

SOCRATES THE *EUTRAPELOS*: XENOPHON AND ARISTOTLE ON ETHICAL VIRTUE*

ABSTRACT

The social virtues are not discussed thematically in the Socratic writings of Plato and Xenophon, but they are on display everywhere. Taking Aristotle's accounts of these virtues as a touchstone, this paper explores the portrait of Socrates as a model of good humour in Xenophon's Symposium. While Xenophon is addressing the same issues as Aristotle, and shares some of his red lines, his conception of the ideal humourist and of virtue in general differs from Aristotle's not only in detail but also in general conception. While he never actually violates the rules Aristotle sets down for eutrapelia, Xenophon's Socrates strives not to avoid opposites but to combine them. It is the careful combining of the spoudaion and the geloion that redeems Xenophon's otherwise outrageous portrait of Socratic humour. This suggests a broader paradigm in which virtuous behaviour is a combination of opposites rather than a middle path.

Keywords: Socrates; Xenophon; Aristotle; virtue; ethics; *Symposium*; Philipppus

Aristotle offers the most articulate theoretical account we have of the ethical and political issues that occupied thinkers and writers in fourth-century Greece. For this reason, his ethical writings provide useful hermeneutical tools that can illuminate much of classical Greek literature, even more than his *Poetics* has done, but they are especially applicable to Socratic literature, which reflects a social circle not far removed from his own. In some cases, such as his discussions of courage and greatness of soul, Aristotle provides examples and descriptions that show where he draws the line between the virtue and the vices, and his student Theophrastus carried this approach further in his sketches of vicious characters. But in many cases, including the social virtues (friendliness, truthfulness in self-presentation and good humour), Aristotle provides only general formulas with few illustrative examples.¹ Plato offers theoretical treatments of many ethical and political issues as well, but not of the social virtues; yet his writings contain valuable portraits of these virtues on almost every page. The same is true of Xenophon, who offers much less theory than either of his two great rivals, but offers extensive portraits of virtuous and less-than-virtuous behaviour. Thus while Aristotle provides an account of the social virtues that potentially illuminates the writings of the Socratic writers, the Socratic writers offer portraits of these same qualities that can give substance to Aristotle's formulas. These portraits cannot show us where Aristotle drew the line, if he drew one, but they can show us where they themselves

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¹ On Aristotle's tendency to provide open-ended formulas, see G. Danzig, 'The political character of Aristotelian reciprocity', *CPh* 95 (2000), 399–424.

drew the lines on the issues that Aristotle outlines. By comparing Xenophon's portraits to Aristotle's theory we can gain an appreciation of the distinctive conception of virtue that animates Xenophon's writings here and elsewhere.

ARISTOTLE'S *EUTRAPELOS*

Aristotle treats *eutrapelia* not as a technical skill involving the production of good jokes (indeed, being funny is not central to his discussion of good humour at all), but as a virtue.² In accordance with his general scheme of virtue, he treats it as a mean between two ethical extremes. The *bômolochos* goes to extremes in making himself and others ridiculous by his unbridled pursuit of the pleasant, saying things that are disgraceful to himself and others, and ignoring *to kalon kai to sumpheron* (*Eth. Nic.* 1126b31–1127a7; see 1128a4–7, 1128a34–1128b2). At the other extreme, the *agroikos* does not provide pleasure at all (1128a7–10, 1128b2–4). Aristotle spends relatively little time on the *agroikos*,³ since he simply fails to engage in humorous or entertaining behaviour at all. His description of the *bômolochos*, on the other hand, helps define the nature of the virtue by contrast.

The *bômolochos* offends other people, since he allows the attraction of *to geloion* to overcome him at the expense of others and himself (1128a33–5):

The *bômolochos* is overcome by the laughable and is unable to spare either himself or others when he makes jokes.

By saying that he is 'overcome' by the laughable, Aristotle indicates his lack of self-control.⁴ As a result he makes *gelos* at the expense of good behaviour (*Eth. Nic.* 1128a6–7):

It is clear that with regard to this there is both excess and falling short of the mean. Those who go too far in the laughable seem to be buffoons and rude people, eager always for the laughable

² The discussion occurs in the treatment of the virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Aristotle explicitly indicates the ethical character of *eutrapelia*: 'Those who joke gracefully are called *eutrapeloi*, as being well-mannered (*eutropoi*). These seem to be motions of the character; and just as bodies are judged by their motions, so too are character-traits (*êthê*, *Eth. Nic.* 1128a)'. This and all other translations from Greek are my own.

³ Noting a tradition of philosophers, especially Pythagoreans, who eschewed laughter along with other strong emotions, S. Halliwell suggests that Aristotle's criticism of the *agroikos* is aimed at morose philosophers like Plato (*Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* [Cambridge, 2008], 312, cf. 275; *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems* [Princeton, 2002], 82). But would the mere appearance of the word *agroikos* be enough to bring Plato to mind? The fact that Aristotle says almost nothing about the *agroikos*, and that Plato wrote scintillatingly clever and humorous dialogues, argues against this proposition.

⁴ See M. Walker, 'Aristotle on wittiness', in P. Destrée and F.V. Trivigno (edd.), *Laughter, Humor, and Comedy in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, 2019), 103–21, at 108. As he argues, the *bômolochos* seems to be lacking in *enkrateia*. Aristotle generally applies *enkrateia* to control of the desires (*epithumiai*) and not to the passions, although on occasion he does use the word *pathos* in relation to *enkrateia* (i.e. *Eth. Nic.* 1145b13–14, 1147b16–18). Similarly, he limits *akrasia* to the bodily pleasures (1117b28–1118a1), but says that the term *akratês* can be applied by analogy also to those overcome by anger (*thumos*), or the desire for victory, honour and wealth (1147b20–1148a22). Although he does not mention the failure to control laughter, it might also be considered an analogous form of *akrasia*. For discussion, see C. Hahnemann, 'Xenophon's depiction of the ability to bear ridicule as a form of self-control', in G. Danzig, D.M. Johnson and D. Konstan (edd.), *Xenophon's Virtues* (forthcoming).

and aiming more at making jokes than at saying graceful things and avoiding pain (*lupein*) for the object of their mockery.

Saying graceful things (*euschêmona*) and avoiding pain to others means, at a minimum, avoiding *aischrologia*—rude language, including explicit sexual and scatological words—and avoiding painful insult-humour. But despite the emphasis on being pleasant, Aristotle reveals some tolerance for these forms of rude humour. Although he prohibits *aischrologia*, Aristotle condones *huponoia* (innuendo), saying that the replacement of *aischrologia* by *huponoia* in recent comedy contributes significantly to *euschêmosynê* (gracefulness: 1128a23–5).⁵ The approval of innuendo shows that the core content of rude humour can be retained, as long as references are veiled.

The same seems to hold of insult-humour. In the passage quoted above, Aristotle castigates the *bômolochos* for causing pain to the object of his mockery (*ton skoptomenon*). That suggests that it is possible to ‘mock’ someone without causing them pain. Indeed, Aristotle seems to allow the use of mild mockery when he asks (1128a25–8):

Should a good mocker be defined by his saying things that are not unfitting to an *eleutherios* or by not causing pain to the other person, or even causing delight?⁶

The fact that a good mocker would not cause pain suggests that Aristotle recognizes the use of gentle ribbing as an acceptable form of humour.⁷

Aristotle’s retention of attenuated forms of rude humour shows the continuing vitality of these forms of humour into the fourth century. In the *Rhetoric*, he refers to *eutrapelia* as *παιδαγωγική ὕβρις* (educated insult: 1389b11–12; see also *Poet.* 1449a32–5). Although Greek humour also included more innocuous varieties, rude and aggressive humour was more common and seems to have been funnier. When Socrates makes an innocuous pun in Xenophon’s *Symposium* (6.7; see also 8.30) he has to apologize for its being ‘cold’ (*psychros*).⁸ If even Aristotle tolerates these elements of humour, in attenuated form, it is not surprising that Socrates makes use of them in Xenophon’s *Symposium*.

Aristotle defines the behaviour of the *eutrapelos* by the standard of the *epidexios*, the *eleutherios kai epieikês*, and the *charieis*. These terms refer to qualities of character: tact or solicitousness, generosity, fairness, grace. Readers often take *epidexiotês* to mean dexterity or cleverness, presumably because of the similar etymology (see, for example, Halliwell [n. 3], 316–17, Walker [n. 4], 105). But *epi dexia* means ‘to the right side’ or

⁵ Halliwell (n. 3 [2008], 319), argues that in *Pol.* 7.17 (1336b20–3) Aristotle condones *aischrologia* in sympotic settings. However, Aristotle only says that young people should be prevented from attending iambic recitals and comedies until they reach the age at which they are permitted to recline and drink wine at a symposium. He does not say that *aischrologia* is acceptable at a *symposium*. See also P. Destrée, ‘Aristotle on why we laugh at jokes’, in P. Destrée and F.V. Trivigno (edd.), *Laughter, Humor, and Comedy in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, 2019), 36–51.

⁶ Here Aristotle assumes that an *eleutherios* would not cause pain to others, which shows that it is a quality with moral significance. Later he says that mockery is a form of vilification, and wonders if it is worth allowing it (*Eth. Nic.* 1128a31–3): ‘Mockery is a form of vilification (*loidorêma*), and lawgivers forbid certain kinds of vilification. Perhaps they ought to forbid certain kinds of mockery as well’. On this reading the word *ἐντα* is carried over to the next line.

⁷ Destrée (n. 5). In my discussion of Xenophon (below), I apply this principle of amelioration to another form of humour that Aristotle does not mention, namely slapstick performances.

⁸ On innocuous humour, see Walker (n. 4), 111 citing *Rh.* 1412a28–b11, 1372a1. For *psychros* referring to weak or insipid speech see Pl. *Euthyd.* 284e, Theophr. *Char.* 2.4–5; also Xen. *Cyr.* 8.4.22–3.

‘to the “lucky” side’. It is the proper order of movement in passing drink in a symposium (Pl. *Symp.* 177d, 214c, 223c) and it is the motion of the cosmos (*Ti.* 36c). The term *dexia* is used by Xenophon to mean something like faithfulness (*Cyr.* 6.1.11). Because of its auspicious character, *epidexiotês* is more ethical than mere cleverness, something like tact or consideration. Aristotle says (*Eth. Nic.* 1128a17–19):

An *epidexios* would say and hear (*legein kai akouein*) the kind of things that are appropriate to a decent (*epieikês*) and generous (*eleutherios*) person.

That would not make sense if *epidexiotês* meant cleverness. Even tactfulness is not exactly right, unless tactfulness includes hearing the right things. The fact that *epidexiotês* includes hearing the right things shows that it is an emphatically moral quality, and includes a concern with one’s own honour or dignity.⁹ The kindness implicit in *epidexiotês* comes out in the following passage (1171b2–3):

A friend is a source of comfort (*paramuthêtikon*) both by his appearance and by his words, if he is an *epidexios*.

The *eutrapelos* is also related to the friendly person: both are concerned with providing pleasures and pains to others, but the *eutrapelos* does so specifically in situations of light-hearted socializing (1108a12–14, 1108a23–30). Aristotle says that the friendly person generally provides pleasure for his or her friends, but when necessary he or she curtails the pleasure out of concern for *to kalon kai to sumpheron* (1126b31–1127a7; cited passage from 1126b):

In a general way I have explained that he will socialize as he should; while having consideration for the good (*to kalon*) and the advantageous, he will aim at not causing pain or at sharing pleasure. For [the virtue] seems to concern pleasures and pains that occur in social situations.

The good and the useful are evoked here because they are the factors that justify setting limits on the provision of pleasure.¹⁰ In the following passage, Aristotle acknowledges that there are cases in which one should be willing to cause pain (*Eth. Nic.* 1126b32–6):

The friendly person disapproves of any such pleasurable activities that would be disgraceful or harmful for him to join and chooses instead to be unpleasant. And if something brings significant disgrace or some harm to the one doing it, while opposition causes little or no pain, he will not accept it but will disapprove.

Although friends should generally provide pleasure to one another, they should also be willing to cause pain in order to preserve honour or prevent some harm or damage to others or themselves. Although these passages occur in the discussion of friendliness,

⁹ Aristotle repeatedly speaks of saying and hearing: *Eth. Nic.* 1128a1–2 (x2), 1128a16–22, 1128a28–30. Sometimes he distinguishes the saying and the hearing (*kai taouta legon an oudèn an eipoi o charieis, ènia d’ oud’ an akoussa*, 1128a35–b1; see 1128a2), implying that one can stand to hear some things that one would never say. He seems to be more tolerant of *aschêmosunê* in the conversation of others, objecting only if it is great (1126b34–6). Plato also notes the difference between hearing disgraceful words and saying them oneself (*Resp.* 10.606c).

¹⁰ To Imelman, the alternative ‘not causing pain or sharing pleasure’ seemed to omit one half of the activities performed by the friendly man, namely his willingness to cause pain when necessary. He conjectured *h̄* instead of *mh̄*, so that the passage would read ‘aiming at causing pain or sharing pleasure’.

they are relevant to playful situations as well, and will be useful in explaining behaviour in Xenophon's *Symposium*.

XENOPHON'S *SYMPOSIUM*

The attitudes that Aristotle expresses reflect common sentiment in his circle, so it is no surprise that they are of relevance to Xenophon's *Symposium*. Although Xenophon does not use the term *eutrapelia*, and does not share Aristotle's views on the nature of the good humourist, Aristotle's analysis of *eutrapelia* offers concepts and terminology useful for understanding the ethical concerns Xenophon is addressing in *Symposium*.

Xenophon says in introducing his *Symposium* that it is possible to learn from the behaviour of *kaloi kagathoi* not only in their serious moments, but also in their moments of *paidia* (levity: 1.1). The word *paidia* is the word Aristotle uses to describe occasions on which good humour is called for (*Eth. Nic.* 1127b34–5). Since the *Symposium* is concerned with *kalokagathia* on such occasions, we can expect portraits of the virtuous use of humour. *Symposium* casts a wide net, portraying not only good humour, but also the other forms of social virtue discussed by Aristotle: friendliness and truthful self-presentation. Socrates is the most impressive exemplar of social virtue in this dialogue, and is proclaimed a *kalos kagathos* by none other than his future prosecutor Lycon (*Symp.* 9.1).¹¹

Despite its introductory words, *Symposium* contains characters other than *kaloi kagathoi*: the unnamed slaves, the Syracusan impresario, and even Philippus the clown, probably do not belong to this category. Although the *kaloi kagathoi* themselves are representative of a moral ideal and not merely a social class, they are not necessarily paragons of virtue. *Kaloi kagathoi* are *pretty* good people, but they are not infallible. While they tend to avoid the extremes of bad behaviour outlined by Aristotle, they do not always conform fully to the demands of virtue. There is no *aischrologia* in *Symposium*, but many of the jokes involve sexual references. Aristotle might have approved of Antisthenes' recommendation to visit unpopular women (*Symp.* 4.28) as a form of humorous innuendo, and Xenophon presents no rebuke. But what about Charmides' proposal for enjoying aphrodisiac pleasure with the beautiful young performers (3.1)? Even if mild sexual references are acceptable in jokes, it is something else to make a serious proposal for disgraceful behaviour. Socrates immediately diverts attention from the proposal (3.2): although he is certainly a *kalos kagathos*, Charmides' behaviour is far from perfect.¹²

There are other violations of social grace as conceived by Aristotle. Hermogenes' silence makes him a classic example of an Aristotelian *agroikos* (as is Aglaitadas in

¹¹ Xenophon does not have clear terminology for the social virtues. *kalos kagathos* is a broad term that certainly includes social virtue. On the related term *kalokagathia*, see F. Bevilacqua, 'kalokagathia in Xenophon: is it a virtue?', in G. Danzig, D.M. Johnson and D. Konstan (edd.), *Xenophon's Virtues* (forthcoming). Other terms include *asteios* and *eucharis* for good social behaviour (see *Cyr.* 2.2.12, 8.4.23, *Ages.* 8.1–4), *struphnos* (*Cyr.* 2.2.11), *agroikos* (*Mem.* 3.13.1) and *psychros* (*Cyr.* 8.4.22, 23) for rude or humourless behaviour, and *alazon* (*Cyr.* 2.2.11–12, *Mem.* 1.7.1–5) for pretending to be more than one is.

¹² For an excellent account of this scene and others, with an emphasis on Socrates' role as a moral guide, see F. Hobden, 'How to be a good symposiast and other lessons from Xenophon's *Symposium*', *PCPS* 50 (2004), 121–40 and *The Symposium in Ancient Greek Society and Thought* (Cambridge, 2013), especially 218–22.

Cyropaedia), and Socrates reproves him for it (*Symp.* 6.1–5).¹³ Because of his mixed birth, it is hard to say confidently that he is a *kalos kagathos*, but he does love *kalokagathia* (8.3; cf. 4.49). Antisthenes behaves in aggressive ways throughout the evening, at one point even insulting Socrates' wife (2.10). He is undoubtedly a *kalos kagathos*, but his behaviour is not ideal. Socrates is gentle with him, diverting attention by changing the subject when he becomes too aggressive (3.5–6, 4.4). The Syracusan impresario insults Socrates in an unpleasant way and for no apparent good purpose (6.6–10). He is almost certainly not a *kalos kagathos*, and he receives a reprimand for being abusive (6.8), as does Philippus for reprimanding him (6.9–10). The Syracusan's offences recall not so much the *agroikos* as Aristotle's *dyskolos* and *dyseris* (*Eth. Nic.* 1126b15–16).

Aristotle noted that the *bômolochos* does not spare himself or others in his love of the laughable. This shows a lack of dignity on his part; but not all forms of self-effacement are necessarily off-limits. Callias admits that he is never thanked for his charity (*Symp.* 4.3); Niceratus explains that his expertise in Homer makes him good at cheating and using onions (4.6–7); and Charmides admits that, for all his love of poverty, he would rather have his wealth back (4.33). Gray has argued that the purpose of these self-effacing remarks is to avoid retaliation for the boasts that each of the speakers was required to make previously.¹⁴ This kind of self-deprecation is not disfiguring because it is mild, and it never raises a laugh, except in the case of Niceratos, when he confesses that he is perceived as a greedy bastard (4.45). In his discussion of being honest and straightforward about one's own merits (*alêtheia*), Aristotle offers an explanation for this kind of mild self-effacement. Contrasting the virtue of being straightforward with the two extremes of boastfulness (*alazoneia*) and humility (which he calls *eirôneia*), Aristotle comments that those who under-state their qualities (*eirônes*) appear charming (*chariesteroi*).¹⁵ This may not be the best mode of self-presentation, but it is not a bad one.

PHILIPPUS THE *GELÔTOPOIOS*

That explains much of the self-deprecation in *Symposium*, but not that of Philippus. Philippus makes himself the butt of his own jokes in ways that seem degrading. He introduces himself by proudly asking the doorman to announce who he is (a lowly entertainer) and why he has come (to fill his belly); he refers to a servant who does not exist, explains that he is exhausted from carrying nothing, and says it is funnier to come uninvited rather than invited (*Symp.* 1.11–13). He breaks down and weeps in public (1.15–16) and performs a ludicrous dance (2.21–3) to get a laugh. Like an Aristotelian *bômolochos*, overcome by the desire for joking (*Eth. Nic.* 1127b32–5), Philippus says that he is unable to be serious (*Symp.* 1.15). Since he is acting for the sake of personal material benefit, we might think of him not only as a *gelôtotoipios* (who may have no ulterior motives: see *Mem.* 3.9.9) but also as a *kolax* in a playful situation.

Why does Philippus not use a more refined form of humour? While this may arguably be a character deficiency (see *Symp.* 1.15), it probably reflects a good awareness

¹³ Socrates is being provocative when he argues that Hermogenes' silence is enough to classify his behaviour as *paroinia*, usually meaning drunken misbehaviour or unpleasant behaviour (*Symp.* 6.1–2).

¹⁴ V. Gray, 'Xenophon's *Symposium*: the display of wisdom', *Hermes* 120 (1992), 58–75.

¹⁵ See also Pl. *Euthyd.* 303e for *charien* used (ironically) to refer to someone who belittles himself.

of Greek tastes in humour. Like other peoples, the Greeks had a long-standing addiction to rude humour. In Homer's *Iliad*, pain and suffering, as well as insult, were prime sources of mirth.¹⁶ In old comedy *aischrologia* is prominent.¹⁷ In the fourth century people would still laugh at the sight of others in distress.¹⁸ Aristotle allows for attenuated versions of rude humour, I suspect, because nothing else would be as funny. Drawing their humour from innocuous sources, frivolous jokes lack the vitality of even veiled *aischrologia* or gentle insult.¹⁹

When we consider the nature of Greek humour from Homer to Aristophanes we may be surprised, in fact, by the mildness of Philippus' behaviour. Although exhibiting one of the marks of a *bômolochos*—self-mockery—he avoids both *aischrologia* and *lupein*.²⁰ If these are such vital forms of humour, why does Philippus not make use of them? We may suppose that, in a composition devoted to portraying the behaviour of *kaloï kagathoi*, Xenophon wished to avoid overly offensive elements, even in the humour of lowly entertainers. This produces a somewhat idealized portrait of a *gelôtopoios*. But why does Philippus also avoid milder forms of humour, such as sexual innuendo and gentle mockery, which are used by other characters including Socrates?

This may be explained dramatically on the grounds that Philippus appears not as an invited guest, but as an *aklêtos*, an uninvited guest. Although Callias has clearly asked him to come, he comes nominally at his own initiative.²¹ Unlike the real guests, he must perform as a clown in order to earn his dinner. Given his low economic and social position he cannot afford to risk his future income by offending anyone with sexual innuendo. In contrast, Charmides proposes enjoying liaisons with the young entertainers (*Symp.* 3.1); Critobulus speaks of the kisses he can win from the young performers (4.18); even Antisthenes jokes about the unpopular women he visits (*Symp.* 4.38). A similar explanation may underlie his refraining from the use of insult-humour: as a low-status *gelôtopoios* or *kolax*, hoping for a future invitation, he cannot afford to insult his hosts or their guests. Excluded from these forms of humour, he initially makes use of silly jokes that fail to raise a laugh. Eventually he draws a laugh by making himself the butt of an insult-joke: he weeps at the loss of his livelihood (1.15–16).²² It is not just a joke: Philippus is sincerely distressed, and when the guests laugh they are laughing at

¹⁶ See the laughter at Hephaestus and Thersites in Books 1 and 2 of the *Iliad*, and the mockery by Idomeneus (13.381–3) and Patroclus (16.740–9).

¹⁷ Old comedy is usually seen as Aristotle's reference here, but Janko thought the reference was to the Megarian Susarion, and that Aristophanes was moderate in Aristotle's eyes: R. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy: Towards a Reconstruction of Poetics II* (London, 1984), 244–50.

¹⁸ At *Euthyd.* 278bc Socrates says that people rejoice and laugh when they see someone pulling a stool from under someone trying to sit down. See also the bench episode in Pl. *Charm.* 155b–c.

¹⁹ See *Symp.* 6.7. Cyrus is accused of being frigid as well (*Cyr.* 8.4.23) not for failing to tell jokes but for telling insipid jokes. Such jokes are called *kala* in *Euthyd.* 299b, and Cyrus seems to think that women like them (*Cyr.* *ibid.*).

²⁰ With one exception: he insults Socrates at one point, perhaps seeing him as a low-status threat to his livelihood (*Symp.* 2.20).

²¹ As B. Huss notes (*Xenophons Symposium. Ein Kommentar* [Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1999], 105, 110, on 1.11 and 1.12; see also *Symp.* 1.15 and 4.50) Callias has asked Philippus to show up in order to entertain his guests. Otherwise, why does he worry that he will get no more invitations (*Symp.* 1.15)? The speeches in *Symp.* 1.11–13 in which Callias pretends that Philippus has come uninvited and hesitates whether to let him in or not are a mildly humorous game. Halliwell suggests that because Callias has asked Philippus to show up he is an invited guest (n. 3 [2008], 143). But being asked to come and beg for dinner is not the same as being invited.

²² Self-mockery is not the preserve of low-status participants like Philippus: Socrates mocks himself, and the only time Niceratus raises a laugh is when he acknowledges being a greedy bastard (*Symp.* 4.45), but they are not in serious distress.

him, not with him.²³ By weeping over his own failure to raise a laugh, Philippus puts himself in the position of Thersites in the *Iliad*, over whose suffering the Greeks laugh heartily. Making oneself the object of mockery for the sake of a laugh is a classic mark of *bômolocheia*. He gets his second laugh by hitching a ride on Socrates' joke that he desires to learn to dance (2.17), taking it one step further by actually performing a ludicrous dance. Again, the other symposiasts laugh at him not with him (ἐπὶ σοὶ γελῶντες, 2.23). By giving these antics to a lowly *gelôtopoios*, and portraying the reactions he gets, Xenophon steers us away from this kind of behaviour. Philippus is here so that we, the readers, can laugh at him, just as do the guests.

SOCRATES THE NEAR-BÔMOLOCHOS

The unfunny, servile Philippus is an obvious foil to Socrates.²⁴ In some ways, clearly, Socrates acts better than Philippus. For example, while Philippus actually performs a ludicrous dance, Socrates got a laugh merely by saying that he wants to learn to dance (*Symp.* 2.15–16). This may reflect the Aristotelian principle of the refinement of offensive behaviour. Just as *aischrologia* and *lupein* are replaced by milder forms of speech, so too slapstick is replaced by allusions to ridiculous behaviour. But while this comparison places Socrates on the more refined side of the line, in other ways Socrates seems to behave worse than Philippus.

Based on Aristotle, one might assume that a *eutrapelos* is a calm, measured, dignified figure, full of gentle, engaging humour. Xenophon's Socrates, in contrast, is by far the most outrageous participant in his *Symposium*. While observing the minimal Aristotelian demands of propriety, which seem to reflect commonly observed norms, Socrates comes closer to violating them than anyone else in the room. His jokes combine mockery, self-mockery and a heavy dose of sexual innuendo.²⁵ Socrates reserves mockery for close friends, as when he calls Antisthenes a pimp and a go-between (4.61) or charges Hermogenes with *paroinia* (unpleasant behaviour when drinking: 6.1–2). More often he indulges in self-mockery, using his own unbeautiful body as a source of mirth. Socrates gets his first laugh by inviting his audience to imagine the rotund middle-aged philosopher performing a dance; later he draws attention to his ugly physical features in the beauty contest, noting especially his protruding eyes and squashed nose, and inspiring a comparison to crabs (5.5–7). There is self-mockery and near-vulgarity in his boast about his expertise in pimping (3.10), in his joke about the kissing abilities of donkeys (5.7) and in what appears to be an imitation of a courtesan (8.6).²⁶ In all these ways Socrates goes beyond the

²³ Although Xenophon writes that he appeared to be weeping (*Symp.* 1.15), this does not imply that he is in reality not in distress (contrast Halliwell [n. 3, 2008], 144 n. 102). Xenophon mentions the appearance because it is this that arouses the laughter. He regularly points out that appearance and reality can be in agreement, as when he says that one should be as good as one appears (*Mem.* 1.7.2–5, *Cyr.* 1.6.22).

²⁴ Other foils include Antisthenes, who is aggressive and tactless, and Hermogenes, who is morose and unfunny. On Antisthenes, see D.M. Johnson, *Xenophon's Socratic Works* (London and New York, 2021), 193–8.

²⁵ For an account of the educational value of Socratic mockery outside of the *Symposium* see J. Lombardini, *The Politics of Socratic Humor* (Oakland, CA, 2018), 93–128.

²⁶ *Symp.* 8.4–6: the customer is Antisthenes. The fact that Socrates complains about beatings and refers to the presence of other customers suggests he is imitating a low-level *hetaera* if not a *pornê*. As

relatively tame humour of Philippus the clown and risks appearing as a *bômolochos* himself. Philippus' behaviour may be excused, to some extent, as being appropriate and even necessary to someone in his position. But Socrates does not have this excuse. Why, then, is he crowned as a true *kalos kagathos* by none other than Lycon, his future accuser (9.1)?²⁷

One way to distinguish Socrates' self-mockery from that of Philippus is by invoking the concept of elite stylization of labour.²⁸ Stylization is when elite members of the community engage in labour for non-economic purposes, thereby transforming it from a rude necessity into an elite vocation. It is the difference between a worker who plants trees for a living, and a wealthy property owner who plants trees as a hobby.²⁹ In the same vein, although he is no wealthier than Philippus, Socrates does not mock himself for the sake of a meal. While Philippus pushes his way into parties to which he is not officially invited, in order to fill his belly, Socrates receives a respectful invitation to dinner, but declines.³⁰ The fact that Socrates is not making fun of himself for the sake of a meal sets his humour apart from that of Philippus even if there were no other differences. To put it another way, Socrates is not really mocking himself, he is only pretending to do so.

One might further explain Socrates' immunity from degradation by arguing that a superior individual can afford to act like a clown without worrying that anyone could mistake him for one. In Phaedo's *Zopyrus* everyone laughs at the idea that Socrates is a lewd womanizer; here too Socrates' other cultivated qualities insulate him from the degradation his behaviour would otherwise bring.³¹ Invoking Weber's concept of charisma, one might argue that this behaviour even enhances Socrates' reputation. As Weber wrote, 'charismatic domination transforms all values and breaks all traditional and rational norms'.³² Given his notoriety, it seems right to treat Socrates as a charismatic figure whose violations of propriety charmed some and offended others.³³ The willingness

T.A. van Berkel notes, the two statuses are sometimes isomorphic (*The Economics of Friendship: Conceptions of Reciprocity in Classical Greece* [Leiden and Boston, 2020], 350–3). Halliwell (n. 3 [2008]), 150 suggests that this is an imitation of a young beloved male. But in a parallel passage (*Mem.* 3.11) Socrates speaks with a *hetaera*; and an imitation of a woman would provide a parallel to Socrates' imitative report of the more dignified Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*.

²⁷ This remark is paradoxical because Socrates is neither beautiful nor rich, and does not act with conventional social grace. The phrase *kalos kagathos* seems to retain an aesthetic connotation (see *Ar. Nub.* 797–8, *Xen. Cyr.* 4.6.3, 7.1.49, *Hell.* 5.4.57). In <...> *kagathos* phrases in the fifth century the first term always retains its meaning and is usually primary (*Soph. Phil.* 119, 421–2, 1050–1, *Trach.* 541–2; *Eur. Heracl.* 298, *Hipp.* 427, 1419, 1454).

²⁸ S. Johnstone, 'Virtuous toil, vicious work: Xenophon on aristocratic style', *CP* 89 (1994), 219–40, has applied this concept to Xenophon.

²⁹ Through the character Cyrus Xenophon suggests (*Oec.* 4.21–5) that if an activity can be done by an elite person in a stylized way, it can be done in the same spirit by a person who does not share the elite status. This shows a remarkable lack of class bias on his part.

³⁰ He does not go as far as Plato's Socrates in despising food and drink, a portrait that Xenophon may have regarded as excessively disdainful and hence boorish, but rather shows a moderate and cultured attitude towards both of them.

³¹ On this dialogue, see L. Rossetti, 'Ricerche sui "Dialoghi Socratici" di Fedone di Elide', *Hermes* 108 (1980), 183–200; L. Rossetti, 'Phaedo's *Zopyrus* (and Socrates' confidences)', in U. Zilioli (ed.), *From the Socratics to the Socratic Schools: Classical Ethics, Metaphysics, and Epistemology* (London and New York, 2015), 82–98; D. Di Lanzo, 'Phaedo of Elis: The biography, *Zopyrus*, and his intellectual profile', in A. Stavru and C. Moore (edd.), *Socrates and the Socratic Dialogue* (Leiden and Boston, 2018), 221–34.

³² M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley, 1978), 1115 [original 1921]; see also A. Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber* (Cambridge, 1971), 160–1.

³³ R. Blondell, 'Where is Socrates on the "ladder of love"?', in J. Leshner, D. Nails and F. Sheffield

to risk breaking social boundaries sets Socrates off from the other more conventional guests, and this may not only reflect his charisma, it may also contribute to it. Moreover, Socrates does not go too far: despite his freedom, he possesses an autonomous sense of judgement that restrains him from violating the delicate boundaries of propriety. In this respect, at least, he conforms to Aristotle's views: as Aristotle says, the *eutrapelos* is a law unto himself (*Eth. Nic.* 1128a32–3).³⁴

SOCRATES THE NEAR-*AGROIKOS*

While all these considerations play a role in justifying Socrates' behaviour and explaining his positive image, another factor is no less important. Socrates' offences include not only his flirtation with *bômolochia*, but also behaviour that resembles that of an *agroikos*. In the opening of the composition, Socrates brings Callias almost to tears by refusing his invitation (*Symp.* 1.5–7). This is prior to the scene of *paidia*, so it does not qualify technically as Aristotelian *agroikia*; but it shows a willingness to be unpleasant that recurs later as well. During the party, Socrates offers pain to others in ways Philippus could not afford to do. He rejects an offer of perfume (2.3),³⁵ proposes moderation in drinking (2.26), offers reprimands to Critobulus (4.19, 4.21–2, 4.28) and Hermogenes (6.1–5), insults to Antisthenes (4.61) and a lecture to Callias his host (8.7–41). Socrates recognizes that his lengthy harangue in chapter eight is out of place at a *symposium*, and he apologizes for it, blaming it partly on the wine (8.24, see 8.41).

Just as his *bômolochia* does not descend into explicit crude behaviour, so too Socrates' *agroikia* does not necessarily violate Aristotle's rules, since Aristotle allowed for violations of pleasantness for the sake of *to kalon kai to sumpheron* (1126b31–1127a7). Socrates' rejection of perfume aims to turn the conversation to higher matters; his request for moderate drinking aims to prevent over-indulgence in alcohol; his reprimands to Critobulus and Hermogenes offer valuable educational lessons. The insults to Antisthenes are another story; they are a prelude to a sincere tribute to a good friend (4.61–4). Socrates' lecture to Callias aims to warn him from a debauched relationship and to stir in him a desire for honourable deeds. And it is received positively: Callias finally achieves a mutual gaze of pleasure with his beloved Autolycus (*Symp.* 8.42; cf. 1.12).³⁶

THE COMBINATION OF OPPOSITES

The use of *agroikia*, far from disfiguring Socrates, plays an important role in redeeming him.³⁷ As we have seen, the polarity of *bômolochos* and *agroikos*, formulated later by

(edd.), *Plato's Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 147–78, at 149 speaks of the Platonic Socrates' 'chutzpah'.

³⁴ By calling him a law unto himself, Aristotle indicates that the *eutrapelos* must decide autonomously where the limits lie in the particular situation, not that he is a special case.

³⁵ Halliwell (n. 3 [2008]), 146 n. 106 notes that his refusal of perfume seems characteristic of an *agroikos*.

³⁶ Unlike Critias, who did not appreciate Socrates' advice for pursuing a young man (*Mem.* 1.2.29–30), Callias accepts Socrates' advice.

³⁷ The portrait of Antisthenes helps moderate the impression of Socrates' *agroikia*. By behaving like a caricature of a rude Platonic Socrates, gracelessly attacking people and refuting them when

Aristotle, plays an important role in Xenophon's *Symposium*, even if Xenophon does not use the terms. But Xenophon employs this polarity in a different way from Aristotle. While Aristotle distinguishes the *eutrapelos* from the *agroikos* and the *bômolochos* by having him avoid both extremes of behaviour, Xenophon's Socrates embraces something very close to both extremes. His off-colour humour and self-mockery draws him close to the Aristotelian *bômolochos*; his reprimands, his semi-serious disquisitions, and his lengthy harangue in chapter eight, make him resemble an *agroikos*. The combination of these opposite tendencies represents Xenophon's solution to the problem of good humour. Rather than adopting a dull intermediate position, as one can arguably find in Aristotle's account, Xenophon presents the virtue of good humour as the *combination of opposites*. Socrates is an improved *bômolochos* and a part-time, unusually interesting, *agroikos*. He is Xenophon's ideal *spoud(ai)ogeloios*.³⁸

Writing imitative literature rather than discursive philosophy, Xenophon had a natural incentive to pursue the colourful rather than the bland. As Plato knew only too well, calm, measured speech is not the most entertaining.³⁹ The combination of serious and humorous adds to the attractiveness of the entertainment that Socrates provides, just as the contrast between light and dark is essential for good paintings and photographs.⁴⁰ Just as he leaves *agroikoi* and *bômolochoi* on stage for the reader to enjoy, so too Xenophon allows aspects of both to co-exist in Socrates. Seriousness provides the immunity from degradation Socrates needs to enable him behave as a near-*bômolochos* without damage, and the coarse humour offsets the ponderousness of the serious discourse. The fact that Socrates employs both of the two opposite forms of behaviour contributes also to his elusiveness. Since he may be either serious or joking at any moment, his words keep the listeners focussed and perplexed, and all the more so when he mixes humorous and serious in a single passage or speaks ambiguously.

In a surprising number of cases, however, Socrates uses humour (or humorous insult) in a straightforward way as an attention-grabbing device to introduce a serious or semi-serious discourse.⁴¹ His claim that he wishes to learn to dance draws his first laugh, and leads to a semi-serious discourse on the virtues of aerobic exercise. His claim that he is a pimp draws another laugh, and gains attention for a serious discourse on the value of self-presentation. The beauty contest provides an opportunity for ethical lessons about the value of physical beauty.⁴² Socrates devotes special attention to preparing the

they are trying to have a good time, Antisthenes makes Xenophon's Socrates look good. See D.L. Gera, 'Xenophon's Socrateses', in M. Trapp (ed.), *Socrates from Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2007), 45–6.

³⁸ See D.L. Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre, and Literary Technique* (Oxford, 1993), 163 n. 39. The term does not appear in Xenophon's writings.

³⁹ See Plato on imitative poetry (*Resp.* 397d, 398a–b).

⁴⁰ According to Huss (n. 21), all *kaloï kagathoi* exhibit some modulation between serious and humorous; the combination of *spoudê* and *paidia* gives Xenophon's *kalos kagathos* a virtue of *eucharis* (65, on *Symp.* 1.1). Most of Socrates' companions (with the exception of Hermogenes) display this quality. Critobulus, the advocate of pleasure, makes a humorous but serious speech on the value of beauty; Charmides makes a humorous but serious speech on the advantages of poverty; and Antisthenes, the advocate of virtue, makes an ironic speech about the true nature of wealth. But Socrates' speech is both more ridiculous and more serious than any of the others.

⁴¹ The idea that a serious lesson should be introduced by a joke was picked up in the Rabbinic literature. The *amora* Rabbah used to open every class with a joke (Talmud Bavli, *Shabat* 30b, *Pesachim* 117a). A Rabbinic variation on the theme of *spoud(ai)ogeloion* appears in Talmud Bavli *Berachot* 30b in expositions of the Biblical phrase *gilu bir'adah* ('rejoice with trembling', Tehilim 2.11).

⁴² Hahnemann (n. 4).

audience for his sympotically inappropriate lecture in chapter eight. First he reprimands Hermogenes for being too serious as a way of pre-empting criticism of his own overly-serious speech (*Symp.* 6.1–2). Then he uses an imitation of a courtesan to grab attention before the speech (8.4–6). By using humour as means to introduce a serious lesson, Socrates transforms the off-colour jokes from vulgar displays into valuable educational tools, and at the same time makes his serious speeches less offensive.⁴³

This mode of behaviour makes Xenophon's Socrates much more interesting and entertaining than anything we can find in Aristotle's *eutrapelos*. Aristotle never considered the possibility of bridging the gap between *bômolochos* and *agroikos* by combining them, even though the term *spoud(ai)ogeloios* was available since at least the time of Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and even though both Xenophon's and Plato's Socrates exhibit variations of this quality. Unlike Xenophon and Plato, Aristotle himself rarely mixes humour with philosophy in his voluminous writings, so it would not be surprising if he never examined the humour of Socrates, although he may have done so in his lost work on comedy. While Aristotle offers precious little discussion of techniques of entertainment in his discussion of *eutrapelia*, for Xenophon expertise in entertainment is an important aspect of virtue. Early in the evening Socrates comments that *eleutheroi* ought to be able to entertain themselves without relying on hired hands (*Symp.* 3.2). If an *eleutheros* should be able to compete successfully with hired entertainers in the same arena, virtuous behaviour is not just an ethical ideal, it is also a form of art.

SOCRATIC TECHNIQUES

To understand Xenophon's picture of Socrates as an ideal humourist, we need to examine the techniques he uses for attracting attention, entertaining and educating his audience. His treatment of dance, combining several typical characteristics of Socratic humour, can serve as an example (*Symp.* 2.15–20). Socrates pulls in the listeners by focussing on an erotic subject—the beauty of the young dancer. His comment that the boy looks more beautiful in motion than when still (*Symp.* 2.15) serves to abstract listeners from the visual beauty and lead them to wonder about the source of that beauty. Charmides understands that Socrates is praising the effect of knowledge and skill, imparted by a teacher, in enhancing beauty.⁴⁴ Philippus, deliberately misinterpreting the comment, engages in a ludicrous dance, effectively disproving the thesis that motion in itself contributes to beauty (*Symp.* 2.21–3). Socrates then points to a practical benefit of the dance, commenting that moving all the parts of the body—neck, legs, and arms—makes the body more *euphoros* (agile or elegant?). Having abstracted from the boy's beauty in two ways, Socrates then offers a frontal attack on aesthetic beauty. Turning to the dance instructor he raises a laugh by asking for lessons, claiming that he will make use of them to perform a dance.⁴⁵ He then uses this ridiculous notion as an

⁴³ See *Mem.* 4.1.1. On the educational function of humour in Xenophon see K. Jazdzewska, 'Laughter in Plato's and Xenophon's *Symposia*', in G. Danzig, D. Johnson and D. Morrison (edd.), *Plato and Xenophon: Comparative Studies* (Leiden and Boston, 2018), 187–207 and Hahnemann (n. 4).

⁴⁴ This is part of a general point about the role of the soul in enhancing beauty which is reflected in Socrates' profession of ability as a pimp; see G. Danzig, 'Xenophon's *Symposium*', in M.A. Flower (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Xenophon* (Cambridge, 2016), 132–51.

⁴⁵ In *Euthydemus* Socrates claims to be taking lessons in music and to be interested in learning eristic as well (272c; see also *Lach.* 201ab).

entrée to a semi-serious disquisition on the advantages of aerobic exercise. The lesson is not merely that aerobic exercise is valuable; by drawing attention to his own ugly appearance as a dancer, Socrates deflates any erotic interest that the boy may have aroused. Socrates will continue to make erotic desire laughable, and will continue to use erotic references to draw attention to valuable lessons as the evening continues.

The scene does not end there. To prove what he said, Socrates calls on Charmides as a witness to his dancing at sunrise (*Symp.* 2.19).⁴⁶ Charmides affirms the truth of Socrates' words, saying that at first he thought Socrates had gone mad, but that after he explained himself with words like those he used just now, he agreed with him, and took up shadow-boxing. What is the point of this additional manoeuvre? Does Socrates really need to affirm the truth of his claim that he has danced previously? Huss has argued that it is a ruse, and that Socrates has neither danced alone at sunrise nor been caught at it by Charmides.⁴⁷ If so, the 'proof' of Socrates' sincerity is actually an additional bluff.⁴⁸ In any case, Charmides is the only one who knows whether this did or did not happen, and he is suddenly called on to play along with the claim in front of the others. Socrates adds to the dynamics of his performance by bringing a member of the audience into his act, thus breaking down the barrier between performer and audience. This is a special feature of Socratic humour that Socrates will use again. These manoeuvres may not raise a laugh, but they keep the audience off-balance, and prevent them from drawing simplistic conclusions about his character and behaviour.

Socrates' stunts get progressively more off-colour as the evening progresses. When it comes his turn to speak of the knowledge in which he takes most pride, he solemnly claims to be most proud of his expertise in pimping (*mastropeia*, 3.10). This will leave the audience in suspense, wondering how exactly he will explain this bizarre claim in the next round.⁴⁹ He confuses them further by immediately denying that he has ever actually practised the trade (*Symp.* 3.10). This comment relieves the suspicion that he may be a pimp,⁵⁰ but at the same time increases the tension about how he will explain the boast, since his denial of practice implies that he used the term literally. Before he gets a chance to clarify his meaning in the next round of speeches, Charmides accuses him of another form of misbehaviour: rubbing shoulders with Critobulus while studying a book together. The rubbing of bodies is used elsewhere by Socrates as a euphemism for sexual relations.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Compare Plato's *Symp.* 216e–17a, where Alcibiades once 'caught' Socrates when his inner being was open.

⁴⁷ See Huss (n. 21), 149–52, 155 on *Symp.* 2.17, 2.19, and 'The dancing Sokrates and the laughing Xenophon, or the other *Symposium*', *AJPh* 120 (1999), 381–409. This may imitate Plato's Socrates who pretended that he learned about erotics from Diotima.

⁴⁸ As Xenophon's Cyrus says, there is nothing wrong with inventing stories to entertain others (*Cyr.* 2.2.12). That makes one 'witty' (ἄστεῖοι) and 'charming' (εὐχάρητες), and Socrates also has a good lesson in mind.

⁴⁹ As David Konstan reminds me, Plato's Socrates uses a similar tactic when he explains the meaning of his practice of midwifery in *Th.* 149a–51c.

⁵⁰ Is Xenophon suggesting that a misunderstanding of Socrates' joke led to the charge that Socrates encourages shameful work? Compare *Mem.* 1.2.56–7 with 2.7–9, where Xenophon argues that Socrates encouraged seemingly shameful work, but not for a shameful purpose.

⁵¹ In *Mem.* 1.2.30 Socrates compares Critias to a pig rubbing himself on a stone. The image of the boy as a stone perfectly fits Socrates' description of the lack of mutual pleasure in sexual relations between an older lover and his boy (*Symp.* 8.21). The use of a euphemism for sexual relations recalls Aristotle's preference for *huponoia*.

Did this really happen? Charmides may be making this up to pay Socrates back for involving him in his previous ruse.⁵² Although he did not initiate this episode, Socrates uses the sexual reference as an opportunity to throw cold water on erotic thoughts. Admitting his guilt, Socrates loudly claims that he still feels the harmful effects of that touch, and adjures Critobulus to keep a distance in the future (*Symp.* 4.27–8). His acquiescence to the (possibly fictional) charges implies that they are true. But Socrates' reaction, placing the blame on Critobulus, seems less than sincere, since it implies that Socrates has no control over himself. By these surprising statements, Socrates keeps his listeners off-balance, wondering what is true and what is false.

There ensues a dispute about the relative values of wisdom and beauty for the purpose of seducing young men. Socrates insists paradoxically not that his wisdom is better than Critobulus' beauty, but that he is more beautiful than Critobulus, and he challenges him to a beauty contest (*Symp.* 4.20). Only after this interchange is concluded does Socrates have a chance to explain that he meant pimping in a metaphorical sense, as the art of education, of which he boasts elsewhere (*Ap.* 20). So, too, his boast that he is more beautiful than Critobulus is transformed into a disquisition on the utility of his facial features. We thus have an interweaving of episodes with an ABAB structure, and in both cases an explanation that retroactively defuses the outrageous boast. As Hahnemann points out, this entire scene, culminating in the prospect of kissing a donkey on the lips, is designed to throw cold water on the erotic impulses of guests such as Charmides.⁵³ But we may also note that Socrates' boast reverses the usual pattern: while other participants boasted about high accomplishments, and then undermined them in the explanation, Socrates boasts about a degraded skill, and then explains it in elevated terms.

The scene does not end here. Just as he involved Charmides in his dancing gag, so too Socrates draws Antisthenes into his pimping routine. Without any provocation, Socrates turns to Antisthenes and accuses him of being the pimp after all, adding that he is a match-maker as well (*Symp.* 4.61). This gratuitous insult serves as a pretext for one of the truly elevated comments of the evening: a short disquisition on friendship (4.62–4). Just as he converts his claim to be a pimp into a reference to his educational activities, so too Socrates converts this insult into a beautiful tribute to his friendship with Antisthenes. In all these cases, erotic jokes and humorous insults serve as attention-grabbing devices for educational lessons.

In chapter eight, Xenophon tells us that Socrates turned to a new topic, eros. Recalling Plato's Phaedrus, he says that eros is a great god and that everyone in the room is its devotee. Recalling Plato's Socrates, he makes it his business to refer to the erotic passion of everyone in the room. However, he has nothing to say for Antisthenes, and asks if he is the only one who loves nothing or no one (8.3–6):

Do you alone, Antisthenes, love no one? By the gods, he said, I love someone very much; it is you! Socrates, making fun of this, said effeminately, Don't make troubles for me right now! And Antisthenes said, How transparently you always do such things, acting as your own pimp. At one time you use the *daimonion* as an excuse not to speak with me, and at another time you are busy with something [or someone] else.

In the name of the gods, replied Socrates, just don't beat me. Your other harsh treatment I can bear with a smile. But, he said, let's keep your love for me a secret, since you don't love me for my soul, but for my good looks.

⁵² See Danzig (n. 44), 149–50.

⁵³ Hahnemann (n. 4).

Socrates responds to Antisthenes' profession of love by offering his raciest performance of the evening, presenting himself in the guise of a female courtesan. In a sense, Socrates is offering Antisthenes an opportunity to fulfil his claim that he visits the most unattractive women (*Symp.* 4.38): what woman could be as ugly as Socrates? Given his evident lack of charms, proven already in the beauty contest, Socrates' claim that he has no time for Antisthenes right now (presumably because he is busy with other customers—see *Mem.* 3.11.16–18) refutes Antisthenes' claim that ugly women are grateful for his visits. As Antisthenes says, Socrates is his own pimp: just as he advises Theodote to be sparing with her charms, so too he acts as his own pimp by pretending that he does not have time for Antisthenes.

This scene is as potentially self-degrading as anything Philippos ever did. Why then does it not damage Socrates' sterling image? I have offered some possible explanations above. But if we take a clue from Socrates' previous behaviour we find that this gag too serves a purpose. Socrates is about to launch into an inappropriately serious harangue about heavenly infatuation, in which sexual relations between men are completely ruled out. Such a speech might sound heavy-handed coming from a less outlandish speaker. Socrates' routine serves both to capture the audience's attention, and to offset the gravity and preciousness of the long diatribe. It is the use of humour to attract attention to serious discourses, the consecutive employment of the ridiculous and the serious, that creates and preserves Socrates' sterling image.

ARETÊ AS A COMBINATION OF OPPOSITES

If virtuous humour involves the combination of opposites, the same may be true of other forms of ethical virtue. In contrast to Aristotle, Xenophon never invokes the concept of *hexis* as an ethical quality and he does not speak of the mean as an ethical norm. His portraits of virtue tend to highlight the combination of opposites. With regard to courage, Xenophon advises both daring and caution;⁵⁴ with regard to pleasure, Xenophon's Socrates advises abstinence as a means of enhancing pleasure (e.g. *Mem.* 1.6.5); with regard to justice, Cyrus both obeys the law and deviates from it. As Sandridge shows, Cyrus' *philanthropia* makes him gentle to others,⁵⁵ but he also loves killing both animals (*Cyr.* 1.4.5–8; cf. *Anab.* 1.9.6) and people (*Cyr.* 1.4.20–4). In all these cases, Xenophon is far from promoting an Aristotelian model of the moderate man who avoids the extremes.

This notion is not unique to Xenophon. In the *Laws*, Plato argued that a wise individual must be acquainted with opposites, especially in the case of humour, but also in every other case (*Leg.* 816de; see also *Resp.* 606c):

For it is impossible to grasp the serious without the comic, or any contrary without the other, if one is going to be wise; but it is also impossible to do both, if one is going to partake of virtue even a little.

⁵⁴ *Mem.* 3.1.6. See D. Johnson, 'Courage in Xenophon', in G. Danzig, D.M. Johnson and D. Konstan (edd.), *Xenophon's Virtues* (forthcoming).

⁵⁵ N.B. Sandridge, *Loving Humanity, Learning, and Being Honored: The Foundations of Leadership in Xenophon's Education of Cyrus* (Washington, DC, 2012), 66–9.

While recognizing the necessity of understanding opposites, Plato rejects the idea that one should act in accordance with the opposites. Wisdom demands a full and unlimited range, but virtue for Plato, as for Aristotle, limits the range of actions one may perform.

This late Platonic understanding of virtue does not match Xenophon's portrait of Socrates or even that of Plato himself.⁵⁶ It is not easy to compare the humorous techniques used by Plato's Socrates with what we have seen of Xenophon's Socrates: Plato's Socrates is far subtler than Xenophon's in his humour, and does not engage in the kind of gags that Xenophon's Socrates uses. As Clay has argued, in *Symposium* Plato demonstrated his mastery of both tragic and comic writing, but Clay did not analyse Socrates' behaviour in these terms.⁵⁷ We can get better results if we consider the portraits of another social virtue, truthfulness in self-presentation (*alêtheia*). Aristotle argues that the best mode of self-presentation is truthfulness about one's merits, as opposed to either excessive boasting or excessive self-denigration (*Eth. Nic.* 1127a12–1127b33). But neither Xenophon's nor Plato's Socrates displays such behaviour. In fact, none of the participants in Xenophon's *Symposium* offers an honest, straightforward self-assessment; instead they offer provocative boasts and then undermine them by admitting their deficiencies. Rather than finding a dull mean between boasting and self-deprecation, here too Xenophon portrays people who combine both extremes.⁵⁸ Socrates does not diverge from this pattern, even if, as I noted above, he reverses the sequence used by other guests, first boasting about expertise in a degraded profession (*mastropeia*) and then explaining it as referring to education for political success (*Symp.* 4.56–60). So too, in Plato's *Symposium* Socrates does not present himself in the straightforward undramatic manner that Aristotle later recommends. Rather he combines outrageous boasting with something like Aristotle's *eirôneia*, a claim of less than what one deserves (*Eth. Nic.* 1127a23–4). So despite their many differences in other ways, when it comes to these social virtues, there is a genuine commonality between Plato's and Xenophon's Socrates.

The notion is even more widespread. In describing the qualities of a good military leader, Xenophon's Socrates advises combining numerous seemingly contradictory traits (*Mem.* 3.1.6; see also *Cyr.* 1.6.27, 1.6.31):

The general must prepare what is needed for the war, and must provide for the needs of the soldiers; he must be inventive, get things done, take care of things, be strong and clever, both kind and brutal, simple and scheming, guarding and thievish, wasteful and rapacious, a giver of gifts and a greedy bastard, cautious and bold; and a good strategist must possess many other natural and learned qualities.⁵⁹

This description of the successful general places the same emphasis on versatility that we have found in the portrayal of excellent humour. In both cases the emphasis is on

⁵⁶ Quite possibly, the statement in *Laws* is a reaction to Xenophon's portrait of Socrates in *Symposium*. For possible Platonic responses to Xenophon see G. Danzig, 'Introduction to the comparative study of Plato and Xenophon' and N. Humble, 'Xenophon and Plato on Sparta', both in G. Danzig, D. Johnson and D. Morrison (edd.), *Plato and Xenophon: Comparative Studies* (Leiden and Boston, 2018), 1–30 and 547–75.

⁵⁷ D. Clay, 'The tragic and comic author of the *Symposium*', *Arion* 2.2 (1975), 238–61. For a sophisticated effort to describe Plato's use of *spoudaiogeloion* in the *Symposium*, see A. Stavru, 'Platone, il dialogo socratico e lo spoudaiogeloion', *Estetica. Studi e Ricerche* 1/2020, 223–40.

⁵⁸ On Xenophon's conception of virtue, see G. Danzig, 'Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon on the ends of virtue', in G. Danzig, D. Johnson and D. Morrison (edd.), *Plato and Xenophon: Comparative Studies* (Leiden and Boston, 2018), 340–64.

⁵⁹ This list may have been inspired by Plato's list of the qualities of eros (*Symp.* 203d).

performance rather than state of character, because for Xenophon that is what virtue is all about.⁶⁰

This commonality points to a model of virtue as a combination of opposites that preceded the more moderate model offered by Plato in the *Laws* and later developed in more detail by Aristotle.⁶¹ This model emphasizes versatility of behaviour and depends on situational judgement to a greater degree than Aristotle's. On this model, one needs to use practical wisdom not merely to calibrate one's practiced inclination for action, but to choose between very different, even contrary, modes of behaviour.⁶² Since nothing is simply good in Xenophon's view (*Mem.* 3.8, 4.6), it is essential that a person be able to employ or not employ a trait of character at the appropriate time and in the appropriate way. This model offers a solution to one of the central ethical issues highlighted later by Aristotle. For Aristotle ethics is not simply about action, it is also, and most importantly, about being a certain kind of person. Xenophon's Socrates may not have a fixed disposition in regard to humor, but the fact that he is capable of employing the actions of a *bômolochos* and an *agroikos* shows he is neither one nor the other of these two vicious types.

CONCLUSIONS

Socrates is a unique figure in *Symposium*, but he is unique only in the sense that he embodies virtue to a higher degree than others. That does not mean that everyone should imitate Socrates, any more than everyone should imitate Cyrus. Xenophon recognized that different natures should observe different modes of behaviour (see *Mem.* 1.3.14, 4.1). Johnson has argued that courage is embodied differently by a leader and a follower.⁶³ Although Socrates is an exemplary figure, he is not necessarily the sole paradigm of virtue. Indeed, in Xenophon's view each person has his or her own unique recipe for creating *aretê* out of a combination of disparate qualities.⁶⁴ Most of the participants in the *Symposium* are *kaloï kagathoi*, and they all possess some admirable degree of virtue, even if it is not the supreme virtue of Socrates.

The idea that *aretê* implies versatility is an old idea, going back at least to the *polytropos* hero of the *Odyssey*. So too is the more moderate view of virtue as an intermediate state, found in a remarkably explicit form at least as early as the *Theognidea* (1.335–6). Before Aristotle, these views of virtue existed side by side. The two views may well have been applied to different virtues, or to different aspects of virtue. Even for Xenophon, not every virtuous quality is a combination of opposites:

⁶⁰ See G. Danzig, 'Xenophon on virtue: an overview', in G. Danzig, D.M. Johnson and D. Konstan (edd.), *Xenophon's Virtues* (forthcoming). See also D. Wolfsdorf, 'Civic and anti-civic ethics', in J. Billings and C. Moore (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Sophists* (Cambridge, 2023), 306–33 for a compatible effort to reconstruct pre-Platonic concepts of virtue.

⁶¹ Plato's description of the appropriate modes of discourse in *Republic* (Books 2–3, 376d–403c) is closer to Aristotle than to Socrates.

⁶² Although Xenophon does not have a defined conception of *phronêsis*, his concern with practical reasoning is evident throughout his writings. For a comparison between the two authors' conceptions of practical reasoning, see C. Mársico, 'Preeminent in φρόνησις: Xenophon and Aristotle on the intellectual virtues', in G. Danzig, D.M. Johnson and D. Konstan (edd.), *Xenophon's Virtues* (forthcoming).

⁶³ Johnson (n. 54).

⁶⁴ See Danzig (n. 60) for this notion and for the idea that *aretê* is a single whole.

enkrateia is not, and neither, presumably, is *eusebeia* or *sôphrosunê*. Each virtuous quality has its own specific character.⁶⁵ Xenophon tolerates this variety because of his fidelity to the phenomena, his lack of a systematizing theory of virtue. This fidelity makes his writings an exceptional resource for understanding virtue in ancient Greece.

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⁶⁵ D. Konstan, 'Before virtue', in G. Danzig, D.M. Johnson and D. Konstan (edd.), *Xenophon's Virtues* (forthcoming).