Why should we bother to understand Plato? The reason is that he is an intelligent man who offers the first comprehensive rational reflection on human affairs, happiness, and its connection to politics. Much of what he says is therefore likely to be true. He also shows us some of the connections between philosophy and the everyday problems and phenomena from which it arises. He therefore offers a sound path to the issues that worry those concerned that philosophy and political philosophy have become too technical and academic.

One might doubt that Plato has much to offer. Four reasons for this stand out: our political preference for equality, which he does not share, our view that someone has proved him wrong or unimportant, say, today, Heidegger and his followers, the power of science (not social science) in explaining things, or the lingering power of religion.

But Heidegger is not obviously true, the connection of science’s discoveries to the human world is not obvious and clear but, rather, problematic, and Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle constitute the first great enlightenment. They provide grounds on which to question the connection between reason and religion and reflections on the phenomena (nature, justice and equality) on which our preference for equality (equal natural rights) rests.

If we seek to understand Plato, how should we proceed? The way from which one learns the most and which distorts matters least is to try to follow an author’s intention. This to begin with means his purpose – what he is trying to achieve or teach through what one is reading. But his intention also means what he is thinking about, because one’s chief goal is to understand the phenomena he is discussing as he uncovers and understands them. And, further, one then wants to see what men are such that we can have this purpose and see these phenomena.

On reflection, the meaning and possibility of what one intends and how one has purposes and intentions are among the matters thinkers dispute. One may think of Husserl’s notion of intentionality and Heidegger’s related but different understanding. If there is no indubitable beginning for any action there will not be one for studying texts either. But, trying to see what an author thinks he is conveying and why, and what he is looking at in order to do so, is a good commonsensical place to begin. Plato’s own understanding of the “knowledge” he seeks begins from the ordinary knowledge one has in the arts, and the everyday activity of pointing something out clearly, adequately, and precisely.

If dialogues are meant to persuade, to what are they persuading? If they mean to educate, what do they teach? Socrates’ ethical goals range from pointing out a practical
danger to himself or others to elevating his interlocutors toward something virtuous and just. His intellectual teaching ranges from loosening sclerotic opinions that restrict thought to opening someone's understanding of his experiences to their fuller unity and cause. Moral and intellectual persuasion differ, but they work together.

The special issue in understanding Plato’s books is that he wrote dialogues, a sometimes charming and sometimes exasperating fact. Most people now take the action in the dialogues and not just the opinions stated in them seriously, although this was much less common before Leo Strauss and Jacob Klein.

If a dialogue is integral to the substance, how is this so? A dialogue lets us see an argument's being addressed to someone in order to teach or persuade him. The persuasive aspects of a dialogue modify its subject by adjusting what and when we hear about it.

They also clarify the subject by teaching something that the formal argument may not. Plato's dialogue on courage, for example, the *Laches*, is oriented to its interlocutors and, especially, to its title character. We do not see what courage is simply and purely. The *Laches* puts courage in a wide context by showing its different effects in different situations, and showing courage's connections to other subjects. Some of courage's full power is revealed in ways that the formal discussion of the subject does not bring obviously to light.

The examples, indications, omissions, characterizations, oaths, replies, opening scenes, and persuasive flow that constitute a dialogue’s action modify what is argued explicitly, and expand our understanding. We can say provisionally that Plato discusses a dialogue's subject in terms of a theme that he expresses through its title. The *Republic* examines justice in terms of the (best) form of government; the *Laches* examines courage in terms of Laches' leading characteristics and opinion. The theme is only one place where the subject shows its power, so it is narrower than the subject. But the theme is broader than the subject, in another sense, because it involves more. Plato clarifies matters by showing this twofold limit. Laches improperly treats part of courage as all of it, for example, but he also experiences it in terms of ridicule, war, and the arts, that is, in terms of matters broader than courage. A dialogue seeks to isolate a subject as it acts in a cosmos oriented to its title figure or action. Plato displays in the dialogue’s action the relation of its subject to the implicit whole in which it takes place.

We progress in understanding Plato if, in addition to these points, we keep in mind this question: How does the philosophic life itself exemplify or modify the subject discussed?

Many discussions in which Socrates advises or confronts his interlocutors involve admonitions to be virtuous or to continue to examine a virtue. So, in the structure of my book *Plato's Political Philosophy* I consider the dialogues devoted to the virtues, and then the *Laws*, which is directed to virtue. I then consider several phenomena (such as nature, wonder, and laughter) from which philosophy begins and to which it is oriented,
and which indicate something of every man’s noetic power. I then further examine virtue in this intellectual light by, among other things, looking at Plato’s examination of beauty or nobility. The remainder of this paper largely reproduces the chapter on Plato’s Greater Hippias in which I do this. Virtue is above all noble, and philosophic wonder has the magnificent and fitting among its objects. The phenomenon of beauty is a central link between intellectual and ethical excellence.

The Greater Hippias

Beauty is central in several dialogues (the Phaedrus and Symposium, for example) and discussed revealingly in others. Only in the Greater Hippias, however, is it explicitly Socrates' chief subject. I therefore begin with the Greater Hippias and then consider Plato's view of beauty generally. To attend to Plato properly one should examine particular dialogues carefully but then also try to draw together their arguments.

I

Socrates starts by exclaiming to the "beautiful and wise" Hippias that it has been a long time since he has come to Athens. Hippias replies that he has had no leisure; his city Elis always sends him as an envoy, most often to Sparta. What, then, caused those named wise in the past--Pittacus, Bias, Thales, on down to Anaxagoras--to hold back from politics? Hippias replies that they lacked the power and prudence to succeed sufficiently at both the common and private. By Zeus, Socrates concludes, the sophists' art has progressed, just as have the other crafts: Bias would be as ridiculous today as Daedelus. Hippias agrees, although he claims that he usually praises past men more than present ones, fearing the envy of the living and the wrath of the dead. Socrates finds Hippias' thinking and naming to be "beautiful." "Gorgias and Prodicus too," were public envoys, made display speeches, associated with youths as Protagoras did, and earned more money than any craftsmen. The men of the past, however, neither earned money nor exhibited.

Hippias replies that Socrates knows nothing beautiful about this. He has earned more money (which he gave to his father, who was filled with wonder at it) than any other two sophists. That Hippias earns so much money while Anaxagoras lost his, Socrates replies, is a beautiful proof of the wisdom of today's men as opposed to their predecessors. But, "tell me this": "from which city have you earned the most money... Clearly it is not from Sparta where you have gone most often?"

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1 See Republic 402B-D, Charmides 159C. For the Greater Hippias I follow Greater Hippias, trans. David R. Sweet, in Thomas Pangle, ed., The Roots of Political Philosophy (Cornell University Press, 1987). I proceed in my exploration of the Greater Hippias by discussing a portion of Plato's argument in a section headed by, say, Roman numeral II. I then, if necessary, comment further on some of the portion's less obvious elements and implications, in a new section with that same Roman numeral followed by a letter, say, II A.

2 The Greek term kalon is translated either as nobility or beauty, and occasionally as fine. We also encounter the sophist Hippias in the Protagoras and Lesser Hippias.

3 Consider Aristotle's discussion of progress or innovation in Politics, Book II, 1268B23-1269A27.

4 On envy, consider Laches' view of Stesilaus, and the discussion of laughter in the Philebus.

5 Greater Hippias 283B.
I A

Unlike conversations others force on Socrates, he initiates this one. Why? One reason is to learn something from Hippias. What could this be? Perhaps Socrates also wishes to teach Hippias, to perplex or deflate and thus neutralize him as a rival for students, and to control the political dangers that flow from his naiveté.⁶

Socrates’ question about Sparta bypasses other topics he easily could have discussed. He might have asked whether money not used well is worth possessing.⁷ Perhaps, however, Hippias loves money too much to question its worth. He might have asked what makes an art an art or what constitutes progress. These questions may be too general for Hippias. Socrates therefore asks a question whose answer proves to upset Hippias’ assumptions about the easy accord among private benefit, public benefit, and progress in sophistry.

II

The "wonderful" fact is that Hippias earns no money in Sparta despite his frequent visits there. No one buys or allows him to sell. Why not? Hippias agrees with Socrates that his wisdom improves virtue, that the Spartans desire virtue for their children, that they are wealthy, and that (in Hippias' view) they cannot educate better than he. Nonetheless, he cannot persuade them that he, rather than they, could advance their sons' virtue. "It is against ancestral tradition for the Spartans to change their laws," he says, "or to educate their sons contrary to what is customary."⁸ Is it, thus, against their tradition to act correctly? No, Hippias replies, it is not lawful for them to employ foreigners.

Hippias agrees that law is set down to help cities but harms them if set down badly. So, are not the law and lawful mistaken when the good is mistaken? Hippias concedes to Socrates that this is true in "precise" speech but not in the many's customary usage; he and Socrates agree that those who know the truth consider the beneficial to be the more lawful. If Hippias' educating is more helpful than the local one, therefore, it is more lawful for Sparta's sons to be educated by him than by their fathers. Hippias agrees, "for you seem to be stating the argument to my advantage, and there is no need for me to oppose it."⁹

Socrates continues. Why do the Spartans praise and listen to Hippias? They do not put up with talking about "the things which you know most beautifully, matters concerning the stars and events in the heavens," geometry, and calculations "since many of them, so to speak, don't even know how to count," or about the "harmonies and

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⁶ Socrates must perplex Hippias because wonder is so trivial for him.
⁷ See Hipparchus, Gorgias 467D-468E, and the discussion of oligarchy and democracy in the Republic, Book VIII.
⁸ Greater Hippias 284B. The regime that is outlined in the Laws helps us to understand this standpoint.
⁹ Greater Hippias 285B.
letters," which Hippias "among human beings knows how to distinguish most precisely." Rather, Hippias says, they enjoy hearing about the generation of heroes and human beings, the founding of cities, "and, in sum, the entire account of ancient things." So, Hippias has "been compelled to learn completely and practice all these sorts of things." He recently "gained a great reputation there regarding beautiful pursuits by describing in detail what a young man ought to pursue." He has "a beautifully constructed speech" that he shortly will exhibit in Athens.¹⁰

II A

This remarkable conversation shows us the gulf between science or wisdom and law or tradition, and indicates Hippias' ignorance of this gulf. Law is truly lawful only if it is good. But legislators do not (always) know what is good. Some or most laws, therefore, are not true law. Such precise knowledge of what is truly lawful, however, differs from customary use. For, in practice, we treat as legal whatever a city promulgates and enforces. Knowledge progresses, moreover, but law is ancestral. A Hippias who learns about numbers, shapes, letters, and harmonies is cosmopolitan, furthermore, while those pleased to hear stories of ancient foundings favor local custom.

Socrates does not press Hippias about this gulf. He does not explore the difference, say, between merely knowing what is good and securing it through enforced law.¹¹ Rather, he hints at force by suggesting that Hippias, who is "compelled" to practice what Sparta wants (for, Elis needs to send envoys there), would recite the list of Athenian archons if Spartans happened to enjoy this.

Hippias does not see that artistic progress puts in question not just old techniques but also ancient laws and foundings. He does not reflect about Sparta's striking contempt for the liberal arts. And, he reduces to a matter of "precision" the difference between what we customarily treat as law and truly beneficial law—that is, he treats them as fundamentally equivalent.¹²

One reason Hippias does not wonder about these splits is because he is so conventional or pious.¹³ He does not recognize a difference between Spartan virtue and the virtue he himself teaches "beautifully." Although he laughs at the old sophists, he gives his money to his father. He believes the good is what is advantageous for him or his own. He thinks that what is wonderful about money is having large amounts of it.

Hippias is not perplexed by the gaps between Sparta and the sophists, the ancient and the beneficial, and law and advantage. Perhaps, then, it is fruitless to explore these questions with him. About what, then, can he be questioned? How might Socrates arrange that Hippias' obtuseness remains harmless? Socrates fastens on the noble or beautiful.

¹⁰ Greater Hippias 286A. See Lesser Hippias.
¹¹ We see in the Laws how the Athenian attempts to close this gulf, while remaining visibly on the side of law and tradition.
¹² Cf. Socrates' discussion with Thrasymachus in the Republic, Book I.
¹³ Greater Hippias 288C.
Hippias sees that the Spartans are preeminent in virtue (nobility) and also capable of hearing beautiful displays. The "beautiful and wise" Hippias does not understand his "wisdom" and its political effects. Perhaps however, he understands the "beautiful."

III

Socrates turns the conversation by mentioning a perplexity into which "someone" threw him. Socrates praised some things as beautiful and blamed others as ugly. When asked "what the beautiful is" he was perplexed; he could not answer. He expects that the wise Hippias can teach him sufficiently and precisely "what is the beautiful itself," so he will not be ridiculed.

Hippias argues that this will be a "small" piece of learning and agrees to let Socrates, imitating this "someone," ask questions and raise objections to what Hippias says. They agree that the just are just by justice, the wise are wise by wisdom, all good things good by the good, and all beautiful things beautiful by the beautiful, as something that is. So, what is the beautiful? Hippias answers that "a beautiful maiden is beautiful." Yet, are there not beautiful mares (as even a god says) and lyres? Hippias agrees but objects to Socrates' spokesman's next example, the pot. The man is "vulgar, taking thought for nothing but the truth." Nonetheless, Hippias sees that if a pot is smooth, round, beautifully fired, and molded by a good potter, "even this utensil is beautiful when it is beautifully made."

"As a whole," however, the pot is not beautiful compared to the maiden or mare. As Socrates quotes Heraclitus, 'the most beautiful ape is ugly compared to the class of humans.' The most beautiful maiden or wisest man, however, would appear like an ape when compared to the class of gods. So, when asked about the beautiful, Hippias answers with something no more beautiful than ugly. Hippias agrees that none would contradict that "the most beautiful maiden is ugly when compared with the class of gods."

Socrates reminds Hippias that his answer would have been correct had he been asked "what is both beautiful and ugly." "But what is the beautiful itself by which all other things are adorned and appear beautiful whenever this form becomes present in a maiden or mare or lyre?" This leads Hippias to his next answer: the beautiful is gold.

III A

Socrates' question about beauty is strange because it presumes a similarity or identity among beautiful things other than their name, "beautiful." If girls, mares, pots, gods, and monkeys are so far apart, however, why should their beauty be similar or

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14 This someone later proves to be the son of Sophroniscus, i.e., Socrates himself, his objecting alter ego. By questioning Hippias through a third party and sometimes answering for him, Socrates maintains the fiction that Hippias is wise.
15 Greater Hippias 288E
16 Greater Hippias 289B
17 See Protagoras' statement about some of the variety in good things Protagoras 334A-C.
identical? Socrates’ question is also odd because by asking for "the beautiful" itself he rejects the possibility that beauty consists of all beautiful things, or all outstandingly beautiful things. Ordinarily, however (before one becomes sophisticated), one might answer a question about what "the beautiful" or beauty is by pointing to someone pretty, as one indicates what a tree is by pointing to several of them or to one that stands out. (Hippias initially sees no difference between saying what is beautiful, i.e., pointing out beautiful things and saying what the beautiful is.) If Socrates pestered someone about pain, the temptation would be great to twist his arm. Why does the beautiful face that launched a thousand ships not tell us what beauty is, or bags of money what wealth is? Socrates looks for a "precise" answer, but Hippias' answer is in its way quite precise. It is a precision, moreover, that anyone can accomplish, because Hippias does not claim special knowledge. Socrates apparently seeks a "beauty," however, that is precisely visible to a knowledge that is not ordinary. What kind of knowledge can this be?

III B

Looking at someone beautiful surely is a clue to discovering beauty. For, what could beauty be without beautiful instances? Nonetheless, what Hippias does not see is that calling the beautiful a beautiful girl overlooks what distinguishes her beautiful characteristics from her other features, and that it fails to connect her beauty to other beauties. The beautiful is what is distinctively beautiful in everything beautiful.

Socrates’ discussion with Hippias also suggests the significance of the difference between the generally and the outstandingly beautiful. Hippias’ view that pots are less dignified than women or horses and, therefore, less beautiful is, within limits, compelling; after all, a museum director who saves his prettiest pot in a fire while letting his homely secretary burn is mad. Yet, to risk only his own life to save his exquisite pot is almost noble. Hippias’ definition shows that in grasping beauty we must account for outstandingly beautiful things, and Socrates’ "vulgar" example shows that we must also grasp the beautiful even in the low. Indeed, Socrates unobtrusively points out general characteristics that make a pot beautiful. Beauty is or accounts for both the most beautiful and most generally beautiful things.

Hippias implicitly distinguishes what is whole--a girl or mare--from what is not--say, something we use only for an external purpose. Indeed, a pretty girl is not (only) pretty for some use or because she is beautifully made but is beautiful as herself and, thus, not so far from "the beautiful." Is the beautiful itself a whole, or is it something partial and dependent? Is beauty present in what we use only because it is present in the beautiful whole to which use belongs? In what way is beauty a cause, that is, that "on account of which things are beautiful?" Hippias readily agrees that we can rank species,
with the most beautiful girl appearing ugly when compared to the gods. If beauty itself is, how does it permit its "appearance" so that a beautiful girl can appear both beautiful and ugly? Hippias is ambiguous (when he ranks what is beautiful) about whether he is comparing classes to classes or classes to individuals. Can the most beautiful pot be more beautiful than an ugly girl, or the wisest or most beautiful human wiser or more beautiful than some gods? 

IV

Hippias' second answer to the question of beauty is gold: a thing that had appeared ugly is "made to appear" beautiful when adorned with gold. They agree, however, that although Phidias is a good craftsman, he made Athena's face from ivory, not gold, and the middle of her eyes from stone. These, too, are beautiful; stone is beautiful "whenever it is fitting" and ugly whenever it "is not fitting." Hippias agrees that "whatever is fitting to each thing makes each thing beautiful" but does not quite concede that ivory and gold must be fitting to be beautiful. They do agree, however, that a ladle made from fig wood is more fitting for a pot of soup than a golden ladle is. If the figwood ladle is more fitting than the golden one, however, it is more beautiful, so gold is not more beautiful than fig wood.

IV A

Hippias' second answer declines from his first: gold has neither the soul nor the independence of the beautiful girl. His answer is not altogether foolish, however, for he takes literally Socrates' suggestion that they are searching for "the beautiful itself by which all other things are adorned and appear beautiful whenever this form becomes present." Hippias allows us to see the common sense or literal meaning of some characteristics of Socrates' ideas. Whatever the beautiful is, it can be present in what we make and adorn, that is, it can be added to or brought out from this. Although Hippias includes adornment and appearance here, he forgets what Socrates has said about form and in-itself-ness.

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23 Consider The Odyssey, and Odysseus' relation to Athena. It is noteworthy that Socrates chooses to bring out the ambiguity or ugliness of human beauty by comparing us to gods above and monkeys below rather than, say, by reminding us of the beautiful girl's ugly old age. We should note, too, how Socrates has suggested varieties in the ways beauty is, and is known--sufficiency, precision, causality, disputability, excellence, utility, and wholeness or form.

24 Greater Hippias 290E-291A. Socrates presents this example as one pressed by his unyielding objector: he agrees that Hippias would not converse with him, for "it wouldn't be fitting" for Hippias, with his beautiful clothes and reputation for wisdom, to be so filled with words.

25 Greater Hippias 289D.

26 We remember that in the Gorgias Socrates distinguishes the false flattery of cosmetics--adorning makeup--from gymnastics' production of beauty and strength. This pair is in turn analogized to sophistry and legislation. The truer beauty of the Spartan virtue brought out by its laws is compared in the Greater Hippias to the false beauty of Hippias' wealth and adornment, procured through his pretty speeches, and the false wisdom of his speech is compared to the truer wisdom of Socratic dialectic--speech that, here, seeks the beautiful.
Hippias is reluctant to reduce gold and ivory's beauty to their being fitting and useful. Indeed, can we not see that gilding beautifies furniture's appearance even if it adds nothing to, or detracts from, its use? We do not smash lovely old china merely because it is not dishwasher safe. The beautiful cannot be reduced to the useful, or what is fit for use. It is also not equivalent to what is fitting for (or pleasant to) our sight: this view of beauty does not capture a whole that stands beautifully alone. The beautiful girl's parts may fit, but her beauty (her looks) also belongs to her striking independence, completion, separateness, form, and vivacity, the whole that shapes and contains the parts. Seeing her as useful, moreover, is not the only or most immediate way of seeing her. Gold is formless and obviously not the only beautiful thing, but it, too, strikes and pleases independent of its use, and often independent of its fit. There is a reason we use gold and ivory when we make beautiful things.

V

Hippias now tries again: "You seem to me to be seeking..." some sort of thing that will never appear ugly to anyone anywhere." "Certainly Hippias," Socrates encourages him, "and now you comprehend beautifully." Hippias' answer is that it is "most beautiful" for a healthy, wealthy, and honored old Greek who has beautifully celebrated his parents' funeral "to be beautifully and magnificently buried by his own offspring." Socrates praises Hippias for his good intention--unlike the clownish sophists Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, the foolish Hippias is earnest--but claims that his unyielding objector will mock them and beat Socrates. (Athens penalizes unjust beating, so Hippias will, without a trial, accept Socrates' account of this beating's justice.) For, they are asking about the beautiful itself that inheres in everything in which it becomes present such that the thing--stone, wood, human, god, every activity and all learning--is beautiful. They are asking what beauty itself is, what is beautiful for all and always--past and future, too. And, despite Hippias' claim, Achilles and others born from gods were in fact buried earlier than their forbears. Hippias claims that such talk (perhaps even in response to another's question) is disrespectful. He then says that he does not include in his answer gods, their children, and some heroes. For them to bury their forbears would be "terrible, impious, and ugly." So, it turns out that the burial Hippias said was beautiful is sometimes ugly, and is not beautiful for all. The objector's reproach is just: Socrates has not said what beauty is.

VA

Hippias' third attempt to say what is beautiful fails "even more laughably" than the first two, perhaps because it is the most pretentious. Yet, his example also advances the discussion, for he is now considering what is noble or reputed to be noble, not only what is pretty. He himself, however, does not distinguish virtue from the actions (proper burials) associated with good reputation. Is not, say, courage always beautiful, even if courageous actions vary, and courage is not the only beautiful thing? Indeed, some beautiful things (say, virtues of character) come closer than others to being beautiful in

27 Greater Hippias 291DE
28 See their conduct in the Euthydemus.
all times and circumstances, although they are not everything that is beautiful, nor (as human) "always." The beautiful is beautiful for all beautiful things, the beautiful is always beautiful, and the beautiful is beautiful and nothing but beautiful or, at least, never ugly.

Plato subtly develops these points in the colloquies about Athens' justice and the gods, as they bring to mind the earlier colloquies about Sparta. Justice is perhaps treated as a virtue, or as a source of virtue, but Hippias does not call virtue beautiful, let alone "the" beautiful.29 Virtue as a cause of reputation, not virtue itself, is Hippias' horizon. He believes that those with wealth, health, and honor deserve a beautiful and magnificent burial. Indeed, Hippias does not call the soul noble or even mention the soul, although it is an obvious link between just punishment, burial, and reverence.

Hippias again shows us his fear of the gods or of a reputation for irreverence. He does not question gods' characteristics, as Socrates does through the alter ego who interrogates him.30 Socratic punishment for, and anger at, foolish answers--his self-punishment for believing he knows what he does not--replaces punishment for impiety. Beauty is always; it replaces or supplements the gods, and searching for it vaults the nobility of the soul beyond Spartan nobility. Hippias falls far short of this.

VI

Hippias has exhausted his inventiveness or Socrates' patience by giving such "naive and easily refuted answers," so Socrates now tells him that his alter ego sometimes takes pity and makes suggestions: Is the beautiful (or anything else he inquires about) such and such?31 Did they, perhaps, catch hold of something when they said that gold is beautiful for the things it fits? They should "consider whether this very thing, the fitting, and the nature of the fitting itself, happens to be the beautiful."32

They do not, however, directly explore what the fitting is. Rather, Socrates asks whether the fitting makes things in which it is present appear beautiful, or be beautiful. After saying "both," Hippias chooses appearance, for suitable clothes make even the laughable appear more beautiful.33 The fitting, however, would then deceive about the beautiful, Socrates says, and he reminds us that they seek that by which all beautiful things are beautiful, just as all large things are large by what exceeds, "whether they appear so or not."34

Hippias then suggests again that when the fitting is present it makes things both be and appear beautiful. It is impossible that beautiful things not appear so "when that which makes them appear so is present." Yet, Socrates reminds him that really beautiful

29 Cf. Greater Hippias 283E-285B with 292AB.
30 See Greater Hippias 292C-293B.
31 See Charmides 169CD, Meno 86D-87C, and Lysis 223A for other instances of how Socrates escapes or tries to escape from apparent roadblocks.
32 Greater Hippias 293E.
33 See Laches on appearing to be courageous; Laches 184BC.
34 Perhaps Socrates uses this example because some beautiful things are "excessive," outstanding, magnificent, and remarkable at the same time they are fitting.
laws and pursuits are neither reputed nor always appear to be beautiful to everyone. Privately and in cities, strife and battle are "most of all about these things." So, if the fitting makes things beautiful, it does not also make them appear so, and if it only makes them appear to be beautiful, it is not what Socrates and Hippias are seeking. "The same thing would never have the power to make things both appear and be either beautiful or anything else." Given the choice, Hippias again says that it seems to him that the fitting makes things appear beautiful. So, they once more have failed to recognize the beautiful.

VI A

Socrates elevates the conversation by suggesting that the beautiful is general, not something particular, such as a girl or a burial. His choice of the fitting is not arbitrary, for it stems from Hippias' earlier remarks about gold.

We are so used to generalities such as "the beautiful" that it is easy to forget their oddness. The fitting and, especially, the "nature" of the fitting, however, are commonsensically less beautiful or desirable to a lover of beauty than the beautiful girl, golden portrait, or Mozart symphony that he immediately pursues or enjoys. Socrates does not suggest here (and only indirectly suggests earlier) that "the beautiful" is itself the most remarkably beautiful of all. If it is not, however, how could its presence beautify the most beautiful things?

This issue of the being, or beauty, of beauty underlies Socrates' distinction between making things be beautiful and appear to be beautiful, and the complexity of this distinction. If beauty does not make things look beautiful, after all, how could we recognize it? In what way, moreover, could it cause the beauty of the visible, or even what is beautiful to the mind's eye? It is difficult to conceive a "beautiful" face that never appears beautiful. Indeed, Socrates has said earlier that the beautiful is that "by which all other things are adorned and appear beautiful whenever this form becomes present."

Perhaps, however, true beauty can appear but need not, as a dark room or veil hides a naturally beautiful body, not only a cosmetically improved one. The appearance of the true is impossible without the true but not guaranteed by it; lighting and perspective are to some degree relative to us. We can blot the large sun with the small thumb. But, then, what appears may be truly, not fraudulently beautiful, even though it appears dimly. The distortion is not caused by what is but is inseparable from (knowing) what is, in all but the truest light, if even there. Indeed, it is unclear how anything could appear beautiful unless it presents something of the truly beautiful. Cosmetics must know enough of what it imitates to make the face or body appear to be what it is not. Even the merely apparent beauty of "beautiful" things may draw us to them or beautify us, as the mind or heart is (somewhat) ordered or elevated by the apparently beautiful girl, piece of

35 Cf. Lysis 217DE.
36 Even the "excess" is not obviously excessive or the most excessive.
37 See Greater Hippias 291D, 292E. Cf. Phaedo 100C, Symposium 21E-212A.
38 Greater Hippias 289D
39 Greater Hippias 294BC.
40 Consider Socrates' discussion of gymnastics, cosmetics, legislation and sophistry in the Gorgias 464A-466B, and the Stranger's discussion of two types of image in the Sophist.
music, or good reputation. The beauty that arises from exercise and health is better than what arises from cosmetics and adornment, but it is better (truer) mostly because it is healthier (more truly caused and connected to other goods) and more lasting, and not so much in terms of the immediate instance of beauty itself. Yet, seeming to be healthy but in fact being ill, is far from health. Beautiful clothes can adorn an ugly body. The noble reputation for virtue--fame--is for a while outstanding even if on false premises, but it does not form the soul nobly or assure noble action. The truly and seemingly beautiful are different, a difference more basic as one moves from body to virtue (soul) to thought, but they are closer than the seemingly and truly good. The closeness of seeming and being is one reason the noble is so contested.

We may explore this matter in another way. When something beautiful appears to the eye, ear, or mind, it seems complete, but, especially to the artist or trainer, its shortcomings or imperfections are also evident. A beautiful girl is and is not beautiful. Beautiful things--noble things--are contentious because they show themselves in practical affairs, where merely being reputed to be excellent brings the external rewards of being excellent. Nobility cannot be in practical affairs without being distorted, and because beauty has much of its power practically, it will indeed be distorted. "Beauty" can perhaps appear in its plain truth to the mind's eye, but its plain truth involves appearance, complexity, and distortion. The total disjunction of the true and false is false.

VI B

We should examine further why beauty and the fitting differ, because, despite Socrates' discussion, fit, proportion, and suitability may seem to us to define beauty adequately. One difficulty is that a beautiful or noble fit differs from the fit of just acts; it is fitting but not (always) noble to be punished, and suitably keeping contracts is too ordinary to be beautiful. So, not all that fits is beautiful.

Moreover, not all that is beautiful can be captured by how things fit. A well-proportioned roach is not beautiful. The balance, suitability, or lack of excess in something's parts--what we see as its beautiful fit--belongs to but does not altogether define the thing's power, form, independence, and end. The parts' own powers, not just their fit, contribute to the whole: the independent or striking beauty of gold is necessary for gold to be applied fittingly. As we have said, the well-fitted parts of the pretty girl do not fully capture her striking and containing shape, limit, form, vivacity, or

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41 Hence, the various statements in the dialogue about what seems or appears to be true.
42 See Glaucon's speeches about justice in Books I and II of the Republic.
43 This complexity is how the discussion of appearance in this first general opinion is allied to Hippias' first concrete statement (that beauty is a beautiful girl); we must remember that each opinion is linked to the others. Socrates hints that beautiful things can be ranked--something implied by appearing closer to and farther from beauty or other beings--when he mentions imitation. Anyone can see that noble practical pursuits are more beautiful than a pair of pretty shoes or that gods are more perfect than men. Yet, the question of such a progressive or hierarchical appearance of beautiful things is, after being alluded to in Hippias' first opinion, not discussed. (Contrast the Symposium and Phaedrus.) The formal search for the beautiful is for something that covers all beautiful things equally.
44 Consider the Laws, where laws concerning many commercial matters are just, but not noble.
independence. The beauty and action of the whole contains, forms, brings out, and awakens the (excellent) parts: to be beautiful is not simply to be well fitted. "Beauty" does not merely fit things together but brings them forth in their active presence. The perfection and completion of the usual beautiful whole, furthermore, is not fully independent of an end or good external to it. Beautiful girls are destined to belong in couples, and well-contained teams are oriented to victory. The fit in something beautiful is set in motion by its ends, and if the end is trivial or base, something's fit and, indeed, the whole that contains it, is not beautiful. The precisely organized burglary is not noble. The nature of the fitting, furthermore, does not directly account for the element of splendor and magnificence in what is beautiful, for the magnificent action fits together resplendent powers. The beautiful involves a certain splendid excess, parts that strain beyond their fit, or a resplendent whole whose independence is itself beyond mere fit or use. The parts of a flea fit together, so in seeking to understand beauty the flea is no more to be sneezed at than the smooth pot of perfectly peppered soup. But the flea is not splendid, magnificent, pleasurable, or chooserworthy. The fit in something beautiful is set in motion by its ends, and if the end is trivial or base, something's fit and, indeed, the whole that contains it, is not beautiful. The precisely organized burglary is not noble. The nature of the fitting, furthermore, does not directly account for the element of splendor and magnificence in what is beautiful, for the magnificent action fits together resplendent powers. The beautiful involves a certain splendid excess, parts that strain beyond their fit, or a resplendent whole whose independence is itself beyond mere fit or use. The parts of a flea fit together, so in seeking to understand beauty the flea is no more to be sneezed at than the smooth pot of perfectly peppered soup. But the flea is not splendid, magnificent, pleasurable, or chooserworthy. The beauty and action of the whole contains, forms, brings out, and awakens the (excellent) parts: to be beautiful is not simply to be well fitted. "Beauty" does not merely fit things together but brings them forth in their active presence. The perfection and completion of the usual beautiful whole, furthermore, is not fully independent of an end or good external to it. Beautiful girls are destined to belong in couples, and well-contained teams are oriented to victory. The fit in something beautiful is set in motion by its ends, and if the end is trivial or base, something's fit and, indeed, the whole that contains it, is not beautiful. The precisely organized burglary is not noble. The nature of the fitting, furthermore, does not directly account for the element of splendor and magnificence in what is beautiful, for the magnificent action fits together resplendent powers. The beautiful involves a certain splendid excess, parts that strain beyond their fit, or a resplendent whole whose independence is itself beyond mere fit or use. The parts of a flea fit together, so in seeking to understand beauty the flea is no more to be sneezed at than the smooth pot of perfectly peppered soup. But the flea is not splendid, magnificent, pleasurable, or chooserworthy. The beauty and action of the whole contains, forms, brings out, and awakens the (excellent) parts: to be beautiful is not simply to be well fitted. "Beauty" does not merely fit things together but brings them forth in their active presence. The perfection and completion of the usual beautiful whole, furthermore, is not fully independent of an end or good external to it. Beautiful girls are destined to belong in couples, and well-contained teams are oriented to victory. The fit in something beautiful is set in motion by its ends, and if the end is trivial or base, something's fit and, indeed, the whole that contains it, is not beautiful. The precisely organized burglary is not noble. The nature of the fitting, furthermore, does not directly account for the element of splendor and magnificence in what is beautiful, for the magnificent action fits together resplendent powers. The beautiful involves a certain splendid excess, parts that strain beyond their fit, or a resplendent whole whose independence is itself beyond mere fit or use. The parts of a flea fit together, so in seeking to understand beauty the flea is no more to be sneezed at than the smooth pot of perfectly peppered soup. But the flea is not splendid, magnificent, pleasurable, or chooserworthy.

This discussion does not tell us fully why the fitting is Socrates' example here of the gulf and connection between being and appearing to be beautiful. Perhaps what fits is easier to counterfeit, undetected, than the simplicity of beautiful gold, or even a beautiful woman. The complexity of the fitting may permit deception and mistake more easily than does the directness of what is striking. We sum up as follows. The fitting is not equivalent to the beautiful because much that is fitting is not beautiful; the fitting as beautiful needs to be distinguished from the fitting as (merely) useful, just, or precise. There can be little beautiful about a key that fits the lock to a jailer's cell, or a justly applied dose of hemlock. Moreover, the beautiful is not only the fitting. The beautiful as fitting also needs to be aligned with the beautiful as resplendent, magnificent, uplifting, striking, independent, rare, grand, and pleasant—what Hippias may have in mind with his beautiful girl, and, surely, with his magnificent burial. More generally, the beautiful as the fitting leads us to wonder how the beautiful can be present in, and therefore connect as beautiful, everything beautiful, and at the same time allow beautiful things to be distinct in their independence or attractiveness.

VII

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45 Consider the connection between size and beauty in Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book IV, chapter 3. See also, *Charmides* 158A.
46 See *Greater Hippias* 295-296E.
47 If the excess is not tamed, it can be garish or mad. The beautiful as the splendid and fitting fits together into a magnificent whole a straining excess of separate beauties, i.e., of things that seek independence, something we especially see in the soul and among men in the city.
48 Cf. *Menexenus* 234C-235C. These characteristics help capture the noble as an end in itself, or as chosen for its own sake, although in fact it may fit further ends. It is not suitable to destroy the noble, as one might a merely fitting flea. One cannot with propriety merely redistribute the parts of something noble.
Socrates still hopes "that whatever the beautiful is will become completely apparent." Hippias claims that he could tell it to Socrates "more precisely than total precision" were he to "go into seclusion for a short time and consider it by myself." Socrates claims that Hippias' talking big will cause the beautiful to be angry and flee still more; "yet there is nothing in what I am saying. For you (Hippias) will find it easily when you are alone. But, before the gods, find it in my presence. Or if you wish seek it with me as we were doing just now and if we find it that will be most beautiful." 

Before Hippias can agree or disagree to "contemplate now what the beautiful seems to you to be," Socrates (not his alter ego) suggests another hypothesis. "Let this be beautiful for us: whatever is useful." Beautiful eyes "are not those that seem to be such yet do not have the power to see, but those which do have that power and are useful for seeing." With whole bodies, running or wrestling, living things, utensils, vehicles, instruments, pursuits, and laws, we call beautiful the useful one, for "how," "in relation to what," and "whenever" it is useful, looking at "how each of them by nature" is made or established. Hippias agrees and is especially vehement about Socrates' next assertion, that "the useful, more than anything else, happens to be beautiful." Power is beautiful and its lack ugly, because a thing with the power to produce something is useful. Politics especially bears witness to this, Hippias claims, "for in politics and in one's own city the powerful is most beautiful of all, but the powerless most ugly of all." And "because of this," Socrates continues and Hippias agrees, wisdom is "most beautiful of all and ignorance ugliest."

The first difficulty now emerges. We do many more bad things than good. Surely, the power to produce what is bad is not beautiful. Perhaps then their "soul wanted to say" that the beautiful is "the useful and powerful for doing something good," that is, that the beautiful is the "beneficial." There is a difficulty here, too, however. What does something is the cause, so the beautiful would be a cause of the good. The cause, however, differs from what it causes. What does something is one thing, and what is done by it (e.g., that which comes into being because of it) is another. The beautiful is "in the form of some sort of father of the good," and we are serious about beautiful things such as prudence because their offspring, the good, is serious. But, then, as the cause is not the caused, or the father the son, the beautiful is not good, and the good is not beautiful. This is unsatisfactory: Hippias and Socrates (he says of himself) are once again perplexed.

VII A

What are we to make of this argument? It begins by saying that the useful is beautiful, acts as if this is equivalent to saying that the beautiful is the useful, and concludes by treating the useful and powerful as altogether different from the good and, therefore, (presumably, although unsaid) as not the beautiful. Earlier, we heard that gold could not be the beautiful because it is unfit for a useful ladle. Here, Socrates begins by implicitly taking this reduction of fit to utility and generalizing: the useful is (the)

49 My italics.
50 Greater Hippias 295B.
51 Greater Hippias 296A.
beautiful. On reflection, Socrates' view is strange, for is not the lovely but useless rose more beautiful than the manure that helps it to grow? Not everything beautiful is useful, and not everything useful is beautiful. Socrates himself, however, does not proceed by directly bringing out the limits (and suggestiveness) of the view that the useful is the beautiful. Rather, he proceeds indirectly, by considering cause and caused, means and end, and power and result.

We should note that Socrates emphasizes utility as function. (An eye is "used for" seeing in the sense that its power is to see. It functions beautifully or virtuously by seeing well.) He does not here differentiate such use from utility considered as a means to a good end (as a needle helps to sew a coat.) Rather, he basically treats the beautiful as a power in a thing or action, the hammer's hammering or nailing, not its being a means for the chair it helps build. We also note that, on this understanding, the same entity could be both good and beautiful, both end and power, or means. Pace Socrates, running, and the healthy whole body (his beautiful means) could cause good in each other (depending on which is the end), as virtuous acts and habits cause each other. Moreover, an eye that sees perfectly (and therefore may cause a good such as success in war or a hunt) might, nonetheless, look less beautiful in one face than another or look less beautiful than another eye that also sees perfectly. Plato's discussion suggests, but does not work through, the complex connection between the beautiful and the good, and their assimilation to and separation from each other. He especially hints at but avoids the duality of wisdom and politics, for prudence may serve politics, but using the mind beautifully may be its own end.

Another feature of this section is to recall again the earlier discussion of Sparta. Nothing useful can be fully beautiful unless it secures the truly good. Are wisdom, wealth, reputation, tradition, or strength the truly noble means, or is one the true end for which we use the noble? Hippias perhaps thinks that wealth is the end and that the means or powers that cause it can plausibly be split from it. In many of Socrates' examples, however, the goods or ends are not merely produced by externally useful means but also inhere in the functioning or activity that beautifully brings them about. Law is a useful external means to some ends, such as wealth, but it also establishes, belongs to, or helps form the vivacity of others (such as justice). The whole body is involved in running, and the mind belongs to (and is not a means separable from) its active thinking or discovering.

As Socrates does when he discusses the fitting, he promotes confusion and perplexity by separating and combining plausibly, but tendentiously. Something we use to produce what is bad is called ugly, but why should this be if (as he claims here) cause and caused can be split so completely? If they are not split, however, how can we determine the beautiful on its own, apart from the good?

Hippias is not satisfied to say that the beautiful is not good. He does not notice the differences between the claims that some beautiful things are good (or some good things

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52 Consider the connection between Hippias' view of politics and power and Callicles' view in the Gorgias, and the connection between Socrates' view in the Gorgias of the soul's order and his view of use here.
beautiful) and all beautiful things are good (or all good things beautiful), nor does he examine the relation among such things and "the" beautiful (and "the" good), the object of their search. Rather, his dissatisfaction is caused by disjunctions he believes false among (his own) "wisdom," power, reputation, and wealth. But, he again has nothing to say, so Socrates must "come up with something" to turn them away from their perplexity.

VIII

"If we should give this answer to that bold fellow [the objecting alter ego]--'O well-born one, the beautiful is the pleasant that comes through hearing and through sight'-don't you suppose we could check him in his boldness?' "Whatever makes us delighted [through hearing and sight] is beautiful." Hippias agrees: "you are saying well what the beautiful is."\(^{53}\)

Socrates asks whether beautiful pursuits and laws "are beautiful by being pleasant through hearing and sight" or through another form. Hippias suggests that it is through another form. Socrates then tells him that the objector is "the son of Sophroniscus" before whom he is ashamed to pretend, to say things without examining them, and to say that he knows what he does not. Socrates, nonetheless, presses the original argument: it also will prove perplexing.

Food, drink, and sex are pleasant, but humans (and Hippias) are ashamed to call the pleasure of sex beautiful, because it is ugly; we do it so no one sees us. So, it is (indeed) the pleasant things through sight and hearing that are beautiful. Yet, these do not differ from other pleasures in respect of pleasure itself, nor because of hearing or of sight as such (which can be unpleasant.) What, then, is the "beauty" that differentiates the pleasures of the senses so that each one and both of two (hearing and sight) are beautiful, but the others are not?

Socrates then, in his own name, begins to discuss commonality.\(^{54}\) Hippias agrees that "the pleasures of sight and sound have something the same which makes them be beautiful, something in common which exists for both of them in common and for each privately." But, he says, only someone inexperienced in the nature of things would believe Socrates' suggestion that both are (or are affected by) that which neither itself is (or undergoes). Socrates, however, sees many such things "before his soul." These do not appear to Hippias, or Hippias is intentionally deceiving him. Socrates agrees that these things are not being just, healthy, wise, and so on. Hippias now angrily admonishes him: Socrates and his customary conversationalists do not "consider the whole of things" but cut up each thing that is and "do not notice the naturally large and continuous bodies of being." Socrates gives Hippias an example of what Hippias believes impossible, namely, two, neither of whose component ones is two, and each of whose components is odd, while two is even.\(^{55}\)

\(^{53}\) Greater Hippias 298A.
\(^{54}\) Greater Hippias 300B. Cf. Theatetus 184D-185D.
\(^{55}\) Greater Hippias 302AB.
Socrates then returns to the pleasures of sight and hearing. He plays with various referents of pleasure, sight, hearing, both, and each, and with our commonsense understanding, to show that it is impossible for the pleasant through sight and hearing to be beautiful because "in becoming beautiful it presents one of the things that are impossible" for it, that is, a both without an either or an either without a both, while it appears illogical to us that beauty should not cover each singly, as well as both together.

Perhaps, then, pleasure through sight and hearing is the best pleasure because it is the most harmless? The beautiful is differentiated from other pleasures by being helpful pleasure. If so, however, we repeat the difficulty of the chasm between the beautiful and the good that vitiated the discussion of use.

Hippias replies that all these things together are only scrapings of speeches divided into bits. The alternative is better and more beautiful: to compose a speech well, and beautifully to persuade courts, assemblies, or any rulers, and save oneself, one's money, and one's friends. Socrates, however, cannot give up what Hippias thinks are his "exceedingly intelligent" babblings, for he wanders and is in perplexity about what Hippias "knows"--what a human being ought to pursue. Whenever he is persuaded by Hippias and other wise ones, the refuter in his home (and others) "asks me if I am not ashamed at daring to converse about beautiful pursuits when I am so manifestly refuted concerning the beautiful because I do not even know what it itself is." How can he know whether a speech or activity is beautiful if he does not recognize the beautiful? "It is necessary to submit to" Hippias' reproach, for it seems to help him. Socrates knows what the proverb means that says "the beautiful things are difficult."

VIII A

Why does Socrates bring out the issue of each and both, or whole and part, or members and composites, through a discussion of pleasure? We might have expected him to discuss this when he discussed the fitting, and to discuss being and appearance when he discussed pleasure. In fact, each issue on which he concentrates in the three definitions pertains to each (and all) of the phenomena he discusses. If pleasure is beautiful, is it good? Can beauty and benefit each be affected separately as cause and caused without in any way being together? Does one know clearly (as Socrates had suggested), the difference between the beneficial and what is useful for the bad, that is, between true and apparent good? Is not the question of what "fits" a question of how the being or nature of the whole inheres in the parts? One of the lessons Socrates wishes us to learn, one of the perplexities with which he keeps us awake, is this range of problems, this unity in multiplicity.

56 Cf. Callicles' opinion in the Gorgias.
57 Greater Hippias 304B.
58 See 289D, 302B, and the discussions of pleasure in the Gorgias, Republic, and Philebus.
59 Greater Hippias 304A.
The special connection between beauty's being a couple and the senses is that the senses grasp commonly what none sees in particular. Together with the mind they grasp men, horses, pots, boats, and laws, and beautiful, useful, and just men, horses, pots, boats, and laws. This common seeing also affects pleasure, for shame affects pleasure. The connection of virtue and the noble also brings this out, for the just is linked to what we hear, through reputation and persuasion. The beauty of the speeches that the Spartans enjoy hearing from Hippias is tied to the pleasure they give, and this pleasure is tied (although not limited) to the nobility of what they say.

Pleasure (and attraction) is obviously connected to beauty, so a discussion of beauty must account for it. The ugly and shameful are, as such, not pleasurable. Pleasures of taste and smell seem too petty to count as beautiful, and Socrates dismisses in advance the sexual pleasure of touch by reminding us of sex's ignobility when visible to others. Pleasure in what is presentable, visible, reputable, seen, and said, not hidden and unsaid, is what Socrates has in mind here as beautiful.

Socrates does not attempt to find an element of pleasure--say, purity--that fits better with noble sights and sounds than with other sights and sounds, for similar purity could belong to some tastes and smells that are sweet but not beautiful. Moreover, perhaps we cannot simply split the pleasure of virtue, of moral beauty, from fearful awe. In any event, it proves hard to differentiate pleasure-sight and pleasure-hearing from each other, or to combine them. Perhaps the pleasure in virtue and virtuous actions combines seeing with hearing about invisible noble forms and is not limited to sensible pleasure. Yet, one should not dismiss pleasure's connection to sensual beauty: beautiful things or bodies give pleasure. And, pleasure is not limited to pleasure in the noble.

These points suggest that beauty is best found in a combination of the fitting, good, and pleasurable, generously understood. What fittingly or precisely belongs to (is used for) beneficial purposes, stands out more or less independently, and is seen and heard in its pleasing resplendence is beautiful. Although beauty as an object of theoretical understanding is not identical with beautiful appearances, it is connected to them as their measure and as allowing the mind fully to enjoy its powers. In this way beauty is what is most beautiful, not merely an intellectual afterthought or a set of nominal generalities.

VIII B

Socrates concludes by differentiating his activity from Hippias'. Hippias is soft. He likes to wear attractive things. No problem looks too hard for him. He has no intellectual curiosity. He gives people what they want, and from them he wants the wealth that it is easy to give. Hippias tends to run together what is good, beautiful, powerful, public, and private. This allows him to make things easy for himself. Everything can be smoothly connected to wealth or to the conventions of the powerful.

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60 Cf. Theatetus 184D-185D.
61 Socrates argues in the Gorgias that persuasion is mere flattery, i.e., that it involves what pleases the audience. Hearing the pleasurable things that Hippias says is not necessarily hearing noble and good things.
62 See Lesser Hippias 368BC.
When he does see the recalcitrance in things—say, in Sparta or in assemblies that need persuading—he does not think about the independence that makes them recalcitrant. Rather, money and pretty speeches work well with almost all. Sparta's conventions or traditions may be unaccountable, but they can be accommodated. Only Socrates provokes his anger and (some) questions. And when he does see the rank in things—pots, horses, girls, gods, and beautiful funerals—he splits them fully from each other, not seeing their likeness.

Hippias' views fit his theoretical statement that Socrates does not notice "the naturally large and continuous bodies of being." They also fit his belief that he can talk more precisely than total precision, that is, that his talk is the cause of precision. Matters such as beauty always, for Hippias, inhere in some body; bodies as "wholes" can have different degrees of power, strength, and size, and what is beautiful is what is useful for a powerful body (say, Sparta) or what it believes or establishes as fitting or reputable.

Socrates (and philosophy) differs from Hippias in these characteristics. He desires to know and does not rest content with ignorance. Speaking truly or correctly is an end, not a means. Knowledge, not wealth, is his goal. "Beautiful" speech is not merely useful speech but fitting and good speech. The soul is oriented toward knowledge of the invisible, not service to the body. Socrates is noble by being himself in defending his own.

While Hippias is unthinkingly overconfident and does not know he is being foolish, Socrates is truly bold because he overturns for himself thoughtless conventionalism. Hippias seeks to look resplendent, while Socrates deals with the truly highest things and subjects himself to them. Socrates' boldness, however, goes together with the cautious precision of seeking to know. Hippias believes he can be more precise than precision itself; Socrates seeks to know what precision is.

Socrates

Socrates' unique boldness and caution in the Greater Hippias should modify or broaden the sometimes overly erotic view of him. As he tells us in the Theages, Theatetus, and Symposium, he knows only erotic things. He is his mother's son; at best he can help others deliver their own thoughts. We see here, however, that Socrates is also his father's son; on the surface he is more loyal than Hippias, who gives his father wealth that one fears may corrupt him. Plato mentions Socrates' father, a stonecutter, in several dialogues. In the Alcibiades I, Socrates suggests his link through his father's art to Daedelus and through him to the god Hephaestus. He plays with his own divinity in order to humble Alcibiades. But, in fact, he subtly suggests a divinity beyond the gods of his fathers. In the Euthydemus Sophroniscus is mentioned as part of Euthydemus' ludicrous argument that makes everyone everyone else's father; the result, however, is hardly different from Socrates' own Republic. In the Laches, Sophroniscus is mentioned to bring out a link between Socrates and Lysimachus. Socrates knows, however, that Lysimachus has ignored him, the son of his supposed friend. Yet, he is himself not his father's son in any conventional way or, apparently, an especially good family man. Socrates is true to
his father on the surface of his arguments, untrue in the life he lives, and true again at root.

Sophroniscus is the father of both Socrates and his objecting alter ego, that is, himself in another guise. Socrates does not merely seek knowledge by erotically following the good through the beautiful. He also sees what is perplexing or difficult in the beautiful and punishes himself for resting with what he does not know. He pushes himself to go forward. Daedelus created statues famous for moving. Socrates is as endlessly inventive as Daedelus, setting up hypotheses when none is forthcoming and setting them in motion when they seem dumbly fixed, all to explore the truths or goods that his intellectual statues imitate or set to work.

The hard side of Socrates is connected to the hard side of nobility. The beautiful things are difficult, not easy as with Hippias, or, more precisely, they are difficult as well as soft and smooth, yielding. Beauty can become angry at them, as courage ridicules Laches and Socrates. This anger stems from the problems' unyielding recalcitrance, about which Socrates teaches Hippias (and himself). Socrates seeks to separate the noble, to set it apart as a whole from other wholes. As separate, it is in a sense impregnable, unmixed, difficult, defensive, protective. Nobility, indeed, is the source of our pride or dignity. As set apart in speech, however, beauty can also be opened to and combined with the other things we know through speech. It beckons, just as it stands apart. The difficulties of Socratic separating and combining, of recalcitrance and fit, of the briskly independent and the attractively yielding, are not easy to escape or to think through. But these difficulties open worlds beyond the grotesqueness of the "naturally large and continuous bodies of being." The highest things are perplexing: the noble is disputed, not accidentally because of our stupidity but necessarily because of the complexity of its simplicity, and of ours.

Beauty

We can supplement or validate what we learn about beauty from the Greater Hippias by considering Plato's characteristic uses of beauty in other discussions.

The beautiful or noble sometimes means what is high, free, rare, grand, lavish, or not petty. The soul's concerns are more beautiful than the body's. Socrates in the Phaedo faces death nobly. The gentleman is the man who is noble and good. An element of this view exists in Hippias' opinions, as we indicated, but the suppositions that

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63 See also Republic 537E-538D.
64 See Euthyphro 11BC.
65 Perhaps this duality is why Socrates splits himself in this dialogue, rather than merely inventing an anonymous spokesman to make certain arguments, as he does in other dialogues.
66 See Greater Hippias 292E ff.
67 See Republic 509A.
68 The gentleman (kaloskagathos) is why it seems wrong to common opinion to separate the noble and good. See for the beautiful, e.g., Euthyphro 13E; Laches 182B; Phaedo 116D; Theatetus 142B, 151E, 184A; Statesman 266C, 289A, 309B; Sophist 216C, 251A, 265C.
Socrates tests and finds wanting in the *Greater Hippias* do not directly consider the beautiful as the high, grand, or lavish.

The beautiful is also the fitting, as it is in the *Greater Hippias*, and it contributes to what is well formed and complete. Related to this is what "beautiful" means when Socrates or an interlocutor praises an argument. Beautiful sometimes stands for what helps move the argument along. It (also) means what is sufficient, or at least adequate, to make the needed distinction. Well-made distinctions that move the argument forward are beautiful, even when the subject is coarse.

Related as well, although more general, is the beautiful understood as the good, useful, functional, easy, and sufficient, a prominent use in the *Greater Hippias*, as we have seen. In Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*, one loves the beautiful in order to cause the good. The loved beautiful being is impregnated with the good and seemingly eternal. With proper orientation we leave it behind for what is still more beautiful and better. One steps from considering beauty in a body to the beautiful in all beautiful bodies, from a beautiful soul to the beauty in all beautiful souls, and thence to beauty itself, in order to impregnate the soul with the good and eternal. What is beautiful acts or attracts to secure or deliver something good.

Plato also uses the beautiful to mean or to designate the simple presence of what stands as striking and attractive, what shows forth as good-looking, harmonious sounding, or pleasant. Socrates distinguishes an attractive bodily bloom from beauty of soul and what the soul understands. The ugly Theatetus is beautiful in soul; to be beautiful in body is to stand out in being well-formed. This use is connected to the discussion of the pleasurable in the *Greater Hippias*.

Related to this (and to the noble as free) is the beautiful used to stand for what is separable, what stands on its own, as its own. Sometimes speech is praised as beautiful in this way. The beautiful is thus tied closely to the pure and the precise. Hippias seeks to grasp beauty itself precisely; his first examples of beauty are the independent girl, or horse. Connected to these uses, finally, are the particular things that interlocutors call beautiful: the virtues, various imitations, bodily forms or faces, arguments and answers, and beauty itself.

I will attempt to unify and clarify these views, keeping in mind our discussion of the *Greater Hippias*. Something beautiful is the thing as it stands out on its own, within its limits. Its beauty, its nobility, its dignity (its height as unity) is its independence, or separateness. Its ugliness is its corruption, its coming apart, its

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69 Phaedo 86A, 110a; Theaetetus 142C, 185E, 195E; Sophist 228A-C, 236A; Statesman 273C, 275A, 277A, 282A, 311B.
70 Euthyphro 9E; Phaedo 73A, 77A, 94A; Statesman 258D, 267A, 271D.
71 Laches 191C; Sophist 228A ff, 247E, 251A-E, 261C; Statesman 278A.
72 Phaedo 70A, 89B, 99A, 110C; Theaetetus 143E,157D; Statesman 269C, 283D; Charmides, opening scene.
73 Philebus 17E.
74 Phaedo 58E, 65CD, 70B, 79D, 98A; Sophist 222C, 227C, 258B; Statesman 262B, 284B-D, 311B.
75 Phaedo 114C; Laches 179C, 192C; Sophist 236BC; Statesman 297C, 301A; Meno 80C.
flabbiness. Something that stands out on its own, however, also stands out in the nature or essence it shares with others. The beautiful girl or mare is a girl or a mare, and beautiful. Courage and moderation are each virtues, that is, noble, separately. But, neither is virtue simply, or all that is, noble. (They must come together to achieve a fuller virtue or nobility.) Because of such incompleteness (and other insufficiencies), moreover, beautiful things need or call for defense, protection. Their beauty is always contestable because it is not simply or fully beautiful or independent.

Something beautiful, although independent, may prove to be complex, because its powers are complex. Once set in motion, the height, distinctiveness, and freedom of its powers may vary with their use. A body could be strong, swift, or simply lovely to look at; gold may be lovely, comforting, a fitting part of an attractive, expensive, and useless portrait or piece of old furniture, or useful for the machines that win wars. The independence of a figure such as Shakespeare’s Coriolanus is noble, but in the play this independence becomes useless and harmful; that is, it transforms itself, although never fully, from nobility to the ignobility of the traitor.

In these ways, something’s beauty is not altogether separable from its use, or good. Things are beautiful as they are at work, as they exercise their powers. When a power cannot be exercised alone, when it is dependent, as the eye is on the body for its health and on the soul for its vistas, moreover, its beauty is connected to its appropriate fit within the whole activity or object it serves—its not being too large to be accommodated with the resources at hand, or too small to work well.

Beauty as fit is especially connected to cause, as the beautiful tool does its job or serves its function, the beautiful chord stands in its necessary place, or the noble war helps win freedom. A chain of argument that leads to a failed result is not beautiful. This connection to cause, however, and the subtle question of sufficiency and insufficiency in fit and function, show the openness, instability, complexity, perplexity, and contention involved in the beautiful as the fitting. For, what causes is independent enough from the caused that it is never encapsulated in it. Harmonies exceed their use in this piece, noble pride exceeds its use in this battle, the power of seeing exceeds this or that sight.

The caused, in turn, sometimes appear to be more causing than caused, as the good result inspires the beautiful or useful action that comes into being because of it. And, the multiplicity of causes or beautifully fitting capacities is too complex for any to have full sway. A house cannot be filled with rooms decorated singly according to a designer’s dream, as if each room were the only one, without the overall effect being garish, making the house hard to inhabit. A beautiful face is not composed from each feature manifested in its maximum force, taken on its own. Any fitting whole, therefore, points to the limited presence of the power of its parts and, therefore, of its own limits as the thing—statue or soul—that it is. Socrates suggests these issues in the Greater Hippias through the paradox that completely splits beauty and good as cause and caused, and by connecting the discussion of the fitting to the issues of being and appearance.
Something beautiful is independent (separate) and good (fitting). It is also attractive, striking, stunning, resplendent, and uplifting, something compelling that stops one short.\(^{76}\) (The attractive and uplifting distinguish the beautiful from the awful, frightening, and deflating.) Hippias' beautiful display speeches are meant to be like this, as is something beautiful in its golden beauty, its full blossoming or harmony.

This third meaning ranges from the fleeting to the more permanent. We can see how it completes the first two by considering the resplendent and perfectly appropriate action or argument, the perfectly complete and striking composition, the admirable city, and the fully attractive outward form or shape that fits parts together and completes them. Plato suggests or employs this sense in his discussion of pleasure or enjoyment, in Hippias' example of the beautiful funeral, and in the way that Hippias attempts to be--and Socrates ironically treats him as--perfect in beauty and wisdom. What is beautiful in this third sense also usually stands in its own imperfections and perplexities.

The beautiful itself, thus, is the (problematic) stunning or radiant presence and form in what freely or uniquely (e.g., this love, this whole) attaches together these fitting and useful elements. None of these components is beauty alone or always beautiful, but beauty is all of these, as one.

\(^{76}\) As we suggested, what is independent and fitting could still be petty.