

SOCRATES THE COSMOPOLITAN

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I. A CITIZEN OF THE WORLD

“When Socrates was asked to which [country] he belonged, he would say, ‘To the world,’ for he thought that he was an inhabitant and citizen of the whole world.”¹ So we are told by those philosophers in later antiquity who liked to see themselves as the heirs of Socrates and as cosmopolitans.² The story is probably not the literal truth. It looks rather like a simple projection onto Socrates of what was said about the man Plato allegedly called “Socrates gone mad.”³ But like any good myth, this story has some truth in it.⁴ I argue that the cosmopolitanism that was developing in fifth century B.C.E. Greek thought and that later flourished among the Cynics and especially the Stoics, influences Socratic ethics as it is presented by Plato’s early dialogues.⁵ Plato’s Socrates is consistently a citizen of the world who renders his special service to Athenians without acknowledging any special obligations to do so.⁶

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¹ 5 MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, *TUSCULAN DISPUTATIONS* 108 (John Edward King trans., 1989). Cf. MUSONIUS RUFUS, *That Exile is no Evil*, in MUSONIUS RUFUS Fragment 9, at 42.1-2; EPICLETUS, *DISCOURSES* in EPICLETUS I 9.1 (W.A. Oldfather trans., 1925); and PLUTARCH, *DE EXILIO* in *L’ESILIO* 600f–01a (Raul Caballero & Giovanni Viansino trans., 1995).

² That is, by the Stoics. Musonius and Epictetus are Stoics, and *Tusculan Disputations* and *De Exilio* are steeped in Stoic tradition.

³ See 4 DIOGENES LAERTIUS, *DIOGENES THE CYNIC* 54, 63. The same conclusion is reached by J.L. Moles, *The Cynics and Politics*, in *JUSTICE AND GENEROSITY: STUDIES IN HELLENISTIC SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY* 129, 132 (André Laks & Malcolm Schofield eds., 1995); and J.L. Moles, *Cynic Cosmopolitanism*, in *THE CYNICS: THE CYNIC MOVEMENT IN ANTIQUITY AND ITS LEGACY* 105, 106 (R. Bracht Branham & Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé eds., 1996).

⁴ Cf. PLATO, *REPUBLIC* in *PLATONIS OPERA*, *infra* note 5, at 377a5–a6 [hereinafter *REPUBLIC*].

⁵ The general growth of cosmopolitanism in Greek thought is still best chronicled by H.C. BALDRY, *THE UNITY OF MANKIND IN GREEK THOUGHT* (Cambridge University Press, 1965). For the Cynics, compare the traditional and widely held view of DONALD R. DUDLEY, *A HISTORY OF CYNICISM* 34–35 (1937), with the revisionist attempts of J.L. Moles, *Cynic Cosmopolitanism*, *supra* note 3, and J.L. Moles, *The Cynics and Politics*, *supra* note 3. For the Stoics, see ERIC BROWN, *STOIC COSMOPOLITANISM* (forthcoming). I restrict myself to those of Plato’s dialogues which are considered early or Socratic by *THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO PLATO* (Richard Kraut ed., 1992), and I provide my own translations of the text in *JOHN BURNET, PLATONIS OPERA* (5 vols., Clarendon, 1900–07). I make no claims about the historical Socrates, even though I believe that a clear view of Socrates-in-Plato is our best first step toward the historical Socrates and even though I suspect that the cosmopolitanism of Socrates-in-Plato is true of the historical Socrates. Those interested in the “Socrates Problem” should consult the essays in, *1 SOCRATES: CRITICAL ASSESSMENTS* 17–223 (William J. Prior ed., 1998), and anyone considering the plausibility of

My case develops in three parts. In Part II, I discuss the broad features of Socratic ethics that suggest the picture of Socrates as a citizen of the world. In Part III, I show that Socrates recognizes only limited obligations to Athens and the Athenians. Finally, in Part IV, I argue that Socrates's habitual refusal to leave Athens is best understood on cosmopolitan grounds.

The evidence for Socrates's philosophy, even when limited to Plato's dialogues, is mixed. I cannot establish beyond a shadow of a doubt that Socrates is a *strict* cosmopolitan who recognizes obligations to human beings as such without acknowledging any obligations to benefit fellow citizens *qua* fellow citizens. It is possible to argue that Socrates is a moderate cosmopolitan who recognizes obligations to all human beings alongside special or stronger obligations to serve fellow citizens.⁷ Even this weaker thesis reveals some truth to the ancient story about Socrates as a citizen of the world; even this picture of Socrates as a *moderate* cosmopolitan changes the way we view the Socratic perspective on citizenship and politics.⁸

II. COSMOPOLITAN ETHICS

The most important indication of Socrates's cosmopolitanism is his rejection of ordinary politics in favor of an extraordinary kind. I start with this trade of ordinary for extraordinary politics, proceed to link this exchange with a commitment to cosmopolitanism, and then justify the link by considering other manifestations of Socrates's cosmopolitan commitments.

Socrates did not entirely reject ordinary politics. He was in fact willing to offer Athens conventional political service on each of the three or four occasions when it called upon him: he

cosmopolitanism in the historical Socrates would do well to consider the cosmopolitanism in his milieu, as suggested by, among other things, Hippias' words to Plato in the *Protagoras*. See PLATO, PROTAGORAS 337c7–d3, in PLATONIS OPERA, *supra* note 5 [hereinafter PROTAGORAS]; EURIPIDES, TGF Fragment 1047, in SELECTED FRAGMENTARY PLAYS (Christopher Collard et al. trans., 1995); Democritus, DK Fragment 247, in THE ATOMISTS, LEUCIPPUS AND DEMOCRITUS: FRAGMENTS (Christopher Charles Whiston trans., 1999). ANTIPHON, DK Fragment 44b, in ANTIPHON & ANDOCIDES (Michael Gagarin & Douglas M. MacDowell trans., 1998); *but see* 1 F. DECLEVA CAZZI, CORPUS DEI PAPIRI FILOSOFICI GRECI E LATINI, 184–85 (Leo S. Olschki ed., 1989).

⁶ Here and throughout I use the word 'obligation' (and, *mutatis mutandis*, 'duty') broadly, such that person A has an obligation to do x with respect to person B, if doing x with respect to B is generally required for A to live a good human life. I am arguing that Socrates does not think that giving extra or special service to his fellow citizens is required for him to live a good human life.

⁷ See *infra* notes 42 and 53 and accompanying text (offering support and resources for this argument). But throughout the rest of my essay, when I use "cosmopolitan," I mean *strict* cosmopolitan, and I aim to make the best case for the stronger thesis.

⁸ Much of the literature on the Socratic perspective on citizenship and politics has focused on the discussions of legal obligation in the *Apology* and *Crito*. See PLATO, APOLOGY, in PLATONIS OPERA, *supra* note 5 [hereinafter APOLOGY]; PLATO, CRITO, in PLATONIS OPERA *supra* note 5 [hereinafter CRITO]; see also *infra* Part III. Other literature focuses on Socrates's views of democracy and oligarchy. See RICHARD KRAUT, SOCRATES AND THE STATE (1984) [hereinafter SOCRATES AND THE STATE] (providing an overview of the scholarly debate); Gregory Vlastos, *The Historical Socrates and the Athenian Democracy*, in SOCRATIC STUDIES 87 (M.F. Burnyeat ed., 1994); PLATO, GORGIAS, in PLATONIS OPERA, *supra* note 5, at 461e1–e3 [hereinafter GORGIAS]; THOMAS C. BRICKHOUSE & NICHOLAS D. SMITH, PLATO'S SOCRATES, 164–66 (1994) [hereinafter PLATO'S SOCRATES]. Even the more general discussions with which I am familiar have neglected the suggestions of Socrates's cosmopolitanism. See, e.g., J.R. Wallach, *Socratic Citizenship*, in 2 SOCRATES: CRITICAL ASSESSMENTS, 69–91 (William J. Prior ed., 1996).

fought in battles at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium;⁹ at least once he served as a member of the Council of Five Hundred;¹⁰ and when the Thirty summoned Socrates to carry out an order, he answered the call, though he refused to carry out the order.¹¹ But as long as Athens did not specifically ask for his service, Socrates avoided politics.¹² He explains why in the *Apology*:

It might perhaps seem strange that I go around giving advice and minding others' business privately but do not dare to go into your assembly and advise the city publicly. [(1)] But the reason for this is one you have heard me mention many times and in many places, namely, that there comes to me a sign from a divinity or god, which Meletus ridiculed even in his indictment. I have had this ever since childhood, this voice which comes to me, and whenever it comes to me, it always turns me away from what I am about to do, and it never turns me toward something. This is what opposes my engagement in political affairs, and [(2)] I think it entirely right to do so. For know well, men of Athens, that if I had long ago tried to engage in political affairs, I would have long ago perished and would have benefited neither you nor myself. Do not be angry with me when I speak the truth, for no one at all will survive if he genuinely opposes either you or any other assembly [p| yow] and prevents many injustices and illegalities from occurring in the city. Rather, anyone who really fights on behalf of the just, if he is going to survive for even a short time, must live privately, and not publicly.¹³

Socrates gives two reasons for avoiding politics. The first, his divine sign, is remarkable, but the second, which is adduced to support the divine sign's opposition to his engagement in political affairs, is more informative for our purposes.¹⁴

This second reason can be misread in two ways. First, it can be interpreted not as a rejection of ordinary politics but as a condemnation of democracy. Socrates does say that no one can safely challenge a popular assembly on a question of justice; this statement is somewhat

⁹ See APOLOGY, *supra* note 8, at 28de; cf. PLATO, LACHES, in PLATONIS OPERA, *supra* note 5, at 181b [hereinafter LACHES].

¹⁰ See APOLOGY, *supra* note 8, at 32b1. In his commentary on the *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Euthyphro*, Burnet notes *ad loc.* that the use of the aorist does not imply that Socrates was a member of the Council only once, but he also notes that according to Aristotle's *Constitution of Athens*, Athenians were limited to two turns on the Council. See John Burnet, *Commentary* to PLATONIS OPERA, (John Burnet trans., 1924); ARISTOTLE, THE CONSTITUTION OF ATHENS 62.3 (Kurt von Fritz & Ernst Kapp trans., 1974) [hereinafter ATHENIAN CONSTITUTION].

¹¹ See APOLOGY, *supra* note 8, at 32c4–d7.

¹² See *id.* at 23b7–c1, 36b5–b9.

¹³ *Id.* at 31c4–32a3.

¹⁴ The tangential questions about the relationship the divine sign and Socrates's reasons for action are the subject of an interesting recent dispute between Brickhouse and Smith on the one hand, and Gregory Vlastos on the other. See THOMAS C. BRICKHOUSE AND NICHOLAS D. SMITH, SOCRATES ON TRIAL ch.5 (1989) [hereinafter SOCRATES ON TRIAL]; PLATO'S SOCRATES, *supra* note 8, at ch.6; Gregory Vlastos, *Brickhouse and Smith's Socrates on Trial*, in 2 STUDIES IN GREEK PHILOSOPHY, 25–29 (Daniel Graham ed., 1995); GREGORY VLASTOS, SOCRATES, IRONIST AND MORAL PHILOSOPHER ch.6 (1991).

hostile to democracy.¹⁵ But it is not clear that this entails a total rejection of democracy. Does Socrates rule out engaging with any *possible* assembly or just any *extant* assembly?¹⁶ Furthermore, it is not clear that he is rejecting *only* democratic assemblies. The problem with assemblies is their opposition to genuine virtue. Does Socrates think that oligarchs are much better on this score? It is quite possible that Socrates is not rejecting democracy *per se*, but instead politics-as-usual.

The second possible interpretive mistake would be to misconstrue Socrates's recommendation to live "privately." We must not be too quick to decide that 'private' means "apolitical" and that 'public' means "political." Regardless of how Socrates's audience understood this distinction, Socrates himself need not think that the business of politics is necessarily *public* business. He might have believed that a person should engage in politics privately by doing the proper business of politics outside the fully public realm of political office and assembly.¹⁷ On this view, Socrates is not contrasting an apolitical life with a political one but an extraordinary political life with an ordinary one.

This broader understanding of the *Apology* passage—both of what it rejects and of what it permits—is supported by the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*. There Socrates scorns the kind of political engagement taught by the Sophists and describes himself as the only genuine politician. In the *Protagoras*, Protagoras' promise to teach Hippocrates virtue and to "make him better and better, every day"¹⁸ is also a pledge to make him successful in ordinary politics: "My teaching is good counsel both concerning household affairs, how one might best arrange one's household, and concerning the affairs of the city, how one might be very successful [dunat tatow] with regard to the affairs of the city, both in acting and in speaking."¹⁹ Protagoras walks a fine line, endorsing his Athenian audience's rejection of the view that there are experts in virtue²⁰ and yet

¹⁵ The connection between a popular assembly and democracy is explicit in Plato's *Statesman*, but the link depends on no particular theorizing. See PLATO, STATESMAN in PLATONIS OPERA *supra* note 5 at 291d6–d7 (or see <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0172&query=head%3D%234>> (visited May 22, 2000) for a version of this text).

¹⁶ Even restricted to Plato's dialogues, the questions about Socrates's attitude toward democracy are vexed. Socrates is quick to condemn the Athenian democracy, and yet, according to the *Crito*, is also especially satisfied with Athens and her laws. See Gregory Vlastos, *The Historical Socrates and the Athenian Democracy*, in SOCRATIC STUDIES 82, 87 (M.F. Burnyeat ed., 1994) (providing an all-out defense of the view that Socrates is a democrat, leaning heavily on Socrates's preference for Athens' laws). Socrates's preference might not be for democracy but instead for freedom of speech. See PLATO, GORGIAS, *supra* note 8, at 461e1–e3; SOCRATES AND THE STATE, *supra* note 8. Socrates is neither a partisan democrat nor a partisan oligarch, though I do not attribute to Socrates a preference for a state without political leaders, as would Brickhouse and Smith. See PLATO'S SOCRATES, *supra* note 8, at 164–66 (1989).

¹⁷ See C.D.C. REEVE, SOCRATES IN THE APOLOGY: AN ESSAY ON PLATO'S APOLOGY OF SOCRATES 155–60 (1989).

¹⁸ PROTGORAS, *supra* note 5, at 318a9.

¹⁹ PROTGORAS, *supra* note 5, at 318e5–319a2. See also Arthur W.H. Adkins, *éretÆ, t°xnh, Democracy and Sophists: PROTGORAS 316b–328d*, 93 J. OF HELLENIC STUD. 3–12 (1973) (exploring the view that Protagoras is attempting to have it both ways in promising to make his pupils both cooperatively virtuous and competitively successful); see generally Arthur W.H. Adkins, *Plato, in ETHICS IN THE HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY* 1, 1–31 (Robert J. Cavalier et al. eds., 1989) (usefully summarizing ARTHUR W. H. ADKINS, MERIT AND RESPONSIBILITY (1960) with respect to Plato).

²⁰ See PROTGORAS, *supra* note 5, at 319b–319d.

promising to teach the special skills that lead to preeminent economic and political power. Throughout the rest of the dialogue, Socrates argues for a quite different picture of virtue. Socratic virtue is the sort of expertise which the Athenian assembly rejects; it requires knowledge of what is good and bad (especially for the soul), not the skills that bring conventional power. This subtle rejection of ordinary politics in the *Protagoras* appears more bluntly in the *Gorgias*, where Socrates associates the ordinary political life with rhetoric. In this dialogue, real virtue and valuable politics—the real expertises²¹—are entirely opposed to the rhetoric and sophistry taught by Sophists, which are mere knacks and part of flattery.²² The rhetoricians merely serve to gratify the citizens; they do not do what politicians should: namely, make people as good as possible.²³

Socrates thus urges his interlocutors in the *Gorgias* to postpone engagement in ordinary politics until they have undergone further training in pursuit of virtue.²⁴ But he is not encouraging the teachers of rhetoric to abandon politics altogether. Rather, he calls for an exchange of ordinary politics for a more extraordinary kind. Socrates believes that his dialectical examinations in pursuit of wisdom and virtue are aimed at making people better and count as attempts at the true political expertise: “I think that I am among the few Athenians—not to say the only one—to undertake the true political expertise and to engage in political matters, and I am alone among Athenians today.”²⁵ Socrates claims that his *elenctic* mission is genuinely political, whereas ordinary public life in Athens falls short.

When Socrates rejects ordinary politics and takes up extraordinary politics, he is trading in local commitments for cosmopolitan ones. This point is not mysterious: ordinary politics is tied to the reach of the *polis*, whereas extraordinary politics is not. Socrates himself recognizes the cosmopolitan nature of his extraordinary politics; he characterizes his mission of examining others in cosmopolitan terms: “Thus, even now I still go around seeking these things, and in accordance with the god I search after *anyone*, whether fellow citizen or foreigner, whom I think is wise.”²⁶ It is natural to read this claim as an expression of Socrates’s unquenchable thirst for wisdom, but this does not exhaust his meaning. For Socrates believes that his search for wisdom also provides the greatest service to those he examines.²⁷ After all, this is why he considers his work genuinely political and why he calls himself the god’s greatest gift to Athens.²⁸ So his

²¹ The real expertises (*ἑξειπαι*) are concerned with the soul, enumerated as justice and legislation, and collectively called the “political expertise.”

²² See *GORGIAS*, *supra* note 16, at 462b.

²³ See *id.* at 502e2–e5; *cf. id.* at 515c4–16d5.

²⁴ See *id.* at 527d2–e7; see also Eric Robertson Dodds, *Introduction and Commentary*, in *PLATO, GORGIAS* (Eric Robertson Dodds trans., 1959) (suggesting that Socrates’s advice does not apply to Socrates himself). For rebuttal, see *SOCRATES AND THE STATE*, *supra* note 8, at 287, n.64.

²⁵ See *GORGIAS*, *supra* note 16, at 521d6–d8. Socrates cites Aristeides the Just as another example of a true practitioner of politics. *Id.* at 526b1–b3.

²⁶ This translates *καὶ τὰν ἐστὲν καὶ ἰὸν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ σοφῶν ἐμῶναι*. See *APOLOGY*, *supra* note 8, at 23b4–b6.

²⁷ See *id.* at 36c3–c5.

²⁸ See *APOLOGY*, *supra* note 8, at 30a5–a7, 30e3.

refusal to limit his *elenctic* mission to Athenians is also a commitment to benefit foreigners alongside fellow citizens—this is the cosmopolitanism of Socrates’s extraordinary politics.

Perhaps this explicit commitment to cosmopolitanism has been passed over in so much scholarly silence because it has been thought to be an isolated remark. But this is a mistake: Socrates’s refusal to limit his extraordinary political activity to conventional political boundaries is not an accidental or passing feature of his ethics. Central to Socrates’s inquiries is his insistence that conventional distinctions among human beings—men and women, old and young, free and slave, citizen and foreigner—are (at least in some important respects) irrelevant. This is especially clear in his conversation with Meno.²⁹ When Meno conventionally defines virtue in separate terms as the virtue of a man, the virtue of a woman, the virtue of a child, etc.,³⁰ Socrates chides him,³¹ and leads him toward the conclusion that “all human beings [pāntew ênyrvpoi] are good in the same way, for by achieving the same goals they become good.”³² And Meno’s very next definition of virtue runs into a similar problem: virtue cannot be “the ability to rule over human beings”³³ if the same account of virtue is supposed to apply to a child or a slave.³⁴ Elsewhere, too, Socrates insists that conventional distinctions hold no water (or at least no wine) when he says that men and women have the same happiness³⁵ and that virtue can be recognized in both Athenians and foreigners and in both free persons and slaves.³⁶

This evidence might be thought to come up short of underwriting a perfectly cosmopolitan scope for Socrates’s extraordinary political mission. First, none of these passages explicitly extends Socrates’s universalism about virtue to non-Greeks, as opposed to Greek foreigners. It might then be thought that there are limits to Socratic cosmopolitanism. But this seems to me to be excessively uncharitable. The objection *assumes* that Socrates would disallow the full extension of the capacity for virtue even though his reasoning with Meno clearly supports the full extension. We do better by taking Socrates at his word when he says that “all human beings [pāntew ênyrvpoi] are good in the same way.”³⁷

²⁹ The same orthodoxy which counts Plato’s early dialogues as our best source for the historical Socrates generally regards the *Meno* as a “transitional” dialogue, partly reflecting the philosophy of Socrates and partly reflecting the philosophy of Plato as it would be developed in the middle-period dialogues. See *supra* note 5 and accompanying text. I take it that the passages I point to from the *Meno* are genuinely Socratic.

³⁰ PLATO, *MENO*, in *PLATONIS OPERA*, *supra* note 5, at 71e1–72a5 (or see <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0178&query=head%3D%234>> (visited May 21, 2000) for a version of this text) [hereinafter *MENO*].

³¹ See *id.* at 72a6–a8.

³² *Id.* at 73c1–c3 (trans. by author).

³³ See *id.* at 73c9–c10 (trans. by author).

³⁴ See *id.* at 73d2–d4.

³⁵ See *GORGIAS*, *supra* note 16, at 470c9–11.

³⁶ See *LACHES*, *supra* note 9, at 186b3–5; *GORGIAS*, *supra* note 16, at 515a5–a7.

³⁷ See *MENO*, *supra* note 30, at 73c1–c3 (trans. by author).

It must also be conceded that these passages do not show that Socrates found conventional distinctions *entirely* irrelevant. When Socrates offers to Meno the analogy that men and women have the same height, he is not suggesting that a tall man is just as tall as a tall woman. Rather, he is saying that the same sort of thing (height) makes both men and women tall. Similarly, then, Socrates's claim that men and women (and the rest) have the same virtue does not entail that a virtuous man and a virtuous woman appropriately do the same things to the same degree; rather, the same sort of thing (the condition of the soul) makes them both virtuous.³⁸ But the very fact that the same condition of the soul can be found in anyone, irrespective of traditional categories, explains why Socrates would be motivated to expand his extraordinary political mission.

Finally, there is a significant difference between saying that every virtuous human being has the same virtue and saying that every human being has the same obligations to every other human being. Just because foreigners have the same potential for virtue that fellow citizens have does not mean that Socrates must owe the same extraordinary political service to both groups. But there is evidence that Socrates is interested in all human beings, not just as *subjects* of moral concern but also as *objects* of moral concern. Consider the frequent Socratic injunction against harming another human being. Socrates and Crito agree that one ought never commit an injustice (édikeîn) or do a wrong (kakourgeîn) even if one has been done an injustice or been wronged.³⁹ Socrates argues against Polemarchus that “it is the function not of the just person to harm [bláptein] either a friend or anyone else, but of his opposite, the unjust person.”⁴⁰ And Socrates relies on similar claims in his attempt to prove to Polus that it is better to suffer injustice than to commit it.⁴¹ In all of these texts, Socrates seems committed to the claim that a person ought not harm another human being, regardless of whether the other is male or female, free or slave, Greek or non-Greek, etc. There is no whisper of a carve-out allowing the just to harm some subset of human beings. So we can conclude that Socrates is committed to at least the following minimal claim of moral cosmopolitanism: human beings have some obligations toward every other human being.

Having gone this far, I believe that we can take seriously Socrates's own cosmopolitan characterization of his extraordinary political mission. Just as he disregards conventional distinctions among human beings when insisting that harming others is wrong, so does Socrates disregard conventional distinctions when he considers whom he should benefit with his extraordinary politics. And although by itself the universalism pervading Socrates's discussions of virtue does not establish cosmopolitan conclusions, it is easy to see how Socrates could turn to this universalism in order to support his cosmopolitan injunction against harm and his cosmopolitan commitment to extraordinary politics. In this way, we can see Socrates as a citizen

³⁸ See *MENO*, *supra* note 28, at 72c6–d1, 73b3–b5.

³⁹ See *CRITO*, *supra* note 8, at 49b8–c9.

⁴⁰ See *REPUBLIC*, *supra* note 4, at 335d11–12. Whether or not Book One of the *Republic* was originally written apart from the rest of the *Republic* as an early dialogue, I think it clearly represents the same Socrates as the early dialogues. (Later books of the *Republic* do not represent this Socrates and are thus irrelevant for our purposes here, but it does not follow from this that the commitments of Socrates in Book One are discarded by the Socrates of the later books.) See *supra* note 5 and accompanying text.

⁴¹ See *GORGIAS*, *supra* note 16, at 474c.

of the world, rejecting the ordinary political service of his native *polis* for the extraordinary political service of the *cosmopolis*.

III. OBLIGATIONS TO ATHENS

We have more work to do to confirm this picture, however. Recall that Socrates does not *entirely* reject ordinary politics, for he answers Athens' call three or four times. And the *Crito's* Laws remind us that Socrates's career in extraordinary politics is spent entirely in Athens. These facts might suggest that Socrates's citizenship in the world is firmly balanced by his Athenian citizenship, and that his obligations to render extraordinary service to human beings are at least conditioned by his obligations to serve his fellow citizens. However, I argue otherwise in this Part and Part IV. In this Part, I argue that the passages in which Socrates seems to accept the existence of local political obligations are carefully restricted and do not commit him to any obligations to benefit Athenians. In Part IV, I offer a cosmopolitan explanation of why Socrates decided to practice extraordinary politics in Athens instead of roaming throughout the Greek world as the Sophists did.

To my knowledge, Socrates does not claim that we have special obligations to our fellow citizens.⁴² But there are three passages in which Socrates seems to recognize special obligations to Athens, and these passages might presuppose or entail special obligations to his fellow Athenians. We need to examine these passages with two sorts of questions in mind. First, what is the nature of the obligations to Athens? (Do they explain his willingness to serve Athens when called? Do they explain the limitation of his mission to Athens?) And second, what is the nature of the arguments for these obligations? (Do the arguments suggest or entail obligations to fellow citizens?)

The first passage that might seem to bind Socrates to Athens is presented as something Socrates *knows*: "I do know [οἶδα] that to do injustice and to disobey a superior [βέλτιον], whether god or human, is evil and shameful."⁴³ This emphatic claim, though unsupported and

⁴² There are two potential exceptions that I would like to note. First, Rachel Barney has reminded me of a rhetorically complicated passage in the *Apology*. Here Socrates is emphasizing to the jurors that they cannot acquit him on the condition that he stop philosophically examining them, and he slyly appeals to Athens' greatness and fame "for wisdom and power" in order to suggest that they should be more willing to pursue wisdom. See APOLOGY, *supra* note 8, at 29d7–d8. In this context, when he repeats his avowal to fulfill his divine mission "with anyone I meet, whether young or old, whether foreigner or citizen," he adds, "but more with citizens, insofar as you are nearer to me in kin [γένει]." *Id.* at 30a3–a5. Because Socrates is clearly using heightened rhetoric designed to persuade the Athenians to respond well to him, it is difficult to put much weight on this addendum for interpreting Socrates's philosophical commitments. Note that by Socrates's lights it should make absolutely no difference to an Athenian considering whether to pursue wisdom that Athens is especially well-regarded for wisdom: pursuing wisdom is simply the greatest good for any human being. See *id.* at 38a1–a7.

Second, Socrates's remarks that he has tried to persuade people not to care for the city's possessions before the city itself is even less clearly exceptional, because it does not commit to requirements for caring for the city itself (or indeed, about whether to care for the city). See *id.* at 36c8.

⁴³ See APOLOGY, *supra* note 8, at 29b6–b7; *Cf. id.* at 28d6–d10. For examples of Socrates's usual practice of disavowing knowledge, see generally *id.* at 20c, 21b, 21d, 23b; PLATO, CHARMEDES in PLATONIS OPERA *supra* note 5, at 165bc, 166cd (or see <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0176&query=head%3D%236>> (visited May 20, 2000) for a version of this text); GORGIAS, *supra* note 16, at 506a, 509a; PLATO, HIPPIAS MAJOR, in PLATONIS OPERA, *supra* note 5, at 286c–86e, 304de (or see <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0180>> (visited May 20, 2000) for

undeveloped, could be interpreted to commit Socrates to the doctrine that one must always obey the commands of one's *polis*.⁴⁴ But there are good reasons to resist this authoritarian understanding of Socrates's claim. First, if we are to interpret charitably, we should be hesitant to hold Socrates to the view that each citizen is obligated to obey every command given by his political superiors. Second, the authoritarian interpretation seems to conflict with Socrates's testimony that he disobeyed a command from the Thirty.⁴⁵ We certainly *can* resist the authoritarian reading, for our interpretation of Socrates's claim turns on what he means by the word 'superior.'⁴⁶ We might suppose that 'superior' means "moral superior" and refers, in Socrates's case, only to a god.⁴⁷ This interpretation has come under fire for being insensitive to the context.⁴⁸ I am not certain that this criticism gets the context right,⁴⁹ but even if it does, we have another non-authoritarian way of understanding the obedience claim. We might take 'superior' to mean "better (more able, more knowledgeable) in the relevant context" so that it could apply to military commanders in battle but to few political leaders.⁵⁰ (A superior political leader, after all, would have to be better at leading people to virtue, and Socrates does not think that any Athenian is better than him at this.)

this text); ARISTOTLE, EUDEMIAN ETHICS 5a–5c, 15c, 15e–16a (<<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0050>> (visited May 20, 2000)); LACHES, *supra* note 9, at 186bc, 186de, 200e; PLATO, LYSIS in PLATONIS OPERA *supra* note 5, at 212a, 223b (or see <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0176&query=head%3D%238>> (visited May 20, 2000) for this text); MENO, *supra* note 28, at 71a, 80d; REPUBLIC, *supra* note 4, at 337e. *See generally* 1 SOCRATES: CRITICAL ASSESSMENTS, *supra* note 8, at 227–99 (taking up the apparent conflict).

⁴⁴ *See generally* SOCRATES ON TRIAL, *supra* note 14, and PLATO'S SOCRATES, *supra* note 8 (defending the authoritarian reading of this passage and of those in the *Crito*).

⁴⁵ The weight of the first objection depends upon our understanding of the passages in the *Crito*. *See* PLATO'S SOCRATES, *supra* note 8, at 150, and SOCRATES ON TRIAL, *supra* note 14, at 185. These texts answer the second objection by supposing that Socrates viewed the Thirty's command as illegal. But it does not follow from this supposition that Socrates found the Thirty to be an illegitimate political regime, since legitimate rulers sometimes issue illegal commands, and the authoritarian doctrine would seem to commit Socrates to obeying illegal commands issued by legitimate rulers.

⁴⁶ "Superior" translates *better*, or "one who is better."

⁴⁷ *See* SOCRATES AND THE STATE, *supra* note 8, at 23, n.38.

⁴⁸ The supposed context is Socrates using this claim to explain why he obeyed his military commanders and served valiantly at Potidaea, Amphipolis, and Delium. *See* SOCRATES ON TRIAL, *supra* note 14, at 141–42; REEVE, *supra* note 17, at 111.

⁴⁹ It seems to me that the entire paragraph about obedience in the *Apology* is composed of two very different halves. *See* APOLOGY, *supra* note 8, at 23d6–30c1. The first half starts with the statement of a limited obedience principle (28d6–d10), and it proceeds to discuss the battles (mentioned at 28e2–e3). This part of the discussion is dominated by the fear of death, which Socrates considers irrational because death is an unknown. Then (at 29b6–7) there is a marked transition from what Socrates does not know (i.e., death) to what he does know (i.e., our broad obedience principle). For the rest of the paragraph, the fear of death plays a smaller role, and Socrates's obedience to the god and unswerving commitment to his divine mission become central. When the whole paragraph is read this way, the broad obedience principle is not supposed to apply to the military service at all; it looks forward, not back.

⁵⁰ *See* REEVE, *supra* note 17, at 112.

These non-authoritarian readings starkly limit the obedience claim. Even on the authoritarian interpretation, Socrates's claim would explain his commitment to answer Athens' call but would not explain his refusal to leave Athens, since he is not ordered by any superior to limit his mission to Athens. On the non-authoritarian readings, Socrates's claim does not even entail his commitment to obey Athens' commands.⁵¹ We can still use the claim to explain Socrates's unswerving commitment to his extraordinary political service, which is commanded by Apollo's oracle. But again, we have no explanation of why that service is limited to Athens.⁵² Moreover—to turn to our second question about the passage—because the *Apology*'s obedience claim comes without justification, we cannot find it presupposing or entailing a principled commitment to Socrates's fellow-citizens.

The second and third passages in which Socrates seems to recognize obligations to Athens appear in the *Crito*, where Socrates has the Laws explain to Crito why Socrates is not justified to escape from jail.⁵³ These passages offer arguments (which I shall call the “parent-city argument” and the “agreement argument”) leading to the conclusion that Socrates ought to “persuade or obey” the city: “You must do what your city and fatherland [πατρίω] command, or you must persuade it as to the nature of justice.”⁵⁴ The meaning of this conclusion has been disputed. We might understand the Laws to be saying that Socrates must persuade the city that its demands are unjust, or (failing that) obey the demands: obedience is required unless one can actually persuade the city. On the other hand, we might understand the Laws to be establishing the condition of justifiable disobedience: obedience is required only if one does not seek to persuade the city that it is unjust.⁵⁵

For our immediate purposes, though, the conclusion of the two *Crito* arguments can remain unsettled. On either interpretation, they have the same restricted force that the obedience claim in the *Apology* has. At most, the Laws are saying that Socrates must obey all of their commands. This would explain why Socrates obeys his city's order to serve militarily and accepts his city's selection of him as a member of the Council of Five Hundred. But it does not explain why Socrates limits his extraordinary service to Athens. It could only do that if the Laws

⁵¹ It does entail his obedience to military commanders, though, on the understanding of ‘superior’ as “more knowledgeable in the context.” See APOLOGY, *supra* note 8, at 23d6–30c1. The other non-authoritarian reading of 29b6–b7 will have to appeal to 28d6–d10 for the details of Socrates's military service.

⁵² Unless, that is, we take literally and very seriously Socrates's suggestion that he has been stationed in Athens by the god. See APOLOGY, *supra* note 8, at 30e3.

⁵³ It has been suggested that the Laws do not speak for Socrates, and if this is right, then these passages present no obstacle whatsoever to recognizing Socratic cosmopolitanism. For a recent, full development of the suggestion, see ROSLYN WEISS, *SOCRATES DISSATISFIED: AN ANALYSIS OF PLATO'S CRITO* (1998). I proceed, for the sake of argument, on the assumption that this suggestion is false.

⁵⁴ See CRITO, *supra* note 8, at 51b10–c1; *cf. id.* at 51e4–52a3.

⁵⁵ See generally PLATO'S SOCRATES, *supra* note 8, and SOCRATES ON TRIAL, *supra* note 14 (defending the former interpretation); SOCRATES AND THE STATE, *supra* note 8 (defending the latter). The dispute turns not just on the wordings of the conclusion, but on the arguments themselves and on the relation between the “persuade or obey” conclusion and external evidence, including Socrates's claim that one should never commit an injustice (see CRITO, *supra* note 8, at 49bc) and his apparent endorsements of disobedience in the *Apology*, where he recounts having disobeyed the Thirty's command and where he vows that he would disobey any restriction to his divine mission.

forbade Socrates from leaving Athens, and they cannot do this without undermining their own arguments for obedience.⁵⁶

The dispute over the “persuade or obey” conclusion does not matter much to a further, speculative question: What would have happened had the Laws commanded Socrates to engage fully in politics, with devoted attention to the Athenian Assembly? According to his remarks in the *Apology*, Socrates would then have had to face a choice among definite death, disobedience to the city, or disobedience to the god (by forsaking what he thinks justice demands). On the authoritarian interpretation of the *Crito*, Socrates would certainly find death preferable to either sort of disobedience. On the more generous reading, Socrates would seem to be justified in disobeying the city—though not the god, because of the implications of the *Apology*’s obedience claim—just so long as he tried to persuade the city of its injustice. But of course, if we take the *Apology*’s warning seriously, Socrates could not even try to persuade the city of its injustice without risking death! So on either interpretation, any obligation to render special benefits to his fellow citizens through legally required ordinary political service threatens to be self-defeating.⁵⁷

Perhaps, however, the two arguments in the *Crito* that lead to the “persuade or obey” doctrine will give us reason to suppose that Socrates recognizes special obligations to benefit his fellow-citizens. In the first argument, the Laws elaborate the claim that Socrates’s escape from jail would constitute an attempt to destroy them.⁵⁸ Because they allowed Socrates’s father to marry his mother and to bring him into the world, the Laws have given birth to Socrates. Then they required Socrates’s father to have him educated in music and gymnastics, so they deserve credit for nourishing and educating Socrates. Since they have given Socrates the great benefits of birth and education, the Laws conclude that he and they are not on equal footing: Socrates is subordinate to the Laws as a child is to his parents or a slave to his master. Hence, the Laws conclude:

You must persuade your fatherland [πατρίω] or do what it commands, and endure in silence if it orders you to endure, whether you are beaten or bound, whether you are led into war to be wounded or killed. You must do these things; justice holds in this way. And you must not yield or run away or leave your post; rather, in war, the law-court, or wherever, you must do what your city and fatherland command, or you must persuade it as to the nature of justice.⁵⁹

The Laws say that a citizen ought to obey as children and slaves ought to obey, but the argument justifies the consideration of citizens as children and slaves by appealing to the benefits they have received. The argument presupposes that the justice of reciprocity imposes certain debts of gratitude on a citizen and that these debts of gratitude entail a commitment to “persuade or obey.”

⁵⁶ See *infra* notes 60–64 and accompanying text.

⁵⁷ Things would be otherwise, of course, if the Athenian Assembly were not opposed to genuine virtue and the laws required Socrates to engage fully in the Assembly. Things would, in fact, be more like they are for those trained to be philosophers in Plato’s ideal city of the *Republic*, who must obey the law that requires them to rule. See Eric Brown, *Justice and Compulsion for Plato’s Philosopher-Rulers*, 20 *ANCIENT PHIL.* 1, 1–17 (2000).

⁵⁸ In the following I summarize the elaboration of the *Crito* in passages 50d1–51b2.

⁵⁹ See *CRITO*, *supra* note 8, at 51b3–c1.

Does the justice of reciprocity as it is employed in the Laws' argument suggest an obligation to serve fellow citizens? If fellow citizens are credited for the benefits that the city bestows, then they would also seem to be owed something. We might well think that fellow citizens should get credited, at least in a democracy where the line between the city and the citizens is thin. But the Laws do not say or even suggest that the justice of reciprocity requires one to provide *service*. Rather it seems that one's obligations to one's fellow citizens are discharged simply by *obeying* the citizens' laws.

Of course, it is *possible* to imagine a stronger appeal to the justice of reciprocity, entailing obligations to serve one's fellow citizens in return for the benefits the city bestows. Interpreted this way, we significantly qualify Socrates's cosmopolitan commitments, since on this reading, Socrates recognizes obligations to give more service to fellow citizens than to foreigners. But even if we follow this interpretation, we cannot attribute to Socrates a general restriction on the appropriate scope of his beneficence. The beefed-up appeal to the justice of reciprocity can only require the sort of service that produces public goods, that repays the whole citizen body for the benefits bestowed by the whole citizen body. It would be odd to discharge this obligation of gratitude, owed to the citizens collectively, by serving the citizens severally. Perhaps Socrates could justify this odd sort of discharge by arguing that in his circumstance he cannot benefit the whole citizen body *except* by benefiting individual citizens one at a time. But he could make this argument only insofar as the benefit he bestows on individuals is a recognizable public benefit. For example, Socrates could not infer from the beefed-up appeal to the justice of reciprocity that he has greater reason to give gifts of wine to fellow citizens than to foreigners.

The Laws' second argument for their "persuade or obey" doctrine imposes another constraint on our understanding of the parent-city argument. On the heels of their first argument, the Laws reason that by becoming a citizen, reflecting on the laws, and expressing satisfaction with the laws, Socrates has already entered into an agreement to "persuade or obey" the city. To establish the fact of agreement, the Laws stress that anyone who is not satisfied with the laws of Athens may leave:

For we—who have given birth to you, raised you, educated you, and given you and all the other citizens all the fine things that we could—still give the opportunity [to leave] and thereby proclaim to any Athenian who wishes that after he has become a citizen and has observed matters in the city and us the laws, he can take his things and go wherever he wishes if he is not satisfied with us. And not one of us laws is an obstacle or forbids any of you from going where you like and keeping your things if you should wish to go to a colony because we and the city do not please you, or if you should wish to reside in some other place.⁶⁰

This escape clause is noticeably missing from the parent-city argument. One might have thought that we have obligations to parents that persist even if we are dissatisfied with our parents.⁶¹ But if the Laws are being consistent, then they are telling us not to construe their parent-city

⁶⁰ See CRITO, *supra* note 8, at 51c8–e1.

⁶¹ This thought need not take the extreme form that obligations to parents persist *come what may*. There is a difference between conditions that cause dissatisfaction and conditions that undoubtedly silence any claims of obligations.

argument in this way.⁶² So even if we strengthen the appeal to reciprocity in the parent-city argument and infer that a citizen has obligations to serve his fellow-citizens, the Laws tell us that one can walk away from these obligations. Any requirement to give special service to *these* citizens rather than *those* people is conditioned by the requirement that *these* citizens have established a satisfactory body politic.⁶³

In addition to constraining our inflation of the parent-city argument, the agreement argument could also provide reasons for recognizing obligations to serve fellow citizens. The agreement argument does not explicitly say that a satisfied citizen has obligations to serve his fellow citizens, but we might think that if agreement entails an obligation to “persuade or obey,” it also entails an obligation to contribute. We might think that agreement obliges citizens to perform all the requirements of citizenship, and that citizenship requires service. Such reasoning goes even further from the text than the potential extension of the parent-city argument, but again, it is possible.⁶⁴

However, there is a good reason for refusing to inflate the parent-city argument and the agreement argument. Namely, we can hold to the cosmopolitan point of Socrates’s profession to “search after *anyone*, whether fellow citizen or foreigner, whom I think is wise.”⁶⁵ On the cosmopolitan interpretation, Socrates recognizes the obligation to obey his city and the god, but neither obligation explains his geographical limitation to Athens. While the Laws use arguments to justify the obligations to obey and these arguments might be extended to obligate Socrates to concentrate his extraordinary political mission, still neither Socrates nor his Laws explicitly call for any such extension.

IV. THINKING GLOBALLY, ACTING LOCALLY

Why, then, does Socrates limit his extraordinary political service to Athens? In the *Apology*, he declares: “I think that no greater good has ever come to be for you in this city than my service to the god.”⁶⁶ If his mission is to serve human beings and if it recognizes no special obligations to serve Athenians, why should Socrates have concentrated his efforts to such effect?

First, Socrates must work on a local level. He cannot seek to benefit other human beings *en masse*, since his conception of extraordinary political service as dialectical examination is inherently personal. This feature of Socrates’s mission is sufficiently well illustrated by the

⁶² I take it that if we can, we should find the Laws’ arguments to be consistent. This might be thought hopeless on the grounds that one cannot choose one’s parents whereas one can choose one’s city. But in fact, one cannot choose the city in which one is born, raised, and educated. The Laws simply insist that a dissatisfied adult can appropriately turn his back on the city in which he was born, raised, and educated. That might seem an odd thing to say about an adult’s relation to his parents, but it is certainly not incoherent or obviously false.

⁶³ A satisfactory body politic is one from which a person does not flee in disgust.

⁶⁴ There is the following interesting result if we beef up the implications of the parent-city argument and the agreement argument in the ways suggested: native and naturalized citizens have different reasons for their obligations to serve and possibly even face obligations to different degrees of service. For if one finds one’s native city satisfactory, then one is obligated to serve by both of our arguments-on-steroids. But if one leaves one’s native city for another, then at most the agreement argument will give one obligations to serve one’s new city.

⁶⁵ *APOLOGY*, *supra* note 8, at 23b4–b6.

⁶⁶ *Id.* at 30a5–a7.

dialogues themselves, but we can note that it is a self-conscious feature. In the *Gorgias*, for example, Socrates explains to Polus how his political skills are especially different from those of conventional politics: “For I know how to produce a single witness for the things I talk about—namely, the person with whom I am having the conversation—but I let the many be. And while I know how to put the vote to one person, I do not even converse with the many.”⁶⁷

But the first step does not show why Socrates restricts his local work in Athens, as opposed to traveling around as the Sophists do, working locally but always changing the locale. Socrates does not seem to think that his elenctic mission calls for this. Of course, Athens in the fifth century B.C.E. is a cosmopolitan place, and so Socrates’s refusal to leave Athens is not a refusal to serve foreigners. Indeed, Plato portrays him examining many foreigners, including Hippias of Elis, Ion of Ephesus, Gorgias of Leontini, Polus of Acragas, and Protagoras of Abdera. Nonetheless, we can reasonably suppose that his decision to stay in Athens had the foreseeable result of benefiting Athenians far more than foreigners. Does Socrates have a reason to do this? I believe that he does, and that his reason is that Athens is especially hospitable to his extraordinary politics. Given Athens’ final judgment on Socrates’s mission, this may seem perverse. But Socrates seems to register special satisfaction with Athens not just in the *Crito*, but also in the *Gorgias*, where he praises it for its freedom of speech.⁶⁸ In fact, Socrates seems to think that no other place would allow him as much freedom to benefit others through his dialectical examinations.⁶⁹

So Socrates is a cosmopolitan who finds himself being of special benefit to one particular place. He is committed to his extraordinary conception of politics as making other human beings better by examining them dialectically, and he recognizes no obligations to make Athenians as opposed to other people better. But the nature of his dialectical examinations does not allow him to benefit huge numbers of people or people at a distance, and he can find no better place to practice his extraordinary politics than Athens. Thus, even if Socrates was right in saying that he gave especially well to Athens, he would also have been right to identify himself as a citizen of the world.

⁶⁷ See GORGIAS, *supra* note 16, at 474a5–b1.

⁶⁸ See *id.* at 461e1–e3.

⁶⁹ See APOLOGY, *supra* note 8, at 37c5–e2.