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Alcibiades: Why the Politically Ambitious cannot be Educated to Philosophic Virtue

Tori Nickol
Carroll College, Helena, MT

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Honors Thesis Topic:

Alcibiades: Why the Politically Ambitious cannot be Educated to Philosophic Virtue

By

Tori Nickol

Professor: Dr. Parsons

Tori

SIGNATURE PAGE

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Abstract

In the *Alcibiades I* dialogue, Socrates attempts to educate the extremely ambitious and beautiful Alcibiades to a life of philosophic virtue. Despite this education, Alcibiades proceeds to a life of infamy and tyrannical aspirations, which prompts one to ask the question: what are the limits of a political individual in a philosophic life, and vice versa? Ultimately, an examination of the *Alcibiades I* dialogue reveals that political types generally fail as philosophers because they are dependent on the city for enabling their ignorance. Philosophers, by contrast, cannot be political men because they are too focused on the development of the individual as opposed to the growth of the city. It is this emphasis on the individual that leads Socrates to attempt an education of Alcibiades (despite being aware of the dangers such an education may hold for the city)—promising, ambitious individuals ought to be educated in the hopes that they may become the best men, even if such a risk comes at the cost of an entire city.

Introduction

Alcibiades is perhaps the most infamous traitor in Athenian history, but before achieving notoriety, Alcibiades was recognized as one of Athens' most talented and ambitious youths. With great political aspirations in mind, Alcibiades is intercepted by Socrates before he can speak to the Athenian assembly. After talking with Socrates in the *Alcibiades I*, Alcibiades seems turned to a Socratic education, an education Socrates promises will aid Alcibiades in his political pursuits.

But a political man cannot be a philosopher, nor can a philosopher be truly involved in politics. In the paper that follows, I will explain how Socrates and Alcibiades illustrate the limits of philosophy and the dangers a philosophic education poses for a politically-minded individual. Ultimately, both Alcibiades and Socrates fail in their attempt to educate Alcibiades because Alcibiades' ideas of virtue, justice, and civic duty prevent him from becoming a true philosopher. Through an examination of these ideas it becomes clear that Socrates was aware that Alcibiades is incapable of a philosophic life, but educates him nonetheless because Socrates' hopes for Alcibiades as an individual outweighs his fear that Alcibiades will destroy Athens; therefore, Socrates' attempt at educating Alcibiades most importantly reveals that the ultimate aim of philosophy is the development of an individual, even if it comes at the cost of the entire city.

Alcibiades the Historical Figure

As a historical figure, Alcibiades is a prominent character in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Alcibiades becomes historically significant during the twelfth year of the war between Athens and Sparta, where he first serves Athens as a general but, over the course of the war, shifts his alliance to Sparta and ultimately finds himself in

Persia. The biological son of Clinias, an Athenian soldier, but an adopted ward of Pericles, the First Man of Athens, Alcibiades became a prominent figure in the Athenian political world “as a man still young in years for any other Hellenic city, but distinguished by the splendor of his ancestry” (Thucydides 5.43.2). However, although Alcibiades’ exceptional ambition propelled him to power and influence initially, it would eventually contribute to his exile from Athens and his ultimate turn from Athenian general to infamous traitor.

Alcibiades enters political life in the summer of the twelfth year of the Peloponnesian War during a time when Athens still held supreme power as an empire over Hellas. His first mention in political life is his leadership of the effort to cancel a peace treaty with Sparta after hearing that the Spartans had committed several infractions (Thucydides 5.42.2-5.43.2). Alcibiades’ plan is opposed by a fellow Athenian, Nicias, against whom Alcibiades would compete during his time in Athens. However, Nicias’s proposal for the Sicilian invasion failed and the Athenians, as a result, made a treaty with the Argives instead, following Alcibiades’ suggestions (5.56.5). Following this interaction Alcibiades becomes a general and leads his troops through the Peloponnesus gathering Athenian allies, which increases his popularity with the people (5.52.2).

During the summer of the seventeenth year of the war, Athens votes to invade Sicily. Nicias vehemently opposes the plan (Thucydides 6.10). In fact, Nicias is so opposed to Athens’ engagement in a Sicilian war that he calls for a second vote on the matter—an extremely unusual event in the assembly (6.14.1). In his request for a second vote, Nicias also assassinates the character of Alcibiades, rebuking him for his youth and excessive personal life. In response, advocates of the expedition speak to the assembly

and of these the “warmest advocate” is Alcibiades. Alcibiades “wished to thwart Nicias as his political opponent . . . and who was, besides, exceedingly ambitious of a command by which he hoped to reduce Sicily and Carthage, and personally to gain in wealth and reputation by means of his success” (6.15.2). In his speech, Alcibiades argues that he is the most worthy of command and that his energy and leadership will necessarily lead to a victory over Sicily (6.16-6.17). Upon the conclusion of Alcibiades’ speech, the Athenians are even more enthusiastic about an expedition to Sicily, which provokes a rebuttal from Nicias, who (hoping to dissuade the Athenians) argues that such a mission would be overwhelming and require nearly all of Athens’ forces and attention (6.19-6.20). However, Nicias’s speech has the opposite effect and actually increases fervor for the mission (6.24.2).

As the preparations for the Sicilian expedition commence, the stone Hermae in the city are vandalized by an unknown culprit (6.26.1-2). An investigation of the mutilation implicates Alcibiades and his alleged involvement is exaggerated by “those who could least endure him.” These accusers argued that “the mutilation of the Hermae were part and parcel a scheme to overthrow the democracy, and that nothing of all this had been done without Alcibiades” (6.28.2). Alcibiades denies any involvement in the destruction of the Hermae and volunteers to stand trial before departing for Sicily (6.29.1). His offer to delay the expedition for his trial was rejected, however, because his opposition feared the people would support him and they secretly planned to summon him back to Athens later on a more damning charge (6.29.3).

Once the Athenians arrive in Sicily, they must rethink their strategy. Alcibiades suggests that the Athenian army ought to sow discord throughout Sicily in efforts of

inciting rebellion against Syracuse, the most powerful Sicilian city. Alcibiades predicts this will not only disrupt all of Sicily, but Athens could gain allies in the process and thus make the eventual attack on Syracuse more profitable (6.48.1). Alcibiades' plan is the most daring (particularly in comparison to Nicias's plan) and his plan receives support (6.50.1). During this time, however, an Athenian envoy comes to take Alcibiades back to stand trial for his alleged role in the defacing of the Hermae. In his absence, his opposition enflamed the fear and anger of the people and these elite now felt they could secure a guilty verdict (6.53.2). Alcibiades agrees to sail back to Athens in his own ship, but instead flees to the Peloponnesus (6.61.6). His failure to appear for trial leads Athens to condemn him to death in absentia (6.61.7).

In Sparta, Alcibiades embraces the Spartan lifestyle and advises Sparta on matters of war. Alcibiades urges Sparta to intervene in Syracuse as well as defends his actions and denies being a "traitor" because, according to him, he was compelled to leave Athens and he is therefore no longer an Athenian (6.92.3). He implores the Spartans to allow him to use his knowledge of Athenian plans to inform their decisions and the Spartans agree (6.93). Alcibiades continues influencing Spartan policy for the next several years.

During these years of advising, Alcibiades allegedly impregnates the wife of Agis, the Spartan king. Therefore, eager to depart from Sparta, Alcibiades gains permission to sail to Chios with a Spartan fleet in an effort to forge an alliance with Persia (8.12.2). Along his journey, Alcibiades encourages Athenian cities to revolt from Athens, eventually landing in Miletus (8.15-8.17). The Milesians revolt and upon this revolt the Spartan envoy, led by Alcibiades, forms an alliance with the Persians,

represented by Tissaphernes (8.17.3). For another year Alcibiades continues to serve Sparta.

However, the Spartans became suspicious of Alcibiades' true ambitions and this, combined with Agis's extreme dislike for Alcibiades, prompted an order from Sparta condemning Alcibiades to death (8.45.1). Alcibiades seeks refuge with Tissaphernes and begins interfering with the Spartan efforts. His interference included instructing Tissaphernes to lower the pay of Spartan soldiers and to refuse to pay those cities that revolted from the Athenian empire (8.45.2). Alcibiades also persuades Tissaphernes to prolong the war, allowing Sparta and Athens to destroy each other so they might be more easily taken by Persia later (8.46.1).

At the same time, however, Alcibiades gave this advice "not merely because he thought it really the best, but because he was seeking means to bring about his restoration to his country" (8.47.1). Alcibiades' scheme works and he negotiates with the Athenians that if they agree to take him back and establish an oligarchy, he will also persuade Tissaphernes (and, by extension, Persia) to support Athens (8.47.2). The Athenians agree and bring Alcibiades back to the city, demolishing the democracy at the same time (8.54.1). However, Tissaphernes makes unreasonable demands that the Athenians are unwilling to accept. Infuriated, they accuse Alcibiades of trickery and deceit and halted all efforts to negotiate with the Persians (8.56.4). After these negotiations are stopped, Athens begins to deteriorate into an oppressive oligarchy. This prompts the Athenian generals to recall Alcibiades in a desperate attempt, once more, to negotiate with the Persians (8.88.1). Alcibiades, realizing what is at stake, makes grandiose claims about the

influence he holds over Tissaphernes and the Athenians reinstate him as a general based on these lies (8.82.1).

As an Athenian general, Alcibiades “did the state a service, and one of the most outstanding kind” (8.86.4). His daring and innovation lead the Athenians to victory. However, his resurgence as a popular Athenian incited jealousy and fear in the oligarchs, who viewed him as a threat to their own power (8.89.4). Alcibiades remained a successful general and returned to Athens after the fall of the oligarchy.

At this time, Thucydides no longer provides insight on the life of Alcibiades. However, according to Plutarch, Alcibiades still lusted after glory and conducted more military excursions. Alcibiades left Athens with the intent to challenge Lysander, of Lacedaemonia, to a battle on the sea. While Alcibiades was away, charges were brought against him once again and once again Alcibiades abandoned the Athenian cause, this time permanently (Plutarch, “The Life of Alcibiades” 212.37). Soon after Alcibiades’ departure from the Athenian camp, Lysander defeated the Athenian forces and even captured Athens, establishing the rein of the Thirty Tyrants (212.38). At this time Alcibiades was still alive and took refuge in Phrygia, but Lysander’s troops pursued him, since he was still seen as a threat to Athens and Sparta (212.39). Upon finding his house, Lysander’s troops set his house on fire and Alcibiades was forced to flee; as he ran from the burning structure he was shot down with arrows and thus the infamous Alcibiades was killed.

Exegesis: *The Alcibiades I*

The *Alcibiades I* opens with Socrates addressing Alcibiades and it most likely takes place in a setting where the two are alone, given the personal nature of the

conversation that follows. Socrates begins by presuming a question from Alcibiades— why he (Socrates) ignored Alcibiades until this point despite the fact that he was the first lover of Alcibiades (Plato, *Alcibiades I* 103a). Although Socrates does not completely explain his reasons for avoiding Alcibiades, he suggests that a “demonic opposition” that has since abandoned him prevented him from pursuing Alcibiades (103b). Now that he is free of this opposition, Socrates endeavors to explain why Alcibiades thinks so highly of himself and scorned all previous lovers. Alcibiades, according to Socrates, finds himself great because of his appearance, his familial connections, and his wealth, though Socrates concedes that Alcibiades cares least for this last point (104a,c). What is most important to Alcibiades, according to Socrates, is “the power that is available to [him]” through Pericles (104b).

Alcibiades, who is silent during Socrates’ explanation, responds that Socrates has underestimated him. He then expresses that he had planned to approach Socrates and question him about his intentions and why he makes such a “nuisance” of himself, constantly appearing where Alcibiades happens to be. Socrates agrees to respond to Alcibiades, but only under the condition that Alcibiades listens and remains; Alcibiades agrees and awaits Socrates’ explanation (104d).

Reassured that Alcibiades will not wander away from him, Socrates delivers a speech to Alcibiades in which he reveals why he feels the need to approach Alcibiades at this time. According to Socrates, he knows Alcibiades better than he knows himself and he is therefore the most qualified to advise Alcibiades. It is clear, Socrates asserts, that Alcibiades is not content with those “superior qualities” which he attributes to himself. Alcibiades’ ambition is too great not to strive for the acquisition of “more” and it is this

ambition to which Socrates is drawn (105a). This ambition drives Alcibiades to pursue addressing the people of Athens, perhaps with the intent of proving “to the Athenians that [he] is deserving of being honored more than Pericles or anyone else who has ever existed and. . . that [he] will have very great power in the city.” Socrates claims that Alcibiades ambition has always been apparent to him, but it was not until Alcibiades acted on it that Socrates could approach him regarding his aspirations (105b-d). But now that Alcibiades has matured, Socrates is the only one who can “bestow the power” he desires (105e).

Alcibiades is skeptical in his response and suggests that Socrates has already decided how the dialogue will proceed, whether or not Alcibiades agrees with him (106a). Begrudgingly, Alcibiades inquires how Socrates could help him obtain the power he could not individually attain. Socrates interjects and assures Alcibiades that he will provide the information he seeks if Alcibiades will only answer the questions Socrates presents to lead him through the argument (106b). In the section of the dialogue that follows, Alcibiades offers very limited responses while Socrates reveals to him his own ignorance.

First, Socrates asks Alcibiades, “What is it that the Athenians have in mind to deliberate about that has caused you to get up to advise them? Are these matters that you have greater knowledge of than they?” (106c). This leading question prompts Alcibiades to respond that he surely knows better than the Athenians and for this reason he is a good advisor. He then makes two divisions of his knowledge: those matters that he knows and consequently advises on and those matters about which he does not know and therefore refrains from advising (107de).

Because Alcibiades feels qualified to advise the Athenians on their affairs, Socrates concludes that the sorts of affairs they are discussing are those which he knows. Consequently he pressures Alcibiades to reveal what these affairs involve; Alcibiades asserts that he may advise on war, or peace, or the other affairs of the city (107cd). Socrates then uses a series of analogies comparing these matters to gymnastics and music to investigate whom Alcibiades believes could be qualified to advise on these matters (108a-d). These analogies ultimately lead Socrates and Alcibiades to a discussion of what is “better,” a concept which Socrates then extends to the subject of war and peace (109a). Alcibiades, during this string of questioning, remains haughtily detached until Socrates inquires which is “better” in the question of waging war or keeping peace.

While the two are discussing war and peace, Socrates directs the conversation to a consideration of the just and unjust (109b). Alcibiades establishes his belief that war is usually waged against those who act “unjustly”—they deceive or act aggressively. Socrates then asks against whom (the just or the unjust) he plans to advise the Athenians wage war. Alcibiades responds by telling Socrates his question is a “terrible thing; for even if someone had it in his mind that war ought to be waged against those practicing the just things, he would not admit to it, at least” (109). Here, Alcibiades subtly exposes that this thought has indeed crossed his mind and he refrains from speaking it because attacking the “just” would not be noble; thus, Alcibiades reveals his attraction to the noble as well as the fact that waging war on the just (i.e., wars of empire) is something he considers. After this discussion of the business of war against the just or the unjust, Socrates further investigates Alcibiades on his knowledge of the just and unjust. He

succeeds in getting Alcibiades to admit that, at least at some point, he (Alcibiades) did not know the just and unjust (110a).

Alcibiades ultimately admits that he was ignorant of the just and unjust, at some point, because he states that he “investigated” those things at some point and Socrates points out that one cannot investigate that which one knows (110a). Alcibiades cannot say exactly when he did not know the just and unjust, because even when he did not know he supposed he knew. Here, Socrates exposes just how closely he followed Alcibiades during his youth because he tells Alcibiades that even when he (Alcibiades) was a child, it was clear that Alcibiades had some idea of the just and unjust. Socrates observed that even as a child Alcibiades, if he felt wronged, would “speak rather in a very loud and confident way about one or another of the children being wicked and unjust and behaving unjustly” (110b). After Socrates makes this point, Alcibiades exclaims that he knew clearly then, even as a child, that he was being treated unjustly. This exclamation suggests that knowledge of the just and unjust cannot be discovered, but Alcibiades has already asserted that he did not “learn” this knowledge either (110d). How, then, did Alcibiades come to know the just and unjust?

When Socrates puts that question to Alcibiades, Alcibiades supposes he “learned them the same way as everybody else . . . from the many” (110de). Socrates appears skeptical and presses Alcibiades to explain whether or not he finds the many adequate as teachers in “weighty matters.” Alcibiades answers him that the many can indeed teach some weighty subjects, using language as an example. To this point Socrates agrees, stating the many can be good teachers of this because they possess, on the subject of language, what all good teachers ought to have: knowledge of the thing themselves

(111ab). Socrates and Alcibiades then agree that the standard for having knowledge of a thing is agreement with one another and not differing (111b). The example that the many can teach language, therefore, holds because the many agree among themselves. On more narrow topics like the definition of a human being or the best form with which to run, however, the many are not fit to teach because they do not reach a unanimous position (111e-112a). Once they have established this standard for good teaching Socrates asks Alcibiades if the many agree with each other concerning the just and the unjust and their affairs (112a). Alcibiades responds that there seems no issue upon which men disagree more; thus, Socrates leads Alcibiades to admit that he could not have come to know the just and the unjust from the many (112d).

It is significant that Alcibiades admits he could not have learned the just and the unjust from the many because his admission that he does not know actually highlights his (Alcibiades') skill in tracing the argument (113b). Thus, Socrates praises Alcibiades for teaching himself these things. In the midst of his praise for Alcibiades, Socrates leads Alcibiades to reexamine his "mad undertaking": to "teach what [he] does not know, having taken no trouble to learn it" (113c).

Upon reflection, Alcibiades posits that the Athenians rarely discuss the just and unjust because they are under the impression that these things are evident—because they do not deliberate over the just and unjust, they are unaware of the different opinions people hold on the issue; they therefore deceive themselves in believing that there is a unanimous opinion on the matter simply because they fail to discuss the just and the unjust. Instead, the Athenians focus on the advantageous things. This leads Alcibiades to another important conclusion: just and advantageous things are not necessarily "the same,

but many have profited from committing great injustices, and . . . there are others who performed just acts that were not to their advantage” (113d). Socrates does not disagree with Alcibiades, but presses him to explain how he came to know this difference (113e). Alcibiades is reluctant to answer Socrates’ inquiry, fearing that Socrates will refute this argument as he did with Alcibiades’ argument concerning how he discovered the just and unjust (113e-114a). Socrates, however, encourages Alcibiades to try to explain how he knows the just and the advantageous are two different things. In fact, Socrates suggests that explaining this difference to one man (Socrates) will prepare Alcibiades to speak in front of the Athenian assembly (114d).

Alcibiades is skeptical of Socrates’ proposition that he, Alcibiades, attempt to explain why the just and advantageous are two different things (114d). However, Socrates convinces Alcibiades that the only way for Alcibiades to be ready to go before the assembly of Athens is if he convinces himself that the just things are different from the advantageous things, and the best way of convincing himself is to hear it *from* himself (114e). Once Alcibiades has agreed to the task, Socrates begins his questions.

If some of the just things are advantageous and some are not, Socrates asks, does it also follow that some of the just things are noble and some are not? Alcibiades responds that the just things are never shameful, instead he asserts that they are always noble. However, he also concludes that some of the noble things are bad while some shameful things are good (115a). To illustrate this, Socrates provides the example of a friend or relative performing the “noble” service of aiding a comrade on the battlefield and then sustaining an injury or dying as a result of their nobility. Thus, although the act is noble and courageous, it has a “bad” effect: injury or death (115b). Socrates pauses the

argument here to consider courage and make a clear distinction that “coming to the aid of friends is not, therefore, noble and bad in the same respect, at least,” a conclusion to which Alcibiades agrees. This reasoning leads Alcibiades to a consideration of the relationship between nobility and courage (115c).

Socrates’ next question is whether courage is good or bad, and he asks Alcibiades to consider it in relation to himself—whether Alcibiades would choose for himself the good or bad things. Alcibiades answers that he would choose the good things (115c). “Then,” Socrates asks Alcibiades, “what do you say about courage? For what price would you choose to be deprived of it?” Alcibiades answers that he would rather die courageously than live as a coward, which leads Socrates to conclude that for Alcibiades, cowardice is the worst among the bad things, “on equality with death” (115d). Therefore, because life and courage are “most opposed to death and cowardice,” these are the things that Alcibiades desires most while death and cowardice are what he desires least (115e). From this, Socrates draws an important conclusion: that if an action is called “bad insofar as it produces something bad, [one] must call the other good insofar as it produces something good” (116a). That which it produces that is “good” is noble and that which is “bad” is shameful. Therefore, in the context of Socrates’ previous example of aid on the battlefield, the nobility of that act is not shameful to the extent that it is noble, nor is the shameful thing good to the extent that it is shameful (116ab). This critique of courage prompts Alcibiades to feel less self-sacrificial because he realizes that even though an action might be shameful and bad to some extent, it might also be noble and good.

In addition to the question of good and bad with nobility, Socrates asks if acting nobly is the same as acting well. Alcibiades observes that it is and agrees that those who

act well are happy. Their happiness comes from the acquisition of good things (116b). Both men therefore agree that because to act well is noble, to act well is also good. Alcibiades also states that the good things are advantageous (116c). Thus, Socrates directs Alcibiades to observe that those who practice noble things are, at the same time, practicing good things—this means that the just things are indeed advantageous (116d). Now that Alcibiades has admitted this, Socrates pushes him to analyze the apparent contradiction this new conclusion creates with his previous conclusion that the just and the advantageous are in fact different (116e).

Alcibiades then exclaims an oath, declaring that he himself does not entirely know what he is saying; instead he is simply wavering back and forth with his answers. Socrates says this ignorance, which he calls “wandering,” happens when one does not truly know what he is talking about. Thus, Alcibiades supposes that he has complete knowledge of the just and advantageous, the noble and the shameful, when he in fact does not, and that is why he “wanders” about (117bc). Socrates tells Alcibiades that he ought to at least recognize his own wandering, for when men are aware that they wander about, they entrust the action that they themselves do not know about to those who do know. To demonstrate his point, Socrates employs the example of a man who does not know how to sail a ship and consequently entrusts that duty to a pilot (117d). Thus, because these men know that they do not know, they do not do wrong. This poses the question: who does go wrong, since it is not, presumably, those who know (117e)?

Because those who recognize that they do not know entrust their actions to another and those who know do not go wrong, Socrates concludes that that it must be those who do not know but presume they do who go wrong (118a). And it follows that

the greatest wrongs happen in relation to the greatest things: the just, noble, good, and advantageous. Socrates then claims that if these are the things about which Alcibiades “wanders about,” then it must be the greatest things of which he is ignorant and, worse, he thinks he knows when he does not. This leads Socrates to conclude that Alcibiades is guilty of stupidity, “in its most extreme form” (118b). However, Socrates reassures him that most who are in Athens also live in this condition, except the very few. This leads Socrates to an examination of Pericles and an opportunity to promote his agenda to replace Pericles as Alcibiades’ guardian.

Under the argument that a wise man ought to make others wise if they are in his presence, Socrates asks Alcibiades whom has become wiser through association with Pericles (118e). Socrates points to the sons of Pericles whom Alcibiades asserts were born fools, and suggests that this means Pericles does not make others wise (118e-119a). In fact, when Socrates asks Alcibiades to name anyone in Athens, or even foreigners, who have been made wiser through association with Pericles, Alcibiades exclaims that he can name no one (119a). It is clear, therefore, that Pericles is not wise if none have become wiser through him.

After this conclusion about Pericles, Alcibiades suggests he and Socrates “take common counsel,” or approach the issue together (119b). This is significant because it is at this point that Socrates replaces Pericles as Alcibiades’ new “guardian.” Socrates then presses Alcibiades to consider how he might approach this problem of his own ignorance. Alcibiades answers that he will not necessarily have to go out of his way to learn how the men of the city approach the things of the city because these men are “ordinary” and Alcibiades thinks he will easily get the better of them simply on his presumption of the

superiority of his nature. In fact, Alcibiades goes so far as to ask, “why is it necessary to go out of one’s way to practice and learn?” (119bc). This response concerns Socrates because it reveals Alcibiades’ arrogance and laziness, two traits a student of the philosophic life cannot possess.

Socrates rebukes Alcibiades upon hearing this, saying that Alcibiades is “unworthy of [his] looks and other things that are [his]” if he is unwilling to learn. Alcibiades is also a fool, Socrates alleges, if he believes the men of Athens are those against whom he is competing (119c). Alcibiades should not concern himself with competing against his “fellow men,” but should instead focus on competing against other great men, like the leaders of armies or the Lacedaemonians and kings (119e). By mentioning the kings of Lacedaemonia and Persia, Socrates subtly suggests the importance of competing against those involved in wars, as Athens has a history of conflict with the two. He also makes a commentary on the type of man Alcibiades will need to be in order to compete with these types: he will necessarily need to become either a king or a tyrant (120bc). Alcibiades says this could be true, but what if these kings are actually no different from ordinary men?

Socrates admits that Alcibiades could make that supposition, but it would not be wise—if Alcibiades presumes these competitors are formidable and is afraid of them, he will be more likely to “take trouble over himself” (120d). This concern for himself will be greatly beneficial and, Socrates argues, appropriate since the supposition that these men are “ordinary” is incorrect. Socrates proceeds to make the argument that well-born lines produce superior natures, “and that those who are well-endowed by nature, if they are also brought up well, will become in this way perfect with a view to virtue” (120e). In

the dialogue that follows, Socrates elevates the lines of the Persians and Lacedaemonians while dismissing the lines of Athens for their baseness (and showing no regard for democracy in the process) (121a-d). A large part of Socrates' discussion is dedicated to the education of the Persians, which he suggests is superior to that of Alcibiades and Athens in general.

In his discussion of Persian education, Socrates focuses on the education of royalty, as this is the group against whom Alcibiades will compete. Young Persian royals are educated by the "royal tutors," each chosen for his reputation as the best in some area of repute: the wise, the just, the moderate, and the courageous (121e-122a). The wisest teaches piety and the "kingly things," the most just teaches justice, the most moderate teaches habituation, and the most courageous teaches courage (122a). Socrates juxtaposes this with the inferior education Alcibiades received, an education directed by Pericles (this provides Socrates with another opportunity to distance Alcibiades from his adoptive father) (122b). Thus, Socrates instills fear in Alcibiades that he is truly ill-equipped to compete with these better educated men. Not only are they better educated, Socrates points out that even their wealth exceeds that of Alcibiades (122d).

It is so obvious, in fact, that Alcibiades is inferior to his competitors in "beauty and size and lineage and wealth and nature of the soul," Socrates tells him that even the mothers of these royals would think Alcibiades mad if he thought he was capable of competing against them without proper training (123e). Socrates' final attempt to make Alcibiades realize the importance of his education comes through this use of foreign women in an attempt to shame Alcibiades. Socrates asks, "Does it not seem shameful that the women of our enemies have a better idea what sort of people we ought to be to make

the attempt against them than we do ourselves?” (124a). His strategy works and Alcibiades is now interested in “taking trouble over himself” and is prepared to heed Socrates’ advice on how to do so (123b).

Once Alcibiades makes it clear he does indeed want to learn, it is Socrates who suggests they take “common counsel,” for he admits he and Alcibiades are the same—except in one important respect: Socrates claims his guardian is superior to Alcibiades’ guardian, Pericles. Socrates makes this claim because he reveals his guardian is “God” (124c). Alcibiades bluntly states that Socrates must be joking. Socrates admits that perhaps he is, but regardless of who his guardian is, the two must take trouble over themselves. Alcibiades asks him how they will go about this and, again, Socrates answers that it will be done in common (124d). He then sets out their common goal: to become as excellent as possible (124e).

Following an intense line of questioning by Socrates, Alcibiades concludes that, in their pursuit of excellence they want to become excellent in the virtue of good men with respect to the affairs practiced by Athenians and “gentlemen” (124e). The term “gentlemen” gives Socrates pause and he asks Alcibiades if these men are sensible or insensible. Alcibiades answers that they are sensible and agrees that to whatever degree each gentleman is sensible, he is also good. To the extent that he is insensible, however, he is bad (125a). Sensing a contradiction, Socrates employs the example of a shoemaker—such a man is “good” when it comes to making footwear, but “bad” where the production of clothing is concerned. Thus, Socrates suggests that Alcibiades’ argument implies that “the same man . . . is both bad and good” (125ab). Alcibiades agrees that it is indeed so. However, when Socrates asks if this means that good men are

also bad, Alcibiades disagrees with him. This prompts Socrates to ask Alcibiades whom he means by the good. The good, according to Alcibiades, are those capable of ruling the city (125b).

Once he has established good men as those who are capable of ruling the city, Alcibiades establishes that those who are ruled are doing something. Specifically, the ruled are “engaging in dealings with one another and making use of one another,” such is the way of living in a city (125c). Socrates adds to this description, noting that the ruled command those who make use of other human beings. Thus, from this Alcibiades decides the “good” are those capable of ruling “those in the city who have a part in the regime and engage in dealings with respect to one another” (125d). But what, Socrates wonders, is the knowledge required of those who have a part in the regime? Alcibiades answers that this type of knowledge is called good counsel, and is that which is directed “toward the better managing and preserving of the city” (125e-126a). If a city is to be well-managed and preserved, Socrates reasons that it must function similarly to the body, wherein some things are present and some are absent. Alcibiades suggests that for a city to be well tended and managed friendship is present and hatred and factional divisions are absent. (125c).

Alcibiades’ description of how a city ought to be managed leads to an examination of friendship. Alcibiades states that “concord” is synonymous with friendship. In the context of the city, this concord means that one must reach an understanding with himself and with others (126de). However, Socrates points out that if this logic holds true then men and women cannot be friends, because there are some things that are distinctly “manly” in their learning and application and others that are

distinctly womanly—consequently, there can be no concord between men and women, which means there can be no friendship (127a). If there is no friendship within a city, perhaps that indicates that the city is not well managed.

This leads Socrates to ask if cities are not well managed if each person is left to practice his or her own things. Although this conclusion seems to be what Alcibiades' previous argument indicates, he denies this and states that the opposite is actually true: cities are well managed if people are left to practice their own things (127b). Socrates alerts Alcibiades to the tension in his argument and asks him to explain what things people practice when they are left to practice their own things. According to Alcibiades, they practice the just things (127c). However, Alcibiades cannot definitively say if this means that friendship comes to exist between those who practice the just things. When Socrates presses him to decide what he means, Alcibiades dramatically admits he is lost in the argument: "By the gods, Socrates! I myself do not know what I mean. I am afraid it has escaped me that I have been in a most shameful condition for some time" (127d).

Alcibiades' moment of despair provides Socrates with the opportunity he has been waiting for—he assures Alcibiades that it is not too late for him to change himself and Socrates can provide assistance. Socrates promises that if Alcibiades looks for a way out of his ignorance and "god is willing" that both Socrates and Alcibiades will become better (127e). The question that Alcibiades must consider, according to Socrates, is how a man takes trouble over himself. Socrates asks Alcibiades if it might be when a man takes trouble over his own things that he takes trouble over himself (128a). Alcibiades is not sure what Socrates means and Socrates consequently employs a number of examples concerning how the hand, feet, and body each tend to their own things. Thus, Alcibiades

agrees with Socrates' conclusion that it is "when someone makes a thing better" that he has taken trouble correctly (128b). However, the two also come to the realization that there is a distinction between taking trouble over oneself and taking trouble over that which belongs to oneself. And when one takes trouble over the things that belong to him he is not necessarily taking trouble over himself (128cd). Despite these determinations, Alcibiades still cannot identify the exact art through which one makes himself better.

Alcibiades' failure to name the art through which a man can better himself is not surprising, according to Socrates. Socrates notes that if men are ignorant of what they are themselves, they will never be able to recognize the art that makes them better (128e). Therefore, before one can name this art of bettering oneself, he must know himself, a task that Alcibiades declares all men are capable of undertaking, but that is quite difficult. Perhaps Alcibiades is incapable of understanding his soul because his love of possessions renders him unable to recognize anything except that which is external. Socrates agrees that the task is difficult, but assures Alcibiades it is the only way men may ever learn what it is to take care of themselves (129a).

In their attempt to figure out what men are, Socrates asks Alcibiades if the "user" and what he is using are different. Alcibiades agrees that they are, after hearing Socrates' example that the "the cutter and user, then, is one thing, what he uses to cut another" (129c). But Socrates complicates his example when he asks about the shoemaker, who uses his eyes and hands while doing his work. Thus, is the shoemaker something different than his hands, his feet, or his whole body (129de)? Alcibiades sees the tension in his argument, but still can offer no answer when Socrates asks him, "Then whatever is man?" (129e).

In the discussion that follows, Socrates and Alcibiades attempt to answer this question. They establish that the man does indeed use his body, and the thing that uses the body is the soul. In its use of the body, Socrates says the soul “rules” it. Thus, Socrates concludes that man can be considered one of three things: “soul or body or both together as a whole” (130a). However, Socrates describes how the body cannot rule itself, nor can the soul and body rule together because this would mean they were co-rulers, and this is not the case (130b). Thus, Socrates declares that man is either nothing or man is the soul (130c). Men are the soul because there is nothing so dominant in men as the soul—the definition of the man as soul has important implications for Socrates’ and Alcibiades’ next discussion concerning the art of conversation.

Socrates explains that when two people associate with each other through speeches, they are communicating one soul to another. Socrates applies the argument to themselves, for when he was speaking and Alcibiades listening, Socrates claims that his speeches were directed to Alcibiades’ soul. Alcibiades agrees and Socrates then reasons that “it is the soul, therefore, that we are bid to become acquainted by the one who enjoins us to know ourselves” (130e). To this Alcibiades also agrees, and thus Socrates reasons that the opposite must also be true: that if one has knowledge of the things that belong to his body, he does not truly have knowledge of himself (131a). Although Alcibiades agrees with this, Socrates continues to explain his argument through the use of examples. For instance, Socrates claims that a farmer and other craftsmen are far from knowing themselves because they only know that which they tend and have no real understanding of their true selves. Therefore, if “it is moderation to know oneself, none of these men is moderate by his art,” concludes Socrates (131b). These men, in addition

to those who practice medicine or are trainers, tend their bodies and the things related to the body but do not tend themselves. Even worse, according to Socrates, are those who tend money; those who tend money are taking trouble over something even more removed from the soul than the body (131bc). Those who love money, then, do not love their body or even something that belongs to them and from this Socrates begins his analysis of those who love Alcibiades.

Socrates begins by talking about Alcibiades' body, because if ever "someone has become a lover of Alcibiades' body, he has fallen in love not with Alcibiades but with something belonging to [him]" (131c). Alcibiades agrees that this is true, and also agrees to Socrates' assertion that whoever has fallen in love with Alcibiades has actually fallen in love with his soul (130c). This is important because the one who loves Alcibiades' body will leave him as soon as his body loses its youthful vigor, but the one who loves Alcibiades' soul will not leave as long as the soul is improving. Socrates claims that because of this, he will stay even after Alcibiades' beauty fades. Alcibiades is pleased and requests that Socrates indeed continue to stay (131cd). Socrates declares that he will stay, and he will stay because he is the only one true lover of Alcibiades (131e). However, Socrates admits, if Alcibiades becomes "corrupted by the populace of Athens," Socrates will give him up. It is an experience Socrates has seen happen to "many and good men" and he cautions Alcibiades to be wary of falling into this trap (132a). To avoid corruption, Socrates suggests that Alcibiades does not approach the things of the city before he educates himself on these very things and how to approach them. Alcibiades agrees, but asks Socrates to explain how he can do this while they also "take trouble over themselves" (132b).

Taking trouble over the soul, Socrates reminds Alcibiades, is how they will take trouble over themselves (132c). Thus, they must understand the Delphic inscription and Socrates tells Alcibiades he will reveal what he suspects the inscription of advising and telling the two. Socrates suggests that they must be like an eye looking in a mirror and seeing itself—they will be like “an eye seeing an eye, therefore, and looking at that part of itself which is best and by which it sees” when they see themselves (132d-133a). If the gaze is somehow misdirected toward something that is not itself, then it cannot see itself. This leads Socrates to an inquiry about how they ought to take trouble over themselves: “if the soul is to know itself, should it look at the soul, and above all at that place in it which the virtue of the soul—wisdom—comes to exist, and any other thing to which this happens?” (133b). Alcibiades agrees that this is how they ought to take trouble over themselves. Socrates continues to question Alcibiades about the soul, and they next conclude that there is nothing in the soul more divine than the part which concerns itself with knowing and thinking. Therefore, since this part is “divine,” it resembles god, and Socrates reasons that someone who educates himself to the divine will also come to know himself (133c).

Knowing oneself and being moderate, Socrates reiterates, is important because if one does not know oneself he cannot know the things of himself that are good and bad (133c). Socrates therefore concludes that a man, for example, Alcibiades, cannot know that his things belong to him without first knowing himself. Alcibiades agrees that this is so and also agrees with Socrates’ statement that if they cannot know their things, they cannot know the things that belong to their things (133d). Based on this, Socrates then argues that what they had previously determined is actually false—that there are some

who do not truly know themselves but that can know their things and what belongs to those things—because if a man is ignorant of himself, he will also be ignorant of these things. This is an important observation, because it means that if one does not have knowledge of himself, he will not have knowledge of the things of others, so he will be ignorant of the things of cities (133e). Such a man, they decide, can never be successful as a politician or as the manager of a household. And if he does not know, he will certainly go wrong, and when he does he will be miserable (133d-134a). Socrates thus delivers a bold conclusion: “It is not possible to be happy, therefore, unless one is moderate and good” (134b). For the individual, this means that it will not be the rich man who becomes happy, but the moderate, and for the city to be happy they do not need “walls or warships, or dockyards,” but rather the people need virtue (134bc).

If he who rules the city ought to give it virtue, he himself must first be virtuous. Socrates tells Alcibiades that if he wants to “act as he wishes” for himself, it is justice and moderation he must acquire, not personal license and rule (134c). Acting in such a way is pleasing to the gods, and it will mean that Alcibiades and the city are looking toward the “divine and bright,” which means they will know themselves and the good things that belong to them (134d). On the other hand, Socrates warns Alcibiades that if he looks toward that which is godless and dark, he will act unjustly and in ignorance of himself. Alcibiades must also exercise his personal license with intelligence, lest he and the city be ruined (134e-135a). Socrates ultimately decides that “it is not tyranny, therefore, excellent Alcibiades, that ought to be secured either for oneself or for the city if you are to be happy, but virtue” (135b). This is significant because Socrates finally names Alcibiades true ambition and Alcibiades agrees that this is true. And before one has such

virtue, Socrates explains, it is best that he does not rule but instead is ruled by another who does have such virtue. Since this is the better option, it is also the nobler, and therefore the more fitting (135b). The two decide from this that it is fitting for a man of vice to be a slave while a man of virtue ought to be free (135c).

Alcibiades agrees that this is all very true and that he sees what he needs to do. Alcibiades agrees to an education by Socrates but proceeds to warn him that he and Socrates “will probably be switching roles . . . I taking yours and you mine, for from this day nothing can keep me from attending on you, and you from being attended upon by me” (135d). Socrates responds that his love for Alcibiades will remain. Alcibiades then promises that he will begin to take trouble over justice beginning from this moment. Socrates tells him he is glad he will do so, yet Socrates also admits, “I stand in dread, not because I do not have trust in your nature, but rather because, seeing the strength of the city, I fear that it will overcome both me and you” (135e).

Literature Review

In the *Alcibiades I*, both Socrates and Alcibiades have much at stake. For Socrates, the attempt to educate Alcibiades represents a test of whether or not the highly ambitious types can be suited to a life of philosophy; for Alcibiades, his discourse with Socrates is a test of whether or not philosophy can fulfill his hopes for political success. Socrates is attracted to the great ambition and promise of Alcibiades and attempts to persuade him that a Socratic education is the only way he can ever realize his desire for power.¹ However, Socrates does reveal some reluctance to undertake this education of Alcibiades because, in addition to the traits that attract Socrates to him, Alcibiades also

¹ Plato, *Alcibiades*, in *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*, ed. Thomas Pangle (New York: Cornell University Press, 1987). 105e.

displays some alarmingly dangerous traits. Alcibiades' love of power puts him at risk of being corrupted by the Athenian populace, but Socrates, now that his daimonia is not advising him otherwise, hopes that despite his potential dangers Alcibiades can be educated to virtue.²

Yet there are many underlying problems that further complicate the Socratic, or “philosophic,” education. Scholars recognize the challenges posed by a philosophic life and the literature examines how these challenges might be overcome. In the opinion of some scholars, however, the problems posed by Socratic philosophy are inevitable and one can only learn to live with them. Overall, the literature surrounding *Alcibiades* examines the desires of this ambitious individual, arguing about whether his motivation comes from a particularly self-interested character, or if it stems from an eroticism that is typical of human nature but that is inflamed by Alcibiades' political aspirations.³ The literature also endeavors to understand the role of Socratic virtue in philosophic life and disagrees over whether or not such virtue can have a place in political life. Some scholars, including Allan Bloom, consider what is precisely meant by a “Socratic education,” and how plausible such an education is, or even how seriously Socrates considers providing such an education.

I. The Socratic Education

While it is very clear that Socrates promises Alcibiades an education, he is not clear what, exactly, this education involves. In the dialogue, Socrates denounces Alcibiades' Athenian education as inferior to the education of Athens' foes, particularly

² Plato, *Alcibiades*, 132a.

³ Mark Lutz, “Alcibiades' Education,” *Socrates' Education to Virtue: Learning the Love of the Noble*, (Albany: State University of New York Press 1998). 112

the Persians.⁴ What is commendable about the Persian education, according to Socrates, is that Persian princes are educated by the wise, the just, the moderate, and the courageous. While Socrates presents this as preferable to the education Alcibiades received as a child, Socrates does little to elaborate on what a Socratic education model might look like. The closest description to what a truly philosophic education might look like come from Socrates' images in *The Republic*; Bloom especially considers how realistic and beneficial that education might actually be.

In Book V of *The Republic*, Socrates presents “three waves” that the imaginary City in Speech will experience, with the third and final wave being the creation of philosopher kings. Socrates suggests that philosophy and political power should coincide in one place and this is the only way a city might ever be free from ills.⁵ Socrates believes philosophers should rule the city because they are greedy about knowledge and they are highly erotic, which means the philosopher will ask questions that many others will not. But why do more young men not pursue this course? Bloom suggests that “healthy young people usually try to excel at what is most respectable within their community” and since a philosophic education is not as valued as a political education, most turn away from it.⁶ This is certainly true of Alcibiades, at least initially. Furthermore, this sort of greed for knowledge should turn potential philosophers to a desire for Socratic education, which Socrates describes in the following chapters.

At the end of Book VI, Socrates discloses the goal of a philosophic education:

⁴ Plato, *Alcibiades*, 121e-122a.

⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, Translated by Allan Bloom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). 399. 472d. However this “city in speech” that Socrates presents is (as he himself knows) impossible.

⁶ Allan Bloom, “Interpretive Essay,” *The Republic*, Translated by Allan Bloom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). 399.

philosophers study is always aimed at the Idea of the Good.⁷ The philosophic education is the pursuit of discovering what the Good truly is—the many are mistaken about what the good means, for they think of it as comfort and pleasure while the “refined” think of prudence. However, Socrates argues that since no human being is truly content with only the comfortable and pleasurable things, these things cannot be the good.⁸ From this Bloom concludes that it is necessary for a Socratic education that a philosopher be erotic because “eros is the soul’s longing for completeness, to be full of being, to know everything which *is*.”⁹ In addition to his eros to discover the good, one will need to *see* it, meaning the philosophers will need the sun.¹⁰ The sun nourishes and generates the growth of the good, but it is not a representation of the good itself—rather, it is an “offspring” of the good. The sun also leads Socrates to his illustration of the philosophic education in the iconic image of the cave.

Essentially, the cave represents the universal image of political life. The philosopher must be compelled to leave the darkness of the cave, so his exit from the artificial world does not come naturally. Once outside the cave, the philosopher realizes his “knowledge” was only a product of his environment and he pities those still in the cave. But he is faced with the dilemma that if he returns to the cave, he will be ridiculed and if he tries to free the others he will be punished. Thus, Socrates seems to suggest that there can be no enlightenment in the cave.¹¹ In his discussion with Glaucon, Socrates later reveals that true education means taking someone as he is (the philosopher) and turning him to the “proper object”—that which naturally fulfills the soul but does not

⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, 504.

⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, 505bc.

⁹ Bloom, “Interpretive Essay,” 402.

¹⁰ Plato, *The Republic*, 507e.

¹¹ Plato, *The Republic*, 515d.

alter it.¹² This idea of “turning to the proper object” is also present in the *Alcibiades*, while Socrates discusses the need for Alcibiades to turn his attention to the care of himself and his soul.¹³ This is an incomplete lesson plan for a philosophic education, but it is the closest Socrates ever comes to revealing a complete lesson plan. This plan for education, however, is of questionable seriousness, for “just as Socrates has overstated the case for the possibility of the city’s accepting wisdom, he overstates the case for the possibility of a man’s becoming wise.”¹⁴ According to Miguel Abensour, Hanna Arendt notes further difficulties with the cave, suggesting that although those within the cave are supposed to represent the inhabitants of a city, the cave is completely devoid of politics.¹⁵ Those within the cave are supposedly chained so that they are immobile and cannot converse with one another and this prevents any political exchange from occurring. Thus, the cave cannot possibly represent a realistic scenario of society and Socrates’ suggestions are therefore dubious.

II. Alcibiades’ Education and Experiences

Should the Socratic education of Alcibiades be considered a failure or a success? Scholars disagree, based on how they interpret the fundamental character of Alcibiades. For Martha Nussbaum, Alcibiades is a dramatic failure and demonstrates that sometimes not even reason can penetrate a “morally defective individual.”¹⁶ However, Darryl De Marzio argues that Alcibiades ought to be read as an “educational success story” because, although he is not turned toward a philosophic life, his education alerts him to the

¹² Bloom, “Interpretive Essay,” 518.

¹³ Plato, *Alcibiades*, 129a.

¹⁴ Bloom, “Interpretive Essay,” 409.

¹⁵ Miguel Abensour, “Against the Sovereignty of Philosophy over Politics: Arendt’s Reading of Plato’s Cave Allegory,” *Social Research* (2007): 962.

¹⁶ Martha Nussbaum, “The Speech of Alcibiades: A Reading of Plato’s *Symposium*,” *The Fragility of Goodness* 1986, 280.

importance of the care of the self.¹⁷

Nussbaum thinks that the fact that Socrates ultimately fails in the attempt to direct Alcibiades away from political life and toward virtue means that the Alcibiades' "story is, in the end, a story of waste and loss, of the failure of practical reason to shape a life".¹⁸ According to Nussbaum, the education fails because of Alcibiades' flawed character. Instead of drawing on the *Alcibiades* for her examination of Alcibiades' character, Nussbaum primarily focuses on the Alcibiades from the *Symposium*. From this text Nussbaum contemplates Alcibiades' experiences with education and concludes that Socrates cannot succeed in a Socratic education because he puts too much emphasis on individual experiences and on the role of literature in education. Alcibiades sees "education" not as a lofty pursuit of the "good," as Socrates explains in *The Republic*, but rather as "the cognitive activity of imagination, emotion, even appetitive feelings."¹⁹ Alcibiades has already been established as a highly erotic individual, and his emphasis on appetitive feelings (like eros and desire) indicate that he might not be capable of a successful Socratic education. While his eros, desire, and appetitive feelings might at first seem promising, Alcibiades' use of these qualities become problematic because he pursues the things that appeal to his own political pursuits. Lutz also agrees that the Alcibiades in the *Symposium* might indicate that Alcibiades is too flawed to succeed in a Socratic education; this Alcibiades has abandoned his attempt to learn the noble and good. However, Lutz does not explicitly claim that Alcibiades is the reason for failure and suggests that it is possible Socrates does not actually understand ambitious desire if he

¹⁷ Darryl De Marzio, "The Care of the Self: Alcibiades I, Socratic Teaching and Ethics Education," *Journal of Education*, (2006): 103.

¹⁸ Nussbaum, "The Speech of Alcibiades," 280.

¹⁹ Nussbaum, "The Speech of Alcibiades," 297.

cannot teach his “beloved” virtue.²⁰

However, contrary to Nussbaum, Darryl De Marzio argues that scholars ought to turn their “attention to the young Alcibiades, who represents an educational success story.”²¹ Alcibiades can be considered an “educational success story” because he ultimately uses his education to attend to the care of the self instead of focusing on the traditional understanding of education, that it is the acquisition of practical knowledge.²² De Marzio argues that the care of the self is the realization of the limits of one’s knowledge. It necessitates the admission that one knows that he does not know. Thus, Socrates’ instruction is ultimately successful because “in giving this educative service to Alcibiades, Socrates has presumably served the state as well, for he has hopefully delayed the ascension of an arrogant Alcibiades to the heights of political power.”²³ De Marzio’s claim is dubious, however, given the rest of Alcibiades’ career so it seems De Marzio’s argument can be somewhat reasonable only if it is read in the context of the immediate good Socrates’ instruction in the *Alcibiades* has done Athens (i.e., stopping Alcibiades from addressing the assembly).

Ultimately, Nussbaum and De Marzio disagree over whether or not eros can or should have any place in the life of a student of philosophy. Both scholars agree that Alcibiades is a highly erotic individual, but see the effects of his eroticism differently. For Nussbaum, Alcibiades’ cannot be a successful student of philosophy because the “nature of personal erotic passion may be such as to be always unstable, always

²⁰ Mark Lutz, “Socrates and Alcibiades,” *Socrates’ Education to Virtue: Learning the Love of the Noble* 130

²¹ De Marzio, “The Care of the Self,” 103.

²² De Marzio, “Care of the Self,” 104.

²³ De Marzio, “Care of the Self,” 118.

threatening, when given a part, to overwhelm the whole.”²⁴ This erotic desire makes Alcibiades self-interested and indifferent to the “truth” because it does not always suit his purposes.²⁵ In *The Alcibiades*, he repeatedly demonstrates his eros and (for the majority of the dialogue) disputes Socrates about the teachings that are contrary to his initial impulses (for example, that the courageous is always “good”). Socrates is also an erotic individual, but he turns his attentions to contemplating the abstract. In so doing, “Socrates loses touch with the character of the contingent things and thus becomes not only unwilling by also unable to provide Alcibiades with the guidance he needs.”²⁶ Thus, eros is not only dangerous in education if the student possesses it, it is equally detrimental if the teacher is highly erotic as well.

Conversely, De Marzio argues that Alcibiades’ erotic nature motivates him to improve himself—he desires to make himself better.²⁷ This character trait is, under this analysis, very beneficial because it engages Alcibiades in a dialectical education, which could be what Socrates describes in *The Republic*: a teacher and student both continuously aware of the ongoing need for education.²⁸ But this question of eroticism and its place in human nature is precisely what supports Lutz’s argument: Lutz asserts that if a Socratic education can reveal a deep need to become noble and good, it verifies that human nature is fundamentally erotic.²⁹ This has important implications because it would mean that Alcibiades’ highly erotic nature could be a normal, albeit intensified, representation of human nature which in turn means that his education could exemplify

²⁴ Nussbaum, “The Speech,” 310.

²⁵ Nussbaum, “The Speech,” 311.

²⁶ Lutz, “Alcibiades’ Education,” 113.

²⁷ De Marzio, “The Care of the Self,” 119.

²⁸ De Marzio, “The Care of the Self,” 120.

²⁹ Lutz, “Alcibiades’ Education,” 114.

what sort of education is possible for human nature in general. If readers are to believe Nussbaum, however, Alcibiades' failed education in virtue would have dangerous implications if Alcibiades represents the "fundamental eroticism" of human nature.

III. Socratic Virtue and Philosophy in the Political Life

In the *Alcibiades*, Socrates emphasizes how superior the Persian education is to the Athenian's education, particularly because Persian princes are educated by four men "of the best reputation—the wisest, the justest, the most moderate, and the most courageous."³⁰ Since these students go on to become rulers, it seems that Socrates suggests there is a place for virtue in political life. However, it is difficult to know how seriously Socrates advances this claim and scholars differ over whether or not Socratic virtue should have a place in political life.

As Socrates makes clear in the *Republic*, the *Alcibiades*, and the *Apology*, Socratic virtue is absolutely necessary for philosophy, but even he seems unsure how to implement philosophic virtue in the civic life. It seems that one cannot be loyal to Socratic virtue while also engaging in the political life of the city—there is "a deadly conflict between philosophy and the classical city."³¹ The two should not be mixed because Socratic virtue requires wisdom, while political life requires more practical knowledge (knowledge that includes catering to the people's ignorance). The danger of implementing Socratic virtue into political life, Lorraine Pangle therefore argues, is that political life mistakes practical knowledge for wisdom.³² The danger of this conflation lies in the fact that Socratic virtue aims at the Idea of the Good while political life too

³⁰ Plato, *Alcibiades*, 121e.

³¹ Lorraine Pangle, "Education and Corruption: *Apology*," *Virtue is Knowledge: The Moral Foundations of Socratic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). 11.

³² Pangle, Lorraine, "Education and Corruption," 15.

frequently aims at the “good” for the city, but this aim is frequently subordinated to the personal ambitions of a few—therefore, conflating virtue with political life might produce an artificial claim that a political action is “good” when it is in fact not.

Even Socrates, in the *Republic*, seems to suggest that Socratic virtue cannot have a place in political life. Again looking at the cave allegory, those who are brought out of the cave into the light possess virtue; however, they cannot return to the cave and inform those still living in the darkness because while these enlightened men have wisdom, they do not have the knowledge of the cave. That knowledge belongs to those who cast shadows upon the walls. Thus, to escape ridicule and punishment, he who has Socratic virtue does not attempt to free those in the cave. Lorraine Pangle alleges that the trial of Socrates in the *Apology* demonstrates the reality of this divide between political life and Socratic virtue.

Other scholars take this idea even further, arguing that Socratic virtue and philosophy ought to have no place at all, but particularly not in political life. Although her critiques are primarily aimed at Plato’s representation of Socratic ideas and not Socrates himself, Abensour’s presentation of Hannah Arendt suggests that virtue aims at the “good” not out of philosophic interest, but actually out of political motivation. By making the study of the good something essentially unobtainable, even to those who dedicate their lives to philosophy, Plato shifts power away from the general population and into the hands of those very few.³³ Furthermore, Abensour interprets Arendt as arguing that Plato sees “political philosophy” as the only solution to the conflicts within a city; according to Abensour, Arendt then critiques this claim because it attempts to create an entirely new nexus of philosophic thought that is deceptive—it misapplies Socratic

³³ Abensour, “Against the Sovereignty,” 957.

ideals about individual virtue so the philosopher can engage in politics and manipulate the public to his political aspirations.³⁴ Socratic virtue, therefore, is incapable of holding any position in political life because it is not being used toward its correct end. Socratic philosophy that is oriented toward virtue cannot be directed toward politics without dangerous results, as Arendt argues the *Apology* reveals.

Yet other scholars argue that while the application of Socratic virtue and philosophy in the political life is flawed, this philosophy can be valuable for politics. For example, Thomas Pangle examines whether or not there is any value in a “political science” education, which he understands as an education that examines behaviors, values, and philosophy to inform the workings of political institutions.³⁵ Pangle acknowledges that political science education—which ought to be understood as a Socratic education—attempts to reconcile “the conflict between education in citizenship and education in genuine political science, theory, or philosophy.”³⁶ Thomas Pangle also clearly acknowledges that there is a divide between political life and philosophic life and he further considers the possibility of integrating the two.

The problem with Socratic philosophy in political life, according to Pangle, is likely because the two require different types of virtue—the first requiring Socratic virtue oriented toward wisdom while the latter requires “civic” virtue, oriented toward the ignorance that entraps the citizens of a republic. Pangle, arguing through an interpretation of Aristophanes, explains the dilemma as follows:

There is no safe coexistence possible between the wisdom of philosophy or science and even the minimum virtue required by a republican society—a society on which the philosopher-scientist, in his humanity,

³⁴ Abensour, “Against the Sovereignty,” 961.

³⁵ Thomas Pangle, “Socrates on the Problem of Political Science Education,” *Political Theory* (1985) 113.

³⁶ Pangle, Thomas, “Socrates on the Problem,” 114.

depends. But then the philosopher-scientist is not truly wise, for he lacks human wisdom or prudence.³⁷

While it appears that Aristophanes finds this divide too large for Socratic philosophy to overcome, Pangle appears more optimistic. Any political tradition, Pangle argues, longs to be guided by an “authoritarian rule,” whether it be piety or reason.³⁸ The task for Socratic philosophy in political life, consequently, is to become that authoritative rule; however, although Pangle does not dismiss this task as entirely impossible, Socrates makes it clear that political men are often not also virtuous men. Thus, if it is true that for cities to be well-ruled their rulers ought to be completely virtuous, it seems that the problem is not that there is no place for Socratic virtue in political life, rather the problem is that men drawn to the political life are not virtuous in the first place.³⁹ Since they lack virtue and then enter into a political arena that also lacks virtue, they do not ever cultivate their virtue for philosophy so the problem is never remedied.

Analysis: Why Alcibiades Fails

Throughout the *Alcibiades* Socrates presents a complicated relationship between virtues and the political and philosophic lives. Specifically, Socrates grounds his arguments concerning virtue in the context of the “just” and the “unjust,” which prompt him to assess questions of the good and the advantageous. Alcibiades initially approaches these issues because Socrates convinces him they will benefit him politically when he addresses the Athenian assembly. However, it is clear as the dialogue progresses that the real motivation behind Socrates’ arguments is not to prepare Alcibiades for an appearance before the Athenian assembly. Through a reevaluation of the virtues of

³⁷ Pangle, Thomas, “Socrates on the Problem,” 115.

³⁸ Pangle, Thomas, “Socrates on the Problem,” 126.

³⁹ Lutz, “Alcibiades Education to Virtue,” 122.

courage, wisdom, and moderation Socrates leads Alcibiades to different definitions of “justice”—the politically just is not synonymous with the philosophically just because each aims at a different end. Because the political life and the philosophic life aim at two different types of justice, the man of Socratic (philosophic) virtue cannot be a man of politics and a man aiming at political justice cannot possess Socratic virtue.

I. Courage

After Alcibiades has admitted that he does not know the just and the unjust Socrates attempts to lead him to a definition of justice.⁴⁰ In this initial approach to defining justice Alcibiades agrees that some just things are advantageous and that “all the just things are also noble.”⁴¹ However, when Socrates presses Alcibiades if it is true that some shameful things might actually be “good” while some noble things might actually be “bad,” Alcibiades admits this may be true and thus the two men approach the issue of courage. In their discussion of courage as a virtue, there is also an implicit critique of nobility and its value (or lack thereof) in the political and philosophic lives.

In Socrates’ example of courage, he asks if it is not true that “many who have gone to the aid of a comrade or relative in war have been wounded or killed, while others did not give such aid when they should have and gotten away safely?”⁴² Alcibiades then admits that this is indeed the case and that must also mean that the attempt to rescue a friend is good insofar as it is noble but bad insofar as death or injury results. Therefore, Socrates asks Alcibiades if something is good if it produces a “good” and bad if it produces a “bad” and Alcibiades agrees that this is correct.⁴³

⁴⁰ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 112d.

⁴¹ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 115a.

⁴² Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 115b.

⁴³ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 115e.

This exchange is significant because it creates a problematic view of courage and justice—if an act of courage produces something bad (death or injury) then it cannot be good. If this is true, then Alcibiades must not want to be courageous in all cases because he explicitly states that he would choose to have the good things for himself. Above all, Alcibiades asserts that he would choose the “greatest” good for himself—if this greatest good is life, then he cannot have courage.⁴⁴ But Alcibiades complicates this admission when he claims that cowardice is on equality with death.

If cowardice and death are really the two greatest bad things, this means that life and courage must be the two greatest goods. However, this creates an impossible relationship—one cannot choose the greatest good if one chooses courage because it can produce death nor can one avoid the greatest bad by choosing life because this necessarily means one will be a coward. If, however, it is possible for one to choose the good by being courageous, even if it does mean death, then this challenges the assertion that the good is “good” because it produces something good. This understanding of choosing courage although it might produce something bad reinforces the fact that Alcibiades does not know the just and the unjust and thus he is not ready to speak to the assembly.

More broadly, this assessment of courage and the good has serious implications for political men in Athens—if a politician goes in front of the assembly and appeals to Athens on the grounds of justice and call for men to be courageous in their exercise of Athenian patriotism because it is “good” then he reveals that he does not truly understand the “good.” For example, it might be politically just to promote courage in the assembly because their courageous patriotism will benefit the city, but it is not necessarily just in

⁴⁴ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 115d.

the philosophic sense to ask citizens to sacrifice their lives for others despite the potential nobility and honor of such an act. Socrates recognizes that political types unquestioningly conflate the noble with the good and assume that courage is always just, good, and noble. By directing Alcibiades away from this understanding, he attempts to direct Alcibiades away from the assembly and away from this misunderstanding.

II. Wisdom

Wisdom is the most difficult virtue to understand, whether it be employed in the political or philosophic life. The wise, according to Socrates, are those who know.⁴⁵ Those who are truly wise are rare, because in both the political and the private life they are surrounded by two types of people: those who know they do not know and those who presume to know when they do not.⁴⁶ This latter group is “the most damaging and disgraceful when it comes to the greatest things” because they attempt to act in areas about which they are ignorant and falsely assume to have knowledge—politicians, and in particular Alcibiades’ guardian Pericles, fall into this category.⁴⁷ Alcibiades, prior to this interaction with Socrates, was also among those who presumed to know when he did not and it is because Socrates awakens him to his ignorance (through the identification of his confusion of nobility and courage) that he now knows he does not know. This recognition and acceptance of one’s own ignorance is the first step to become wise.⁴⁸ However, one cannot be a politician if one admits he is ignorant because then he will not be able to direct the assembly because he will recognize the limitations of his own knowledge and the people will reject him as unwise. Socrates recognizes that those who are aware of the

⁴⁵ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 118b.

⁴⁶ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 118a-c.

⁴⁷ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 118d.

⁴⁸ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 119a.

limits of their understanding cannot justly become politicians because they realize that they do not know. However, he does not want to reveal this to Alcibiades at this early point in the dialogue, possibly out of fear that Alcibiades will leave him.

Thus, Socrates employs an example of wisdom that appeals to Alcibiades' political ambitions, but in reality it has deeper implications. The example Socrates employs is that of the education of Persian princes. This example is worth examination not only with its relevance to wisdom, but also because—by insisting that the kings of Persia and Sparta are Alcibiades' competition and with whom he should concern himself—Socrates appears to be suggesting that Alcibiades pursue tyranny.⁴⁹ The implications of this suggestion will be explored following an analysis of Socrates' actual example.

Socrates praises the Persian education because when a Persian prince has matured, “he is taken over by those they call the royal tutors; four of these are chosen from among those mature Persians of the best reputation—the wisest, the justest, the most moderate, and the most courageous.”⁵⁰ Thus, the Persian prince receives teaching on wisdom from the most wise, which would indicate is “one who knows.” This wisdom is qualified, however, when Socrates proceeds to say this tutor teaches “the worship of the gods” and “skill in kingly things.”⁵¹ Even the “wisest” of the Persians can only teach his charge in the areas that make him good for the city; this can be juxtaposed with Socrates' claim that he can make Alcibiades better by teaching him how to achieve good for himself through the process of “knowing thyself.”⁵² Consequently, through this

⁴⁹ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 120a.

⁵⁰ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 121e.

⁵¹ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 122a.

⁵² Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 124c.

example of wisdom, Socrates implies that the political man seeks wisdom that is good for the city insofar as it allows the political man to keep control of it whereas philosophic wisdom applies to the individual.

As a result, the philosophic man can never be considered wise in the political sense because the philosopher recognizes that he must know himself in order to take trouble over himself and he cannot do this while also attempting to take trouble over his city.⁵³ If this is the case and it means that a political man is not wise in the best sense, it also reveals that Pericles, the guardian of Alcibiades and chief politician in Athens, is not truly wise. Thus, through this example and examination of courage, Socrates has subtly replaced Pericles as Alcibiades' guardian in addition to inserting himself into the role of the first Persian tutor despite the fact that his example indicates that if Alcibiades aspires to be wise in the truest sense, he must abandon his political ambition.

III. Moderation and Eros

Alcibiades is not a moderate individual. This is made clear through Socrates' descriptions of him at the onset of the dialogue, in which Alcibiades is described as extremely beautiful, extremely well-situated socially, and extremely impressed with himself.⁵⁴ However, it is not this superficial lack of moderation that prevents Alcibiades from becoming a philosopher. For even a philosopher must be immoderate in his desire to truly know himself.⁵⁵ Consequently, a philosopher must be erotic in the sense that his *eros* (desire) to become wise is immoderate. This immoderation is markedly different than the immoderate *eros* that drives political men; for example, Socrates exposes Alcibiades true motivation for wanting to speak in front of the Athenian assembly when

⁵³ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 128ac.

⁵⁴ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 104a-c.

⁵⁵ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 129a.

he tells Alcibiades, “You will prove to the Athenians that you are deserving of being honored more than Pericles or anyone else who has ever existed and . . . you will have very great power in the city.”⁵⁶ The political are driven by eros that aims at power and this power can only come from the city. Thus, the political man’s eros depends on others for satisfaction while the philosopher’s eros depends on his own understanding of himself and is, in contrast, much more self-sufficient. Both political types and philosophers are parasites in the sense that they depend on the city for their livelihood. However, the philosopher is the least harmful parasite because he depends on the city for interaction and in the pursuit of making individuals better. By contrast, the political man depends on the city for estimations of his own worth (nobility) and for political power.

This immoderate eros that drives the political man is exacerbated by his political lifestyle, as Socrates makes clear in his allusion to wars of empire. Socrates asks Alcibiades whom he might suggest the Athenians go to war against, “those behaving unjustly or those practicing the just things?”⁵⁷ Alcibiades replies, “What you are asking is a terrible thing; for even if someone had it in his mind that war ought to be wage against those practicing the just things, he would not admit to it.”⁵⁸ Clearly, Alcibiades is among those interested in attacking those “practicing the just things,” demonstrating the insatiability of his eros. Eros, for the political man, is not concerned with justice as it applies to the city, but rather as it applies to himself. This confusion of justice can be, again, traced back to Alcibiades’ confusion of the just and unjust. In this case, Alcibiades confuses the just as being synonymous with the “advantageous.”

⁵⁶ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 105b.

⁵⁷ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 109b.

⁵⁸ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 109c.

Socrates makes Alcibiades realize his confusion, a key point in the dialogue being the moment wherein Alcibiades admits that “just and advantageous things are not, I suppose, the same, but many have profited from committing great injustices and I suppose there are others who performed just acts that were not to their advantage.”⁵⁹ While this moment is significant because Alcibiades clearly realizes his mistake, it is perhaps more important for what it reveals about Alcibiades’ immoderate nature and how it affects his understandings of courage and wisdom. Alcibiades’ admission that the just and the advantageous are not the same corresponds to the idea that courage cannot be both noble and advantageous. Additionally, his admission that injustice is somewhat profitable exposes a problem with wisdom in the political arena—in his observation that injustice can yield profit, Alcibiades admits that he is able to recognize injustice, but his recognition of it is not enough to prevent him from pursuing it as advantage. This demonstrates that Alcibiades is capable of recognizing the problematic presentation of courage and wisdom as exclusively just and advantageous but that his immoderate eros urges him to ignore this problem because it might interfere with his own ambitions. Therefore, this confusion indicates that political men cannot be philosophers because they are unwilling to moderate their eros. In the case of Alcibiades (and others like him), perhaps his love for himself overshadows his desire for the truth.

IV. The City and the Individual

The discussion of Socratic virtues—courage, wisdom, moderation—and their connection to justice necessitates a discussion of the environment in which they are practiced because for the philosophic man these virtues are an individual pursuit while for the political man everything must be focused with respect to the city. For the

⁵⁹ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 113d.

philosopher, he is “good” insofar as he directs his life toward the Good, a point Socrates elaborates in *The Republic*.⁶⁰ The philosopher uses his eros to discover what it means to be a complete human being, concerning himself with knowing himself before striving after other knowledge. In order to “know thyself,” one must be wise (achieved by knowing that one does not know) and immoderately pursue the Good. The philosopher must consequently remove himself from the affairs of the city because they do not always aim at the good.

Conversely, the political man, as understood by Alcibiades, is “good” by his own definition. When Socrates asks whom Alcibiades means by “the good men” Alcibiades responds that they are “those capable of ruling in the city.”⁶¹ The city is defined by its people, and they are characterized by their transactions with each other and by the use they find with each other.⁶² Thus, Alcibiades defines the good men as those who rule over human beings while they interact with each other. Those good men can also be referred to as political men, and Alcibiades declares that they are directed “toward the better managing and preserving of the city.”⁶³ This end is very different than the philosopher’s end, specifically because the philosopher aims at a universal idea of the good whereas the political man aims for a condition of “concord.”

Concord makes the city better managed and better tended because it produces friendship and decreases the threats of faction and hatred.⁶⁴ Concord is the agreement reached by the great number of the citizens when each practices his own things.

However, this definition of concord is problematic because, as Socrates points out, there

⁶⁰ Plato, *The Republic*, 507e.

⁶¹ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 125b.

⁶² Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 125c.

⁶³ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 126a.

⁶⁴ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 126c.

are certain issues on which people can never reach concord because not everyone has knowledge of that subject.⁶⁵ Since each person practicing his own things is practicing something different and consequently using different knowledge to accomplish his task, there cannot be concord in this condition. Instead, Socrates argues that concord arises when each citizen practices the just things.

This, however, creates an impossible scenario for the political man—if citizens are truly practicing the “just things,” that necessitates knowledge of justice. In order to know justice, it has been established that one must know oneself, a feat accomplished only through philosophy, and if all citizens were indeed philosophers they would not be in need of being ruled. Thus, the political man cannot rule a city that has concord because this condition cannot exist. The implication of this, then, is that the political man who aims at the preservation and management of the city aims at a condition that is impossible to achieve. Furthermore, this idea of concord stands in tension with the love of honor that concerns political men. In a state of true concord, no one would be concerned with any task that was not his own and would thus not feel particularly interested or impressed with the work of others. Because political men crave honor they would consequently be unsatisfied in a city of concord even if such a city could exist. A political man does not really seek concord, rather he seeks obedience and acquiescence to his judgment.

V. What we Learn from Alcibiades’ Failed Education

Alcibiades is clearly not a common interlocutor—Socrates devotes significant time to their discourse and Alcibiades is capable of tracing Socrates’ arguments. Why, then, does Alcibiades ultimately fail not only as a philosopher, but also as a citizen of Athens? Socrates proves to Alcibiades that his understanding of the just and the unjust,

⁶⁵ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 127a.

courage, and of the political man are confused and yet still, Alcibiades ultimately becomes a traitorous tyrant. The answer begins with Socrates' grave assessment of Alcibiades at the conclusion of the dialogue: "I stand in dread, not because I do not have trust in your nature, but rather because, seeing the strength of the city, I fear that it will overcome both me and you."⁶⁶ While this statement could be an allusion to Socrates' eventual execution (during which Alcibiades is presented as proof of Socrates' corruption of Athenian youth), it also suggests that perhaps it is not solely Alcibiades' ambitious nature that leads him to failure, but the combination of his ambition and his dependency on the city.

The city is a powerful force, both for the philosopher and for the political man. While the political man builds a relationship to the city out of his immoderate love for glory and his desire for power, the philosopher is also moved by some interest for the city. As Socrates' allegory of the cave in the *Republic* demonstrates, the philosopher returns to the cave in an effort to bring truth back to those who remain imprisoned by their chains inside.⁶⁷ Socrates himself demonstrates that he feels some interest in preserving the city in his interactions with Alcibiades—he stops Alcibiades from speaking in the assembly when he believes Alcibiades might do harm by speaking about that which he thinks he knows but does not.⁶⁸ Therefore, Socrates' education of Alcibiades is focused on developing Alcibiades as an individual through philosophy, but it is also concerned with the good of the city (even if only for his own self-interest).

Socrates' attempt to educate Alcibiades to virtue reveals just how much he cares about both the city and the individual. Alcibiades is a unique pupil for Socrates because

⁶⁶ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 135e.

⁶⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, 515d.

⁶⁸ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 107cd.

his ambition and immoderate eros is comparable to that of a philosopher, but his “nature” is oriented toward the city and his involvement in it. Thus, Alcibiades’ education reveals that if the good of the city is to be cared for, it requires risking a “failed” education of a man like Alcibiades, an exceptional being for whom the city is worth jeopardizing. In his attempt to educate Alcibiades, Socrates emphasizes moderation and Alcibiades’ responses to Socrates’ teachings on courage and wealth indicate that he begins to appreciate the importance of moderation. However, Athens itself is immoderate—Socrates alludes to Athens’ excessive strength, making it capable of overcoming both himself and Alcibiades—and consequently does not create an environment in which a “moderate” Alcibiades can prosper.⁶⁹

Ultimately, Alcibiades’ education reveals that the philosopher cannot be a true political man because he cannot convert his philosophic justice, with its emphasis on the individual to the civic justice necessary and love for honor necessitated by political life. Alcibiades demonstrates that the politically ambitious may receive a philosophic education, but that education can be harmful if the individual does not ever remove himself from a political environment and allow himself to develop as a philosopher. Despite these risks, Alcibiades’ education reveals that the value of one, moderate, just man vastly outweighs the potential consequences (like the destruction of Athens) of not educating such an individual. Socrates’ attempt to educate Alcibiades reveals that the philosophic education’s emphasis on the individual can only improve that individual if he is willing to subordinate his love for himself to a love for the truth. Thus, perhaps the

⁶⁹ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 135e.

philosophical can only hope to be political when his moderation and wisdom matches the immoderate “strength of the city.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 135e.

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