POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY IN PLATO´S *ALCIBIADES I*[*†]

Psicología Política en el *Alcibiades I* de Platón

José Daniel Parra
Universidad Externado de Colombia

ABSTRACT

The following essay presents a close reading of the Platonic dialogue *Alcibiades I.* In the text, Socrates is depicted as a young teacher approaching young Alcibiades, a future prominent and *hubristic* ruler of post-Periclean democratic Athens. In his propadeutic task, Socrates appeals to Alcibiades' unlimited self-love in order to gain his confidence and attention, rousing his spirited ambition and keen intellect, trying to tempt him into becoming a philosopher. We explore the roots of Alcibiades' character, his desire for primacy intermingled with his fear of failure. For motives that will be explored in this essay, the mayeutic education of Alcibiades towards the life of wisdom not only failed, but also had undesired political outcomes. Would a more powerful Socrates have been able to procure Alcibiades' ultimate allegiance? The *Alcibiades I* sheds light on the roots and potential limitations of the study of Platonic political philosophy.
Key Words: Socratic mayeutics, classical political philosophy, government, *thumos*, dialectic.

RESUMEN

Este ensayo propone una lectura del diálogo platónico *Alcibíades I*. En el texto, vemos a Sócrates como joven maestro aproximándose al también joven Alcibíades, quien sabemos se convertirá en un prominente y *hubristico* gobernante de la Atenas democrática post-Periclea. En su tarea propedéutica, Sócrates apela al amor propio ilimitado de Alcibíades con el fin de ganar su confianza y atención, incitando su espíritu de ambición y su agudo intelecto, tratando de tentarlo hacia la vida filosófica. En el texto exploramos las raíces

[*] **Recibido** Marzo de 2010; **aprobado** Agosto de 2010.
[†] Este artículo es producto del proyecto *Humanismo como Política*, adscrito al Observatorio OPERA, del Centro de Investigaciones y Proyectos Especiales CIPE, Universidad Externado de Colombia. Fue originalmente uno de los capítulos de la investigación de maestría titulada *Paideia: A Study of Socratic Teaching*, realizada en la Universidad de Carleton, bajo la dirección de los profesores Waller R. Newell, Tom Darby, y el apoyo especial de Horst Hutter. El autor agradece a los profesores Juan Camilo Rodríguez, y Fernando Estrada Gallego por el apoyo institucional y académico que hizo posible la publicación del texto.

del carácter de Alcibíades, su deseo de primacía enlazado con su temor al fracaso. La educación mayéutica de Alcibíades hacia la vida filosófica no sólo falló, sino que además tuvo indeseables consecuencias políticas. ¿Habría sido un Sócrates más poderoso capaz de procurarse la lealtad última de Alcibíades? El *Alcibíades I* arroja luz sobre las raíces y limitaciones potenciales del estudio de la filosofía política platónica.
Palabras Clave: Mayéutica socrática, filosofía política clásica, gobierno, *thumos,* dialéctica.

1. Introduction

The *Alcibiades I*[1] is an attempt at a philosophical propadeutic[2]. It is an *ad hoc* conversation as it were, whereby the setting remains indistinct (presumably it is a private conversation: *where* it takes place we do not know). It is a performed dialogue: we are shown the actions of two fictionalized characters in the present tense, without the filter of a narrator. The dramatic date of the *Alcibiades I* occurs some seventeen years before the *Symposium* (416 BCE), and thus, the reader is left to wonder if by this time Socrates has already been initiated into the pedagogical mysteries of *eros* by the prophetess Diotima. Presumably he has. Nevertheless he still seems to be unseasoned in the erotic art of *psychagoge*[3] or soul-shaping. We will take this into account as perhaps one of the limitations of his approach to Alcibiades at this point in time, and, arguably, as perhaps one of the reasons for his ultimate failure to steer Alcibiades' longing away

[1] I have used the Loeb Classical Library edition of Plato's *Alcibiades I.* Trans. W.R.M Lamb (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1964). Other references from the Corpus Platonicum are from *The Complete Works of Plato,* ed. John M. Cooper (Cambridge: Hackett, 1997). Citations are by Stephanus number. References from Aristotle are from *The Basic Works of Aristotle, e*d. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001).

[2] The Arabic medieval philosopher Al Farabi considered the *Alcibiades I* the gateway into the Platonic corpus. The dialogues were either read out-loud or performed for an audience of pupils (c.f. Aristotle *Politics* 1263b16, where reference is made to reactions to a Platonic dialogue by "listeners") in the academy, the selection of dialogues taking place in accordance with the spiritual and intellectual development of school members. For an interesting discussion on the chronology and scholarly debate about the authenticity of the *Alcibiades I*, see Gary Alan Scott, *Plato's Socrates as Educator* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp 205-207. For further discussions about *paideia* in classical political philosophy see the work of Waller R. Newell *Ruling Passion the Erotics of Statecraft in Platonic Political Philosophy.* (Laham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) with Catherine H. Zuckert *Plato´s Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues*. (Chicago: U Chicago P, 2009), pp. 229-237. Consider also the important work of Pierre Hadot *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Trans. Michael Chase. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002), especially pp. 149-157. A classical observation about the relation between the historical Socrates and young Alcibiades can be found in Xenophon *Memorabilia* I.2.39.

[3] Plato *Laws* 650b6-9.

from his love of being praised by the *demos* towards the love of wisdom and the philosophical way of life.

The action of the dialogue begins with Socrates praising Alcibiades' beauty. Beauty functions as a catalyst for attention: it evokes awe (and attraction if we think the object of desire is attainable) and/or fear (if we expect rejection, especially on the basis of past failures). Many of Alcibiades' suitors have felt attracted to the promising youth and yet have tended to become distant from him, intimidated by his keen spiritedness. Now he no longer has the pristine beauty of a child (*pais*), and is becoming a "grown up" (*meirakion*), a young man; presumably not only his beard has started to show, but also his voice is turning thicker, graver. Socrates had remained distant yet most attentive to the boy's elementary education—his *daimonion* prevented him from approaching Alcibiades at such early stage (103a6)—but now he considers that it is the right moment *(kairos*) to explain him the reason why he feels his arrogant character (*megalophónon*, 103b5) is too much for others to bare (104 a).

2. Deconstructing Alcibiades: *Pater* and *Patria*

Socrates offers to diagnose Alcibiades' character. He possesses all the right qualities of the *kaloi kagathoi*, good birth, looks, stature, family connections, fortune. He is also the nephew and *protegé* of the great statesman Pericles, for Alcibiades' father died when he was a child[4]. As in the case of other archetypal figures of outstanding young men such as, say, Telemachus (Homer, *Odyssey* III, 77-79, 370-377 and IV, 315-323, with 696-711), or Oedipus (Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* 307-315 and 1511-1514) the premature loss or untimely withering of a father figure will eventually mark Alcibiades' desire to vindicate his past. *Thumotic* men seem to be drawn to the political arena as therapy for the pain of some essential loss. Is the critical fate of their fathers awaiting them?—most likely, hence their need for power, friends, resources to turn-around and overcome these haunting omens[5]. Surely they do not want to resemble their fathers in their mistakes or shortcomings: they both want and don't want to live up to their father's nature, which is also their own. The *thumotic* man is torn: angry for his father's failings or unfulfilled expectations (this he conceives of as wrongs still unexpiated), and driven (for privation elicits

[4] Plutarch. *Lives*. Dryden's translation. Ed. and intro. Charles W. Elliot. (Danbury: Grolier, 1980) pp. 106. According to C.D.C. Reeve's introduction to Plato's *Republic* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), pp. viii, Plato's father, Ariston, also died when Plato was still a boy, and his mother re-married Pyrilampes, a friend of Pericles.

[5] Political power presupposes but also reinforces friendships: "holders of public office can do many people a good turn" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1188b15).

pain, and in that condition a man is always aiming at something[6]) to live up to his own, and thus his fathers', true nature[7]. Thus his passion of pride is fueled by anger rooted in fear of failure. Alcibiades is angry, but he is still too young to understand this[8]. He is not Callicles, who comes from a somewhat lower station in life and who is also older, more seasoned, and so more self-conscious about his political pretensions and fears[9]. Perhaps the eventual failure of Socrates to steer Alcibiades away from the temptation of tyranny has to do with Alcibiades' deeply rooted feeling of indignation at even the possibility of not striving to perform great or noble deeds. Why? Because otherwise Alcibiades would have turned out soft: aristocrats who don't have a sense of purpose tend to become effete (consider the problem with the sons of Pericles mentioned at 118e1-2[10]). Also: in contrast to the poet Agathon, for instance, who is also beautiful and talented but dreamy and passive (*Symposium* 223d9-10), Alcibiades is hot-blooded (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1389 a25-30) a quality that induces him to daring action.

Alcibiades, despite having all advantages that ordinary people seek, is not content with them (104 e-105 a). In the enumeration of Alcibiades' qualities (104 a-b) Socrates failed to mention a crucial element, which will indeed be the fishhook through which he aspires to reach him: education. Education is not (yet) an object of Alcibiades' pride. Can education make him more powerful? Socrates tempts him: "suppose one of the gods asked you, 'Alcibiades, would you rather live with what you now have, or would you rather die on the spot if you weren't permitted to acquire anything greater?' I think, you'd choose to die. What then *is* your real ambition in life? I'll tell you" (105a5-8). Alcibiades craves universal, unequal recognition. How should Socrates deal with Alcibiades' unlimited self-love? Young Alcibiades is not fearful of death and his strengths, pride and *eros,* have directed his attention towards political action[11].

[6] *Ibid*., 1739 a10.

[7] This psychological knot will be determinant for the political ambitions of the young Alcibiades (and thus for Athens), which perhaps the diagnostician Socrates failed to observe. C.f. Machiavelli *Discoursi* III, 17.

[8] Plutarch, Lives: "'You bite Alcibiades, like a woman', 'no', replied he, 'like a lion'" (p. 107). See especially Nietzsche *Gay Science,* aphorism 9, with *Zarathustra* II, "On the Tarantulas": "What was silent in the father speaks in the son; and often I found the son the unveiled secret of the father". Consider also Hannah Arendt *The Human Condition* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1998), pp. 9.

[9] I have attempted to provide a discussion on the psycho-political relation between Socrates and Callicles in my essay "The Rhetoric of Action: A Reflection on Plato´s *Gorgias*". *Praxis Filosófica*, Nueva Serie, No. 28, Enero-Junio 2009, p. 55-75.

[10] In connection to this point see also Plato *Laws* 694c6-696a5.

[11] Contrast Plato *Phaedo* 64a 2-4, with Xenophon *Memorabilia* I.2.16.

Alcibiades is also a few days shy from addressing the Athenian assembly for the first time (105b1), aspiring to be honored even more than the great Athenian statesman Pericles[12] (105b3). Can the political community accommodate the imposing ambitions of Alcibiades? Political praxis aims at containing *thumos* (fear and anger), channeling it in the direction of active civic virtue for the purposes of recognition in serving the common good. But Alcibiades' spiritedness is also subordinated to love, to his desire for immortality, that is, to attain the good always. Can political life offer him this? Here the pedagogic dynamic of the dialogue presents a problem: the word philosophy is never mentioned in the *Alcibiades I*. Why is philosophy omitted? Plato hints that the future general-statesman will strive for transcendence (*Symposium* 208b3-7) through the life of action.

3. *Paideia* and Empire

Why should Alcibiades associate with Socrates? Socrates starts to appeal to Alcibiades' sensibilities by acknowledging him as a man (*aner,* 104 e5). Alcibiades is about to enter public life. Not even the political ascendancy of Pericles seems to be enough to satisfy Alcibiades' intent: Socrates inflames Alcibiades' ambition to encompass world fame, the horizon of the Athenian *polis* being too narrow for his great expectations. Perhaps the failure of Socrates to mention philosophy in the dialogue is preliminary or strategic (he does not want to turn Alcibiades off), for it is a common misunderstanding to conceive philosophers as "odd" or useless for political purposes (*Republic* 487d-e). However this may be, Socratic mayeutics draws the need for philosophy not in a preventive but almost in a curative or homeopathic sense: knowledge of ignorance has to precede the desire to know. For why would one pursue what one already has? Socrates appeals to young Alcibiades using the political paradigm, but he universalizes it, claiming that his desire for glory can only be fulfilled by being recognized to the extent of great rulers of the stature of Cyrus or Xerxes. The constitutional limits of the Athenian polis seem to be too constraining for Alcibiades' aspirations. Consistency should make Alcibiades strive to become emperor.

We can see Socrates' risky pedagogical method of bringing Alcibiades to a universal object of longing so that, presumably, after undergoing a purgation for the purposes of overcoming and elevating his political *mania* (which the *Republic* as a whole aims to achieve) he would then be in a psychologically open state which would make him self-conscious of his

[12] Thucydides describes Periclean Athens as "in principle, a democracy; in practice, rule by the first man (*logoi men demokratia, ergoi de upo tou protou andros arché*)". *History of the Peloponnesian War,* (2.65.9).

radical ignorance, a necessary step prior to the sense of wonder that is the source of the desire to know. But what if Alcibiades is not willing to forgo *doxa*? Shadows are sirens. The love of true knowledge or wisdom, has to be preceded by an *aporia* or perplexity—Alcibiades has to *know* that he knows nothing, this pre-*noetic* experience has to grip him, before Socrates can turn his desire towards the love of knowing. For knowing that one does not know does not preclude the probability of further knowing. Knowing can only make sense if something can be known. The love of knowing tends to be abstract, meaning that its object(s) may not be tactile, but its origins are rooted in our common experience. The search for objective knowledge begins *inter homines,* that is, with political questions (105a-d). Socrates appeals to Alcibiades' sensibilities—his pride and ambition—with a political scenario that transcends the horizon of the polis. As noted before, this is a dangerous proposition: Socrates attempts to have power over Alcibiades by expanding Alcibiades' conception of his object of longing, from the local or particular to the universal. This, at a political level, he accomplished. What proved problematic was the further step to have Alcibiades move from the concrete (love of demos) to abstraction (love of philosophy) further to the elusive Idea of the Good that illuminates the Forms (*Republic* 518d9ff.), and then back to the polis—a full process without which the Socratic teaching, by the standards of the city, has seditious or at least impious implications[13].

Is the love of the *demos* possible after the awakening of the love of wisdom? How can these two "loves" learn from one another? How is *thumotic* love of the *demos* different from Socratic "philanthropy"? Is philosophic philanthropy possible? And if so, can (or should) it be political? Did Socrates succumb to the temptation of vying for Alcibiades' love (105e-106a1) disclosing certain things perhaps unsuited for a young man of his temperament?[14]

4. *Paideia* and War

The discussion has made Alcibiades curious, yet he still remains somewhat indifferent (106a-b). He is expecting Socrates, like every teacher, to moralize at him through long rhetorical speeches. But Socrates will not, for he values Alcibiades' attention (106b1-4). Socrates (perhaps

[13] We should also note that excessive piety, or immoderate moderation can also be detrimental for the well-being of the political community, particularly at war, as the case of the Athenian general Nicias attests during the Sicilian expedition. Leo Strauss *The City and Man* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1978), pp. 192-209

[14] "The Master said: 'Learning without thinking is useless. Thinking without learning is dangerous". Confucius *Analects* book II, ch. 25.

prematurely) conceives this is as a good moment to introduce Alcibiades into the dynamic of the *elenchus*. Socrates wants to teach Alcibiades to think, and so has crafted his approach to Alcibiades in the following way: first he will induce Alcibiades to assent to a statement; this statement will function as the starting point for further questions. These questions, in turn, will differ from the original proposition in that they will seem platitudes, usually requiring simple yes or no answers: they are not so much requests of information or detail as much as demands for an assent. Socrates will then "follow the logos" (*Protagoras* 333c) eventually leading to the affirmation or the contradiction of the original claim. Socrates is ironic in the sense that he pretends to be oblivious of the structure of the *elenchus*. After all, being refuted tends to make people ashamed or angry (think of Thrasymachus in *Republic* at 337a). The way in which Socrates presents his questions to Alcibiades seems to be somewhat contrived, unpolished: he questions him as he tries to tease him into learning to ask questions himself. We should also note that, according to the dramatic date of the dialogue (possibly 433 BCE) Alcibiades was about 19 years of age. Socrates would have been around 36 years old: perhaps at this point in time he was still an inexperienced dialectician and teacher of political philosophy (for he spent the first part of his career studying/teaching natural science). Young teachers tend to be imprudent.

To come back to the text, at 106c Socrates questions Alcibiades with regards to his intention to advice the Athenian assembly: Alcibiades would be a good adviser only about matters of which he has attained knowledge. What he knows he either learned from others, or found about on his own (106d5-6). Actual learning presupposes an active desire to learn: it differs from habituation, training, or primary instruction in that for the most part these are imparted to us to form our character and disposition, as preparation for proper conduct and further development. Now, Alcibiades has received instruction in music and gymnastics and these are the subjects he has incorporated. Alcibiades is a high school graduate trying to run for public office, as it were. Will Alcibiades advice the Athenians on grammar, wrestling, or lyre playing? What if the Athenians are seeking advice on measures regarding, say, public health, should they listen to a precocious wealthy citizen, or to a doctor? As usual, Socrates contends that the standard for political counsel should be expertise in the matter in question (107c4-5). But what does the assembly deliberate about? This is a crucial point in the dialogue, which demonstrates Alcibiades' familiarity with the objects of political passion: it is not any kind of political business but the most fundamental problem that draws Alcibiades' attention—the

question of war. The regular management of government or routine matters of domestic policy is something Alcibiades is not really concerned about. Apparently *Oikonomia* does not agitate the passions, even if taking place at a large scale, the way questions of justice and war do.

5. War and Justice

But then—how do we know whom or what is right to fight when and for how long? (107d3-4). The way a physician or medical expert is able to identify a sickness and knows that what is right is to attempt to re-establish health in the patient, the political expert must also know a standard of what is right regarding the problem of war. Although Alcibiades is no doctor he knows that it is better for a sick patient to get healthier—but he seems to be at a loss when it comes to knowing what is proper when advising the assembly on the issue of war (108e8-109a4). War is usually undertaken under grounds of having been cheated, robbed, or injured. Whom will Alcibiades advice the Athenians to wage war against—those who are treating them justly or unjustly? This is a key question: one can almost see Socrates and Alcibiades beginning to "go down to the Piraeus" (*Republic* 327a1). But not so fast: Alcibiades is not Glaucon. Alcibiades knows (he has possibly overheard private conversations of Pericles with senior Athenian officials) that they are not dealing with a straightforward question (109c): "even if someone thought it was necessary [*ananke*] to wage war on people who were treating us justly, he wouldn't admit it" (109c1-3). This would be unlawful (*nominon*) and improper, Socrates replies. Young Alcibiades agrees. Alcibiades tells Socrates, hypothetically, that there may be wars caused by necessity which may override justice. If all just wars may be said to be necessary, it does not follow that all necessary wars are just. The rhetoric of war cannot be put forward in terms of necessity (109c8)—for that which we conceive as "right" or "better" when it comes to war-making means to be "more just". Apparently (*phainetai*), replies Alcibiades.

To continue: how did Alcibiades learn to make the distinction between the just and the unjust? Who taught him? Socrates says ironically that he would be the first to attend to such teacher, so that he could learn from him this politically most important distinction (109d). But can't Alcibiades know about justice and injustice without a teacher? He certainly could, if he had searched, but this he would not do unless he was under the understanding that he did not already know its meaning (109e). There must have been a time when Alcibiades thought he did not know what justice is. But when? Even during Alcibiades' boyhood Socrates saw him complain confidently against his playmates when he was being cheated (110b). Even

as a child Alcibiades knew when other boys where being unfair to him. Alcibiades swears by Zeus that he cannot tell when he first found out the meaning of justice (110c11)—but, upon reflection, he must have learned it the way everybody learns about these things: from the multitude (*para ton pollon*). Furthermore, didn't he also learn to speak Greek from them? (111a1). Is language or grammar an object of deliberation? (c.f. Aristotle *N.E.* 1112a34-b11). The multitude is a competent teacher of Greek language because in that field it tends to be of one mind (*homonoia*). Is this the case with the question of justice? Are people of the same mind, or do they differ, when it comes to deciding and acting upon what is just and unjust?

The passions tend to stir the people in different directions making them disagree with each other with regards to just and unjust men and their actions. Alcibiades must have seen the incessant quarrels about questions of justice, or if he hasn't, at least he might have heard about them from other sources—particularly Homer (112 a-c). Alcibiades is familiar with the *Illiad* and the *Odyssey*: he acknowledges the authority of the poet. The people are not of a common mind about justice and this is depicted (and shaped?) by epic poetry. Alcibiades is not in a position to trust wholeheartedly the people's judgment on this issue, and yet it was from the people that he came to know about it: he is perplexed. If Alcibiades did not learn from himself about justice, and if what he thinks he has learned from the people is found wanting, it seems that, after all, he might not know what justice is. This, Alcibiades thinks, is what Socrates is affirming (112e). Socrates corrects him: no, he has only limited himself to ask questions, all the conclusions Alcibiades has drawn for himself. But Alcibiades is not convinced (113c1).

Alcibiades recollects about what actually takes place in the assembly: in practice, Athenians take the question of justice and injustice for granted—what they really debate about is the advantageous in contrast to the non-expedient. The assembly does not engage in political philosophy: they think justice is something obvious (113d2-3). They deliberate *not* about the true "what" of political questions, but about their "how" (which assumes a "what"). Socrates is undaunted: even if political discourse happens to be utilitarian or "realist" the same question remains: how do we know we are right? (113e). From whom did Alcibiades learn what is advantageous? Alcibiades notes that from the point of view of the assembly justice and expediency are not coeval. Socrates urges him, then, to try to persuade him of the truth of this proposition, through dialectical questions. Socrates makes Alcibiades aware of the fact that he does not possess Socrates' power to ask questions. What is the difference between knowledge of asking questions

and the delivery of a discourse? At this point Socrates *mélanges* the two to force Alcibiades to think dialectically even though Alcibiades still has not realized the difference between dialectic and rhetoric[15]. Question me the way you would question the assembly—Socrates continues—if you can persuade me, you will have persuaded them: "is there any difference between an orator speaking to the people and an orator speaking in this sort of conversation, except in so far as the former persuades them all together while the latter persuades them one by one?" (114d) Of course there is a difference, as the distinction between the techniques of the philosopher Socrates and the rhetorician Thrasymachus attest. But on this point, Socrates remains silent.

At this juncture in the dialogue Plato leaves the reader with the impression that Alcibiades is eager for an education in political science (*politike*). Is Socrates prepared to teach him statecraft? Shouldn't Alcibiades become a philosopher first? But as noted before the word *philosophy* is not even mentioned in the text. What would this knowledge of political things amount to? Is it just a matter of habituation, and thus experience that can only come to him with time? And in that case why would Alcibiades need Socrates? Perhaps we should make a brief exploration about some essential features of statesmanship with the help of Aristotle's analytical clarity, to get a sense of the art of political rule.

6. *Politike*

Statesmanship or political science (*politike episteme*) is the practical science used by statesmen (*politikos*) in the business of ruling. It has an active rather than a purely theoretical character. *Politike* attempts to balance the understanding of universal standards (the *epistemic* grasp of first principles and the hierarchy of ends) with experience shaped by the ethical *endoxa* of a given political community (*N.E.* 1180ª32-1181b12). It is also a kind of craft (*techne*) in the sense that it aims at some good by means of distinct measures (*dynamis*), as does, say, medicine, or gymnastics. Ethics and compulsion are the fields of action of statesmanship; ethics aims to define the human good, happiness (*eudaemonia*), and to bring it about (*NE* 1094a 22-24) not only at the level of the individual but also if possible, for the community at large. Human beings are political animals (*Politics* 1253a5) and thus the ends which they aim at individually presuppose a political context with its advantages and limitations. The nature of human

[15] In connection to this distinction we are reminded of the case of Polus—a seasoned rhetorician who is also unaware of dialectical reasoning—in the *Gorgias* (461b4-462a6). See also Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit.* Tras. A.V. Miller. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), Preface, sections 57-58.

beings is not fully developed, according to Aristotle, unless it is nurtured by ethical education (*NE* 1152 b1-8), which aims at self-overcoming or virtue (a *sine qua non* of happiness). Commendation however, may prove to be insufficient when dealing with the recalcitrant or vicious. Even the "virtuous" may not be so all the time. The statesman's task in such cases is to restrain public offences by means of corrective treatment (*kolazein*) which aims at rehabilitation (*N.E.* 1119a33), or, in more severe cases to punish (*timorein*) or exact a penalty through lawful compulsion. Ethics is a *praxis,* an activity substantiated by praise and blame under the guidance of prudent judgement (*phronesis*). Ethical persuasion however seems to not be sufficient to make most human beings opt for virtue most of the time, hence the need of law. Statecraft aims at "making" people better (*N.E.* 1179b-1180a*)*, if necessary, by means of regulations and coercive measures. For Aristotle the art of governing is thus an amalgam of prudence and regulative procedures, a tension, between the activity of political freedom and the craft of political authority[16].

Politike is concerned with action, hence it deals with usual truths or probabilities (*hos epi to polu*). A usual truth is a judgement that is pertinent to most of the cases it is applied to, but not to all. Ethics is concerned with this realm of activity, and not with universals of no exception, such as necessity (*ananke*). So, what is necessity? In the *Metaphysics* (V, 5) Aristotle contends that it is a category of that which an entity requires for its self-preservation. *Ananke* entails what is compulsory or contrary to motive and purpose. It implies the set of conditions without which a given good would be of no avail. The compulsory is called necessary—thus the necessary is painful. Necessity is something that would not be subject to deliberate persuasion, it is contrary to the movement that accords with purpose and reasoning. A necessity cannot be otherwise unless affected by a stronger necessary motion.

Now, ethics on the other hand is concerned with the usual or open-ended, and thus deliberation is an essential undertaking for this field of endeavour. While epistemic knowledge aims at understanding *ananke*, deliberation as the reasonable process aiming at a practical decision (*prohairesis*) results from the rational aim to attain some good. It is a desire to do something in the present moment, to act, following a rational calculation (*logismos*) or inference that has shown a course of action to be proper or required to achieve a given end (*N.E.* 1112b26; 1139a21-b5). *Prohairesis* deals with particular cases (*kath' hekaston*) that must be

[16] On this point I am indebted to W.R. Newell's essay "Superlative Virtue: The Problem of Monarchy in Aristotle's *Politics*". *Western Political Quarterly,* Vol. 40, No.1 (Mar., 1987), pp. 159-178.

judged by perception (*aisthesis*); actions are concerned with particulars, and perception is what makes us aware of these (*NE* 1109b20-3). We attain facts through perception, and prudence (*phronesis*, *NE* 1141b14-22) rationally perceives from the facts whether they are permissible or commendable, harmful or dangerous. The principles of justice (*dike*) are only usual, lacking the exactness of science (*episteme*)—hence we debate about them—for otherwise they could not be concerned with *human action* but only with necessary behaviour or determined conduct. Hence the importance of self-knowledge and knowledge of human character types which combines knowledge of the distinct, the usual, and the necessary in man. Men should appeal to their deliberative capacity, their perception and their understanding (*nous*) to see what ethical principles apply to a given practical situation. This will be second nature to the *phronetic* man, because of his experience (*empeiria*), a key aid to prudence (*NE* 1141b18). The ability of ruling others presupposes self-rule.

7. In Search of a Guide: Socrates or Pericles?

To come back to the text, at 116e we are shown that whereas Socrates keeps saying the same things on the same subjects, Alcibiades, when questioned, says first one thing, but then ends up contradicting himself. Alcibiades however, intends to be consistent. Socrates asks: "wouldn't you say that whenever someone doesn't know something his *psyche* will necessarily waver about it?" (117b2-3). We do not set to do something unless we think we know what we are doing, or else we let the expert do it. Otherwise we make mistakes and miss the mark (*hamartámontes*, 117e8-9). It is ignorance (*agnoia*) that causes truly undesired outcomes. Not-knowing (*amathia*) about the most important things like justice and the advantageous is most harmful. Is not Alcibiades wavering about these notions? And how can Alcibiades rush into politics in that state? It is true that he would not be alone in this condition for he would have most politicians for company. Perhaps one of the exceptions would be his guardian, the statesman Pericles (118c-2). Pericles has done his homework: he studied with Pythoclides and Anaxagoras, and even now, despite his old age, he consults with his music teacher, Damon. Can Pericles teach Alcibiades the art of politics? Socrates makes a distinction between understanding something and being able to teach someone what one represents. What is the difference between a craft (*techne*) and a knack (*alogon pragma*)? How is it possible that Pericles knows what he seems to know, and yet he has been incapable of teaching his sons, who have turned out simpletons (118e1-2)? Because for Socrates we know that someone understands something when he can demonstrate

that he has made someone else understand it. Now, Pericles is able to practice *politike*, but the fact that he has not been able to transmit this knowledge to his heirs would seem to indicate that he is not self-conscious about the procedures of his practice, unlike a true teacher. Pericles is also an unleisured man. Alcibiades should not be counting on learning the art of rule from him (118e4-6). Who could orient Alcibiades? Does he intend to remain in his present perplexed condition, or is he willing to practice self-cultivation (*epimeleian tina poieisthai*)?

Learning to rule others presupposes learning self-rule. If politics were only a matter of *phronesis*, then, naturally Alcibiades would have to undergo a process of apprenticeship (like most politicians do) to accumulate the experience necessary to learn to discern political phenomena by means of trial and error. And Alcibiades, given his outstanding nature, would very quickly surpass his political rivals (119b-c). This kind of consideration disappoints Socrates: he cannot admit mediocrity, that is, the willing acceptance of lived contradictions. Socrates focuses his soul-shaping strategy on Alcibiades´ *thumos:* with whom should a high-spirited man (*megalophrona*) like Alcibiades compete against? Because being better than one's inferiors is no reason for pride (119e5-6). Alcibiades should be thinking about a rivalry with the powerful leaders of other great states like Sparta, or even of empires, like Persia. This sounds like the truth (*alethe légeis*) to him.

8. Alcibiades of Arabia

Being entangled in the political rivalries and deliberative minutiae of democratic politics would distract Alcibiades from becoming a truly magnificent ruler. He should compare himself not to his fellow citizens, but to the sovereign rulers of Athens' enemy states. Local politics might not require great preparation but competition with foreign rulers, and war, can lead to lethal outcomes for the unprepared. Now Alcibiades is eager to learn and listen. We note in passing that he still thinks the Persian king and the Spartan generals are no different from any regular politician (120c2-4). But in any case, wouldn't self-cultivation help him face these rivals? Could self-cultivation actually harm him? He doesn't think so. Still, how long would this project of self-shaping take? For we also know that Socrates, who is also involved in this process of self-cultivation, seems to have no time left to deal publicly with political matters (*Apology* 23b). Can this process of self-knowledge lead Alcibiades away from his political ambitions? We can almost hear him pondering: would this self-cultivation make me like you, Socrates? Socrates appeals to Alcibiades' prejudices—

he comes from one of the most notorious families in Athens: those who are well born will turn out virtuous (*gignesthai pros aretén*, 120d9-10), only if properly educated. Young Alcibiades is amenable to shame into learning not for the desire to know, but out of pride and the love of victory.

The Persian princes—Alcibiades' true rivals—are brought up with a rigorous education; around age fourteen they are entrusted to four royal tutors (*basileus paidagogous*), selected for being the wisest, the most just, the most sound-minded, and the bravest. What does the Persian prince learn from them? Four teachers, each for a cardinal virtue. Why don't the Persians have teachers that embody all the four virtues? Would Socrates be such a teacher? In any event, from the wise man (*sophostatos*) the Persian prince learns the worship of the gods, the Magian lore of Zoroaster and also the secrets that a king should know (122-a1-3). The most just man (*dikaiótatos*) teaches him to be truthful. The sound-minded (*sophronestatos*) tutor teaches him how not to be mastered by the pleasures, so he can be free, and self-ruled. The bravest one (*andreiótatos*) teaches the Persian prince to be fearless, because fear is slavery (122a3-8). It is no different with the Spartan generals, who also undergo a thorough education, though perhaps one of the differences is that the Spartans are educated in a kind of austerity that contrasts starkly with the luxury and extravagance of the Persians.

What is the distinction between this comprehensive education and what Alcibiades' potential teacher Socrates has to offer him? And what about Alcibiades' *current* tutor Zopyrus the Thrasyan, an old man selected for him by Pericles? Pericles cannot educate Alcibiades—but is he at least able to select for him a proper teacher? (cf. Machiavelli, *Prince*, XXII). Socrates offers to teach Alcibiades out of love (122b7-8). Is Alcibiades in a condition to compete with these foreign kings? Socrates can help him, not because he himself is in a position to compete with the great kings—Socrates is not Pericles, but unlike him, he thinks he is able to improve his pupil through intelligence (*epimeteia*) and skill (*techne*). Pericles cannot teach what he practices, while Socrates can teach what he could (so he seems to claim) but chooses not to practice. But Socrates is in a similar condition than Alcibiades: the difference is that Socrates' guide or guardian is better and wiser than Pericles. What is Socrates' guide? A god, he claims (124c6). Alcibiades tells him to please be serious: an appeal to god seems to be a way just to end reasoned discussion. The pedagogical intent of Socrates here is to use Alcibiades' sense of consistency for the purposes of elevating his unlimited self-love towards the ultimate universal object of longing[17].

[17] "It always *is* and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes, nor wanes ... it is not

Can Alcibiades move one more step upwards in "Diotima's ladder"? Can Socrates initiate Alcibiades into the mysteries of love? (*Symposium* 210a1-5). Socrates is taking the risk of expanding Alcibiades' horizon to encompass the Whole, shaping his desire for immortality (to attain the good always), by shifting his unlimited self-love to unlimited love of the good, by means of true virtue (cf. *Symposium* 212a-b). Alcibiades however, refuses to believe in dualism (124d1). Socrates tries to change strategy. Young Alcibiades could become interested in political philosophy, but political theology or political theory are not of his taste. Alcibiades is a skeptic. But are there not degrees of skepticism? And if so under what standard do we reckon them? Now, Socrates contends that every human being needs to cultivate or shape himself, but this is the case especially for him and for Alcibiades. This is most important for the purposes of what noble men (*oi andres oi agathoi*) do, the taking care of vitally crucial things such as leading and ruling the citizens of Athens (124e). Socrates draws Alcibiades' attention from spirited competition with foreign rulers (i.e. war), to a *failed* hint at an initiation into the love of (a) god or the good, to end back again with local Athenian politics. Because Alcibiades is keen on the notion that the highest activity he can perform is ruling[18]. For the purposes of this matter (and as a precondition for successful foreign policy?), Alcibiades needs to learn the craft of political rule. From Alcibiades' perspective, if politics were only a contest for honours and recognition then perhaps he would not need an intensive intellectual preparation, but since honours are not the cause, but the possible result of sound political practice, he will have to learn *politike*, the skill and the knowledge (*episteme*) of how to rule over men (125d7-125e6). Does Alcibiades know the aim of statecraft? In the medical craft when health is present and disease absent, we can know that the practitioner has been successful. In the political craft when some type of civic friendship is present, and hatred and insurrection are absent from the city, then the practitioner can claim to be doing the right thing.

When each person does his own work right mutual friendship ensues (127b10-11). Political friendship or civic justice seems to be related to minding one's own business. But is minding one's own business equivalent

anywhere in another thing, as in an animal, or in earth, or in heaven, or in anything else, but itself by itself, with itself, it is always in one form; and all the other beautiful things share in that, in such a way that when those others come to be or pass away, this does not become the least bit smaller or greater, nor suffer any change" (Plato *Symposium* 211a2-b6).

[18] Plato, *Laws* 713e4-6. See Mark Blitz "Plato's *Alcibiades I*" *Interpretation* 22, No. 3 (Spring 1995), pp. 339-358. For a complementary discussion pertaining Theages, a less gifted student than Alcibiades and his relation with Socrates consider Thomas L. Pangle "Socrates and the Problem of Political Science Education". *Political Theory*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Feb., 1985), pp. 112-137, and Catherine Zuckert *Plato´s Philosophers*, pp. 355-56.

to performing one's own art? Or is it to cultivate oneself? (128a1). We cultivate or shape our body through the art (*techne*) of gymnastics. Is our self composed fully by our tactile body? How difficult is it to know oneself (*gnomai heauton*)? Alcibiades responds: "sometimes I think, Socrates, that anyone can do it, but then sometimes I think it's extremely difficult" (129a5-6). Does Alcibiades know himself? Does Socrates? Does Alcibiades know that he must strive for self-knowledge, given that the unexamined life is not worth living? Socrates claims that if they know themselves they will be better able to know how to form and enhance themselves. At this point in the dialogue Socrates extricates the soul from the body for the heuristic purpose of directing Alcibiades' attention to the formation and shaping of his *psyche*. The seeming dualism at this juncture aims at clearly delineating the sources of the self (130a8-11), in order to structure a physio-psychological hierarchy, so as try to crystallise in the young Alcibiades a center of striving distinct from the anxieties of the ego. Self-knowledge here would be a kind of soul-care as soul-craft for the purposes of clear-sighted and sound-minded action (131b4). It is still an open question whether Alcibiades, even at his point of his life, is truly convinced of the necessity of this *askesis*. For didn't Socrates also induce him to seek to rule universally? And if he is in a position to do so, and thus aim at attaining immortal political glory, why shouldn't he thoroughly focus on such promethean goal? What if the active nature of Alcibiades is unsuited for the pedagogical and contemplative life of never-ending self-examination?

Socrates tells Alcibiades that he is his true lover (*erastes,* 131e9; *Republic* 490a-b). He fears that Alcibiades' self-love will drive him to seek the love of the *demos*, that is, to aim at being acclaimed by them. This is not in itself bad, but it is essential that Alcibiades prepare himself before hand, Socratic education being the *pharmakon* (132b2) or antidote against the danger of populism and misguided rule. Alcibiades should strive to know and account for his true self first, that is, his *psyche*, and the highest part within it, which reflects the divine (*theoi,* 133c4), for "someone who looked at it and grasped everything divine—vision (*thean*) and intelligence (*phronein*)—would have the best grasp of himself as well" (133c4-6). But for this process introspection is not enough: the way to self-knowledge entails a mirroring—looking into the soul of another, into the most divine element thereof, expressed in that person's way of life. Socrates claims that self-knowledge is the same as being sound-minded (*sophrosynen einai*). Alcibiades senses Socrates is mixing certain possible truths with moralism. And again: why virtue? Courage and intelligence are

clearly necessary to rule, but does someone with the political ambitions of Alcibiades need justice and *sophrosyne* beyond appearing to have them for public convenience?

10. Plato´s *Laws*: An Excursus in the Quest for Civic Virtue

To further explore the psycho-political conundrum of Alcibiades' quest for self-knowledge as a prerequisite for statecraft, it might be useful to approach the discussion on civic virtue depicted in Plato's *Laws*[19]. In book I the Cretan Kleinias contends that since an "endless war exists against all cities" (625e), civic education must consist in training citizens for courage, given that "nothing is really beneficial, neither possessions nor customs, unless one triumphs in war . . . for all the good things of the defeated belong to the victors" (626b). The Athenian Stranger addresses Kleinias' argument by saying that indeed conflict is a fact of the nature of things, but this is true not only for nations, but also for individuals among, and *within* themselves. Given that the "harshest of all wars . . . is civil war" (629d), the greatest virtue, as Theognis asserts, is "trustworthiness in the midst of dangers" which is the result of "justice and moderation and prudence, existing in a man along with courage . . . for a man would never become trustworthy and sound in the midst of civil wars if he didn't have the whole of virtue" (630b). Thus, in the account of the *Laws* the cardinal virtues conform a union in multiplicity as the quality of trustworthiness irrespective of positive law.

The virtue of courage (*Andreia)* is the foundation of action. It is an unnatural virtue—built upon a person's natural spiritedness—first instilled through habituation, whereby the sub-rational nature of the young child's *psyche* is conditioned by means of praise and blame in order to forgo immediate fears, for the purposes of a long-term goal (791c). Courage however, in order to be noble and avoid rashness, has to be complemented (630b): character education also requires a sense of inner measure *(sophrosyne),* which allows the person to balance his own appetites, his impulses, on the basis of self-knowledge. Because of its passive qualities *Sophrosyne* in itself tends to be inactive and too limiting (696d4-e2) and therefore has to be complemented by courage. Education in gymnastics, by means of singing, dancing, chanting is key in fostering *andreia* and *sophrosyne*, generating a sense of inner accord and harmony, induced from the outside in the child's sub-rational part of the soul.

[19] For this section of the essay I have used *The Laws of Plato*. Translated, with Notes and an Interpretative Essay by Thomas L. Pangle. (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1988).

The virtues pertinent to the sub-rational part of the soul require further cultivation toward civic purposes in order to be beneficial for the public good. Once the youth reaches the age of reason, courage is further developed by means of praise and blame, and fear of the laws. S*ophrosyne* is an inner reflection of justice: its attributes of self-control, harmony, moderation and self-knowledge, which are pertinent to a person's appetites and his personal benefit, can be expanded to take into consideration the good of others. *Sophrosyne* harmonizes the soul, protecting it from inner war; justice (giving to each their due) attempts to befriend individuals within a political community, protecting it from civil and international conflict (629 c). Self-friendship, and not only a friend-enemy distinction *à la* Carl Schmitt[20], is the basis of self-identity and civic friendship (consider *Republic* 423e-24a).

Given that the discussion of the virtues in the *Laws* is being phrased against the backdrop of war (international, civic, inner) the highest form of virtue, instead of wisdom (*Republic* 427e), becomes prudence. *Phronesis* is a political virtue. It comprises a sense of practical reason, an insight of existential possibilities for acting in a given situation. It is a quality of the rational part of the *psyche* that presupposes a correct ordering of the appetites (it needs courage to assert itself, and soundmindedness to know how to keep measure), in order to make possible good judgment and insight for the right moment of action (*kairos)*.

The multiplicity of civic virtues unified under a single virtue makes sense understood in terms of an educational process that has to address first *andreia* and *sophrosyne* by pedagogical means at early age, so as to create, induce, foster the right habits, which then become the basis upon which the rational parts of virtue—justice and prudence—are instilled and developed in men and women who already have a cultivated disposition toward the noble, the beneficial, and the beautiful. The unity of the civic virtues is paralleled with the three aims of legislation expressed in the *Laws*: freedom, friendship, reason (701d). Only citizens who are harmonious within themselves are able to befriend others, and it is this aim of civic friendship which allows the community not only to avoid the greatest evil—civil war—but to be willing and able to affirm its freedoms from ever-recurring disruptions domestically and internationally. In this platonic account of practical constitutional politics, reason (*phronesis*) is the prudence that guides legislators to foster and institute the laws that make freedom and friendship possible.

[20] Carl Schmitt *The Concept of the Political* . Trans. and Introduction George Schwab, with a Foreword by Tracy B. Strong. (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1996).

11. A Future Statesman: Power or Virtue?

If Alcibiades does not know himself he cannot know what belongs to himself: he cannot know his due. If he cannot know what belongs to himself, he also couldn't know what belongs to the city (133e8-9). In that condition, can Alcibiades be a true statesman? Wouldn't Alcibiades be bound to make mistakes (*hamartesétai*) both private and public? Socrates appeals to Alcibiades' soft spot: his fear of failure. Alcibiades has to be soundminded to be a good steerer of the ship of state (134b-c), and for this it is essential that he impart virtue to the citizens. And the best way to do so—by example (in addition consider also Machiavelli *Prince* chs. IX and XII). At this point Socrates pushes the argument too far telling Alcibiades that what he needs to become a statesman is not really political power nor authority, but justice and self-control. But Alcibiades senses the distinct quality of power (134c9-19). Now, is power sufficient for correct rule even if intelligence (*nous*) is lacking (134e)? Even the most powerful ship is bound to sink if its captain lacks insight and the skill of navigation. Likewise, according to Socrates, a ruler "by necessity" (*ananke*) needs virtue (*arete*) to guide the ship of state. So the power Alcibiades needs is *arete*. But before he has a better grasp of virtue, he should learn to rule by being ruled by somebody else. Is Socrates willing to become Alcibiades' teacher? Alcibiades claims that from now on, he will be his constant companion (*paidagogein*). Socrates believes him, but he is hesitant: what he distrusts is not Alcibiades' nature, but the city's power, its luring song, which, he foresees, might get the better of them both.

12. Conclusion

The purpose of this essay has been to discuss Socratic philosophical *paideia* in the Platonic dialogue *Alcibiades I*. The aim was to depict and analyze a Platonic illustration whereby young Socrates performs the role of political educator. The dialogue between Socrates and Alcibiades shows a conversation at leisure (*schoole*) dedicated to initiate a young man into a philosophical practice of self-examination and self-shaping. Initial perplexity is awakened by Socratic questioning which, in principle, aims at bringing about a quest for self-knowledge, a process involving both potential discovery and transformation. As we saw in the paper however, Socrates' initial encounter with Alcibiades was entangled with many reservations the young aristocratic Athenian had with regards to dedicating himself to the examined, contemplative life. The dialogue ends with a willingness on the part of Alcibiades to learn the art of self-rule from Socrates for the instrumental intent of becoming a statesman. Even

young Socrates was conscientious of the fact that the different characters of his interlocutors ought to inform the way he approaches them (*Phaedrus* 248d-c1), and therefore, his conversation with young Alcibiades aimed to appeal to his spirited nature and self-love, suggesting a further maturation towards the life of the love of wisdom.

One of the key themes we explored was the dynamic between Socratic psycho-political education and his conviction that ruling should be the manifestation of statecraft. In this dialogue, Socrates approaches young Alcibiades with the intention of shaping his politics in the direction of civic virtue (*arete*) through character formation and clear-sighted understanding[21]. Self-knowledge is inextricably linked with cognizance of other natural human types. Furthermore, the theme of *eros* is constantly alluded to in Socrates' philosophical rhetoric as a means to tap into his interlocutor's source of striving. Philosophical *paideia* is a love story: the pull is a noble quest. Now, what are the motives preventing the love of wisdom from taking root in a spirited young man? Should a potential ruler become a philosopher first? And if not the lover of wisdom, who should rule? The *Alcibiades I* is a Platonic dialogue trying to depict the first steps in Socratic education, its beautiful prospects as well as its human limitations. The relation between Socrates and Alcibiades remains the psycho-political root for the study of Platonic political philosophy.

[21] Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*, pp. 2-3.