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On Plato's *Hipparchus*

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On Plato's *Hipparchus*

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Abstract

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The *Hipparchus*, Plato's short dialogue on the love of gain, generally receives little attention from contemporary scholars. This essay, however, argues that Socrates' brazenly amoral defense of seeking gain provides deep insights into some of the fundamental themes of Platonic political philosophy, helping to clarify the character of the human good, as well as its relation to philosophy and morality.

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Introduction

An essay on one of Plato's dialogues normally needs little justification. While the often cryptic nature of his work has produced wildly different interpretations, the judgment—more than 2,300 years after his death—that Plato was a philosopher of the first degree—and the dialogues works of the highest philosophical quality—is generally accepted. The *Hipparchus*, however, is one of the few exceptions. The authenticity of the work was challenged in the nineteenth century and at least once during antiquity, and it receives little scholarly attention today.¹ This essay will not attempt an historical or philological refutation of the claim that the *Hipparchus* is spurious, although I do hope to demonstrate, albeit as a secondary concern, that the *Hipparchus* is a dialogue worthy of Plato and on the level of his other works; this task, if it is accomplished, would also have the fortunate consequence of addressing the claims that the *Hipparchus* does not belong in the Platonic canon, as this criticism, in the instances when an argument is offered, rests on a reading of the work as the product of an inferior imitator, rather than any specific historical claim about its origin.² My primary

¹Thomas L. Pangle, introduction to *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic*

²Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato*, trans. William Dobson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1836), 159.: “The Hipparchus as we have it is connected with no other dialogue of Plato whatsoever, and is so far from being unworthy of its insignificant and unplatonic ending, that the unfavorable prejudice which the two

interest, however, is to understand the *Hipparchus* on its own terms. This task becomes imperative if we accept that we might have something of the highest importance to learn from the dialogue.

The dialogue begins with several of Socrates' characteristic "what is ___?" questions. As we learn from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and the dialogues themselves, Socrates sought to examine "what each of the beings is" (*Memorabilia*, IV.6.1) by investigating the character of the classes; in the case of the class of the noble things, for example, he looked for the characteristic or characteristics all noble things have in common. But while many of the dialogues begin with a specific "what is" question, the investigation that follows is virtually never restricted to examining *only* that question. It would be absurd to say that the discussion in the *Meno* only investigates virtue, or the *Republic* only investigates justice. It is always the case, due to Socrates' method and to the nature of the questions themselves, that related questions arise over the course of the dialogue. No dialogue begins with "what is philosophy?" for example, and yet the question of the character of philosophy or the philosophic life is threaded throughout Plato's writings.

What is the subject of the *Hipparchus*? The most obvious place to go for

extremities [the beginning and end of the dialogue] at once excite against it never meets with anything effectually calculated to remove it. For the dialectics which it exhibits are a tedious and lame performance, always revolving around the same point on which it was fixed at the commencement, without making a single step in advance.")

an answer is the two questions that begin the dialogue: what is the love of gain, and who are the lovers of gain (φιλοκερδες)? And from these we can infer a third question, whose absence is somewhat surprising: what is gain? The comrade only answers one of these questions; he gives a description of the lover of gain. Hence it is partially accurate to say that the dialogue initially focuses on the identity of the lovers of gain. Φιλοκερδες, it should be noted, has a similar connotation in Greek as “lover of gain” or “profiteer” does in English.³ A φιλοκερδες is someone who loves gain too much, placing it above other, more important considerations. He is greedy and thus prone to cheating or gaining off of people unethically—what we might also call a “bloodsucker.”

What immediately comes to sight when considering the lover of gain, as we see in the dialogue, is the intense indignation that he evokes. The activity of the lover of gain, to a man like Socrates’ comrade in the conversation, seems to be extremely unjust. Furthermore, as we see over the course of the dialogue, the root of this indignation is intensely complicated, often shaped by contradictory opinions that the comrade is not entirely aware that he holds. To give just one example, the comrade vacillates between thinking that gain is simply good or synonymous with what is good for a

³ Allan Bloom, “The Political Philosopher in Democratic Society: The Socratic View,” in *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 35.

person, and that certain types of gain are bad. As we eventually see, the comrade argues that there is such a thing as evil gain (227e6). By evil gain, he means the type of gain that a decent man wouldn't dare attempt, gain earned by immoral means. And though he argues at several points that evil gain is a *loss* for the lover of gain, he still persists in calling it gain, albeit evil gain. But the separation of morality and gain, at least in speech, points to the comrade's uncertainty about whether the lover of gain is actually getting something good, or whether the evil means have any effect on what he actually gains—a million dollars is still a million dollars, we might say, regardless of how it was earned. The comrade is angry, at least in part, because he thinks that lovers of gain cheat their way to the gains that decent men rightfully earned, but that anger seems to imply that what the lovers of gain *gain* is actually quite desirable. And yet the complete separation of morality and gain is ultimately unacceptable to the comrade insofar as he argues that evil gain is a loss, or that evil means somehow negate what would otherwise be gainful.

The comrade cannot accept that it is good to be a lover of gain, or that decent men are worse off by foregoing shameful gains. But the comrade's half-conscious suspicion that the lover of gain's gains are actually good for him suggests that he thinks, on some level, that the restraint of decent men entails the loss of certain good things. I would briefly note that this view of

decency is at least understandable, as we commonly understand the decent or moral man as someone who often pursues ends that are not in line with his self-interest, and thus at some expense to his own good. And yet we also think that it is better to be moral than immoral, or at least more choice-worthy, despite the fact that it might often serve our self-interest to *not* be moral. This tension is partially reflected in the comrade's willingness, at several points in the dialogue, to admit that gain is good or necessarily good, and his desire to argue that it is bad to be a lover of gain.

But if gain is good, and the lover of gain apparently harms himself, we as readers must eventually entertain the possibility that the comrade is mistaken about the identity of lovers of gain. Perhaps the lovers of gain in the truest sense would be those men who actually love what is truly good for them. This possibility, of course, hinges on the question of whether gain *is* necessarily good. Socrates appears to prove multiple times that it is, but the comrade remains skeptical. Whether or not the reader ultimately agrees with Socrates, the discussion forces us to think through the problems in the comrade's articulation of the gainful and the good, and thus the relationship between the love of gain and the love of the good.

In briefly sketching some of the range of issues treated, directly or indirectly, in the dialogue, I mean to demonstrate that the subject matter of the *Hipparchus* include some of the deepest themes of Platonic political

philosophy. This has been at least partially acknowledged by some of the dialogues' critics.⁴ The *Hipparchus*'s worth in providing satisfactory or at least stimulating answers will only be come to light through a close examination of the dialogue itself.

The *Hipparchus* can be divided into four sections. The first section picks up a conversation already in progress, and covers the comrade's attempt to give an initial definition of the lover of gain and Socrates' counter-examination, culminating in the apparent conclusion that no human being is a lover of gain. In the second section, Socrates examines the relation between gain and the good, and concludes that *all* human beings are lovers of gain. In response, the comrade attempts to articulate a new understanding of gain that will redeem his position; here he makes the claim that there is such a thing as evil gain, or gain that is a loss. The third section is a long digression on the infamous Athenian ruler Hipparchus, who gives the dialogue its name. Though it occupies a significant portion of the dialogue, the digression has a somewhat unclear relationship to the rest of the dialogue. For now, I will only mention the curious fact that Socrates' story of Hipparchus's rule—an account that differs from all surviving historical accounts—culminates in Hipparchus undertaking the private education of an unnamed boy, which is followed by his assassination at the hands of two men jealous of their

⁴ Schleiermacher, *Introductions*, 157-58.

relationship. If for no other reason, this account should draw our attention for its striking similarity to Socrates' own fate. The digression is followed by the fourth and final section of the dialogue, which ends in the rather forced agreement that all men are lovers of gain.

Chapter I: 225a1-226e7

The dialogue begins with a conversation in progress. We have no information about the comrade's name, his background, other than that he is apparently a young man (226a2), or the time and place. Whether the comrade initiated the conversation himself or was drawn into it, it quickly becomes evident to the reader that Socrates' interlocutor is neither an aspiring student nor a rival claimant to wisdom. His primary passion on display is indignation, and we can suppose that the dialogue picks up after the comrade has made some disparaging remarks about lovers of gain. In any case, the dialogue begins with Socrates asking the following questions:

SOC.: So what is the love of gain? Just what can it be, and who are the lovers of gain? (225a1-2)

Socrates does not specifically ask why the lover of gain is worthy of condemnation, but his questions are sufficient to provoke a kind of indirect answer. The comrade answers that the lovers of gain are those that “think it worthwhile to make a gain from worthless things” (225a3-4). That the comrade intends for this response to both describe the lover of gain and indicate why he is contemptible is quickly confirmed when Socrates asks if the lovers of gain know the things from which they attempt to gain are worthless, adding that they would be fools if they did. The comrade

passionately replies that they are “not fools but villains and evildoers” who “know that the things from which they dare to make gain from are worthless, yet they still dare to be lovers of gain through shamelessness” (225b1-4). The comrade is certain that knowingly attempting to profit from worthless things is shameful.

Socrates’ counter-argument, which he elaborates through a series of examples that soon follow, is that it is impossible to make a gain from worthless things; if you could, he implies, those things would not be worthless. And because no one would *knowingly* attempt to make a gain from a thing that is impossible to make a gain from, the lovers of gain, if they exist, must be fools—they must not understand that what they are trying to do is futile. Socrates’ argument has a kind of formal solidity to it—the conclusions follow from the premise—but it is clear that the comrade does not agree that the lover of gain is a person who fruitlessly strives for an impossible gain. While continuing to assert that the things from which the lover of gain dares to make a gain are “worthless,” he seems to think that they accomplish what Socrates suggested was impossible—make a gain from these worthless things.

If the comrade thought of the lover of gain as simply a fool, or if he thought that the lover of gain failed to make any gain, the lover of gain would be more pitiable than contemptible. The comrade is certain the lover of gain

knows what he is trying to do, and thus is worthy of condemnation. But does the comrade's description of the lover of gain make any sense, or does Socrates' argument that a worthless thing cannot yield gain mean that it must be amended? The comrade's account of the lover of gain, rather than being incoherent, is somewhat intuitive. Consider a person who cheats on a test, or sells a barren piece of land on the pretense that it is fertile, or a Wall Street baron who gains from hollow financial instruments: all these people could plausibly be said to earn something from nothing, and all of them elicit strong condemnation. Like the comrade would argue, these people are generally condemned *not* because their gain is not in some sense a genuine gain—money and acing a test are certainly good things—but because of the method or means by which they achieve it. They are not fools, or at least are not foolish about how to get the goods they are after, but what they are doing is somehow wrong.

So then how can we articulate the comrade's grievance with the lover of gain? And how can we define the comrade's notion of "worthlessness" such that his definition of the lover of gain is not reduced to nonsense? The comrade doesn't seem to think that the materials the lover of gain employs are worthless in the sense that one *could* never gain from them; he means, it appears, that a person doesn't *deserve* to gain anything from them. The Greek is helpful. τῶν μηδενὸς ἀξίων can be translated as "worthless things," but it can

also imply “the things worthy of nothing.” A cheater is not worthy of his gains, but his cheating may have brought him things that are literally “worth” a great deal. Certain means or materials, the comrade believes, are more deserving of producing gain than others, and this notion of justice that dictates what things are fitting or worthwhile to gain from is not equivalent to what things are *actually* gained from. We might say that teachers deserve more than pimps, but that statement implies nothing about who actually earns more.

The lover of gain, then, is the kind of man who gains from things not worthy of gaining from. By extension, the lover of gain is a man who is not worthy of his gains; his gaining is unjust. But we could go farther: implicit in the comrade's accusation is the idea that the lover of gain actively harms other people, either by pawning off worthless things on gullible people or acquiring goods that other men deserve more than he. The problem posed by the lover of gain is precisely that he subverts the normal or fair exchange of goods with his villainy, and thus threatens gain and security of the men who abide by the rules of honest exchange. The comrade believes, perhaps quite rightly, that the lover of gain poses a danger to a society—indeed, he poses a danger to the comrade's own gain.

Again, the comrade does not take issue with the type of gain that the lover of gain seeks, but rather with *how* he seeks it. The fact that the comrade

does not criticize the type of gain earned by the lover of gain seems to suggest that the gain itself is unobjectionable, that is, the kind of gain a decent man would also find desirable. For all the vitriol he directs at the lover of gain, the lover of gain has something that the comrade would like to have.

Furthermore, the comrade does not seem to think—or perhaps doesn't want to admit—that the lover of gain possesses a special kind of knowledge that enables him to make his illicit gains; what sets the lover of gain apart from other men, according to the comrade, is his “shamelessness.” And yet this implies that the only thing holding good men like the comrade back from being lovers of gain is shame; the comrade is one little white lie away, so to speak, from sharing in their gains, an idea that could not fail to provide temptation. Underneath the comrade's criticism of the lover of gain, then, we can see two different perspectives: if the comrade focuses on the lover of gain's gain, the lover of gain is someone to be envied; if he focuses on his shameful conduct, he is someone to be despised. To the extent to which the comrade shifts, however unconsciously, between these two thoughts, we might conclude that he is not altogether certain that the life of the lover of gain is not actually quite good.

After the comrade claims that the lover of gain is not a fool but a villain, Socrates asks the comrade if the lover of gain is like a farmer who plants worthless plants, thinking it worthwhile to make a gain. The comrade

responds, “The lover of gain, Socrates, thinks he ought to make a gain from everything” (225b9-10). At this point, Socrates’ tone quickly changes; he harshly reprimands the comrade, scolding him for answering “aimlessly, as though [he] had suffered some injustice from someone” (225c1-2). The comrade's thinking is too colored by his anger towards the lover of gain; he wants to persuade Socrates that he, too, ought to despise the lover of gain, and thus is not very interested in a rational discussion. Despite Socrates’ bewildering questions, the comrade probably doesn't consider the possibility that he is wrong about the lover of gain, or has something to learn. But nothing can come of the investigation, at least from Socrates' perspective, if the comrade restricts himself to thoughtlessly hurling insults. To bring the comrade to heel, Socrates turns the comrade's criticism around on him; the comrade thinks that he can get what he wants through an unreflective argument; he thinks that he can gain from worthless things. Moreover, by accusing the comrade of speaking as if he has suffered an injustice, Socrates implies that the comrade is as shameless as the lover of gain. He is trying to hide a personal vendetta under the veneer of selflessly defending good and decent men. His moralizing is self-interested. Whereas the comrade wants to use shame to force the lovers of gain to abide by the rules of the city, Socrates uses shame to force the comrade to abide by the rules of philosophical

discussion. If the comrade hopes to benefit from his discussion with Socrates, his arguments must be worthy of making a gain.

Before moving any further, let us examine the comrade's rather extraordinary statement that the lover of gain thinks he ought to make a gain from *everything*. Coming right after his emphatic denial that the lover of gain was a fool, the statement seems to mean that the lover of gain *can* make a gain from everything, or at least that it is possible to gain from everything. Now, Socrates has just asked whether a farmer thinks it worthwhile to make a gain from a worthless plant—a quiet reminder that there are limits to certain kinds of gain—but the comrade acts as if the question is irrelevant. Because of the comrade's nearly exclusive focus on the *moral* limits to gain, on the kind of gain that men *should not* pursue, he tends to think of these as the *only* limits. He seems to envision a life unencumbered by shame as radically free to pursue one's selfish interests. He forgets, as Socrates has already begun to indicate, that there are obstacles to fulfilling our self-interest that are not moral in character. Undoubtedly the comrade has not thought the matter through as clearly as Socrates, but I would suggest there is also more specific cause. When the comrade claims that the lover of gain would try to make a gain from everything, he is thinking of primarily of money. He would not dispute that one could never harvest crops from worthless plants, but under the right conditions a lover of gain could sell

worthless plants for a financial gain, and thus to the extent that he primarily or instinctively thinks of gain in terms of money, it really does seem possible to gain from everything.

The comrade's association of gain with money also helps to explain one of the curious traits of the discussion: that the comrade speaks of gain as a monolithic thing. He never feels a need to specify what *kind* of gain, or gain for *whom*. And although Socrates appears to go along with the comrade in speaking of gain and lovers of gain without any qualifications or distinctions, he subtly provides several correctives to the comrade's view in the section that follows.

After scolding the comrade, Socrates asks, “Now, who knows about the worth of plants, in what seasons and soil it is worth planting them—if we too may throw in one of those wise phrases with which people who are clever beautify those speeches?” (225c7-10). The farmer, the comrade replies. Socrates then asks if thinking it worthwhile to make a gain is the same as thinking one *ought* to make a gain. The comrade agrees (we'll return to this in a moment), and when Socrates then asks him if a farmer would think to make a gain from worthless plants, he exclaims—“By Zeus!—that they would not.”

The image of a farmer planting worthless plants, as well as the suggestion that the farmer has anything in common with a lover of gain,

must strike the comrade as absurd. The lover of gain, in the comrade's eyes, is the kind of man whose pursuit of excessive gains threatens the well being of the men around him. The farmer is the opposite. He provides an essential good for the city. The idea that the farmer is a lover of gain would mean condemning a man who allows the comrade to live.

Socrates moves on to a hypothetical horseman. The comrade agrees that the horseman would never think he is making a gain from giving his horse worthless food. Again, the point seems to be the same as with the farmer: no one would knowingly attempt to gain from a worthless thing. But Socrates has something up his sleeve. Consider how he poses these two questions to the comrade:

SOC.: And what about this: do you think that a horseman who knows he is giving his horse worthless food doesn't know that he is harming the horse?

COM.: I don't.

SOC.: Then *he* doesn't think that he is making a gain from worthless food.

COM.: No. (226a6-11)

Notice the shift. First Socrates speaks of the harm done to the horse, and then speaks of the gain, or lack thereof, for the *horseman*. He muddles the horse's good with the horseman's gain. But equating these two things is, of course, misleading. Although the good of the horse and the good of the horseman may overlap, they will not always be the same. A horseman may breed a horse for war at great risk to the horse. Or the horse might simply be

better off living in the wild, with no chance for the horseman to make a gain from it. By falsely equating their goods, Socrates brings our attention to the fact that gain is always a gain *for someone*, and the same thing could constitute a gain for someone and a loss for someone else. Thus we cannot speak intelligently about gain unless we know who stands to gain.

Let's go back to the farmer. When Socrates asks whether a farmer would knowingly plant a worthless plant, he omits the fact that seeds, not plants, are what the farmer puts into the ground. A stalk of corn is certainly worth something—almost anyone could get sustenance from it—but is a seed? Isn't a seed, in the hands of someone who doesn't know how to tend it, a worthless thing? The farmer's knowledge of seasons and soil allows him to create worth from nothing. So too with a stonemason, making a house out of stone, or any artisan whose knowledge allows him gain from something that is worthless to other men. In a strange twist, these artisans appear like lovers of gain!

Of course, the comrade doesn't think that the work of an artisan is the same as lover of gain, but logic has led him to the following problem: by agreeing with Socrates' suggestion that thinking a gain was worthwhile was the same as thinking that one *ought* to make a gain, the comrade, in effect, claimed that men always think they ought to pursue all worthwhile gains (225d2-3). But that doesn't make much sense. Obviously not every person

who thinks planting a vegetable garden is worthwhile, say, also feels that they *ought* to plant one. And while the comrade would surely correct his error if it was pointed out to him, it nevertheless speaks to how much the comrade ignores the differences between individuals—their intellect, desires, needs, and so on—when conceiving of gain.

The third example is a pilot who furnishes his ship with worthless equipment; is it possible, Socrates asks, “he doesn't know that he will suffer loss and will run the risk of being destroyed himself and destroying the ship and everything he is carrying?” (226b5-7). Interestingly, the pilot is the only example that Socrates gives in which he mentions that the person suffers “loss” and, perhaps not coincidentally, the only time he mentions the person's death. But he speaks as if the pilot's potential death is not a part of his loss (“will suffer loss *and* will run the risk of being destroyed himself”), which is, at the very least, a strange way to put it. Yet the phrasing, I think, is a playful critique of the comrade's implicit view of gain as reducible to money. If gain is simply monetary gain, then life and death are separate from gain. Of course, the comrade doesn't really believe that, but Socrates draws out the implicit logic of the notion that gain can be thought of as independent of a person or soul.

The next example, a general, is similar to the pilot, though Socrates does not mention his death or potential loss. Socrates asks whether a general

whose army had worthless arms would “think to make a gain from them, or consider it worthwhile” (226c3-4). In each of the previous examples, the gain that Socrates refers to could be plausibly taken to mean financial gain—selling or trading for a monetary gain—and this is probably what the comrade was thinking when he agreed that they would not attempt to gain from worthless things. Speaking of the general as concerned about making a gain, then, must sound odd to the comrade's ear. We presume that when the general considers his strategy, he isn't focused on maximizing the amount of money he will make. The general appears to place his own gain beneath the gain or good of the city, although in doing so he seems to get something very enviable. Indeed, the comrade might envy a general who has heroically served the city, but the absence from the comrade's account of sacrifice as a kind of gain demonstrates how little he is a lover of the noble. He thinks that men should restrict themselves from certain kinds of gain, but there is no suggestion that that he sees much of a benefit in doing so. He doesn't see a gain in *not* seeking gain.

In order to see the shape of the argument so far, it is helpful to take a step back and summarize the comrade's position as it has come to light: The comrade distinguishes between shameless lovers of gain and those who, out of a justified shame, limit their gains. He further distinguishes between things that yield a worthwhile gain and worthless things that perhaps can be

gained from but whose yield is undeserved. The lovers of gain are those who think that they should gain from all things, while good men know that they ought to only gain from some things.

According to the comrade, the difference between lovers of gain and other men is the way they go about attempting to make gain. He never argues that these two groups are pursuing fundamentally different things, or that non-lovers of gain are after a different sort of gain than the lovers of gain. He appears to assume that if a good man could earn the same gain from worthy things as the lovers of gain earn from worthless ones, he would. Indeed, as I pointed out earlier, the treatment of gain as a homogenous thing is one of the striking details of the dialogue; the comrade never feels the need to specify what *kind* of gain he is talking about, in part because he associates gain so closely with money.

Furthermore, in same the way we speak of making a hundred dollar gain or profit without specifying who is making the money, the comrade's notion of gain abstracts from the individual making the gain. He treats the gain that all men pursue as the same—with its half-conscious assumption that all men share the same good—and thus he would assume that a ten-drachma gain is equally good for all men. In other words, he feels comfortable abstracting from the individual because he thinks that all men are the same.

It would never occur to the comrade to ask, “what is gain?” because he thinks that gain is obvious to all men. He might sense, albeit vaguely, that gain is something necessarily good, but it has not really occurred to him to consider what that implies about the character of gain. As a result, he treats the worth of a thing as somehow inherent in the thing itself, independent of whoever is trying to gain from it. But the worth of seeds to a farmer depends on whether he needs the crops, either to consume himself or to sell, whether the conditions are suitable for the growth of a particular type of plant, and so on. Seeds in the hands of someone ignorant of the art of farming might be completely worthless, regardless of the conditions. The comrade, in other words, muddles the moral worthiness of gaining from a thing with its value in generating a gain. But gain, as Socrates quietly indicates, is necessarily a gain for someone, and whether or not a given thing constitutes a gain depends on the person and their aims. Because the comrade is so focused on worthless things, or on the gaining of shameless men, while being half-consciously convinced a gain can simply be reduced to a monetary gain, he neglects to even really consider the more fundamental question of what a true gain actually is.

The comrade shows no sign that he has grasped the deeper implications of Socrates’ examples, but he half-heartedly agrees with Socrates that no man would knowingly attempt to profit from worthless

things, and thus no man is a lover of gain. The agreement is somewhat curious, though, because the comrade's use of "worthless" did not seem to preclude the possibility that one could make a gain from these "worthless" things, only that one shouldn't. But the comrade never steps up to clarify that he and Socrates might differ in their interpretation of "worthless." He never says, as we might expect, "Socrates, I mean to say that the lover of gain dares to make a gain from things that no one *should* make a gain from. You are twisting my words." Where we might expect the comrade to argue that it is only wrong to make a shameful gain, he instead seems to at least partially agree with Socrates, as he now describes the lover of gain as not really gaining at all:

COM.: But I, Socrates, want to say that the lovers of gain are those who, out of greed, are always striving preternaturally for insignificant things of little or no worth in loving gain. (226d7-e1)

In this new definition, the life of the lover of gain appears altogether bad. The comrade now says that the lover of gain strives for things of little or no worth, and that it is motivated by his greed, while earlier he had given no indication that the lover of gain's gain was small at all, and had linked his lover of gaining to his shamelessness.

The two definitions paint two different pictures: in the original, the comrade spoke as if he assumed that the lover of gain did in fact make gains, but these were objectionable insofar as they were made by means that a

decent person would never employ. In the second, the lover of gain appears as a sick man, so overpowered by greed that he pathetically pursues every small gain, like someone who spends his days searching for discarded pennies. We might be tempted to think that Socrates' questioning caused the comrade to amend his view, but this interpretation is problematic. The comrade gives no indication that he thinks that the new definition is a revision of the old. It is not the case, as one often sees in the dialogues, of an interlocutor who admits that his old argument was mistaken and needs to be discarded. Rather, I would argue that the comrade thinks that both definitions describe the same phenomenon—that they are both true. But these two definitions are in a great deal of tension, so the comrade's views on the lover of gain are not clear at all. It seems as though, on the one hand, the comrade truly believes that the lover of gain actually acquires good things—things that are desirable to all men—through his daring and shamelessness. On the other hand, the comrade now asserts that the things that the lover of gain strives for are of little or no worth. He denies that the lovers of gain are gaining, like when we say to cheaters, a la Frank Sinatra, "you're cheating yourself," by which I think we mean, "you think you're getting something good, but you're not." With that in mind, I would offer one amendment to the previous discussion. When the comrade had spoken of the lover of gain daring to make a gain from worthless things, he seemed to imply, in contrast to Socrates, that it was

possible to gain from worthless things. But I think this needs to be qualified. On some level, the comrade believes that you *can't* gain from worthless things, or that the lover of gain really doesn't get *anything* good, and to the extent to which the comrade harbors the belief that the lover of gain earns nothing, he also thinks that the moral limits to gain are insurmountable, that is, that indecent gain isn't really gain at all. I would immediately add that the comrade's anger toward the lover of gain speaks to the fact that he is far from certain that this is truly the case. When Socrates claims, in response to this second definition, that the lover of gain must be ignorant of the fact that the things he pursues are worth nothing (and thus, he implies a fool), the comrade reluctantly agrees (226e2-4). He doesn't really think that the lovers of gain are fools, but his second description of the lover of gain seems to necessarily point to this conclusion. He has the uneasy feeling that the argument has gone awry, but he can't see how.

Chapter II: 226e8-228a10

After the comrade's hesitant agreement that no man is a lover of gain, Socrates gets him to agree that gain is the opposite of loss (226e10-227a1), and that it is never good to suffer loss (227a2-3). Gain, being the opposite of what is bad for a person, is good, and Socrates has the comrade concede that both himself and the lover of gain love what is good (227b1-5). Socrates then asks the comrade if he loves all good things, and when the comrade agrees, Socrates says, "Now ask me too if I don't as well; for I will agree with you that I too love the good things. But aside from you and me, don't all human beings seem to you to love the good things and hate the bad?" (227c1-4). Thus the argument seems to have concluded that all men, the comrade and Socrates included, are lovers of the good, and—since they have also agreed that gain is good—lovers of gain. But on this last point—that the lovers of the good are the same as lovers of gain—the comrade is understandably uncomfortable, answering Socrates that this "seems" to be the case (227b2). He is uncomfortable, of course, because he has implicated himself as a lover of gain.

The difficulty that the comrade faces could be put in the following way: when prompted by Socrates, he admits that gain *must* be good. He senses that this is what gain *means*. But this implies that, as a lover of the good, the

comrade is also a lover of gain, and he certainly doesn't think that this is the case. He seems to have two options: he must either concede that he wants to same thing as the lover of gain—which he'll never do—or he must argue that the gain that the lover of gain seeks is not really gain at all, or at least not good for him.

The comrade, searching for a solution, restates what had been implicit in his earlier position: while it is true that the lover of gain, like all men, loves what is good, the lover of gain thinks it worthwhile to make gain from the things “which the decent wouldn't dare to make a gain from” (227d4). But Socrates immediately reminds him that they had already agreed that to make a gain is to be benefited. The following exchange is worth looking over in its entirety:

COM.: Well, what of it?

SOC.: Just this, that we agreed in addition that everyone wants the good things always.

COM.: Yes.

SOC.: Furthermore, the good want to have all gains, if these are good at least.

COM.: Not, Socrates, gains from which they are going to suffer harm.

SOC.: Do you say that suffering harm is suffering loss or something else?

COM.: No, I say it is suffering loss.

SOC.: Is it by gain that human beings suffer loss or by loss?

COM.: By both: because they suffer loss both by loss and by evil gain.

SOC.: Well, does anything decent and good seem to you to be evil?

COM.: Not to me.

SOC.: And we agreed a little while ago that gain is the opposite of loss, which is bad?

COM.: I assent.

SOC.: And that being the opposite of bad it is good?

COM.: We agreed to that.

SOC.: So you see, you are trying to deceive me, purposely saying the opposite of what we agreed to before. (227d7-228a8)

The beginning of this exchange is curious. Socrates makes a distinction between “everyone” and “the good” (227d8-12), which I think we could interpret in the following way: When Socrates says that everyone wants “the good things always” (227d9), he is referring to the earlier agreement that all men desire their own good, a claim which we could restate as “If a thing appeared to be good to a man, he would desire it.” It does not necessarily follow from this statement that some specific thing is actually is desired; it only states the condition or criteria that distinguishes the things that appear desirable. If a man is unaware of a new medical treatment that could cure his disease, we could say that the treatment would be *good* for him, but it would be impossible to say that he desired it. Or someone might desire harmful drugs, wrongly thinking that they were good for him. To say that all men love the good doesn't mean that all men are lovers of the things that are truly good for them. And it seems to be this more narrow class of men that Socrates is indicating when he speaks of the good as wanting “all gains, if these are good at least” (227d11-12).⁵

⁵ Christopher Bruell, “Hipparchus, or Lover of Gain,” in *On the Socratic Education: An Introduction to the Shorter Dialogues* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 4-5.

The notion that some men know better than others what is good for them appears obvious enough, but it quietly hints at a new possibility about the identity of lovers of gain. For it seems that what distinguishes men who love what is truly gainful is the knowledge of their own good, rather than “shamelessness,” and hence these “good” men, by which the comrade assumes Socrates to mean decent men, would seem to be the lovers of gain in the truest sense. But the comrade could never *fully* accept the idea that what distinguishes good men is the superior knowledge of their own good, as it would mean admitting that lovers of gain, or at least the men he thinks of as lovers of gain, are fools.

And yet as much as the comrade might recoil at the idea that the men he regards as lovers of gain are simply misguided in their pursuit of gain, he nevertheless feels compelled to argue that the lovers of gain are actually hurting themselves, a position that is probably part genuine conviction and part hope. Hence the comrade goes on to object that good or decent men would actually not want all gains, but rather would abstain from “gains from which they are going to suffer harm” (227e1). The comrade agrees with Socrates that suffering harm is suffering loss, but he claims that human beings can suffer loss both through loss and evil gain (227e6). But Socrates quickly reminds the comrade that they had agreed earlier that gain is good. The comrade cannot bring himself to abandon the belief that gain is good, but

he also wants to argue that evil gain is a loss. Yet he does not quite say that evil gain is the *same* as loss—humans suffer loss, he says, both through loss *and* evil gain (227e6)—and thus rejects what would seem to be the thrust of the argument, that a gain that is a loss or bad is impossible.

His reluctance to reduce evil gain to *simply* a loss, and therefore not a gain at all, reflects the comrade's willingness to separate morality and gain, a separation that tacitly assumes that there is no gain in being moral or decent. The most the comrade can bring himself to say is that one can suffer loss through evil gain, but there is no corresponding claim that decency or morality is a gain in and of itself. The comrade is a moralist, but he is more concerned with stamping out villains and evildoers than encouraging men to aspire to great virtue; his standard is the decent, not the gentleman. We might say he is an advocate of a certain kind of moderation, though it's more accurate to say that he wants men to be *mild* in their desires. It appears that he is less certain in his belief that it is good to be moderate than that it would be good for him if all men were moderate.

Chapter III: 228b1-229d7

The section ends with both participants accusing each other of being deceptive. Socrates responds to the comrade's accusation with "Hush!" (εὐφήμει), a word often associated with sacred rites, demanding silence in the presence of a god; he says he is obeying a "good and wise man" (228b1-2). The comrade is justifiably puzzled, and asks of whom he is speaking. Socrates proceeds to give a long account of Hipparchus and his rule.

Hipparchus, of course, is the namesake of the dialogue, which seems to suggest that this section has a central importance. However, the reader is immediately faced with a difficulty: it is not at all clear what the relation is between the digression on Hipparchus and the preceding argument; gone is any mention of gain or the lover of gain, and what we find instead is a strange revisionist history of a man whose reputation among Athenians made him nearly synonymous with tyrannical rule, and his assassination at the hands of Aristogeiton and Harmodius representative of the Athenian triumph over tyranny. Thucydides disagreed with this popular account, arguing instead that Athenian rule became truly tyrannical after Hippias took power. He presents Hipparchus as an excellent ruler whose assassination was the beginning of tyranny rather than the end of it (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, 6.54-57). Socrates agrees with the basics of Thucydides account, though

he adds a good deal that can be found in no other surviving historical account. In any case, given Hipparchus's infamy among the Greeks, it is strange that Socrates chooses to single him out for praise, and even stranger that he speaks of Hipparchus like a god.

Socrates specifically praises Hipparchus's wisdom, which he says was “displayed in many fine deeds” (228b6). Wishing to educate the city, Hipparchus was the first to bring the Homeric epics to his people, and paid for the poets Anacreon and Simonides to come to Athens (228b7-12). This poetic education of the city dwellers was then followed by the education of the countryside. Hipparchus, Socrates claims, built statues of Hermes inscribed with his own poetry and examples of his wisdom along the roads outside of Athens, wishing to share his wisdom with the country-folk and spur them to come to the city for the completion of their education (228c7-e6). He also hoped—and Socrates suggests that this was his primary motive—that these monuments to his wisdom would have the effect that “his citizens would not marvel at the wise Delphic inscriptions such as 'Know Thyself,' 'Nothing in Excess,' and the like but would rather think the words of Hipparchus wise” (228e1-4). Hipparchus sought the reverence normally given only to divine wisdom.

The final part of Hipparchus's educational efforts, in the order that Socrates presents them, is his private education of the young boy. Here

Socrates directly challenges a key detail of the conventional account of Hipparchus's rule: Aristogeiton, Socrates claims, prided himself on his skill as an educator and considered Hipparchus a rival in this respect. Harmodius was one of his favorites. When a “beautiful and well-born” young boy who had previously marveled at the wisdom of these two men began associating with Hipparchus, he grew to despise them. Deeply pained over this dishonor, Aristogeiton and Harmodius killed Hipparchus. His assassination was the act of spurned rivals (229c1-d7).

Socrates does not appear concerned with providing a genuine historical account, and never attempts to justify his significant revisions. The importance of the Hipparchus story, I suggest, seems to be the following: by describing the phases of Hipparchus’s educational efforts, Socrates presents a kind of anatomy of the love of gain in the context of the love of wisdom. It also serves as of defense of the lover of gain; though the comrade likely has smaller fish in mind, by evoking the memory of a tyrant and then praising him, Socrates praises a man considered to be one of the most extreme examples of the lawless and selfish pursuit of gain.

But if we are meant to examine the love of gain through the example of Hipparchus, it initially seems odd to see Socrates calls Hipparchus a gentleman (*καλός τε κἀγαθός*). This is the only time the Greek word for noble appears in the entire dialogue. Hipparchus's nobility is connected to his wish

that his people be wise; he has dedicated himself to their education, and from this perspective it would seem that he is far from a lover of gain, as least in the way it has been understood by the comrade. But Socrates also adds that Hipparchus wished to make his people wise “so that he could rule over people who were the best possible” (228c4-5). Hipparchus didn't simply want the Athenians to be wise; he wanted their excellence to reflect on him as a ruler.

Hipparchus's efforts, according to Socrates, were successful in educating the city dwellers and winning himself a reputation for wisdom (228c7-d1). When Hipparchus turned his attention to the education of the country folk, he did it with the added ambition of replacing the wisdom of the Delphic oracle with his own. Perhaps Hipparchus's increased ambition was fueled by nagging doubts that his reputation for wisdom was truly deserved; Homer and his hired poets, Socrates implies, were the true educators. Accordingly, this second stage of his educational effort self-consciously and ostentatiously presented Hipparchus as the educator. Building Hermae throughout the countryside, Hipparchus has them all inscribed with the words: “This is a memorial of Hipparchus,” which is then followed by a wise saying (229a4). Gods speaking through the oracle are replaced by Hipparchus “speaking” through a statue. Hipparchus draws these various wise sayings from, as Socrates puts it, “his own wisdom, which he got both from learning and from his own discovery,” which seems to imply that Hipparchus had to

supplement his own insights with those he read elsewhere, although the way they are presented on the Hermae all but demands an observer to interpret them as Hipparchus's own words. Again, Hipparchus's desire to *deserve* his reputation for wisdom—a desire that seems to have inspired him to abandon the use of the poets—paradoxically points to his own lack of conviction that he truly is wise. By passing off acquired wisdom as his own, Hipparchus confirms his wish to appear wiser than he truly is.

Socrates describes the third stage of Hipparchus's education as the private education of a young boy. The order of presentation prompts us to reflect on what may have inspired Hipparchus to take a radically different tack from his previous efforts. One possible clue can be found in what Socrates omits from the account of the education of the country. In contrast to his description of the education of the city, Socrates never says that the education of the country folk was successful. And if we recall precisely what Hipparchus was attempting to do—replace the wisdom of the gods with his own—it is likely that those efforts met with heavy resistance from among the more pious and traditional inhabitants of the countryside. Perhaps, then, what Socrates is quietly suggesting is that it was precisely the failure to be honored among the people of the country that forced Hipparchus, for the first time, to fully face his doubts about his own wisdom—doubts that seem to have been at least partially assuaged by the acclaim that he had received up

to this point. If Hipparchus did indeed fully grasp that he wanted truly to be wise, rather than merely thought of as wise, it would help to explain his apparent turn to the private education of the (beautiful) young boy. We are not told what this education consisted of, only that it led the young boy to despise his previous teachers (229d5-6). The similarities to Socrates' own situation are striking. Without saying so, Socrates turns Hipparchus into a philosopher like himself.

What are we supposed to make of this ending to the story? I submit it is meant to serve several purposes, depending on the audience. For the comrade, the story of Hipparchus is a tacit defense of philosophy. It is tacit, in part, because the comrade does not even realize that he is an enemy of philosophy. When the comrade rails against the love of gain, what he has primarily in mind are cheaters—unscrupulous businessmen and snake-oil salesman. He would not think to include philosophers in this category. He might think that philosophy takes worthless means—pointless discussions of obscure topics—and produces no gain, but there is no indication that he finds it offensive. To him, philosophers are harmless fools. But philosophers are not always thought of in this way, as Hipparchus's assassination and Socrates' eventual fate remind us. When philosophers capture the souls of the young and the beautiful and turn them against the city, they appear to make a great gain out of nothing. In these moments, the same sort of anger that the

comrade has demonstrated toward the lover of gain is directed at the philosopher, with the addition that it is inflamed by eros. In order to protect against this danger, Socrates takes the indirect path of rehabilitating the reputation of a man synonymous with tyranny. He is able to replace the philosophy with the tyrant because they both appear to place no boundaries on the pursuit of their own good. By arguing that the rule of Hipparchus was good for the city—almost like the rule of Cronos (229b7)—he softens the association the comrade has between the tyrant's gain and the comrade's personal loss. Specifically, by making Hipparchus into a rather impious lover of wisdom, he implies that the philosopher's pursuit of wisdom, which seems at least equally impious, poses no threat to the city.

To a different reader, the story speaks to the identity of the good things or true gains. Hipparchus is forced to examine his love of honor, or what seems to constitute the end of political life, and ends up resembling Socrates. His story quietly points to philosophy or philosophic friendship as superior to the ends pursued by the city. By portraying Hipparchus as a political man acting like a philosopher, Socrates downplays the tension between philosophy and the city, though Hipparchus's eventual demise is a sober reminder of that tension.

Chapter IV: 229d8-232c9

The comrade, not surprisingly, is not impressed with Socrates' story; he accuses Socrates once again of trying to deceive him (229e1-3). He may be unsure of what Socrates' intentions are, but he knows that dishonestly is the tool of men who try to gain at his expense. Socrates offers, as a show of goodwill, to allow the comrade to change any part of their previous argument. Socrates lists a number of possibilities: Should they change the claim that all human beings desire the good things? "No, no." That suffering loss is bad? "No, no." That gain and making gain is the opposite of loss and suffering loss? "Not that either" (229e4-230a1). Socrates finally suggests that the comrade change the claim that making gain, as the opposite of bad, is good. The comrade agrees that this should be amended; gain is not always good (230a2-6). Some gain is good, and some gain is bad, he concedes, though his agreement that gain is, in fact, the opposite of loss would seem to mean that bad gain is not a loss. Socrates then asks whether good and bad gain are equally gain, but the comrade does not understand the question. Socrates tells him to think of food: there is good food and bad food, and they differ insofar as they are good or bad, but are identical insofar as they are food. The comrade agrees. And isn't it the same, Socrates adds, with drink and "everything else that exists," including human beings—they differ insofar as

they are good or bad, but the same insofar as they are all drink, man, etc. (230a11-c7). The comrade agrees with this and with Socrates' conclusion that evil and decent gain must be both equally gain (230c8-10). Decent gain is not any more gain than evil gain.

What is meant by gain, however, is still hazy to the comrade. Socrates asks him what he sees in common between decent and evil gain, or what trait or traits they share that make them both gain. He is asking the comrade to define gain—a question noticeably absent at the start of the dialogue—but the comrade is either unable to answer or Socrates doesn't give him a chance. In any case, Socrates continues on without the comrade responding, going through the previous examples for the ostensible reason of explaining precisely what he is asking. “If you were to ask me,” Socrates says, “on what account I call both good food and bad food equally food, I would say to you that it is because both are dry nourishment” (230e1-4). And good and bad drink are equally drink because they are both wet nourishment. Socrates, after this demonstration, asks the comrade to try again and define gain.

Again, either Socrates does not intend to let the comrade answer, or the comrade is unable to. In any case, before the comrade says anything, Socrates immediately poses a different question: “do you call a gain every possession that one has obtained either by spending nothing or by spending less and getting more?” (231a6-8). The comrade agrees. Socrates asks him if

he means something like being served a feast for free, but then getting sick (231b2-4). “By Zeus I am not!” Of course the comrade doesn’t mean this. Free food is a loss if it makes you sick. What if the feast made you healthy, Socrates asks? The comrade answers that it would be a gain. Socrates points out that the comrade seems to coming around to the earlier claim that gain is good, and loss is bad. The comrade admits that he is at a loss.

Socrates now asks the comrade if a person makes a gain if they obtain more than they have spent. This new definition is similar to the previous one, which the comrade had been forced to abandon when Socrates reminded him that too much food could be a loss, even if it is free. Thus the comrade is aware for the moment, that human needs must be considered when judging a gain, and, accordingly, he now hedges his answer, “Not if it is bad, I say, but if one gets more gold or silver than one has spent” (231c8-9). One could eat too much food, which would constitute a loss, but the comrade can’t imagine that it would be possible to have too much gold or silver. Socrates then asks if trading a half a measure for gold for twice the amount of silver would be a gain. Of course not, the comrade responds, gold is worth twelve times as much as silver.

It is important to tease out the significance of this series of questions. Would spending nothing, receiving a feast, and getting sick be a gain? The comrade, not surprisingly, says no. Assuming then, for the moment, that the

primary purpose of food was to make you healthy, how would you know what a gainful meal would be? You would need to know, for instance, the nutritional properties of different foods, the amount of a vitamin or mineral that produced toxicity, the current needs or state of your body, food allergies, what you plan to do after the meal (are you going to bed? Are you going for a swim?) The list of considerations could go on and on, not to mention that somewhat with an exquisite palate might reasonably trade a stomach-ache for a delicious meal, or somewhat trying to gain weight for athletics could be better off gorging themselves. To conceive of a gain as simply an “increase” skips over all the questions that need be addressed in considering the good for a particular individual. The comrade, for his part, is not used to considering that more of a good thing could be bad, which is partially why he has struggled to articulate a convincing argument for moderation. But what Socrates gestures to here is a notion of moderation different than that of the comrade, one that aligns it with the amount of a thing that is best for a particular human being. “Nothing in Excess” is informed by “Know Thyself,” or the human good by an understanding of human nature. What seems so obvious to the comrade—the identity of gain—is to Socrates a deep puzzle.

Again, the comrade is only dimly aware of what he has admitted when he agreed that a great feast could be a loss. He senses that the gainfulness of a thing is dependent on its effects on an individual, but doesn’t realize the

amount of investigation it would take to fully understand whether a thing constituted a gain. The comrade quickly reverts to his preferred way of thinking about gain—as spending little or no money and getting something worth more money. We sometimes refer to this nowadays as “getting a steal,” a phrase that nicely evokes the half-conscious thought that we are actually harming the other person by getting such a great deal. Indeed, spending little or no money and getting something worth more money in return seems to imply that the seller is being ripped off. And yet the comrade agrees that this is a gain—getting more gold or silver than one has spent. Socrates has subtly coaxed the comrade to speak like the lovers of gain he despises, and thereby show his true colors. The comrade would like to spend less and get more, but in that respect he is not very different from the men who want to gain from worthless things.

Moreover, the comrade speaks of gold and silver as if the gainfulness of a thing could be known by its price tag. Certainly it is often true that gold is valued more than silver, and thus better insofar as it could be used to purchase more things, but this isn't always true. It might be better to have silver in a city that values silver more than gold, or if one wanted to make a certain kind of jewelry or ornamentation. The goodness of gold and silver is entirely dependent on who has it, and nothing suggests they are good for every person, or equally good for all people. Even for someone like the

comrade, in a place where gold was traded for twelve times the amount of silver, it makes very little sense to say that the things you could purchase for a certain amount of gold are always twelve times better than what you could get for an equal amount of silver, as if a doctor that charged twelve times the amount of another was necessarily twelve times better at treating their patients. The worth of something like gold would need to be measured by the ends that it is a means to, ends whose goodness is dependent on the needs of an individual, at a specific time and place. The comrade's shallowness is reflected in how little he has actually considered human needs, in part because his idea of human nature is so dominated by the love of money.

After the comrade describes gain with the example of gold and silver, Socrates asks whether the worth is worth anything except when it is possessed (231e5-6). The comrade accepts this clarification, although perhaps without being fully aware that it entails a denial that there is any worth in giving up a good thing. The comrade then agrees, upon Socrates' suggestion, that worth is the possession of what is advantageous, and the advantageous is good. Socrates remarks that it appears as though they have come around the conclusion, "for the third or fourth time," that the gain is good (232a2). The comrade admits, with some hesitation, that it seems that way.

With this admission in hand, Socrates offers, rather gratuitously, a kind of summary of the conversation:

SOC.: Do you remember from what point this discussion of ours began?

COM.: I think so.

SOC.: If you don't, I will remind you. You disagreed with me, arguing that the good do want to gain not from every gain but only from those gains that are good, not from the evil.

COM.: That's right.

SOC.: And now doesn't the argument compel us to agree that all gains, large and small, are good?

COM.: For my part, Socrates, it has compelled rather than persuaded me. (232a4-b4)

The conversation ends with Socrates instructing the comrade that it would be incorrect to reproach a man as a lover of gain, as the man making the reproach would also be a lover of gain. The comrade's moral high ground is an illusion; he is a hypocrite.

Conclusion

The comrade, as he himself says, is not really persuaded by Socrates' argument. Surely he still believes that some men pursue evil gains that decent men wouldn't dare to make, and Socrates argument seems to endorse the limitless pursuit of money. But the comrade has not really ingested Socrates' lesson at all. The comrade's thinking is so thoroughly shaped by the conventional notion that the worth of things is the same as their price that he clings to the half-aware belief that it is a correct measure of their goodness. He must have found the conversation with Socrates worthless. Socrates alarms him because his deceptiveness seems to be a sign that he is trying to swindle the comrade, but it certainly does not occur to him that Socrates is making a very different sort of gain, or that he sees worth in what appears to the comrade to be worthless.

The comrade remains, to the end, a defender of the city and the city's laws, insofar as they place restrictions on indecent or dishonest behavior. Law ensures the common good, or at least that most people are better off than in a society in which lovers of gain run rampant. Yet while the comrade is probably sure that these restrictions benefit most people, he appears to be less convinced that law-abidingness is simply good for every person. Accordingly, his defense of decency has to resort to shaming the indecent,

rather than arguing that the indecent are simply misguided about their own good. Lovers of gain are shameless, but they aren't stupid.

Socrates, as we have seen, ignores the shamelessness of a lover of gain; he speaks like a man wholly unfamiliar with the concept. He reduces the discussion, in effect, to a question of whether the lover of gain is getting something good or not. The comrade implicitly accepts the new terms of the discussion, perhaps in part out of a sense that shamefulness is not an entirely compelling reason to abstain from gain. Thus to defend the law, he must argue that evil gain is actually a loss, which is to say that it is always in our interest to follow the law.

To the reader, and surely to the comrade, too, the argument that being a decent or law-abiding person is always in our interest is not particularly persuasive. Perhaps, however, the apparent weakness is due to the character of the man making that argument. At several times throughout the conversation, Socrates has quietly gestured at a very different idea of gain—the gain of a general nobly serving the city, a gain acquired not by *possessing* a good thing but by giving it up or abstaining from it. That the comrade has failed to articulate a defense of law or morality in terms of the superiority of

self-sacrifice over self-interest means that this argument must still be wrestled with.⁶

⁶ Bruell, "Hipparchus," 6.

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