that *technikoi* were teachers of *technai*. A question we raised and discussed briefly in the first chapter is why Socrates should think that experts were the people best equipped to teach others to be experts in their domain (p. 24). We can now answer the question: Socrates wanted to communicate. Had the ability to teach one's craft to others been left out of his notion of *technikos*, he would have been out of step with the ordinary understanding of the word and without any good reason to do so. The question that would be posed to him is what kind of swordsmith, housebuilder, sculptor, shoemaker, arithmetician or geometer could be successful in her craft and worthy of being called a *technikos* without being

able to teach others to do what she can do? These paradigmatic *technikoi* are able to pass along their *technai* to others. This desire to communicate puts a certain constraint on Socrates' notion: teachability is built into the notion of *technikos*.

One might agree that to communicate successfully, Socrates needs to say that being *technikos* and being able to teach the related *technē* go together, and still object that this is not part of what *makes* one *technikos*. The two abilities—teaching an ability and the ability itself—are distinct, and the latter does not conceptually imply the former. They simply tend to go together, perhaps for pragmatic reasons: what sort of parent does not want to pass along the skills that allow them to survive to their children, especially at a time and in a place where offering their children a wide range of different careers was not an option, and especially when what options existed were not free, unlike the passing on of these skills? So although it might be right that all *technikoi* are teachers of *technai* (and the best ones at that), Socrates would be making a mistake if he believed that part of what it *meant* to be *technikos* was to be able to teach one's *technē* to others.

The reply is that the conceptual link between ability and ability to teach that ability is there. This is so, at any rate, if the ability to explain the point of one's craft and how to achieve the goals of that craft are part of what it means to be *technikos* in the ordinary sense of that word (*cf. Grg.* 465a, 500e-501a). That is because being able to provide such explanations just is being able to teach the craft to others: it is the ability to teach someone, step by step, how one produces the results experts in the domain are supposed to achieve when successful. And the ability to explain the point of one's craft and how to achieve the goals of the craft are not separable from the notion of *technikos* that would be recognizable to a native speaker of the language. Such explanations help us to see that the person in question isn't just lucky or inspired

by a god. They are evidence that their success proceeds from *knowledge*, which requires an account of why one's beliefs are true and rules out people who get results through dumb luck from being labeled *technikoi*. They are also evidence that the knowledge is *theirs* (assuming they are not reading a manual or something of the sort), ruling out people who get consistent results through divine inspiration. Being able to explain what the ends are and how to achieve them is therefore inseparable from the notion of *technikos*, and because this just is the ability to teach one's expertise, part of what it is to be *technikos* is to be able to pass along one's specialized knowledge to others. A desire to communicate—and probably also a recognition of the good reasons that exist for this component of the definition—keep the ability to teach a *technē* embedded within the meaning of the word '*technikos*' in Socrates' re-definition.

Does Socrates achieve his first goal of communicating effectively in re-defining '*technikos*' and the words he uses equivalently? If there were a breakdown in successful communication, we would expect it to arise when his ideas about *technikoi* and *sophoi* depart from the ideas most people had about these notions in his time and place. The breakdown would not occur because of a failure to persuade. One can be understood perfectly well without being persuasive. The breakdown would be Socrates' interlocutors' failure to understand what he is saying when he uses the terms as he does. Whether or not this occurs is difficult to assess. Socrates' tendency is to ask if his interlocutors assent to a proposal, so where differences in terminology occur, all parties are brought to an agreement on the terms of the argument, or at any rate the source of disagreement is pushed out into the open. Furthermore, because this is Socrates' method of investigation, he almost never departs from commonsense understandings of '*technikos*' or '*sophos*' unilaterally, pushing others to accept his own views about the matter, rather than asking them if they agree to this or that proposal.

The major and obvious exception to this generalization is Socrates' behavior in the *Gorgias*. In the *Gorgias*, he makes his views about *technai* and *technikoi* explicit and contrasts them with the ideas of his interlocutors. His interlocutors' ideas about expertise allow oratory to be a *technē*, whereas Socrates views it as an *empeiria*, a knack, because it doesn't have an account of the nature of those things it aims to bring about or an account of how to bring about those things (465a2-5). Orators pretend to *know* how to do what they claim they know how to do when in fact (because they lack the relevant accounts) they are just guessing (464b2-466a3, see esp. 464c3-e2 with respect to the delicacy-makers). Socrates' interlocutor does not grasp the meaning of his remarks in their entirety, but he does get the gist: oratory isn't a craft and this makes it less desirable.

POLUS: What, then, are you saying? Do you think oratory is flattery?

SOCRATES: No, rather, *I* said it was a portion of flattery. Why, don't you remember, being the age you are? What will you accomplish next?

POLUS: Well, do you think that as flatterers in their cities, the good orators are thought to be bad? (*Grg.* 466a4-10)

Socrates' next interlocutor in the dialogue, Callicles, does not misunderstand Socrates' points when he reiterates them, either. At a certain point in their discussion, Callicles pretends that he doesn't understand where the proposals he assented to will lead, since they will lead somewhere undesirable. Gorgias persuades Callicles to stop pretending that he doesn't understand (497a3-c2). So it is clear that Callicles is following the discussion in general. When Socrates recapitulates all of his prior points about the distinction between *technai* and *empeiriai* and more specifically the *technai* of body and soul and the flattery (*kolakeutikē*) of these, Callicles understands Socrates' points well enough to mock him.

SOCRATES: But do *you* now share with us the same opinion about these matters, or do you speak to the contrary?

CALLICLES: *I* won't [speak to the contrary], but I shall assent so that the argument may be concluded and so that I gratify Gorgias, here.

Callicles behaves exactly as Socrates says orators do behave: they please their audience without accounting for the nature of pleasure, of whether it is good or bad, and without account for how it is produced reliably. Callicles chooses to assent because it will please his audience, not because it will be what's best for them. This is exactly how Socrates does *not* want his interlocutors to behave: he wants them to state what they really believe, so they can get closer to the truth about how they should live (e.g. 486e5-487a3). Callicles knows this, and it is why he responds in the way that he does. He is disobedient to annoy Socrates, and he could not do this successfully if he didn't understand what was being said about *technai* and *empeiriai*. Furthermore, Socrates detects no failure of communication, here. Typically when this happens, he offers more clarification (e.g. in the *Euthyphro* and *Laches* when his interlocutors don't see that he wants a fully general definition of piety or courage). Perhaps detecting the mockery, Socrates simply moves on to the next question (*Grg.* 501d1-2).

Socrates' other goal in re-defining *technikos* is to make sure his definition includes all and only the people who can teach their crafts to others. He formulated his notion of expertise before Chaerephon visited the oracle, and his goals at that time were to find someone who could make him good and—presumably—to make sure that no one led him astray by taking him into their care when they were not teachers of the art. It does not take any additional work to see that Socrates has achieved this goal. As we saw before, the ability to teach a *technē* part of what it means to be *technikos*, both in Socrates' view and according to common usage. From this we already know that all and only those people who can teach their crafts to others are included in his definition of '*technikos*'. The upshot is that Socrates achieves both of the goals he has in defining his terms as he does. This makes Socrates' definition of '*technikos*' plausible. To test the plausibility of his full view, though, we still need to assess Socrates' methods.

### 3.3 The Plausibility of Socrates' Methods

The plausibility of Socrates' definition depends on his goals, but the plausibility of his methods for sorting people into *technikos* and *atechnos* categories depends on how accurate they are. If they are completely accurate, then whenever they are used as prescribed, there will be a match between the qualities the view says people have and the qualities they actually have. Those labeled *technikos* will have the qualities 'technikos' picks out. Those labeled *atechnos* won't have those qualities. Our questions are then what threshold of accuracy Socrates' methods must reach to be plausible and whether those methods reach that threshold.<sup>78</sup>

The answer to the first question depends on what Socrates wants his view to do. How accurate it must be depends on how much accuracy is required to achieve his goals. It is clear both from what has come before, in the introduction, and from other passages that Socrates does not want to leave any room for error at all, if he can help it. Methods with less-than-perfect results could mean leading him astray about who the experts in human excellence are. He does not want to end up doing something wrong because he is following the instructions of someone whom he has mistaken for an expert. He says that his *whole concern* is to avoid doing anything unjust or impious.

Then, however, I demonstrated, not in word, but in deed once again, that death is of no concern to me (if it were not a rather cliché thing to say), none whatsoever. Rather, my whole concern is this: not doing anything unjust or impious τοῦ δὲ μηδὲν ἄδικον μηδ' ἀνόσιον ἐργάζεσθαι, τούτου δὲ τὸ πᾶν μέλει.<sup>79</sup> (*Ap.* 32c8-d3)

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<sup>78</sup> Why do I persist with talk of plausibility when we've now switched to talk of accuracy, which is a more specific label than the former? I want to say that Socrates' view as a whole is plausible (and accuracy isn't the right standard of assessment for his whole view). The whole view is plausible for different reasons. Goal achievement is one way for a view to be plausible, and accuracy another. The former kind of plausibility applies to the definition and the latter to the methods.

<sup>79</sup> The phrase 'a rather cliché thing' translates ἀγροικότερον. The word more literally means, "a rather rustic thing", a thing that an uneducated rustic would say. Socrates is emphasizing his lack of originality and sophistication, not his bad manners and poor taste (*cf.* Grube's 'vulgar' in Cooper 1997): it is something anyone might say to appear brave in the face of death. *Cf.* *Ap.* 32a8, part of his preface to this whole section about his dedication to justice (and how one who fights for justice cannot do so in government, because he will die): "And I shall tell you things that are tiresome and smack of the lawcourts, but true."

From this, it would follow that he does not want to mislabel anyone who might lead him into either course of action.

Socrates emphasizes the same point shortly thereafter, but in a different way.

So, do you think I would have survived all these years if I were engaged in public affairs, and, acting in a manner that befits a good man, I came to the aid of justice, and (just as one should) considered this the most important thing (τοῦτο περὶ πλείστου ἐποιούμην)? Far from it, gentlemen-Athenians. Nor would anyone else. Rather, through my whole life, if I did anything anywhere in public, in private, I was the same person. Nor did I *ever* make an agreement with anyone contrary to justice (οὐδενὶ πώποτε συγχωρήσας οὐδὲν παρὰ τὸ δίκαιον), neither with another person nor with *any* of those whom my slanderers claim to be my students. (*Ap.* 32e2-33a5)

It is clear, then, that he would want to avoid anybody who could lead him into any sort of wrongdoing. The most important thing is to come to the assistance of justice, which means *avoiding* injustice is paramount.

Yet it is also clear that Socrates does not want to miss out. He wanted to become a good person, as we've seen in the *Laches*. There, at 186b8-c2, he says of the *technē* that would allow him to teach others to be good: "Well then, Lysimachus and Melesias, I am the first to say about myself that I have had no teacher in this. And certainly, I have yearned for it, starting from youth." In the last passage from the *Apology*, Socrates also tells us that to be good, one must consider coming to the aid of justice the most important thing. In light of his goal of becoming a good person prior to his investigation of the oracle's message, he would not want to miss out on the opportunity to learn how to be just, on how to do things in the right way. So Socrates wants his tests for expertise to be very accurate indeed.

Does Socrates meet his own demanding threshold of accuracy for his view to be plausible, to get him what he needs? If one believes what I have argued so far, then the answer is certainly yes. Plato equipped him with a highly sophisticated view about how one should



categorize individuals as *technikos* and *atechnos*. Plato also depicts him as succeeding in both identifying experts and in identifying non-experts as such. Most of Socrates' positive identifications of experts occur off-stage. With no reason to think he failed here, however, the presumption would be that Plato thought he was right when he judged, e.g., that the *dēmiourgoi* and the *cheirotechnai* had *technai*. In those few instances where Socrates identifies an expert on stage, like Damon or Prodicus, we find Plato's Socrates appealing to their guidance and expertise in non-Socratic dialogues, too, which suggests that Plato thought his positive judgments about their expertise were correct. For example, Socrates suggests that those setting up the ideal city in the *Republic* should consult Damon as to the sorts of music that should be given up because it produces vice, and which should remain in their city, because it cultivates virtue.

And I said, "But in these matters, we shall also consult with Damon as to which meters are suited to servility and arrogance or madness and other vice, and which rhythms, [suited] to their opposites, must remain." (*Rep.* III, 400b1-4)

In a much-later discussion about art, too, Prodicus is praised for his ability to retain students who loved and admired him, unlike Homer, which is supposed to be evidence of his having improved his students (*Rep.* X 600c3-d5). This suggests that Socrates was getting it right about who the experts were. This makes sense if they do indeed have skills that are connected to living well, like being able to argue by appealing to fine distinctions, and being able to discern how different sorts of music affects the soul.

Plato depicts Socrates as succeeding in showing who the *non*-experts are, too. In the Socratic dialogues, Socrates is the philosophical protagonist. He shows people who think they are wise that they are not. The one major objection to the claim that Plato thought Socrates' methods were accurate in the universe Plato created for him was Socrates' line of questioning in the *Charmides*. We saw in the last chapter that this line of questioning does not undermine the

depiction of Socrates we get in the other Socratic dialogues. Plato depicts him in the Socratic dialogues as successful in debunking claims to expertise and recognizing the non-experts as such.

This means that Socrates meets the threshold for accuracy he sets out for himself, though it is supposed to be a very high one. We do not see Socrates fail. He succeeds in locating the experts and excels at spotlighting the *atechnoi*. This makes Socrates' methods for detecting expertise plausible, plausible because they are accurate. We have just seen that his definition of *technikos* is also plausible. The definition of expertise and the methods for finding experts were the two components of Socrates' views about how a layperson should recognize expertise and lack thereof. Because both are plausible, we can conclude that Socrates' views about how a layperson should identify experts are plausible, too.

### 3.4 Old Objections Answered

The positive argument for the claim that Socrates' views about recognizing experts is complete, but we saw objections to his views, especially to the method for finding experts in human virtue, at the end of the first chapter. Discussion of these objections was postponed to the present chapter because it was in this chapter that I would more fully assess the plausibility of Socrates' views. These were the objections:

- (1) Socrates says that if one knows which things improve some class of items when added and how to make the addition, then that person has expertise. He also says in the *Gorgias* that the ὀνοποιός, the delicacy-maker, is not an expert. But the delicacy-maker knows which things improves the things he makes and how to add that which improves them to them so as to get the improvements. So why isn't he an expert?

(2) To use Socrates' third method for finding experts, one must test to see if the person has an account that explains what those things are that improves what one aims to improve and how the result can be brought about. How, though, can a layperson tell whether an account given by a purported expert is true or false? Without knowing this, Socrates seems not much better off than someone without worked out views about expertise.

The answers to both of these objections will be speculative. They would not arise if there were clear answers that could be gleaned from the texts. The chef, for example, who focuses on making fine foods, seems to be improving some class of items, and to know how to teach others to do the same, as though he had a *technē*. We also never see Socrates get far enough in an investigation of whether or not someone has human virtue (the time when this method of looking for expertise would be used) to find out how he would test the truth of someone's accounts.

Though speculative, we can ground the answers to some degree in what we get in the Socratic dialogues. The answer to (1) is that the *opsopoioi* do not actually improve some class of items. As Socrates says in the *Gorgias*, *opsopoiikē* does not aim at what is best, but at what is pleasant. "...delicacy-making disguises itself as medicine and pretends to know which foods are best for the body..." (*Grg.* 464d3-5). Food is meant to be nutritious, not delicious. This is essentially what Socrates is telling us in this passage. So someone who focuses on making delicacies is not improving any kind of dish by making its flavor more subtle, complex, or unique. He will only improve it by making it more nutritious. By definition, this is not what an *opsopoiios* is doing. He is aiming at making the food he makes delicious, and that does not make food a better member of its kind.

This answer remains speculative because Socrates does not come out and say that this is why *opsopoiikē* is not a *technē*. He says instead that it lacks an account of what its goals are and

how to achieve them (*Grg.* 465a2-5). What I am saying, in essence, is that when Socrates tells us that *opsopoiikē* lacks an account of what its goals are, he is suggesting that if it did, it would essentially be the same as medicine. It would aim at improving food, which means making it more nutritious, not at seasoning it, which makes it more immediately gratifying. Accounts need to be true and there is something that food is truly for, which is to nourish, not to please.

The second objection is trickier to answer. Socrates spends a great deal of time testing his interlocutors for accounts of what it is they claim to know: what those things that improve the things they claim to be experts in improving are. He never walks away satisfied, so we never see what his standards are for detecting a *true* account of what something is. We only know that he doesn't think someone could contradict themselves about the topic of their purported expertise and in fact be *technikos*. Yet he must have some sense of what sort of account would be satisfying to him, especially before he reaches the conclusion that there are no experts in human virtue. Otherwise, he would not really be open to the possibility of finding expertise in this way, or at least not experts in human virtue, which he clearly must be before and during his investigation of the oracle's message.

My speculative answer is that Socrates thinks this is the best you can do: if you don't know the domain yourself, then you can only show that no matter how hard you tried, you couldn't trap them in a contradiction. This does not yet prove the truth of what they are saying, but it does prove that they have beliefs made quite stable by an "account" that can survive all sorts of difficult tests and provides answers to the most critical questions a layperson can formulate. (I have put 'account' in scare quotes because Socrates tells us that an account, a *logos*, rather than a story, a *muthos*, must be true, and how one can tell the difference is precisely what is at issue, here—*Grg.* 523a.) This is substantial evidence of expertise, though not yet

enough to prove expertise when certification and success cannot be applied: when this happens, the purported expert has a lot of explaining to do. Furthermore, if done properly, it should also give the layperson some sense of what success in the domain would look like. If success is adding virtue to souls, then it will help to know what it is that is getting added. It will help to know that it is virtue and not something less-than-virtue that is getting added if one is to look at success. But making another person good would presumably take a long time—many years. Success cannot be witnessed in a few hours. So one would need to rely on the explanation for how virtue is added to souls. How could one know, without watching someone work over years, that this was correct? And against what standards would we measure such correctness?

Here we can think of measuring the success of the expert in human virtue as measuring the success of the expert in housebuilding. If we watch parts of a house's construction, we can begin to see over a period of time that the person has substantial knowledge about the domain. They are getting a house built. The analogy to the expert in human virtue would be getting someone to avoid obvious injustice and impiety regularly and to do things that are obviously just and pious. But just like the house, one cannot be sure that the product is of high quality until a great deal of time has passed. Is the home still standing the following year? How much repairing did it need only ten years after being built, or twenty? A goal of building a home is to build a structure that lasts—a housebuilder's success in doing this cannot be measured except to see it over time. Similarly, a year of behaving well does not make a person just and pious. To be fully virtuous, it requires a lifetime, and this is part of what makes detecting experts in human virtue so difficult. One can get increasingly good evidence for the individual's expertise over time, however, if the standards for success have been made reasonably clear to the layperson, so that they can judge the works of a purported expert in human virtue.

What we have seen in this chapter, then, is why Socrates' views about recognizing expertise are plausible, and how he can get around important major objections to those views, especially his view about how to identify experts in human virtue. This brings us to the close of an argument for the claim that Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to a plausible view about how to recognize experts (his own).

1. Socrates has a view about how laypeople should recognize experts. (I)
2. Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to that view. (II)
3. Socrates' view is plausible. (III)
- C. So, Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to a plausible view about how to recognize experts (his own). (= (i))

This takes us most of the way to the end, but it was not quite the conclusion of this dissertation.

# Conclusion

What I have argued in this dissertation is that the Socrates of Plato's Socratic dialogues is an expert in recognizing expertise. He can detect expertise and its lack accurately even in those areas where he himself is not an expert. He can also detect expertise and its lack in those areas where it is exceedingly difficult to do so. This is significant because to arrive at the conclusion that there are no experts in human virtue, and that the closest one can get is to discuss how one should live and how one should govern every day, Socrates needs expertise in recognizing experts. This I argued in my introductory chapter. My argument that Socrates had what he needed was a *modus ponens*.

- (i) Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts according to a plausible view about how to recognize experts (his own).
- (ii) If someone is an expert according to a plausible view about how to recognize experts, then plausibly, she is.
- (iii) Plausibly, Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts. (From (i) and (ii))

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to establish (i). In the meantime, I have taken (ii) for granted. This was the right thing to do: (i) is the substantive claim that many will disagree with for lots of different reasons. The second premise seems much more obviously correct. Are there reasons to doubt (ii)?

Reasons to doubt (ii) will not come from Plato. He does not deal explicitly with this sort of claim. Nor is (ii) an epistemological principle pulled from the contemporary literature on expertise. It is supposed to be a claim that seems, intuitively, to be right. However, one might point out that, as we saw in the last chapter, there are many ways of making something "plausible". What makes a *view* about detecting experts plausible may be different from what makes it plausible that some *person* has expertise. For example: Socrates' view tells us that there are no experts in human virtue, but common sense says that there are such experts. So just

because a plausible view about how to detect experts tells us that X is not an expert, it doesn't follow that plausibly, she is not an expert. Or closer to home: a plausible view about expert-recognition says that moral philosophers are experts in the analysis of moral arguments, but that doesn't make it plausible that they are, if common sense is the standard and common sense says nothing at all about arguments or about what philosophers do.

However, the adverb 'plausibly' could be dropped from the formulation of (ii) without any loss, and this undermines the objection. There aren't two different notions of plausibility at play in (ii). The second premise simply says that if a view that is plausible (read: has accurate methods for detecting expertise, where expertise is defined by the view), then, if someone has a certain set of qualities according to that view, she really has those qualities. And this will of course be true if the view is "plausible" in the favored sense, because the methods for detecting those qualities will be accurate. So, if someone is labeled 'expert' by a plausible view, then she will have the qualities that 'expert' picks out according to that view. This makes the second premise more intuitively correct than it might otherwise have appeared.

If (ii) is true and my arguments for (i) are sound, then it follows that Socrates is an expert in recognizing experts. This makes it possible for him to conclude that there are no experts in human virtue and for him to have successfully understood the oracle's message to Chaerephon, when she said that no one was wiser than Socrates—no one had more expertise in human virtue.



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