

### *Introduction*

Plato's Socrates gives constant thought to the Delphic inscription "Know Yourself" (γνώθι σαυτόν), most notably in the *Charmides*, *Phaedrus* and *Alcibiades I*, but also in the *Protagoras* (343b), *Philebus* (48c) and *Rival Lovers* (138a).<sup>1</sup> Xenophon's Socrates seems to give much less thought to it. He refers explicitly to the inscription only once (*Mem.* 4.2.24), and for many readers, his analysis has little depth. For David Johnson, for example, his argument about self-knowledge "shows no inkling of the complicated problems with the possibility of second-order knowledge that Plato discusses in the *Charmides*." Johnson takes Xenophon's Socrates to espouse a simpler view: it "consists not in knowing that one knows nothing, or in knowing *what* or even *that* one knows, but in knowing what one knows *how to do*." For Xenophon's Socrates, Johnson says, knowing yourself is a matter neither of recognizing your ignorance nor of acknowledging one's knowledge, but simply of knowing your powers, a skill of self-assessment or self-inventory.<sup>2</sup>

This paper argues that Xenophon's Socrates has a philosophically richer notion of self-knowledge than Johnson, and recent scholars to be discussed below, have assumed. The "know your powers" view frequently attributed to Xenophon's Socrates wrongly takes the initial interpretation by Socrates' interlocutor, Euthydemus, as the view articulated throughout the entire conversation depicted in *Memorabilia* 4.2. While knowing one's powers contributes to knowing oneself, Xenophon shows that it is only part of the story. The fuller story that emerges from the conversation between Socrates and Euthydemus relates self-knowledge to self-ownership, knowledge of justice and the good, and conversation. Coming to know oneself means coming to act on the basis of the knowledge of justice and goodness, and acting on this frees oneself from a self-imposed enslavement. Xenophon's clever use of characterization and drama, his imagery of a horse-buyer contemplating the purchase of a horse and his depiction of wide-ranging ethical inquiry make this work a worthy companion to Platonic discussions of self-knowledge, and thought-provoking in its own right. I begin with a brief summary of *Mem.* 4.2; discuss the popularity of the "know your powers" gloss of "know yourself" and adumbrate some criticisms of that gloss; and in several sections articulate Xenophon's positive picture of self-knowledge. I conclude by discussing Socrates' indirect way of talking about self-knowledge, and summarizing my findings.

### *A dialogue about self-knowledge*

Xenophon wrote *Memorabilia* 4.2 as a unified literary whole, fitted within the context of Book Four but a complete account of a multi-day Socratic interaction.<sup>3</sup> Euthydemus, a young man eager for wisdom and leadership, fails under Socratic examination to distinguish the unjust from the just (*Mem.* 4.2.1–19). He begins to suspect his own confusion.<sup>4</sup> After another refutation (20–21), he bursts into self-conscious awareness of his trouble (23). He sees himself unable (ὄρωντα ἑμαυτὸν... οὐδὲ... δυνάμενον) to speak well about the most crucial matters, and recognizes no way to change for the better. Socrates responds by extolling the importance of "knowing yourself" (γνώθι σαυτόν). This ability contributes more than other abilities to personal success, and it helps oneself and others avoid harms (24–9). Euthydemus, persuaded, asks how he might start self-investigation (ἄρξασθαι ἐπισκοπεῖν ἑαυτὸν, 30). Socrates answers by asking Euthydemus whether he knows what is good. When Euthydemus claims it would be slavish not to know at least this, and so implies that he does know what is good, Socrates refutes him. Straightaway, Socrates asks about the nature of those whom Euthydemus hopes to lead, and when Euthydemus answers, refutes him once again. At this point, Xenophon switches from direct narration to capping comment and reports that Euthydemus finally realized his need for Socrates' companionship, becoming a regular associate (39–40).

This entire conversation provides information about Socrates' understanding of self-knowledge, as I aim to make clear below. I focus first on the usual interpretation of Xenophontic Socratic self-knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> For analysis, see, e.g., Rappe (1995); Tsouna (2001); McCabe (2007); Moore (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Johnson (2005) 62, 65. For similar views, discussed below, see Wilkins (1929) 52–3; Courcelle (1974) 19–20; Annas (1985) 121; Phillips (1989) 368.

<sup>3</sup> Rossetti (2001) treats the passage as a discrete dialogue worthy of the title *Euthydemus*.

<sup>4</sup> ἀλλ', ὡς Σώκρατες, οὐκέτι μὲν ἔγωγε πιστεύω οἷς ἀποκρίνομαι· καὶ γὰρ τὰ πρόσθεν πάντα νῦν ἄλλως ἔχειν δοκεῖ μοι, ἢ ὡς ἐγὼ τότε ᾤμην. ("But, Socrates, I no longer believe in what I answer, for even all the things earlier now seem to be otherwise for me than as I then thought," 19).

### *Knowing yourself as knowing your powers*

Immediately after asking whether Euthydemus noticed the “Know yourself” inscribed at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, Socrates glosses its meaning. He starts by rejecting the seemingly superficial equivalence “Know your name,” and continues by comparing knowing oneself with a horse-buyer coming to evaluate the character-traits and abilities of a horse he might buy. Euthydemus accepts the comparison and infers that “the one not knowing his powers is ignorant of himself” (ὁ μὴ εἰδὼς τὴν αὐτοῦ δύναμιν ἀγνοεῖν ἑαυτόν, 4.2.25).<sup>5</sup> Knowing one’s powers is necessary for self-knowledge. The advice is apt for Euthydemus. He has already revealed himself to know his powers inadequately. He thinks that his book-collecting (1, 8-10) suffices for his aspiration to political wisdom (9, 11). He already believes that he “will excel all others in the power to speak and act” (παντῶν διοίσειν τῷ δύνασθαι λέγειν καὶ πράττειν, 1). But his conversation with Socrates has shown that Euthydemus has not yet accurately determined whether he has the power to get this political wisdom.

Whereas Euthydemus simply denies that self-knowledge happens without knowing your powers, most recent scholars have assumed that Xenophon’s dialogue here defines self-knowledge *as* knowing your powers. I have already quoted Johnson’s view, that knowing yourself is “knowing what one knows how to do.” Phillips writes that “Socrates proposes that knowing yourself means knowing your δύναμις... [your] capacities and limitations” (1989, 368). Courcelle glosses knowing yourself as being able to measure your capacities from a social point of view (1974, 19–20), and Wilkins fits it into her category of “γνώθι σαυτὸν as know what you can and cannot do” (1917, 23).<sup>6</sup>

These recent commentators presumably gloss knowing yourself as knowing your powers because Euthydemus’ answer tracks Socrates’ question, whether the self-investigator will have come to know his own power (ἔγνωκε τὴν αὐτοῦ δύναμιν, 25). Socrates seems even to affirm Euthydemus’ answer when he says that those who know themselves discern the powers they have (διαγιγνώσκουσιν ἄ... δύνανται, 26). Xenophon’s frequent discussion of powers in this chapter makes talk of them appear especially significant.<sup>7</sup> And in the context of the chapter, it produces a plausible view of the benefit of self-knowledge. If self-knowledge means knowing one’s powers, then having self-knowledge would allow a person either to act in accordance with his powers or, should he wish to act differently, to increase his powers.<sup>8</sup> Self-knowledge would serve either restrictively, as a chastening, or positively, as a goad to self-improvement. It would be a prompt to be diffident or to seek personal development. Euthydemus, in his desire for the kingly art, that most excellent skill sought by politicians, estate-managers, and leaders, must see whether he has what it takes. So while these scholars do not always make precise the relationship between self-knowledge and knowing your powers—perhaps not all assume an identity between them—they have good reasons for positing an important relationship there.

In fact, while only in *Mem.* 4.2 does Xenophon’s Socrates talk about the Delphic inscription, throughout the previous book he repeatedly and usefully corrects his interlocutors’ self-understanding about their suitability for their desired goals. For example, Socrates’ aspiring cavalry-commander friend fails to recognize that he will have to care for and improve his men’s horses and the men themselves; and to be obeyed, he will have to speak well about goodness and have deep knowledge about the most important matters (3.3). In another conversation, Socrates shows Nichomachides that he neglects to consider the skills appropriate to generalship; he should know what he needs and how to get it, as a good businessman does (3.4). Glaucon, who wants to lead the city, ignores how little knowledge he has for that purpose, including the sources of the city’s revenue and expense, military and defensive strength, and the productivity of mines and fields. Just as the estate-manager knows his inventory and makes effort to replenish supplies, the statesman must understand all that about which he might speak and on which he might act (3.6). Charmides, Socrates’ next interlocutor, has the reverse problem, having competence enough to lead the city but too much reserve and fear to do so. Socrates tells Charmides that he is

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<sup>5</sup> All translations by the author.

<sup>6</sup> Annas (1985) 121 reads the passage more complexly, as arguing that “those who know themselves know what is suitable (ἐπιτήδειον) for themselves, and discern what they can and cannot do,” and thereby obediently fulfill their station and duties.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to those cited from 4.2 (sections 1, 25, 26): Socrates finding it contradictory that some people think that they become “able” (δυνατοί, δυνατῶν) to play music only with help but that they are “able” (δυνατοί) to speak in the Assembly instinctively and without adequate preparation or training (ἀνευ παρασκευῆς καὶ ἐπιμελείας αὐτόματοι, 6); Euthydemus making his collection of books as complete “as I am able” (8); Euthydemus asserting he “is able” to list what is just (12); Euthydemus saying that the man “able” to err in reading and writing is the most literate (20); Euthydemus complaining that he is “unable” to answer questions he should be able to answer (23); Socrates observing that cities “ignorant of their own power” enter foolish wars (29); also 33, 37.

<sup>8</sup> Tortzen (2002) 11 glosses this passage: “know your limits, *i.e.*, accept that you are ignorant and try to be wiser.”

ignorant of himself (ἀγνοῖ σεαυτόν), having failed, like many men, to examine and pay attention to himself (τὸ ἑαυτοῦς ἐξετάζειν ... τὸ σαυτῷ προσέχειν); he must realize that the assembly deserves no fear and that his ability to improve public affairs will benefit even himself (3.7). In these four exchanges, Socrates appears to want his friends to know their powers, and expects that by knowing them, and thus themselves, they will succeed in the lives they desire.

In what follows, I will argue that while “Know your powers” may partially gloss “Know yourself,” it is inadequate as a full analysis of the injunction. Knowing yourself does involve some amount of self-observation and self-inventory, and close scrutiny of one’s strengths and weaknesses. You do not have to be profoundly incurious to overlook certain unpleasant or unfortunate aspects of yourself; surely all humans obscure from themselves their qualities inconsistent with their self-ideal, and so Socrates’ advice is perennially valuable. Yet Xenophon gives Socrates a more realistic, complex, and satisfying view of self-knowledge than this one.

### *Problems with the “knowing your powers” view*

Socrates’ remarks about self-knowledge throughout *Mem.* 4.2 give a positive picture of self-knowledge connected to the concepts of mastery and slavery, knowledge and ignorance of justice and goodness, and conversation with and reciprocal ethical diagnosis of others. But before reconstructing this positive picture, it is worth canvassing the simplest reasons against taking the “knowing your powers” view as the complete story.

First, if Socrates had wanted Euthydemus simply to know his powers, he could have said “Know your powers.” Instead, Socrates cites the Delphic precept “Know yourself,” and reiterates the Delphic provenance of that maxim (24).<sup>9</sup> The Delphic maxim does not obviously mean “know your powers,” and whether its meaning is confusing, multiple, or indeterminate,<sup>10</sup> Socrates’ appeal to it suggests that he is alluding to some deeper meaning linked to its profound position in Greek intellectual, moral, and even spiritual life.

Second, when listing the benefits of self-knowledge, Socrates says that it gives you information about more than yourself. Perhaps paradoxically, by knowing yourself you may know others. Socrates says that it is on account of self-knowledge that people may assess others (διὰ τοῦτο δὲ καὶ... τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους δυνάμενοι δοκιμάζειν, 26), and this assessment is the same action you perform on yourself. There is some strain to thinking that knowing your own powers allows you thereby to know others’ powers. Your own powers appear too narrow an object of knowledge for this broader social outcome.

Third, once Euthydemus accepts the importance of knowing himself, he asks where one ought to begin examining oneself (ὁπόθεν δὲ χρὴ ἄρξασθαι ἐπισκοπεῖν ἑαυτόν, 30). Socrates answers Euthydemus’ question by asking his own question in return: “Well then ... I suppose you know full well what sorts of things are good, what sorts bad?” (οὐκοῦν... τὰ μὲν ἀγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακὰ ὁποῖά ἐστι, πάντως πού γινώσκεις; 31). This suggests that knowing yourself begins in a certain kind of knowing: knowing what is good. And yet knowing your powers does not obviously begin in knowing what is good.

Fourth, at the very point Socrates refers to the Delphic maxim, he gives a two-part gloss. Knowing yourself involves, at the same time, both recognizing your power and investigating what sort a person one is in light of human purposes (ὁ ἑαυτὸν ἐπισκεψάμενος, ὁποῖός ἐστι πρὸς τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην χρείαν, ἔγνωκε τὴν αὐτοῦ δύναμιν, 25). Socrates repeats this doubling in his next speech: those who know themselves know what is valuable to them while they also discern what powers they have (τὰ τε ἐπιτήδεια ἑαυτοῖς ἴσασι καὶ διαγιγνώσκουσιν ἃ τε δύνανται καὶ ἃ μὴ, 26). It is not yet clear what this adjunct to knowing your powers is, but it is obviously something more than knowing your powers, and not assimilable to it.

Together these observations provide reason enough to revisit the view of self-knowledge in *Mem.* 4.2. This revisiting demands a more synoptic perspective on the whole chapter.

### *Knowing yourself as knowing about justice*

We may understand *Mem.* 4.2 better by seeing its position in book four. In *Mem.* 4.1.3-4 Xenophon describes Socrates’ approach toward those who think their natural abilities are sufficient for success. He argues that even thoroughbred horses, from excellent stock, need improvement (παιδείας). Men too need knowledge of what they have to do

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<sup>9</sup> Except in *Apol.* 14, Xenophon’s Socrates appeals to Delphi only one other time, in the following chapter on veneration of the gods: the Delphic god says that one pleases the gods by following the law of the state (4.3.16).

<sup>10</sup> Wilkins (1917); Fontenrose (1978) 294; Pl. *Chrm.* 164d-165a.

(ἀ δει πρᾶττειν); otherwise, they would be out of control, implacable, and useless (δυσκατέκτους, δυσαποτρέπτους, φαυλοτάτους). In *Mem.* 4.1.5, Xenophon describes Socrates' approach toward those who believe their wealth adequate for success. Without knowing the difference between beneficial and harmful things, he convinces them, they would be fools (ήλίθιος) and without success.

In *Mem.* 4.2, Xenophon describes a third Socratic approach, this time toward those who consider themselves to have received the best education and who think highly of their wisdom (παιδείας τε τῆς ἀρίστης τετυχηκέναι καὶ μέγα φρονοῦσιν ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ, 1).<sup>11</sup> Euthydemus is one of these men. The formal parallels between this section and the previous two suggests substantive parallels in the lessons. In the first two cases, Socrates recommends an abstract knowledge that also has particular application: what it is necessary to do, and thus what you must do; and distinctions of value, and thus, again, what you must choose. Xenophon prepares the reader to think that Socrates will convince Euthydemus that he needs some abstract knowledge that may at the same time serve his particular uses.

Xenophon's account of Socrates' interaction with Euthydemus starts with a humorous account of his indirection. Socrates learns that Euthydemus collects books of the poets and wise men (4.2.1, 8-9). Euthydemus takes those anthologies of wisdom to suffice for his education to statesmanship; he thinks he does not need teachers. Socrates disagrees; he thinks Euthydemus, like everyone else, needs guidance. But this puts Socrates in a bind. He needs to teach Euthydemus, who does not accept the value of teachers, that he needs teachers. So Socrates instead talks to his friends—within Euthydemus' hearing—about the importance of teachers to every other skilled person, and the folly in relying on impulse (ἀπὸ ταῦτομάτου) (4.2.2-6). This sideways introduction works; Euthydemus finally enters the conversation. But his entrance to the conversation does not mean he yet recognizes his mistake. Instead he believes that Socrates has been praising the value of wisdom over money, and thus that he has been affirming Euthydemus' value-judgments (9). At least Euthydemus will now answer Socrates' questions; Socrates asks them with an eye to Euthydemus' pride and continued resistance to the value of teaching (10).

The ensuing ten chapters appear to take on the question of justice (11-21). Excellence in the political life that Euthydemus desires requires being just. Euthydemus tries to prove that he already embodies justice by showing that he can list the "works of justice" (δύνωμαι ἐγὼ τὰ τῆς δικαιοσύνης ἔργα ἐξηγήσασθαι, 12). He thinks there is a "learning and knowledge of justice" (20). He believes—though admits he cannot substantiate the claim—that knowing justice makes one just. He soon finds out that justice confuses him more than he anticipated.<sup>12</sup> This has two overlapping consequences. First, Socrates convinces him that this confusion, like any confusion, reveals that "what he thought he knew he does not know" (ἀ ᾗτεο εἰδέναι οὐκ οἶδεν, 21). So he comes to know what he does not know, what he is not able to do—in this case, defend his initial ideas about the works of justice; and Euthydemus makes this admission of ignorance explicit (23). Second, the failure to know about justice, just like the failure to know about beauty and justice, makes him "slavish" (ἀνδραποδώδεις, 22).<sup>13</sup> By lacking knowledge of justice, he lacks self-mastery. These two consequences fit together. Since failing to know oneself involves unknowingly failing to know about justice, and failing to know about justice makes one slavish, failing to know

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<sup>11</sup> On 4.2 specifically, Phillips (1989); Johnson (2005); Rossetti (2011). On 4.4 and Book 4 more generally, Vander Waerdt (1993) 39-48; Morrison (1995); Gray (1998) 150-157; Cooper (1999) 25-7 (though repeatedly asserting that Xenophon is not a philosopher and thus that he is uninterested in presenting Socrates' "philosophical" opinions, 10, 14, 27); Johnson (2003) and (2012); Dorion (2003) ccx-cxxiv, cccxi-ccxxxvii and (2010); Stavru (2008). What is otherwise a minute and attentive reading of Socrates' almost Gorgianic "macro-rhetorical" strategy in the conversation, Rossetti (2011) 76-80 leaves the γνῶθι σαυτὸν passage unanalyzed at the level of content. He observes the following *functions* of the passage: (i) to leave the tension from the previous exchange unresolved, allowing Euthydemus to "interiorize the trauma"; (ii) to give the young man a feeling of control, by letting him think "autonomously" about his visits to Delphi; and (iii) to correct Euthydemus ("you do not know yourself") in a way that Euthydemus can gladly accept and thus reveal his reasonable character.

<sup>12</sup> Socrates examines Euthydemus' knowledge of justice by sketching a simple chart and having them inscribe the deeds of justice and injustice on either side (13). Euthydemus struggles. First they have to redo everything (διορισώμεθα πάλιν, 16). Then he has to retract what he has said (μετατιθεμαι τὰ εἰρημένα, 18). After these two revisions Euthydemus starts doubting his answers, observing that the deeds of justice now look different than they did at first (19). Socrates drags him through a trying sequence of questions about intentional and unintentional deception, and the equation of knowing justice with being just. At this point, Euthydemus becomes even more sensitive to his uncertainties: "I seem to myself about even these things not to know what I'm saying" (20).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 4.2.23: Socrates: "it's necessary, in every way, thoroughly straining (διατειναμένους), to flee this [i.e., ignorance of the good and just], lest we become slaves."

oneself makes one slavish.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, not being slavish—embodying self-mastery—involves knowing oneself, by way of consciously knowing about justice.

So far, Socrates has presented several faces of self-knowledge. It is a recognition of what one knows and does not know. This is knowing one's power only in the minimal sense that successfully revealing one's knowledge is an ability. It is also the avoidance of slavishness. This is being in charge of oneself. And it is knowing justice. Knowing justice puts one in charge of oneself; and knowing that one knows justice makes one knowingly master of oneself.

Immediately after Socrates' remarks about Euthydemus' slavish self-ignorance about his ignorance of justice, Socrates asks his questions about the Delphic injunction (24). Socrates apparently treats his discussion of the precept as summarizing, elevating, and elaborating on the previous discussion, which he thus reaffirms to have been about self-knowledge. He shows that Euthydemus' needed attention to justice and his own attitude about his understanding of justice is what the Delphic injunction enjoins. Euthydemus' answer to Socrates' question about his reaction to seeing the injunction—that he thought he already knew himself—recapitulates Euthydemus' self-confidence in the earlier sections.

### *Knowing yourself as coming to own yourself*

Socrates immediately glosses the Delphic inscription γνῶθι σαυτὸν as “investigating yourself, who you are” (σαυτὸν ἐπισκοπεῖν, ὅστις εἶς, 24). He does not say that the Delphic inscription picks out any particular elements of oneself to know; it involves figuring out who one is (overall). This general knowledge of oneself Euthydemus takes to be the most readily accessible kind of knowledge, perhaps because its object is closer and more familiar than any other (σκολῆ... ἂν ἄλλο τι ἦδειν, εἴ γε μηδ' ἐμαυτὸν ἐγίγνωσκον, “hardly would I know anything else, if I didn't know myself”). Socrates parodies Euthydemus' insouciant and reductive view by wondering whether “knowing oneself” really means “knowing one's name” (τοῦνομα τὸ ἑαυτοῦ μόνον οἶδεν). One's name is the closest and most easily-known, but at the same time the most superficial, aspect of oneself.<sup>15</sup> But Socrates' suggestion points in the same direction that his first gloss pointed: to the whole person, for which one's name stands in.

All this is too allusive, and so Socrates advances to an analogy. He likens the person who aims to know himself to the horse-buyer who desires to know a candidate horse (ἠνοούμενοι... βούλωνται γινῶναι):

Horse-buyers do not first think they know what they desire to know until they investigate (ἐπισκέψωνται) whether it is pliable or stubborn (εὐπειθής... ἢ δυσπειθής), whether it is strong or weak, whether quick or slow, and everything else concerning the usefulness (χρείαν) of a horse, in what way it is serviceable (ἐπιτηδία) and unserviceable. (25)

It seems important that Xenophon specifies a horse-buyer, not a spectator or judge at a horse-show, or a zoologist, or a painter.<sup>16</sup> The significance of horse-buying is clear in Xenophon's *On the Art of Horsemanship*: the horse you buy may determine whether you live or die:

So to summarize, whichever horse would be sound-footed, gentle, fairly quick, willing and able to undergo toil, and, especially, pliable, this one would, likely enough, be the most painless and safest for a rider in wartime. But others, either because of torpor needing much driving, or because of an excess of spirit much coaxing and maintaining, will make the rider's hands full and him spiritless when in danger. (III.12)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> “But by the gods,” he [Euthydemus] says, “Socrates, I really thought I was philosophizing a philosophy, the one through which I thought it best to be educated in the matters appropriate for a man striving (ὀρεγομένω) to be a gentleman (καλοκάγαθίας): but now, how do you imagine I am, spiritless, seeing myself (ὀρῶντα ἑμαυτὸν), despite my earlier efforts (προπεποιημένα), not even being able to answer what I'm asked about what it's most necessary to know about, and having no other avenue traveling along which I might become better?” (23)

<sup>15</sup> See also Pl. *Tht.* 203a6-d10, with Roochnik (2002) 45, where Socrates uses his own name as the example of something significant to know.

<sup>16</sup> The Socrates of Pl. *Resp.* 333c1 emphasizes the importance of horse-expertise when buying a horse, and at *Apology* 20a6-b2, 25b4-6, he emphasizes the importance for training (see with Lane (2005) 24–5). In the *Phaedrus* Socrates gives buying a horse the central place in his analysis of fruitful rhetoric (260b1-c8). See Griffith (2006) for the general importance for the ancient Greeks of thinking about horses.

<sup>17</sup> ὡς δὲ συνελόντι εἰπεῖν, ὅστις εὐπους μὲν εἴη, πρῶος δὲ, ἀρκούντως δὲ ποδώκης, ἐθέλοι δὲ καὶ δύναιτο πόνους ὑποφέρειν, πειθοίτο δὲ μάλιστα, οὗτος ἂν εἰκότως ἀλυπτότατος τ' εἴη καὶ σωτηριώτατος τῷ ἀναβάτῃ ἐν τοῖς πολεμικοῖς. οἱ δὲ ἢ διὰ βλακείαν ἐλάσεως πολλῆς δεόμενοι ἢ διὰ τὸ ὑπέρθυμοι εἶναι πολλῆς θωπείας τε καὶ πραγματείας ἀσχολίαν μὲν ταῖς χερσὶ τοῦ ἀναβάτου παρέχουσιν, ἀθυμίαν δ' ἐν τοῖς κινδύνοις.

A horse's initially hidden traits prove decisive in its usefulness, and thus whether one should commit oneself to this horse.

The horse-buyer must have several types of knowledge. He must know, first of all, what makes a horse useful. This is the knowledge of the ideal of a horse, of a horse's function and good state. Xenophon's manuals on horsemanship reflect on this general matter. The horse-buyer must know how to investigate a horse's abilities. This investigative expertise applies to any horse, but is a practical ability rather than a theoretical discovery. It is concerned with observing, manipulating, and judging individual horses on any occasion. Xenophon's manuals can give some suggestions about this, but would not perform as well as an actual teacher. Finally, the horse-buyer must learn the details of the particular horse, in what way it fulfills the various excellences of a horse. This knowledge determines whether to buy a particular horse or not. So knowing a horse well enough to decide whether to attach your life to it requires the ability both to discern the good for horses and discern the state of a particular horse with respect to it.

Socrates says that the case of knowing the horse one might purchase is analogous to knowing oneself. The analogy suggests at least five important features of self-knowledge: urgency, self-ownership or self-purchase, technical difficulties in the investigation, a focus on certain qualities, and multiple kinds of knowledge.

Deciding which horse to buy, and thus knowing a horse, has an urgency; the wrong horse could put its buyer in grave danger. Coming to know yourself thus also has an urgency. For a soldier, the danger of self-ignorance could be mortal: it could put him in unnecessary risk, or lead him to sacrifice himself for an end he does not actually endorse, or fail to obey those deserving his obedience. For Euthydemus, an aspiring statesman, the danger may not be to his natural life as such, but to his political success; acting without self-knowledge could cause him social anonymity, or exile, or mediocrity. Or for Euthydemus or anyone seeking to be a free citizen and a gentleman, self-ignorance puts one into the evil state of slavery, a fatal condition for whomever desires autonomy. Getting self-knowledge does more than advance a person's self-actualization, as increased literary creativity or athletic prowess may; it has, so this analogy suggests, a much more grave and significant importance.

The horse-buyer seeks to own a horse. Ownership depends on some exchange, but the exchange does not explain the purchase of a particular horse. The specific purchase occurs only once the buyer determines that he wishes to commit himself to some particular horse. This commitment means having identified some horse as the right one and one's exclusive steed. The analogy to self-knowledge may sound forced. It is odd to think of knowing oneself as coming to own or purchase oneself. In the first place, we are already on our own property, as it were. And in the second place, there does not seem much choice; we seem to have only one self to choose from. But the thought of owning oneself is really not so implausible. We already have the notion of disowning parts of ourselves, treating them as foreign, irrelevant, or none of our business. We also have the opposite notion, of recognizing parts of ourselves, treating them as constitutive of or important to who we are. We see Euthydemus disowning certain of his pretensions as foolish and thus no longer part of himself; and we see him eventually owning up to certain aspects of himself, especially his discipleship to Socrates. The clearest way of seeing the possibility of owning oneself is in the context of slavery. Slaves do not own themselves; they are not responsible for what they do, and do not receive the reward of being who they are. While some slaves are enslaved by slave-owners, others are enslaved by impulse and delusion. The opposite of a slave is a master of oneself. But one masters oneself only by taking on ownership of oneself.

The good horse-buyer has a skill of assessment. He does not simply look at a horse, or express his feeling about the horse. He uses the series of discrete tests that Xenophon describes, tests that might even strike the amateur as surprising, tedious, or irrelevant. Likewise, knowing oneself takes more skill than knowing one's name. It may involve a complex of investigations, studies, tests, and assays. The meandering conversation that Socrates instigates between Euthydemus and himself reveals a range of such methods of self-investigation.

One reason for the skillfulness of horse assessment is the specific variety of traits evaluated. For a horse, it is sound-footedness, gentleness, speed, endurance, pliability, energy, self-control. These traits should not be obscured by one's interest in the horse's coat, lineage, farm, or other less important traits. Human self-knowledge may also concern itself with particular human virtues. If Xenophon implies a close parallel between horse-knowing and self-knowing, then self-knowledge might care about *karteria*, reasonableness, courage, and *sôphrosunê*. Of relatively minor importance are one's name, one's possessions, and even the history of one's education; one's knowledge of virtue is of relatively great importance.

The horse-buyer, as described above, knows not just about some candidate horse, but also how to find out about that horse, and about the ideals of horseness. So too then the self-knower. Knowing *yourself* may seem to have only one

object; but it actually requires knowing, in addition to your particular powers, the nature of the good human, and how to measure success against that ideal.

These five parallels between horse-buying and knowing oneself show the ways that knowing oneself could plausibly be likened to coming to own oneself. The most important parallel is that knowing oneself is not a matter of passive observation or inventorying. It is a complex practical decision with deep self-constituting import.

### *The benefits of self-knowledge and conversation*

The next part of Socrates' speech about self-knowledge takes a new tack.<sup>18</sup> It appeals to the "goods" of self-knowledge; Socrates ends up addressing three types of goods. I will speak of the first and third types before proceeding to speak of the second type, the ability to attain the parallel of self-knowledge, a sort of other-knowledge. For each of the three sorts of benefits, Socrates gives two arguments: about the positive consequences of self-knowledge, and about the negative consequences of self-deception (τὸ ἐψεῦσθαι ἑαυτῶν). I start with the positive case.

Socrates recapitulates the two-fold process undergone by those who know themselves (οἱ εἰδότες ἑαυτοῦς): first, they know something general to all humans, namely what is useful for them (τά ἐπιτήδεια ἑαυτοῖς ἴσασι), and second, they discern (or "recognize completely") what they can do and cannot do (διαγιγνώσκουσιν ἅ τε δύνανται καὶ ἅ μὴ). This gives them resource and forethought:

And doing what they understand (ἐπίστανται), they get what they need and they do well; but drawing back (ἀπεχόμενοι) from what they do not understand, they become error-free and utterly flee doing badly. (4.2.26)

Knowing oneself, in giving one ownership over oneself, contributes to acting with control. One does only that which one is able to do. One adheres to that which is properly one's own. That which one "stands on," which is one's own, necessarily works in one's favor. Everything else one "stays away from."

Knowing what one *does* is part of knowing oneself. Those who know what they do become well-reputed and honored (27). They gain this social credibility all around. Those similar to them can put them to use, presumably in some joint enterprise. Those who somehow miss the mark in their own affairs love them for their advice, their protection, and their support in their own hopes for success. Socrates is saying that self-knowledge has more than a constitutive function, and more than the benefit that comes from improving in what one wants to do. It yields the benefits the *kalos kagathos* seeks: public esteem, helpfulness to his peers, and *noblesse oblige* relative to his hapless neighbors.<sup>19</sup>

By contrast, neither constitutive nor external goods accrue to those who do not know themselves (27). The situation for them stands exactly opposite to that of the self-knowers. Those who do not know themselves are thoroughly deceived (διεψευσμένοι) about their own powers, about their needs, and about their actions. They miss the good and fall into the bad. Socially, their grasping at what is actually bad causes every kind of dishonor (29). Socrates puts the contrast starkly. But his summary of the personal and public consequences of self-knowledge and self-deception does not imply his lack of concern for the central function of self-knowledge. He simply adds to the gravity of the decision to own oneself or not.

Socrates makes a brief but puzzling remark when giving the second benefit of self-knowledge and the second cost of self-deception. He was just talking about the benefits consequent to those knowing themselves doing what they understand. "And on account of this too" (διὰ τοῦτο δὲ καί...), Socrates says, "they may assess others" (τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους δυνάμενοι δοκιμάζειν, 26). He adds yet another item: "and through their engagement (χρείας) with others, they get what is good and guard against the bad." Those lacking self-knowledge, as we already said, are thoroughly deceived about their own powers; but they are also thoroughly deceived about others' powers and about human affairs more generally (καὶ τὰλλα ἀνθρώπινα πράγματα).

This reveals something crucial about self-knowledge. Knowing yourself is not simply a matter of introspection, remembering your past, or feeling and then cataloguing your desires. The reason is that I cannot introspect another person,

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<sup>18</sup> He introduces it with "and isn't this also clear ... ?" (ἐκεῖνο δὲ οὐ φανερόν, 26).

<sup>19</sup> At *Mem.* 1.6.9 Socrates tells Antiphon that he does not think there is any pleasure so great as "realizing that oneself (ἑαυτὸν τε ἠγείσθαι) is becoming better and acquiring better friends." At 3.7.9, Socrates tells Charmides that he should focus not just on examining his friends but also himself (ἑαυτοῦς ἐξετάζειν); this will lead best to attending properly to the things of the city, whence both his friends and him will benefit.

or remember her past, or feel her desires. Self-knowledge is not even a behavioristic judgment based on appeal to external criteria. Perhaps we do learn about others by observing their behaviors; we see whether they keep acting whimsically or erratically or impetuously. But much of the material Socrates has attributed to self-knowledge could not be so viewed, for example the good for men or one's powers with respect to justice and goodness. So self-knowledge cannot rely solely on these two spectator modes, introspection and observation of behavior. It must be some third mode.

That third we see in Xenophon's depiction of Socrates' engagement with Euthydemus. Socrates simultaneously reflects on the good for humans, and determines Euthydemus' powers, in the course of having a characteristic sort of conversation with him. He has investigated the works of justice, and will go on to investigate the infallibly good elements of the happy life. Both he and Euthydemus have discovered unsuccessful views, and have perhaps gotten insight into the more promising directions a future search should take. Because Socrates can attend to what he knows and does not know, he will not erroneously agree with Euthydemus' unsubstantiated views; this allows him to help Euthydemus identify the places where he has gone wrong. In theory, Euthydemus could do the same for Socrates.

Conversation bridges two people, and in doing so it helps bridge the particularity and universality both of which self-knowledge seeks. To know what generally holds for people, it is useful to check your potentially partial and self-serving views against others. To know what holds specifically for oneself, one discovers that one's perspective or status is not held or manifested universally. It is also helpful, for learning about one's private views, to have someone ask questions that circumvent one's liabilities to self-deceive. The questioner in a conversation holds the answerer to account: to fail to answer a question, and to do so sincerely, is to fail to respect the rights of an interlocutor. Some people find it easy to lie to themselves, on the thought that it hardly matters whether they do so, and is more pleasant than telling themselves the truth. But many of these people feel strongly the obligation to speak openly and honestly with those who obviously care about them.

Xenophon's tale of Socrates' conversation with Euthydemus continually reinforces these facts. Without intellectual companionship, people cannot "understand how to judge what it is necessary to do" (κρίνειν οὐκ ἐπισταμένους ἃ δεῖ πράττειν, 4.1.4, cf. 5). Themistocles became great only through some association (διὰ συνουσίαν) with the wise (4.2.2). Others learn their skill only through long tutelage (4–7). Euthydemus, according to Socrates, can make no progress in wisdom simply by collecting and reading books. Xenophon makes clear that Euthydemus did not at first care for conversation: he only gradually grew comfortable with Socrates' way of talking (αὐτὸν ἐτοιμότερον ὑπομένοντα 8). Once he did, he answers, and reveals his zeal: he admits to wanting to add to his literary collection (8), thinking Socrates approves of his collecting (9). But he also hesitates in saying what exactly he wants from it (διεσιώπησεν... σκοπῶν, 10). Once Socrates guesses it, Euthydemus forcefully (σφοδρὰ γ') assents (11).

This process of excitement, uncertainty, Socratic input, and then recognition continues through the narration. Going through the process enough times, Euthydemus finally realizes that his attitude toward himself and his prognosis for his future successes are unsupported by evidence. From his conversation with Socrates, he realizes he has not heretofore taken seriously enough his obligations to himself. This self-realization is essential. Though the process of coming to know himself is the same as the process of coming to know another person, he cannot own another person as he can own himself. Decisions to commit himself to certain courses of action—what self-ownership amounts to—come only from himself.

### *Knowing yourself as knowing the good*

Euthydemus comes to be convinced about the value of knowing himself. He now wants to know how to begin investigating himself (ἐπισκοπεῖν ἑαυτόν); he says he "looks to you [Socrates] if you are willing to go through it" (30). Socrates answers with his own question, as I quoted above: "Well then ... I suppose you know full well what sorts of things are good, what sorts bad?" (31) Socrates responds to Euthydemus' question about the start of investigating by seeing whether he knows something already. Were he interested in changing the topic, he could say so. Instead, since much of his discussion with Euthydemus has already concerned self-knowledge and the epistemic prerequisites to it—about knowing whether one knows about justice, the question of intentionality, the issue of slavery and self-mastery, ownership, and the benefits of self-knowledge—Socrates certainly appears to be continuing on this topic.

Euthydemus' answer to Socrates' question shows that the men maintain the topic of self-knowledge. Euthydemus says that if he *didn't* know what is good, he would be "worse than slaves" (τῶν ἀνδραπόδων φαυλότερος, 31). This echoes exactly the point at 4.2.22 where ignorance of goodness, along with ignorance of justice and beauty, would be slavish, and



where thinking one does know what one does not know would be a failure of self-knowledge. Obviously, then, since knowledge of the good is part of self-knowledge, Socrates' question at 4.2.31 is an answer to Euthydemus' methodological question.

Euthydemus, buoyed by some confidence in this topic, asserts that good things include health, the causes of health, wisdom, and the sources of happiness (31–4). Unfortunately, as with his views of just things, under the pressure of examination he can maintain none of these views. Socrates diagnoses Euthydemus' failure not by appealing to Euthydemus' false beliefs but by observing his epistemic proclivities: “perhaps you did not investigate (ἔσκεψαι) these things because you intensely believed (τὸ σφόδρα πιστεύειν) you knew them” (36). Getting self-knowledge requires vigilance about one's habits of self-deception, especially in respect to those fundamental issues that are also the hardest to make sense of. This most fundamental issue is the good for humans. Euthydemus neither knows what is good for humans—and himself—nor, until this point, knew that he lacked knowledge of those goods. With neither sort of knowledge, he would be unable to act well or revise those actions that may be found to have skewed from the proper path. Pursuing self-knowledge appears to include the pursuit of both sorts of knowledge. It may even include a pursuit of further matters. It appears to include an epistemic self-maintenance, an attention to the potentially-blinding intensity of one's beliefs. Once he has been shown up repeatedly, “he was down on himself, considering himself to be in fact a slave” (καταφρονήσας ἑαυτοῦ καὶ νομίσας τῷ ὄντι ἀνδράποδον εἶναι, 39).

Not only is knowing about goodness part of self-knowledge, mistakenly thinking you know about goodness is a typical failure of self-knowledge. At 4.2.36, Socrates chastises Euthydemus for having been so confident that his beliefs about goodness were instances of knowledge that he never even thought about them. He continues in that section to discover that Euthydemus also fails to know what it is to be a leader of people—the position in society he wishes to occupy—because he does not even know who the people are. He does not know himself *qua* statesman. Put in another way, he does not know the good of the people, or his own good, because he does not know who they are, or he is.

### *Socratic indirection*

I have argued that nearly all of *Mem.* 4.2 concerns self-knowledge. This argument was necessary because much of it seems not to be about self-knowledge. Indeed, when Euthydemus explicitly asks Socrates how to start knowing himself, Socrates does not give him a direct answer. Socrates instead practices indirection, as he did at the beginning of the dialogue.

Were self-knowledge simply the inventorying of one's strengths and weaknesses, we could not easily explain Socrates' choice not to give a direct statement about the nature of self-knowledge, an attitude apparently relatively rare in Xenophon's treatment of his teacher.<sup>20</sup> There would seem to be no harm in helping a person come to know in what dimensions of life he was capable and in what feeble. But teaching a route to self-knowledge could have its risks. Socrates may worry about the following situation: suppose Euthydemus believes that upon following some rules he will have reached his goal. As soon as he learns the guidelines for knowing himself, he may believe he has gone much of the way to attaining self-knowledge. Socrates has reasons for such a worry. He has already diagnosed Euthydemus' susceptibility to premature self-confidence. Euthydemus infers his own wisdom from his possession of books containing the wisdom of sages. His inference is invalid; Socrates quickly gets him to see that he lacks that wisdom. If Euthydemus leaves the conversation thinking that Socrates told him explicitly how to get self-knowledge, he may believe that as soon as he does what Socrates requests, he can return to his bid for political leadership. He may observe his strengths and weaknesses, and, on the basis of his putative discoveries, begin to act. He may never think about what Xenophon shows him eventually to conclude (given that Socrates has not propounded an explicit route to self-knowledge): that he is ignorant about goodness (35), about happiness and what to pray for (36), and about whom he intends to rule (36–9); that he is worthless (φαιλότης), ought to be silent, and is nearly completely ignorant (39); that he deserves his own scorn and identification with slaves (39); and that he would be respected by nobody unless he were to associate constantly with Socrates (40). If seeking self-knowledge is a commitment to a certain continued self-improving investigation, rather than a report of one's current status (the “knowing one's powers” view), then believing at any time that one had achieved self-knowledge would be self-defeating.

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<sup>20</sup> Morrison (1994); cf. 4.2.40, on Socrates' later openness with Euthydemus: ὁ δ', ὡς ἔγνω αὐτὸν οὕτως ἔχοντα, ἡκιστα μὲν διετάρρατεν, ἀπλοῦστατα δὲ καὶ σαφέστατα ἐξηγεῖτο ἃ τε ἐνόμιζεν εἰδέναι δεῖν καὶ ἐπιτηδεύειν κράτιστα εἶναι (“And Socrates, since he recognized how things were with him, confounded him minimally, and expounded most simply and clearly what he thought it necessary to know and best to pursue”).

## Conclusion

Knowing yourself, for Xenophon's Socrates, includes knowing your powers. This means knowing what you can do. But what you can do includes what you know about. If you do not know about goodness, justice, and beauty, you cannot use these as reasons to act. You instead use your impulses, suspicions, and self-images as guides for action. These are not really up to you; they are whatever you have absorbed. And so you are enslaved to them. Self-mastery amounts to acting on the basis of what you reflectively believe to be best. Such reflection requires self-knowledge and acknowledgement. Acting on the basis of good reasons can save a person from the risks error, confusion, and strident self-confidence can lead him to. Thus self-knowledge is a matter of life and death, or at least of good life and bad life.

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