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Making Something from Nothing: On Plato's *Hipparchus*

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Abstract: Plato's *Hipparchus* is generally not taken particularly seriously; it is thought either spurious or negligible. Yet its theme, love of the good, places it at the summit of philosophy, at least as Socrates presents it in the *Republic*. Why, then, is such a slight writing the locus of the discussion of so monumental a question? As is so often the case in Platonic dialogues, in the *Hipparchus*, we find our way to the deepest questions by way of reflecting on the puzzles revealed in apparently superficial particulars. The most obvious such puzzle in the *Hipparchus* is its title, for Hipparchus is not a participant in the dialogue but rather the famous, or perhaps infamous, character for whom it is named.

Plato's *Hipparchus* is generally not taken particularly seriously; it is thought either spurious or negligible.[1] Yet its theme, love of the good, places it at the summit of philosophy, at least as Socrates presents it in the *Republic*.[2] Why, then, is such a slight writing the locus of the discussion of so monumental a question? As is so often the case in Platonic dialogues, in the *Hipparchus* we find our way to the deepest questions by way of reflecting on the puzzles revealed in apparently superficial particulars. The most obvious such puzzle in the *Hipparchus* is its title, for Hipparchus is not a participant in the dialogue but rather the famous, or perhaps infamous, character for whom it is named. Socrates does give an extended account of him, but it does not seem at first to exemplify the dialogue's theme, and so its relevance for the whole is hard to

[1]This paper was initially written for a conference on the thought of Seth Benardete in the spring of 2005 at Howard University. When I turned to the *Hipparchus* shortly after Benardete's death in 2001, I was struck by how its display of the relation between the superficial and profound, the playful and serious, reminded me of reading books with him. A Platonic dialogue is, of course, many things; in its way, the *Hipparchus* stands as a monument to Seth Benardete.

[2]See *Republic* 502c–516c. Consider as well the following remark of Seth Benardete: "Only two dialogues begin without any preliminaries—they start straight off with the question, 'What is?'—and in both cases the interlocutor is anonymous. That the love of the good emerges as the theme of one (*Hipparchus*) and law is the theme of the other (*Minos*) seems not unrelated to their evidently philosophical character" (*Socrates and Plato: The Dialectics of Eros*, [Munich: Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, 1999], 51; see also page 53, n. 29).

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make out. This digression is merely the most extensive and striking of several instances in the dialogue where Socrates says things that seem to come out of nowhere and to involve gratuitous details of language, plot, or character. There is a prominent string of these passages in the first section of the dialogue. In what follows, I will turn first to an account of this section and then to its significance in light of the long digression on Hipparchus.

I

While every Platonic dialogue, whatever its subject seems to be, is ultimately about philosophy, Plato, nevertheless, always begins with the recognizable. Accordingly, if we wish to understand pleasure, love, friendship, or justice, we would do well to turn dialogues that raise these issues directly—to the *Philebus*, *Symposium*, *Lysis*, and *Republic*, for example. Yet Platonic dialogues have a way of transfiguring the ordinary. The truth of pleasure, love, friendship, and justice emerges eventually as something less easily recognizable but still more worthy—philosophy. Remarkably, this is true even of the *Phaedo*, where our customary understanding of death is transformed into philosophy. We view death in a revealingly incoherent manner that displays the duplicitous longing of the human soul for its own permanence. When it finally understands itself, this longing is philosophy as the practice of dying and having died.

The obvious subject matter of Plato's *Hipparchus*, is love of gain—*philokerdeia*. The word and its cognates are rare in the Greek texts we have; with astonishingly few exceptions, they occur solely in two brief passages in Plato. Of some forty instances, only four are post-Platonic and only two pre-Platonic. Six are found in Plato's contemporary Xenophon. The remaining twenty-eight instances occur in Plato—nineteen in the six-and-a-half Stephanus pages that constitute the *Hipparchus*, nine in four pages of book 9 of the *Republic* (eight in a single two-page argument), and one in the first book of the *Laws*.[3] In general, Plato, and in particular the *Hipparchus*, may, therefore, be said to be the classical source for our understanding of love of gain.

In *Republic*, book 9, Socrates provides three arguments to prove that the life of the tyrant is the worst of lives. In the second of these, he argues that life constituted by the love of wisdom—philosophy—is highest because, unlike the two other contenders for the title of best of lives (the love of gain

[3]See Theocritus, *Idylls* Id. Poem 16, line 60; Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*, 2.201; Epictetus, Fragments: Appian *Mithridatic Wars*, 8.51; Pindar, *Isthmian* 2, line 6; Aristophanes, *Ploutos* line 590; Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.9.16, *Kunegetikos* 13.12, *Kuropaideia* 1.6.32, *Oikonomikos* 12.16, 14.7.14.10; Plato, *Hipparchus* 225a1, 225a2, 225a7, 225b2, 225b4, 225b8, 225c2, 226d2, 226d6, 226d8, 226e2, 226e10, 227b1, 227b3, 227c7, 227c8, 227d1, 232c5, 232c7, *Republic* 581a7, 581c4, 582a9, 582b3, 582b7, 582d8, 582e1, 583a10, 586d5, *Laws* 649d5.

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and the love of honor), philosophy alone involves experience of the other two. In this argument (not particularly persuasive by the way), love of gain seems to mean thoughtlessly wanting to fulfill whatever desires arise in us. The *Hipparchus* presents a similar picture but with somewhat different emphasis. In the view of Socrates' anonymous interlocutor, love of gain is contemptible—low class (of course, it characterizes the lowest class in Socrates' city in speech in the *Republic*). Assuming that this non-Socratic understanding of love of gain is the ordinary view from which Plato wishes to begin, Allan Bloom translates *philokerdês* as "profiteer."[4] This seems to accord with the view of Xenophon, who in four different books repeatedly links *philokerdeia* to deception and injustice.[5] We may, therefore, reasonably call the *philokerdês* a cheat. Thus, if every Platonic dialogue is ultimately about philosophy, we are naturally moved to wonder why Plato would write a dialogue in which he invites us to consider philosophy the highest kind of cheating.

The problem is still more complicated. *Philokerdeia* is a compound of the verb *philein* (to love or feel affection toward) and the noun *kerdos* (gain or profit). In the *Hipparchus*, Socrates gets his interlocutor—a young Athenian man—to admit two things. If the *philokerdeis* are those who wittingly think that they will gain from something worthless, then no one is a lover of gain, for to think that something is of no worth is precisely not to expect any benefit from it. We identify gain with benefit and so with the good, and we are all lovers of the good. On the other hand, if in loving gain, the *philokerdeis* love what is good, then, as all men must perforce love what is good for them, all men are *philokerdeis*. There are either no lovers of gain, or all are lovers of gain, the principle of both arguments being the same—that all men love the good. Perhaps, then, the *Hipparchus* does not single out petty cheating as its theme, but rather, it displays the universal attribute of all human beings—love of the good. This would presumably link it to the *Republic*.

Is the *Hipparchus* about cheating, or is the *Hipparchus* about the good itself? Perhaps it is about both. The lover of gain is in his pettiness comic and in his grandness tragic. But how are we to think these two together? It may be worth mentioning another pair of claims here. On the one hand, philosophy is the highest and paradigmatic human activity; on the other hand, philosophy is ridiculous. Owing to his preoccupation with the heavens, Thales falls into a well, much to the amusement of the slave girl who is watching. The togetherness of this pair—the high and the ridiculous—is, I think, the underlying subject matter of Plato's *Hipparchus*.

The *Hipparchus* divides roughly into five sections. Its first attempt to answer the question of who the lovers of gain are leads to the conclusion that no one is

[4]See Bloom, Allan, "On the *Hipparchus*," in *The Roots of Political Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Pangle (Ithaca: Cornell, 1987), 35.

[5]See *Oikonomikos* 12.16, 14.7, and 14.10; *Anabasis* 1.9.16; *Kurou Paideia* 1.6.32; *Kunêgetikos* 13.12.

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a lover of gain (225a–226d); this is the section to which I will pay special attention. Its second section leads to the conclusion that, since everyone loves the good, everyone is a lover of gain (226d–228a). In response to the *aporia* constituted by pairing these two sections, Socrates playfully accuses his interlocutor of deception—of cheating, and, in frustration, his interlocutor, somewhat more seriously, returns the accusation. To this charge, Socrates responds with the third section, the long digression about Hipparchus from which the dialogue gets its title (228b–229d). Hipparchus was a former ruler of Athens, who although generally thought to be a tyrant, was really, as Socrates assures his interlocutor, a good and wise man whose wisdom consisted, in part, in saying things like "Do not deceive a friend." This seemingly thin device is used to connect the Hipparchus section (a quarter of the whole) to the rest of the dialogue. The digression is, of course, revisionist history, since the common view, as we know from Thucydides' own revision of it, was that Hipparchus was a tyrant whose assassination by Harmodius and Aristigeiton was a source of great civic pride in democratic Athens.[6] Following the pep talk of the Hipparchus section, Socrates pushes to continue the argument by offering to let his companion take back any of several premises that led to *aporia*. The comrade chooses to retract his claim that the gainful is always good, a claim that he had, in fact, attempted to retract earlier and that Socrates proceeds to prove anew in the next section (229d–232a). In the remainder (232a–c), Socrates recapitulates the previous arguments and draws the conclusion that since all are lovers of gain, the very man who contemptuously reproaches lovers of gain—this anonymous young Athenian, for example—is necessarily himself a lover of gain. We note that, if love of gain is the same as love of the good, presumably this very attempt to condemn love of gain is a manifestation of the comrade's love of gain.

II

The *Hipparchus* begins with Socrates asking three questions:

> For what [is] the gain-loving? What ever is it, and who [are] the gain-loving ones? (225a1–2)[7]

We are plunged into the middle of a conversation about which we know neither the time, the place, nor the occasion. We know neither why Socrates raises these three questions nor why he thinks asking will be important to his young companion, although he does once remark that the companion seems to lash out randomly as though he has been recently cheated

[6]See Thucydides, *Historiae* (Oxford: Oxford Classical Texts, 1988), 1.20 and 6.54–59.

[7]All citations from the *Hipparchus* are from *Platonis Opera*, vol. 2, ed. Burnet (Oxford: Oxford Classical Texts, 1988). Translations are my own.

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(225b10). At the beginning of a dialogue strikingly silent as to place and time, of the three questions Socrates asks, the first two go unanswered (one makes only the noun explicit—it is a nominal sentence—the other, only the verb). The question to which the companion replies—which determines the subsequent course of the argument—restores the explicit subject, this time not in the abstract form of the gain-loving but rather by asking who are those who love gain; once more, the verb is suppressed. The first formulation is the most abstract; the second places the question in time, for it contains what is literally a temporal indicator: "What *ever* (or at any *time*) is it?" This, in turn, gives way to the least abstract form of the question: not what "gain-loving" or even "the gain-lover" is but who the gain-lovers are. Is this the only form in which the question can really be addressed? Allan Bloom suggests that the unasked question of the dialogue—and the one requiring an answer for any adequate account of gain-loving—is "What is gain?"[8] I am not so sure. Is gain ever intelligible apart from the one who gains? Suppose that the only way to understand gain is through the love of gain, and the only way to understand the love of gain is through the lover of gain. Suppose, in other words, that the good and gain are one—that, in Seth Benardete's words, "the good in the first place is the measure of other things in regard to their usefulness for someone or something."[9] Furthermore, if every thing for which something is useful is always in the end useful for some one, then all gain will ultimately be measured in terms of the one for whom it is a gain—a lover of gain.

That something like this is what Plato means us to see becomes clear from the comrade's reply—his first attempt at defining the lover of gain. The term crucial to his definition is "worth."[10]

> They [the *philokerdeis*] seem to me to be those who deem it worth it [or worthy] to gain from things worth [or worthy of] nothing. (225a3–4)

Worth might be said to be the companion's understanding of what it is one gains when one gains. For the comrade, because the lover of gain thinks it worth gaining from what is really of no worth, the lover of gain is a cheater. He succeeds in milking some good for himself out of something that is really no good. And if what he is dealing with is really no good, then the good he derives from it must necessarily have its source elsewhere. Gaining this good for himself would involve cheating, however, only were it to entail another's loss, and, of course, this is the case only if the good—as always

[8]Bloom, 35–36.

[9]See Seth Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 155.

[10]This is the first appearance in the dialogue of the verb *axioô* and its cognate adjective *axios*. In the first two pages of this seven-and-a-half-page dialogue, they occur twenty-one times. Then they disappear for five pages and reappear six times on the final page.

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someone's good, when not for you—is for someone else. Without realizing, the companion has pointed to the problem around which the *Hipparchus* is organized. *Axioun* means to deem or think worthy, but this is a bit deceptive in its suggestion that the world contains objects that may be said to be of worth independent of their relation to anything else. While *axioun* ordinarily means to deem worthy of reward, it may also mean to deem worthy of punishment. One might fill out its meaning as follows: *Axioun* means to deem something or someone worthy of, or fit for, something; it measures one thing against another. Its meaning quickly (perhaps even immediately) falls into a sort of shorthand in which this doubleness is suppressed and, according to which, because X is worthy of Y, X is worth something, and so, therefore, is of worth. But this slide obscures the fact that worth is always a relative term; "to be worthy" always means "to be worthy of." Furthermore, the first definition of the lover of gain suggests that "being worthy of" is a function of "being deemed of worth." There can be no gain without one to whom the gain will accrue. The word *psuche*, soul, does not occur in the *Hipparchus*.[11] This is perhaps the cause of the difficulty Socrates and his companion have in defining love of gain, for good is unintelligible apart from soul.[12]

Socrates' response to the first definition should, therefore, come as no surprise. If the good is always the good-for, and if good-for must ultimately mean good for someone, for a soul, then the question is whether the soul for which something is good must be aware of this goodness. Socrates asks if the lovers of gain knowingly deem worthy what is really of no worth or if they do it in ignorance, whether they are simply fools—thoughtless ones (*anoêtoi*). But this is really to ask for the connection between the good and awareness of the good. For the companion to preserve his moral indignation at cheating, he must claim that lovers of gain know what they are doing. And, if there is anything to distinguish lovers of gain from the rest of mankind, we must agree. Lovers of gain are, thus, not fools but *panourgoi*—men so shameless as to dare to do absolutely anything for gain. So presumably lovers of gain first see that something is really worthless (and, therefore, one would think, rather easy to acquire) and then cleverly devise a way to profit from it nevertheless. They are like alchemists or magicians. Or, like Rumpelstiltskin, they spin gold from straw. And yet, if the good is always the good-for, such a miraculous transformation would be possible only if what is ordinarily worth nothing suddenly—owing to the cleverness of a

[11]There are four Platonic dialogues of which this is true; the others are *Theages*, *Euthyphro*, and *Crito*.

[12]That the good is always the good-for means that nothing would be good were there no souls in the world. A soul (and this does not mean only human souls), as that for which things are, is the ground of all worth (consider, for example, the first sentence the first section of Kant's *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*). Without souls such terms as "satisfaction," "sufficiency," and "perfection" would have no meaning. This is not to say that any soul can by itself determine precisely its own good.

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certain soul—comes to be a treasure trove. In assuming this god-like function, in making something from nothing by acknowledging no limits, the lover of gain reveals himself as the source of the worth of what was previously worthless. Love of gain understood in this way masks hyperbolic self-celebration. Yet, in its perversity, this way does reveal the truth about the soul as the origin of all worth.

To bring this point home Socrates, as is his wont, introduces a homely example.

> Do you then say the lover of gain to be this sort—such as if a farming man (*geôrgos anêr*) should plant knowing that the plant is worth nothing, he would deem it worthy to gain from this rearing? (225b4–6)

Socrates' use of the phrase *geôrgos anêr* is the first of a series of instances in which he introduces something unexpected into the conversation—a gratuitous detail. The language is too elevated. Are farmers *andres*—he-men? Thucydides does have Pericles use the phrase when asking the Athenians whether they really think it will be so easy for the Spartans, who are *geôrgoi andres*, to learn the art of seamanship (1.142.7), but in a somewhat more appropriate way. Pericles is speaking of Spartans and in the context of their preparedness for war. Socrates' example is complicated. At first, it seems to mean that some farmers might knowingly plant worthless plants with the expectation of later passing them off as worth something. On second thought, we see that, whether he means the comrade to see it or not, what Socrates says is really true of all plants. At sowing time, a plant is only a seed—chicken feed. So in a way, all farmers are cheats—seeking to profit from what is originally worth almost nothing. And if what is true of farming is true of all the arts, then, in working material into a new form for the sake of some use or advantage, all art would be a form of cheating. Now Socrates, in his own way, is doing something similar. He makes an example of a class of men ordinarily taken quite for granted. These men of little worth are transformed, for the moment, and deemed worthy of all our attention. Is this why they are *geôrgoi andres*? Is to exemplify to make exemplary?

Socrates may make a big deal of the farmers, but his companion breezes right past them—replying curtly that the gain-lover "thinks he must profit from everything" (225b9–10). We notice in passing that he has substituted the phrase *oietai dein*—"he thinks he must"—for the verb *axioun*, thus, tacitly claiming that to deem something worthy of doing is to think that one ought to do it. Socrates' response is unexpectedly harsh.

> Do not answer randomly [without plan or purpose—from *a/hekôn*, not willfully] in this way, as if having been done some injustice by someone, but, paying attention to me, answer just as though I were asking again from the beginning. (225b10–c2)

Having barely digested the oxymoronic he-men farmers, we are now puzzled by another curiously gratuitous detail—Socrates' abrupt claim that the

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comrade is speaking at random when his reply seems fairly reasonable and in the spirit of a *ti esti* question. And what can Socrates mean by scolding him for harboring a grudge? How does he know this? To feel cheated, one must presume some knowledge of the world's moral landscape. Socrates seems somehow to discern that moralism is the cause of his companion's inability to apply his mind. Isn't it strange, though, that this is likened to answering at random or without purpose? One would think moralism would rather involve the sort of tunnel vision that occurs when one looks at the world not randomly but with a predetermined goal or end in mind. Still, if we approach the world with excessive moralism—with a grudge—we don't open our minds to it. To open one's mind means to take seriously that which is, to attend to it in all of its detail. To be interested in something is to take an interest in it, to elevate its worth relative to the rest of the world, which then appropriately recedes into the background. Socrates' young comrade levels the worth of everything by ignoring what is to be learned by attending to details. Because he is so confident, he too easily looks past the specifics of Socrates' example of the *geôrgos anêr*. The comrade dismisses farmers, whose worth Socrates' exemplification has inflated, in his rush to get on to bigger, more important, things. At the same time, Socrates suggests that in acting in this intellectually random fashion the young man has not paid sufficient attention not only to his example but also to Socrates himself.

And so Socrates must remind him of the details of farming. He does so in a strikingly peculiar way. This is the third gratuitous detail. The farmer, Socrates says, would know about the worth of plants—for example, at what season/hour/time (*hôra*) and in what place (*khôra*) they are to be planted in a way that is worthy. Details of time and place (we recall that they are obtrusively absent in the setting of this dialogue) are perhaps the conditions for specificity. They are what the expert in the worth of anything would have to know. Rules are easily learned; their effective application to specific situations is another matter. Yet Socrates announces the general necessity to attend to place and time in a pun—*hôra*/*khôra*—that would collapse the difference between them and then likens his pun to the practice of the wise who are very adept at beautifying their speeches in the law courts. The worth or good of something depends on the details of particular circumstances. Farmers must know when and where to plant. But to announce that this is the case is only to generalize in a beautiful way; it is certainly not to reproduce the real knowledge of the farmer. It invokes particulars as the particular. Yet, as Nietzsche remarks somewhere, "the individual is the last and greatest abstraction." The poetry of the wise is, thus, the illusory rendering of the particularity of the particular. It wants to disclose what is, but it is a deception—a cheat—that emerges out of the necessity to deal with the particular in a general way.[13] It is particularly at home in the law courts.

[13]Compare *Minos* 315a7–8.

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This general account of particularity leads to a serious error. Noticing the comrade's earlier conflation of the two, Socrates asks him whether to think it worthy (*axioun*) to gain is the same as to believe that one must (*oiesthai dein*) gain. The comrade agrees too readily. The subject of the infinitive *dein* here is the same as the subject of *oiesthai*. Whoever is doing the believing thinks that he is the one who must gain. *Axioun* doesn't work this way. I may deem a book worth writing without feeling a necessity to write it. Every artisan knows that he will lose from the use of shoddy materials, that his final product will be worse than a product made from good materials. He may, however, deem it worth using shoddy materials, at less cost and so at a gain to himself, if the loss is borne by someone else. By accepting the equation of *oiesthai dein* and *axioun*, Socrates treats my gain and one's gain as though they mean the same thing—as though I in particular and the particular in general were the same. He overlooks the difference between subjects—grammatical and otherwise.

This oversight allows Socrates to accuse the now befuddled comrade of trying to cheat him by deceptively claiming what he does not even himself believe—that is, that a man with the art of farming (*geôrgikos anêr*) would knowingly try to gain from a bad plant. Here Socrates adds (we are at first unsure why) that the comrade, being young, should not try to deceive a man who is old. This is the fourth gratuitous detail in the first argument. What does Socrates' age have to do with the alleged deception? Socrates literally scolds the comrade for not turning his mind to him. Socrates' good is idiosyncratic; it is, for example, relative to his age. This difference in goods accounts for the possibility of deception, and so of cheating. The comrade in his enthusiasm takes the independence of the good from soul for granted. We will see that precisely because he is such a Platonist Socrates can cheat him.

Let us look at the way Socrates formulates this accusation.

> Do not attempt to deceive me, one already an older man, you being so young, by answering just now what you yourself do not even think, but say truly, do you think any man (*andra*) becoming someone who has the art of farming (*geôrgikon*) and recognizing that he plants a plant worth nothing thinks to gain from this? (225d5–226a4)

Socrates first seems to accuse the young man, more mentally agile than he himself, of taking advantage of the older man's failing powers. Yet this is obviously deeply ironic, for precisely at this point in the dialogue Socrates most takes advantage of the youthful enthusiasm of the comrade by encouraging him to equate deeming it worth gaining from something useless with thinking one will gain from it for oneself. This emerges especially clearly from the double use of the verb *oiesthai*, "to think." By having Socrates ask whether the comrade thinks that the farmer thinks he will gain from something worthless while knowing it to be worthless, Plato indicates to us that there is thinking going on both within the example and in the reception

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of the example. Accordingly, the awareness that one is cheating—the possibility of which Socrates denies in the content of his question—manifests itself on the level of his act of questioning at the very moment of that question. Socrates accuses the comrade of cheating in an argument in which he is supposed to be denying the possibility of cheating because it is not possible to think that one can gain from something of no worth. In fact, the argument itself is not worth much. The comrade does not know what he is doing, and so is not really cheating. As Socrates knows this, he himself is cheating the comrade into thinking the argument is adequate, but, since its conclusion will serve to call into question the comrade's moral smugness and intellectual inattentiveness, he is doing it for the young man's own good.

The list of examples that follows confirms this difficulty. An expert in horses might not expect his horse to thrive on meal that is worth nothing, and so, being aware that his horse will be corrupted, he will not expect to gain from worthless meal—unless, of course, he wants to use worthless meal to feed a horse, who will in turn be worthless, but which our expert will knowingly sell to someone else at a profit inflated by the fact that he has not had to spend very much on food. So he won't gain a healthy horse, but he will gain money that he could, should he wish, spend on purchasing other healthy horses. To be of worth is to be worth something, and this something is variable. A pilot may gain when his ship goes down if, for example, he wishes to collect the insurance or if he has a mortal enemy among the crew and wishes him dead. Gain and loss are not as obviously fixed as the comrade seems to think and as Socrates makes them seem, for they are always relative to a soul, and the intention of a particular soul—the good it aims at—is neither simply transparent nor constant. A sergeant who provides his troops with faulty equipment does something shockingly immoral, but if he does so in boot camp to force them to learn to adapt to circumstances, his goal is their education.[14] While it may well be the case that we never expect to gain from what is utterly worthless, we may very well expect to gain from appearances—either what appears worthless and is not or what appears to be of worth and is not. Love of gain, understood as cheating, depends on these discrepancies in how things appear to us. And such discrepancies are the necessary consequence of the existence of different souls. When Socrates, therefore, finally asks whether any of the craftsmen or any of the rest of those men who are intelligent thinks he will gain from instruments or from equipment that are worth nothing, the comrade responds by saying "It appears not" (226d1). This is the first of his answers to express anything less than complete certainty. The comrade really means, "It appears not to you, Socrates, and I must agree because I can't see any way around it, but it doesn't really appear so to me." In defeating the comrade with bad

[14]Compare *Republic* 467c–e.

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arguments, Socrates, thus, has introduced him to the nature of gain as dependent upon soul. His second definition, accordingly, has a different tone.

> But Socrates I wish to say the gain-lovers to be those who at all times out of insatiability long beyond what is natural both for things quite small and for things worth little or nothing, and they love gain. (226d7–e2)

This is the beginning of the second argument, and we will not pursue it here. Socrates will drive his companion to the conclusion that, since these men cannot knowingly love what is worth nothing and so must think what they love to be worth something, in fact, they are no different from the rest of men since all love what they think to be good. It is worth noting, however, that in this second definition, the companion emphasizes not so much the state of the object loved by the lover of gain but the state of his soul—a state at all times filled with insatiable longing beyond what is natural. The love of gain, present in us all, contains the seed of tyranny.

At the end of the second argument, Socrates renews his charge that the comrade is acting deceitfully, "purposely saying things opposite to those we just now agreed on" (228a6–7). They have just shown that whatever men do, they do for the good; this holds as well for thinking. To think is to think purposely–for the good. To answer at random is not to think well. To raise a question is to be interested in a piece of the world, to have an interest in it but not yet to understand what it is good for, what worth it has. To seek to answer this question is to attempt to transform something hitherto not worth very much into something of worth. If there are no limits on our questions—that is, if we long to understand everything and thereby philosophize—then we seek to see the good in everything. Naturally, to those not interested in the world in this way, philosophy will appear to be cheating—sophistry. Since the good must always be understood as the good-for, the attempt to understand everything as good points in two directions. I may either seek to change myself so that I become a soul for whom everything is in some way good—to become someone who is interested in everything; or I may seek to change the world so that everything in it is in some way good for my soul—to be someone who is interested solely in himself. The first alternative is philosophy and the second is tyranny. The long digression on Hipparchus, for which this dialogue is named, is, thus, not as gratuitous as it at first seems, for in it Socrates engages in a bit of sophistry that would transform a tyrant into a philosopher.

III

Immediately after he forces the comrade to conclude that everybody loves gain, Socrates accuses him of deception, of "intentionally saying things contrary to what [they] just agreed" (228a6–7). He implies that the comrade is concealing the truth for a hidden advantage or gain. So Socrates accuses him of cheating, and yet it seems quite obvious that the comrade has been

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unwillingly brought into *aporia*. When he responds by protesting that it is Socrates who deceives by somehow turning things upside down in speeches, Socrates hushes him with language that suggests he has uttered sacrilege. The sacrilege is supposed to consist in not obeying or being persuaded by a good and wise man, who turns out to be Hipparchus. By introducing Hipparchus as though he were a god, Socrates embarks on an unexpected rehabilitation of an Athenian villain. Having just demonstrated that everyone loves the good, and having just accused the comrade of harboring a hidden intent of which he is not even aware, Socrates proceeds to tell a story that seeks to understand the tyrant Hipparchus as one who sought the good. On the surface, this story will deny that Hipparchus was, in fact, a tyrant and liken his rule to that of Kronos (whose reputation was, of course, itself not entirely untarnished). Perhaps, then, Socrates means to follow his argument that all men love the good by examining the most difficult case—the good loved by the tyrant. To make Hipparchus a good guy is necessary, therefore, not so much to show that he was not a tyrant as simply to understand tyranny. We are confronted first with a surface phenomenon. Convention will have set its worth, but as soon as the phenomenon becomes a puzzle for us, this worth is called into question. In trying to make sense of it, we are forced to get beneath the conventional surface—to mine for its true significance. This mining for truth is experienced as a movement from the less to the more valuable. Now the comrade thinks of no worth those who think it worth profiting from things of no worth. He holds cheaters in contempt. First, Socrates means to show him that to understand what makes cheaters tick, one must understand them in light of the good at which, perhaps without even realizing it, their activity aims. To bring his point home Socrates, before our very eyes, transforms an infamous Athenian tyrant into a "good and wise man" (228b2), "the eldest and wisest of the sons of Peisistratus" (228b5–6). Moreover, the good at which the tyrant aims is especially revealing, for to love everything is to reveal that everything is in principle lovable. We experience the true good in mining for the hidden good understood to be present even in what at first seems worthless.

Socrates' purified version of Hipparchus first shows the "beautiful deeds of wisdom" (228b6–7) by bringing the poems of Homer to Athens and compelling the rhapsodes to perform the various parts in sequence—thereby assuring Homer's original intent. Then he patronizes living poets, bringing Anacreon and Simonides to Athens, presumably so that they might make poems. Their poems deal with particulars but make them grander than they seem in ordinary life. One cannot be certain of Hipparchus's intent, but it seems plausible that he wished to beautify his world in the manner of those adepts whose wise sayings make things beautiful in the law courts. Apparently, however, this does not suffice, for Hipparchus proceeds to try to educate the citizens of Athens, not so much for their sakes but so that he might rule the best of men, i.e., to make himself more splendid. Hipparchus does not begrudge these men his wisdom, for he is himself

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kalos te k'agathos, beautiful and good. After the townsmen come to wonder at this wisdom, Hipparchus extends his generosity and spreads his seed to the countryside, giving of himself by setting up statues of the god Hermes throughout the town and the country, statues inscribed with Hipparchus's own wise sayings set to meter. These are meant to overshadow the traditional wise sayings inscribed at Delphi: "Know thyself" and "Nothing in excess." We will return in a moment to these statues. For now, it is important to see that everything Hipparchus does in Athens may be understood to have as its purpose the reforming of his world so as to make it altogether good. But Hipparchus does not proceed by teasing out the goodness latent in things otherwise worth little or nothing. He knows that the good is the good-for, but he understands himself to be the him for whom it is good. Hipparchus grasps, in his way, the dependence of the good on the soul but understands this to mean that his soul is the fixed measure of all goodness. The Athenians are called "his citizens" (228e2), and the wisdom to be memorialized is regularly "his wisdom" (228d3–4, 228e6), as though wisdom were an object to be possessed and placed on a statue. For Hipparchus, Hipparchus is the good, and he knows just who this Hipparchus is. The disagreement of subsequent generations over the true identity of Hipparchus is surely a sign of how badly he fared in his attempt to pass this knowledge along. Socrates may rehabilitate Hipparchus in this dialogue, discovering the worth in one worth little or nothing—Hipparchus does display with a certain purity the fundamental feature of the human soul—but even this rehabilitated Hipparchus is a tyrant.

The goodness of the tyrant is that he understands better than most the dependence of the good on the soul. For him, the question "What is love of gain?" would lead not to the question "What is gain?" but to the question "Who is the lover?" And yet, the tyrant is finally a fool, *anoêtos*, because of the way he understands himself. This problem is revealed in Socrates' account of the Hermae erected by Hipparchus as monuments. Hipparchus wants to be like Homer, admired for his wisdom. At the same time, he is aware that poems once cut loose from the poet are objects that may be appropriated by others for their own purposes. Rhapsodes need not sing the whole of Homer's *Iliad*; nor need they sing the poem in the manner in which it was meant to be heard. A poem may present wisdom but with the consequence that what is most important, the wise man, vanishes. Hipparchus began by buying poems but then moved on to buying poets.

In his own case, Hipparchus seeks to overcome the dilemma of the separation of the poet from his poem by finding a way to make himself present alongside his wisdom, even when he is absent. He understands that the good as the good-for is always dependent upon some soul or self, but, by thinking the soul can be directly represented, he misunderstands its being. In making of himself what the good is for—an object to be placed alongside other objects—Hipparchus unwittingly reverts to the view that the good exists in the manner of other beings. He poeticizes the good. Socrates describes his plan:

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> But, when those citizens around the town had been educated by him, and wondered at him for his wisdom, planning in turn to educate those in the country, he stood up Hermae for them along the roads in middle of the town and of each of the demes. And then, he selected from his own wisdom, which he both learned and which he himself discovered, those things he considered to be wisest, and having stretched these poems of his and examples of his wisdom into elegiac meter, he inscribed them on Hermae in order that, first, his citizens would not wonder at those wise writings at Delphi—both the "Know thyself" and the "Nothing in excess" and the rest of this sort—but rather that they would consider the utterances of Hipparchus wise, so that while going here and there, and reading, and getting a taste of his wisdom, they might continue going back and forth from the country and also be educated in the rest. And the inscriptions are two-fold. On the one hand, on the places on the left of each Hermes it has been inscribed, saying that the Hermes stands in the middle of the town and of the deme. On the other hand, on the places on the right it [or he] says, "This is a memorial of Hipparchus; walk thinking just things." And there are many other beautiful poems inscribed on other Hermae. But indeed this one is on the Steiria Road, on which it [he] says, "This is a memorial of Hipparchus; deceive not a friend." I, then, would not, I suppose, dare to deceive you who are a friend to me nor distrust him being such as he is. (228d3–229b3)

There is a good deal to be investigated here. Socrates goes on to provide an alternate version of the story of the killing of Hipparchus by Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Apparently Hipparchus was not very successful in immortalizing himself; he was the Ozymandias of his day. It also is probably no accident that just after Thucydides' own revision of this story in the context of the erotic longing that overtakes the city of Athens in the Sicilian Expedition, the moving force of that expedition, Alcibiades, is brought down, having been accused of the mutilation of the Hermae. But let's restrict ourselves to the passage I have cited.

Hipparchus wishes to set up monuments that will stand not only for his wisdom but more importantly for himself.[15] What exactly is an Athenian wandering the roads meant to experience when coming upon one of these statues? Not simply the wisdom of the sayings. For this, neither statue nor proprietary claim would be necessary. Through these surrogates, Hipparchus wishes to reproduce the awe in which the Athenians hold his person. Accordingly, he attempts to find a way to reproduce in the Athenians the experience of being in the presence of someone uttering a

[15]According to Thucydides (6.27), the Hermae were block-like statues commonly set up at the entrances to private homes and temples. The description here is not very elaborate, but in general one may say that each Hermes is a figure accompanied by a pair of inscriptions—one on the right and one on the left—although it is not altogether clear what this means. Perhaps the two are visible at the same time, perhaps not.

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uniquely wise saying. Now, the inscription on the left is given to us in indirect discourse, and so we do not know exactly what form it takes. We are told that it locates the Hermae by town and deme, but we do not know whether we alone are being told that it is a Hermes or whether this is part of the inscription. It could be in the first person or in the third: "I am a Hermes and stand here in Colonus," or "I stand in Colonus," or "This Hermes stands in Colonus," or "This stands in Colonus." And is the god speaking or the statue? In any case, on the left either the god or the statue announces its location; this presumably distinguishes it from all the other statues. We are given examples of two of the right-side inscriptions. They are directly quoted, but they are introduced in such a way that, once again, we do not know who or what is meant to be speaking, since *phêsin* may be translated either "he said" or "it said." On the left side of the left-side both say "This [right here] is a memorial [or memory] of Hipparchus." If it is the god who says that this is a memorial of Hipparchus, what follows immediately to the right will be a quotation; the god will cite a wise saying of Hipparchus, but by lending its authority to the saying, it will diminish the authority of Hipparchus. *Phêsin*, of course, could simply mean "it says," in which case, perhaps Hipparchus is meant to be the speaker of the whole line. Or the statue could identify itself as a memorial, and Hipparchus would be left as the speaker of the wise saying to the right. Or is the saying, and not the statue, meant to be the memorial? Hipparchus attempts to make himself permanent in his wisdom, but his intention is repeatedly thwarted by the difficulty of locating the soul from which the logos issues. First, we do not understand what the relation is between the statue and what is written on the statue. If the writing on the left has the form "I stand in Colonus," then the speaker is either the statue, which is quite impossible since stone does not speak, or it is the god, in which case the saying is not really true, for the god only symbolically stands in Colonus. Nor do we understand how the writing on the left is to be combined with the writing on the right, where an undetermined speaker tells us that this is either a memory of or a memorial to Hipparchus. And this same sentence introduces to its immediate right the quite different Hipparchan bons mots inscribed on each statue, each meant to remind us of one man—Hipparchus. What is clear is that Hipparchus has not found a way to celebrate himself for his wisdom by placing himself alongside his wisdom.

Hipparchus's true motive is revealed in the conclusion of the digression, the revisionist story of his death. In the standard version, Hipparchus was a tyrant who snubbed the sister of Harmodius by refusing to allow her to participate in a religious festival. Harmodious and his lover, Aristogeiton, then killed Hipparchus in a celebrated act of tyrannicide. Thucydides revises this account first by citing evidence (inscriptions written on an altar and a pillar) to show that Hippias and not Hipparchus was a tyrant and by providing an additional motive for the insult of Harmodius's sister: Harmodius had twice rebuffed Hipparchus's

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sexual advances.[16] In Thucydides, this account is surrounded by a larger story of a time in Athens in which "*erôs* fell upon all alike to sail away" to conquer Sicily, clearly suggesting a connection between erotic and political rivalry.[17] Here, in his own revision, Socrates changes the character of the erotic rivalry. Hipparchus steals one of the students of Harmodius and Aristogeiton (Socrates knew but no longer remembers his name). This youth, who was beautiful and well born, wondered at their wisdom, but after being with Hipparchus (a sexual double entendre), he came to despise them. Thus dishonored, Harmodius and Aristogeiton kill Hipparchus. It is neither the slight to Harmodius's sister, nor the love of Aristogeiton for Harmodius, nor their love for the beautiful youth that motivates the tyrannicide; it is jealously over a reputation for wisdom. But how much has Socrates really changed? The eros of Harmodius and Aristogeiton is politicized. In seeking to make themselves objects of admiration, of wonder, they mirror Hipparchus's tyrannical desire to be the beloved of all mankind—to be the good.

In Socrates' famous account of logographic necessity in the *Phaedrus*, he tells Phaedrus that a perfect speech, like an animal, must be an organic whole, with each part in its proper place. Yet a corpse, too, has this organic structure. An animal must move; it must be animated. Only eleven lines after he has addressed Phaedrus as "dear head" (264a8), Socrates says that a logos, like an animal, must have a head (264c2–5). Logos requires an addressee if it is to be animated. In the immediate sequel, Socrates contrasts the perfect speech with what is written on the tomb of Midas. The tomb has two parts: a statue of a girl in bronze and the inscribed logos. We take the speech to come from the girl, but this is an illusion, for they are really quite separate. The evidence that the two are not together is that the inscription is artfully designed so as to let the reader begin anywhere; the four lines can be read in any order. The following is Seth Benardete's commentary on this passage.

> A nonliving being speaks, shaped in the likeness of a living being; it utters a speech about a nonliving being as if he were not nonliving. The speech itself is without any temporal order; any line can be put before or after any other. Its indifference to temporal order seems to be at one with its speaking of eternity. . . . The speech of the girl is random; the image of the girl is lifeless. The juxtaposition of the two points to the difficulty of putting them together. No tinkering with the syntax, though it may impose a necessity on the sequence, would make the utterance whole. It cannot be a whole unless it can be the utterance of the girl, and it cannot be her utterance unless she is alive.[18]

What is missing from Midas's tomb is soul.

[16]For this account, see Thucydides, 1.20 and 6.54–.59.

[17]Thucydides, 6.24.3.

[18]Seth Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 177.

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Plato writes a dialogue in which Socrates defends cheating by understanding it as love of the good. In its most memorable passage, Socrates defends a tyrant by calling him good and wise. The wisdom of Hipparchus consists of his awareness that he is in some sense the good. His foolishness consists in taking this too seriously, in so treasuring himself as good that he cannot let go of himself. In misunderstanding himself—his soul—as something that can be made a permanent object of adoration, Hipparchus turns himself to gold and, therewith, becomes something of little or no worth. This reversal is rather funny. The *Hipparchus* is generally thought to be a trifle—if genuine, something Plato perhaps invented in his idle hours. Nevertheless, it proves to raise the highest of questions—the nature of philosophy in its relation to the good. Accordingly, the *Hipparchus* may be said to imitate what it is about, and so to demonstrate the manner in which philosophy, in finding the good everywhere, makes something from what seems at first nothing. In this it is not tyrannical. It is true that the soul is inseparable from the good. But the soul can only celebrate itself unqualifiedly as the good if it knows what it is celebrating—if it has self-knowledge. Failing this, it must give itself up to that activity in which it most experiences itself as good. In taking up the least of things, in understanding their true significance and elevating their worth, it makes them good and thereby indirectly experiences itself in its goodness. This serious playfulness, the signature feature of philosophy, accounts for why Plato can be at once so serious about what is ordinarily taken to be superficial while at the same time being so deeply funny.

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