GREEK AND ROMAN EDUCATION

A Sourcebook

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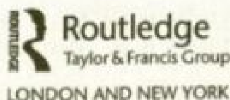

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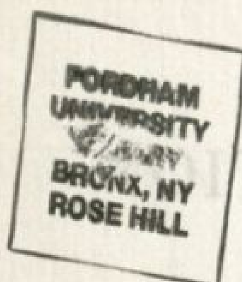
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THE SOPHISTS, SOCRATES, AND THE FIFTH-CENTURY ENLIGHTENMENT

Children in the fifth century who were able to continue their formal education to completion normally stopped at about the age of fourteen or fifteen. This traditional education in letters, music and physical training did not in itself, however, provide people with all the knowledge and skills that they needed to be successful in life. In particular, many people who were otherwise prosperous were at a disadvantage if they did not belong to traditional, well-connected families, especially aristocratic ones, and did not therefore possess some of the advantages that inherited status conferred. It was in this environment that professional educators called "sophists" made their appearance around the middle of the fifth century. Most of them were non-Athenian Greeks. Although they taught a wide range of subjects (**4.5–8**), all of them offered people the opportunity to learn the "art of persuasion" – rhetoric – provided that these people were willing and able to pay the fees they charged (**4.9–10**). By adopting the name "sophist," whose meaning is literally "practitioner in *or* purveyor of wisdom," they were appropriating for themselves the status of traditional educator, since in its earliest use this term had been applied above all to poets, who were seen as the transmitters of received wisdom in Greek society (**4.3, 6**).

In important respects the educational movement which the sophists initiated was a democratic one: their teaching was available to anyone who could pay (**4.12**), regardless of inherited social class, and it is no coincidence that they came to be connected most closely with Athens. In 461 BC, Athens instituted reforms to its democratic system which in principle removed from the aristocratic classes many of the privileges that they had traditionally possessed and passed them to the general body of Athenian citizens. A driving force behind these democratic reforms was Pericles, himself an aristocrat from an old and prominent family who seems to have played a significant role in the arrival and cultivation of the sophists, as well as other intellectuals and artists. Subsequent reforms in the fifth century included the introduction of pay for jury service, for membership on the Council of 500 (the *boulé*), and for the most influential magisterial positions.

In democratic Athens the ability to influence others through persuasive speech was of paramount importance. The city therefore provided a ready market for the kinds of practical skills that the sophists undertook to teach; and although their lessons were restricted to those who could afford them, their clientele extended beyond the children of the old aristocratic families. It is fair to say that the sophists not only profited from the existence of Athenian democracy but also (despite severe criticism from some quarters: **4.11**) helped to further its cause. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the sophists could have flourished in any setting but a democratic one.

The importance of the sophists, however, lies especially in the fact that they were humanists: their thought was focused upon the human being and the human condition, they asked fundamental questions about human nature, and they sought answers to these questions from the perspective of human individuals and their innate limitations (**4.1**). Their radical thinking, tied closely to the political life of the city, helped to free Greek education from the well-worn path that it had taken for centuries with only modest changes.

Socrates' activity is best understood, both chronologically and intellectually, within the context of this movement (**4.13–21**). Despite the fact that he seems to have acknowledged the importance of irrational forces in his associations with other people (**4.15–16**), his most prominent intellectual characteristic was his relentless dedication to reason and his resistance to society's traditional, often untested, assumptions. It is, however, a gross error to confuse him with the sophists (e.g. **4.18**), as some of the evidence presented below will show.

General background: Pfeiffer 1968: 16–56; Guthrie 1969; Ehrenberg 1973: 333–83; Kerferd 1981, 1997; de Romilly 1992: 1–29; Benson 1997. *Translated sources*: Dillon and Gergel 2003.

4.1. The sophists and the human-centred world

(a) Antiphon, *On Truth* fr. 44(b) II–III, (b) Protagoras, *On Truth* fr. 1

Theognis, Pindar and others believed that a person's heredity and innate character (*phusis*) determined his chances for success in the world (**1.6–7**). They assumed, however, that only those who belonged to the social élite possessed the right kind of *phusis*. Writing around 425 BC, the sophist Antiphon (**a**) expressed a different view: *phusis* is not "heredity" but rather "human nature," a quality which all people share by virtue of their membership in the human race. By implication, the factor which differentiates Greeks from non-Greeks (i.e. barbarians) is not *phusis* but *nomos*, i.e. "custom" or "convention." A further implication of Antiphon's position

must follow: with the right upbringing, including exposure to certain cultural norms, a barbarian could acquire the characteristics associated with a Greek (language, religious observances, political organization, etc.). Differences between people, not only Greeks and barbarians but also the well-born and the low-born, could be minimized if not eliminated through education and acculturation.

Since the sophists accepted students on the basis not of their social standing but of their ability to pay fees (which were sometimes very high: **4.12**), they naturally adhered to the belief that differences among members of their potential clientele also existed generally because of *nomos*, not *phusis*. Hence a person of intelligence and talent would not be prevented from achieving worldly success simply because he did not come from old money; provided he (or his parents) could pay, he would learn from the sophists the skills and techniques that he needed. Furthermore, if important differences between cultures and between individual people depend upon *nomos*, which is changeable from culture to culture, rather than on unchanging *phusis*, the beliefs that the individual person holds, fallible though they may be, will count for a great deal, whereas absolute truths will be difficult if not impossible to establish. Protagoras' famous words (**b**) express the human-centred and relativistic view that the only criterion of what is true and real is the judgement of the individual person rather than an ideal, impersonal standard. This view of the world lies at the heart of the conflict between Socrates and the sophists, as well as between Plato and his philosophical rivals in the fourth century. Further reading: Kerferd 1981: 49–51, 83–130, 1997: 249–51, 260–62; Ostwald 1986: 250–73; Long 2005.

a

. . . [the customs of those near us] we know and respect, but the customs of those who live far away we neither know nor respect. In this we have become barbarians in the eyes of one another. And yet by nature we are all naturally disposed in the same way to be either barbarians or Greeks. It is possible to examine . . . the things necessary by nature for all people . . . none of us has been marked off as either barbarian or Greek. For we all breathe into the air through the mouth and nostrils; we laugh when we are pleased and cry when we are pained; with our sense of hearing we receive sounds; with our sense of sight we see with the ray of light; we work with our hands; we walk with our feet. . . .

b

A person is the measure of all things, of the things that are, that they are, of the things that are not, that they are not.

4.2. An educational simile

Antiphon, *On Concord* fr. 60

The comparison of education with farming – the most common simile in ancient education (e.g. **5.21**, **8.18**) – involves analogy with a rational occupation, agriculture, which was considered to require skill and knowledge. Use of the simile here reflects the theoretical analysis of education which began in the fifth century BC. Further reading: Jaeger 1947: 312–14; Guthrie 1969: 168; Morgan 1998: 240–70; Pendrick 2002: 409–12.

> The most important thing of all, I think, is education (*paideusis*). For whenever someone begins any matter whatsoever in the right way, its completion is likely to turn out right as well. Whatever kind of seed a person plants in the ground is just the kind of crop one ought to expect; and whenever the education that one plants in a young body is good, the final product lives and flourishes throughout its whole life, and neither rain nor drought destroys it.

4.3. The sophists in their historical context

Plato, *Protagoras* 316d3–e5

Plato's dialogue *Protagoras* is set in the house of the wealthy Athenian Callias, perhaps in the late 420s BC. It depicts a meeting between Socrates and Protagoras, the most famous and important of the fifth-century sophists; also in attendance are other prominent sophists, including Prodicus (from the island of Ceos) and Hippias (from the city of Elis in the north-western Peloponnese). In the following passage Protagoras places his profession in its historical context by comparing it and linking it to the activities of earlier "wise men," in particular poets and seers. For the importance of poets, especially Homer, in traditional education, see **1.9**, **3.8–9**. Further reading: Morrison 1949; Guthrie 1969: 27–34; Kerferd 1981: 15–44; Ostwald 1986: 238–50.

> (316d) I claim that the sophist's skill is an old one, but that those men of an earlier time who practised it created a pretext and covered it up because they feared that it was resented. Some presented it as poetry, for instance Homer, Hesiod and Simonides; others – Orpheus, Musaeus and their followers – as sacred rites and prophecy. I have noticed that some others have presented it as physical education (*gymnastiké*) too, such as Iccus of Tarentum and, still to this day, Herodicus of Selymbria, originally from Megara and a sophist second to none. (e) Your man Agathocles, who was a great sophist, made music his pretext, as did Pythoclides from Ceos and many others. All

these men, as I was saying, used these skills as screens because they were afraid of resentment.

4.4. The sophists and "liberal education"

Plato, *Protagoras* 312a7–b6

At the beginning of the *Protagoras*, Socrates discusses with the young Hippocrates whether Hippocrates should go to Protagoras for the next stage in his education. Hippocrates has completed the regular curriculum (*grammata*, *mousiké*, *gymnastiké*: **3.14–15**), which is said to be suited to a "freeborn layman" and therefore comprises a "liberal education" (see also **5.24**). As such, this kind of education is thought to be like that which Protagoras offers to his students. Further reading: Marrou 1956: 46–60; Guthrie 1969: 35–40, 44–48, 50–51; Kerferd 1981: 15–23.

(a) "But, Hippocrates, perhaps you imagine that the education you will receive from Protagoras will not be like that [i.e. like that of professionals], (b) but rather of the sort you received from the *grammatistés*, *kitharistés* and *paidotribés*. You didn't learn any of these skills so that you might become an expert practitioner, but only to gain the kind of education that befits a freeborn layman."

"Well," he said, "in my opinion, that's rather more like the education one would receive from Protagoras."

4.5. What do the sophists teach?

Plato, *Protagoras* 318a6–319a7

The claim by Protagoras in this extract that he can improve his students and make them better citizens reflects a traditional Greek expectation about the teacher's role. The fact that Socrates gives the name "political skill" to the characteristic quality of the good citizen is less surprising when we realize that "citizen" in Greek is *polités*, and "political skill" is *politiké*. Protagoras' reference in this passage to sophists who teach "arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music" (he is thinking of Hippias) has special importance for the history of Western education, since it is the first instance in which the subjects of the medieval *quadrivium* are grouped together (see **10.27**). Further reading: Dillon and Gergel 2003: 1–42 (translated sources for Protagoras); Guthrie 1969: 14–26, 44–48; Kerferd 1981: 1–3, 37–39; Scolnicov 1988: 21–29; de Romilly 1992: 196–203; Ford 2001.

(318a) Protagoras said in reply, "Young man, if you associate with me as your teacher, it will be your good fortune to return home a better

man on the day you join me. . . . Each day thereafter will see consistent improvement." . . .

[Socrates presses Protagoras to be more precise.] (d) "If Hippocrates here comes to study with Protagoras and departs a better man the very day he begins his association, and if there is further improvement on each subsequent day, where will that improvement be found, Protagoras?. . . ."

When he had heard what I had to say, Protagoras replied, "Your question is a good one, Socrates. . . . If Hippocrates comes to me, his experience will be different from what it would have been had he gone to study with any other sophist. The others damage the young by forcing them back against their will to the technical subjects from which they have fled. (e) For these sophists teach them arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music." At this point he glanced at Hippias. "If, however, Hippocrates comes to me, he won't learn anything other than what he has come to learn. The purpose of my instruction is to teach sound judgement, first in his handling of private affairs, so that he can manage his household in the best way possible, then in handling affairs of the state, (319a) so that in the public domain he may reach the highest level of competence in his action and speech."

"Am I following your line of argument correctly?" I asked. "I believe that you are talking about political skill, and that you are guaranteeing to make men good citizens."

4.6. The sophists and poetry

Plato, *Protagoras* 338e6–339a6

By taking it upon themselves to teach the analysis of poetry ("literary criticism"), the sophists were incorporating an activity into their curriculum which held a traditional place (and would continue to do so); see **1.9**, **3.8–9**, **4.3**. Further reading: Kerferd 1950, 1981: 24; Jaeger 1947: 1, 295–97; Ford 2001: 103–7.

(338e) Protagoras began to ask his questions in roughly the following manner. "I believe, Socrates, that it is critical for a man's education to have him become an expert about poetry. (339a) That entails the ability to understand which passages of a given poet are properly composed and which are not, to know how to distinguish between them, and to give an explanation, when asked. My question now will be about the issue which you and I have made the subject of our discussion, that is, goodness (*aretê*). I have, however, transferred the context to the realm of poetry, and that will be the only difference."

4.7. Gorgias on the teachability of goodness (*areté*)

Plato, *Meno* 95b1–d1

Can goodness (*areté*) be taught, or is it transmitted by innate character (*phusis*)? If it can be taught, who teaches it? These questions represent one of the great intellectual controversies of the fifth century, with wide social ramifications, and they continued to be debated long after (see also **3.15**; Kidd 1988: 100). As he does in the *Protagoras*, so here Plato considers these problems. Gorgias (from the Greek city of Leontini in Sicily) is viewed as different from other sophists because of his reluctance to claim that he teaches *areté*; his aim is the more practical one of turning men into clever speakers, that is, of making them skilful in *rhetoriké*. Further reading: Dillon and Gergel 2003: 43–97 (translated sources for Gorgias); Harrison 1964; Guthrie 1969: 271–73; Kerferd 1981: 44–45, 131–38, 1997: 253–56; de Romilly 1992: 44–47, 203–7.

(95b) SOCRATES: Well then, tell me. Are these people[1] willing to offer themselves as teachers of the young? Are they prepared to agree that they are teachers and that goodness (*areté*) can be taught?

MENO: Oh, not at all, Socrates. One minute you might hear them say that it can, the next that it can't.

SOCRATES: Then are we to describe them as teachers of this thing, when they can't even agree on that point?

MENO: No, Socrates, I don't think so.

SOCRATES: Well, let's turn to the sophists. They are the only men who make that claim. Do you believe that they are teachers of goodness?

(c) MENO: Oh, Socrates, that's why I really admire Gorgias. You'd never hear him making that promise. He laughs at the others when he hears them doing so. He sees it as his function to make men clever speakers.

SOCRATES: So, you yourself do not believe that the sophists are teachers?

MENO: I can't say, Socrates. My reaction is just like that of the majority of people. One moment I think that they are, the next that they are not.

SOCRATES: Do you think that you and your fellow-politicians are the only people who can't make up their minds on its teachability? (d) Why, the poet Theognis says the very same thing.[2]

1 The *kaloi kagathoi*, literally "good and noble men," i.e. "outstanding members of society," referred to just before this extract. For this phrase, see Ch. 3 n. 18.

2 Socrates now quotes Theognis 33–36 (**1.5**) and 435, 434 and 436–38 (**1.6**) to demonstrate ancient disagreement and confusion over the teachability of *areté*.

4.8. Hippias the polymath

Plato, *Hippias Major* 285b7–d4

Of all the sophists, Hippias was reputed to possess knowledge over the widest range of subjects. The following passage provides a partial indication of the breadth of the expertise to which he laid claim. Sparta was much nearer Hippias' home of Elis than Athens was, so his visits there are understandable. His interest in human and divine family relationships and in the past in general likely reflects the feats of memory for which he was famous (see Xenophon, *Dinner Party* 4.62; Plato, *Hippias Minor* 368d2–7). Further reading: Dillon and Gergel 2003: 118–32 (translated sources for Hippias); Guthrie 1969: 280–85; Kerferd 1981: 46–49, 1997: 258–60.

(285b) SOCRATES: What then, Hippias, are the subjects which the Spartans love to hear you discuss . . . ? Or is it obvious that it is those subjects on which you are an expert, (c) astronomy and the phenomena of the heavens?

HIPPIAS: Not at all. They refuse even to tolerate those topics.

SOCRATES: But do they enjoy hearing you discuss geometry?

HIPPIAS: Absolutely not. For many of them, so to speak, do not even know how to count.

SOCRATES: Then they are far from ready to put up with you giving a talk about making calculations.

HIPPIAS: By God, miles from it!

SOCRATES: Well then, those topics on which you have the knowledge to make more accurate pronouncements than any other man, (d) the function of letters, syllables, rhythm and harmony?

HIPPIAS: What sort of harmonies and letters could you be referring to?

SOCRATES: Well, what are the subjects they are happy to listen to and of which they approve? . . .

HIPPIAS: The family relationships of heroes and men, Socrates, the settlement of cities founded in the distant past, and, to put it in a nutshell, the entire field of ancient history.

4.9. Sophists in action (I): rhetorical display (*epideixis*)

(a) Gorgias, *Encomium of Helen* 6–9, 15,
(b) Xenophon, *Memoirs of Socrates* 2.1.21–23, 27–28

Different sophists taught different subjects and skills, and specialization enabled one sophist to differentiate himself from the others in selling his talents on the open market. In one way or another, however, all sophists

taught *rhetoriké*, "the art of speaking." One of the ways in which they attracted students to themselves was through the public delivery of a "display-speech" (*epideixis*) which demonstrated the level of rhetorical skill to which a prospective student might hope to aspire. These display-speeches frequently took for their themes some mythological topic – not surprisingly, since such themes reflect the subject-matter of so much in a young Greek's education. The following extracts are drawn from two of the very few examples to survive from the fifth century. In **a** an attempt has been made to provide some indication of the artificial verbal effects that Gorgias tried to achieve. Extract **b** is preserved in Xenophon's *Memoirs of Socrates* expressly as the composition of Prodicus. Its moralistic account of Heracles' choice between virtue and vice is strongly reminiscent of the traditional wisdom that Hesiod communicated in his *Works and Days* (**1.3**). Further reading: Pfeiffer 1968: 45–49; Guthrie 1969: 41–44; Kerferd 1981: 45–46, 78–82; Ostwald 1986: 236–50; de Romilly 1992: 57–73; Ford 2001: 94–97; Dillon and Gergel 2003: 76–84 (full translation of the *Encomium of Helen*), 111–16 (full translation of the *Choice of Heracles*).

a

(6) It is either because of the wishes (*boulemata*) of Chance and the plans (*bouleumata*) of the gods and the decrees (*psephismata*) of Necessity that Helen did what she did, or because she was abducted by force, or persuaded by words, or captured by love. If it was because of the first, the accuser deserves to be accused, since it is impossible to hinder the desire (*prothumia*) of a god with human forethought (*promethia*). For it is natural not for the stronger to be hindered by the weaker but for the weaker to be controlled and led by the stronger, and for the stronger to guide and the weaker to follow. A god is a stronger thing than a human being in terms of force and wisdom and other things; so if the responsibility must be attributed (*anatheteon*) to Chance and God, Helen must be absolved (*apoluteon*) of her infamy.

(7) But if she was abducted by force and unlawfully violated and unjustly assaulted, clearly the man who seized her or assaulted her acted unjustly, and the woman who was seized or assaulted suffered misfortune. So the barbarian who undertook a barbaric undertaking in speech and law and deed deserves to receive blame in speech, loss of rights in law, and punishment in deed; and as for the woman who was violated and deprived of her homeland and bereaved of her loved ones, how would it not be reasonable that she be pitied rather than slandered? For he carried out terrible acts, while she endured them; so it is just to pity the one and to hate the other.

(8) But if that which persuaded and deceived her mind was speech, it is not difficult as well to make a defence in the face of this and to

dispel the accusation in the following way. Speech is a great ruler, since it accomplishes deeds most divine with a body most minute and invisible. For it can stop fear and remove pain and instil joy and increase pity. I shall demonstrate that this is so; (9) but I must also demonstrate (*deixai*) it to my listeners by opinion (*doxê*). . . .

(15) That she did not commit a crime but suffered misfortune if she was persuaded by words has been stated; and I shall examine the fourth charge in the fourth part of my speech. If the force that did all these things was love (*erôs*), it will not be difficult for her to escape the blame for the crime that is said to have occurred.

b

[Socrates is the speaker] (21) The wise man Prodicus sets forth the same view about goodness (*areté*) in that famous composition about Heracles which he puts on display. As far as I remember he tells it like this. When Heracles was setting out from childhood into manhood, at the stage at which young men become independent and show whether they will follow a virtuous or a wicked path in life, he went out to a peaceful place and sat down, wondering which of the two paths he should take. (22) It appeared to him that two tall women were approaching. One of them was attractive and had a noble air about her; her body was clean, her expression modest, her bearing sensible, and her clothing white. The other had been fed in such a way that she was corpulent and soft; she was made up so that, he thought, her colour appeared whiter and redder than it really was, her bearing was more upright than was natural, her expression was brazen, and her clothing revealed as much of her charms as possible. She examined herself constantly, checked to see if anyone else was looking at her, and gazed at her shadow. (23) When they were nearer to Heracles, the one I mentioned first walked in the same way, but the other, wishing to get there first, ran up to Heracles and said: "I see, Heracles, that you don't know which path to take in your life. If you make me your friend, I will take you along the most pleasant and easiest path; there are no pleasures that you won't taste, and you will live your life without knowing any hardships. . . ."

(27) The other woman went up to him and said: "I have come to you, Heracles, because I know your parents and have learned your nature in the course of your education. I therefore expect that if you should take the path that leads to me you would become a noble performer of outstanding deeds, and I would appear yet more honourable and more glorious for my noble acts. I shall not deceive you with promises of pleasure to come, but I shall truthfully explain how the gods have arranged things as they really are. (28) None of the things

that are truly good and attractive do the gods give to people without exertion and practice. If you want the gods to be favourable to you, you must worship the gods; if you want your friends to love you, you must do good by your friends; if it's your desire that some city honour you, you must help that city. . . ."

4.10. Sophists in action (II): argumentation (eristic)

Plato, *Euthydemus* 275d2–277c7

Rhetoric can be a competitive skill if it is directed towards winning arguments. For this reason some sophists taught students to debate and win, regardless of the side they took in a dispute. They used two related techniques, "antilogic," which involved arguing opposing sides of a single proposition, and "eristic," which was devoted to refuting one's opponent regardless of the paradoxical nature of the conclusions that were reached. Good examples of the logical bases and assumptions underlying antilogic can be found in the anonymous treatise called *Double Arguments* (*Dissoi Logoi*), which dates to about 400 BC or shortly after (translation in Dillon and Gergel 2003: 39–42, 266–82, 318–33).

Both antilogic and eristic could be used "to make the strong argument weak and the weak argument strong" (see **3.11**), and in the hands of the unscrupulous this approach to words and their meanings had the potential to descend into mere verbal gymnastics. Plato provides us with an entertaining example of the ludicrous contortions that two sophists, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, achieve at the expense of an inexperienced young interlocutor. His depiction of these sophists contains plenty of caricature. Further reading: Kerferd 1981: 53–54, 59–67, 1997: 246–48; Rankin 1983: 15–21; de Romilly 1992: 69–92; Scholz 2003.

(275d) Euthydemus began something like this, I believe: "Clinias, which people are the learners, the wise or the ignorant?" Since the question was a big one, the boy blushed and looked at me, not knowing what to do. I realized that he was confused, so I said, "Don't be afraid, Clinias; be a man, and give whichever answer seems right to you. (e) It may be that you will get a great deal of good from it."

At this moment Dionysodorus was leaning a little towards me; he had a big smile on his face and said in my ear: "Look, Socrates, I predict that no matter which answer the boy gives, he will be refuted." Just as he was saying this Clinias answered, so that I didn't even have the opportunity to warn the boy to be careful. (276a) Instead he answered that the wise are the learners.

Euthydemus then said, "Are there some people you call teachers, or not?" – He acknowledged that there were.

"So the teachers are teachers of the learners, just as the lyre-player and the writing-master (*grammatistés*) were, of course, the teachers of you and the other boys, and you were the learners?" – He agreed.

"Now, when you were learning, you didn't yet know the things you were learning, did you?" – "No," he replied.

"So were you wise when you didn't know these things?" – (b) "Of course not," he said.

"If you weren't wise, then, you were ignorant." – "Yes indeed."

"So since you were learning what you didn't know, you were learning when you were ignorant." – The boy nodded his head.

"Then it's the ignorant who learn, Clinias, not the wise, as you think."

After he said this, the two men's followers shouted and laughed, just like a chorus after their leader had given it a signal. (c) Before the boy had fully regained his breath, Dionysodorus took over and said, "When the writing-master dictated to you, which children would learn what was being dictated, the wise or the ignorant?" – "The wise," Clinias said.

"So it's the wise who learn, not the ignorant, and you didn't give Euthydemus a good answer a moment ago?"

(d) At this very moment the two men's admirers let out a huge, boisterous laugh, delighted with their wisdom. The rest of us kept quiet out of astonishment. Noticing that we were astonished, Euthydemus wouldn't let the boy go, so that our admiration of him would be greater still. He continued his questions, and like a skilful dancer he twisted the same question two ways: "Do the learners learn what they know or what they don't know?"

Again Dionysodorus whispered quietly to me: (e) "Here's another one, Socrates, just like the first."

"Good heavens," I said, "I certainly thought the first question was good!"

"All our questions, Socrates," he said, "are inescapable in just that way."

"That's why, I think, your pupils have such a high opinion of you."

Meanwhile Clinias answered Euthydemus that the learners learn what they don't know. Then Euthydemus asked him the same series of questions as before: (277a) "But don't you know letters?" he said. – "Yes," Clinias replied.

"All of them?" – He agreed.

"So whenever someone dictates something, isn't he dictating letters?" – He agreed.

"Then is he dictating things you know, if you really do know them all?" – He agreed to this too.

"So you're not the one who is learning what someone is dictating,

but it's the one who doesn't know letters who is learning?" – "No," he said, "I'm the one who is learning."

"So you are learning what you know," he said, (b) "if in fact you know all the letters." – He agreed.

"Then your answer was wrong," he said.

Euthydemus had not yet finished saying this when Dionysodorus took over the argument as though it were a ball and aimed it at the boy again, saying: "Euthydemus is deceiving you, Clinias. Just tell me, isn't learning the acquisition of knowledge of what one is learning?" – Clinias agreed.

"As for knowing, isn't it the possession of knowledge already?" – He agreed.

"Then not knowing is not yet having knowledge?" – (c) He agreed with him.

"So are those who acquire something the ones who possess it already or the ones who don't?" – "The ones who don't."

"Then you're in agreement that the ones who don't know belong to the category of those who don't possess something?" – He nodded.

"Then the learners belong to the category of those who are acquiring something," he said, "not of those who possess it?" – He agreed.

"So those who don't know," he said, "are learning, not those who know."

4.11. A contemporary view of the sophists

Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* 3.38.3–7

In the summer of 427 BC the city of Mytilene (on the island of Lesbos) revolted from the Athenian Empire. In order to punish the Mytilenaeans and set an example that would discourage similar behaviour from their other subject allies, the Athenians decided in their Assembly to put to death all adult males in Mytilene and enslave all women and children. They immediately dispatched a ship to carry out their decision; but then they thought that this sentence might be unreasonably harsh, so on the next day they reopened the debate over the fate of Mytilene. In this extract – the only place where Thucydides mentions the sophists – Cleon, a leading Athenian politician at this time (see **3.17**), criticizes his fellow citizens for their lack of resolve and complains that their real desire in reconsidering the previous day's decree is to be seduced by fine speeches, as though the words have no relation to real people and real dangers. Further reading: Guthrie 1969: 84–88; Kerferd 1981: 123–25.

(3) In contests like these our city gives prizes to others but assumes dangers itself. (4) You are to blame: you conduct these contests badly,

since it is your habit to watch speeches and listen to deeds. You consider future actions as feasible on the basis of fine words, yet the events that have already happened you consider on the basis of criticisms that people make in an attractive way; even when you have seen it with your own eyes you fail to take what has been done as more credible than what you have heard. (5) You take first-place for being deceived by the novelty of an argument and for refusing to follow the approved course of action. You are slaves to whatever is eccentric and you despise the conventional. (6) Each person's wish, above all, is to have the ability to speak for himself, but failing that, you compete against those who do speak by appearing not to lag the field in following their insight and to express your approval quickly when someone makes a good point, eager to anticipate a speaker's arguments and slow to predict their consequences. (7) Your search is for almost any world other than the one you live in, but when it comes to matters that are right in front of you, your understanding falls short. To put it simply, you are overcome by the pleasure of listening; you are like people who sit around watching sophists rather than deliberating about the city.

4.12. The sophists and payment for teaching

(a) Plato, *Apology* 20a2–b9, (b) Pl. *Hippias Major* 282b4–e8, (c) Pl. *Cratylus* 384b1–c2, (d) [Plato], *Axiochus* 366c1–3, (e) [Plato], *Alcibiades* I 119a1–6, (f) Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Protagoras* 9.52

Precisely how well the sophists were paid has been a matter of considerable debate, since the collected evidence records wildly differing rates. But like the pay that skilled professionals have received in all ages, the fees that a sophist could command would have depended substantially on his reputation. The following extracts represent a sample of the divergent information about individual sophists' fees. In considering the evidence in these passages it is useful to keep in mind (a) that many skilled workers in Athens around 400 BC were paid 1 drachma per day, though some were no doubt paid more and many were paid less, and (b) that 100 drachmas = 1 mina. Further reading: Forbes 1942: 12–19; Guthrie 1969: 35–40; Vlastos 1975: 155–61; Kerferd 1981: 25–28; Blank 1985; Loomis 1998: 62–75, 232–39; Too 2000: 17–31; Rihll 2003: 184–89.

a

(a) [Socrates is the speaker] Now, I happened to meet a man, Callias the son of Hipponicus, who has spent more money on sophists than everyone else put together. Since he has two sons, I asked him:

"Callias, if your sons were colts or calves, we'd be able to engage and pay for a trainer who could make them distinguished at the excellence appropriate to them, (b) and he would be someone skilled at horses or farming. But as it is, since they are human beings, whom do you plan to engage as a trainer? Who is expert in this kind of human, political excellence? . . . Is there someone," I said, "or isn't there?" "Of course there is," he said. "Who is he," I said, "and where's he from, and how much does he charge for his teaching?" "Evenus," he said, "from Paros – for 5 minas."[3]

b

(b) Socrates: This man Gorgias, the sophist from Leontini, came here from his home on public business as an ambassador, since he was considered the most competent man in Leontini at tending to the interests of his city, and it was the general view that he was the most accomplished speaker in their Assembly. In his private capacity he made displays and associated with the young people here, and in this way earned and received a great deal of money from our city. (c) Then again, our friend Prodicus often went to other places on public business. The last time he came here from Ceos for this purpose, just recently, and spoke in the Council, he gained a great reputation, and he made private displays, associated with young people, and received an extraordinary sum of money. But none of those men of old ever thought that he should exact money as payment for his wisdom (*sophia*) or should make displays among people from all sorts of places. (d) They were so simple-minded and had failed to realize how valuable money is. But Gorgias and Prodicus have each earned more money from their wisdom than any craftsman has from any art you can name. Protagoras did the same even before them.

Hippias: You don't know the beauty of this, Socrates, for if you knew how much money I've made, you'd be astonished. Forget about the other occasions. I went to Sicily once when Protagoras was visiting there. (e) He had a great reputation and was older than I was, but even though I was much younger, I made in a short time much more than 150 minas; and from one very small place, Inycus, I earned more than 100 minas. I returned home with this money and gave it to my father; he and his fellow-citizens were amazed. I'm pretty certain that I've made more money than any other two sophists you'd care to mention.

3 For Callias' expenditures on sophists, see also Xenophon, *Dinner Party* 1.5.

c

[Socrates is the speaker] (b) Now, the investigation of words is really no trivial subject. If I had heard Prodicus' 50-drachma lecture (*epideixis*) – which, he claims, can provide the listener with an education on the topic – nothing would stop you from knowing immediately the truth about correctness of names. As it is, however, I haven't heard it; instead I listened to the 1-drachma lecture. (c) So I don't know the truth of the matter on these problems.

d

The things I'm saying are echoes of the wise Prodicus, some purchased for half a drachma, others for 2 drachmas, others for 4 drachmas. He doesn't teach anyone for nothing.

e

Now, of all other Athenians or foreigners, name a slave or free man who is reputed to have become wiser by associating with Pericles, just as I can say that Pythodorus and Callias did by associating with Zeno. Each of them paid Zeno 100 minas and has become wise and famous.

f

Protagoras was the first to charge 100 minas as a fee.

4.13. Socrates on the value of education

Xenophon, *Socrates' Defence* 20–21

Our sources sometimes present Socrates as though he were a consultant on the subject of education (e.g. Plato, *Laches* 178a1–180a5, *Euthydemus* 306d2ff.). Whether or not this depiction is faithful to the historical Socrates, it is consistent with the opinion which he is made to express in the following selection. Here Socrates is dealing with the formal accusation that he corrupts the young; his respondent, Meletus, appears also in **3.1c**.

(20) "By god," Meletus said, "I do know those whom you have convinced to listen to you instead of their parents." "I admit it," Socrates said, "at least as regards education (*paideia*). Parents know it's a special concern of mine. When it comes to health, people listen to doctors rather than to their parents. In the assemblies all Athenians listen, as you know, to the most sensible speakers rather than to their relatives. After all, don't you elect as generals those who you think are the most knowledgeable about warfare, in preference to your fathers,

your brothers, and even yourselves?" "It's to our advantage that way," said Meletus, "and it's our custom." (21) "Then don't you think that this too is remarkable, that the people who are most capable in other activities not only receive fair compensation but are even given special honours, whereas I am being prosecuted by you on a capital charge because some people consider me to be preeminent on the subject of education, which is the greatest human good?"

4.14. The Socratic method

Plato, *Meno* 81e3–85d8

The expression "Socratic method" is generally used today to describe a procedure in which the teacher asks questions rather than telling students what they should know, while the students learn through the answers that they are steered towards. Yet the method which the Platonic Socrates followed implies a good deal more than simple interrogation. Socrates claimed that he himself did not know the answers to the ethical questions that he posed, such as "what is justice?" and "what is goodness?" And since he did not know the answers to questions like these, he could not claim to be a teacher or to have students; instead he referred to his "associates," "people who spend time with me" (**4.15–16**). This outlook further implies that both he and his respondents (his "associates") were engaged in joint investigations, searching together for answers which neither of them knew in advance.

In the following passage, Socrates draws out of his respondent a correct conclusion on a geometrical problem – how to double a square – even though neither of them knows the answer at the outset. The passage raises a number of questions: Could Socrates really lead his respondent to the correct answer if he (Socrates) did not know the answer from the start? What significance is there in the fact that Socrates uses a geometrical problem to illustrate his method? Can the procedure set out here be applied not only to problems that involve number and proportion but also to those that involve ethics and morality? What are the pedagogical implications of linking this procedure to the theory that all learning is "recollection"? Further reading: Sharples 1985: 7–10; Scolnicov 1988: 51–59; Brickhouse and Smith 2000: 53–72.

(81e) MENO: What do you mean that we don't learn but that what we call learning is recollection? Can you teach me that this is so?

SOCRATES: A moment ago, Meno, I said that you're a scoundrel, and now you're asking if I can teach you, (82a) even though I say that there is no such thing as teaching, only recollection – no doubt so that I will appear to contradict myself right away.

MENO: Of course not, Socrates. That's not why I said this; it was out of habit. But if you can somehow demonstrate to me that it's as you say, please do.

SOCRATES: It isn't easy, but I'm willing anyway to do my best because you ask me. Call over one of your many retainers over there, whichever you want, (b) so that I can use him to show you.

MENO: Of course. Come over here!

SOCRATES: Is he a Greek, and does he speak Greek?

MENO: Certainly – he's been raised in the house.

SOCRATES: Consider carefully whether it seems to you that he is recalling or is learning from me.

MENO: Yes, I will.

SOCRATES: Tell me, boy, you know that a square is like this? [Socrates sketches square ABCD in the sand: Figure 4.1] – Yes.

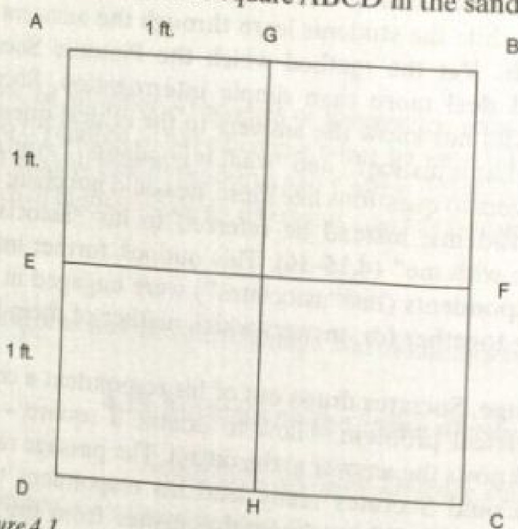

Figure 4.1

(c) SOCRATES: A square has all these four lines equal? – Yes.

SOCRATES: These lines that go through the middle, they're equal too? [EF, GH] – Yes.

SOCRATES: Now, a figure like this could be larger or smaller? – Yes.

SOCRATES: So if this side were two feet long and this side two feet long, how many feet would the whole thing be? Look at it this way: if it were two feet long on this side but only one foot on this side, the area would be two feet once, wouldn't it? – Yes.

(d) SOCRATES: But since it's two feet long on this side too, it comes to twice two feet, doesn't it? – Yes, it does.

SOCRATES: So it's twice two feet? – Yes.

SOCRATES: How much is twice two feet? Work it out and tell me. – Four, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Can there be another figure twice the size of this one, but like it, with all its sides equal, like this one? – Yes.

SOCRATES: How many feet will its area be? – Eight.

SOCRATES: Now, try to tell me how long each of its sides will be. This figure's side is two feet long. (e) What will be the side of the one twice its area? – It'll be twice the length, obviously.

SOCRATES: Do you see, Meno? I'm not teaching him anything; I'm simply asking questions. And now he thinks he knows the length of the side that will produce the eight-feet square. Don't you think so?

MENO: Yes I do.

SOCRATES: Does he know? – Certainly not.

SOCRATES: He thinks it's twice as long, doesn't he? – Yes.

SOCRATES: Observe him recollecting in the right order, as one should recollect. Tell me, do you say that the figure twice the area is made from the line that's twice the length? (83a) Here's what I mean: don't assume a figure that's long on this side and short on that one, but equal on all sides, like this one, but twice the area of this one, eight feet. Just consider whether you still think it will come from the side that's twice the length. – Yes, I think so.

SOCRATES: So this side is twice the length of that one [AB] if we add another here [B] that's the same length? – Yes.

SOCRATES: You think that the eight-feet area will be produced from this line, if there are four lines of this length? – Yes.

(b) SOCRATES: Then let's draw four equal lines on the basis of it. [Figure 4.2: AI, IJ, JK, KA] That would be, in your opinion, the eight-feet area, wouldn't it? – Certainly.

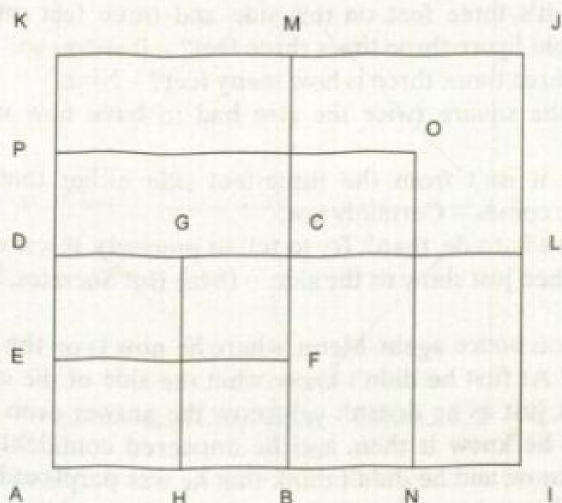

Figure 4.2

SOCRATES: So in it are these four squares, each of them equal to this four-feet square? [Socrates adds the lines CL, CM] – Yes.

SOCRATES: How large is it? Isn't it four times the size? – Of course.

SOCRATES: So four times is the same as twice the size? – Certainly not!

SOCRATES: How many times is it? – Four times.

(c) SOCRATES: So from the side that's twice the length a figure is produced that's not twice the area but four times? – That's true.

SOCRATES: Four times four are sixteen, aren't they? – Yes.

SOCRATES: And from what kind of side does an eight-feet area come? An area four times the size has come from this side, hasn't it? – Yes.

SOCRATES: And the four-feet area here comes from this side that's half the length? – Yes.

SOCRATES: Fine. Isn't the eight-feet area twice the size of this one, but half the size of the other one? – Yes.

SOCRATES: Won't it be made from a side longer than this one but shorter than that one? Don't you think so? – Yes, I think so.

(d) SOCRATES: Good – answer what you think is right. Now tell me: was this line two feet long, and the other one four feet long? – Yes.

SOCRATES: Then the side of the eight-feet figure has to be longer than this two-feet one, but shorter than the four-feet one. – It has to be.

(e) SOCRATES: Now try to say how long you think it is. – Three feet.

SOCRATES: If it's three feet, will it be three feet if we add half of this side? [BN] Here's two, and here's one. And on this side likewise here's two, and here's one. This makes the figure that you mean? [ANOP] – Yes.

SOCRATES: So if it's three feet on this side and three feet on the other, is the whole figure three times three feet? – It seems so.

SOCRATES: But three times three is how many feet? – Nine.

SOCRATES: But the square twice the size had to have how many feet? – Eight.

SOCRATES: Then it isn't from the three-feet side either that the eight-feet figure comes. – Certainly not.

SOCRATES: From what side, then? Try to tell us precisely. If you don't want to count, then just show us the side. – (84a) But Socrates, I just don't know.

SOCRATES: Do you notice again, Meno, where he now is on the path of recollection? At first he didn't know what the side of the eight-feet square was, just as he doesn't yet know the answer even now, but he *thought* he knew it then, and he answered confidently as though he did know, and he didn't think that he was perplexed. But *now* he thinks that he's perplexed; (b) he doesn't know the answer, but neither does he think he knows.

MENO: You're right.

SOCRATES: So is he in a better position now in regard to what he didn't know? – I think so.

SOCRATES: By putting him into perplexity and numbing him as the stingray does, we didn't do him any harm, did we?[4] – No, I don't think so.

SOCRATES: Actually, I think, we've done something useful towards helping him discover the position he's in. For now he would be glad to look for the answer, since he doesn't know it, whereas earlier he thought he could speak easily and effectively, both often and before large crowds, on the subject of the square that's twice the size of another, (c) since he thought the side had to be twice the length. – It looks that way.

SOCRATES: Do you think he would have tried to look for or to learn what he thought he knew (though he didn't know it) before he was thrown into perplexity, when he realized he didn't know and then longed to know? – I don't think he would have, Socrates.

SOCRATES: So it helped him to become numb? – I think so.

SOCRATES: Look at what he will discover as a result of this perplexity simply by searching together with me, even though I'm only asking questions and not teaching him. (d) Watch whether you find me teaching and explaining to him instead of asking for his opinions.

Tell me: do we consider this a four-foot figure? [Figure 4.3: ABCD] Do you understand? – I do.

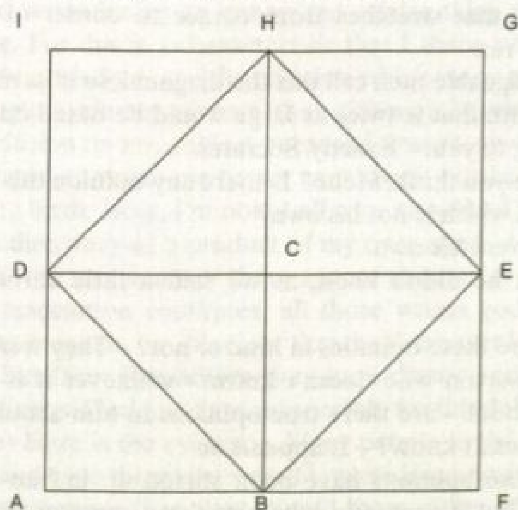

Figure 4.3

4 A little earlier Socrates was compared to a stingray because of his numbing effect on his interlocutors.

SOCRATES: Can we add this figure which is equal to it? [BCEF] – Yes.

SOCRATES: And this third figure too which is equal to each of them? [CEGH] – Yes.

SOCRATES: So can we fill in this space in the corner? [DCHI] – Of course.

SOCRATES: So these must be four equal figures? – Yes.

(e) SOCRATES: Then how many times larger than this one is this whole figure? – Four times.

SOCRATES: But we had to have a figure twice as large – or don't you remember? – I certainly do.

SOCRATES: Does this line, from corner to corner, cut each of these figures in two? – (85a) Yes.

SOCRATES: So these are four equal lines, enclosing this figure? [BEHD] – Yes they are.

SOCRATES: Look it over: how large is this figure? – I don't understand.

SOCRATES: Within these figures, all four of them, each line cuts off half of each, doesn't it? – Yes.

SOCRATES: So how many of this size are in this figure? [BEHD] – Four.

SOCRATES: And how many in this one? [ABCD] – Two.

SOCRATES: And four is how much larger than two? – Twice as large.

SOCRATES: How many feet is this? – Eight.

(b) SOCRATES: On the basis of what line? – This one.

SOCRATES: The one that stretches from corner to corner of the four-foot figure? – Yes.

SOCRATES: Knowledgeable men call this the diagonal; so if its name is diagonal, the figure that is twice as large would be based on the diagonal, according to you. – Exactly, Socrates.

SOCRATES: What do you think, Meno? Is there any opinion this boy gave in his answers which is not his own?

(c) MENO: No, they were his own.

SOCRATES: And yet he didn't know, as we said a little earlier. – That's true.

SOCRATES: And were these opinions in him, or not? – They were.

SOCRATES: So the person who doesn't know – whatever it is that he doesn't know about – are there true opinions in him about the things which he doesn't know? – It appears so.

SOCRATES: And these opinions have been stirred up in him now just like a dream, but if someone asks him these same questions again and again and in many ways, you know that in the end he will have a knowledge about these things which is as accurate as anyone's. – (d) That's likely.

SOCRATES: So he will have knowledge without being taught but only by being questioned, and by finding knowledge in himself? – Yes.

SOCRATES: And to find knowledge in oneself is recollection, isn't it? – Exactly.

4.15. Intellectual obstetrics

Plato, *Theaetetus* 150b9–151c2

The premise which underlies **4.14** – that Socrates does not know the answers to the questions he asks any better than his respondents do, but that he is nevertheless skilled in eliciting correct answers – leads to a celebrated comparison which the Platonic Socrates draws between himself and a midwife: as the midwife is skilled at assisting other women to give birth to the children that they have conceived but is unable to produce children herself, so Socrates is intellectually infertile but is skilled at helping those who are "pregnant" to give birth to their intellectual "offspring." In this passage Socrates also implies that success in his dialectical process may rely on factors that are not fully rational (note his references to the intervention of "god" and of his own "divine sign"). Further reading: Crombie 1964: 15–20, 35–40; Burnyeat 1977; Tomin 1987; Tarrant 1988; Sedley 2004: 28–37.

(150b) This is the most important quality in our [i.e. the midwives'] craft, (c) to be able to test by every means whether the young man's mind is producing an image and a false thing or a genuine and true thing. For this is a characteristic that I share with midwives: I cannot produce wisdom, and the criticism which many people in the past have brought against me is true, that, although I question others, I draw no conclusion on any subject because I possess no wisdom. The reason is this: god compels me to act as midwife but has prevented me from giving birth. Now, I'm not at all wise myself, (d) nor have I made any wise discovery as a product of my own mind. As for those who associate with me, some of them appear at first very unintelligent, but as our association continues, all those whom god allows make astonishing progress. . . . It's clear that they've never learned anything from me, but from themselves they have discovered and produced many fine things. God and I are responsible for this delivery.

(e) Here is the evidence. Many people in the past didn't know this fact and gave themselves credit, while heaping scorn on me; they then left me sooner than they should have, either of their own accord or because they were persuaded by others to do so. After they left me, bad company caused them to miscarry what they still had left and to raise poorly and lose what I helped them bring to birth. They put a

higher stock in lies and phantoms than they did in the truth, and in the end they seemed foolish, both to themselves and to others. (151a).... Whenever they return, begging to associate with me and stopping at nothing to do it, the divine sign that comes to me prevents me from associating with some of them; but it allows me to associate with others, and these people improve once again.

Now, those who associate with me share the same experience that women have who are giving birth: they feel labour-pains and are filled day and night with a feeling of helplessness, to a much greater degree than pregnant women. My skill can both awaken and put a stop to this labour-pain. (b) These associates of mine have just this experience. However, Theaetetus, there are those who don't seem to me somehow to be pregnant. When I recognize that they have no need of me, I'm very glad to match them up and, God willing, I'm highly competent at guessing from whose association they can get the greatest help. Indeed, I've handed many of them over to Prodicus, and many to other wise and divinely inspired men.

Here's why I've drawn this out at length for you, my fine boy. I suspect that you are pregnant and in labour, as you yourself think. So behave towards me as you would towards a midwife's son who is himself skilled in midwifery: (c) do your best to answer whatever questions I ask you.

4.16. Improvement through *eros*

Aeschines of Sphettus, *Alcibiades* fr. 11

Aeschines, a contemporary of Plato, also wrote dramatic dialogues which featured Socrates in the lead role, though only fragments of them survive today. The speaker in the following passage is Socrates. Like Plato's Socrates (**4.15**, **17**), Aeschines' character disavows knowledge of any skill and attributes the beneficial influence that he has on others to forces less rational than dialectic. In this case, that force is *eros*, "desire," "passion," or "love." Further reading: Field 1967: 146–52; Guthrie 1969: 390–98; Dillon 1994.

Many sick people become healthy, some by human skill, others by a divine gift. Those who become healthy by human skill do so because they are treated by doctors, while those who become healthy by a divine gift do so because a longing leads them to what will help them. They want to throw up just when it will be beneficial for them to do so, and to go hunting when it will be beneficial for them to get some exercise. If I had thought that I could be of help through some kind of skill (*techné*), I would be proving that I am guilty of a great error. But

as it is, I thought that in the case of Alcibiades this ability had been granted to me by a divine gift, and that none of this should be cause for surprise. Because of the love (*eros*) which I happened to have for Alcibiades, my experience was no different from that of the women who worship Dionysus. For whenever they become possessed, they draw milk and honey from the same wells that others can't even fetch water from. What's more, although I possess no rational skill which I could teach a man and through which I could help him, nevertheless I thought that by associating with Alcibiades I could improve him through my love (*eros*).

4.17. Socratic ignorance and payment for teaching

Plato, *Apology* 19d8–20a2

Since (as **4.14–16** make clear) Socrates did not lay claim to knowledge or to an ability to teach (and denied that he had any students), it is natural that, unlike the sophists, he did not seek payment from his "associates" for the time that they spent with him. On this basis Plato repeatedly contrasts Socrates with the sophists, sometimes explicitly, as below, but usually implicitly; some other writers draw this contrast as well. For the sophists' fees see **4.12**. Here Socrates presents the unremunerated companionship of a fellow citizen as the alternative to association with a sophist; cf. **3.1c–d**. Further reading: Harrison 1964: 191.

(19d) None of those claims is true, and if you've heard it said that I set out to teach people and that I exact payment, that isn't true either. (e) And yet I do think that it's a fine thing if someone were able to teach people, as Gorgias of Leontini, Prodicus of Chios, and Hippias of Elis do. Each of them is capable of going to the various cities and of persuading the young men there – who have the opportunity to associate free of charge with any of their fellow citizens they want – (20a) they all persuade them to abandon their association with those men, to associate with the sophists, to give them money, and to feel grateful on top of it.

4.18. Socrates as head of a school

Aristophanes, *Clouds* 133–84

In his comedy *Clouds*, Aristophanes presents a very different picture of Socrates from the one that we find in Plato, Xenophon, Aeschines and others. *His* Socrates teaches, has pupils, runs a school, charges fees, is willing to steal in order to put food on the table (and encourages his pupils to do the

same), is an atheist, and shows a variety of philosophical and scientific interests for which the Socrates who appears in our other sources has little or no time. In this extract the old farmer Strepsiades, father of the dissolute young Pheidippides, knocks on the door of Socrates' school (the *phrontisterion* or "thinkery") and is answered by one of Socrates' students. The butt of Aristophanes' humour in this passage is less Socrates himself than it is all the intellectuals in Athens around this time, especially the sophists and those who speculated on the nature of the physical world. Further reading: Guthrie 1969: 359–407; Dover 1968: xxxii–lvii, 1972: 116–20.

STUDENT: Go to hell! Who knocked on the door?

STREPSIADES: Strepsiades, the son of Pheidon, from Cicynna.

STUDENT: You're a fool; you've kicked the door so unscientifically that you caused an idea that I'd discovered to miscarry.[5]

STREPSIADES: Do forgive me; I live far off in the country. But tell me what miscarried.

STUDENT: It's not lawful to tell about it except to students.

STREPSIADES: Just go ahead and tell me. I've come here to the Thinkery to be a student.

STUDENT: I'll tell you, but you have to treat it as Mysteries.[6] Just now Socrates asked Chairephon how many of its own feet a flea can jump. He asked because a flea had bitten Chairephon's forehead and jumped over onto Socrates' head.

STREPSIADES: How did he measure the distance?

STUDENT: Very cleverly. He melted wax, then he took the flea and dipped its two feet into the wax, and then Persian slippers formed around it as the wax cooled. He slipped them off and measured the distance.

STREPSIADES: King Zeus! What a subtle mind the man has!

STUDENT: Then maybe you'd like to hear about another of Socrates' big ideas?

STREPSIADES: Would I! Please let me in on it.

STUDENT: Chairephon . . . was asking him whether he thought gnats sing through their mouth or their arse.

STREPSIADES: Well, what did he say about the gnat?

STUDENT: He claimed the gnat's inside is narrow, and because the passage is thin the wind is forced to travel straight to the arse. And because its anus is a hole attached to a narrow passage, it rings out under the force of the wind.

5 For the metaphor of "intellectual miscarriage," see **4.15**.
6 Religious rites about which the initiates were required to maintain secrecy.

STREPSIADES: So the anus is the gnat's trumpet. The man knows guts like no-one else! Anyone with that knowledge of a gnat's innards could get off easily if he were a defendant!

STUDENT: And just the other day he had a great idea taken from him by a lizard.

STREPSIADES: How? You've got to tell me!

STUDENT: He was looking at the paths and orbits of the moon, and then as he gazed upwards in the dark with his mouth open, a gecko shat on him from the roof.

STREPSIADES: That's a good one! A gecko shat on Socrates!

STUDENT: And yesterday we had nothing to eat in the evening.

STREPSIADES: Alright – so what did he manage to do for food?

STUDENT: He sprinkled fine ash on the table, bent a skewer, then he took a pair of compasses and lifted a cloak from the wrestling school.

STREPSIADES: Thales[7] was a miracle, but he has nothing on this man. Hurry up, open the Thinkery and show me Socrates as fast as you can. I want to be his student. Open the door!

4.19. Criticism of the contemporary curriculum

Plato [?], *Clitophon* 407b1–e3

Although attributed to Plato, the *Clitophon* is usually believed to have been written by someone else, perhaps not long after Plato's death. Much of this short dialogue consists of statements and speeches which the character Clitophon presents as the kind of thing that Socrates was often heard to say. The source of these statements and speeches is probably not the actual utterances of the historical Socrates but rather the ideas he was typically made to express in Socratic literature by Socratic writers. Hence the passage below is probably a fair representation of criticisms which fourth-century readers thought to be typically Socratic. The speaker is Clitophon, who is here assuming the character of Socrates. Further reading: Slings 1999: 1–4, 209–15; Guthrie 1978: 387–89; Rutherford 1995: 96–101; Rowe 2000: 303–7.

(407b) What is your hurry, you people? Don't you know how pointless your actions are? You do your utmost to acquire money, but as for your sons, to whom you are going to leave this money, you don't care whether they will know how to use it for moral purposes; you do not

7 One of the "Seven Sages," renowned for his wisdom; he is believed to have predicted a solar eclipse in 585 BC and is often considered to be the first philosopher.

find teachers of morality for them, if it really can be learned, or, if it can be acquired by training and exercise, people who can exercise and train them; nor in fact did you have yourselves taken care of in this way at any earlier time. (c) You see that you and your children have had an adequate education in letters (*grammata*), music (*mousiké*) and physical education (*gymnastiké*), which you believe to be a complete education in goodness (*areté*), and yet you prove to be just as bad in matters of money.

How is it then that you do not despise the current system of education (*paideusis*) and do not look for people to put an end to this lack of harmony? Yet it's because of this tunelessness and neglect, not because of the foot's discord with the lyre, that a brother behaves without measure and harmony towards a brother and cities towards cities; (d) they quarrel and fight, and they commit and suffer the worst acts. You claim that it isn't because of lack of education or ignorance that immoral people are immoral, but that they are like this deliberately; yet still you have the nerve to say that immorality is shameful and hateful to the gods. How, then, could anyone deliberately choose an evil like this? If he is overcome by pleasures, you say. Well, if overcoming them really is deliberate, being overcome by them is not deliberate? Either way the argument proves that acting immorally is not deliberate, (e) and that every man privately, and likewise all cities publicly, must take greater care over this than they do now.

4.20. Socrates and Plato

Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Plato* 3.5–6

Socrates' most famous associate was Plato. The following extract reflects an anecdotal tradition, widely known in antiquity, about the effect which Plato's first meeting with Socrates had on him. It is very doubtful that the details of this story are to be believed; like many anecdotes, this one instead expresses an essential rather than a literal truth. In this case, that essential truth is the decisive impact that Plato's initial encounter with Socrates had in changing the course of Plato's life. Yet the story that Plato wrote tragedies as a young man traces its origin to a relatively early source, Aristotle's student Dicaearchus. Further reading: Riginos 1976: 43–51; Guthrie 1969: 349–55.

(5) [Dicaearchus said that] Plato wrote poems – dithyrambs first of all, and then lyrics and tragedies. . . . But then, when he was about to compete with a tragedy, he listened to Socrates in front of the theatre of Dionysus, and then he burned his poems, saying: "Hephaestus,

come here; Plato now has need of you."[8] (6) It is said that from this time, when he was twenty years old, Plato listened to Socrates continuously.

4.21. Socrates and Aristippus

(a) Plutarch, *On the Education of Children* 4f, (b) Diogenes Laertius, *Life of Aristippus* 2.72

At least one of Socrates' followers departed from Socrates' firmly held principles by charging fees to his students. Although the evidence about Aristippus' fees varies from source to source, there is at any rate ancient consensus that he was a professional teacher. Aristippus (like Plato, apparently) was not with Socrates the day he died,[9] but he was clearly a close follower. Further reading: Guthrie 1969: 490–99; Field 1967: 159–60.

a

Aristippus . . . criticized a father who had no judgement or sense. When someone asked Aristippus how much he demanded as payment for teaching his son, he said, "A thousand drachmas." When the man said, "Good God, what an outrageous demand! I can buy a slave for a thousand!" Aristippus said, "Then you will have two slaves, your son and the one you buy."

b

When someone was criticizing Aristippus for taking money despite the fact that he was Socrates' student, he said, "Of course I do. When people used to send Socrates food and wine, he would take a little and send the rest back. He had the most important people in Athens as his providers, whereas I have Eutychides, whom I've bought with money."

8 An adaptation of Homer, *Iliad* 18.392.
9 See Plato, *Phaedo* 59b5–c6.