

## WAS SOCRATES A "UTILITARIAN"?

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Was Socrates a "utilitarian"? In his History of Greek Philosophy,<sup>1</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie claims that "The Utilitarian conception of good is certainly Socratic" (p. 143) and "one of the most indisputably Socratic tenets is that the goodness of anything lies in its fitness to perform its proper function" (p. 144). Guthrie realizes that "an important consequence is that goodness is relative to the desired end" (p. 143).<sup>2</sup> Although Guthrie does go on to qualify these claims, he certainly does leave the impression that in some philosophically important sense it is helpful to characterize Socrates in these terms. I wish to argue that this is misleading, although, in the end, my complaint might amount essentially to a charge of mistaken emphasis.

Before proceeding further I shall try to specify with more precision the position which Guthrie seems to espouse. In the first place, by "utilitarian" he appears to mean one who equates the good with the useful or the beneficial (pp. 142-7), although he points out that pleasure is sometimes added (p. 143). Moreover, Guthrie views the connection as one of essential identity, or definitional equivalence. That is, he attributes to Socrates the claim that the good can be defined in terms of the useful. On p. 166 Guthrie writes: "Pleasure cannot be itself the end of life. If we want a word to be the equivalent of 'good' (agathon) and explain it, we must try another. Socrates himself suggested 'useful,' or 'beneficial.' I do not know whether to attribute to Guthrie the view, which his language (especially "a word") and the use of inverted commas suggest, that Socrates gave a verbal definition of "good" as "useful." What is most important, for present purposes, and what is made clear by the rest of Guthrie's discussion, is that he attributes to Socrates at least the position that good is essentially the same as the useful, and that the latter can be employed to characterize or define the former.

A further feature of Guthrie's position is the suggestion that Socrates' utilitarianism had its limits, although the nature of the qualification is not spelled out clearly.

Socrates agreed with the Sophists that different specific, or subordinate, activities had their different ends or 'goods,' calling for different means to acquire them. On the other hand he deplored the extreme, individualistic relativism which said that whatever any man thought right was right for him. The ends, and so the means, were objectively determined, and the expert would attain them while the ignorant would not . . . . Where Socrates went beyond the Sophists was in seeing the need for . . . formal definition. (p. 146)

Guthrie does not dwell on the nature of the "ends" which were "objectively determined," nor does he explore the implications for Socrates' purported utilitarianism of the search for definitions.

I propose to examine, *seriatim*, the passages which Guthrie cites in support of his interpretation. I shall attempt to show that the characterization of Socrates' ultimate philosophical position as "utilitarian" is, at the very least, highly misleading, for it neglects precisely that which is distinctive of that position, and which differentiates it from that of the Sophists.

Guthrie begins by citing Thrasymachus' injunction, at the beginning of Republic I (336-D), that Socrates not give him a definition of justice in terms of the necessary, or the beneficial, or the helpful, or the advantageous. Guthrie thinks that this is evidence that "Socrates was famous for this utilitarian approach to goodness and virtue" (p. 142). He points out, moreover, that at 339B, Socrates "agrees that he believes justice to be something advantageous" (p. 142).

Let us begin by noting that it would be a rather precarious procedure to reconstruct Socrates' own position from the words of a Thrasymachus. He himself (as Socrates notes at 339A) gives what is ostensibly a definition of justice in terms of to sympheron, and may very well have misunderstood what he might have heard about Socrates' own position.<sup>3</sup> Socrates' agreement that justice is something advantageous, when closely examined, reveals what will, I hope, emerge clearly as a mistake in Guthrie's interpretation. In this passage Socrates is simply reiterating his claim, which he argues for later in the same book (349ff.), that justice is in fact something advantageous. The words at 339B3-4, epēidē gar sympheron ge ti einai kai egō homologō to dikalon, might well be translated, "For I also agree that the just is some advantage," implying not a definition of the just, but a statement of (contingent) fact. This is, of course, a claim that is made in other

dialogues (e.g., the Gorgias 507Aff), and one which Plato himself argues for at great length in the remaining books of the Republic. It seems, then, that Guthrie has failed to distinguish between two very different propositions:

- (a) The just is essentially the same as (is definable as) the advantageous.
- (b) The just is in fact advantageous.

The fact that Socrates held (b) is certainly not evidence that he held (a), although Guthrie's references several times reflect his failure to distinguish between the two. Plato too held that the just life was in fact the most pleasant (Republic IX), but the definition of justice in book IV is not given in terms of pleasure. In book I, after giving up for the time being, the attempt to define justice, Socrates goes on to argue that the life of justice is the happy life, rather than, as Thrasymachus had claimed, the life of injustice (347E-354C).

Thus, it seems that although Socrates did hold that there is a contingent, factual relationship between the just and the advantageous, he did not identify the two. Guthrie, it appears, has mistaken a pathos for an ousia.<sup>4</sup>

The next passage which Guthrie cites is Hippias Major 295C, where Socrates says "Let us postulate that whatever is useful is beautiful (or fine, kalon)."  
Socrates does indeed say this, in an attempt to help the confused polymath with an account of to kalon. The important thing to note, however, is that Socrates goes on to refute the claim that to kalon can be identified with to chrēsimon. He points out that power is the most useful thing, but that those who do wrong do so by power. Thus, the useful cannot be the same thing as the good. If one emends the definition to "power and usefulness for good," then to kalon seems to be equivalent to to ophelimon, the beneficial. But then, since to kalon is the cause of good, it cannot be identical with it. Thus, this passage contains an argument against the identification of the good and the useful or beneficial.<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, while discussing the Hippias Major, that Socrates also suggests, at various points, "the appropriate" (to prepon, 293D) and "the pleasant through hearing and sight" (297) as possible definitions of to kalon. These suggestions also have a "utilitarian" flavor, but, again, are refuted by Socrates himself. "The appropriate" fails as a definition because it neglects the difference between seeming and being beautiful; the appropriate is the cause, says Hippias, of the former, but to kalon is the cause of the

latter. Thus they cannot be the same. "The pleasant through sight and hearing" cannot be to kalon, for this definition fails to specify what is common to both (and only) these two pleasures.

Guthrie cites Gorgias 474D: ". . . all things fine--bodies, colors, shapes, sounds, habits or pursuits--are so called either in view of their usefulness for some purpose or because they give pleasure" (Guthrie's translation, p. 142). Now, as several commentators have pointed out, there seems to be a close resemblance between this passage and the ones discussed already from the Hippias Major.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it would appear that if the conception of beauty in the Hippias is unsatisfactory, so is the similar account in the Gorgias.

Moreover, the language of 474D--e.g., "it is with reference to no standard (eis ouden apoblepon) that you term (kaleis) each one of them beautiful . . ." and "In the first place . . . when you term (legeis) beautiful bodies 'beautiful,' is it not either with reference to some utility . . ." <sup>7</sup>--seems to suggest that the useful or pleasure are being suggested as criteria for calling something good. But one thing may be a criterion for calling something good without defining what it is to be good. The presence of smoke may provide a criterion for the presence of fire without implying that smoke is essentially the same as (or definable as) fire.

The Meno (87D-E) is cited as evidence for the claim that because aretē makes us good, it must be something advantageous or useful. It seems clear, however, that in this passage Socrates is advancing his customary claim that there is a (factual) link between something's being good and its being advantageous. It does not seem to embody a definitional claim equating the good with the useful. When Socrates says at 87E2, panta gar t'agatha ophelima. ouchi?, these words imply nothing more than the claim that good things are in fact beneficial. The ophelima is predicative. The same seems to be true at 88C-D: "If virtue is an attribute of the spirit, and one which cannot fail to be beneficial, it must be wisdom; for all spiritual qualities in and by themselves are neither advantageous nor harmful, but become advantageous or harmful by the presence with them of wisdom or folly. If we accept this argument, then virtue, to be something advantageous must be a sort of wisdom." Nothing in this passage implies that a definition is being given; the casual language (e.g., "becomes": gignetai) suggests that there is not.

Incidentally, this passage goes on to suggest (87E-89A) that there is something, namely wisdom, that is

good (and hence, advantageous) in all circumstances. Thus, the relativism lurking behind the supposed equation of the good and the useful or advantageous seems emphatically disavowed.<sup>8</sup>

The last of the major Platonic passages to which Guthrie appeals is Protagoras 358B, which is surely some prima facie evidence that Socrates was a "utilitarian" in a more strictly Bentham-Mill sense of the term. Into the vexed question of the implications of Protagoras 351Aff. for the attribution of "hedonism" (either ethical or psychological or both) to Socrates, I shall not enter in this paper. I will simply point out that it seems that most contemporary scholars wish, for one reason or another, to withhold attribution of the doctrine enunciated in this passage to the historical Socrates.<sup>9</sup>

It is from several passages of Xenophon that Guthrie culls his weightiest evidence for the "utilitarian" Socrates. He cites Mem. 3.9.4.: "All men, I believe, choose from the various courses open to them the one which they think will be most advantageous to them, and follow that." Guthrie remarks: "An important consequence is that goodness is relative to a desired end" (p. 143). Now the passage cited is of no relevance with respect to the question of the identification of the good and the useful, for it concerns the statement of a theory of motivation, not of goodness. Secondly, the passage does not have the implication that goodness is relative, for what men think is to their advantage (and, consequently, if the theory is true, choose) may well turn out to not be so. Moreover, even if Guthrie were correct in his claim that this passage implies an important relativism, this fact would, one would think, give him pause.

There are two further passages from Xenophon, cited by Guthrie, which do seem to state genuinely a doctrine of "relativism." In Mem. 3.8.1-7, Socrates is asked by Aristippus to name something which is good, intending to show him that, whatever he might name, that it is sometimes bad.

Socrates counters by asking whether he is to name something good for fever, or for ophthalmia, or for hunger or what, 'because if you are asking me whether I know of something good which is not the good of anything, I neither know nor want to know.' Similarly with what is beautiful (kalon), Socrates knows plenty of beautiful things, all unlike one another. 'How can what is beautiful be unlike what is beautiful?' In the way that a beautiful (fine) wrestler is unlike a beautiful runner, a shield, beautiful for protection,

differs from a javelin which is beautiful for its swift and powerful motion. The answer is the same for good and beautiful because what is good in relation to anything is beautiful in relation to the same thing. Aretē is expressly mentioned as an example. The question whether in that case a dung-basket is beautiful leaves Socrates unperturbed. 'Of course, and a golden shield is ugly if the one is well made for its special work and the other badly.' Since everything has its own limited province of usefulness, everything may be said to be both good and bad, beautiful and ugly: what is good for hunger is often bad for fever, a build that is beautiful for wrestling is often ugly for running, 'for all things are good and beautiful in relation to the purpose for which they are well adapted.' (pp. 143-44)

But this passage is quite in contrast with the procedure and assumptions of Plato's Socrates. In the early dialogues, Socrates is not interested in characterizing individual actions (like an act of running or wrestling) or things (like javelins and shields); he is interested in defining the essential forms (ideai, eidē) that make things what they are.<sup>10</sup> An excellent example, especially appropriate for its contrast to the Xenophontine passage just cited, comes from the Hippias Major, where Socrates is interested in a definition of the eidos of beauty, that which makes all beautiful things beautiful. He is not interested, ultimately, in such things as soup spoons, no matter how useful they might be, nor even in beautiful maidens, for (at least in comparison to a goddess) any beautiful maiden would appear ugly.

Hippias, darkly perceiving, after many false starts, the nature of the answer desired by Socrates, says: "You are looking, I think, for a reply ascribing to beauty such a nature that it will never appear ugly to anyone anywhere?" Socrates replies: "Exactly, you catch my meaning admirably" (291D). Thus, far from being "relative," or "both beautiful and ugly," Socrates wants a definition of that which is always beautiful and never ugly. That is, he wants a definition of a form. So, if Socrates is a "relativist," it is not with respect to the most important and distinctive feature of his philosophy. Of course we may admit that Socrates was a "relativist" about the goodness of such things as dung baskets and soup spoons, and even about the beauty of women. Who, after all, is not? Any sane person would admit that a particular spoon is useful for some purposes and not for others. But Socrates, apparently

in contrast to the Sophists, supplemented this common sense utilitarianism and relativism with an important philosophical doctrine, i.e., the assumption that there are objectively existing forms which are not relative in that they are not characterized by contrary predicates.<sup>11</sup> Thus, it is surely misleading to emphasize that aspect in which Socrates would agree with the Sophists and with ordinary, "utilitarian" common sense, to the neglect of precisely that element of his position which was different.

Now one might conceivably claim that on this issue the passage from Xenophon (to which we may add Mem. 4.6.8-9, also cited by Guthrie for the primacy of the useful and for relativism) is more representative of the historical Socrates, and that Plato is distorting him with his own additions. I think that this view is mistaken, and that convincing general arguments can be given for the reasonableness of giving Plato priority over Xenophon as a witness on Socrates' philosophy. But I am spared the task of doing this, for Guthrie himself has admitted (pp. 29-30) that in questions of philosophical doctrine, Plato is to be preferred as a witness over the more pedestrian Xenophon. Once this is admitted, we can largely discount Xenophon's evidence as a product of the practical and utilitarian cast of his own mind, rather than serious evidence for the doctrines of the historical Socrates, whom we may believe to have been a bit less "useful" than Xenophon makes him out to have been.<sup>12</sup>

Guthrie is aware, of course that there were, for Socrates, objective and non-relative ends. He quotes Gouldner,<sup>13</sup> "Men think of the practically useful as that helping them to get what they want, but it is more useful to know what is worth wanting" (p. 145). But at this point we have abandoned pure utilitarianism, for we are now determining utility by an external, non-utilitarian standard. Thus Socrates' final position is (again, as Guthrie seems to admit), not a utilitarian one. But then it seems rather unhelpful to stress the utilitarian element in his thought, if that element is shared by almost everyone, and is surpassed by what is most distinctive in his final position.

Granted that Socrates thought that there was an objective standard for determining what is "really" useful, Guthrie stresses that Socrates failed to make clear exactly what it was.

Thrasymachus and Clitophon were right to be annoyed when they asked in what consisted human excellence, righteousness or good

conduct, and were put off with the answer that it was 'the useful'; [just where is Thrasymachus given this "answer"?] for this was an answer without content. What is useful, what will further the ends of human life? . . . But when it comes to the aim of human existence, the good life which the aretē that we are seeking is to ensure, one cannot name any single, material thing. Any that could be mentioned might be misused, and . . . would in any case be a particular instance incapable of universality. What is wanted is 'that quality, characteristic mark, or formal structure that all good things, no matter how relative, particular and materially different, must share if they are to be good to all.'

It is precisely this universal, rather than any particular "material thing" that Socrates was seeking. That he failed to find it does not alter the fact that he assumed its existence, and that this assumption provides the central underpinning for his philosophical position. It is for just this reason that I have argued that Guthrie's characterization of Socrates as a "utilitarian" is misleading.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). This volume has been reprinted as two paperbacks, The Sophists and Socrates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971). Since the paperback edition is likely to be available to more readers, references will be to it. The principal section discussed in this paper covers pp. 462-467 in the History and, since it is relatively short, quotations should be easily locatable. All unidentified references in the paper are to Guthrie. I have transliterated all Greek which occurs in quotations from Guthrie and from those other authors cited in the notes.

<sup>2</sup>The claim that Socrates' philosophical position was one of "utilitarianism" has been made before. The latest attempt to refute it known to me is that of Norman Gulley, The Philosophy of Socrates (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), pp. 165-8. After commenting on several passages in Xenophon (Mem. 4.6.7.; 3.8), where Socrates seems to equate the good with the useful in meaning, and accepts the implied relativism of so doing, Gulley writes: "This emphasis on the instrumental sense of 'good' is in keeping with those features of the Greek's moral language . . . which gave to all Greek moral thought its broadly utilitarian character. It illustrates how readily the Greeks used 'good' synonymously with 'useful' or 'beneficial' . . . . Now Socrates is not propounding a moral doctrine about what the good is when he talks about the instrumental sense of good . . . . For to propound such a doctrine would be to give a descriptive specification of 'the good,' considered as the end of human action, and distinguishable in this substantial use from its instrumental use as 'beneficial,' 'profitable,' or 'useful' (Plato, Hippias Major 286E-297D, 303E). Socrates' remarks are about this instrumental use, and are not concerned to specify a moral ideal. It follows that those scholars have been mistaken who have tried to construct a moral ideal out of these remarks or out of the paradox that no one does wrong willingly. For there is nothing here which implies that Socrates was a relativist or subjectivist in his moral theory, or that he equated 'the good' with the useful or the advantageous" (pp. 166-7). Gulley goes on to criticize the claim of Henry Jackson

that Socrates was a utilitarian in the sense of equating the good with the useful. "As for the other marks which Jackson ascribed to Socrates' conception of 'the good,' such marks as the 'utility,' the 'advancement,' the 'well-being of the individual,' these are marks of the utilitarianism of the Greek's moral language, not peculiar marks of Socrates' conception of 'the good.' The references to 'immediate' utility and 'the common-place offers of worldly reward' are just misguided exaggerations, prompted to some extent, perhaps, by Xenophon's own severely practical outlook" (p. 168). I would venture, however, to ascribe the utilitarian element in Socrates not so much to the Greeks' moral language as to the fact that almost all human beings are, at a certain level, utilitarians. How else, e.g., would one specify the goodness of a soup spoon if not in terms of its usefulness or fitness to perform its function? This "lower-level" utilitarianism is simply a feature of common sense.

<sup>3</sup>For a claim that Thrasymachus' "interest of the stronger" is not intended as a definition of justice, see G. B. Kerferd, "The Doctrine of Thrasymachus in Plato's Republic," Durham University Journal, 9 (1947-48), 19-27.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Euthyphro 11A.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Gulley, op. cit., p. 76: "There is . . . a use of 'good' where it is not synonymous with the useful or beneficial. As Plato points out in the Hippias Major (296E-297D, 303E), 'beautiful' is what is instrumental to 'good,' or what causes good as its result. Beneficial and good are thus distinguishable as cause and effect. Here 'good' is used as a term for the end rather than as a term for what is conducive to the end. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle use it in this way when they describe the end of human action substantively as 'the good' (to agathon)."

<sup>6</sup>Cf. G. M. A. Grube, "On the Authenticity of the Hippias Major," Classical Quarterly, 20 (1926), 134-147: "Hippias and Gorgias 474D-E--Stallbaum first pointed out the similarity between these passages. In the Gorgias we are told that Beauty is due either to usefulness or to pleasure . . . . Anyone at all familiar with the Hippias Major will at once recognize many of its expressions and ideas here . . . . In the Gorgias Beauty is reduced to two ideas (which were not novel, but common Greek conceptions). This account of Beauty was not a sound Socratic definition, as we are distinctly told in the Hippias that a definition should give the

one common ground of beauty . . ." (pp. 145-5). Similarly, E. R. Dodds, Plato: Gorgias (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 250, writes: "The analysis of the notion of to kalon is the main subject of the Hippias Major; and I am inclined to think . . . that the brief treatment of the topic here presupposes that discussion and its result--namely that neither ōphelia nor hedonē nor the combination of both by itself sufficient to explain what we mean by kalon." This conclusion seems to be strengthened by the reflection that the main point of the Gorgias is to demonstrate that the life of justice and temperance is in fact the best and (ultimately) most beneficial, and by the pervasive anti-hedonism of the dialogue. Is it likely that Socrates, who constantly criticizes the arts of flattery for aiming at pleasure and not at the good would have defined to kalon in terms of pleasure?

In connection with Dodd's view of the Gorgias, it must be admitted that in his note on 475A3 (p. 251) he writes: "Polus unconsciously paves the way for Socrates' 'proof' by tacitly substituting agathōi for ōphelimōi Socrates accepts this, and the equation of the two seems to be in fact Socratic." In support of this claim he cites Prot. 333D9: taut' estin agatha ha estin ophelima tois anthropois. That this is not taken by Protagoras as a definition is made clear from his next words: "My goodness yes," he said, "and there are things I call good even though they aren't beneficial to men." C. C. W. Taylor, trans., Plato: Protagoras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). Even if one were to claim that the wording of Socrates' next question (334A1-3) supports Dodd's interpretation, it still seems to me that the text indicates no more than a claim of factual conjunction and not a connection in terms of a definition.

<sup>7</sup>W. C. Helmbold, trans., Gorgias, Translated with An Introduction (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1952).

<sup>8</sup>George Nakhnikian, "The First Socratic Paradox," Journal of the History of Philosophy, 11, No. 1 (1973), 1-17, in his discussion of Meno 77B-78B, claims that the argument can be read as suggesting a conceptual relation between something being good and its being beneficial to the person who possesses it. "I find it both textually supported and illuminating to view these assumptions [in Socrates' argument] as if they were intended to convey the idea that there is a conceptual relation between being evil (good) and being harmful (beneficial) to the possessor, a relation like the one that exists between being red and being colored or between being a cat and

being a mammal . . . . As I read him, for Socrates 'If x is evil, then x harms those who possess it' and 'if x is good, then x benefits those who possess it' are true in virtue of what it is to be good and to be evil. However, they are not definitions. They are, so to speak, meaning postulates" (p. 4). It seems to me, however, that Meno 77D, while it might be read as implying some such conceptual connection, need not be so read. The "necessity" that what is bad is harmful might just as well be factual as conceptual; and we know that Socrates did actually hold that it was. I think it would be difficult to imagine that Socrates would accuse someone who holds that there are some good things that are not beneficial (as does Protagoras at Prot. 333D9) with making the same kind of mistake as that made by someone who asserted that there are some green things which are not colored. It seems rather anachronistic to attribute something this sophisticated to Socrates. Nakhnikian himself admits this. "I do not mean to suggest that the distinction between these two kinds of necessity [conceptual and psychological] is either clear or sharp. Nor do I mean to imply that Socrates (or Plato) deliberately and systematically observe any such distinction. My view is that certain passages may be read in terms of some such distinction . . ." (p. 4). In any case, it is clear that Nakhnikian does not want to attribute to Socrates the view that goodness is defined in terms of the beneficial. "It is important to note that nowhere in the Socratic dialogues is 'good' used to mean that which benefits me. Such a definition would be viciously relativistic. It would make it impossible for anyone but me to mean by the word 'good' what I mean by it" (p. 15).

<sup>9</sup>The two most popular interpretations of the passage which do not take it as implying that the historical Socrates was a hedonist are (a) the claim that the passage represents Plato's own view at the time, or (b) that the argument which contains the hedonistic premise is essentially ad hominem, and does not represent the view either of Plato or of the historical Socrates. A version of the first interpretation was presented by R. Hackforth, "Hedonism in Plato's Protagoras," Classical Quarterly, 22 (1928), 39-42, while J. P. Sullivan, "The Hedonism in Plato's Protagoras," Phronesis, 6 (1961), 10-28, and G. Santas, "Plato's Protagoras and Explanations of Weakness," Philosophical Review, 75 (1966), 3-33, adopt versions of the second. G. Vlastos, "Introduction" to Plato, Protagoras Jowett's translation revised by Martin Ostwald, (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1956), who points out that "the majority of the commentators have held that L [the hedonistic premise] is not Socrates' own opinion . . ." (p. xl, note 50), writes, "What Socrates most likely meant to assert is the rather different proposition, or rather two of them

(a) that pleasure is a good (not the only one), (b) that whatever is best will in fact be the most pleasant. (a) and (b) do not add up to hedonism, i.e., to making pleasure definitive of good . . ." (p. xli). Vlastos' view was modified in "Socrates on Acrasia," Phoenix, 23 (1969), 71-88, where the trouble is now diagnosed as a failure to distinguish between (A) All pleasure is good and all pain is evil, and (B) All good is pleasure and all evil is pain. Socrates, according to Vlastos, is committed to (A) but not to (B). N. Gulley (op. cit.) follows Hackforth in claiming that it is Plato who has given the hedonistic form to the argument for the Socratic paradox in the Protagoras, but (following Vlastos' 1956 view) claims that Plato is not a hedonist, although Plato does not adequately distinguish between the theses that good is identical with pleasure and that the good life is in fact the most pleasant. Despite the fact that these alternative interpretations have problems of their own, it seems to me that the difficulties which they face are small when compared with the alternative of attempting to reconcile the hedonism of the Protagoras, assuming it to be genuinely Socratic, with the rest of what we know about Socrates. As Vlastos notes ("Introduction," p. xli), "Hedonism is not in keeping with the general temper or method of Socratic ethics: Socrates never seeks to answer the question 'Is x the morally best thing?' by inquiring whether or not x is the most pleasant thing to do and, having satisfied himself that it is, arguing that it is therefore morally best." The fact that Socrates combats hedonism in the Gorgias and elsewhere seems to make an alternative interpretation for the Protagoras' hedonism attractive.

<sup>10</sup>The best account of the theory of forms in the early dialogues is to be found in R. E. Allen, Plato's 'Euthyphro' and the Earlier Theory of Forms (London: Humanities Press, 1970).

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Euthyphro 5D.

<sup>12</sup>Guthrie remarks, a propos of the passages from Xenophon which we have been discussing: "In these conversations Socrates is making exactly the same point that Protagoras makes in Plato's dialogue, that nothing is good or bad, beneficial or harmful in abstracto, but only in relation to a particular object . . ." (p. 144). But the fact that this is so should, one would have thought, have caused Guthrie some alarm. Are we really to suppose that Socrates, who is apparently in the process of arguing (as he clearly does in the Meno 87E-89A) that knowledge or wisdom is something which is absolutely valuable would agree with Protagoras? Are we to acquiesce in the claim that Socrates, who is constantly

attempting to define universals, knows of nothing which is good in abstracto? I am in general agreement with Guthrie's strategy for approaching the "Socratic problem," which is developed in a sane and convincing manner on pp. 5-57. Since Guthrie obviously feels that evidence from early Platonic dialogues, such as the ones referred to in the present section, provides an acceptable indication of the views of the historical Socrates, and since I agree, I will not enter further into this extremely complex problem.

<sup>13</sup>A. W. Gouldner, Enter Plato (London, 1967), p. 182.