

# Chasing Secretariat: Plato, Socrates, and the Education of the Horseman

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## ABSTRACT

If, in recent years, Plato's zoological analogies have drawn particular interest, pride of place goes to the horse. Drawing evidence from Plato's *Apology*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, and *Alcibiades*, among others, I argue that situating Socrates' horse analogies in the context of Greek horse culture, Athenian class politics and education, and the city's recent political history deepens our understanding of Socrates' rhetoric and Plato's political thought. First, I argue that by calling Athens a noble horse and reiterating the horse analogy in the *Apology*, Socrates balances his harsh critique of Athenian democracy with a positive appraisal of the city's potential. The question is not how to change what Athens is but how to identify, train and harness its strengths. Second, Socrates' famous depiction of the soul in the *Phaedrus*—as a charioteer steering two horses, one noble, one ignoble—suggests an intimate philosophical link between the education of a horse and that of a human. Like the breaking and training of a noble horse, the purpose of noble education is not to weaken or enfeeble the spirit but to strengthen and cultivate noble spirits while also teaching them discipline. Third and finally, what bridges these themes is the problem of democratic leadership. In democratic Athens, Socrates does not depict himself as a metaphorical charioteer or even a trainer of Athens. Instead, he attempts to prepare other potential trainers, jockeys, and charioteers—aristocratic youths like Alcibiades and Critias—to play those roles. These spirited figures, as I discuss via the treatment of Plato's *Alcibiades* and *Symposium*, are Socrates' horses, which in turn are to be the trainers and jockeys of a more noble Athens. Viewed from this perspective, the horse analogy represents not only Socrates' political philosophy but also his practical political theory. Unfortunately, those training methods were ineffective.

## Introduction

Plato's writings are steeped in images and allegories (Collobert et al. 2012; Destrée and Edmonds III 2017). As Debra Rosenthal wrote, "Plato made the political world intelligible by using metaphors and analogies" (Rosenthal 1982, 283), and we should take this literally.<sup>1</sup> Even for philosophers, absolute knowledge is fugitive, and images are a helpful place to start. But for the masses as well, familiar images democratize philosophic discussion by opening it to the layman. They engage common sense and encourage people to share opinions, which can then be tested and criticized, withdrawn or modified. This is the beginning of philosophical dialog, and it is no surprise that Socrates the philosopher embraced this approach to engage the person in the street. Analogies can also mislead, however, and that too is part of their use. For as Michael Naas writes, the use of "analogy or metaphor allows one to select out some common attributes of disparate things without having to affirm any kind of identity between those things" (Naas 2015, 52). If an interlocutor can illuminate to others where simple analogies do not hold, that too is instructive.

Analogies are not just tools of analysis—they are tools of rhetoric. And while many analogies can be profitably analyzed absent any context at all, their use is culturally embedded. Accordingly, analogies inherently and often deliberately have a social, historical, political, and rhetorical resonance all their own, which their audience will understand without explanation, and which will vary by time and place. Consider for example the relative ease, until today, of digesting Socrates' frequent references to craftsmanship in Plato's works. On the surface, Socrates uses craftsmanship analogies to make a simple point to his interlocutors—that while the people naturally defer to experts with regard to most crafts (and thus recognize the legitimacy of the rule of knowledge with regard to those things), they curiously do not do so with politics, and therefore should seek to better understand this contradiction and correct it.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, when Socrates turns the Athenian craftsman's technical

<sup>1</sup>Famous examples of Platonic imagery are myriad. To mention the most obvious, they include the *Republic's* "allegory of the cave" and "parable of the ship," which illustrate the experience of philosophy and the flaws of democracy. In addition, Plato's use of medical and medicinal images (King 1954; Lidz 1995; Naso 1990; Moes 2001; Levin 2014), the metaphor of light and the Sun (Notopoulos 1944a; 1944b; Wheeler III 1997), and Euclidean exercises like the *Republic's* "divided line" (Notopoulos 1936; Hackforth 1942; Denyer 2007) and *Meno's* geometric lessons (Bedu-Addo 1983; 1984) have been studied at length. Finally, and as referenced below, the analogy between city and soul virtually defines Platonic political theory (Williams 1997; Ferrari 2005; Blössner 2007). For all his attention to unvarnished truth, it seems that images are Plato's main teaching heuristic.

<sup>2</sup>In a representative passage, Socrates says to the title character in the *Protagoras* (Plato 1997, 319b-d): "I maintain, along with the rest of the Greek world, that the Athenians are wise. And I observe that when we convene in the Assembly and the city has to take some action on a building project, we send for builders to advise us; if it has to do with the construction of ships, we send for shipwrights; and so forth for everything that is considered learnable

knowledge on its head—to highlight its political and philosophical limitations—this marks a sharp social and political critique of democratic Athens that Plato’s audience would have recognized, and which may have contributed to Socrates’ death.<sup>3</sup>

In recent years, Plato’s zoological analogies have drawn special interest. And among the many of Plato’s “philosophical beasts” (Bell and Nass 2015), pride of place goes to the horse. For as Jeremy Bell writes, “the horse has forged an exceptionally broad path throughout Plato’s corpus, one that cuts across nearly every text and terrain therein,” appearing in “no fewer than twenty of the dialogues,” and “invoked in order to illustrate issues as varied as rhetoric (*Phaedrus* 260b-c), recollection (*Phaedo* 73e), eugenics (*Republic* 459b), education (*Republic* 413d; *Apology* 20a), ontological difference (*Phaedo* 78e), military training (*Republic* 467e, 537a), hedonism (*Philebus* 67b), and eroticism (*Phaedrus* 253d-254e)” (Bell 2015, 116 and 128, nt. 1). And like craftsmanship, the horse and horsemanship were not value-neutral, but imbued in Athens with rich social (wealthy vs. poor; noble vs. vulgar) and political (democratic vs. oligarchic) significance.

Amongst Plato scholars, two horse analogies have received the most attention—one equine, the other equestrian. The first example, found in Plato’s *Apology*, occurs immediately prior to Socrates’ conviction on charges of corrupting the youth and impiety. As usually translated, it finds Socrates comparing himself to a “gadfly,” and the city of Athens to a “great and noble horse”:

Indeed, men of Athens, I am far from making a defense now on my own behalf, as might be thought, but on yours, to prevent you from wrongdoing by mistreating the god’s gift to you by condemning me; for if you kill me you will not easily find another like me. I was attached to this city by the god—though it seems a ridiculous thing to say—as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly. It is to fulfill some such function that I believe the god has placed me in the city. I never cease to rouse each and every one of you, to persuade and reproach you all day long and everywhere I find myself in your company. (Plato 2002, 30d-31a)

The second example, which occurs in the *Phaedrus*, involves a discussion about the relation between erotic love, sexual gratification, and moderation, in which Socrates analogizes the human soul to the image of a charioteer steering two very different horses:

Of the nature of the soul, though her true form be ever a theme of large and more than mortal discourse, let me speak briefly, and in a figure. And let the figure be composite—a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. Now the winged horses and the charioteers of the gods are all of them noble and of noble descent, but those of other races are mixed; the human charioteer drives his in a pair; and one of them is noble and of noble breed, and the other is ignoble and of ignoble breed; and the driving of them of necessity gives a great deal of trouble to him. (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 246a-b)

In Plato scholarship these images are usually analyzed separately, drawing little attention to the continuities suggested by the horse analogy. But in what follows, I link these and other related Socratic texts via this bridge. I argue that close attention to Socrates’ horse analogies, read in the context of Greek horse culture, Athenian class politics and education, and the city’s recent political history, deepens our understanding of Socratic rhetoric in Plato’s texts, as well as Plato’s (and/or his Socrates’) political thought as a whole. I argue that of all analogies in the Socratic corpus, the horse most encapsulates Socrates’ practical approach to politics.

But making this argument requires some rehabilitation. For even in the *Apology*’s famous account of the “gadfly,” the horse suffers from neglect. As Jeremy Bell (2015, 115) rightly notes, there is a “pervasive tendency of scholars to overlook, dismiss, or downplay the other image that Socrates invoked in this passage, the image of the horse.” “To be sure,” he writes, “Socrates is a gadfly, but only insofar as Athens is a horse.”

In an otherwise highly nuanced analysis of the passage, for example, Michael Naas (2015) focuses almost exclusively on the political and philosophical significance of the “gadfly,” even crediting Socrates’ Greek with indirectly coining an English term: “Socrates,” he writes, would “seem to have been the first example or first specimen of this uniquely American species of gadfly, an individual who might be considered a horsefly, from the point of view of those being provoked, but who is considered to have a positive influence or to administer a positive stimulus by those who truly understand the role of gadfly” (Ibid, 54). Drawing parallels between Socrates and the tradition of American civil disobedience and free speech, Naas argues that “Socrates would

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and teachable. But if anyone else, a person not regarded as a craftsman, tries to advise them, no matter how handsome and rich and well-born he might be, they just don’t accept him. They laugh at him and shout him down until he either gives up trying to speak and steps down himself, or the archer-police remove him forcibly by order of the board. This is how they proceed in matters which they consider technical. But when it is a matter of deliberating on city management, anyone can stand up and advise them, carpenter, blacksmith, shoemaker, merchant, ship-captain, rich man, poor man, well-born, low-born—it doesn’t matter—and nobody blasts him for presuming to give counsel without any prior training under a teacher.”

<sup>3</sup>Oded Balaban (2007, 7), for example, has argued that Plato’s frequent use of craftsman analogies “does indeed intend to introduce a new meaning of craft by shifting its focus from the expert knowledge of means (the tacitly presupposed view of common sense shared by the Sophists) towards the knowledge of ends.” By criticizing the lack of philosophical wisdom among Athens’ working classes, Socrates directly (and daringly) challenges the political competence of precisely that class of citizen—the middle-class tradesmen—who benefitted most from Athenian democracy. On this point and at some length, I.F. Stone (1989, 119) details how Socrates, in the *Apology* and elsewhere, expressed “the kind of disdain that an aristocrat felt for the ‘vulgar tradesmen’ who had begun to make their appearance in politics, of ‘low birth’ but sometimes of larger fortune than the aristocrats.” Stone goes on to cite how, “A private case pleaded by Demosthenes about half a century after the death of Socrates reveals that snobbish remarks about a person’s humble origins or trade were then punishable in Athens under the law against *kakegoria* (‘bad-mouthing’), which covered various forms of slander,” and how “Socrates’ own attitude towards ‘traffickers in the market-place’ may have played its part in provoking his chief accuser,” the “master tanner” Anytus (Stone 1989, 119-120).

appear to be the very essence of a *political* gadfly, an individual who stings, awakens, goads, and rouses, who is anything but blind and who knows what is best for the state and its inhabitants, or who at least knows that complacency and stupor are not in their best interest” (Ibid, 55).

This argument is compelling on its face—there is no better proof than Martin Luther King, Jr.’s description of himself from a Birmingham jail as a “nonviolent [gadfly]” that exists to “create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal” (King 1992, 87). But in giving analytical pride of place to the “gadfly,” it overlooks the symbolism of the horse. Socrates did not call just *any* city a horse—he called *Athens* a horse; and he chose a *horse* over all other animals. Why was this? Focusing solely on the gadfly, at the expense of the horse, obscures the interaction between the two, and how the symbolism of being called a great and noble, but sluggish horse, would have resonated in particular ways to an Athenian audience.<sup>4</sup>

In another study, Josiah Ober (2003) calls Socrates’ equine metaphor “tongue-in-cheek,” because Socrates himself says it “seems a ridiculous thing to say” (30e, Grube translation). But there is equally compelling reason to take the analogy seriously on its face, for as Ober also notes, the gadfly-horse image “recalls the point of [Socrates’] earlier horse-training analogy when refuting Meletus: the mass of Athenian citizens, like their children, can best be regarded as a lazy beast in need of being disciplined by the rare individual who understands what is in fact good for them. On this reading, popular ideology is no better than a state of sleep, popular opinions are mere dreams. The people only come awake, and then momentarily, when stung by Socrates.” Thus, however ridiculous the analogy may “seem,” the horse analogy binds two critical moments in the *Apology*—the moment when Socrates criticizes Athenian political institutions most directly, and the moment when he defends his philosophical pursuits in religious terms. It is therefore no Olympian leap to take the horse analogy seriously, and to credit Socrates for his irony.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, in the aforementioned analysis by Jeremy Bell, the *Apology*’s horse analogy does receive a refreshingly sustained treatment. Bell highlights, for example, that “What comes to the fore in the image of Athens’ equinity is not the horse in an unqualified sense but the horse as the embodiment of an animal whose endogenous vigor has been lost amid the myriad and unbridled values, beliefs, and desires structuring the daily life of the *polis*” (Bell 2015, 117). In this context, argues Bell, Socrates’ philosophy represents a “politics of care” (Ibid, 117), and Socrates’ actions vis-à-vis Athens are “to be likened to one who trains an otherwise wild or unruly horse to be tame and good” (Ibid, 118). Tameness should not be misunderstood as docility. It is, rather, a certain training of the spirit, the practice of self-government or care over the soul’s desires, a philosophical cultivation that steers those desires in the right direction, at the right pace (Ibid, 124). The process of philosophy is thus something more akin to the “process of breaking an untamed foal or colt, which, because of its excessive wildness, requires many bridles or trainers” (Ibid, 120).

Bell’s analysis clears a path for further inquiry. Perhaps most notably, it builds an explicit bridge between Plato’s *Apology*, where Socrates compares Athens to a horse, and the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates analogizes the soul to two struggling horses steered by a charioteer. Bell (Ibid, 125-6) highlights, for example, how “in contrast to the *Apology*, where Socrates had compared himself to a gadfly or trainer taming his fellow citizens, the relationship [in the *Phaedrus*] has been internalized: one now stands in relation to *oneself* as a trainer stands in relation to a horse. One must tame oneself, one must become moderate (*sōphrōn*), in order to live a good life. Moreover, the necessity of training, taming, and ruling oneself extend beyond one’s own good; it is also necessary in order to be of any benefit to another.” Drawing the political implications of this, Bell writes that “this means that one must first rule oneself before ruling others.”

On this sound theoretical foundation, however, Bell leaves many questions to others. First, if Socrates’ “politics of care” is expressed through the metaphor of horsemanship, what does this mean *practically* for Athens? To what extent, and how, did Socrates think his actions would improve Athens? Second, taking Socrates’ *Apology* seriously as rhetoric, how would Socrates’ audience have processed this metaphor, and to what effect? In contrast to a beast of burden, a horse requires a trainer to break and exercise it, and a jockey or charioteer to steer it. If Socrates is neither of these—a mere “gadfly”—then who or what are these things in his normative scheme, and where does Socrates fit in? And finally, what might *that* training or steering—political education and leadership proper—actually look like? For provocatively, if Socrates accuses Athens of being a “somewhat sluggish” horse, then Athens’ problem would seem to be of impotence, not excess.

In pursuing these questions, we inevitably risk stretching the horse image beyond its original intent, misleadingly turning a “tongue-in-cheek” metaphor into a political thesis. But the attempt is warranted not only because of the critical moments in which the metaphor appears, but also because it offers a novel and meaningful path into Plato’s Socratic texts, where whatever Socrates’ (or Plato’s) larger intent, the symbolism of the horse is relevant and recurring. In addition, to focus on the horse metaphor enables a synthesis of diverse Platonic texts that shines a fresh light on the coherence of Plato’s corpus and his

<sup>4</sup>At the conclusion of this study, it may be worth asking how our reading of King’s use of “gadfly” would change if the same metaphor—the noble but sluggish horse—were used to describe America. Would the horse analogy have the same meaning to an American audience as to an Athenian one?

<sup>5</sup>See also Marshall (2017, 171), who argues in this context that “there is nothing inherently ridiculous about a god sending a gadfly; in [Aeschylus’] *Suppliant Women* and *Prometheus Bound*, it is treated as a serious matter that causes real pain.” Ironically, Marshall writes this to support an argument that the Greek word in question, *μῶψ* (*myops*), means “spur” rather than “gadfly” in this particular passage.

Socrates' larger philosophical project. This is especially true when also placed within the social and political context of ancient Athens. Thus, and only after a brief foray into ancient Greek horse culture, I make three distinct arguments.

First, I argue that by calling Athens a noble horse, and using the horse analogy multiple times in the *Apology*, Socrates balances his harsh critique of Athenian democracy with a positive appraisal of the city's essential character. In the *Apology*, Socrates does not call Athens a mule or an ass; he calls it a horse, an animal celebrated for precisely those things any noble city would desire—strength, energy, courage, even wealth. The question is therefore not how to change what Athens *is* at its core, but how to help Athens realize its unique potential—i.e. how to best train it.

Second, Socrates' famous depiction of the soul in the *Phaedrus*—as a charioteer steering two horses, one noble, one ignoble—suggests that there is an intimate philosophical link between the education of a horse and that of a human; that, in some sense, horses and humans are best educated in the same way. Until today, no animal more powerfully symbolizes the link between strength and spirit, beauty and grace, and education and nobility, than the horse. And like the breaking and training of a noble horse, the purpose of noble education is not to weaken or enfeeble that spirit, but to strengthen and cultivate noble spirits while also teaching them discipline. By Socrates' time, horse training techniques were well-developed, and a protracted discussion of horse training, used as a metaphor for human education, would have naturally inspired comparison.

Third and finally, I argue that what bridges these themes in the *Apology* and *Phaedrus* is the problem of democratic leadership. In democratic Athens, Socrates does not depict himself as a charioteer, or even a trainer of Athens proper—and indeed, his role is less direct. Day-to-day, he tries to prepare other potential trainers, jockeys, and charioteers—particularly the aristocratic Athenian youths like Alcibiades and Critias who follow him, and who *can* persuade an audience—to play those roles instead. These spirited figures, as I discuss with additional treatment of Plato's *Alcibiades* and *Symposium*, are Socrates' horses, who in turn (and if well trained by Socrates) are to be the trainers and jockeys of a more noble Athens. Viewed this way, the horse analogy represents not only Socrates' political philosophy, but his practical political theory as well; although to his unfortunate demise (as well as Athens'), his training methods were ineffective.

## Horses and Horsemanship in Ancient Greece

As a point of entry, it is helpful to consider the cultural status of horses in ancient Greece and Athens; and here my summary draws extensively on Mark Griffith's extraordinary two-part analysis of this topic (2006a; 2006b). The first thing to note is that, in Socrates' world, the horse's social symbolism would have been widely assumed. As Griffith notes, "In Archaic and classical Greece, a high proportion of men and women of all social classes, both rural and urban, lived and worked closely with and alongside equids," and "many households kept one or more of these equids on the premises" (Griffith 2006a, 192). Moreover, "[I]t is no exaggeration to say that the Greeks of the Archaic and Classical periods were obsessed with horses" (Ibid, 201), although horse ownership (as distinct from donkeys or mules) was a privilege of the wealthy.<sup>6</sup>

In Plato's and Socrates' time, cavalry was not the dominant branch of Athens' military, particularly given the rough terrain of Attica and the growing preference during the era of the *polis* for hoplite infantry.<sup>7</sup> But its size had increased substantially in the mid-fifth century B.C. to as many as one thousand Athenian cavalrymen, as did its military role and *esprit de corps* during the Peloponnesian War against Sparta (431-404 B.C.) (Bugh 1988, 39, 80-81). Notwithstanding its late development, throughout Greece and not least in Athens, the horse in general had long been linked to the warrior's spirit and other forms of prestige. And as late as 600-400 B.C., the peak of hoplite warfare, Griffith reports that "horses and horsemen appear to be far more emblematic of Greek mentalities and fantasies of heroism than infantry warriors" (Griffith 2006a, 201).

Furthermore, "A domesticated horse's most positive characteristics (from a human point of view) were/are its speed, docility, loyalty, and elegant appearance. On the negative side, horses tend to be fragile, expensive to maintain, often skittish and panicky, and also sexually very excitable; and in the case of the Greeks, they were not bred to be sturdy enough to carry or pull heavy loads. So, because horses were generally employed only for battle, racing, elite transportation, and display, rather than menial 'work,' they might be regarded by some as 'lazy'" (Ibid, 198). This description reveals what, in ancient Greece, was an "aesthetic and ethical prejudice in favor of the horse's nobility and quasi-heroic status" (Ibid, 198, nt. 53), so that "*Hippotrophia* (horse breeding, training, and riding) was recognized throughout Greece as perhaps the most precious and distinctive marker of wealth, brilliance, and style (or, in the eyes of the less aristocratically minded, of luxury, extravagance, and waste)" (Ibid, 200). In Athens, *hippotrophia* was specifically associated with "excessive luxury, waste, and antidemocratic (or specifically pro-Spartan or pro-Persian) tendencies" (Ibid, 202). It would not have been lost on Socrates' audience, for example, that "In Sparta, *hippeus* was the official title for a full Spartan" (Ibid, 201, nt. 68), drawing an analogy between the disciplined Spartan warrior citizens and a well-bred war horse.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>"Since a horse consumes as much as six times the amount of barley that a man eats in one day, and the cost of buying one in the first place could support a family of six for two years, only the wealthy could afford one." (Stuttard 2018, 54)

<sup>7</sup>This is, of course, to say nothing of Athens' dominant navy for much of the century.

<sup>8</sup>Sparta's horse championing, like Athens', shows that the military symbolism of horses did not depend on a correspondingly strong cavalry—that is to say, the horse's military symbolism was not an artifact of nationalism, but a Greek cultural phenomenon. Sparta, of course, fielded the most famous and mighty

Horses in Greece were not bred for menial tasks. They were bred “for war, for hunting, for play, for show. Rarely were they used to do *work*” (Ibid, 203). Perhaps most notably, as a symbol of luxury, ambition, and aristocratic display, they were often kept by the rich for chariot racing. This was in marked contrast to, say, the donkey, for which the cultural tendency “is one of condescension and disapproval: donkeys are inferiors, incapable of higher culture, and deserving only of the roughest treatment,” and there is a “deeply entrenched cultural binary between the ‘high-class’ horse and ‘low-class’ donkey”: “The horse is tall and elegant, long-haired, luxurious, refined, militarily spectacular and respected, distinctively named, finely adorned, expensive to keep, and fastidious in its diet, voice, and activities—and thus ‘noble,’” whereas “the donkey is rough, cheap, coarse, noncombatant, hardworking (but sometimes recalcitrant), low-maintenance, anonymous, and thus ‘ignoble, asinine,’ even ‘slavish’” (Ibid, 228).

The Greeks were thus prodigal in attaching human qualities—noble, slavish, or otherwise—to equids; and the upshot of this is at least two-fold. First, the appearance of a horse, donkey, or mule would naturally elicit associations of class, education, culture, and status, to which different citizens may have different reactions. Where (at least stereotypically) the poor or middle-class might cast resentful glances at horses and their owners for their luxurious and oligarchic propensities, those of wealthy or aristocratic backgrounds might see in horses a symbol of noble breeding, high culture, and imperial success. On the other hand, whether in religious or warlike depictions of Athenian figures and heroes, and whether on the Parthenon Frieze or the side of a large amphora, the horse image could ennoble Athens and all its citizens universally. Thus, when Socrates compares Athens to a “great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size,” this analogy would resonate both strongly, and in several diverse ways. In some, it might invoke feelings of class resentment or social pride; in others, more charismatic images of brilliance and nobility, war and heroism, Olympic victory and citizen pride, would come to mind.

During Socrates’ trial in 399 B.C., whatever polarizing tendencies that horse imagery may have had would have been amplified by events. The Athenian jury would likely have been dominated by the poor,<sup>9</sup> and their memories of the Athenian cavalry’s collaboration with the cruel, traitorous, and oligarchic regime of the Thirty Tyrants (404/403 B.C.) would no doubt have been fresh. The cavalry fought bravely during the Peloponnesian War, and this period saw the height of its prestige. Recognizing the necessity of effective cavalry by the mid-5<sup>th</sup> century, the Athenians supported its one thousand cavalrymen via state loans for horse purchases (*katastasis*), state supplements for horse depreciation, and an additional grain allowance (*sitos*) (Bugh 1988, 56-61). But “Whatever good service the cavalry had provided in the great war with Sparta was soon to be lost in the events of 404/3” (Ibid, 119). The restored democracy “immediately attacked the financial foundations of the cavalry” (Ibid, 129), and as Anderson (1961, 133-4) reports, when the Thirty were ousted, a prohibition on future political activity by their collaborators “seems to have been enforced especially strictly against the cavalry, who had held out in Athens until the end, camping under arms in the concert chamber, guarding the walls as infantry by night and carrying out dawn patrols on horseback.” Even if cavalry service had not been disqualifying for certain offices, nonetheless “If it became known that a man seeking office had been a cavalryman in 404/3, he became open to attacks by his personal enemies or opportunistic rivals” (Bugh 1988, 140).

In addition to, and distinct from, these social and political resonances, there was also the philosophical. Unlike the donkey or mule, the horse (while not philosophical itself) bears a certain relationship to the philosophical. The donkey is built and bred for menial labor, and is not specially trained or skilled. As a pure physical specimen, it is not expected to learn, but only to work; and accordingly, there is little care by its owner for the capacity of its intellect or strength of its soul. The horse, on the other hand, learns. If it cannot be reasoned with, it can at least be taught, and it certainly can improve. The horse is a relational animal. It works closely and even intimately (in a physical sense) with humans. And while the relation between human (trainer/rider/charioteer) and horse is one of subordination, it is not simple domination. The horse is physically superior to the

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hoplite army in all of Greece, and did not organize a cavalry until 424 B.C. out of military necessity (Bugh 1988, 12, 94). The Spartan example also shows how oligarchic and militaristic elements could smoothly combine in the symbolism of the horse.

Perhaps not coincidentally, horse politics proved more complicated in democratic Athens, often intersecting with class. As described by J.K. Anderson (1961, 128-9), “The ancient principle, that the capacity in which each man served was determined by his landed estate, was established at least as early as the beginning of the sixth century B.C. When the lawgiver Solon reformed the Athenian constitution he divided the citizens into four classes. . . the second class (called *hippeis* or ‘knights’) being required to furnish themselves with horses and serve as cavalry. This division of the citizens into classes persisted into the fourth century B.C., but by that time had long been an anachronism[.]” Indeed, “It may in fact be doubted whether any effective force of cavalry was ever raised under Solon’s system,” and it was only between 445-431 B.C., following a bungled invasion of Thessaly in which the weaknesses of heavy infantry against cavalry defense were exposed, that Athens raised a cavalry in earnest, consisting of one thousand men, and organized into ten squadrons of one hundred men from each of the city’s ten tribes (Ibid, 130-131). But, and as discussed below, if “The pride taken by the whole city in this cavalry is reflected in the Parthenon frieze, carved in about 440 B.C.,” then by Plato’s/Socrates’ time (and only a few years before Socrates’ death) their reputation had soured dramatically, as members of this cavalry (“committed in a body”) were known to be among the last holdouts in support of the oligarchic Thirty Tyrants (404/3 B.C.) (Ibid, 132-134; see Bugh 1988, 120-153).

<sup>9</sup>As an attempt to bring the poor into politics, Athens paid jurors a meaningful sum, although the composition of a typical Athenian jury at different times has been subject to dispute. Markle (2004, 96-97) argues that “jury and assembly pay was sufficient to allow citizens, who otherwise would have been compelled to work full time to support their households, to have leisure to serve on juries and to attend the assemblies,” and that “those historians who maintain that Athenian juries and assemblies were composed predominantly of citizens of moderate property have misinterpreted statements made by the Attic orators. Contrary to their views, I will attempt to show that the orators are addressing juries and assemblies in which the poor, that is citizens who had no leisure, constituted the majority.”

rider, and can easily hurt the rider or sabotage his aims.<sup>10</sup> One can beat a horse into submission, but few people can literally strong-arm it. Riding a strong horse leaves one especially vulnerable; but the alternative of a feeble horse that is so weakened or beaten as to lack strength and spirit (and thus danger) is also no good. So the art of horsemanship—breaking, training, and exercising a horse—involves much. On one hand, one must rear a horse to be physically and spiritually strong, even courageous. On the other hand, one must teach that horse to willfully respond to guidance. This in turn requires approaching the horse in relational terms, as a subordinate but also a partner.

Along these lines, in Athenian culture horse training was both a literal and symbolic model of the most noble education of Athenian youth. A symbolic depiction of this mindset is the famous Parthenon Frieze, sculpted in Socrates' early adulthood, in the age of Pericles. It is, writes Griffith, "perhaps the most celebrated of all sculptural monuments to have survived from Classical Athens," and "depicts a procession of Athens' finest, 165 young horsemen with their horses and chariots, arrayed in a glorious profusion of poses and costumes." Griffith further explains how, "It is indeed striking that, even at a period when hoplites and rowers were recognized. . . as providing the backbone of the city's military might, and the 'masses' . . . were properly regarded as the dominant sovereign political body, horses and horsemen continued to play such a central role in the city's self-image" (Griffith 2006b: 320). The inclusion of young elites alongside their horses is instructive, for in Greek writings, "Similar vocabulary (and mythology) is applied to the schooling of horses as to that of 'herds' of elite children and adolescents that were trained in gymnastic exercises, dance, athletic/military manoeuvres, and races. Diet, coordination of team formation, and, especially, musical responsiveness and elegance received close attention. For horses too, like these youthful humans, were thought to be distinctively 'musical' in ways that donkeys and mules were not" (Ibid, 317).

Historically, horse riding itself had been a vital component of aristocratic Greek education which, like other forms of physical education, was as much concerned with character as it was fitness (Demirel and Yildiran 2013, 193). These youths received not only the education of their bodies, but in learning to handle a horse, they acquired the moral and temperamental education of a leader, or even (metaphorically) a lover. A Greek rider "sat directly on his horse's back," which was "a very intimate and direct kind of contact" (Griffith 2006b, 322). And as they led the horse, they learned to balance the thrill of its power with the necessity of friendship, trust, and moderation in order to harness that power for mutual benefit. As Griffith's fascinating description continues:

Like a car or motorcycle, a horse or team of horses is far stronger and faster than a human rider or driver, and if properly directed—with just a quick dab on the gas pedal or brakes, or a deft flick of the steering wheel—can provide an exhilarating, superhuman surge of power as a virtual extension of the rider/driver's own potency and will. But, unlike a motorcycle or car, and more like a sexual partner, the horse has feelings and a mind of its own, and responds not just mechanically to the promptings and programmed directions of the rider (reins, voice, hands, knees, heels, goad, whip, etc.) but also out of its own experience, anticipation, desires, and (often most importantly) its previously learned sense of trust in the rider. (Ibid, 324).

Education of youths was similar to that of horses: the former "needed to learn to be obedient and disciplined, while still preserving a free and noble spirit; they had to be willing, dependable servants of others (their teacher or leader; their rider or driver) and yet also trusty and self-reliant comrades to their peers, as well as being potential leaders of others in due course" (Ibid, 332). Learning to ride a horse thus represented a symbolic consummation of a kind of educational cycle in which he who must learn to be led (like a spirited horse) was in turn being trained to lead.

The analogy linking this noble model of education to citizen or political education required no Olympian leap. In an echo of Aristotle's description of the virtue of a citizen as "the capacity to rule and be ruled finely" (Aristotle 2013, 1277a25-30), the most laudable education trained Athenian youths both to be ruled by virtue, and to nobly rule (or steer) others in the same way. If for some, particularly the poor and middle class, democratic political education was grounded in regular participation in Athenian juries and magistracies drawn by lot (rather than public education<sup>11</sup>), then for those with means, the foundations of political virtue were associated with private training of a more classical variety. Central to that training was a relationship with horses.

<sup>10</sup>My late father, a great horseman himself, lost one of his front teeth after being thrown from a quarter horse, and broke a leg after being tossed from another. On the life of a contemporary horseman, see Carey LeJeune, "A Wonderful Ride: A Tribute to Kenny LeJeune." *Thoroughbred Daily News* (online), December 10, 2020. This paper is dedicated to his memory.

<sup>11</sup>In his monumental work on Athenian democracy, Hansen (1999, 312) writes that in democratic Athens "[S]chools were private and perhaps too expensive for poor citizens. It is indeed a paradox that Athenian democracy on the one hand presupposed that its citizens could read and write and on the other hand took no public action to ensure schooling for them. In Plato's and Aristotle's utopias schooling is universal and compulsory and the lack of a public educational system was one of the most insistent criticisms directed by the philosophers against the democracy." However, compare with I. F. Stone (1989, 42), who writes that, "Elementary education for all citizens was achieved early in Athens, at least a century before Socrates, and literacy seems to have been widespread. This reflected the rise of democracy. But the higher education remained the monopoly of the aristocracy until Sophists came along. They provoked upper-class antagonism by teaching the arts of rhetoric—for an ability to speak well in public was the open door to middle-class political participation in the debates of the assembly and the higher offices of the city."

## Socrates' Apology and the Education of Athens

This background in equine culture and Athenian education helps situate Socrates' description in the *Apology* of himself as a "gadfly" and of Athens as a "great and noble horse." On one hand, it suggests an extraordinarily limited political role for Socrates. A "gadfly" may awaken, annoy, or even stir to action, but a horse's typical response to this (swatting its tail, flexing its muscles, shaking its head, scratching its belly) hardly analogizes to training, leading, or exercising. Not much of the whole is affected by a single fly. Analogously, as Warman (1983, 48) notes, throughout the Platonic dialogues, "Socrates claims to use persuasion on individuals (not crowds, juries, etc.)." And as he says in the *Apology*, "It may seem strange that while I go around and give this advice privately and interfere in private affairs, I do not venture to go to the assembly and there advise the city," but "Be sure, men of Athens, that if I had long ago attempted to take part in politics, I should have died long ago," for "A man who really fights for justice must lead a private, not a public, life if he is to survive for even a short time" (Plato 2002, 31c-32a).

Socrates concedes, then, that he works on *only* individuals, shunning the role of statesman, politician, or even lawyer, and the charge against him of corrupting the youth is consistent with this approach. But this raises a question of efficacy, for his eventual fate notwithstanding, it is reasonable to ask why Socrates, if he genuinely intended to improve the city, did not attempt something more analogous to the jockey or trainer—if not as a statesman or Assembly speaker, then perhaps as an orator or speech-writer like the later Demosthenes. For in democratic Athens the stakes of effective speaking were high. Consider the example of Pericles, who convinced Athenians to expand their empire and use their imperial bounty to beautify the city; or Themistocles, who convinced Athens to use the spoils of their silver mines to build a navy; or, for that matter, notorious demagogues like Cleon, who could recklessly appeal to the irrational, selfish, and base desires of the masses. This is not to claim that Pericles or Themistocles represented ideal leaders (or Cleon the worst), but such men could and did decisively steer Athenian politics, empire, and culture into unexplored territories, even if the masses only erratically followed their lead.<sup>12</sup>

The pressure for further explanation is exacerbated by Socrates' questionable claim that "if I had long ago attempted to take part in politics, I should have died long ago." This is not clear, for as Hansen (1995, 20-21) writes, "The trial of Sokrates is, in fact, the only attested case of an Athenian having been put on trial for what he thought and said," and that while "the condemnation and execution of Sokrates demonstrates that the Athenians did not always live up to their own ideals," nonetheless, "that those ideals were not just empty words is apparent both from the presumption that the trial of Sokrates was unique in Athenian history, and from the fact that Sokrates, after all, lived to be seventy although he must have criticized the democratic institutions regularly throughout his adult life." Socrates himself supports this point unambiguously in the *Crito*, in the conversation he constructs with the Athenian Laws to convince Crito that fleeing his death sentence under watch of bribed guards would be unjust (Plato 2002, 50a-54e), leading Hanna Pitkin (1966, 42) to conclude that Socrates "can find no fault with the Athenian laws, nor even with the Athenian way of administering them," but that "Only his own particular conviction and sentence are (almost fortuitously) unjust," and his "focus on his past acceptance of the laws and his gratitude to them is in fact an evaluation of the Athenian government."

So much for Socrates' curious abjuration of Assembly speaking. A separate forum for influencing the public in Athens was the courts, where lawyers, orators, and speechwriters, speaking to large citizen juries, and initiating or contesting criminal charges themselves, gave Athenian law its life. But Socrates also rejects this role—indeed he sneers at it.<sup>13</sup> The key moment comes in Socrates' cross examination of his accuser Meletus, where the charge against him of corrupting the youth is broached directly:

Tell me, my good sir, who improves our young men? – The laws.

That is not what I am asking, but what person who has knowledge of the laws to begin with? – These jurymen, Socrates.

How do you mean, Meletus? Are these able to educate the young and improve them? –

Certainly. [...]

What about the members of the Council? – The Councillors, also.

But, Meletus, what about the assembly? Do members of the assembly corrupt the young, or do they all improve them? – They improve them. (Plato 2002, 24e-25a)

In a stunning reproach of the very court (and jury) to which he is speaking, Socrates rejects the Athenian ideal of citizen education through (paid) public participation. Instead, and following this interchange, he refutes Meletus via an analogy to horse training. He says:

<sup>12</sup>Themistocles was famously ostracized, while Pericles was censured and fined after the first year of the Peloponnesian War, though he was quickly reelected as general. On the latter, see Thucydides (1972, 163).

<sup>13</sup>On the legal profession in Ancient Athens, see Chroust (1954) who notes, among other things, the extent to which "Socrates, when on trial for his life, emphatically refused to resort to such practices" (Ibid, 374) as were typical of Athenian lawyers, giving some sense of his attitude towards the profession.

Tell me: does this also apply to horses, do you think? That all men improve them and one individual corrupts them? Or is quite the contrary true, one individual is able to improve them, or very few, namely, the horse breeders, whereas the majority, if they have horses and use them, corrupt them. Is that not the case, Meletus, both with horses and all other animals? (Plato 2002, 25b)

Socrates' analogy to horses is calibrated to challenge Meletus's (and the jury's) democratic sensibilities, and to force Meletus into a posture of self-critique. In light of the charges against Socrates, the symbolism is clear. The "horses" in question are the noble/wealthy youths he is accused of corrupting; and Socrates, assuming by analogy the role of their trainer, suggests that he, who provides a philosophical education, offers more of value to these young Athenian horses than democratic socialization via the Athenian Assembly or courts. In this respect, too, there may be an undertone of snobbery, insofar as the "horses" themselves would represent an elite class of citizens whose oligarchic sympathies would clash with the jurors.'

But by later casting Athenian democracy itself as a "noble horse," Socrates also hopes to *incorporate* the jurors, by appealing to their *own* noble spirits—to rein them *within* this analogy and the noble standard it sets. First, by posing the horse analogy to Meletus as a reasonable premise from which to discuss Athenian education, Socrates lures him into a snare; for though the mention of horses will no doubt trigger a panoply of class-based resentments amongst the jurors, it simultaneously cannot be rejected, for the horse image is deeply woven into Athens' noble self-image. Who would not want to be compared to a horse? Miletus, thus compelled to accept the premise that horse education is a reasonable analogy to Athenian youth education, can no longer consistently defend his prior argument that socialization to Athenian democratic institutions via public participation is sufficient.<sup>14</sup> When pressed on this issue, he becomes silent.

The philosophical contrast between Socrates' and Miletus's theories of education could not be starker. Miletus's attitude reflects a democratic political culture that Bernard Manin has defined by its "distrust of professionalism" based on a "general presumption. . . that every political function was performable by non-specialists unless there were compelling reasons to think otherwise," and all this "designed to safeguard the political power of ordinary citizens" (Manin 1997, 32; Sobak 2015). Socrates' horse analogy, on the other hand, draws a distinct contrast between Athenian amateurism and the professionalism with which a truly noble education—like that of a horse by a horseman—would be approached.

Thus, when Socrates later compares Athens to a "great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size," his purpose is not simply to castigate Athens, but to shame Athens via a direct appeal to its Greek sense of nobility—an appeal to the ideal reflected on the Parthenon Frieze, or the pride all Athenians attached to horse- and chariot-racing victories at the Olympic festivals, notwithstanding their monopoly by the wealthy.<sup>15</sup> Athenians, for all their democratic leanings, fancied themselves to be classically noble, and horse imagery contributed to that strong, courageous, and warlike self-image. Socrates' judgment in the *Apology* and *Crito* thus turns out to be not a one-sided indictment of Athens, but rather a strategic, rhetorical appeal to traditional conceptions of honor, tailored to a democratic audience. For the sake of their city, he urges them to consider a training regimen more befitting a horse, and less befitting an ass.

But how might this look in practice, and how does Socrates' role as "gadfly" realistically advance his cause? In the *Apology* and *Crito*, Plato does not pursue the analogy this far, and to answer these questions requires two further steps. The first step is to examine more finely the problem of democratic education, and Socrates' noble alternative to the Athenian model. For this, we turn to Plato's *Phaedrus*, which analogizes the human soul to a horse-drawn chariot. The second step is to link this model of education directly to political leadership. And this, I will proffer, can be done through consideration of Socrates' interaction with Alcibiades, perhaps the most spirited horse in all of Athens, in Plato's *Alcibiades* and *Symposium*.

## ***Phaedrus*, the Chariot, and the Erotic Model of Education**

Plato's *Phaedrus* is a dialogue about love, moderation, and rhetoric; but its sum achieves a whole greater than its parts, for it offers a model of Socratic education refracted through the equine spirit and the art of horsemanship. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates analogizes the aspirational soul, the noble soul, to a "natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer," a team in which, of the horses, "one of them is noble and of noble breed, and the other is ignoble and of ignoble breed." Later in the dialog, Socrates further distinguishes the horses not only via their noble and ignoble status generally, but also (and part and parcel of this) via their respective virtues, drives, and self-discipline: "The [noble] right-hand horse is upright and cleanly made; he has a lofty neck and an aquiline nose; his colour is white, and his eyes dark; he is a lover of honour and modesty and

<sup>14</sup>One might compare Socrates' approach here to the discussion in the *Republic* where Socrates compares those who seek resolution of social ills via the legal system to "those who are sick but, due to licentiousness, aren't willing to quit their worthless way of life. . . For all their treatment, they get nowhere, except, of course, to make their illnesses more complicated and bigger, always hoping that if someone would just recommend a drug, they will be—thanks to it—healthy" (Plato 1991, 425e-426a). Legal penalties are a paltry substitute for genuine education.

<sup>15</sup>Golden (2011, 5) calls it "remarkable that the Athenian democracy encouraged and supported sport despite the fact that successful competitors – in athletics as well as horse- and chariot-racing – were overwhelmingly drawn from the elite. The reason? The Athenians regarded training for and participating in sport as a physical and ideological preparation for war." In this vein, it is perhaps no surprise that Socrates' initial proposal for punishment was free meals at the Prytaneum, an honor typically bestowed on Olympian victors for their service to the state.

temperance, and the follower of true glory; he needs no touch of the whip but is guided by word and admonition only,” whereas “The other [ignoble] is a crooked lumbering animal, put together anyhow; he has a short thick neck; he is flat-faced and of a dark colour, with grey eyes and blood-red complexion; the mate of insolence and pride, shag-eared and deaf, hardly yielding to whip and spur” (Plato, *Phaedrus*, Jowett trans.).

This description recalls a similar three-part image of the soul (and city) posited by Socrates in the *Republic*. There, Socrates suggested that the soul, like the city, was composed of rational, spirited, and appetitive parts, and the role of philosophy was to ensure that each part adopted “the practice of minding one’s own business,” which, “when it comes to being in a certain way, is probably justice” (Plato 1991, 433b). A healthy and harmonious order, argued Socrates, be it in the soul or city, depended on the rule of the philosophic over the whole, aided by a strong alliance between the philosophic and spirited parts. In this model, appetites are not banished from the soul or regime, and they remain essential and productive components; but they are subordinate to the other parts. The appetites must not rule the whole, nor ever coax the spirit to align with it instead of reason. As Ferrari (2007, 174) writes, “So long as both the calculative and the spirited elements have been properly educated and acculturated, [Socrates] explains, they will work together to ensure that the desiring element does not grow strong through satisfying bodily pleasures and then attempt to usurp authority and enslave the other elements.” Instead, philosophy aligns with, ennobles, and ultimately guides the spirit in the pursuit of beautiful endeavors.

At least superficially, Socrates’ chariot analogy in the *Phaedrus* aligns with this approach. In the *Phaedrus*’s charioteer analogy, the soul has three parts. The charioteer, the leader who steers the two horses, seems analogous to reason; the “noble” or “good” horse represents the timocratic (or noble warrior) spirit; while the “ignoble” or “bad” horse represents the baser appetitive drives (see Guigon 2021, 20-21, and nt. 8; Bell 2015, 130, nt. 23). But upon inspection, the comparison is not so simple. The two horses (which seem to correspond to spirit and appetite) are not related (as in the *Republic*) by a clear relationship of rank or subordination; in fact, they appear to be equal partners, running in parallel and equally subject to the rule of the charioteer, who must somehow not only discipline both but get them to cooperate on equal terms. The climax of this problem comes at a moment when, as Socrates describes it to Phaedrus, the soul is confronted with the image of beauty and consumed by the erotic desire to consummate, and must determine how to act. The scene, which is loaded with sexual imagery, is worth quoting at length:

Now when the charioteer beholds the vision of love, and has his whole soul warmed through sense, and is full of the prickings and ticklings of desire, the obedient steed, then as always under the government of shame, refrains from leaping on the beloved; but the other, heedless of the pricks and of the blows of the whip, plunges and runs away, giving all manner of trouble to his companion and the charioteer, whom he forces to approach the beloved and to remember the joys of love. They at first indignantly oppose him and will not be urged on to do terrible and unlawful deeds; but at last, when he persists in plaguing them, they yield and agree to do as he bids them.

And now they are at the spot and behold the flashing beauty of the beloved; which when the charioteer sees, his memory is carried to the true beauty, whom he beholds in company with Modesty like an image placed upon a holy pedestal. He sees her, but he is afraid and falls backwards in adoration, and by his fall is compelled to pull back the reins with such violence as to bring both the steeds on their haunches, the one willing and unresisting, the unruly one very unwilling; and when they have gone back a little, the one is overcome with shame and wonder, and his whole soul is bathed in perspiration; the other, when the pain is over which the bridle and the fall had given him, having with difficulty taken breath, is full of wrath and reproaches, which he heaps upon the charioteer and his fellow-steed, for want of courage and manhood, declaring that they have been false to their agreement and guilty of desertion. Again they refuse, and again he urges them on, and will scarce yield to their prayer that he would wait until another time. When the appointed hour comes, they make as if they had forgotten, and he reminds them, fighting and neighing and dragging them on, until at length he, on the same thoughts intent, forces them to draw near again. And when they are near he stoops his head and puts up his tail, and takes the bit in his teeth, and pulls shamelessly. Then the charioteer is worse off than ever; he falls back like a racer at the barrier, and with a still more violent wrench drags the bit out of the teeth of the wild steed and covers his abusive tongue and-jaws with blood, and forces his legs and haunches to the ground and punishes him sorely. And when this has happened several times and the villain has ceased from his wanton way, he is tamed and humbled, and follows the will of the charioteer, and when he sees the beautiful one he is ready to die of fear. And from that time forward the soul of the lover follows the beloved in modesty and holy fear.

And so the beloved who, like a god, has received every true and loyal service from his lover, not in pretense but in reality, being also himself of a nature friendly to his admirer, if in former days he has blushed to own his passion and turned away his lover, because his youthful companions or others slanderously told him that he would be disgraced, now as years advance, at the appointed age and time, is led to receive him into communion. (Plato, *Phaedrus*, Jowett trans.)

This passage has received substantial analysis. Recently, for example, Guigon (2021) has highlighted the brutality of the scene, arguing that, throughout the Platonic corpus, one finds a consistent theme through which the appetitive drives can only really be subordinated through violence, even where reason or philosophy must command that violent attack. Meanwhile, Belfiore (2006) interprets the example as a religious allusion to the sublimation of enthusiasm in religious choral dances, with

Socrates playing the role of charioteer, and the black horse functioning as a satyr-like creature that initiates a necessary (if also reckless) engagement with beauty. This initiation is important because the white horse may, because of its extreme discipline, be too modest to engage erotically with beauty. In other words, modesty that is itself excessive is also debilitating, for it blocks any consummation at all with beauty. Therefore it, too, needs an erotic push. These arguments are complementary. They address how modesty and desire must, through philosophic engagement, work in coordination to achieve a proper relationship. Beauty must be engaged, and true love should be consummated—but not pruriently.

To reiterate, three points warrant emphasis. First, as Belfiore points out, the scene illustrates how, “All three capacities [reason, spirit, and appetite], and not only a rational part of the soul, are given an essential and positive role in striving towards the good and the beautiful, and each capacity is represented as having certain defects.” Second, and subsequently, a noble and philosophical disposition, itself a product of education, requires a certain harmony or balanced relation between the three, and in particular between noble modesty and erotic desire, mediated by philosophy: “The black horse represents an impulse to move in bold and disorderly fashion toward erotic objects, while the white horse represents the impulse to stand still and to resist these objects. Both horses are able to use and to follow reason and are therefore capable of being trained by the charioteer, who must also train himself to guide them without imposing excessive restraint or yielding to the impulse to move forward without any restraint” (Belfiore 2006, 190-1). Third and finally, erotic desire is not to be despised; it is, rather, a force to be harnessed and guided. For spirit to approach beauty, it must be spurred by desire; but for desire to not profane beauty, it must be restrained. Erotic desire is satisfied as beauty is approached—but at a noble trot, not a sprint.<sup>16</sup>

Reading the charioteer myth as a statement on Socratic education, a glance at Greek horsemanship may again be instructive, if only by the roughest analogy. Most fundamentally though, and as discussed in a thorough study of Ancient Greek horsemanship by J.K. Anderson (1961), who in turn leans heavily on Xenophon’s study “On Horsemanship” (Xenophon 1997), it was widely recognized that the best horseman would similarly recognize that the proper training of a horse was not to weaken its spirit or desire, but to strengthen its body and nurture its spirit while, at the same time, making both amenable to the sound direction of the rational rider.

In this vein and provisionally, it is instructive to first contrast the philosophy of horse training with the lack of art used with donkeys. As Anderson reports, dating to the Bronze Age, cart animals like donkeys “had their heads left completely free, being guided only with a long whip or stick, with which they could be tapped on this side or that. . . Sometimes they were urged on with a goad, but it does not seem to have been thought necessary to have a means of restraining them—a fact which suggests that they were often overloaded and in miserable condition” (Anderson 1961, 66). Donkeys thus had no appreciable spirit or intellect, and were not “taught” anything. In contrast, “Most nations have managed their horses through direct control of the head. This is generally achieved either by pressure upon the outside of the nose, or by pressure upon the sensitive parts inside the mouth, or by a combination of both” (Ibid, 40); and, “In the classical period—roughly the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.—when men rode more than they drove, bits of new forms, with very severe mouthpieces, had been devised” (Ibid, 64). Greek horses had no stirrup or saddle; and though they were appreciably smaller than the modern horse, the absence of these tools made the importance of sound training—for spirit, strength, courage, *and* obedience—all the more important, given how easy it would be to throw, let alone buck off a rider.

The most important reference of the period is Xenophon’s (1997) *On Horsemanship*, and careful reading of this treatise gives added relevance, and some interesting contrast, to the analogies we have drawn between noble Socratic education and horsemanship. Xenophon was a follower of Socrates and an accomplished horseman (Ibid, 65). And his writings on horsemanship mark an insightful moment of intersection in this regard.

Much of what Xenophon says about horses and horse training will by now sound familiar. A well-trained horse, he says, will be neither too sluggish, nor too spirited, for “those [horses] which are either so sluggish that they often need urging on, or so high-spirited that they often need careful coaxing, make constant demands on a rider’s hands and adversely affect his morale in times of danger” (Ibid, 101). Accordingly, Xenophon frequently advises on how to encourage spiritedness and test a horse’s character (Ibid, 98, 100). He gives specific advice on “the best way of managing a horse in case it turns out to be either excessively lively or excessively sluggish,” noting for example that, “the first thing to appreciate is that spirit in a horse is the equivalent of anger in a human being. So just as the best way to avoid infuriating someone is not to say or do anything that will irritate him, you are least likely to arouse a high-spirited horse if you avoid annoying it” (Ibid, 112). When a horse is very spirited, the rider should avoid a “sudden wrench” to calm it down, and should “stop a spirited horse from ever reaching its top speed,” and “of course you should never let it race against another horse (remembering that the most high-spirited horses are also the most competitive)” (Ibid, 112-3). Regarding “managing a lazy horse,” his explanation is terse: “always do the opposite of what I said for a lively horse” (Ibid, 113). The art of training a horse, then, is very much an art of balance—of exciting a horse’s spirit to the point of being useful, but not overly so. Xenophon even calls “the best piece of advice I can give” that “if

<sup>16</sup>There is much in all this that alludes to male relations in Athens between the older, pursuing *erastes* and youthful *eromenos*. On homoerotic themes in the *Phaedrus*, see Dubois (1982); and on the general theme of Greek norms surrounding homoerotic pursuit and flight, courtship and copulation that bears some relation to the *Phaedrus*’s charioteer myth, see Dover (2016, 81-100).

you need a horse for war. . . to not get one that is too high-spirited” (Ibid, 113).<sup>17</sup>

This sounds fine in theory. But the challenge of horsemanship involves the complexity of lessons to be taught to an animal not endowed with reason. For to be useful, a horse must be dignified and disciplined; cooperative, trusting, and trustworthy; and it must get along with people as if they shared a common sense; and yet it must do so without philosophy, since “Whereas the gods have given us human beings the ability to use reasoned argument to teach other people what to do, you can obviously not use reasoned argument to teach a horse anything.” And so the approach must accordingly be more crude: “The best way for you to teach a horse what it is supposed to do is to reward it when it does what you want and punish any disobedience” (Ibid, 111-2).

Still, Xenophon is adamant that a horse, even if it is not philosophically rational, must at least *understand* what it is doing, and not simply be brutalized into submission. For not only is this likely to be counterproductive (with responses varying depending on its strength of spirit), but “when a horse acts under compulsion it does not understand what it is doing, and the action is just as inelegant as a dancer’s movements would be if he were trained by whip and spur.” Indeed, “Under that kind of regime the same goes for a horse as a human being: both of them are far more likely to look ugly than attractive. No, however dazzling and attractive a display the horse is required to put on, it always has to do so of its own accord, acting only on the aids the rider gives it” (Ibid, 117). A well-trained horse thus must develop trust with its rider or trainer—believing especially that good actions will be rewarded, and that so far as it listens to commands, it will never be harmed. It must also be trained for courage, rather than fear, relying again on its confidence in the rider, as well as familiarity with different situations through prior exposure and positive associations, and a general composure in novel situations modeled to it by its rider and other horses: “The single most important precept and lesson is never, in any of one’s dealings with the horse, to get angry with it. The point is that anger and foresight do not go together, and so we often do something that we are bound to regret later.” In potentially frightening situations, for example, “Compulsion and blows only make the horse more afraid” (Ibid, 106). One is more apt to succeed through patience, camaraderie, and stern but mostly positive reinforcement.

Finally, under extraordinary circumstances, particularly where there is early need of moral training, the horse may require a slightly violent intervention to move it towards understanding. Thus, though Xenophon offers little description of the early “breaking” in of a horse, he does suggest that a trainer early on carry “at least two bits,” and that, “One of them should be smooth and have good-sized discs, while the other should be rough and have heavy, small discs.” Indeed “the pimples of the rough bit should be sharp enough to hurt the horse when the bit is inserted into its mouth and make it drop the bit into place; when it is given the smooth one instead, then, it will be such a relief that it will carry out on the smooth bit everything it has been trained to do on the rough bit” (Ibid, 114). Elsewhere, particularly when a horse hesitatingly confronts a ditch or fearful jump, he suggests that “someone with a whip or a switch should give it as hard a whack as he can. . . and from then on you will never need to do that again.” The rider should also use the spur to ensure that the horse jumps “with its whole body rather than trailing its hindquarters” (Ibid, 110).

In sum the Greek art of horsemanship, though not a direct parallel with elite Athenian education, still offered a useful analogy to the philosophy behind it. Though the horse itself was not “rational,” if its soul could be trained to respond to the reasoned guidance of the rider or charioteer, then the combination of man and horse would simulate—almost literally—the image of the soul Socrates depicts in the *Phaedrus*. Man himself plays the steering role of philosopher, and the art of horse training is to cultivate a strength of spirit and character in the horse that, without proper instruction, would be liable to excess and danger, but that with instruction can be capably (and in some sense knowingly, with some degree of understanding) steered towards the good. The harsh bit and painful whip are used briefly at early critical stages, but more enduring is an education in courageous experience, trustful camaraderie, and positive reinforcement. The spirited horse obeys the rider because he/she has come to understand that doing so is good. And though the relationship involves subordination, it is also one of love, and they are virtuous companions.

## Conclusion: Socrates and the Tragedy of Alcibiades

To conclude, I want to suggest that from the combination of the images thus far discussed—from the *Apology*, the image of Socrates as gadfly and of Athens as a great and noble but sluggish horse; and from the *Phaedrus*, of the noble soul as a horse-drawn chariot driven actively but moderately towards erotic love—it follows that Socrates’ interaction with the noble aristocratic youths of his time can be interpreted, in alignment with this imagery, as a kind of noble horse-training, which prepared these same youths to one day ride the horse of Athens.

Though Socrates did not actively participate in the Assembly or the courts, as he notes at trial, he nonetheless *did* attempt to influence the politics of Athens, in a manner consistent with this model, through his sustained interactions with, and mentoring of, the noble aristocratic youths of his time. These were charismatic and influential men—speakers with the capacity to move

<sup>17</sup>Socrates makes much the same point in the *Republic* (Plato 1991, 491e), when he says to Adeimantus that, “Won’t we say for souls too. . . that. . . those with the best natures become exceptionally bad when they get bad instruction? Or do you suppose an ordinary nature is the source of great injustices and unmixed villainy? Don’t you suppose, rather, that it’s a lusty one corrupted by its rearing, while a weak nature will never be the cause of great things either good or bad?”

the Assembly and either spur or calm its desires, plus the financial resources to influence Athenian public opinion (and beautify the city) in a variety of other ways. Notwithstanding Athenian democracy's general reliance on lotteries to fill most public positions, these young men had the potential to lead the city through elected positions like the generalships, their rhetoric in the courts and, perhaps most importantly, their speeches and proposals at the Athenian Assembly.

Socrates' interactions with these aristocratic young men, and their subsequent involvement in a number of sordid or seditious activities, including two short-lived but brutal overthrows of Athenian democracy in 411 and 404 B.C., contributed to the charge against him of corrupting the youth, and his subsequent conviction and death sentence for the same (see esp. Hansen 1995; Stone 1989). As Socrates saw it, though, these were potentially noble and spirited horses that, if properly trained, might in turn become the trainers, jockeys, or charioteers to lead the noble horse Athens towards its fullest, most beautiful potential.

If sluggish in learning, Athens certainly did not lack the spirit. As is well known, it was throughout Socrates' life the most wealthy, cosmopolitan, influential, and daring city in Greece. And in an extraordinary analysis of Athenian political culture, drawn from Pericles' Funeral Oration in Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*, Steven Forde (1986, 439) attributes this spirit to—and describes imperial Athenian patriotism in terms of—“a kind of erotic attachment,” or “erotic passion,” through which “Athenians should become devoted, willing servants of the city by beholding its power, manifested every day in deeds, and becoming lovers of it.” Pericles, the architect of Athens' empire, appreciated this disposition and encouraged it, for this erotic desire for glory, expansion, and propagation was the cultural basis of Athenian imperial greatness.<sup>18</sup> But like a good trainer, he also sought to rein that spirit in, as he saw in advance the catastrophic potential of unbridled Athenian spirit-desire without restraint. “Pericles' appeal to *eros*,” writes Forde, “circumvents or supplants those conventional mechanisms of community, and seeks to bind the Athenians directly or immediately to the city, depicted as a beloved object.” While on the other hand, “His policy for the war [with Sparta] in particular is to resist all temptation to indulge in imperial expansion for the duration” (Ibid, 439). But, “This is precisely the part of Pericles' policy that proved most untenable after his death,” for “Among other things, [the Athenians] proved unable to resist the imperial temptation, and embarked on a vast project to conquer the island of Sicily. They did so, according to Thucydides, under the influence of erotic passion” (Ibid, 440).

Pericles rode the Athenian horse until his death. But in Socrates' account, he did not train it for virtue. The cultivation of Athenian spirit and desire was not disciplined under the bridle or bit, and the spirited horse had never truly been broken.<sup>19</sup> In Xenophon's terms, Pericles made the mistake of letting the Athenian horse run at top speed, at which point he was fated to lose control, while Athens would buck off and kick any rider who tried to rein it in. The erotic empire was consummated, not after a long period of education and nurture, but at the first moment of opportunity. And this corrupted Athens' relationship with empire from the start. Meanwhile, through his relationships with other talented and charismatic youths, Socrates hoped to train a different horse who might one day, in turn, transition to the role of trainer/rider himself, one with the capacity to add noble discipline to Athenian *eros* in ways Pericles had not.

Socrates' most famous attempt at such training was the charismatic Alcibiades—the adopted nephew of Pericles. “He was naturally a man of many strong passions,” writes Plutarch, “the mightiest of which were the love of rivalry and the love of preeminence. . . . But it was the love which Socrates had for him that bore strong testimony to the boy's native excellence and good parts. . . . and, fearful of the influence upon him of wealth and rank and the throng of citizens, foreigners and allies who sought to preempt his affections by flattery and favour, he was fain to protect him, and not suffer such a fair flowering plant to cast its native fruit to perdition” (Plutarch 1916, 2.1, 4.1). Plutarch describes how “the love of Socrates, though it had many powerful rivals, somehow mastered Alcibiades. For he was good of natural parts, and the words of his teacher took hold of him and wrung his heart and brought tears to his eyes.” And Alcibiades, “whenever Socrates found him filled with vanity and wantonness, was reduced to shape by the Master's discourse, and rendered humble and cautious” (Plutarch 1916, 6.1, 6.4).

<sup>18</sup>The Corinthians argued this to the Spartans in a debate preceding the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, in language reminiscent of the *Phaedrus*: “[Y]ou have never yet tried to imagine what sort of people these Athenians are against whom you will have to fight – how much, indeed how completely different from you. An Athenian is always an innovator, quick to form a resolution and quick at carrying it out. . . . Then again, Athenian daring will outrun its own resources; they will take risks against their better judgment, and still, in the midst of danger, remain confident. . . . Think of this, too: while you are hanging back, they never hesitate; while you stay at home, they are always abroad; for they think that the farther they go the more they will get. . . . *Of them alone it may be said that they possess a thing almost as soon as they have begun to desire it, so quickly with them does action follow upon decision*” (Thucydides 1972, 75-6, emphasis added).

<sup>19</sup>On this point Socrates criticizes Pericles most directly in the *Gorgias*, in a passage that leaves little doubt about the salience of the analogy between political education and horsemanship: “But tell me this as well,” he asks Callicles, “Are the Athenians said to have become better because of Pericles, or, quite to the contrary, are they said to have been corrupted by him? That's what I hear, anyhow, that Pericles made the Athenians idle and cowardly, chatterers and money-grubbers, since he was the first to institute wages for them.” Then, after highlighting the Athenians' censure of Pericles' prudent war policy at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War (when the people “came close to condemning him to death”), Socrates observes that “A man like that who cared for donkeys or horses or cattle would at least look bad if he showed these animals kicking, butting, and biting him because of their wildness, when they had been doing none of these things when he took them over. Or don't you think that any caretaker of any animal is a bad one who will show his animals to be wilder than when he took them over, when they were gentler?” Socrates then asks Callicles, “Is man one of the animals, too?” and when Callicles agrees, asks, “Wasn't Pericles a caretaker of men?...Well? Shouldn't he, according to what we agreed just now, have turned them out more just instead of more unjust, if while he cared for them he really was good at politics?...But Pericles certainly showed them to be wilder than they were when he took them over, and that toward himself, the person he'd least want this to happen to.” (Plato 1997, 515e-516c)

Alcibiades appears in several Platonic dialogues, but for our purposes two are especially important.<sup>20</sup> First, in the *Alcibiades*, Socrates approaches Alcibiades as a young man for the first time. The dialog occurs just as Alcibiades is preparing to enter politics, and Socrates, apparently smitten with Alcibiades' beauty and spiritual potential, hopes to influence Alcibiades, who declares unabashedly his desire to, in Socrates's words, be "the most influential man in the city, and if you're the greatest here, you'll be the greatest in the rest of Greece, and not only in Greece, but also among the foreigners who live on the same continent as we do." Indeed, says Socrates to Alcibiades as the dialog commences, "you want your reputation and your influence to saturate all mankind" (Plato 1997, 105b-c).

Socrates claims to be the only man who can help Alcibiades achieve his goals; but in the process, he tries to convince Alcibiades that, since he knows little about justice (and mistakenly thinks that the skill of achieving "advantage" for Athens, absent a concomitant knowledge of justice, will be sufficient for successful leadership), it may be necessary to delay his entry into politics until his education with Socrates is complete. Socrates persuades Alcibiades that knowledge of justice is not only an end in itself, but will be essential if he is to achieve his political goals; and that if the city is to prosper under his leadership, then "it isn't supreme power you need to get for yourself or the city, but virtue" (Ibid, 135b). In the process, Socrates will often tickle Alcibiades' pride and ambition with comparisons to other great empires, like Sparta or Persia.

Horses also play a role. On more than one occasion, Socrates highlights to Alcibiades that, in attempting to understand how to rule a city, they must agree that they are no longer dealing with horses, but rather with people or citizens (Ibid, 124e, 125b). This statement would resonate, for not only was Alcibiades arguably the most famous horse owner in all of Greece, but the prestige of his horses would, later in life, become meaningfully intertwined with his political ambitions.<sup>21</sup> Alcibiades took seriously the prestige associated with his horses, and with rearing them properly. Now Socrates both raises and lowers the ante. On one hand, as Helfer (2017, 79) notes, "Rule over horses, Alcibiades recognizes, is nothing grand," and therefore he must come to understand "what is it about human beings living together in a political community that makes presiding over them so prestigious?" Alcibiades must see that his political ambitions are both more serious and important than horse racing (a pure competition), and also fundamentally different in nature, and potentially more noble and glorious if done well. At the same time, contrasting citizens with horses exposes a danger from the citizens not present in horses—a horse may be corrupted by a trainer, but it is not capable of *corrupting* its trainer in the same way as the people. Socrates thus expresses to Alcibiades his "greatest fear, that a love for the common people might corrupt you, for many Athenian gentlemen have suffered that fate already"—that is, his fear that Alcibiades' erotic desire for fame may seek early consummation before he knows what he is doing. "Get in training first," Socrates says, as if speaking to a noble horse, "and learn what you need to know *before* entering politics. That will give you the antidote against the terrible dangers" (Plato 1997, 132a-b).

The theme of Plato's *Alcibiades* thus centers on the relationship between Socratic education, political action, and the training of *eros*. Socrates recognizes Alcibiades' extraordinary spirit for politics, and the great potential for good or bad it harbors. As such, Socrates attempts to both spur and tame Alcibiades' spirit, to make it amenable to philosophic riding; in an erotic sense, it is to persuade Alcibiades that, if he truly desires glory, and thinks glory a noble and beautiful thing, he should not seek to consummate his erotic political desires just yet, or to run at a political sprint (as it were), until he has been broken, and until a philosopher has taken his reins.

Socrates tried his hand at horsemanship with Alcibiades, but in the end one cannot help but judge his attempt a failure. For while arguably no Greek of his time was ever more courageous (Alcibiades was known to have saved Socrates' life on the battlefield, served in the Athenian infantry, cavalry, and navy, and was a brilliant commander), or more skilled politically (having been appointed general at several points; having negotiated critical military alliances seemingly at will; and having miraculously rebuilt the Athenian navy after the failed Sicilian Expedition), none also was more infamous for his reckless ambition and self-indulgence—whether erotic indulgence in the physical sense (including impregnating a Spartan queen), ambition in a political sense (persuading the Athenian Assembly to approve and fund a suicidal mission into Sicily while still at war with the Spartans, which he would naturally lead, and in direct conflict with Pericles' advice), or shamelessness in a moral sense (having betrayed Athens to Sparta right after laying these plans, and after having been accused of numerous religious violations).

Socrates' failure is alluded to in Plato's *Symposium* in which, set "some fifteen years later, at the peak of Alcibiades' fame and shortly before the launch of the Sicilian Expedition" (Helfer 2017, 7), Alcibiades arrives to the party late and drunk, and acknowledges that although "Socrates is the only man in the world who has made me feel shame," yet "the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: I caved in to my desire to please the crowd" (Plato 1989, 216b). In this respect, the words of

<sup>20</sup>The most complete analysis of the engagement between Plato's Socrates and Alcibiades that I am aware of is Helfer (2017). I have benefitted greatly from this text.

<sup>21</sup>At the 416 B.C. Olympic Games, "Alcibiades entered... not one but seven chariots for the four-horse chariot race. Which meant that he brought with him no fewer than twenty-eight horses... It was both a shameless flaunting of extraordinary wealth and a naked statement of pure power—the acknowledged power of Athens and, more pointedly, the power to which Alcibiades aspired himself" (Stuttard 2018, 129). In an almost ludicrous outcome where both personal and political prestige were at stake, and where supporting an Athenian victory would be considered an act of significant public service, Alcibiades' horses won first, second, and third place.

Diotima delivered just earlier and approvingly by Socrates, on the topic of *eros*, anticipate our full previous discussion: “[W]hat Love wants is not beauty, as you think it is,” she says to Socrates, but “Reproduction and birth in beauty,” for “Look, if you will, at how human beings seek honor. . . I believe that anyone will do anything for the sake of immortal virtue and the glorious fame that follows; and the better the people, the more they will do, for they are all in love with immortality” (Ibid, 206e, 208c-e). Alcibiades, like the Athenian citizens, was pregnant with ambition. The Athenian masses erotically desired a glorious and wealthy empire for their city and themselves, and pursued immediate consummation; Alcibiades erotically desired the fame and glory of his leadership of these masses and this empire, and pursued immediate consummation.

Putting this together, we can better understand David Stuttard’s recent argument that “It was partly Plato’s ambition to clear his mentor’s name by scorching any suggestion that Socrates was a malign influence on the *jeunesse dorée* of Athens, and demonstrating that it was in spite and not because of his teaching that they behaved the way they did,” and that with respect to Alcibiades in particular, “we must be aware of Plato’s agenda: if only Alcibiades had given himself over to Socrates’ teaching, his fate and that of Athens could have been very different” (Stuttard 2018, 4). But the point must be understood in two senses—it is not just that Socrates did not corrupt Alcibiades (or, for that matter, others like Critias who would briefly lead the Thirty Tyrants)—it was that he tried his best to train him. For Alcibiades was a strong and spirited horse who needed training, and so was Athens. As the cultural legacy of Athens amply testifies, no city in the Greek world had a greater appreciation for beauty; and as history informs us, at its best no city in Greece had a more energetic and graceful spirit. Socrates was not only a “gadfly” to Athens, he was a “spur” to Athens towards something more noble and beautiful.<sup>22</sup> As his life, words, and actions attest, he thought Athens to be a noble and spirited horse, that needed a much better, and much different training. Socrates’ courting of Alcibiades was an attempt to train one spirited horse to lead another. If the failure of this training contributed to his death, it was not for lack of desire.

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<sup>22</sup>For the thesis that the proper translation of  $\mu\omega\psi$  is “spur” rather than “gadfly” in the *Apology*, see Marshall (2017).

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