So however we translate it, and whatever unexamined assumptions lie behind the affinity, the background question of the *Hippias Major* is at least a close cousin of that of the *Gorgias*: which things, and which people, are good, praiseworthy, commendable, admirable, "beautiful"?

In this dialogue the question is not less concrete than its parallels in the *Laches*, *Charmides*, and *Euthyphro*, but it is less concentrated: there, there is a single application or coherent set of applications of the term in question which the sought-for definition would clarify; here, the preamble provides about a dozen occurrences of cognates, any of which might be made the target of the attempted definition.

2.2.7. Lysis

The question that looks most like a definition question here occurs, as already noted (§ 1.1) in 212ab: "When someone loves someone, which becomes the lover of which . . .?"; Socrates understands this as the question, "what is the lover?" or, better, "what is the friend?"

The question is raised against a background of puzzles promulgated by Socrates himself: to the extent that they can be lumped together, the lump has to do with the question "how should one treat someone one loves?" (see, e.g., 204e–205a, 206bc, 207d–210e). Hippothales loves Lysis (although there is no indication that Lysis is even aware of this), and tries to ingratiate himself with Lysis (cf. 205b–d); Socrates' own approach is more in the parental style, in that he refuses to gratify Lysis (cf. 210e2–5), but this he takes to conflict with the initial idea (expressed in 207d5–e7) that loving someone involves promoting that person's happiness by granting his wishes. In the face of this conflict, Socrates wants to go back to fundamentals: he expresses ignorance as to how one person becomes[34] loved of another (212a5–6), and that leads to his question.

So the concrete questions on which the presumed definition would have a bearing are questions about the individuals Hippothales, Lysis, and Socrates: are they in fact friends, or not?

2.2.8. Republic *I*

Lastly, in *Republic* I, we encounter Cephalus, pleasant[35] but moribund, who, as he goes to meet his reward or otherwise (see 330d–331b), is given

[34] γίγνεται (212a5). This makes the question a trifle ambiguous, since it could be translated "turns out to be": it need not refer to winning friends, but just to the conditions under which one person turns out to be, or is as a matter of fact, a friend of another.

[35] According to Gifford (2001) 52–80, the appearance of pleasantness and justice is a sham.

to reflection on the extent to which he has met the demands of "justice" or "right" (see the frequent use of δίκη and cognates in his speech: 330d8, e1, e5, e6, 331a1, a4). His wealth[36] has been a great comfort, since it has enabled him to stay free of debt and deception (331b1–5). From this Socrates first (331c1–3) extracts an account of justice – justice is "truthfulness . . . and giving back what one has received from someone" – and then (c3–d3) argues for its inadequacy. Here the purported definition for justice has not come on the scene as an answer to the question "what is justice?" but the explicit question is the only thing missing. There is an explicit background question, "what good is being wealthy?" and the question implicitly raised by that is whether Cephalus is, in fact, just.

2.2.9. The importance of definition

attempt to answer some
e. The Theory of Forms
that arise in the attempt
: for some, it means that
? This is a mistake. The
to the question whether
uestions of the latter sort
they do that, in Socrates'
not be answered without
ms, in Plato's estimation,
So it is hardly of minor

So let us now ask: *why* does
re to answer the question

2.3. THE INTELLECTUALIST ASSUMPTION

It is not easy to say whether learning to fight in heavy armor, or to make the worse argument appear the stronger (Aristotle's formulation of Protagoras' profession: *Rhetoric* B 24. 1402ᵃ24–26),[39] will help bring on excellence.

[36] Which must have been fairly substantial: cf. Lysias, *Against Eratosthenes* 19 for an inventory of goods most of which must have been part of Cephalus' estate. See Dover (1968b) 29–30, Nails (2002) 84.

[37] Cf. treatments of the Theory such as that of Woodbridge (1929) or Randall (1970) (cf. esp. 188–200).

[38] Anyway, in Plato; but so also Aristotle (§ 1.2) and Xenophon (cf. *Memorabilia* I 1.16, IV 6.1).

[39] The phrase is attached to other sophists by Cicero, *Brutus* VIII 30. It is used in connection with Socrates: in the indictment against him as quoted by him in *Apology* 19b5–6 (cf. 18b8–c1: but not

Socrates thinks we need a definition to pronounce on these questions. He is sometimes fairly explicit about the kind of assumption he may be making here. In its strongest form, it is the following, which I shall call the "Intellectualist Assumption":[40]

(IA) To know that . . . *F* —, one must be able to say what the *F*, or *F*ness, is.

For example: to know whether Euthyphro's prosecution of his father is a pious thing to do, one must be able to say what the pious, or piety, is; to know whether excellence can be taught, one must be able to say what excellence is.

This assumption is too strong. It is, for one thing, simply false: we can tell which things on the table are books without being able to say what a book is, at least in the sense of being able to give a definition that would satisfy Substitutivity, (S) in § 2.1 above; even the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *s.v.* "book," in the course of over six columns of defining, fails to provide anything like that. And our ability to tell is not confined to cases in which we are dealing with straightforwardly perceptible items[41] like books; we are also able unhesitatingly to identify central cases of courage and central cases in which this is lacking. And if this doesn't count as knowledge, it is difficult to see why.[42] We also know perfectly well that courage (as opposed to rashness) is in general a good thing. We possess a good deal of pretheoretical knowledge about anything for which we have concepts; that is at least a part of what it is to have the concepts.

in the version of the indictment given by Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I 1.1; cf. Xenophon, *Apology* 10 and Diogenes Laertius II 40, Long [1964], 73.20–22, Marcovich [1999] I 119.18–120.1), and in Aristophanes' *Clouds* 882–884, 893–894, to which Socrates refers in Plato's *Apology* (19b: but he does not say, *pace* Cope and Sandys [1877] II 321, that Aristophanes was "its original author"). See Grote (1846/56) (1899/1900 ed.) VIII 362–64.

[40] It is part of what is widely referred to in the literature as the "Socratic fallacy," after Geach (1966) 371 saw it in the *Euthyphro*. Woodruff (1987) 79 (cf. Woodruff [1982] 140) refers to (IA) as the "principle of the *priority of definition*"; so also Nehamas (1986) 277 n. 6 = (1999) 51 n. 5, 290, Benson (1990) 19, Prior (1998) 98; Brickhouse and Smith (2000): "the *Priority of Definitional Knowledge*"; so also Benson (2000) 112 and *passim*.

Where I see (IA), Dreyfus (1990) (esp. 10–15) sees the source of what he calls cognitivism. Matson and Leite (1991) demur, but they (146) opt for the (to me quite improbable) suggestion that Socrates wanted to show that definitions are "*impossible*" (their italics). McDonough (1991) also protests against Dreyfus's claims, but he appeals mainly to the *Statesman* (303–305).

[41] As Prior (1998) 104 seems to imply.

[42] Prior (1998) (see esp. 107–9) beefs up the requirements for (Platonic) knowledge by making (IA) one of them. I do not see that he provides any real independent motivation for this; it is certainly no argument for it that Aristotle accepted it or something like it. And the fact that someone who claims knowledge can be expected "to provide some rational explanation of the fact known" (107) doesn't mean that such a person must do any defining. Prior (103–4) says that it does, but see text below.

There are actually two stages of error built into (IA), as we can see if we consider the fact that someone who makes a claim of the form "*x* is *F*" may, particularly if the claim is somewhat borderline (as is, e.g., Euthyphro's), justly be asked to explain why we should suppose the claim true. First, (IA) assumes that any such explanation must ultimately be based on a definition: a direct answer to the question "what is *F*ness?" But, in fact, there are lots of theories that do not take that form at all, e.g., Rawls's theory in *A Theory of Justice*.[43] So it is perfectly possible to undertake the justification of a questionable claim of the form "*x* is *F*" without basing that justification on a definition for *F*ness. But, second, it is perfectly possible to undertake a justification of a claim of that sort without having any theory of *F*ness at all. I take it we do this all the time. Such pretheoretical justifications may point the way toward a theory of *F*ness, but they do not in any clear sense presuppose such a theory.

But the problem is not just that the Intellectualist Assumption is false; more disastrously, it cannot be true if Socrates' task of defining is to be successfully performed, for that depends on our knowing things in advance. For example, the easiest way to see that the attempt to define "book" as "a written narrative"[44] must fail is to reflect that the book one is holding is a dictionary, and so not a narrative at all; and this requires one to know that what one is holding is a book, without yet (presumably) being able to say what a book is. Suppose you and I encountered a word quite new to both of us, say, "decacuminate," and neither of us has the faintest notion whether this, that, or the other is decacuminated or not. A discussion between us of the question "what is decacumination?" is foredoomed to failure.[45] If the Intellectualist Assumption were correct, that would be the predicament we would be in when we tried to say what courage is: if we did not already know, we would know nothing whatever about courage or things courageous; we would have only the word in common, as we do with "decacuminate." A search for a definition would never succeed unless one of the participants was already in a position to give it.

There is a weaker, and consequently less implausible, version of the assumption that comes of replacing "be able to say" in it by "know":

(IA_1) To know that . . . *F* —, one must know what the *F*, or *F*ness, is.

[43] See Rawls (1971) 51 = (1999) 44: "A theory of justice is subject to the same rules of method as other theories. Definitions and analyses of meaning do not have a special place: definition is but one device used in setting up the general structure of theory."

[44] A definition that, as I seem to recall, appeared in an older edition of *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*.

[45] Unless one of us recalled his or her Latin: *cacumen* means "top," as in the top of a tree. In the *Meno*, Socrates is going to resort to something rather like this strategy.

The original assumption, (IA), can be seen as a composite of this and a principle of expressibility:[46]

(PE) One can always say what one knows.

One natural response to the composite (IA) is that its fault lies in its second component, (PE):[47] I may not be able to *say* what a book is, especially if what is required is the philosopher's format for a definition, but my ability to tell a book from a bell or a candle shows, one might say, that I *know* what a book is.

In fact, this way of rendering (IA_1) plausible seems to me dangerously unclear. What is not clear is the nature of the knowledge that is attributed to me. If it is of the sort sometimes referred to as "tacit" knowledge,[48] (IA_1) may turn out to be true because it is trivial. For this sort of knowledge seems simply to *consist* in my ability to tell books from bells and candles. Saying that I know what a book is, on this line, is only redescribing my discriminatory capacities, registering the fact that sometimes or often I can tell that . . . book —: that this is a book, that that is not a book, that books generally weigh more than individual pieces of paper, that, at least before the computer age, books were required for education, etc.

But surely any defender of (IA_1) would want more out of it than that. It sounds like a substantive claim: in particular, it sounds as if it is supposed to *explain* one's ability to tell that . . . book —, instead of simply saying that to have that ability one must have that ability. But then it is no longer clear whether it is true. And, unfortunately, I know no way of making it true without making it trivial.

We can break (IA_1) down further. The sentences for which ". . . *F* —" stands in may have all sorts of different structures; two in particular crop up in our texts. Most commonly "*F*" is in predicate position: the question is whether this action is pious, or that man is temperate. But sometimes it figures, syntactically transformed, as the subject term: the question is whether excellence can be taught, or whether justice is any good to the person who has it, and these questions require definitions of excellence and justice, respectively. We have, then, predicate versions and subject versions of (IA_1).[49]

[46] See here Sesonske (1963) 3–4 (Sesonske and Fleming [1965] 84–85); Benson (1990) 20 n. 2, (2000) 114, calls this "the verbalization requirement."

[47] Benson (1990) 29 n. 20 says this; see also Benson (2000) 114.

[48] And vigorously defended by the Chomskians. See Fodor (1968), esp. 638, for a formulation of the idea.

[49] See also Beversluis (1987) 211–12 = Benson (1992) 107–8, Nehamas (1986) 277–80 with 280 n. 10 = (1999) 28–30 with 51 n. 9, Benson (1990) 20 (in n. 2), Prior (1998) 100.

How many of these claims does Socrates adopt?[50] In the dialogues here counted as Socratic, all of them; we'll shortly be looking at the texts. That leads to a problem: it is a consequence of (IA) that we cannot know that this, that, or the other action is courageous without being able to say what courage is. But we need to know things of this kind if we are ever to say what courage is. And Socrates himself will be found accepting examples of that kind in the course of attempting to find out what courage is. So, on the face of it, his procedures stand in contradiction to his principles.

Socrates, at least before the *Meno*, shows no awareness of this fact; the *Meno*, however, makes a great deal of it. That is going to be of importance for my story; as I see it, the *Meno* rejects (IA_1). But from the present vantage-point, it is worth remarking that the conflict between (IA_1) and Socrates' practice of evaluating proposed *definientia* is masked. For outright claims of knowledge about the matters he discusses in his quest for definitions are virtually nonexistent.[51] At *Apology* 29b6–7 Socrates, having said that he doesn't know much about matters in Hades, adds:[52] "but that to do injustice and to disobey one's superior, whether god or man, I know is bad and shameful." And that's about it.[53] That isn't much, and besides, first, it is not in the context of definition-hunting, and second, Socrates says nothing to indicate his commitment to (IA) or (IA_1) in the *Apology*.

[50] According to Vlastos (1985) 23–26 (expanded in Vlastos [1990] and again in Vlastos [1994] 67–86), not all of them, and according to Beversluis (1987), none at all. This is in part because Vlastos has adopted a chronological hypothesis according to which the *Lysis* and *Hippias Major* are transitional between the Socratic dialogues and the middle dialogues and *Republic* I 354a12–c3 has been "tacked on at the end of Book I" (Vlastos [1985] 26 n. 65; cf. [1990] 15 n. 31 = [1994] 81 n. 41: see n. 76 below), and Beversluis follows him. (Contrast Beversluis [1974] 334ab.) But mainly it has to do with the fact that Vlastos is prepared to see two senses of "know," in one of which (IA) is acceptable and in the other of which it is not.

The chronological consideration is, for my purposes, largely irrelevant. My question has to do with the emergence of the Theory of Forms, and according to both these authors, the *Lysis* and *Hippias Major* precede the dialogues in which that happens. So the views Socrates espouses in these dialogues are part of the background for that emergence, and among those views, according to Vlastos (1985) 23 n. 54 (cf. [1990] 3 = [1994] 71) and Beversluis (1987) 221 n. 4, is (IA_1).

[51] See here Vlastos (1985) 6–11 = Vlastos (1994) 43–48. Matson and Leite (1991) 151 import the verb "know" into contexts in which it does not in fact occur.

[52] This passage, to which Irwin (1977b) 58 called attention, has gained a certain notoriety since Vlastos (1985) 7, 11 = Vlastos (1994) 43–44, 48 placed so much weight on it; see Irwin (1995) 28–29, 358 n. 37.

[53] There is an exhaustive list of Socrates' claims to know things in the *Apology* in Reeve (1989) 54–55. Most of them require a certain amount of work to bring them into conflict with (IA_1): e.g., *Apology* 37b5–8 implies, for each of several alternatives to the death penalty (alternatives such as going into exile), that he knows it is bad (Brickhouse and Smith [1994] 127 list this as a case of Socrates professing "actually to *know* things of moral importance"; cf. also Brickhouse and Smith [2000] 103). And we may well suppose that 21d (along with other passages listed by Reeve [1989] 54), although it doesn't say so outright, implies that Socrates does not know what badness is. If we accept these implications, Socrates is in conflict with (IA_1).

Still, the difficulty is only a little below the surface in dialogues in which (IA) or (IA_1) are in play. If the analyses below are correct, those dialogues are *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Major*, *Republic* I, *Laches*, *Protagoras*, *Charmides*, and *Lysis*.

Then consider, for example, the following passages in which definition hunting is at stake. At *Euthyphro* 6d6–7, Socrates suggests that he and Euthyphro would agree that there are many pious things. In the *Hippias Major*, Socrates gets Hippias to agree that there are beautiful mares, lyres, and pots (288c–289a). In *Republic* I 350cd, Socrates explains how he managed to get Thrasymachus to accept that "the just {man} has become manifest to us as being good and wise" (c10–11). In *Laches* 191de, Socrates explains to Laches why his answer to the defining question about courage was too narrow: it included only those who are courageous in war, but not those who are courageous amid dangers at sea, in the face of disease, poverty, and so on,

> SOC: . . . for I dare say, Laches, there are some courageous {people} even in such {matters}.
> LACH: And very {courageous}, Socrates.
> SOC: Then all these {people} are courageous. (191e1–4)

And Laches of course agrees. Similar claims are made in every one of these dialogues.

But none of them is made with the verb "know" attached. So the contradiction between (IA_1) and what Socrates is saying is not a formal contradiction; we don't have Socrates saying anything like:

(IA_1C) We can't know whether these people are courageous without knowing what courage is, and
(¬KC) we don't know what courage is, but
(Kc) we do know that these people are courageous.

That would give us a formal contradiction. The most Socrates will say is not (Kc), but

(c) these people are courageous,

and from that with (IA_1C) and (¬KC) no contradiction can be derived.

Still, if I unhesitatingly state (c), there is something distinctly odd about my going on "but, of course, I don't know that." And Socrates and Laches *are* unhesitatingly stating (c). Although no one ever does this in a Socratic dialogue (or even in the *Meno*), a clever interlocutor might perfectly well

have responded to Socrates' efforts to gather premises for his refutations by saying: but look, Socrates, by your own lights, you can't know that these men are courageous. So what right do you have to say that they are?

If Socrates were John Rawls, he might think of (c) as a "considered moral judgment," to be kept going as long as is feasible, but in principle capable of being turned off, if the theory ultimately fails to confirm it.[54] Frankly, I cannot imagine what it would be like to give up the belief that there are people at sea who are courageous, or the belief that a person who risks his life to save someone who has fallen overboard is courageous, and so I cannot fathom why anyone would want to deny knowing these things. So, although I find this strategy quite implausible in these cases, it is there if anyone wants it. I'm going to suppose that Socrates' procedures do conflict, in the way described, with his professions. There is an interpretative principle of charity adopted by many scholars:[55] do not read a position in such a way that it involves inconsistency, if there are viable alternatives. The trouble is that here no alternatives seem to me really viable.

Various attempts have been made to read the dialogues in a way that gets around the apparent conflict between Socrates' claims and his practice.[56] The way I'm going to read them, the conflict is there, and is one of the driving forces tending toward the theory of recollection we find in the *Meno*. Attempts to make Socrates come out smelling like roses will be dealt with along the way. But a Socrates who is inconsistent on this score strikes me as more interesting[57] than these consistent ones.

Since (IA) (see n. 40) was first discerned in the *Euthyphro*, I start with that.

[54] Rawls (1971) 20 = (1999) 18: "These convictions are provisional fixed points which we presume any conception of justice must fit . . . even the judgments we take provisionally as fixed points are liable to revision."

[55] Explicitly stated by Brickhouse and Smith (2000) 5: "Other things being equal, the interpretation that provides a more interesting or more plausible view is preferable." Such a principle plainly underlies a great deal of the work of Vlastos, not simply in the area under discussion, but elsewhere as well: see, e.g., Vlastos (1965).

[56] Santas (1972) 140–41, Santas (1979) 69–70, 116–17, Burnyeat (1977b) 386–87, Irwin (1977b) 40–41, Teloh (1981) 20–21, Woodruff (1982) 139–40, Prior (1998), etc.: we can allow ourselves true beliefs to the effect that this or that action is courageous without having knowledge, for which a definition is required. Vlastos (1985), (1990) = (1994): there are different senses of "know." Beversluis (1987), Brickhouse and Smith (1994) 55–60, and, less exhaustively, (2000) 113–17: no Socratic dialogue maintains (IA).

[57] Cf. Brickhouse and Smith's formulation of the principle of charity, n. 55 above.