

Why wasn't Socrates a cosmopolitan?

Abstract: Though Socrates can easily look like a cosmopolitan in political theory, it is clear on a closer reading of the relevant texts that, in the most important sense of the term, he turns out—disappointingly, perhaps—not to be. The reasons why not are instructive and important, both for readers of Plato and for political theorists.

Roughly, cosmopolitanism is the view that the whole *cosmos*, world, is a single *polis*, community, in some way that has normative significance. Here to be rough is to be accurate. “Cosmopolitanism” is an exceedingly loose term, at times little more than a slogan. The term can name a moral or a political thesis:

(MC) The whole world is a single moral community;

(PC) The whole world is a single political community;

—or it can name a thesis which is both moral and political, in either direction of argument:

(MCPC) The whole world is a single moral community, *and therefore* a single political community;

(PCMC) The whole world is a single political community, *and therefore* a single moral community.

There is the further question what is supposed to be the normative significance of any such thesis. Like the American revolutionaries' slogan that “All men are created equal”, with which of course cosmopolitanism has important philosophical and historical connections (more about these later), these versions of cosmopolitanism all state an alleged fact which is supposed to have fundamental evaluative and practical importance. Exactly what this evaluative and practical importance is remains, so far, wide open.

(MC) “The whole world is a single moral community” can be read, at the extreme of triviality, as enouncing no more than the rather obvious idea that like cases should be treated alike. At the other extreme, it can equally be read as renouncing all *other* moral communities except the whole world—that is, as a statement of an extreme impartialism. In between these extremes, it can be seen as the liberal commonplace (a commonplace I entirely agree with) that racism and sexism are bad.

(PC)'s claim that “The whole world is a single political community” can be similarly dialectically weightless—and in political practice, often is. Or it can be a decidedly substantive and thoroughly subversive thesis, proposing the end of all *other* political communities: thus the quixotic French revolutionary theorist Anacharsis Cloots or, more mildly, the first cosmopolitan of all, Diogenes the Cynic (412-323 BC), the point of whose famous claim to be a citizen of the world (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 6.63) seems to have been to raise questions about all other sorts of citizenship, in the name of a proto-Rousseauian “return to nature”. (PC) too has a range of more

or less sensible intermediate readings. The idea, for instance, that we only have one world, are all in it together, and so had better look after it carefully, is another liberal commonplace that it would be hard to disagree with (though in practice many of our leaders seem to manage, even the supposedly liberal ones).

History plays its part in dividing the theses. For instance, Socrates was patently not a cosmopolitan in the sense that the Stoics of the Alexandrian, post-Alexandrian, and Roman empires apparently were—and that for a very good and very obvious reason: he did not live under any of those empires. The aspiration to world-citizenship looks quite different from the standpoint of a *polis*, such as Athens, that is perennially threatened by enormous barbarian empires, and from a standpoint, such as Cicero's or Seneca's, at the heart of an empire that covers most of the known world. We could put a similar thought as a simple tactical point. If what you want to do, as a practical philosopher, is *change things for the better*, then in Cicero's or Seneca's historical situation the Stoics' sort of moral cosmopolitanism is an obvious possibility, whereas in Socrates' or Plato's historical situation, we might have thought, nothing remotely like that could have been a realistic possibility at all.¹

I say “we might have thought”, because in fact there was a well-known group of contemporaries of Socrates who seem to have been something very like cosmopolitans in both theory and practice: namely, of course, the sophists. Their practice, itinerant teaching of the skills that make for success in the *polis* (that is: in any *polis*), was at least panhellenic. *Apology* 19e lists Gorgias of Leontium, Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis as sophists “who go the round of the cities”, i.e. the Greek cities. And their arguments (like Diogenes the Cynic's) often appealed to *physis* as a deeper reality than the *nomos* which divided humans into nationalities. Thus at *Protagoras* 337c Hippias tells his hearers—who are a mixture of Athenian and other Greeks—that “I take you all to be kinsmen, housemates, fellow citizens (*syggeneis, oikeious, politas*) by nature, though not by convention; for like is akin to like by nature, while convention, the tyrant (*tyrannos*) of mankind, imposes on us all sorts of unnatural compulsions (*polla para tēn physin biazetai*)”.²

A panhellenic impulse was, then, a familiar part of the philosophical world that Socrates inhabited; and panhellenic, we might suppose, is about as near to comprehensively cosmopolitan as we can expect to get in Socrates' time. (I shall come back to the difference between panhellenism and cosmopolitanism at the end of this paper.) Nothing was more natural, in the intellectual environment of Athens in Socrates' time, than to ask quite general questions such as the Sophists asked, about how to become a leader in *any* city, not just one's own, or such as Socrates himself

¹ Of course there was—as Martine van Ittersum has reminded me—an Athenian empire too, which Socrates and Plato lived under. But neither of them viewed that empire as a suitable conduit for spreading cosmopolitan thinking, as Seneca saw the Roman empire. They took the more conservative attitude, to some extent echoed by Cicero, of seeing the empire as a threat to aristocracy. And in any case the Athenian empire was very different in nature from the empires that came after Alexander. Some empires are long-lasting structures in which economic hegemony follows on from military; others are strictly transient phenomena, in which military hegemony follows economic. The Alexandrian and Roman empires were of the former type; the Athenian empire, like the British, was of the latter.

² All translations in this paper are my own. Translations from the *Theaetetus* follow my *Reading Plato's Theaetetus* (Hackett, 2005); some of the other translations follow my *Plato Reader* (Edinburgh UP, 1996).

asked, about what would be the ideal constitution for *any* city. And here we may perhaps say, given the way things went for Socrates in Athens, not only “not just one’s own”, but “particularly not one’s own”.

Here then is one clear sense in which Socrates may or may not have been a cosmopolitan: he may have been a cosmopolitan in something like the same way that Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias and the others were—seeing all cities (or at least all Greek cities) as alike to him, and himself as, in principle at least, a citizen of them all. However, this point has to remain frustratingly speculative. In the nature of the case trustworthy evidence for such a quasi-sophistic cosmopolitanism in Socrates is hard to come by, since our main source Plato was keen, as is evident again and again in the dialogues from the *Apology* on, to distance Socrates from the sophists, for the obvious reason that he saw Socrates as unjustly condemned by his own contemporaries for being a sophist.

Perhaps despite themselves, Plato’s dialogues nonetheless give us a variety of evidential pointers on this issue. On the one side, it is clear that Socrates was the very opposite of a wandering sage in the way that these sophists were. The *Phaedrus* tells us that Socrates hardly ever leaves Athens (230d). One of his main reasons for refusing to escape from prison in the *Crito* is that he cannot so much as imagine life anywhere else—it would make him *katagelastos*, a laughing stock (*Crito* 53a; cp. *Apology* 37d). At the most fundamental level, Socrates sees himself as on a divine mission to Athens specifically, and nowhere else (*Apology* 37e). Socrates’ local commitment to Athens is strong enough to cost him the open-eyed sacrifice of his life; in this sense he could not be less of a cosmopolitan.

On the other side, consider this, from the Digression in the *Theaetetus* (173d10-174b4):

The philosophical man is not even aware that he is unaware of [the city’s political affairs]. His abstinence from these things is not put on for the sake of appearing grand. The truth is that only his body is positioned and stationed in the city. His understanding thinks that things like [political plots] are petty nothings, and he contemns them. In Pindar’s phrase [*Nemean* 10.87] his understanding is “in all directions borne”... For the philosophical man investigates the whole nature (*physin*) of each single thing that exists in every respect... He is oblivious not only of what his neighbour does, but almost of whether that neighbour was raised as a human being or some other sort of animal. The philosophical man’s interest and strenuous inquiry is rather directed towards the *essence* of being human...

The evidence of this passage is that Socrates’ willingness to stay in one city, Athens, was not a sign that he thought that there was anything morally unique about that city (as opposed to thinking that he himself was specifically called to engage with its citizens, and therefore to station his body in Athens). The philosopher is cosmopolitan insofar as he is universalist in his concerns, and this universalism is aligned with a rejection of the merely physical: it is a mere accident that Socrates finds himself in this very city, just as it is a mere accident that he finds himself in this very body (an accident to which, famously, Plato often draws our attention by stressing the mismatch between Socrates’ exterior and interior: see, e.g., *Symposium* 215b). To a

“true philosopher” the particularities of this or that city are *not worth* knowing about—it is what is true of all human beings, or all cities, that is worth knowing.

Of course, we should be careful how we use this passage as evidence of a Socratic cosmopolitanism, given that the *Theaetetus* clearly is not a “Socratic” dialogue, even if it is a neo- or retro-Socratic one. The “philosophical man’s” interest in nature (*physis*) and essence (*ti de pot’ estin anthrôpos*) looks more Platonic than Socratic. Furthermore, there is a difference between a practical concern not just for one particular but for every city, and practical concern not just for one particular but for *no* city.

There again, compare Stoic cosmopolitanism, where those two attitudes are not so very far apart. The Stoics’ idea that it is morally *indifferent* which city you are in, provided only you go after Stoic virtue, is as much the idea that no city matters particularly as it is the idea that all cities matter equally. Perhaps the same was true in Socrates’ cosmopolitanism. Also, the fact that an attitude is Platonically expressed in the *Theaetetus* obviously does not mean that that attitude was not also, at an earlier date, expressed in a different way by Socrates. As I shall now show, this Platonic passage’s concern with the universal nature of man is a concern that we can already find in arguably Socratic contexts. I have three in mind.

The first and second are two famous arguments about justice from *Republic* I (335b-e) and the *Crito* (47e-49e). In these passages Socrates argues—and this Socrates, I should think, is as near as we can get in Plato to the Socrates of history—that injustice is unnatural, and so harmful, in two different ways. In the *Crito* the leading thought is that injustice is unnatural, and so harmful, for the agent of injustice; in the *Republic*, that injustice is unnatural, and so harmful, for its victim.

Crito 48b8: Living well and living justly are one and the same; so
47d3 there is a part of us which is harmed by injustice and helped by justice [= the soul].

47e4: Our life is not worth living with a corrupted and perished body.

47e9: The soul is more important than the body.

47e7-10: *A fortiori*, our life is not worth living when the soul, that part of us which is harmed by injustice and helped by justice, is corrupted and perished.

49b8 So we should never do injustice at all.

49b7 So we should never return injustice for injustice (*antadikein*), because that involves doing injustice.

49c7 But there is no difference between harming (*kakôs poiein*) humans (*anthrôpous*) and doing injustice [to them] (*adikein*) [cp. 48b8 above].

49d10 So we should never (a) do injustice to others (*adikein*), (b) do injustice to others in return for injustice (*antadikein*), (c) harm others (*kakôs poiein*, 49c9), or (d) harm others in return for harm (*kakôs paskhonta amynesthai antidrônta kakôs*); for these all come to the same thing.

Being unjust is bad for the person who is unjust, because his injustice harms his soul: this is as much a fact about the soul, according to this argument, as it is a fact about the body that certain sorts of lifestyle or activity (or inactivity) will do it harm. In particular, this alleged fact about the soul is presented as no less general than the fact about the body: it is true of *any* human body that, say, alcoholism will ruin it, and

likewise true of *any* human soul that injustice will ruin it. (Cp. the argument of *Republic* 353d-354a that justice is the function of the soul, so that injustice cannot be good for it.)

49c7 adds, as a subsidiary point, the thesis that is the main point of the argument in *Republic* Book 1—that injustice is also bad for its victim:

Republic 335b5: To harm a horse is to make it worse in respect of the specifically equine excellence.

335bb6-c1: In general, to harm any creature is to make it worse in respect of its specific excellence.

335c2: So to harm a human is to make him worse in respect of the specifically human excellence (*tên anthrôpeian aretên*).

335c3: But the specifically human excellence is justice.

335c4: So to harm someone is to make him more unjust.

335c6: Now in general, expert practitioners of a skill S, acting in character, make others more skilled in S, not less skilled.

335c9: So expert practitioners of justice, acting in character, will make others more just, not less just.

335d2: Furthermore the characteristic causal power of a thing which is F is to transmit to other things Fness, and not the opposite of Fness.

335d4: So a man who is good will characteristically transmit to other men goodness, and not badness.

335d6: Now a just man is a good man.

335d9: So the just man's function will not be to harm others, irrespective of whether they are his friends or not. To harm others is the function of his opposite, the unjust man.

Like the *Crito* argument, this is a cosmopolitan argument in two respects at once. First and most obviously, the conclusion of the argument—as with the *Crito* argument—is that a just man will subject *no one* else to harm or injustice: not even when those others are themselves enemies, as on the traditional understanding of Simonides' maxim that justice is *ta ophilomena hekastôi apodidonai* (331e3), or have themselves done a grave injustice to the just man, as the Athenian state has to Socrates at the beginning of the *Crito*.³ The conclusion is, on the face of it, a perfectly general one: if we take it literally, it means that every human is owed justice by every other—even the “meanest Mysian” (*Theaetetus* 209b7).

Second and more fundamentally, both the *Crito* and the *Republic* arguments base a moral ban on harming others, whether or not in retaliation, on points about *human* nature and *human* function. There is no restriction here to specifically Athenian, or even Greek, nature or function. If this account of nature and function is true at all, there is, once more, no reason given why it won't be as true in Mysia as it is in Athens.

These look, then, very like cosmopolitan arguments. They also look very like responses to the kinds of sceptical theses argued by the sophists. The sophists were,

³ For further reflections on the injustice that Athens does to Socrates, and on how he should have responded to it, see my “Socrates and Antigone: two ways not to be martyred”, *Prudentia* 2001, or at <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/philos/ANTig.short.wpd.htm>.

historically, the first in the Greek tradition to make a systematic distinction between *physis* and *nomos*; and that distinction proved Hegelianly epochal. Once it had been made, it was rationally impossible to go back from it to the prelapsarian innocence which need look no further than our own community for a sufficient justification of our community's moral practice. So Socrates (and Plato too) found themselves confronted by corrosive sceptics like the sophists Thrasymachus and Callicles, who argued that justice is not natural, but a mere conventional con-trick whereby the strong keep down the weak (so Thrasymachus) or *vice versa* (so Callicles). Or they found themselves arguing with sceptics of more constructive intent like the sophist Protagoras, who argued that although there is no such thing as *natural* justice, still we may reasonably talk, in proto-Humean or –Hobbesian style, of justice as a conventional agreement that humans make for their mutual advantage. Both sorts of sophisticated position, the nihilist and the constructivist, based their sceptical claims on Herodotean relativism: it was the comparison of the differences between different societies that led them so swiftly to the conclusion that the ethical views conventional in their own society were part of *nomos*, not of *physis*. Socrates' response to this scepticism is to dig deeper: to look for a more fundamental account of *physis*. And that inevitably means a more general account, one that can take us to a level where the differences between societies can in one way or another be sublated.

There is an interesting parallel to this strategy of argument in Plato's epistemology (and perhaps Socrates': as I say, it is impossible to be sure about distinguishing them). However else they may have differed, Socrates and Plato shared an aspiration to discover *knowledge*. The traditional way of defending knowledge-claims is the one that Aristotle attempts to resuscitate in his epistemology. It is to rely upon the deliverances of an epistemic tradition, collecting and harmonising the *phainomena* and the views of "the many and the wise" (see e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1145b3-7). The obvious objection to such a procedure is that it makes knowledge hostage to fortune (or as the moderns have it, vulnerable to epistemic luck⁴). If I collect and harmonise the phenomena that are bequeathed to me *by a healthy epistemic tradition*, well and good: in that case, I stand some chance of arriving at something more worth calling knowledge than if I base my decisions about what to believe on a lucky dip, or other randomising procedure. The trouble is, of course, the assumption that I am in fact the heir of a healthy epistemic tradition. Here too, the snake in the innocent garden of tradition is the snake of relativism. And here too, Socrates' and Plato's preferred way of scotching that snake—perhaps even of killing it—is to try and dig down to a level of cognition fundamental enough to be natural rather than conventional.

This is what Socrates is doing in the astonishing argumentative *tour de force* which is my third arguably-Socratic affirmation of cosmopolitanism, *Meno* 80c-86b. In this passage we uncover, by way of dialectic, a form of knowledge that is radically independent of epistemic traditions: a kind of knowledge that is (in principle) possible for any human being—even the slave-boy out of whom Socrates coaxes it. The point demonstrated by Socrates' dialectical questioning of the slave-boy is this (*Meno* 81c4-d1):

⁴ See Duncan Pritchard, *Epistemic Luck*, Oxford UP 2005.

Since the human⁵ soul is immortal and has been reborn so many times... consequently there is nothing it has not learnt. Therefore it is nothing wonderful if the soul can recall what it knew before, both about virtue and about other things. For all of nature is related... (*hate gar tês physeôs hapasês syggenous ousês*)

Here we need not be distracted by the apparent fallacy of arguing from “At all times that X has existed, X has known p” to “X has known p at all times”—any more than we needed to be distracted, when considering the above arguments about justice from the *Crito* and *Republic* I, by the worry that they include no argument at all for the vital claim that justice is the human function (a worry which, I take it, the rest of the *Republic* is meant to address).

A more important worry for present purposes is the question who is named by “Socrates” here. My claim is that this argument is a Socratic one to at least some degree: but what degree? Is the *Meno*’s Socrates just a Platonic character, or is he also (some approximation to) the historical Socrates? I am happy to accept the well-known arguments that the *Meno*’s Socrates was not an advocate of Plato’s theory of recollection.⁶ That does not matter for my purposes, so long as I am entitled to claim that Socrates believed that the dialectical method was as epistemically pure, and as epistemically basic, as Plato (at the *Meno* stage of his career) took recollection to be. For on those assumptions, what we have here can be seen as evidence that the Platonic theory of recollection, and the Socratic theory of dialectic from which it grew, could both be deployed to the same effect: to spell out an anti-sophistical appeal to nature as a way of finessing the sophists’ doctrines of convention. The point of this move is exactly parallel to the point of the moves already described that Socrates makes about justice and harm. And the move is also parallel inasmuch as it delivers an *epistemic* cosmopolitanism: knowledge is not the preserve of any special tradition, race, or other elite group, because the best way of attaining knowledge—true knowledge—is open, in principle, to any human being whatsoever.

In the light of all this evidence, the title of this paper might seem to embody a mistaken presupposition. Doesn’t it turn out that in fact Socrates *was* a cosmopolitan? Unfortunately not. The reasons why not are instructive.

There are of course senses of “cosmopolitanism”—as I noted at the beginning—in which anyone who thinks at all about ethics or politics can hardly avoid being a cosmopolitan. If it is cosmopolitanism merely to think that like cases should be treated alike, then I concede that Socrates was a cosmopolitan, and so is almost everybody else. When I deny that he was a cosmopolitan, I have a more interesting form of cosmopolitanism in mind.

To see what this is, compare the *Meno* passage just cited with another passage—and on most accounts, an older and so more Socratic passage—that tells us something else about slaves. This is *Euthyphro* 3e6-6b2. With evident embarrassment (“I look mad to be doing this”, 4a1), Euthyphro tells Socrates that he is prosecuting

⁵ I supply the word “human” from 81b3-4, *psychê tou anthrôpou*. There is no reason to think that by 81c4 we are talking about any other soul.

⁶ For an entertaining recent discussion of the problem of the historical Socrates, see Christopher Rowe’s Durham inaugural lecture: <http://www.dur.ac.uk/Classics/histos/1998/rowe.html>.

his own father for murder. Socrates is astonished, and responds ironically that “not just anyone could be right to do such a thing (*orthôs praxai*), but only someone far advanced in wisdom” (4b1). “Far indeed, by Zeus” replies Euthyphro smugly. And now comes a crucial exchange (4b3-c1):

Socrates: It’s someone from your family (*tôn oikeiôn tis*) who was murdered by your father, then? But of course it is—I’m sure you would hardly have brought a murder charge against him on behalf of a stranger (*hyper allotriou*).

Euthyphro. It is laughable, Socrates, that you should think it makes any difference whether the murder victim was a stranger or a family member, and do not see that the only thing to be concerned about is whether the killer killed in justice (*en dikêi*) or not. If he acted in justice he should be left alone, if he acted unjustly then he should be prosecuted—even if he shares your own hearth (*synhestios*) and eats at the same table as you (*homotrapezos*).

This passage ought to puzzle us a little, or more than a little. Euthyphro’s concern with justice and nothing else is strikingly reminiscent of Socrates’ main concern in the *Crito* (48b9-c2: the only important question about the idea of running away from execution is whether or not it would be *just* to do that). Indeed if the *Crito* was written before the *Euthyphro*, it might even seem a reasonable assumption that Euthyphro’s words here are meant to echo Socrates’. Yet obviously, Euthyphro is being ‘set up’ here. In this preliminary part of the dialogue he is being lined up to be knocked down by Socrates; shortly after this passage, the elenctic demolition duly begins. Socrates’ sarcasm to him is there to tell us, if we don’t get the message any other way, that Euthyphro—for all his zeal for justice—labours under a profound misunderstanding.

What, then, has he got wrong? Euthyphro’s misunderstanding, as Plato takes it to be, quickly appears as we read on, and find out whom his father has murdered (4c3-e4):

...the man who is dead was a poor dependent (*pelatês*) of mine who worked for us as a serf (*ethêteuen*) on our farm in Naxos. In a drunken rage he cut the throat of one of our household slaves (*oiketôn*). My father bound him hand and foot and threw him into a ditch, and then sent his manservant (*andra*) to Athens to consult an oracle as to what he should do with him. During this delay my father made light of and neglected the bound man, since “he was a murderer and it was no matter even if he died”. And die he did... Now my father and the others at home (*hoi alloi oikeioi*) are angry with me about this, because I am prosecuting my father for murdering a murderer. In any case—they say—my father didn’t kill him: but even if he most certainly had killed him, since the one who died was himself a murderer, I should not concern myself with the matter (*phrontizein*), since it is impious for a son to bring a murder charge against his own father. So bad, Socrates, is their ignorance of the divine view about what is pious and impious.

Just to leave us in no doubt what Plato (and/ or Socrates: I won’t keep adding this) really thinks about Euthyphro’s deeds, here is how Plato has Socrates reply to this (4e5-5a5):

Socrates. And you, by Zeus, Euthyphro: you think that your own knowledge of what “divine views” are, and of what is pious or impious, is so exact that, given the actions which you have related, you can prosecute your father without any fear that you yourself might turn out to be doing something impious?

Euthyphro. There would be no point to me, Socrates, and Euthyphro would be no different from the mass of men, if I did not have exact knowledge of everything of that sort.

Socrates. Why then, my amazing Euthyphro, the best thing for me to do is become your pupil...

The rhetoric could hardly make it plainer that Plato thinks that Euthyphro is utterly wrong to believe that he should prosecute his father for murdering the serf by neglect. He is wrong because he fails to see that the virtue of piety demands that one not pursue one’s father through the courts without an extremely good reason for doing so. That means that Plato thinks that the thoughts about justice that support Euthyphro’s decision to prosecute his father do *not* constitute an extremely good reason.

But that is a pretty striking result, given what those thoughts about justice are. For Euthyphro’s main thought in favour of prosecution is the one already quoted from 4b: it is ridiculous to suppose that the distinction between family members and others has any importance compared with the distinction between acting “in justice” and not acting in injustice. This is a cosmopolitan thought. But here, very strikingly, it is rejected, apparently on the grounds that there are morally significant differences, in the circumstances, between Euthyphro’s father and the serf. What differences are these?

Four possible differences surface in Euthyphro’s account of the facts as quoted above (4c3-e4). First, as Euthyphro’s family have been telling him, his father killed by omission, not by commission: he did not slit the serf’s throat (which is how the serf killed the domestic slave), he simply left him to die. This argument is specious, not because it relies on something like⁷ the action-omission distinction, but because it misuses that distinction. We are told that the serf was left tied up in his ditch with no food or water for the length of time—it would have been perhaps a week—that it took a messenger to sail the three hundred miles from Naxos to Athens and back. So Euthyphro’s father can hardly have failed to know that he would almost certainly die, but took no action to prevent his death. Murders by omission rather than action are perfectly possible, and this is one of them.

Second, Euthyphro reports his father as reasoning that the serf—unlike Euthyphro’s father—was a murderer, and so that it did not matter if he underwent harsh treatment and neglect. It seems clearer than it does with the first difference that Plato means us to endorse this reasoning: this seems to be an important part of his case for thinking that Euthyphro is wrong to treat his father and the slave with complete impartiality. But what does the *Crito* say (49d10)? “We should never harm others in return for harm.” That obviously means that A should not harm B for

⁷ There is only scanty evidence as to how clear the action-omission distinction was to Socrates and his contemporaries; of course the canonical statements of that distinction came long after his time. This passage is itself testimony that 5th-century BC Athenians had some idea of something like it.

harming A. It had better also mean, by only a slight extension of sense, that A should not harm B for harming C. There is no point banning revenge unless we include third-party revenge in the ban, since without that inclusion the ban on revenge will fail to cover the most virulent and destructive forms of revenge: the Aeschylean blood-feud, for example.

Thus the *Crito* apparently gives a clear and decisive reason why it is unjust for Euthyphro's father to murder the serf by negligence:⁸ because it is unjust for me to harm someone, just because that someone is himself a harmer of others (whether me or someone else). This ought to disable the effect of the second moral difference between Euthyphro's father and the serf; but it doesn't. Why not?

The answer, I think, lies in the third and fourth differences between them. The third difference is that Euthyphro's father, unlike the serf, is his *father*; and the fourth difference is that the serf, unlike Euthyphro's father, is a *serf*. Family differences make a moral difference; and the difference between slaves and *eleutheroi*, freemen (sometimes "liberal gentlemen"), makes a moral difference. And these, of course, are profoundly anti-cosmopolitan points.

So we have an apparent clash between the *Crito*'s cosmopolitanism, based on the virtue of justice, and the *Euthyphro*'s parochialism, based on the virtue of piety. Both are views, or so I have suggested, that we have reason to attribute not only to Plato's Socrates but also to history's Socrates, insofar as we have reason to attribute to the latter any views at all. What conclusion should we draw from this clash?

We could conclude that either the *Crito* or the *Euthyphro* involves a misrepresentation. That is, we could say that Socrates (or "Socrates") cannot have held the views that the one dialogue attributes to him, because he evidently held the views that the other attributes to him. Since he was a cosmopolitan, as the *Crito* shows, he can't have been a parochialist of the sort that the *Euthyphro* suggests—or *vice versa*. But there is a third possibility, and I think a more plausible one. This is that the clash between the *Crito*'s cosmopolitanism and the *Euthyphro*'s parochialism was simply inaudible to most, if not all, Greeks of Socrates' time; and that it took a philosopher of genius—whether that was Socrates himself, or Plato—to get them to hear it.

Consider here the famous words of the American Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

One tension that underlies these words was instantly pointed out by contemporary British critics of the American revolutionaries. The tension is, of course, the one created by the notorious fact of slavery: "Slaves there are in America,

⁸ No counter-plea is entered, even implicitly, that Euthyphro's father is *punishing* the serf. If the serf were being punished, it would be important that he *should* suffer and perhaps die. Euthyphro's father's attitude is different: it is that what happens to the serf does not matter either way.

and where there are slaves, there liberty is alienated” (*The Gentleman's Magazine*, London, August 1776, vol. 46, pp. 403–404).⁹ There is, to put it mildly, a long way to go from the premiss that “All men are created equal” to the conclusion that chattel slavery is all right for black people.

Talking of “people”, a further tension arises from the almost equally notorious fact that the framers of the American constitution were less than literal in their use of the phrase “all men”. They apparently used it *not* in the famous “inclusive sense”, that well-known grammatical conservatives’ stand-by, in which women allegedly also count as men. Or at any rate, they used it in a way that raised no inconvenient questions about whether women should for example be allowed to vote, and that successfully marginalised that question of suffrage for over half a century after the question of slavery had been finally settled in the US.¹⁰ This second tension was not so quickly pointed out by British critics of the American revolutionaries. And that, I take it, was for an interesting reason: because in this second respect, there was no important difference between the social structures of America and the older realm.

I generalise: clashes between principles and practice, or between two different principles, where they are habitually missed by the whole of a society, can become *socially invisible*. And this, I submit, is what happened to slaves in the cosmopolitanism of the *Crito*—and of the American revolution. As the *Crito*’s principles about justice were intended, there was *no* clash between them and the *Euthyphro*’s principles about piety. For the *Crito*’s principles were simply not meant to apply to slaves, and typical Greek contemporaries of Socrates would have thought it preposterous so to apply them—as preposterous as many in the Old South of the US continued, long after 1865, to think it was to apply the words of the 1776 Declaration that “all men are created equal” to their “peculiar institution”, to deliver the conclusion that black men (and women) should be freed from slavery.

This point about the status (or rather non-status) of slaves in Socrates’ moral universe has a parallel regarding the status of barbarians, which brings us back to the difference between panhellenism and cosmopolitanism that I earmarked above. The point is a linguistic one, about the Greek word *xenos*, which is used (for instance) at *Protagoras* 315a7 to describe the majority of those who are following the famous sophists and the sons of Pericles around at the beginning of the discussions of that dialogue. In their Stanford Encyclopedia article on “Cosmopolitanism”, Eric Brown and Pauline Kleingeld have suggested that Hippias’ words at *Protagoras* 337c, which I quoted above, are evidence that Hippias was a cosmopolitan, because they are addressed to “a motley crew of Athenians and foreigners”. But here, as 315a7 shows, “foreigners” is *xenoi*; and it is usually misleading to translate Plato’s Greek *xenos* simply as “foreigner”. Certainly *xenos* is the opposite of *politês*, “citizen”. However, *politês* stands in two significant oppositions: one is to *xenos*, usually if not always meaning a Greek from a different city (recall that *xenos* can also mean either partner in a guest/ host relationship—indeed Liddell & Scott treats this as the word’s primary

⁹ Thanks to Wikipedia (s.v. “United States Declaration of Independence”) for the reference.

It is worth bearing in mind how *old* slavery in the American South already was by 1861. As Diarmaid McCulloch points out in *Reformation* (541), as far back as 1715 North Carolina already had twice as many black as white inhabitants.

¹⁰ Slavery went out in the UK in 1807, in the US in 1865; full women’s suffrage arrived in the US in one instalment in 1920, in the UK in two instalments, in 1918 and 1928.

meaning); the other is to *barbaros*, meaning someone who is not a Greek at all. Hippias's words are no welcome to *barbaroi*; they are a welcome to *xenoi*. His words show that he was a panhellenist; they do nothing to show that he was a cosmopolitan in our sense of accepting *any* human being of *any* race—even, heaven help us, a non-Greek race—on equal terms.

Once we see this distinction, a number of other things also swim into focus. One small matter is the point of Socrates' question, at *Meno* 82b2, as to whether the slave-boy is a Greek and a Greek-speaker (*hellênizei*), which Meno answers "Yes, he was born in the household". At first sight, it may appear that Socrates examines the slave-boy because he is pursuing an *a fortiori* argument: "If a bedrock of rationality is identifiably present even in a slave-boy, how much more is it present in everyone else". If that was the point, we might expect the slave-boy, like plenty of actual slaves at Athens, *not* to be a Greek: the *a fortiori* will be even stronger if it is "If a bedrock of rationality is present even in a barbarian slave-boy...". But given that the slave-boy is in fact Greek, the point of Socrates' question must be something else. Either the point is merely the boring one that the slave-boy is someone with whom communication will not be impossible for linguistic reasons; or else the point is the more interesting one that the slave-boy does at least pass a minimum threshold for being the kind of human of whom rationality might be expected—namely, a Greek. If the point is the latter, then once more we have a passage which supports panhellenism, but which not only fails to support a wider cosmopolitanism but actively opposes it.

The moral of all this is discouraging, but important. It is not as easy as it seems to extract a thoroughgoing, genuine, and substantive cosmopolitanism from apparently cosmopolitan, morally or politically universalist, theses such as Socrates offers in the *Crito*. Historically, cosmopolitan rationality has frequently been afflicted with serious blind-spots, which make apparently literal cosmopolitan slogans harder to take literally than one might expect. Also, these blind-spots can be hard to notice. The most important part of any philosophical argument, but particularly one about rights or moral status, can be precisely that part of the argument that is not stated; the sound of a successful prejudice is silence.

It is a mark of their genius that the Greek philosophical tradition's silent exclusion of slaves, barbarians, and women was at least noticed at some point in the intellectual continuum between Socrates and Plato. That, no doubt, is why Plato's *Republic* is the first philosophical¹¹ document in the Greek tradition that seriously breaks this silence by attempting to address these moral exclusions, and—by way of an appeal to differences in the nature of the soul—to justify them (in the case of slaves and barbarians) or else modify them (in the case of women); the project is of course continued, with more justifying and less modifying, in Aristotle's *Politics*.

This is, in the strict sense of the word, a reactionary project. It is an attempt to reverse an intellectual discovery, the sophists' discovery that it was possible to ask the

¹¹ Arguably Greek philosophy was well behind Greek literature in questioning these prejudices: Euripides' play *Ion* stars a slave, and his *Troïades* stars a number of barbarian women. And, of course, as far back as Homer we have barbarian Trojans portrayed with sympathy and warmth. Perhaps in this respect Greek philosophy was behind Greek history too: Herodotus has already been mentioned as a raiser of disquieting questions about the unique correctness of Greek ethical customs.

question why we should make *any* distinctions between persons on the grounds of race, gender, or slavery. That discovery took a little while to escape from such reactionary attempts to un-discover it as those that are visible in the *Republic* and the *Politics*, and to have its due impact on human social organisation: a small matter of two and a half thousand years. Indeed those of us who suspect that our society still cherishes certain blind-spots are likely to think that it has not fully impacted on us yet.