

The Benefits of Bullies: Sophists as Unknowing Teachers of Moderation in Plato's *Euthydemus*

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Abstract: Though Plato's *Euthydemus* is usually interpreted as an unambiguous attempt to discredit the sophists' teaching methods, I argue that the dialogue defends the role sophists play in philosophic education. Read in its dramatic context, the dialogue reveals that sophists offer a low-stakes environment for the testing and development of an important political virtue: moderation. The sophist's classroom facilitates the cultivation of moderation by simulating the agonistic conditions of the assembly or courtroom, where many encounter temptations to bully others verbally. By arousing one's inner bully, the sophists expose the limits of one's moderation. While not sufficient for developing moderation, such self-revelations constitute a necessary part of the process even for a philosopher like Socrates. Ironically, by bringing out the worst in their students, the sophists unknowingly supply a protreptic to philosophy.

While many agree that moderation is needed for a more just political life, few would advise engaging with bullies to cultivate moderation.² Yet, as this essay will argue, this is precisely what Plato's *Euthydemus* recommends.

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² Plato and Aristotle were among the first to argue for the political importance of the virtues. Contemporary thinkers who have revived this tradition of thought include Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer, Michael J. Sandel, Stephen Macedo, William Galston, Peter Berkowitz, and others. Recent work has also defended the place of specific virtues in political life. For example, on the role of courage, see Richard Avramenko, *Courage: The Politics of Life and Limb* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011) and Ryan K. Balot, *Courage in the Democratic Polis: Ideology and Critique in Classical Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University

Depicting a conversation in which Socrates tries to persuade Crito to enroll himself and his sons in the classes of two sophists, the *Euthydemus* has long puzzled scholars because of Socrates' portrayal of these sophists not as teachers of virtue, but as bullies. Accordingly, most interpreters dismiss Socrates' appeals to Crito as ironic, reading the dialogue as Plato's attempt to persuade readers of the superiority of his educational method by opposing it to that of his rivals, the sophists. While the largely unfavorable treatment of sophists throughout the Platonic corpus supports this reading, the persistence of Socrates' pleas to Crito—along with other clues—should give one pause.³ Challenging the common perception of Plato as hostile to sophists, I argue that

Press, 2014). For moderation as a political virtue, see Harry Clor, *On Moderation: Defending an Ancient Virtue in a Modern World* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008) and Aurelian Craiutu, *A Virtue for Courageous Minds: Moderation in French Political Thought, 1748-1830* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

³ Plato's attacks on the sophists are so notorious that numerous scholars attribute the sophists' bad reputation to Plato. See, for example, George Grote, *A History of Greece*, vol. VIII (London: John Murray, 1850), p. 483; Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1945), p. 225, n. 52; G.B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Susan C. Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998); and Edward Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003). As Christopher Tindale points out, Plato's treatment of the sophists is more nuanced than usually recognized. Yet, even he agrees Plato's response to the sophists 'is still largely negative.' See Christopher W. Tindale, *Reason's Dark Champions: Constructive*

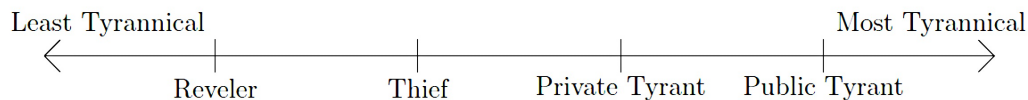
when read as a whole and within its dramatic context, the *Euthydemus* offers a compelling argument for engaging bullies like the sophists. Put simply, in mimicking the agonistic conditions of the Athenian assembly or courtroom—where individuals are likely to be tempted to impress others by bullying their opponents with shameful arguments—the sophist’s classroom offers a comparatively harmless opportunity to test and to develop one’s moderation. That is, by arousing one’s inner bully, the sophists expose the limits of one’s moderation and thus inadvertently help to teach what they claim to teach. Though a visit to the sophist’s classroom is not *sufficient* for cultivating moderation, it can assist with a *necessary* step in the development of any virtue: realizing one does not already possess it. Ironically, by bringing out the worst in their students, the sophists unknowingly supply a protreptic to philosophy. Ultimately, this explains Socrates’ engagement with the sophists. For an experienced philosopher knows that while exposure to bullies like the sophists can be dangerous, it is a danger one must face to develop a virtue as important as moderation.

While sophists existed as a professional class only in ancient times, a modern day analogue can be found in the concept of the verbal bully. Just as a schoolyard bully uses his superior size to push smaller boys down or a workplace bully uses her superior rank to keep others from advancing, sophists use their skill with words to beat others into submission. In one memorable image in the dialogue, the sophists Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are described as only being able to ‘make game of people ... just as those who draw away stools from those about

to sit down rejoice and laugh when they see one sprawling on one's back' (278b-c).⁴ While this may sound innocent and comical, Socrates' later comparison of the sophists to monsters (297c) signals that we should regard the sophists not as friendly pranksters, but as sinister individuals with the bully's penchant for cornering and abusing others.

Though no exact equivalent of the term 'bully' exists in ancient Greek, Plato's awareness of this concept emerges in the discussion of the tyrannical (τυραννικός) soul in Book 9 of the *Republic*. Here, Socrates makes clear that different gradations of tyranny exist in the soul. Within all souls one finds tyrannical impulses, but in some these impulses lie relatively dormant—emerging only in one's sleeping dreams—while in others they are more manifest. Socrates thus speaks of the development of the tyrannical man from drunken reveler, to robber, to private tyrant murdering his family and friends, to public tyrant doing whatever it takes to acquire and maintain power.

Tyrannical Tendencies



On this scale, the sophist falls somewhere near the thief. This is elucidated when, describing the 'small (σμικρά)' evils of a soul not yet arrived at the height of tyranny, Socrates mentions those who steal, kidnap, or 'are sycophants (συκοφαντοῦσιν), if they are powerful at speaking (λέγειν)' (575b). While 'sycophant' was a derogative term used to refer to citizens who abused the legal system by bringing frivolous lawsuits, it became nearly synonymous with the term 'sophist', as sophists were typically responsible for teaching the skills needed to be successful in private

⁴ All translations are my own, developed in consultation with *Plato: Euthydemus*, trans. Gregory A. McBrayer and Mary P. Nichols (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2012).

litigation.⁵ Indeed, the terms ‘sycophant’ and ‘sophist’ were so commonly interchanged in 4th century B.C. Athens that Isocrates felt it necessary in a treatise defending his rhetorical teachings to point out that originally the two terms were distinguished.⁶ Given the close association between sycophants and sophists, the classification of sycophants as tyrannical souls (roughly on a par with thieves) logically extends to sophists. The sophists exhibit the cruelties of a tyrannical soul, yet are neither political tyrants nor private tyrants using gross physical violence against their families, friends, and neighbors.⁷ Rather, like the bestial Thrasymachus, they tyrannize others with words. Though Plato had no word for this concept of small-scale tyrants or pre-tyrants, the modern word ‘bully’ is fitting. While it can imply the use of physical force, many bullies tear down others with their words alone, much as the sophists do.

Generally, the Greeks did not find bullying problematic; indeed, they applauded the demolishing of one’s opponent in argument. However, part of Plato’s mission in the *Euthydemus* is to challenge the common conception of what it means to be a good political leader. His aim is

⁵ To illustrate, Socrates’ description in the *Republic* of a sycophant could easily apply to the sophists in the *Euthydemus*: ‘out of design doing harm in argument’ (341a). For more on sycophants and sophists, see Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 170-174.

⁶ Isocrates, *Antidosis*, 313.

⁷ Similarly, in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Socrates offers a hierarchy of souls in which tyrants are most removed from the sight of truth, with sophists being the second most removed (248d-e). This suggests a close association between sophist and tyrant, with the former being less corrupted than the latter.

to show that bullying is the mark of a tyrannical soul and, as such, connected with the fulfillment of erotic appetites rather than the pursuit of the common good. This comes to light through the contrast drawn between the sophists and Socrates. Though at times Socrates uses the same techniques as the sophists, Plato consistently distinguishes his approach from the sophists' bullying. The sophists, he shows, are men of hubris who delight in cornering and abusing others for their own personal gain. Socrates, by contrast, appears as a humble man who challenges his interlocutors for their own benefit.⁸ The pains Plato takes in the *Euthydemus* to highlight this distinction suggests he finds the sophists' bullying more concerning than any of their other qualities. Simply put, such behavior betokens the figure of the tyrant that Plato finds so worrisome. By inciting others to imitate them, the sophists encourage the development of tyrannical tendencies and thus the perpetuation of injustices.

⁸ Other scholars have argued this point at length. Zuckert in particular gives an excellent overview of the differences between Socrates and the sophists. See Catherine Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp. 494-501. For further discussion, see Rosamond Kent Sprague, *Plato's Use of Fallacy: A Study of the Euthydemus and Some Other Dialogues* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962); R.S.W. Hawtrey, *Commentary on Plato's Euthydemus* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981); Robin Jackson, 'Socrates' Iolaus: Myth and Eristic in Plato's *Euthydemus*', *The Classical Quarterly*, 40.2 (1990), pp. 378-95; Thomas Chance, *Plato's Euthydemus: Analysis of What Is and Is Not Philosophy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); and Ann N. Michelini, 'Socrates Plays the Buffoon: Cautionary Protreptic in "Euthydemus"', *The American Journal of Philology*, 121.4 (2000), pp. 509-35.

Yet, contrary to what we would expect, rather than recommend avoiding sophists because they arouse our tyrannical tendencies, Plato demonstrates that we should engage sophists *because* they help us perceive our inner bully. This emerges from Socrates' conversation with Crito, who, as we will see, believes himself morally incapable of arguing in the sophists' shameless manner. By relating an encounter with sophists where Socrates himself broke down and acted immoderately, Socrates attempts to show Crito that moderation is a virtue more easily preached than practiced. For Socrates, the value of the sophist's classroom lies in testing the limits of his moderation and thus gaining insight into his own character. This is why he recommends the sophists to Crito, and perhaps also why in other dialogues, such as *Hippias Major*, he insists he has benefitted from being abused (ὀνειδίζεσθαι) by a sophist (304e).

Though not sufficient by itself, Plato conveys that moderation is necessary for a more just life and a more just form of political leadership. After all, moderation is the virtue that sycophants, who are overly zealous about prosecuting others, lack. The *Euthydemus*' numerous evocations of moderation further suggest this virtue's importance in the dialogue. Various translations as 'moderation,' 'self-control,' or 'temperance,' σωφροσύνη first appears in adjective form in Socrates and Cleinias' list of 'good things' at 279b. Similarly, at 281c, Socrates and Cleinias agree that one will be able to do more if one is 'moderate' (σώφρων). At 304b, Socrates implies that the sophists lack moderation when he remarks that if the sophists are moderate (σωφρονῆτε) then they will advise their students to converse only amongst themselves. In these references, moderation is seen as an important virtue. The closely related concept of measure (μετρίότης) also figures prominently in the dialogue. Generally, in Platonic thought, to be moderate is to act with restraint over one's appetites and to observe the divine principle of limit, as the inscription 'nothing too much (μηδὲν ἄγαν)' on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi enjoins.

Towards the dialogue's conclusion, concerns relating to overindulgence arise as Euthydemus proposes that if medicine is good then one ought to drink it 'as much as possible (ὥς πλεῖστον)' and that if it is good to have spears and shields in war then one ought to have 'as many as possible (ὥς πλεῖστα)' (299b-c). Indeed, the language of measure appears explicitly in a passage on speechwriters, who are said to 'have engaged moderately (μετρίως) in philosophy, and moderately (μετρίως) in politics' (305d). These evocations of the notion of moderation call our attention to this virtue and its importance in political life.⁹

The argument outlined above is developed as follows. First, I show why existing interpretations of Plato's *Euthydemus* do not adequately explain the relationship between philosophy and sophistry presented therein. Next, I argue that Socrates' exchanges with Crito establish the central problem Plato confronts: widespread disdain of sophists. Turning to Socrates' account of his encounter with the sophists, I then reveal how his narration highlights the sophists' skill at provoking others to immoderation. The next section argues that though this may seem like a reason to avoid the sophists, Socrates' exchange with Crito at the end of the dialogue explains why Socrates thinks Crito should engage the sophists, and why he himself found it valuable to visit the sophist's classroom. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that the *Euthydemus* not only offers readers a better understanding of why Socrates conversed with the sophists, but also a clearer conception of what Platonic philosophy entails.

I. Socrates' Appeals to Crito: Ironic?

⁹ For more on moderation in Plato's thought, see Helen North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), pp. 150-196.

The traditional reading of the *Euthydemus* as an anti-sophistic tract appears as early as 1918, when John B. Edwards pointed to the ascendancy of the eristic method of argumentation at the time Plato wrote the *Euthydemus* as evidence that ‘Plato’s particular purpose in the *Euthydemus* was to combat the sophistic tendencies of the age.’¹⁰ One need look no further than the dialogue itself to find evidence supporting this interpretation. Such evidence includes Plato’s characterization of Socrates as genuinely concerned with his interlocutor’s well-being and the sophist brothers as lacking such concern,¹¹ the sophists’ willingness and Socrates’ unwillingness to say anything to win an argument,¹² and the way the dialogue alternates between sophistic eristic and Socratic protreptic, as though the two were being compared.¹³ So blatant is the contrast between sophistry and philosophy that Thomas Chance argues that ‘with some degree of precision, not to say exactness, [Plato] actually depicts eristic as *the* antithesis to dialectic, in fact, as *the* very paradigm of otherness.’¹⁴ Likewise, Christopher W. Tindale writes that ‘the *Euthydemus* constitutes Plato’s most derisive treatment of “sophistic thought.”’¹⁵

Given the plethora of evidence supporting the traditional interpretation of the dialogue as promoting Platonic over sophistic education, it is apparent why many scholars treat as ironic Socrates’ appeals to Crito to join him in learning from the sophists. The conclusion follows so logically from Socrates’ disparaging account of the sophists that scholars tend to state or assume

¹⁰ John B. Edwards, ‘The *Euthydemus*’, *The Classical Weekly*, 11.27 (1918), pp. 210-13, p. 211.

¹¹ Sprague, *Plato’s Use of Fallacy*, pp. 3-4.

¹² Jackson, ‘Socrates’ Iolaos’, p. 378-95.

¹³ Hawtrey, *Commentary on Plato’s Euthydemus*, p. 18.

¹⁴ Chance, *Plato’s Euthydemus*, p. 19.

¹⁵ Tindale, *Reason’s Dark Champions*, p. 10.

it rather than argue it. George Grote is emblematic in this regard, noting in passing that Socrates ‘[concludes] the recital, *in his ironical way*, by saying that he intended to become a pupil under the two Sophists, and by inviting Kriton to be a pupil along with him.’¹⁶ Likewise, David Roochnik avers that Socrates ‘is transparently ironic in his praise of his sophistic competitors.’¹⁷ Some, such as A.E. Taylor, do not analyze Socrates’ exchanges with Crito at all, viewing their conversation as ‘a sort of appendix.’¹⁸ Leo Strauss is thus not far off in his response to Socrates’ insistence on becoming the sophists’ pupils: ‘Everyone will say, everyone has said that this is “that customary irony of Socrates.”’¹⁹ Why should they not, when at every turn of his narration the sophists demonstrate qualities antithetical to true philosophers?

A few scholars have questioned the appeal to irony and have done so within the framework of the classic interpretation of the *Euthydemus* as setting in opposition philosophy and sophistry.²⁰ Their basic insight—that it is possible for Plato and his character Socrates to

¹⁶ George Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates* (London: London Murray, 1867), 2nd ed., p. 556; emphasis mine.

¹⁷ David Roochnik, ‘The Serious Play of Plato’s *Euthydemus*’, *Interpretation*, 18.2 (1990-91), pp. 211-33, p. 211.

¹⁸ A.E. Taylor, *Plato: The Man and His Work* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1960), 7th ed., p. 100.

¹⁹ Leo Strauss, ‘On the *Euthydemus*’, *Interpretation*, 1 (1970), pp. 1-20, p. 1.

²⁰ Of course, this framework is itself subject to examination. Strauss, for one, contends, ‘Socrates was not the mortal enemy of the sophists nor were the sophists the mortal enemies of Socrates. According to Socrates, the greatest enemy of philosophy, the greatest sophist, is the political multitude (*Republic* 492a5-e6), i.e. the enactor of the Athenian laws.’ See Strauss, ‘On the

view sophistry as inferior to philosophy yet find it essential to engage the sophists—is not only plausible but borne out by the text itself. Among these scholars, the predominant conclusion is that Socrates thinks it imperative that he and Crito engage with the sophists not for their own benefit, but for the sake of their children, whom the sophists might corrupt if they are not there to intervene. As Chance puts it, ‘What the Critos and Axiochuses cannot comprehend is that a persistent refusal to fight openly against the brothers (or, in the language of this dialogue, to refuse to go to their school) allows these self-seeking profiteers, without opposition, to usurp the role of genuine teachers.’²¹ In explicit support of Chance’s conclusion, Ann N. Michelini contends that Socrates participates ‘in an ultimately fruitless exchange with a pair of trivial and amoral tricksters’ to ‘protect’ the young men of whom the sophists make sport.²² Likewise, Catherine Zuckert argues that though ‘it is clear that there is nothing Socrates can learn from them,’ he engages the sophists because he recognizes that ‘youths need to learn how the sophists defeat their opponents in argument, if they are not ... to be discouraged from pursuing philosophy.’²³

Euthydemus’, p. 20. Mary P. Nichols and Denise Schaeffer also question the apparent opposition between philosophy and sophistry: ‘The *Euthydemus* contributes to our understanding of philosophy not simply by defending it as superior to its rivals, but by raising seriously the question of whether philosophy is good.’ See Mary P. Nichols and Denise Schaeffer, ‘Interpretive Essay,’ in *Plato: Euthydemus* (Newburyport: Focus Publishing, 2012), pp. 63-91, p. 90.

²¹ Chance, *Plato’s Euthydemus*, p. 206.

²² Michelini, ‘Socrates Plays the Buffoon’, pp. 516-17.

²³ Zuckert, *Plato’s Philosophers*, p. 493.

Though commendable for raising the possibility that Socrates' appeals to Crito may be sincere, the explanation these scholars offer faces serious challenges. First, if Socrates hopes to show Crito the need for men such as themselves to prevent sophists from usurping the role of genuine teachers, why does he choose to relate an occasion on which he was *unsuccessful* in this regard? In his narrative, Socrates emerges not as a heroic elder who rescues the young from the corruption of sophistic education, but as an old man whose besting by the sophists seems to *increase* their standing among the young men. His story shows, in short, not how a wise elder's participation in such conversations might challenge sophistic authority, but how it might bolster it.²⁴ We must also ask why Socrates would wish to enlist Crito in defending philosophic education against its pseudo-philosophic counterpart. After all, Crito presents himself as unable to discern the difference between philosophy and sophistry even after hearing a lengthy tale in which those differences are highlighted.

A less common yet more persuasive approach to demonstrating the sincerity of Socrates' appeals proceeds from the insight that Crito himself might learn something from engaging with sophists. Zuckert follows this line of reasoning when she argues that Socrates seeks to show Crito that 'a person needs to be willing to risk making himself look ridiculous by admitting that he does not know something, if he is to learn.'²⁵ In other words, older men like Crito must engage with sophists not only to protect the young, but also to advance their own learning. Insofar as the process of learning requires us to admit our ignorance, engagement with sophists can benefit Crito because it helps expose him to the undignified feeling of looking ridiculous before his children—a feeling he must be willing to face if he is to learn. In Zuckert's reading,

²⁴ Also see Nichols and Schaeffer, 'Interpretive Essay,' p. 83.

²⁵ Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers*, p. 501.

this fear—not the fear of poor memory impeding learning—prevents Crito from taking lessons from the sophists.

By accounting for Socrates' decision to relate an encounter with sophists where they make *him* look foolish rather than the other way around, Zuckert's argument surpasses the predominant explanation that Socrates seeks to show Crito he must engage with sophists to protect his children. Yet, this argument falls short in three respects. First, there is no direct textual evidence suggesting that Crito fears appearing ridiculous before his children. Indeed, this reading must contend with Crito's repeated expressions of concern for his children's education. If Crito fears looking ridiculous in front of his children, then why does he insist on discovering whether the sophists are worthy teachers rather than offering to send his son, alone, to the lessons? Second, if Socrates is interested in showing Crito the necessity of appearing ridiculous before one can learn, then why does he relate an encounter with sophists rather than one strictly with philosophers? As even Plato's earliest dialogues indicate, philosophers are capable of making their interlocutors look ridiculous. Hence, even if one accepts the claim that Socrates wishes to show Crito that willingness to look ridiculous is a prerequisite for learning, one must still contend with the further question of why Socrates—with this goal in mind—chooses to recount a meeting with sophists. Finally, Zuckert's interpretation cannot explain why Socrates himself might find it valuable to engage with sophists.

Unlike other interpretations, my reading can explain why Socrates recommends engaging with sophists and how he himself benefits from such engagement. As I argue in what follows, Socrates wishes to show that engaging with bullies such as Euthydemus and Dionysodorus provides a comparatively harmless occasion to test and to develop one's moderation. By bringing out the tyrannical tendencies that lie within us all, the sophists allow one to test the limits of

one's moderation and to work on strengthening it. Socrates engages with sophists, then, not simply to protect young men from the damaging effects of a sophistic education, but for the sake of nurturing an important virtue in his own soul. The exchange is not 'fruitless,' even for him, as it allows him to test and to develop his moderation. It is this Socrates wishes to show Crito who, as we will see, has as much difficulty as his fellow citizens do with understanding why Socrates engages with sophists.

II. Crito's Exhortation to Sophistry

To obtain a more complete grasp of the *Euthydemus*, we must attend to the dialogue's distinctive dramatic structure, and especially to Crito's role in the dialogue. By giving the dialogue a unique structure among Platonic dialogues—as a narration interrupted by dramatic scenes in which another person (Crito) converses with Socrates about his narration—Plato highlights the interplay between Socrates' narration and the conversation framing it. Thus, rather than treat the exchanges between Socrates and Crito as inconsequential, we should respect Plato's artistry by considering what these scenes achieve. In what follows, I argue that these exchanges establish the central problem Plato confronts: widespread disdain of sophists. Though not himself completely disdainful of sophists, Crito's resistance to them motivates the dialogue's inquiry into why sophists are worth engaging and hence why Socrates frequents their classroom.

Throughout the *Euthydemus*, Crito displays ambivalence towards sophists. Indeed, from the beginning Plato dramatizes Crito's hesitance to enter the sophists' 'classroom' when Crito describes to Socrates how he had hoped to listen to his conversation with the 'stranger,' but could not owing to the large crowd. While it may be true that Crito could not break through the crowd, his disclosure towards the end of the dialogue of a long standing sense of distrust towards

sophists points to a deeper reason for remaining outside the circle. After hearing the story of Socrates' encounter with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Crito relays a conversation he had with another man present at the discussion. Though disagreeing with the man's disparagement of philosophy, Crito confesses that he himself would likely 'take more pleasure in being refuted than in refuting others with such arguments' and, moreover, that 'the willingness to engage in discussion with such men in the presence of many people seems ... to be rightly censured' (304c-d, 305b). By 'such men,' he means men 'acting foolishly and making much ado about nothing,' who 'care not at all what they say, but cling onto any phrase that is uttered' (304e-305a). This relatively low opinion of the sophists is soon reiterated when Crito mentions that, whenever he is in Socrates' presence, he always feels it is madness to neglect his sons' education, 'but whenever I look into any one of those professing to educate people, I am driven away and each of them seems to me when beholding him to be altogether odd' (306e-307a). As these remarks reveal, even before hearing Socrates' story, Crito feels apprehensive of sophists. His trust in Socrates prevents him from completely turning away, but he is unconvinced they offer any educational benefits. Rather, they appear to be fools who waste their time on insignificant matters and have no scruples about making shameful arguments. Crito thus finds himself on the fence when it comes to engaging with sophists, as his position just outside the crowd symbolizes.²⁶

²⁶ This ambivalence in Crito's character supports Martin J. Plax's argument that Crito straddles the boundary between the philosopher and the many. See Martin J. Plax, 'Crito in Plato's *Euthydemus*: The Lover of Family and of Money', *Polis*, 17.1-2 (2000), pp. 35-59. This paper might rightly be read as a response to Plax's question of 'why Plato utilized Crito as Socrates' interlocutor in a dialogue that explicitly exposes the methods of eristic refutation' (p. 57).

Crito would not have been alone in his distrust of sophists, for as various primary sources indicate, many Athenians shared his suspicions. Aristophanes' comic portrayal of sophists—among whom he includes Socrates—in the *Clouds* attests to this common disdain for sophists. Sent to the 'Thinkery' to learn how to help his father evade paying his debts, the young Pheidippides emerges a pale, useless intellectual who not only beats the creditors, but also, literally, his own father. A parallel to Aristophanes' representation of the sophists as corrupters of the youth appears in Plato's *Meno*, where one of Socrates' primary accusers, Anytus, refers to sophists as a manifest plague and corruption to those who frequent them (91c). In the *Protagoras*, too, Plato captures the general hostility towards sophists when Socrates makes the eager Hippocrates blush by asking if he would not be ashamed to present himself before the Greeks as a sophist (312a). So bad a reputation did the sophists hold that Isocrates thought it necessary to differentiate himself from the rest of the sophists in a speech titled 'Against the Sophists.' As these primary sources indicate, many Athenians found the sophists objectionable, even as some of the wealthiest Athenians paid exorbitant fees to have their sons educated by them.²⁷ The attitude towards sophists that Plato articulates through Crito captures, in short, a view commonly expressed within the larger community.

If anything, Crito displays a more positive attitude towards sophists than many of his fellow citizens. After all, he says he is willing to bring his son to be educated by them. Yet, juxtaposing Crito with the character Hippocrates in Plato's *Protagoras* suffices to illuminate Crito's hesitation. While Hippocrates barges into Socrates' room before daybreak to share the news of Protagoras' arrival and implores Socrates to take him to meet him, proclaiming he would

²⁷ Also see K.J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 10-11.

bankrupt himself and his friends to gain the sophist's wisdom, Crito does not inquire about Euthydemus until after Socrates' meeting with him. He is even unaware that there were actually two sophists in town. Then, beseeched by Socrates to join him in taking lessons from the sophists and to bring along his son Critobulus, Crito responds, 'But there is nothing preventing it, Socrates, if it seems good to you. But first you must describe to me what the wisdom of these men is, so that I may know what we will learn' (272d). Although Crito claims to have no objection to taking lessons from the sophists, he wants some assurance the encounter will be worthwhile. He is not, like the young and rash Hippocrates, chomping at the bit to meet them. Rather, he does what Socrates berates Hippocrates for not doing—he stops to investigate what the sophist teaches before entrusting his soul, and son, to him. This is because, as his later confessions to Socrates reveal, he finds the sophists repelling.

The generally negative portrait of sophists that Plato paints throughout his dialogues suggests he shares Crito's suspicion of sophists, rendering Socrates' enthusiasm for taking lessons from them puzzling. One could argue, as most scholars do, that Socrates is being ironic, but that would require us to ignore numerous clues that Plato wants us to take Socrates seriously in his recommendation of the sophists. Besides the reasons Socrates gives Crito at the end of the dialogue—an exchange that will later be addressed—we discover at the outset of Socrates' narration a significant clue that we must take him seriously. As Socrates reports, he was about to leave the dressing room of the Lyceum when his divine sign came, moving him to sit down again. The encounter with the sophists takes place, then, because of Socrates' customary sign. As Strauss notes, 'By forbidding him to leave, the *daimonion* permitted, nay, sanctioned the conversation that followed. No other conversation presented by Plato has so high an origin.'²⁸ In

²⁸ Strauss, 'On the Euthydemus', p. 3.

casting Socrates' conversation with the sophists as the result of divine intervention, Plato signifies that something good comes of this encounter and invites his readers to discover what that is.²⁹

In addition to the sanction of the *daimonion*, the choice of subject matter for the conversation further signifies the sincerity of Socrates' desire to engage the sophists. Upon learning they possess knowledge of virtue and are in town to demonstrate their wisdom, Socrates points out that before them is an audience eager to learn. First, however, he asks, 'which of these two would you be able to make good: only a man already persuaded it is necessary to learn from you, or also that man not yet persuaded, through a complete disbelief that virtue is a thing that may be learnt or that you all are teachers of it?' (274d-e). Assured they can persuade the latter, Socrates requests that they save their teachings on virtue for later, and instead persuade Cleinias, the cousin of the famous Alcibiades, to want to learn virtue from them. Cleinias is not the only character in need of such persuasion, however. Crito, too, is skeptical of the sophists' teaching abilities. He does not even allow them the opportunity to convince him themselves; instead, it falls on Socrates to exhort Crito to take lessons from them. By having Socrates request that the sophists work to persuade Cleinias to become their pupil, Plato again signals that through his narration Socrates hopes to persuade Crito to do the same. In other words, Socrates will attempt

²⁹ This is not to devalue what emerges from other conversations presented by Plato. In a dialogue that brings to light the benefits of engaging with sophists, the widespread distrust of sophists may have necessitated the inclusion of such a powerful symbol. Furthermore, numerous commentaries dismissing the *Euthydemus* as one of Plato's less serious dialogues suggest this dialogue may have been in more need of a signifier of its importance than other dialogues.

to convince Crito to take lessons from the sophists, appropriately enough, by recounting to him a conversation in which the sophists attempt to convince someone to hire them as teachers.

Neither Crito's ambivalent attitude towards the sophists nor the various signs that Socrates genuinely wants Crito to take lessons from them are coincidental. To the careful reader, these elements of the *Euthydemus* convey that Plato aims to challenge the Greeks' general disdain for sophists and to explain why Socrates engages with them. Through the framing of the dialogue, Plato makes clear that the *Euthydemus* is not merely an amusing tale about an encounter between Socrates and the sophists. Rather, Crito's role in the dialogue and Socrates' exchanges with him establish the dialogue as a meditation on the benefits of engaging with sophists. As discussed in the next section, these benefits are illustrated through Socrates' account of his meeting with the sophists, where it is shown that the sophists excel at arousing one's inner bully and thus at revealing one's lack of moderation.

III. The Sophist's Power to Arouse One's Inner Bully

For careful readers on the lookout for a justification for Socrates' engagement with the sophists, Plato now presents a chronicle of one particularly illuminating encounter. Told from the perspective of Socrates, this report depicts the sophists as so prone to making outlandish arguments that conversations with them verge on the comical. Yet, lurking behind the humor of Socrates' exchange with the sophists is a serious problem the narrative brings to light. That is, Socrates' story of his encounter with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus underscores the sophists' ability to arouse one's inner bully. Their skill in this regard is highlighted by the transformation Socrates' young friends undergo from the beginning to the end of their encounter. As we will see, while at first the sophists' tactics shock and dismay Socrates' friends, by the end they all

delight in witnessing each other using these same tactics. Socrates even presents himself as vulnerable to the sophists' provocation, as he too begins to bully his interlocutors with arguments designed to ensnare and humiliate them. These transformations in character seem, *prima facie*, to warn against engaging with the sophists. Yet, as I will argue more fully in the next section, what Socrates means to reveal to Crito—and what Plato wishes to convey to readers—is that testing the limits of one's moderation is vital to the development of moderation. Otherwise, one may not suspect one is deficient in this virtue. Facing the sophists' provocation to unleash one's inner bully allows one to test and to develop one's moderation, thus promoting philosophic education.

The sophists' ability to arouse one's inner bully is seen in Socrates' narrative namely through the character of Ctesippus, who transforms from one who finds the sophists' way of arguing shameful to one who himself delights in acting like a bully. Ctesippus' transformation begins when Euthydemus gets under his skin by accusing Socrates and his companions of wishing Cleinias dead and gone. Ctesippus interjects here for the first time with the reproach, 'Thurian Stranger, if it were not rude to say, then I would say: "on your head," for speaking falsely of me and the others concerning such a matter—which I myself think too unholy to say—that I could wish this man to be dead' (283e). Though Ctesippus politely defends himself against the sophists and thus does not act like a bully, as the conversation continues Ctesippus gradually jettisons this respectful demeanor. Unwilling to acquiesce to Euthydemus' sophistic logic, Ctesippus continues arguing with him, eventually provoking Dionysodorus to berate Ctesippus for 'turning abusive (λοιδορῆ)' (284e). Even Socrates observes that they seemed 'to bear themselves savagely (ἀγριωτέρως) towards each other' (285a). Once sitting with his friends in silent dismay over the sophists' refutation of his beloved Cleinias, Ctesippus now resembles a wild creature lashing out in fury at the sophists' provocation.

As Socrates' story continues, Ctesippus becomes progressively worse in the sophists' hands. Insisting he does not abuse Dionysodorus, but merely contradicts his remarks, Ctesippus is assailed for believing in the possibility of contradiction. When Dionysodorus contends that Ctesippus could not cite a single case of a person contradicting another, Ctesippus snarls, 'Well listen now as I demonstrate for you Ctesippus contradicting Dionysodorus' (285e). Though Dionysodorus soon silences him, when Socrates steps in and uncovers the flaws in his argument, Ctesippus rejoices, 'You say wondrous things ... oh men of Thurii or Chios or wherever and however you delight in being called, as it does not matter to you at all whether you talk nonsense' (288a-b). When he first inserted himself into the conversation (at 283e), Ctesippus expressed a desire not to offend the 'Thurian Stranger.' Now, he hurls insults with no restraint. The sophists, it seems, excel at arousing one's inner bully.

Indeed, no sooner has Ctesippus lost control of himself than he begins imitating the sophists in their method of disputation, despite his former aversion to sophistry. After various attempts to mimic their bullying, his unfriendly repartee with the sophists reaches its climax when he asks if all things are silent or if they speak, to which Dionysodorus replies, 'Neither and both' (300d). Upon hearing these words, Ctesippus completes his transformation:

And Ctesippus, as was his custom, bursting out loudly into laughter, said: Oh Euthydemus, your brother has made the argument go both ways, and has been destroyed and defeated. Then Cleinias was greatly delighted and laughed, so that Ctesippus grew ten times larger. But it seems to me that Ctesippus, rogue as he is, had heard these same things from these men themselves. For there is no such wisdom nowadays among other people. (300d)

Desiring to impress his beloved Cleinias, Ctesippus becomes swept up in the sophist's game. Instead of remaining moderate, he transforms into a bully using sophistic arguments to defeat others. Rewarded at last by his beloved's laughter, Ctesippus is elated, as though he had the strength of ten men. He takes enjoyment in the very mode of arguing he earlier deemed shameful.

Ctesippus is not the only one who succumbs to the temptation of sophistry; Socrates also finds himself making sport of others. We see this as the discussion turns to the beautiful. When Socrates claims that beautiful things are different from the beautiful though each has some beauty present with it, Dionysodorus asks how one thing, by having a different thing present with it, can be itself different. Socrates' response resembles that of a sophist: 'Are you at a loss then with respect to this? I asked: already I was attempting to imitate the wisdom of these men, seeing that I was desiring it' (301b).³⁰ Moments later, he mocks Dionysodorus for not seeing what even a child would see (301b). As this shows, Socrates himself finds it difficult to maintain a philosophic disposition in the face of bullies like the sophists. Even he transforms, momentarily, into a bully.

Though Ctesippus and Socrates are the only ones to imitate the sophists' bullying, ultimately everyone is transformed. Recall that, at the beginning of Socrates' story, the sophists' followers cheered and laughed as the brothers refuted Cleinias, while Socrates' friends, dismayed, held their peace. We have already seen Cleinias—once the victim of sophistic

³⁰ It is possible Socrates is not being truthful here (though, if true, this would not nullify the argument that Socrates wishes to show Crito the benefits of engaging with sophists). As previously argued, he differentiates himself from the sophists by employing their arguments not for the sake of personal victory, but for the benefit of those watching.

refutation—laugh at Ctesippus’ use of eristic to defeat Dionysodorus. By the end of the story, everyone is laughing and not at the defeat of the sophists, but at the defeat of their own. This happens when, through a series of exchanges, the sophists at last render Socrates and Ctesippus speechless. ‘Thereupon indeed, my dear Crito,’ says Socrates, ‘no one whatsoever of those present did not wildly praise the argument and the two men, and they nearly died from laughing and clapping and rejoicing’ (303b). Not themselves engaging in bullying, every member of Socrates’ party nonetheless becomes an accomplice to the bullying the sophists provoke.³¹

As Socrates’ story illustrates, the sophists are terrible bullies who excel at unleashing the tyrannical tendencies of others. Their willingness to deliver low blows in argument and their smug sense of superiority when opponents fall in their trap are so irritating that it would require immense self-control to avoid becoming a bully oneself. This is especially true when the humiliation takes place in front of one’s family, friends, and beloveds. Why, then, should anyone risk releasing their inner bully or, at the very least, discovering they delight in watching others being bullied? Turning now to the dialogue’s ending, the next section argues that in helping to bring out one’s inner bully, engagement with sophists provides a training ground for the cultivation of moderation. This emerges through Socrates’ final conversation with Crito, which reveals that, like many others, Crito overestimates his own moderation. Accordingly, he must first discover the limits of his moderation before he can realize his need for philosophic education. The sophist’s classroom, where even a man as virtuous as Socrates struggles to remain moderate, offers an ideal environment in which to test and to develop this virtue.

³¹ So perhaps do readers, if they laugh but do not contemplate what it means to delight in the sophists’ bullying. The dialogue’s humor functions, in other words, as a protreptic to philosophy much as the sophists’ bullying does.

IV. The Benefits of Bullies

Despite having just heard a lengthy account of how the sophists excel at provoking those resistant to sophistry to act like sophists, Crito proclaims that he ‘run[s] the risk (κινδυνεύω) of being one of those not like Euthydemus, but one of those ... who take more pleasure in being refuted than in refuting others with such arguments’ (304c-d). Consequently, he cannot understand why anyone would take lessons from sophists. It is here that Crito confesses that he recently heard another man’s account of Socrates’ encounter with the sophists. According to the man, philosophy is a worthless and ridiculous pursuit because those at the head of the profession do nothing but babble; had Crito seen the way they carried on, he would have been ashamed for Socrates (304e-305a). While thinking the man wrong to decry philosophy as such, Crito feels he was right to admonish Socrates for conversing with such men ‘in the presence of many people (πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων).’ Working on the presumption that he would not take up the sophists’ cudgels but rather would be the victim of their bullying, Crito cannot see what good could come of being humiliated in front of everyone.

To defend his engagement with the sophists, Socrates first inquires further into the identity of the man who disparaged him. Learning the man is a logographer—a speechwriter for the courts who never himself delivers orations, but rather equips orators for the fray—Socrates says he is not surprised. For speechwriters, whom Prodicus describes as the ‘border-ground between philosopher and statesman,’ believe that the followers of philosophy are all that stand in their way to claiming the ‘prize of victory in reputation (εἰς δόξαν) concerning wisdom’ (305c-d). According to Socrates, more than this stands in their way, however:

For, they think themselves to be in truth the wisest, but whenever they take part in private conversations (τοῖς ἰδίοις λόγοις), they are cut short by those around Euthydemus. Yet they believe themselves to be altogether wise—and fittingly, for they have engaged moderately (μετρίως) in philosophy, and moderately (μετρίως) in politics, on quite reasonable grounds—for they partake in both as far as needed and, being without risk (κινδύνων) and struggle (ἀγώνων), reap the fruits of wisdom. (305d-e)

Socrates' use of the word 'risk', so closely following Crito's use of it at 304c, suggests this word bears special significance. To grasp Socrates' critique of the speechwriter for not engaging the sophists, one might therefore begin by considering to what risk he is referring.

Upon first examination, Socrates seems to mean the risk of choosing either philosophy or politics. Yet, at 306a-c, Socrates implies that even avoiding making a choice about which to pursue involves risk.³² Thus, the risk from which the speechwriter shelters himself cannot be that of choosing philosophy or politics. Instead, it seems more likely that the risk to which Socrates alludes is exposing oneself before others, given his remark about the speechwriter engaging the sophists privately. From the speechwriter's viewpoint, by engaging the sophists privately rather than publically, he is able to test his wisdom—which, for him, means his cleverness in argument—without damaging his reputation. For while such encounters may not help to secure

³² As he argues, the speechwriter's approach would only be wise if both philosophy and politics were bad. For if one is good while the other is bad then the speechwriter will have exposed himself to a bad pursuit, and if both are good then he will have deprived himself of their full benefits by pursuing each half-heartedly. Socrates does not consider whether pursuing them half-heartedly, but together might yield greater benefits than pursuing each separately but fully. Nonetheless, he successfully conveys that even an apparent non-choice involves risk.

his reputation for wisdom, they also do not injure it as easily. Rather, they allow the speechwriter a fairly safe opportunity to see where he stands relative to the sophists before challenging them to a public debate. It is for this reason that the speechwriter thinks himself wisest. He pursues the prize for reputation in wisdom, yet without the risk of damaging his reputation by being defeated in argument before a large group of witnesses.

The speechwriter's strategy accords with Crito's own evaluation of the risk involved in engaging sophists. After all, Crito believes he risks discovering that he does not have the desire to take up the sophists' weapons against them, and thus will face public humiliation as they defeat him in argument. His concern, like the speechwriter's, is for his reputation. Though Crito never states this explicitly, he implies it when he insists that the speechwriter was wrong to decry philosophy, but was right to blame the readiness to engage such men in the presence of others (304a-b). For both Crito and the speechwriter, the risk of engaging sophists lies in damaging one's reputation. One senses, however, that whereas the speechwriter fears he will not be able to outwit the sophists at their own game, Crito fears he will not be unscrupulous enough to play the game at all.

Yet, as Socrates' story demonstrates, more often than not, one will discover that one *does* have the capacity to bully others verbally. However much Crito believes he would be ashamed to make sophistic arguments, having never visited the sophist's classroom, he cannot be certain he would not take up or delight in their arguments. To believe he would not is to believe he is more moderate than any of Socrates' friends and even Socrates himself. What Crito risks discovering,

then, is that he is not who he thinks he is.³³ He risks discovering he is no more virtuous than the bully he finds so loathsome.

This is suggested not only by the events that take place in Socrates' narrative, but also by Socrates' own description of the risk involved in engaging the sophists. Socrates uses the word 'risk' earlier in the dialogue when he tells of how he was willing to take 'the risk (ὁ κίνδυνος)' by placing himself in the sophists' hands (285c). Comparing Dionysodorus to Medea, Socrates declares, 'Let him destroy me, and if he likes, boil me, or whatever he wishes to do: only let him show me forth (ἀποφηνάτω) as good (χρηστὸν)' (285c). Ctesippus follows this by asserting, 'I too, Socrates, am ready to hand myself over to the strangers, if they also wish to skin me even more than they are now doing, if my hide is not to end by being made into wineskin, just as that of Marsyas, but into virtue (ἀρετήν)' (285c-d). The allusions to Medea and Marsyas are appropriate in describing the activity of the sophists, as the former promised to rejuvenate King Pelias but through cunning had him killed, while the latter was flayed alive for losing a musical contest to the god Apollo, who is said to have won through a ruse.³⁴ In comparing the sophists to Medea and Apollo, Socrates and Ctesippus insinuate that the same could happen to them. Rather than emerge from the process better men, they could simply be tricked into becoming worse.

³³ My reading corroborates Sara Ahbel-Rappe's. As she argues, by beginning the *Euthydemus* with the word 'who' (τίς), Plato casts the dialogue as a quest for identity. Plato's aim is to show that, 'Socratic philosophy begins as a sincerely undertaken effort to ask this question about oneself.' Sara Ahbel-Rappe, 'Father of the Dogs? Tracking the Cynics in Plato's *Euthydemus*', *Classical Philology*, 95.3 (2000), pp. 282-303, p. 285.

³⁴ Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.4.2; Diod. Sic. 3.59.2-6.

Though both describe this with bodily metaphors, Socrates' desire to be shown χρηστός (morally good, the opposite of κακός) and Ctesippus' desire to have ἀρετή (moral virtue) suggest that what they risk are not their reputations, as Crito and the speechwriter believe, but the goodness of their souls.

If the risk is even greater than Crito realizes, why does Socrates recommend engaging the sophists? A clue lies in how Socrates and Ctesippus, respectively, construe what the sophists will do to them. Ctesippus envisions the sophists fashioning him into a final product or bringing him to a certain end, as conveyed by the word τελευτήσῃ ('to end by being made into'), rooted in the word τέλος ('end'). Socrates, on the other hand, wishes that the sophists will 'show [him] forth (ἀποφηνάτω)' as someone who is good. In using ἀποφαίνω—a compound composed of the preposition ἀπο and the verb φαίνω ('to show')—Socrates evokes the notion not of being made virtuous, but of being discovered virtuous. Related to the word for 'light' (φως), φαίνω also suggests a shining forth. What Socrates hopes, in other words, is that his encounter with the sophists will give evidence of his virtue. He risks, then, learning that he is not as virtuous as he believes. Socrates, the great advocate of self-examination, is willing to take this risk, however, for he understands that it is better to discover he is immoderate in the sophist's classroom than in a setting with more serious consequences.

In sum, Socrates' divine sign sanctifies the encounter because it allows Socrates to know himself better, to know how moderate he is. Ultimately, the benefit of this extends beyond the personal, to the political. For the key desire the sophists evoke—the desire to impress others—is the same desire one is likely to experience in important public venues such as the assembly or courtroom. Just as it would be preferable to discover one is a coward during a fire drill rather than an actual fire, it is preferable to discover in the sophist's classroom rather than in the

assembly—where the future of the entire polity may be at stake—that one lacks moderation. As the Athenian Stranger argues in Plato’s *Laws*, it is safer to test and practice one’s self-control in a situation involving play than when the stakes are real (649d-650b). Moreover, Ctesippus’ presence in the *Phaedo* at Socrates’ death suggests the transformation the sophists’ evoke can be overcome.

One final question remains. Why does Socrates endorse Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in particular? After all, like most people, Crito cares about the bottom-line; he can afford to spend neither all his time nor his money taking lessons from sophists. Why then does Socrates recommend these two? Why do we not see him trying to persuade Crito to engage, for instance, with Protagoras or Gorgias? To explain Plato’s decision to have Socrates encourage Crito to take lessons specifically from these sophists, we must understand in what way the two brothers distinguish themselves from other sophists.

Of the seven dialogues in the Platonic corpus bearing the name of a sophist, only the *Euthydemus* offers a substantial introduction to the sophists it portrays. We might therefore look to the passage where Socrates introduces the brothers for clues as to what distinguishes them. What most stands out in Socrates’ introduction of the sophists is his repeated characterization of them as ‘all-round sportsmen (οἱ παγκρατιασταί)’ (271c-272b). In fact, Socrates declares, they are not only able ‘to fight in arms (ἐν ὅπλοις ... μάχεσθαι),’ but also ‘to fight in words (ἐν τοῖς λόγοις μάχεσθαι)’ (271d-272a). Socrates later repeats this description when he introduces the brothers to Cleinias as men who ‘know everything about war (τὸν πόλεμον), as much as is needed for one preparing to be a good general’ (273c). Compared to other sophists in Plato’s dialogues, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are more heavily cast as skilled fighters.

Given the sophists' representation as knowledgeable in warfare, perhaps it is no coincidence that Crito interrupts Socrates' story at precisely the point when he and Cleinias are discussing the art of generalship. The interruption occurs when, in searching for the art that makes its possessors happy, Cleinias justifies his disagreement with Socrates' claim that generalship is this art. Contending that generalship is the art of hunting men, Cleinias explains how, with any form of hunting, once the prey is caught the hunters are unable to use it:

the huntsmen and the fishermen hand it over to the cooks, and likewise with the geometers, astronomers, and mathematicians—for these men are also hunters, since none of them make diagrams but discover things that are. Seeing that they themselves do not know how to use their prey, but only how to hunt it, I presume they hand over their discoveries to the dialecticians to make full use of, as many of them as are not utterly mindless. (290b-c)

As R.S.W. Hawtrey explains, this passage makes sense in relation to the hierarchy of studies proposed in the *Republic*, along with the divided line.³⁵ In Platonic epistemology, dialectic is the highest art, the art associated with understanding. The mathematical sciences fall short of dialectic because, while dealing with abstractions, they do not ascend to contemplation of the Forms. Thus, Cleinias concludes, just as hunters hand over their prey to cooks and mathematical scientists hand over their discoveries to dialecticians, generals hand over the men they hunt to politicians.

Here Plato employs a special dramatic device he seldom invokes—he has a character from the dramatic framing interrupt the dialogue's interior narrative. Hearing Cleinias' reasoning

³⁵ R.S.W. Hawtrey, 'How Do Dialecticians Use Diagrams? –Plato, "Euthydemus" 290b-c', *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, 12.2 (1978), pp. 14-18.

on why the art of generalship cannot be the art they seek, Crito cries out, ‘What are you saying, Socrates? That lad said such things?’ (290e). Interrupting Socrates’ narrative for the first and only time, Crito does so to express incredulity over the attribution to Cleinias of such a wise argument, an argument he ultimately concludes must belong to some ‘superior power (τῶν κρείττονων)’ (291a). The strangeness of this interruption in the narrative along with the suggestion that a divine power may be responsible for the argument denotes the passage’s significance.³⁶ The passage tells us that the sophist brothers, skilled as they are in generalship, are essentially hunters of men. As such, they know how to capture people, but not what to do once they have been caught. It is not far-fetched to propose that the same applies to their skill in fighting verbal battles. Though they excel at seducing the Athenian youth to employ sophistic arguments, they are unable to go further. Thus, if they are not utter blockheads, they will hand their ‘prey’ over to someone else. Who could that someone be other than a philosopher, and what does this suggest but that hunters of men like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus play a less laudable though no less fundamental role in the philosophic endeavor? In the end, Socrates recommends the sophist brothers to Crito because they are sure to catch him in a trap no matter how brilliant he is at anticipating and trying to avoid them. If Crito is anything like Ctesippus, or even Socrates, he is likely to respond to this by imitating the sophists’ bullying. Yet, this is precisely

³⁶ I leave aside the question of the true authorship of this passage, or why Socrates attributes it to Cleinias. For this debate see, namely, Chance, *Plato’s Euthydemus*, pp. 122-24; Tucker Landy, ‘Philosophy, Statesmanship, and Pragmatism in Plato’s *Euthydemus*’, *Interpretation*, 25.2 (1997), pp. 181-200, p. 193; Michelini, ‘Socrates Plays the Buffoon’, p. 526; and Strauss, ‘On the *Euthydemus*’, p. 14-15.

what Crito must experience before philosophy can help him. He must recognize his own lack of virtue and thus his need for philosophy.

Conclusion

Reading the *Euthydemus* as a mere condemnation of sophists, the rich insights the dialogue has to offer would escape one's notice. To be sure, Plato finds sophists and their bullying objectionable. Yet, he also recognizes and appreciates the role they unknowingly play in promoting the development of moderation. Stimulating our appetite for victory over others not for a worthy cause but for the sake of obtaining glory in the eyes of men or for the thrill of winning, the sophist's 'classroom' simulates places like the assembly, the courtroom, or even the battlefield. By taking the sophist's test in front of a crowd, one is afforded the opportunity to gauge one's self-control when faced with easy victories and to strengthen the capacity to act with measure in the face of such temptation. As such, the encounter provides a kind of fitness test for the soul—an opportunity to test and to develop one's moderation. In this way, engagement with sophists actually can prepare individuals for political life, contrary to the opinions of Crito and many others.

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates describes sophistry as a branch of pandering which 'considers in no way what is best, but always hunts (θηρεύεται) fools with what is most pleasant and deceives them, so that this pleasure seems to be most worthy' (464d). As the *Euthydemus* illustrates, the ephemeral pleasure sophistry produces is the thrill of conquering others in argument and, for some, the esteem this generates. Yet the *Euthydemus* also reveals that the life of a philosopher is not a life sheltered from pleasures that may distract from contemplation of the ideal. Rather, it is a life lived nobly within the den of iniquity, amidst the pull of unworthy pleasures. The

philosopher cannot practice moderation—or, as Plato puts it in the *Phaedo*, ‘practice for dying and death’—unless he faces situations where his self-control may be compromised. By provoking us to give up the true pleasure of internal harmony in favor of the transitory pleasure of besting someone in argument, sophists provide a classroom for the testing and development of moderation. Hence, philosophy needs sophistry, for the benefits of engaging with bullies outweigh the risks.³⁷

³⁷ I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers at *Polis* for their many insightful comments. Thanks are also due to Richard Avramenko, Daniel Kapust, and Michelle Schwarze for their invaluable feedback on earlier drafts.