MR. SOCRATES GOES TO WASHINGTON: THE CARE OF THE SELF AND THE CULTIVATION OF CITIZENSHIP IN LATE-MODERNITY

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Preface and Acknowledgements

I believe that I'm one of a few Athenians to take up the true political craft and practice the true politics. ~Socrates[1]

Socrates believed that his philosophical project, of interrogating the elites of Athens about their beliefs, therefore forcing them to question themselves and admit the limits and inadequacies of their knowledge, was the "true political craft." Socrates attempted to shift the focus of political dialogue towards the soul in a way that was deeply unsettling, eventually leading to his execution. Though late-modern democracies differ from Socrates's Athens in almost every respect, I believe that citizens can still benefit from Socratic teaching. I believe that Socrates's call for Athenians to look to and care for their souls can be useful for citizens trying to vivify democratic institutions and act justly.

This project will make three main claims. First, late-modern democracies present citizens with a unique set of challenges that require rethinking the conception of citizenship as a static category that simply classifies individuals. Instead, I will contend that citizenship must be understood as a process, in which citizens must continually work upon themselves to vivify democratic institutions and act democratically in spheres outside of politics as generally understood. Second, citizens should cultivate a particular *ethos* of what Stephen White calls "presumptive generosity," which "is intended as an initial response designed to restrain the resentment and hostility we otherwise tend to bring into public engagement."[2] This *ethos* challenges one's own identity claims, and is focused on the presencing of difference and the proliferation of identity claims. Third, this *ethos* requires that citizens "care" for themselves. This care requires a type of self-reflection that problematizes the subject's conception of self,

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[1] Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl, in *Plato: Complete Works,* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianpolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 517b.

[2] Stephen White, *The Ethos of a Late-Modern Citizen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 96.

exposing that her identity is constituted by difference and is more ambiguous and problematic than she had previously believed. In turn, this self-reflection requires a "mirror;" to gain this self-knowledge citizens must engage in dialogues with others, and themselves, which works to presence the contingency of these identity claims.[3] I contend that these engagements with difference are critical to cultivate an *ethos* of presumptive generosity. By problematizing their own strong identity claims and recognizing the difference and contingency inherent in them, citizens can become more attuned to difference in others, resisting the urge to turn difference into something that must be converted or destroyed.

Chapter 1 will describe Stephen White's conception of "presumptive generosity" in greater detail through an analysis of his recent book, *The Ethos of a Late-Modern Citizen*. This *ethos* is valuable for two critical reasons. First, it shifts the terrain of politics away from institutions and structures to the practices that citizens must undertake to live and act democratically. Second, the *ethos* of presumptive generosity itself is valuable in that it restrains our impulse to turn difference into a threat. By adopting an *ethos* of a host or pilgrim, White argues that citizens can work to create a more tolerant and pluralistic society. However, I will argue that White insufficiently articulates how one is to cultivate such an *ethos*. Despite his gestures at the end of his book, he fails to provide a method for citizens to develop presumptive generosity.

Chapter 2 attempts to articulate such a method by turning to Plato's dialogue, the *Alcibiades*. Here Socrates attempts to convince the young Alcibiades that he must care for his soul before entering politics. This involves a type of reflective self-knowledge in which the subject uses a mirror to see herself "in itself." The reflection in the mirror shows the subject who

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[3] I will use two variations of the word 'other(s)' throughout this paper. I use others both to mean people who I am not and people perceived as belonging to a different identity group. When I use Others I am implying that this person's differences are viewed as a threat or danger to my own being.

she is, not what she has; it shows the subject her own soul. I contend that this practice of caring for oneself can be extricated from its Platonic context, by arguing that a certain type of friendship can be used as a mirror rather than relying on Plato's mirror of God. I will provide a reading of the *Alcibiades* that focuses on Socratic dialogue as a method of caring for oneself as it problematizes ones own deeply held beliefs.

In Chapter 3, I will return to late-modern democracy and argue that this method of self-cultivation can inculcate an *ethos* of presumptive generosity. By reflecting back upon oneself and challenging one's own identity claims, caring for the self helps citizens to realize the contingency of identity, allowing them to be more generous when they encounter difference. I will utilize Romand Coles's theory of receptivity and tabling as a model for how citizens should practice self-cultivation. Coles argues that citizens should engage in dialogue with others in order to shift their own predispositions, but should approach these dialogues intending to listen, rather than persuade. He further argues that instead of engaging in these dialogues at a public deliberative table, citizens should physically move the sites of these dialogues out of their comfort zones to where others live. I will argue that this model of dialogue can help citizens cultivate an *ethos* that is attuned to difference.

Chapter 1: White and Citizenship—An *Ethos* of Presumptive Generosity

In *The Ethos of a Late-Modern Citizen*, Stephen White argues that late-modern

democracies face a set of challenges that require citizens to rethink both their role in democratic

politics and the nature of citizenship itself. White identifies five sites that shape the

contemporary theoretical landscape, which require citizens to respond in accordance to what

White views as critical criteria for a reasonable response: "moral attentiveness and self-

restraint."[4] The first site regards forming just political and social institutions. The second

involves reflection upon and expression of the sources or foundations of our moral intuitions and

political judgments. The third site requires reasonable responses to competing claims for identity

recognition. The fourth entails the need to expand moral imaginations to respond to human

rights and global justice claims beyond both geopolitical and moral boundaries. The final site

involves speculating about the future of democratic governance in response to the shifting

dynamics of democracy.[5] In each of these five sites, White argues that cultivating an *ethos* of

presumptive generosity, or "attentiveness and a gratitude toward the presencing of being," can

help reorient predispositions towards others in a way that helps to restrain impulses to transform

other people into dangerous Others, to see them as people rather than threats to be defeated.

For White, this *ethos* has two interrelated facets. The first facet requires rethinking the

ontological sources of human beings. White argues that we should understand being as an

"agonistic becoming or presencing of life."[6] Shifting our understanding and relationship to being

in this way further requires that we approach ontological questions with openness in a way that

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[4] White, *Ethos,* 8.
[5] Ibid., 8.
[6] Ibid., 48.

respects this presencing rather than forcing it into a mold of an idealized human being.[7] Building

from this first facet, the second facet is the requirement of restraint. Drawing on the work of

William Connolly, White argues that despite the constant interplay between identity and

difference, subjects still face the temptation to transform other people's differences into

something threatening and dangerous. As Connolly argues, "unfettered by other influences the

politics of moral identity all too readily transcendetalizes violence against the other."[8] In each of

the five sites, citizens will be confronted by difference and must resist the temptation to

demonize this difference. An *ethos* of presumptive generosity shifts the predispositions of

citizens when they encounter difference, but should not be understood merely as tolerance.

Presumptive generosity is not merely a 'letting be' of other human beings but as an active

affirmation of difference.

　　　　This chapter will address White's argument for a late-modern *ethos* of presumptive

generosity. I will make two arguments. First, the value of White's project is the articulation of

an *ethos* that attempts to shift the focus of political theory and citizenship from questions of

institutional structure to what White calls "living these structures." By arguing that these

challenges to democracy cannot be solved through juridical models, this *ethos* reorients political

discussion. Instead of looking for legislative solutions to craft institutions or expand moral

imagination, White transfers the burden towards citizens and their responses to these challenges.

This move also broadens our traditional notions of oppression. No longer should citizens be

solely concerned with oppression at the hands of political institutions, but further forms of

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[7] One can also see parallels to his earlier work in *Sustaining Affirmation*. See Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). He argues for a weak ontological sketch of the self which offers "figurations of human being in terms of certain existential realities, most notably language, mortality or finitude, natality, and the articulation of 'sources of the self,'" that "for weak ontology, human being is the negotiation of these existential realities (9)".

[8] William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xviii.

oppression stemming from economic inequality, social norms, and other forms of stigmatization. My second argument is that White's account of this *ethos* assumes that citizens are already predisposed towards presumptive generosity; citizens who are not so predisposed may not see the value in cultivating such an *ethos* and even those who do may not be able to overcome cultural and historical pressures to transform other people into threatening Others. My purpose in this chapter is not to undermine White's project but to contribute to this discussion, as the need for a method to cultivate this *ethos* underscores the value that I feel White's project has.

This chapter will have three main sections. In the first section I will analyze how White constructs his *ethos* of presumptive generosity as an attempt to respond to the challenges facing late-modern democracies. In doing so, this section will address how White attempts to ground his *ethos* of presumptive generosity in the shared burden of mortality. The second section will focus on the value of such an *ethos*. I will focus not on how this *ethos* addresses the five sites that White identifies, but on the broader move of shifting the terms of political theory from institutional questions to the roles and responsibilities of citizens. In the final section I will articulate my criticism of White, arguing that he fails to clearly articulate how one is to cultivate such an *ethos*. I will attempt to address this problem in chapters two and three.

I: A Late-Modern *Ethos*

White's construction of an *ethos* of presumptive generosity involves two steps. First, he argues that the challenges facing late-modern democracies require reconsidering the idea of the liberal modern subject in favor of a more agonistic subject. This subject must recognize the play of identity\difference inherent in her own being instead of viewing her identity as settled, thus disrupting her preconceived notions. Second, White attempts to articulate a new grounding for certain liberal values, most notably human dignity. White argues that these values can no longer

be grounded on "strong" ontological sources such as God or Nature. Instead, he attempts to

ground these values in the shared subjection to human finitude that all humans face. This section

will analyze these two arguments.

> White presents the common modern conception of the liberal subject as:
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> *He* is conceived as *disengaged* from his social background and oriented toward *mastery* of the world that confronts him; nevertheless, he can *discover,* by light of *reason*, *universally applicable principles of justice*, grounded in some *foundationalist account* of God, nature, progress, or human communication that can become the basis of a constructive political *consensus* with other individuals.[9]

While White finds several aspects of this account of subjectivity problematic, he focuses on two

aspects: the idea of a disengaged self who can uncover absolute principles and the premise that

there are strong foundational accounts that "animate" these selves.[10] Building on his previous

work, White attempts to construct a "weak" ontological account of subjectivity. He describes

what he calls a sticker subject in contrast to a "Teflon" subject that "is envisioned as power itself

through natural and social obstacles; it dreams ultimately of frictionless motion."[11] Instead of

this self-constituting subject, White envisions human beings that are already bound up in certain

ways to certain existential conditions that they cannot truly escape or fully articulate.[12] In

contrast to a strong ontological source, these conditions, or weak ontological sources, do not

fully determine subjects, nor can they be an absolute ground to any moral or political system. In

contrast, these sources are "misconstrued when grasped either as something with a truth that

reveals itself to us in an unmediated way or as something that is simply a matter of radical

choice."[13]

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[9] White, *Ethos*, 33-34. White's emphasis indicates what he and other theorists find problematic about this conception of the subject.
[10] Ibid., 35.
[11] White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 4.
[12] Ibid., 9.
[13] Ibid.

White attempts to construe these weak ontological sources as coming from an agonistic account of being, but attempts to do so without reverting to Carl Schmitt's account of agonism.[14] While White admires Chantal Mouffe's appropriation of Schmitt's ontology, he fears that this pure agonism cannot provide a strong enough justification for liberal values that he requires. Subjects may adhere to such values when it is beneficial, but "when the strategic circumstances shift, and these ideals possibly become obstacles to these interests, I see no basis for imagining these subjects doing anything other than discarding liberal, pluralist niceties."[15] Though White finds Schmittian ontology valuable for displacing the idea of the modern liberal subject, he wants to avoid the implication that this agonism necessitates a politics of pure confrontation.

To contrast Schmitt, White turns to Friedrich Nietzsche and William Connolly. Drawing on Nietzsche's early essay "Homer's Contest," White argues for a distinction between agonism and antagonism. According to Nietzsche, Eris, the goddess of conflict, is actually two goddesses who compete. One promotes conflict in the form of war, while the other takes the form of competition.[16] Nietzsche argues that part of the *ethos* of Greek nobility was the ability to restrain agonism from devolving into antagonism.[17] This articulation of agnoism fits within White's articulation of a weak ontology. While the subject is constituted by agonism, she is not committed to antagonism, but can work to restrain such impulse and act graciously towards others. White grants that this restraint is in part produced by the Greek *ethos*; magnanimity is praised while hubris is demonized. While White argues that his *ethos* of presumptive generosity

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[14] White describes Schmitt's ontological account of the subject as one imbedded purely in relationships of friendship and opposition. "The work of the Schmittian subject is, first and foremost, that of struggling agasint the enemy who threatens its collective identity." White, *Ethos*, 37.

[15] Ibid., 39.

[16] Ibid., 40.

[17] Ibid., 41. See Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homer's Contest," in *On the Genealogy of Morality,* ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). "But for the ancients, the aim of agonistic education was the well-being of the whole, of state society…every Athenian was to develop himself, through the contest, to the degree to which this self was of most to use to Athens and would cause least damage" (178-179).

must go further than the Greek inclination towards generosity, his appropriation of Nietzschean agonism is compatible with his ultimate goal of presumptive generositity.

White then turns to Connolly's conception of identity\difference. For Connolly identity and difference are in continual play; an identity can only be defined in relationship to its differences and simultaneously is imbued with its own contradictions and ambiguities. "Identity is thus a slippery, insecure experience, dependent on its ability to define difference and vulnerable to the tendency of entities it would so define to counter, resist, overturn, or subvert definitions applied to them."[18] Connolly's account of identity, based on difference and agonism, does not necessitate the type of pure conflict to which Schmitt dooms politics. Instead, "the kinds and degrees of conflict in a given society are dependent on how pliant or resistant citizens are to a whole set of 'temptations' or 'pressures' to fundamentalize the play of identity and difference."[19] Therefore, a subject can cultivate a certain *ethos* that allows her to appreciate and allow difference to presence itself, rather than crystallizing difference as a threat to her own identity.[20]

This conception of agonism allows White to move beyond the disengaged self of liberal theory, but does provide a strong enough ground for human dignity that is a prerequisite for his *ethos* of presumptive generosity. This grounding is crucial to address the problem of distance, whether geographical, cultural, economic, or political, and therefore requires a sense of connectedness that can move subjects towards presumptive generosity rather than towards a fundamentalist response. Whereas earlier accounts of subjectivity may have employed God,

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[18] William Connolly, *Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1991), 64.

[19] White, *Ethos*, 41. See also Connolly, *Ethos of Pluralization*, xii. "This correlation between pluralization and fundamentalization is not accidental, for each conditions the other: each drive to pluralization is countered by a fundamentalism that claims to be authorized by a god or by nature."

[20] Connolly calls this notion "Critical Responsiveness" and argues that it is a way to engage the play of identity and difference in a way that resists the temptation to absolutize difference as fundamentalism. Connolly, *Ethos of Pluralization*, xvi-xvii

Nature, or some other "strong" foundational account, White finds this problematic. He requires some foundation or grounding for human dignity that is coherent with his account of agonistic subjects.

White attempts to ground this connectedness on the interaction between human capaciousness and human finitude. White defines capaciousness as "the meaning-making of a meaning-seeking creature."[21] For White, human beings continually try to formulate and express a meaning for themselves. However, rather than a disengaged self trying to master the world, White's ontology casts human beings as always bound up in the imperfect articulation of ontological sources.[22] Ceding to the theistic critique, White admits that capaciousness alone is not enough to ground human dignity.[23] "Without this sort of underlying affirmation, our respect for the other's dignity or worth is deeply susceptible to disappointment, frustration and resentment, dispositions that can easily slide towards feelings of hostility."[24] Unwilling to revert to theism or risk the liberal values that he cherishes, White articulates the shared burden of mortality as a ground for the connectedness between human beings. He describes mortality as "a burden under which we continually struggle, and for which we seek a mode of comprehension that embeds the awareness of that struggle in our everyday life as a countervailing force to the momentum we draw from our sense of ourselves as capacious agents."[25] White's conception of mortality as a burden isn't simply the awareness that we are mortal beings, but that our finitude acts as a restraining force upon human capaciousness. While human beings attempt to seek and

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[21] White, *Ethos*, 51.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 55. White cites Waldron's articulation of Locke, in which the values enshrined by liberalism are inherently reliant on some account of God. It is only through Reason that we recognize that we are all God's creatures and therefore demand a certain amount of dignity and respect. Any secular attempt to articulate these values without an ontological source will always end in a failed justification. See also Jeremy Waldron, *God, Locke and Equality: Christian Foundations in Locke's Political Thought* (Cambrdige: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 12-14, 44-45, 81-82)
[24] Ibid., 57.
[25] Ibid., 66.

create meaning for their lives, their finitude always cuts these projects short. Every attempt to fully articulate ourselves remains incomplete. White argues that once individuals have abandoned strong ontological sources for human being, they remain struggling without any transcendent guarantees of completeness or finality.[26]

Drawing on Connolly, White argues that this shared burden of mortality not only reigns in untamed capaciousness, but also creates an inherent connection between human beings. He argues that "my particular identity as an agent emerges from multilayered processes of isolating certain qualities from the abundance of this becoming."[27] In this account, human beings are not isolated disengaged individuals, but construct their identity from the interplay of identity\difference. This conception of finitude allows White to construct weak ties of community between individuals. Subjects must recognize their common fate of finitude and their inability to master the world. White's *ethos* hopes to achieve a stronger tie of community that other secular accounts of human dignity.[28] Subjects are always dependent on others in their attempts to articulate their own being; engaging the differences that subjects find in others can aid in their own self articulation by exposing them to contingencies in identity they had not previously encountered or imagined.

From this move, White's *ethos* begins to take shape. He argues that this *ethos* is precisely needed because of his account of human being. Because of the anxiety of human finitude, there is always a temptation to "script that which is other to me into roles that portray it as alien, threatening, dangerous, or evil."[29] White argues that citizens, instead of succumbing to

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[26] Ibid., 67. Rorty makes a similar argument: "human life is the working out of a sophisticated idiosyncratic fantasy, and as a reminder that no such working out gets completed before death interrupts. It cannot get completed because there is nothing to complete, there is only a web of relations to be rewoven, a web which time lengthens every day." Richard Rorty, *Contingency Irony Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 42-43.
[27] White, *Ethos*, 67.
[28] Ibid., 74.
[29] Ibid., 68.

a fear of finitude and transforming difference a threat, should cultivate an *ethos* that can restrain

these temptations, precisely at the times that these pressures are the strongest. White concedes

that this bond may be weak and ephemeral, but argues that these brief spaces of connectedness

can help shift predispositions towards the other. As an example, he points to the final scene of

the *Illiad* in which Priam requests that Hector's body be returned to Troy. White believes that

"what is stunning about the meeting is the fact that vivified consciousness of mortality allowed

any bond, however slender, to emerge."[30] He argues that it is necessary to adopt such an *ethos* of

a generous host that can temper our impulse to otherize, at least momentarily, to create space for

solidarity.

II: Shifting the Terms of Politics

In this section, I address what is valuable about White's project: it shifts the terms of

political theory away from questions of institutional form towards how citizens are to act in order

to vivify these institutions and the type of *ethos* they must adopt to engage in this project.

Therefore, I will eschew a lengthy discussion of whether or not White's *ethos* is able to

successfully handle the challenges that face late-modern democracy. Instead I will focus on how

his responses to these challenges work to change predispositions rather than present political

solutions. For White these challenges are sites for citizens to act democratically rather than for

institutional fixes.

White begins this reorientation by using J.S. Mill as a way to understand the goals of his

project. He argues that while Mill supports the creation of liberal institutions to protect

individuals from the arbitrary use of state power, he is more concerned with micropolitical

actions that can be just, if not more, oppressive. Mill "is also concerned with a broader *ethos* of

citizenship that will help motivate individuals to go beyond the minimum obligation to obey just

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[30] Ibid., 76.

laws."[31] Mill's purpose is not merely criminalize racist actions, but to cultivate citizens who resist racism in the public sphere. Mill's focus is an attempt to protect individuals from an unlegislated tyranny of the majority where certain modes of being are excluded because they haven't been considered by the majority. Instead of relying on purely juridical protections for individuals, Mill wants to cultivate citizens that will act justly even in cases where the law does not require it.

White accepts the basic premise of Mill's argument, but wants to push it further. Where Mill is attempting to enshrine a baseline cautionary principle of toleration, White is attempting to cultivate a more active *ethos* that goes beyond simply letting others be. Presumptive generosity "requires from us an at least temporarily more unsettling engagement with the other…this *ethos* expresses an ontological awareness of the way in which political engagement is entangled with the dynamics of identity formation and consolidation."[32] White is drawing two distinctions. First, toleration is content at simply letting others be different. Presumptive generosity forces subjects to actively engage the other in order to unsettle their notions of identity. A presumptively generous subject cannot live excluded from difference and merely be tolerant, but must continually confront difference. Second, each has a different conception of identity. Where toleration views identity as static principles and then attempts to craft tempered responses to these prefixed sets, presumptive generosity challenges this view, arguing instead that identity is not pregiven but is mutually constituted by difference.[33]

This further move required by presumptive generosity can be illustrated by White's critique of a Rawlsian response to the first site of crafting just institutions. Like White, Rawls has requirements of reasonableness and restraint when crafting just institutions. Rawls wants to

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[31] Ibid., 17.
[32] Ibid., 105.
[33] Ibid., 105-106.

achieve a "standard of fairness" within a pluralist society, in which all members would respect fellow citizens despite differences within this society.[34] White's concern is that this standard of fairness might not be strong enough to incur restraint when confronted with radical difference, as Rawls limits toleration to those that "can be plausibly be seen as within the bounds of reasonable pluralism."[35] Again, White seems to be operating on a different plane than Rawls. Rawls's solutions are presupposed in his project, as he is attempting provide a structural argument for human dignity and justice without initially grounding these values.[36] Instead, White is willing to subject traditional justifications for these values to questioning, favoring an articulation of a more robust *ethos*. His purpose is to shift the theoretical terrain. "Such an *ethos* inquires not only about the justness of basic structures but also about how we go about 'living…the structures'…we must be concerned with everyday dispositions and motivations as we are with fundamental structures."[37] White is not satisfied by erecting just institutions, but requires the cultivation of a citizenry that can vivify such institutions.

White's shift can also be seen in his response to the fifth site concerning the prospects for democracy. He identifies this as a problem with three main facets: increasing economic inequality, shifts in the nature of the democratic populace, and the loss of faith in the *demos* to animate political life.[38] These problems cannot be solved through institutional means, as the institutions themselves are under threat; this site requires some work on the part of citizens to vivify and rejuvenate them. Additionally, White opposes another popular move by theorists,

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[34] Ibid., 15.
[35] Ibid. Rawls argues that we must "assess the strength of people's claims, not only against our claims, but against one another, or on our common practices and institutions, all this giving rise to difficulties in our making sound reasonable judgments." John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 56.
[36] White, *Ethos*, 16.
[37] Ibid., 16-17
[38] Ibid., 77.

embracing the idea of a "democracy to come," or a "fugitive democracy."[39] He fears that the

bleakness of these theories can limit our political imagination. White finds fault with these

theories both for their vague abstractions as well as their seemingly apolitical nature, fearing that

these theories will eschew actions by citizens, in favor for some "democracy to come." White

contrasts his *ethos* of presumptive generosity with both of these solutions. For him, both fail to

engage in the necessary ontological questioning that he views as requisite in late-modernity.

Where Rawls assumes the validity of liberal values of dignity and fairness, Wolin and Derrida

make sweeping claims about the bleakness of the prospects for democracy. White argues that

this is because of certain ontological assumptions that their political projects are grounded in.[40]

Instead White's *ethos* forces subjects to be more attentive to their ontological prefigurations in

order to foster the presencing of difference in others.

In contrast to these pessimistic portraits of democracy that eschew the responsibility for

political activity to some nebulous fugitive entity, White casts presumptive generosity as a

valuable way for citizens to participate and enhance democratic structures. Presumptive

generosity is an active predisposition that responds to the "emergence of new identities as well as

the way in which they tend to provoke discomfort, resentment, and hostility from established

constituencies."[41] This *ethos* shifts the focus of political activity to the responsibility of

democratic citizens for their own responses to the shifting features of democracy. Where Rawls,

Wolin, and Derrida argue for absolute solution for political questions, White follows Connolly

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[39] White targets Sheldon Wolin and Jacques Derrida. Wolin argues for a "fugitive democracy," "a term meant to emphasize evasive and episodic qualities that keep opposition mobile enough to escape temporarily from the crushing oppression of the state and capitalism" (White, *Ethos,* 84). Derrida argues that democracy is haunted by its failures to live up to its radical potential. "This haunting holds open the possibility of 'another concept of the political' and animates the idea of a 'democracy to come'" (85).

[40] White argues that Derrida adopts the notion of fugidity because of his "ontology of difference, his sense that the world is a continual play of presence and absence" (Ibid., 86).

[41] Ibid., 87.

towards what he calls a "rhizomatic" theory.[42] He finds this model valuable, because instead of embracing a single path for politics stemming from a universal conception of value or identity, it favors fluctuating and dynamic bases for democracy. His *ethos* opens up ontological questioning that aims at both disrupting totalizing political theories as well as vivifying democratic institutions.

Here, Bonnie Honig's distinction between *virtù* and virtue theories can contribute to situating White's *ethos* within the terms of political theory. She argues that while "virtue" theorists argue that institutional form can provide solutions for political problems, "*virtù* theorists argue that no such fit is possible, that every politics has its remainders, that resistances are engendered by every settlement, even by those that are relatively enabling or empowering."[43] White's *ethos* can be placed on the side of a *virtù* theory as it refuses to accept that political questions have stable or final answers. White admits that his *ethos* is "an initial disposition that may be legitimately deemphasized as a new claim or movement gains ground in political space."[44] Presumptive generosity does not intend to predict the correct course of behavior when confronted with difference, but merely hopes to restrain urges to demonize others. This predisposition does not prevent groups that are antithetical to democracy to be opposed or excluded from democratic debate. By denying the finality of politics, White's *ethos* opens up political space for contestation and the actual practicing of politics, rather than foreclosing and displacing political activity.[45]

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[42] White and Connolly borrows this term from Gilles Deleuze. "In contrast with the more traditional tree metaphor, according to which a central, common trunk (of values and identity) nourishes and supports all the many branches (groups), rhizomes are types of plants that have no trunk but rather throw out roots and shoots in multiple directions (88). See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Mineapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3-25

[43] Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1993), 3.

[44] White, *Ethos*, 88.

[45] Honig, *Political Theory*, 206.

In addition to addressing the five sites of practical wisdom that he identifies, I find that the true value of his theory is that it redefines the terrain of political theory in two significant ways. First, by focusing on an *ethos* White places the burdens of democracy on its citizens rather than squarely on its institutions. Second, this *ethos* requires rethinking the very notions of citizenship. This process will inherently cause disruptions, but it also forces citizens to be political. Instead of viewing politics as something that occurs "out there," either at the voting booth, in Washington D.C., or state capitals, every citizen is responsible for politics. Focusing on stopping these forms of oppression that fill in the "gaps" of juridical protections helps citizens to vivify democratic life.

III: Questions of Method

While I find White's *ethos* a beneficial resource for citizens in late-modernity, I believe that he does not provide an adequate method for citizens to cultivate such an *ethos*. His focus is articulating the necessity and value of presumptive generosity. Because of this focus, his project presupposes subjects that have already cultivated presumptive generosity, or at least that that they see the value of cultivating such an *ethos*. He leaves the question of how to achieve such an *ethos*, especially for those who are most susceptible to transforming difference into Otherness, ambiguous. My intent in this section is not to belittle White's project, nor to suggest that it is utopian, but to contribute to this debate by working to refine his project.

While White does gesture towards a method, he does not believe that it can be a policy solution. Instead, using immigration as an example, he argues that presumptive generosity, "would encourage more, and more varied, face-to-face engagements of American citizens with immigrants, in order to perhaps better grasp on an everyday level what animates as well as

threatens these people's lives."[46] White suggests an actual physical confrontation with the other to force citizens to question their own notions of identity. This would, in theory, expose privileged citizens who hold strong prejudices to the conditions of those that they would otherwise view as a dangerous Other. Exposing citizens to radical difference can help to challenge their own deep seated prejudices.

However, this method still puts the cart before the horse. Only those who already are sympathetic to White's *ethos* would even engage in the project of relocation engagement. There is a danger that many who hold strong prejudices are content to leave the other "over there." They might simply embrace the toleration of "letting the other be," while using it to veil their prejudices. Furthermore, these citizens are precisely the ones that require the cultivation of this *ethos* to challenge their prejudices and engage in dialogues with different beings. There is also a dangerous risk of this strategy achieving the opposite result. Direct physical engagement without already adopting the *ethos* of presumptive generosity can turn sites of cooperation into sites of contestation and antagonism. Connolly's account of fundamentalism is important here. He argues that fundamentalism results in refusing to question the "sources" of oneself and turning competing sources into something evil that must be defeated.[47] He also warns that "all of us have strains of fundamentalism flowing through us. And no component of cultural life automatically escapes colonization by fundamentalist impulses."[48] Without shifting one's predispositions, face-to-face engagement with the other could leave these prejudices unchallenged or dangerously entrench fundamentalist urges to demonize them.

It should be noted that this criticism is not requesting a policy prescription or definite route that citizens should take to cultivate this *ethos*. As argued, White's aversion toward such

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[46] White, *Ethos*, 110.
[47] Connolly, *Ethos of Pluralization*, 105.
[48] Ibid., 106.

strategies is partly why I find his project so valuable. Instead my criticism is that White does not provide enough tools for citizens to cultivate such an *ethos*. My concern is that the magnitude of the temptation to transform the other into an enemy could make it difficult for citizens to cultivate an *ethos* of presumptive generosity without a clear method. As long as it remains at the level of abstraction, citizens may not see the importance of such an *ethos*, instead viewing it as a purely theoretical project. Citizens who see the value in such a project will lack the practical tools to cultivate these predispositions. For White's *ethos* to be more broadly realized, I believe that it requires the articulation of certain techniques and practices that can be used to help citizens cultivate an *ethos* of presumptive generosity. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I will turn to Plato's *Alcibiades* and its mandate of caring for oneself to describe the method of friendship and dialogue as a potential technique of a late-modern *ethos*.

Chapter 2: The Care of the Self in Plato's *Alcibiades*—Reflection and Self Knowledge

I find Stephen White's account of a late-modern *ethos* of presumptive generosity, based on forbearance, restraint, and attunement, persuasive as a way to reframe citizenship as a response to the challenges that democracies now face. I believe that focusing on a particular *ethos*, or spirit, of citizenship that can help citizens to rethink their assumptions towards others, including racial and sexual prejudices as well as moral stigmas associated with certain behaviors, can lead them to act in less oppressive and dominating ways. However, while I find White's account of this *ethos* intriguing, he under-specifies or assumes the cultivation of this *ethos*/citizen; he too easily links citizens to this *ethos* without demonstrating such a link. That is, while White illustrates the advantages offered by this *ethos*, he leaves his reader unsure of the processes through which it can be made choate. Despite his gestures towards such a method at the end of the book, arguing for "moving our more privileged selves to the places where the less privileged have their actual tables—in clubs, homes, or churches," it remains unclear whether or not this move doesn't already require the *ethos* he is describing.[49] The act of relocation seems to already imply that citizens have changed their predispositions towards the other by moving out of the comfort of their homes, both literally and symbolically, and placed themselves in direct dialogue with the other.

To address the problem of cultivating such an *ethos*, I turn towards ancient philosophy, a region neglected by White despite his reliance on the idea of an *ethos*.[50] Specifically I turn to Plato's *Alcibiades* and its focus on caring for the self as a necessary prerequisite for virtuous and just political action. This turn towards Plato may seem problematic in attempting to articulate a

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[49] White, *Ethos*, 110.

[50] Despite a brief discussion of the etymology of the word, White confines his discussion of ethos to more contemporary thinkers. While this may be in the interest of avoiding the metaphysical baggage of classical philosophy, it seems paradoxical to ignore the original meaning and intent of such a central concept. Ibid., 1-3.

political strategy for late-modernity, because of his explicit linkage of politics and metaphysical speculation.[51] However, the purpose of this paper is not to employ a Platonic political theory to address late-modernity, but rather to extract and translate his concept of the care of the self in the *Alcibiades* in order to augment the White's late-modern *ethos*.[52] Thus, my project aims to revise and adapt, not relocate, Platonic political theory.

What can the *Alcibiades* contribute to this discussion? I contend that the *Alcibiades'*s thesis of self-care is politically valuable for two reasons. First, I argue that it can help to rethink political action; political actors are not immediately able to participate in politics virtuously, but require some work upon themselves. In order to lead Athens, not only against its rivals, but to inculcate a sense of justice in her citizenry, Alcibiades must first cultivate justice within himself. In a late modern liberal democracy, the broadening of citizenship has made political activity, and therefore the obligations of caring for the self, universal. Second, Socrates argues that in order to care for himself, Alcibiades must gain self-knowledge. This must be understood in two senses. First, Alcibiades must correctly locate the self in order to care for it; as Socrates will argue, the

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[51] This is especially problematic in terms of White's attempt to situate this ethos within what he calls a "weak ontology," in which certain ontological figures, "as well as some basic conceptualizations of how those figures interrelate in terms of language, finitude, natality, and the articulation of our deepest 'sources of the self'" (4). This is an attempt to move beyond foundationalist ontologies without denying that certain ontological commitments have particular significance. See also See White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, 4-5.

[52] One may also object to my use of the *Alcibiades* based on various charges of inauthenticity. However, questions of authenticity are beyond the scope of this paper and cannot be easily, or even definitively, resolved. For my purposes I will treat the dialogue as part of the Platonic corpus for three reasons: first, the burden of proof should be on those proving its inauthenticity; second, it has a long history of being included in the Platonic corpus and has been vouched for by modern scholars such as Annas and Klosko; and third, if the argument in this paper is seen as valid then the dialogue itself will have been shown to have value regardless of its authorship. For detailed discussions of the authenticity of the dialogue see: David M. Johnson, "A Commentary on Plato's *Alcibiades*," (PhD. Diss., University of North Carolina, 1996), Nicholas Denyer, Introduction to *Plato: Alcibiades*, ed. Nicholas Denyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 14-26, Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, "Alcibiades 1," in *Schleiermacher's Introductions to Plato's Dialogues*, trans. William Dobson (New York, NY: Arno Press), 328-336, R. S. Bluck, "The Origin of the Greater Alcibiades," *The Classical Quarterly* 3 (Jan.-Apr., 1953): 46-52, Pamela Clark, "The Greater Alcibiades," *The Classical Quarterly* 5 (Jul.-Oct., 1955): 231-240, and Charles M. Young, "Plato and Computer Dating," in *Plato: Critical Assessments*, vol. I, *General Issues of Interpretation*, ed. Nicholas D. Smith (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), 29-49, and Gerard R. Ledger, *Re-Counting Plato: A Computer Analysis of Plato's Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

self is not one's possessions or one's body, but one's soul. Alcibiades must care for his soul. Second, and more importantly, self-knowledge requires habits of critical reflexivity, in which the subject turns back towards herself not only once, but as a process of continual transformation, an *ethos*. Cultivating one's self is itself a critical form of self-knowledge, in which the subject subjects herself to scrutiny and questioning. This critical reflexivity is what I find valuable for our discussions of late-modernity, as it destabilizes stable notions of identity. By subjecting the self to intense scrutiny, the subject is able to recognize the contingencies inherent in her being, allowing her to cultivate the *ethos* of presumptive generosity.

However, this critical reflexivity must be further unpacked and treated delicately. In order to achieve this level of self-knowledge, Socrates argues that Alcibiades must look at the soul through a mirror, and suggests that God is the purest and clearest mirror. Julia Annas and David Johnson interpret this passage by arguing that in order to gain knowledge of oneself, one must gain knowledge of God, or the nature of reality. While this reading is both internally and externally consistent, situating the *Alcibiades* within Plato's middle dialogues, it myopically focuses on one passage, the mirror of God. This focus ignores the ways throughout the dialogue that Socrates attempts to help Alcibiades care for himself. I believe that a coherent reading of self-knowledge can be achieved both without relying on this passage and avoiding the metaphysical baggage of Annas's and Johnson's readings. I argue that self-knowledge does not require a perfect mirror to cause subjects to care for themselves; an imperfect mirror will still provide an image of the self to reflect upon. As such, the subject can use a multitude of mediums to engage in this reflection. I will argue that friendship is a critical mirror that can be utilized in a late-modern context. Engaging friends in a dialogue allows one to truly see oneself. However, this requires a true friendship; the friends must both be concerned in cultivating

themselves. By engaging the self through this critical friendship, the subject is forced to

question her preconceived notions of identity, allowing for a restrained attentiveness to

difference.

This paper will consist in four main sections. The first will offer a close reading of

Plato's *Alcibiades,* with special emphasis placed on three areas: the care of the self as a necessity

for virtuous political action, Plato's concept of the self, and the relationship between self-care

and self-knowledge. This section will conclude by introducing the mirror analogy. The second

will examine the metaphysical readings of the mirror analogy offered by Annas and Johnson.

The third will argue that these readings do not exhaust the possibilities for interpreting this

dialogue, and will provide my alternative reading based on the reflexivity of the self achieved

through friendship, rather than gaining knowledge of God. The final section will conclude this

chapter by both articulating the value of the care of the self for late-modern, and articulating

what such care would look like in such a context.

I: The Care of the Self in Plato's *Alcibiades*

In the opening of the dialogue, Socrates confronts Alcibiades days before he plans to

present himself to the Assembly.[53] He begins by first praising Alcibiades for his beauty, his

family's prestige, and his wealth.[54] Socrates further appeals to Alcibiades's political ambitions,

to have "your [Alcibiades's] reputation and your influence to saturate all mankind."[55] This

invocation is an ironic ploy by Socrates.   Socrates wants Alcibiades to care for himself, not his

glory and power. He is using Alcibiades's own ambition to force him to care for himself and

engage in a project of self-mastery. When asked how he plans to advise the Athenians, or even

upon what he shall advise them, Alcibiades fails to provide Socrates a satisfactory answer.

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[53] Plato, *Alcibiades*, trans. D.S. Hutchinson, in *Plato: Complete Works,* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianoplis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997),105b.
[54] Ibid., 104a-c.
[55] Ibid., 105c.

Socrates asks Alcibiades in what subjects has he greater knowledge than the Athenian assembly, and then argues that Alcibiades's education failed to cover the business that concerned the Assembly.[56] After lengthy dialogue, Alcibiades agrees that knowledge of justice is required for advising the Athenians.[57]

The dialogue has already made several important points. First, there is a special knowledge or skill that is necessary for political activity. Alcibiades must learn justice before he can practice politics virtuously and effectively. Alcibiades must have mastery of his own passions in order to use his political power virtuously and justly. This means that politics inherently requires some work by political actors; no one is a readymade political actor. Second, this opening passage is an indictment of Athenian pedagogy. Despite Alcibiades's wealth and prestige, he still lacks necessary political knowledge.[58] Socrates extends this criticism later in the dialogue to the entirety of Athens's political system, arguing that Alcibiades is "not alone in this sad state—you've got most of our city's politicians for company."[59] From these two reasons alone, a justification for the care of the self can be found. Because politics requires knowledge of justice, and because the Athenian pedagogical system fails to impart such knowledge, it requires work on the part of the subject to gain such knowledge. Furthermore, as Pericles states, all citizens must be concerned and take part in politics, and "we are unique in considering the

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[56] Ibid., 106d-109c.

[57] Ibid., 109d. Socrates convinces Alcibiades that in order to direct the Athenians to a 'better' course of action, there must be a substantive qualitative difference between the two actions. Alcibiades himself characterizes better as more just and worse as less just. Justice here becomes the principle political virtue.

[58] See also, Michel Foucault *The Hermeneutics of the Subject,* trans. Graham Burchell (New York, NY: Picador, 2005), 44. Foucault argues that this failure of pedagogy should be understood in two ways. The first is politically, as Athenian education is compared unfavorably to the virtuous education of Sparta and Persia. The second he terms "amorously" as "the love of boys in Athens cannot fulfill the task of instruction that would be able to justify it and give it a foundation." Because men pursue boys in their youth but fail to continue their mentorship when they reach maturity, they fail to impart necessary skills such as political knowledge.

[59] Plato, *Alcibiades*, 118b-c.

man who take no part in these to be not apolitical but useless."[60] Contemporary politics, with the universalization of suffrage, again takes this form, as all citizens are political actors.

Socrates is also making another important point in the opening of the dialogue. Socrates states that he "was the first man to fall in love with you, son of Clinias, and now that the others have stopped pursuing you I suppose you're wondering why I'm the only one who hasn't given up."[61] Prefiguring later gestures in the dialogue, Socrates is shifting the focus towards Alcibiades's soul. While his other suitors have left him now that he has grown and aged, Socrates remains attracted to Alcibiades. Socrates is in love with what Socrates is, not what he has. Furthermore, Socrates also is describing the type of relationship that Alcibiades needs in order to care for himself, and gain knowledge of justice. "I hope to exert great influence over you by showing you that I'm worth the world to you and that nobody is capable of providing you with the influence you crave…except me."[62] Alcibiades needs more than just an erotic relationship, but a relationship that is focused on improving him. Socrates believes that only through his friendship can Alcibiades gain knowledge of justice.

Alcibiades continues the dialogue attempting to argue that he does in fact have knowledge of justice. However, Alcibiades is again unable to provide a coherent account of his knowledge of justice, causing Socrates to conclude that this is because he has neither learned it from a teacher nor discovered it himself, and therefore has no knowledge of justice.[63] Alcibiades counters, allowing Plato to make another critique of Athenian politics, by offering a false dichotomy, arguing that "the Athenians and the other Greeks rarely discuss which course is more

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[60] Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. By Steve Lattimore, (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing Company, 1998), 93.
[61] Ibid., 103a.
[62] Ibid., 105e.
[63] Ibid., 112d.

just or unjust….they skip over it and ask which one would be advantageous to do."[64] However, by demonstrating that those who do admirable things gain advantages and that just people conduct themselves admirably, Socrates argues that the just is advantageous.[65] After Alcibiades admits to Socrates that he has never seen his opinion waver so much, Socrates concludes that Alcibiades is suffering from twofold ignorance.[66] Socrates chastises Alcibiades arguing "it's obvious from what we've said that not only are you ignorant about the most important things, but you also think you know what you don't know."[67] This twofold ignorance indicates that Alcibiades's lack of political knowledge is much more pervasive than initially known; Alcibiades not only lacks knowledge of justice, but also lacks knowledge of himself. Here the dialogue's focus shifts. In order to gain knowledge justice, and with it a sense of self-mastery, one must know oneself; to order the soul and subdue the passions, one must know oneself.

Self-knowledge is intrinsically linked to the notion of care. First, it is the foremost requirement for caring for the self. As Socrates states, "I'm afraid we often think were cultivating ourselves when we're not."[68] In order to properly care for himself, Alcibiades must correctly identify the self. Additionally, Socrates is not focused on defining Alcibiades's particular self, but what the self is in itself.[69] Socrates begins this investigation by first differentiating things that belong to the self and the self itself, between things that the self does and things the self is. "When you're cultivating what belongs to you, you're not cultivating yourself."[70] While this point may seem simple and unnecessary, Plato's point is political.

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[64] Ibid., 113d.
[65] Ibid., 116b-116d. This is a very simplistic and condensed form of this argument. Plato takes up this argument in greater detail in the *Republic*. Here all that has been proven is that justice is prudent, but not that justice is good in itself.
[66] Ibid., 116e.
[67] Ibid., 118b.
[68] Ibid., 128a.
[69] Ibid., 129b. The "self in itself" comes from a translation of the reflexive *auto to auto*. See N. 20.
[70] Ibid., 128d.

Caring for the self doesn't involve gathering riches or glory, but is a focus purely of the self on the self.[71] As Socrates states, one wouldn't care for the soul in the same way that one would care for one's shoes or one's body.[72] However, in each case, one requires the help of a master: a cobbler for shoes, a doctor for the body, and a friend for the soul.

Socrates continues the dialogue by drawing another obvious distinction: between a craftsman and his tools.[73] He extends this analogy to the question of the self. Just as a lyre player is distinct from the lyre, Socrates argues that that which uses the body is also distinct from the body.[74] Socrates is arguing that the self must be distinct from the body. The self is that which uses the body, which Socrates identifies as the soul.[75] However, the soul that Socrates is proposing is neither an immaterial substance nor a transcendent being. The soul is that which rules the body, and is therefore the agent of embodied action rather than a subsistent being. This is in sharp contrast to the immortal soul of the *Phaedo* or the tripartite soul of the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*.[76] Socrates is pointing to something that is distinct from the body, but not to some substance. He is arguing that the soul should be conceived as an embodied agent of action. Gregory Vlastos also distinguishes two different conceptions of the soul in Plato's philosophy, writing that "For Socrates$_E$ our soul is our self…It is the 'I' of psychological function and moral

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[71] While acting virtuously certainly may lead to the acquisition of wealth and fame, they are byproducts and not the focus of caring for the self.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 129c.

[74] Ibid., 129e.

[75] Ibid., 130c.

[76] In the *Phaedo* Plato argues that the soul participates in the form of life, and therefore refuses to admit death and is therefore indestructible. Plato, *Phaedo* trans. By G.M.A. Grube in *Plato: Complete Works,* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 106b. In the *Phaedrus* Plato describes the soul as a chariot with two horses of opposite nature. The Charioteer must therefore negotiate the conflicting forces within the soul in order to live a virtuous life. Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. By A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, in *Plato: Complete Works,* ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997),246a-b. In the *Republic* Plato divides the Soul into three sections: the rational, the spirted and the appetitive, which correspond to classes in the city. Justice consists in ordering these parts of the soul. Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1968), 440e-441a, 443d-e.

imputation—the 'I' in 'I feel, I think, I know, I choose, I act.'"[77] The self that Alcibiades must care for is the ethical subject of action, not a metaphysical substance.

This problematization of the self has its own political implications. Alcibiades must gain knowledge of himself in order to care for himself, but this knowledge is not knowledge of a substance. Instead this knowledge is of the ethical subject of action. Alcibiades must gain knowledge of his strengths and weaknesses, his virtues and vices, his passions and his relishes. All of these play into this conception of the soul. Furthermore all of these are subject to change. In caring for himself, Alcibiades must also create a stable character that is able to subdue both existing and new passions. Alcibiades must cultivate the rational and restraining drives to dominate his drives for pleasure and domination. By forcing the subject to reflect back on herself, self-knowledge itself is beneficial for ethical actions. Only when Alcibiades knows his passions and weaknesses can he be on guard against them; if he has no knowledge of his temptations then he will be unable to resist them.

Having now determined what the self as the object of care is, Socrates begins to argue what caring for the self entails. He begins by defining care as a skill that makes something better.[78] Caring for the self is a practice that will improve the self. Therefore, caring for the self must be differentiated from practices that both focus on one's possessions or one's body. Gaining wealth and prestige is not caring for the self, as it concerns one's positions. Healthy practices similarly care for the body and not the self. Instead caring for the self must consist in

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[77] Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 55. By Socrates_E Vlastos means the Socrates of the early Socratic dialogues. Vlastos also writes, "Socrates_M has a complex, tripartite model of the soul. Socrates_E knows nothing of this model, which would have unsettled his conception of moral virtue" (48).

[78] Plato, *Alcibiades*, 128b. By defining this as a skill that improves the self, Socrates is making an implicit claim of expert knowledge. While this may seem problematic, I will argue later in the paper that caring for the self requires a unique type of friendship in which the friends work to improve the other. In order to do so, one must approach expert friends to gain certain knowledge. One should consult an economist in order to gain knowledge of economics, just as one should consult a physician to help care for one's body.

practices that improve the self. At this point Alcibiades begins to grow frustrated with Socrates, demanding "try to explain how exactly we should cultivate ourselves."[79] Socrates responds that by correctly identifying the self they have already begun moving in this direction, and that "the next step is that we have to cultivate our soul and look to that."[80]

At this point the dialogue shifts to a provoking and difficult to interpret passage. Socrates frustrates both Alcibiades and the reader by not clearly defining what he means when he says that Alcibiades must cultivate himself. Instead, he begins a cryptic analogy comparing self-knowledge, and as I will argue caring for the self, to a mirror. Gesturing towards the famous inscription at Delphi, "Know Thyself," Socrates argues that the best way to know oneself is to use something "that allows us to see both it and ourselves when we look at it."[81] In order to truly gain self-knowledge one requires a mirror; Alcibiades needs something to "reflect" himself against in order to truly know and care for himself. Socrates argues that humans can look into the eye of another person and are able to see both the other and the reflection of themselves.[82] Socrates draws the analogy to the soul. Just as humans can look into another's eye to see themselves, "if the soul, Alcibiades, is to know itself, it must look a soul, and especially at that region in which what makes a soul good, wisdom, occurs."[83] However, Socrates leaves this analogy ambiguous. The next section examines a reading of this analogy through the lens of a

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[79] Ibid., 132b.

[80] Ibid., 132c. A potential problem with this theory emerges here. Socrates also states that they should "let others take care of our bodies and our property." Ibid. This phrase could be read as a tacit endorsement of elitism or slavery. The philosophers and elite young men should care for themselves, while inferior classes and slaves should take care of the everyday necessities. However, the argument that the Athenians endorsed slavery does not harm my argument. As has been stated, my purpose is not to adopt Platonic practices, but to reformulate certain aspects of the care of the self to help cultivate an ethos of presumptive generosity. As such, the care of the self is a practice intended for all individuals. My argument is to extend Socrates' demand that we care for ourselves not to reinstitute the practice of slavery.

[81] Ibid., 132d.

[82] Ibid., 133b.

[83] Ibid.

Platonic, or Neo-Platonic, lens. In order to gain the truest knowledge of himself Alcibiades must look to God, as only such knowledge of God will Alcibiades know the true nature of himself.

II: The Mirror of God—A Metaphysical Reading of Self-Knowledge

Julia Annas provides a reading of self-knowledge that begins similarly to the reading I've offered above. She argues that self-knowledge is not a type of psychological reflection, but is "knowing myself in the sense of knowing my place in society, knowing who I am and where I stand in relation to others."[84] For Annas, self-knowledge is necessary for *sōphrosunē*, or self control; knowledge of one's relationships with others is critical for ethical conduct. She argues that this self-knowledge is a prerequisite for justice, especially in a Platonic sense of both psychic and political harmony. One must know one's place in the social order to perform one's function well.[85] In this conception of self-knowledge, correctly locating oneself within a social order, Annas allows space for the reading of care as an active process of questioning one's inherited social norms, practices, and ideas. To know the self is to know how the self is shaped through power, knowledge, language, and one's own relationships. This knowledge is crucial to my reading of care, as knowledge of the power relationships in which the subject finds herself in allows the subject to critique and problematize these relationships in.

However, Annas pushes self-knowledge further, basing this interpretation on the following passage:

> Socrates: Just as mirrors are clearer, purer, and brighter than the reflecting surface of the eye, isn't God both purer and brighter than the best part of our soul?
> Alcibiades: I would certainly think so, Socrates.

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[84] Julia Annas, "Self-Knowledge in Early Plato," in *Platonic Investigations*, ed. Dominic J. O'Meara (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press), 111-138., 121.
[85] Ibid. 123. For Plato's conception of Justice see Plato, *Republic,* 433a-b.

> Socrates: So the way that we can best see and know ourselves is to use the finest
> mirror available and look at God and, on the human level, at the virtue of the
> soul?[86]

This passage suggests that to truly know and care for ourselves individuals must compare their souls to that of God or reality as a whole.[87] Annas writes, "He[Plato] takes self-knowledge to involve not just social facts, but at the deepest level, facts about objective reality as a whole…self-knowledge is knowledge of how one stands among others, and thus involve a true conception of the world in which one lives."[88] David Johnson makes a similar argument. According to Johnson, Socrates argues that using God as a mirror for the soul allows the rational part of the soul to avoid the distractions of the passions and thus gain a true knowledge of itself.[89] This reading equates the rational part of the soul with the divine, suggesting that Plato may be pointing towards the divided soul of the middle dialogues. A further implication of this reading is that the nature of the "true self" shifts from the agent behind action to a metaphysical entity. Johnson argues that the true self is God: "This intellect…what Alcibiades was finally to see, to love, and to identify with was the pure unadulterated mind that is God."[90] To know oneself is to know God.

This reading of the mirror analogy has deep roots in the Neo-Platonic tradition. The Neo-Platonic philosopher Proclus's commentary of the *Alcibiades* depicts care for the self as a

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[86] Plato, *Alcibiades*, 133c8-17. Most scholars believe that this passage was added by a later Neo-Platonic or Christian author. Plato, *Alcibiades*, n.30. John Burnet also comments that this passage is not found in either the *Beta* or the *Tau* manuscripts, but is only found in the Eusebius manuscript. John Burnett, *Platonis Opera* Vol. II, (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Pres, 1901), 349.
[87] I recognize that Plato I clearly not referring to the Christian God in this passage. While I use the capitalized form as it is used in the dialogue, I am not restricting its use. God could be the nature of reality, the universe as a whole, or some other truth. What is important is that the mirror be perceived as something transcendent.
[88] Annas, "Self-Knowledge in Early Plato," 129.
[89] David Johnson, "God as the True Self: Plato's *Alcibiades*," *Ancient Philosophy* 19 (1999): 1-19, 15. One can see the echoes of Platonic asceticism. By orientating one's vision towards God, the body is again subordinated.
[90] Ibid., 17.

method to transcend the physical world.[91] He argues that self-knowledge is the critical initial

step to such transcendence, as "the beginnings of perfection depend on the consideration of

ourselves."[92] Similar to other Neo-Platonists, Proclus argues that the body corrupts the soul and

"obstruct[s] the contemplation of the realities."[93] Furthermore, Proclus appeals to the Platonic

concept of *anamnesis*. He argues that the soul's incarnation is the root cause of Alcibiades's

twofold ignorance. Following this reading, Alcibiades's failure to recognize his lack of political

knowledge is not caused by a failure of pedagogy, but is a result of the nature of human souls.

"Although souls descend to birth filled essentially with knowledge, yet as a result of birth, they

contract forgetfulness… for this reason they acquire twofold ignorance, under the impression

that through such notions they possess knowledge, but really in a state of ignorance on account

of their forgetfulness."[94] Caring for the self allows Alcibiades to reclaim the perfect knowledge

that his soul possessed before birth.[95]

　　　　While not committing themselves to such a Neo-Platonic theory of *anamnesis*, Annas and

Johnson still provide readings that are intended to square the dialogue with mature Platonic

metaphysics. In both cases caring for the self involves gaining knowledge of a transcendent

reality, whether it is God or nature as a whole. To know oneself is to know where one fits in the

order of nature, to know one's place in the universe. This reading of the mirror analogy is

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[91] In Platonic and Neoplatonic thought, physical sensible world has less being because of its transience, while the insensible world of the forms has more being. As Plato argues in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*, philosophy is a preparation for death, in which the soul is separated from the body, and freed from the corruptions of the physical world.

[92] Proclus, *Proclus: Alcibiades, A Translation and Commentary*, trans. William O'Neill (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 4.

[93] Ibid., 148.

[94] Ibid., 125-126.

[95] There are several problems with Proclus's reading, but as his reading is not the focus of my paper I will not go into detail. Most importantly, Proclus's reading relies too much on the metaphysical doctrines of the middle dialogues, such as the tripartite eternal soul and Plato's anamnetic theory of knowledge. As shown by my reading in the previous section, these claims cannot be made from an analysis of the *Alcibiades* itself. Furthermore, this reading limits the political utility of the dialogue by casting caring for the self as a speculative rather than political activity. Finally, Proclus's argument no longer provides any utility in a late modern context. Modernity has rejected many of these metaphysical assumptions, at least explicitly, especially a soul that cyclically enters human bodies.

valuable, as it shifts the focus away from an idea of the self-knowledge from a type of psychological introspection, to knowing what the self truly is. The dialogue supports this move as Socrates states, "we should first consider what 'itself' is, in itself. But in fact, we've only been considering what an individual self is, instead of what 'itself' is."[96] Socrates believes that in order to care for himself, Alcibiades must know the nature of the self, not merely his own individuality. This involves a sort of metaphysical speculation in order to discover this true nature of the self. However, I find this reading inadequate, while internally consistent. Annas and Johnson both focus almost exclusively on the mirror of God passage. This allows them to articulate a reading of the *Alcibiades* that is consistent with the metaphysical moves of Plato's middle dialogues. While this move may be justified based on the text of the dialogue, it is not the only way to read this passage.

This reading of self-knowledge creates a reading of caring for the self as transformation through contemplation. Alcibiades must compare his own soul to the divine perfection of God. This act of comparison can be seen as a transformative experience. Once Alcibiades gains true knowledge of himself, he can gain knowledge of the true form of justice. This knowledge allows him, returning from the transcendent reality of God to the *polis* to lead and govern effectively. The knowledge of perfect justice allows Alcibiades to impart justice to his subjects, as in the Platonic conception only those who have virtue can teach it to others. This reading clearly situates the *Alcibiades* within the thought of the middle dialogues. There is some justification for their reading elsewhere in the dialogue. In the "Royal *Logos*," Socrates points to the four virtues of the soul that are present in the *Republic*: wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice.[97] Furthermore, Socrates also describes a part of the soul as "that region in it resembles

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[96] Plato, *Alcibiades*, 130d.
[97] Plato, *Alcibiades,* 121e.

the divine, and someone who looked at that and grasped everything divine...would have the best

grasp of himself as well."[98] In these passages Plato seems to be gesturing towards his more

complex metaphysics that he develops in the middle period.

However, I believe that there are several aspects of the *Alcibiades* that cannot be

subsumed into the philosophy of the middle dialogues, opening up space for an alternative

reading.[99] The first is the stark contrast between the soul of the *Alcibiades* and the soul of the

middle dialogues. As argued earlier, this soul is simply the 'I' or subject behind an action rather

than a substance. This positions the dialogue more closely with the early Socratic dialogues.

Furthermore, Socrates never appeals to the doctrine of the Forms in the *Alcibiades*. While

Socrates does ask Alcibiades what justice is and what the self is, he is asking what Alcibiades's

own thoughts are to convince him to care for himself. Socrates never appeals to transcendent

entities to solve these problems, instead focusing on Alcibiades's own account.[100] Finally, the

political theory offered in the *Alcibiades* differs from the political theory of the middle dialogues.

In these, Plato's need for epistemological certainty extends to the ethical questions of

Socrates.[101] Justice is no longer an act of knowing the self and the self's relation to her world,

but instead requires knowledge of the Form of justice. Similarly, while Plato maintains a focus

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[98] Ibid., 133c.

[99] This raises immediate questions concerning placement of the dialogue. Denyer argues that if the dialogue is placed within the standard corpus it would not fit, suggesting a reworking of the chronology of the dialogues. Denyer, Introduction to *Plato; Alcibiades*, 24. Johnson, analyzing both Friedlander and Vlasto's chronology, argues that it should be viewed as a transitionary dialogue between the Socratic and the Middle. Johnson, "A Commentary on Plato's *Alcibiades*," 59,63. I believe that these questions are best left to classicists and will treat the dialogue as a late Socratic dialogue.

[100] Most scholars believe that the Forms were Plato's attempt to provide an epistemologically certain answer to the Socratic definitional question amid the Heraclitean theory of the constant flux of the sensible world. Therefore Plato had to appeal to a non-sensible Form in order to maintain objectivity. See T. H. Irwin, "The Theory of the Forms," in *Plato 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 143-170., 148-150; Malcolm Schofield, "Plato in his Time and Place," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 36-62., 52; C. C. W. Taylor, "Plato's Epistemology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 165-190., 174-176; and Verity Harte, "Plato's Metaphysics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, ed. Gail Fine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 191-216.

[101] George Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 56-57.

on the self in his later philosophy, the focus shifts to the self transcending the sensible world. [102]

Politically, the middle and late dialogues shift towards an institutional focus. While still

focusing on caring for the self, Plato shifts the subject of care from the self to the *polis*—

focusing on pedagogy and structure in the *Republic* and laws and institutions in the *Laws*.[103]

These shifts can be viewed as a result of Plato's view that Socratic politics were a failure. There

is a continual risk in democracies of individuals failing to care for themselves. Without every

citizen having a Socrates to mentor them, forcing them to focus on and care for themselves, how

can the citizenry effectively practice politics? Therefore, instead of using philosophy to prepare

for political activity, Plato argues that philosophers should direct political activity.[104]

III: The Mirror of Friends—A Non-Metaphysical Reading of Self-Knowledge

The readings offered by both Annas and Johnson are both internally consistent and

correspond the mature Plato in the middle dialogues. However, I believe that there is space for

an alternative reading for two reasons. The first, as argued above, is that there are several

aspects of the dialogue that cannot easily be incorporated into Plato's mature system, in fact

resembling his earlier Socratic dialogues. The second is that the passage itself leaves such space.

As Socrates states, "the way that we can best see and know ourselves is to use the finest mirror

available and look at God and, on the human level, at the virtue of the soul?"[105] The most

perfect way to gain self-knowledge would be to look towards God. However, if this is not

possible, it is necessary to look to the human soul. While this may be an imperfect knowledge, it

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[102] Paul Friedlander, *Plato 1: An Introduction*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (New York, NY: Pantheon books, 1958), 64.
[103] Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*, 176. Annas argues against this interpretation, arguing that the *Republic* should be treated as an ethical rather than political text. Under this interpretation the self-care survives in Plato, but takes on a substantially different from than in the *Alcibiades*. Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithica NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 26-27
[104] The death of Socrates had a profound effect on Plato; he viewed the death of his teacher as an inherent flaw in his political theory. MalcolmSchofield, "Plato in his Time and Place," 41. For the view of Platonic political theory as a critique of Socrates see Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory*, 56-57.
[105] Plato, *Alcibiades*, 133c.

still allows Alcibiades to know and care for himself. Alcibiades must look to another soul in order to see himself. Socrates plays on the double meaning of pupil, arguing "when a man looks into an eye his face appears in it, like in a mirror. We call this the 'pupil', for it's a sort of miniature of the man."[106] Looking into another's eye, one sees a reflection of herself as a pupil; in our friends we see reflections of ourselves. In order to gain a true knowledge of oneself, one must engage in honest dialogue with true friends.

A certain type of friendship is required, however, to serve as a mirror for the self. Socrates began making this point at the outset of the dialogue in his criticism of the suitors that only pursued Alcibiades for his beauty, prestige, and wealth.[107] These "friends" were only interested in Alcibiades for what he has— his wealth, fame, and body— not what Alcibiades is; they cannot possibly show a reflection of Alcibiades back to himself. This is because their friendship with Alcibiades is purely that of self-interest, not through a love of Alcibiades. They will not criticize and force Alcibiades to reflect back on himself, but will flatter him in order to partake in his possessions. This prefigures Aristotle's concept of perfect friendship, which he describes as "that between good men who are alike in excellence or virtue. For these friends wish alike for one another's good because they are good men."[108] Socrates truly loves Alcibiades and wants to improve him, through harsh criticism if necessary. Only in this way will the friend act as a mirror and a site of self-reflection.

The entire Socratic project can be conceived of in this way. Using this reading of the mirror analogy allows the *elenchus* to be deployed. The dialogue itself is a method to care for

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[106] Ibid., 133a.
[107] Ibid., 104.
[108] Aristotle, *Niccomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald, (Upper Saddle Rivier, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 1156B5-10

the self.[109] Throughout the dialogue Socrates engages Alcibiades in questioning and critique,

forcing Alcibiades to question the knowledge that he believed to have. This form extends

throughout the dialogues, "Socrates harassed his interlocutors with questions which put

themselves into question, forcing them to pay attention to and take care of themselves."[110]

Alcibiades must deploy the Socratic *elenchus* against himself by continuing the dialogue with

Socrates and with others. This internal dialogue is a crucial element of caring for oneself as it

creates a critical distance with the self. Friendship creates a second self that is worked on by the

self, despite being the same entity that is the subject of such action. The self as the object of care

becomes something that the self can work upon, cultivate, improve, and transform. Under this

analysis, self-knowledge is no longer based on a relationship to some metaphysical principle or

truth, but instead is understood as a certain type of relationship to the self.

Following this line of reasoning, self-knowledge must be conceived of in two ways. In

the first, self-knowledge exists in a weak sense. In order to care for himself, Alcibiades must

correctly locate the self. This is Socrates's purpose in defining the self as the soul that controls

the body. In the second, self-knowledge is an active process of caring for the self. Here self-

knowledge implies not a state of consciousness, but an active process of engaging the self in

Socratic questioning. This conception of self-knowledge conceives of the subject as both the

subject and object of care. My reading of the Socrates's mirror analogy turns on this point. We

are to gain self-knowledge by looking reflexively to the self through the mirror of friends.[111] .

Therefore, when Socrates says that the soul must look at another soul, one must treat these two

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[109] Nehamas extends this point beyond the interlocutors, arguing that the true irony of the dialogues is that we as readers take *Socrates's* side against his interlocutors, but are forced to examine ourselves. The purpose of the dialogue is to have the reader is to examine his or her own belief set and make sure that it is consistent. Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 41-42.

[110] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1995), 89. Original emphasis.

[111] Plato, *Alcibiades*, 132b-133c.

souls as the same.[112] I believe that this move is justified because of the extensive rhetorical use

of mirrors and reflection throughout the dialogue.[113] When one is using a mirror, what is

importance isn't the surface of the mirror, but the image that is reflected. Alcibiades must

represent himself in some way to critique and judge himself. Friendship provides a potential site

of reflection, allowing both friends to cultivate herself

      This knowledge of the self is critical for subjects to cultivate themselves, which is the

purpose of self-knowledge. Socrates argues that if Alcibiades has no knowledge of himself he

has no knowledge of his belongings, or his belongings' belongings.[114] I read this passage not

merely to imply that knowledge of the self allows one to know her body and possessions, but

also passions, vices, and virtues. It is only through this knowledge that one can cultivate virtue.

This problematiziation of the self allows the self to treat oneself as site of activity and action.

This interpretation of the self allows the self to work on the self and cultivate ourselves. As

Charles Taylor writes, "To stand back from ourselves and our existing 'relish'…allows us the

possibility to remake ourselves …We are creatures of ultimately contingent connections: we

have formed certain habits. But we can break from them and re-form them."[115]

      There are two reasons why I believe that this reason is to be preferred to the readings

offered by Julia Annas and Mark Johnson. The first is that it can stand alone without recourse to

the metaphysics of the middle dialogues. Their readings myopically focus on the singular

reference to the mirror of God in the dialogue in order to read the dialogue as more Platonic.

However, in doing so they have ignored the mirror that Socrates is providing for Alcibiades

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[112] Ibid., 133b.
[113] Ibid., 132e-133a, 133c.
[114] Ibid., 133d-e.p
[115] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 170. These lines however are problematic, as they imply that the subject can in some way free herself from her contingencies and liberate herself from all forms of power. I do not believe that this is a possible way to read the care of the self. As I will argue later, one cannot "free" oneself, but one can work to reformulate power relations such that they are less oppressive.

throughout the entire dialogue: himself. This allows the care of the self to more smoothly be extracted from its context without metaphysical baggage. The second reason builds precisely on the first: it is not reliant on Platonic metaphysics, it can be deployed in a late modern context. Using friends to care for oneself allows the subject to gain knowledge of her social location and of the networks of power that she finds herself in, as well as the relationship between herself and these forces. Such a dialogical process of caring for oneself can in turn disrupt these power relationships, by creating space for subjects to question these relationships.

Again I find Bonnie Honig's distinction between *virtù* and virtue theories useful in articulating self-cultivation. She writes, "It is for the sake of those perpetually generated remainders of politics that *virtù* theorists seek to secure the perpetuity of political contest."[116] The care of the self should be understood as a *virtù* theory. I make this claim not only because of the *aporia* that plagues the Socratic dialogues but also because of the function of self-knowledge. Alcibiades, at the beginning of the dialogue, has his mind made up about his ideas concerning politics, justice, and himself. Socrates disrupts this knowledge by commanding Alcibiades to care for himself. By utilizing the *elenchus* as a practice of care itself, self-knowledge contests stable political knowledge. This exposes how common conceptions of virtue and justice are inherently incomplete.[117] These, and other answers to political questions, always carry unintended consequences and remainders will always exist. For this reason, this theory is both theoretically and historically politically subversive.[118] Socrates was tried for both corrupting the youth and appearing to make the weaker argument the stronger. While the political nature of the first is obvious, especially when viewed in relation to his relationship with Alcibiades, the second is also decisively political. Socrates' methodology forced individuals to examine

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[116] Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory*, 3.
[117] Dana Villa, *Socratic Citizenship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001)., 2.
[118] Vlastos, *Socratic Studies,* 89, 94.

themselves, unsettling their previously held opinions, weakening their previous claims to knowledge.

IV: The *Ethos* of Care—The Care of the Self in Late-Modernity

Having provided an alternative reading of self-knowledge in the *Alcibiades* it remains for this activity to be translated in order to address late-modern concerns. This requires three steps. First, it must be demonstrated that this technique can be extracted from its Platonic context and applied to late-modernity, by arguing that my reading can be situated in what White frames as weak ontological terms. Second, these techniques must be clearly articulated. Late modern subjectivity differs in fundamental ways from its ancient counterpart; it is hard to imagine the hard drinking of the *Symposium*, for example, as democracy in action. Not all of Socrates' methods can be perfectly translated into a contemporary context. Finally, I must articulate what the care of the self contributes to White's discussion of a late-modern *ethos*.

My reading of self-knowledge, a model of self-reflection without the metaphysical baggage of the Plato, can easily be articulated within White's weak ontological framework. Gaining critical self-knowledge through dialogue with friends problematizes stable notions of identity. Self-reflection, putting the self itself into question, allows the subject to recognize the contingencies inherent in her own being. What she originally took to be her identity now becomes the play of difference. She must therefore remain attuned to herself in order to continue developing this *ethos* of presumptive generosity. The subject is able to recognize that "identity is thus a slippery, insecure experience, dependent on its ability to define difference and vulnerable to the tendency of entities it would so define to counter, resist, overturn, or subvert definitions applied to them."[119] As Connolly notes, however, this play of identities always carries implicit

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[119] William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 64.

relations of power, and the potential for oppression and domination.[120] Therefore, the

recognition of the contingency of difference is critical to tempering this temptation view peoples

that are different as Others that must be dominated. This recognition of difference is critical to

develop the presumptive generosity that White argues for. The reflexive self-knowledge

involved in caring for the self shifts the predispositions of the subject towards the other. By

extending the same respect for difference within her own identity towards the other, she resists

the slide from difference, to otherness, to evil Other.

Furthermore, the care of the self can be seen as an aesthetic cultivation of one's identity.

Following Foucault's appropriation, self-cultivation, conceived as an aesthetic process, creates

space within power relationships where subjects can express agency, though not autonomy.[121]

Foucault believed that these techniques could allow marginalized groups to create different types

of modes of being within normalizing power relations.[122] Subjects should cultivate values and

desires that they find aesthetically valuable for themselves, instead of those determined by

normalizing pressures. However, Foucault does not believe this to be a project of liberation.

Having rejected the idea of a Teflon subject, complete autonomy is impossible for the stickier

subjects of late modernity. Caring for the self does not transcend power/knowledge

relationships, as there is no pre-political state of nature to which the subject can return. "Thus

the freedom we attain in ethical conduct is not a liberation of a true self from all social

influences, but rather an ability to modify ourselves in the context of the social influences at

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[120] Ibid., 66.

[121] See also, Mark Bevir, "Foucault and Critique," in *Political Theory* 27 (Feb., 1999): 65-84.

[122] Foucault specifically was concerned with the emerging LGBT movement. However, Foucault viewed appeals towards equality and identity as "falling into the great trap of the institution." For this reason, Foucault's focus was always on "modes of being;" in which the subject herself is transformed. Frederic Gros, "Course Context" to *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* by Michel Foucault, ed. Frederic Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York, NY: Picador, 2005), 544-5.

work on us."[123] By turning the disciplinary techniques of modernity towards the self, subjects

can reformulate the power relations in which they find themselves bound. Treating the self as a

work of art allows subjects to cultivate this *ethos* of presumptive generosity towards the other.

As Rorty makes similar gestures arguing for a new sense of solidarity "thought of as the ability

to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, customs, and the like) as

unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation—the ability to

think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of 'us.'"[124] Because her

identity is contingent, she is not bound to react negatively towards the other, but work to

emphasize the attentiveness and restraint required for this *ethos*.[125]

What would a late-modern care of the self look like? As argued in the previous section,

caring for oneself requires using friendship as a mirror to reflect back on oneself. One route

involves a literal appropriation, in which one uses the relationships that one already has formed

in order to care for oneself. She works to improve herself and improve her friends. However,

another more radical route, ironically opened up by the universalization of political action, can

be found in participatory democracy. The combination of universal suffrage and globalization

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[123] Ibid.

[124] Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 192. White critiques Rorty's notion of solidarity, however; "What is asked of us as 'hosts' in this context is a good deal more demanding than Rorty's 'Don't be Cruel,' as well as differently justified." White, *The Ethos of a Late-Modern Citizen*, 106. White argues that not only must this ethos be directed at public political activity, but that it has its root in a post-foundational, or weak ontological, rather than an anti-foundationalist theory that Rorty embraces. Ibid., 107. I also would argue that caring for the self is intended to be an active political process rather than simply a restraint against demonizing the other.

[125] There is a clear danger that my application of the ancient concept of care to the context of late modernity is fundamentally flawed, as Johnson and Annas have both argued that the self that Socrates identifies in the *Alcibiades* is not the liberal individual self. Johnson, "A Commentary on Plato's *Alcibiades*, 46-47." Annas also argues that Socrates is searching for a particular type of life-*eudemonia* or the good life- that is an alien concept to modern audiences. Annas, *Platonic Ethics Old and New*, 37. It could be argued that by characterizing care as an act of individual self constructions is extracting Plato's thought from his political context and inserting it inappropriately into a modern context. However, as I have argued throughout this paper, my focus is not to reconstruct Plato's argument, but to test if the care of the self can be unpacked into a valuable theory for late modern citizenship. The dialogue describes the self as a subject-soul, or acting agent, rather than a substance-soul. While I concede that Greek subjectivity differs in fundamental ways from the late modern subject, the purpose of this paper is to show that the Socratic political theory suggested by the *Alcibiades* can help address some of the problems facing the late modern subject.

has opened the sites of interaction between citizens. As all citizens are political actors, they are thrown into cites where they must confront the other. These sites of interaction, be they jury panels, public schools, city councils, or voting booths, bring individuals into direct contact. This contact can serve as the mirror that Socrates requires. The other is the mirror that the self uses to reflect back on herself. The difference of the other problematizes any static views of identity that the subject may hold. This forces her to reflect back on herself and recognize the contingency of her own identity.

Thus friends, enemies, and strangers all serve as potential mirrors for late-modern subjects. This is similar to White's suggestion towards the end of his book. His project aims "at cultivating a sensibility that sees individuals, families, and ways of life, not collective types."[126] White wants his late-modern citizens to associate the other with lives and faces rather than preconceived stereotypes and identities. Self-care works towards a similar but distinct end. In both cases, the subject is trying to cultivate a disposition of presumptive generosity. However, my focus is less on individualizing the other, but using the other to force the subject back towards herself. By using the other as a mirror, the subject can engage in a dialogue with both herself and the other, allowing her to cultivate the tolerance and restraint necessary to address the problems of late-modernity.

There is, however, a paradox facing the care of the self in late-modernity. As noted, the space for interaction and dialogue required for this care of the self that is opened by liberal democracy carries its own dangers of apathy and indifference. While the care of the self can help address problems of discrimination and stigmatization that plague the late-modern democracy, it still requires citizens to take it upon themselves to cultivate this *ethos*. It requires that citizens use the spaces of interaction to reflect back on their own notions of identity rather

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[126] White, *Ethos*, 110.

than simply falling back on their own prejudices. Even more fundamentally, it requires that citizens seek out these sites of contestation and dialogue instead of remaining apolitical. However, our liberal sensibilities preclude us from suggesting that citizens should be forced to interact with their fellow human beings. The sphere of protection that liberalism has fashioned around the individual renders intolerable the idea of "forcing them to be free." This should not be seen as a damming impasse to my project; my purpose isn't to recommend policy but to demonstrate the value of the care of the self for a late-modern citizenry. One cannot force citizens to care for themselves, but only suggest avenues and gesture towards new approaches to these problems. These gestures, tensions, and challenges mandate a further investigation of self-cultivation in late-modernity, and I turn to such a project in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Self-Cultivation in Late-Modernity—Dialogue and Receptivity

Chapter 1 identified both the strengths and weaknesses of Stephen White's project in *The Ethos of a Late-Modern Citizen*. His approach is valuable for shifting the focus of political activity away from purely institutional questions to the practices that citizens must undertake to vivify and fulfill the promise of these institutions. However, while he clearly and effectively articulates the value of cultivating an *ethos* of presumptive generosity, he unsatisfactorily expresses a method for developing this *ethos*. Chapter 2 attempted to support White's theory by looking to Plato's *Alcibiades* and its requirement of caring for oneself before engaging in political activity. The dialogue also articulated a method for caring for oneself: it proposes using a mirror, either of God or of another human soul, to gain self-knowledge. The mirror is valuable because it allows the subject to see both herself (the reflection) and the other (the mirror itself). I argued that this practice can be a valuable way to cultivate the *ethos* that White describes, as it allows the subject to use the other in order to challenge her own conceptions of identity. By challenging her own ideas of herself, she can become more hospitable when confronted by difference.

This chapter will attempt to bridge those chapters, attempting to argue how self-cultivation as understood in the *Alcibiades* can be used in a late-modern democracy to develop an *ethos* of presumptive generosity that White defends. This project requires considerable unpacking and explicating, as late-modern citizens do not enjoy the benefit of their own Socrates who can interrogate them and force them to care for themselves. Instead of relying on the gadfly of Socrates, citizens must find their own mirrors who can force them to reflect back upon themselves. This requires citizens to engage in dialogues, both with those close to them who share their identity claims, and with those whom they would find different or foreign. This

second type of dialogue, engagement of difference, is critical for self-cultivation; difference

becomes a mirror that allows citizens to reflect back on how their own identity is constituted by

difference, and how portions of their identity cut through and across difference. However, such

dialogues present problems for political action; in political debates and dialogues winning

matters. In these situations, such as elections, legislative votes, or court decisions, wins and

losses can be tantamount to life and death, placing enormous pressure on parties to compete

against different groups rather than to cultivate a respect for them. Several theorists have

espoused models of deliberative democracy, in which the democratic legitimacy requires

participation by those affected by the action being deliberated upon.[127] This model attempts to

broaden the space of political decision-making to groups that normally would be excluded, but

has been criticized for ignoring the problems of identity and difference.[128] These tensions

suggest an inherent problem in articulating a care of the self for late-modern democratic citizens.

These tensions also suggest that self-cultivation must take place in spheres outside of

politics as normally understood. This is suggested in the *Alcibiades* itself, as Socrates instructs

Alcibiades that he must care for his soul before he advises the city on matters of politics. Here, I

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[127] See John Dryzek, *Foundations and Frontiers of Deliberative Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), John Dryzek, *Discursive Democracy: Politics, Policy, and Political Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Seyla Benhabib, "Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy," in *Democracy and Difference* ed. Seyla Benhabib (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 67-94, and Jurgen Habermas "Reconciliation Through the Public use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls's Political Liberalism" *The Journal of Philosophy* 92, 3 (March, 1995): 109-131 for a sampling of these theories.

[128] Chantal Mouffe argues that conceptions of deliberative democracy rely on an ideal situation of universal communicability that is impossible to foster. Chantal Mouffe, "Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism?" *Social Research* 66 (1999): 745-758. She also argues that deliberative democracy cannot sustain deliberation amidst the tensions of identity claims, and that "democratic theory needs to acknowledge the ineradicability of antagonism and the impossibility of achieving a fully inclusive rational consensus." Chantal Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*, Political Science Series 72 (Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies, 2000). Simon argues that certain identity groups may even resist deliberations because of fears of patronage or masked oppression. William H. Simon "Three Limitations of Deliberative Democracy: Identity Politics, Bad Faith, and Indeterminacy," in *Deliberative Politics: Essays on Democracy and Disagreement*, ed. Stephen Macedo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). Dryzek attempts to alleviate these tensions between identity politics and deliberative democracy by decoupling the deliberations from the decision making processes and locating these deliberations in the public sphere. See John Dryzek, "Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies: Alternatives to Agonism and Analgesia" *Political Theory* 33, 2 (2005).

find Romand Coles's arguments for a dialogical ethics valuable: such an ethic attempts to engage a discursive exchange across and through the intersections between the various dichotomies that are created in contemporary political discourse, attempting to challenge the nature of these "edges."[129] He argues for an *ethos* that engages these edges in political discourse that allows for the proliferation of difference and the cultivation of an *ethos* of respect for such difference. He writes, "The position I am proposing seeks to affirm difference without falling into indifferent relativism, and maintain a general ethical position without falling into the trap of totalizing reason."[130] To engender this dialogue, Coles focuses on receptivity and listening, which in contrast to deliberative models is intended not to passively appreciate difference, but engaging the other in a way that the other into expressing herself in an attempt to presence difference. "Listening, therefore, is an art cultivated through the active negotiation of discrepant points in a constellation of agonistic concerns…critical interventions that aim to bring one's own perspectives into play with the others while attentively listening to their responses."[131] This model is also extremely receptive of the mirror analogy. By engaging the other receptively, one can use the other passively as a way to reflect back on oneself. The focus on receptivity allows the subject to appreciate the other as a mirror rather than try to convert or dominate her.

This chapter will use Coles's theory of receptivity as a springboard for describing the practices of caring for the self in late-modernity. I will argue that citizens, to care for themselves and cultivate an *ethos* of presumptive generosity, must actively engage in dialogue with those who would be regarded as "different," but must do so in a receptive manner focusing on an appreciation for difference rather than focusing on building consensus. These dialogues can take a myriad of forms, from service learning and volunteering with inner city youth, to attending

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[129] Romand Coles, *Self/Power/Other*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1992), 2.
[130] Ibid., 8.
[131] Romand Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 221.

artistic events of different and foreign cultures. These engagements allow citizens to reflect back

upon their own static conceptions of identity while also gaining greater exposure to difference,

thus problematizing self/other dichotomies that plague democratic politics. This chapter will be

divided into two main sections. The first will expound Coles's theory of receptivity and attempt

to provide various models of dialogue that can be used for self-cultivation. The second will

argue that these engagements can function both as Socratic mirrors and can cultivate White's

ethos of presumptive generosity.

I: Receptivity and Dialogue

Romand Coles attempts to frame a response to democratic challenges that moves beyond

both the liberalism/communitarianism and agonism/rationalism debates.[132] Arguing that such

responses make the mistake of conceiving of identity claims as static or unproblematic, Coles

attempts to sketch an *ethos* which embraces tensions in identity claims and "the dialogical

interworld of differences to which they belong."[133] Coles's *ethos* is intended to foster dialogues

between difference that can ground democratic action by being more attuned to the play of

identity\difference, which should be understood as existing both within individuals and societies.

While the idea of a dialogue may suggest a theoretical proximity to deliberative democrats, I will

demonstrate in the following exegesis two key differences, which are critical both for Coles's

project as well as instilling self-cultivation. The first difference is that Coles's dialogical *ethos* is

structured outside of formal decision making processes, and exists entirely in the "public

sphere." While his model organization, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), is in a broad

sense an interest group, its focus is not on a particular political issue, but rather on fostering a

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[132] Coles, *Self/Power/Other*, 4-7.
[133] Ibid., 8

culture "of vibrant participatory and pluralizing democratic practices."[134] Secondly, instead of focusing on persuasion and consensus building, Coles focuses on receptivity and listening. This contrasting approach intends on actively presencing difference in others. I will argue that this notion of receptivity is a superior way to unpack the mirror analogy of the *Alcibiades* into contemporary democratic practice.

Coles's theory of receptivity attempts to shift the terms of political engagement. Similar to White, he argues for reconceiving politics on both a theoretical and practical level, arguing that most accounts of political activity work to preserve the status quo rather than contribute to more "radical reformations of democratic theory itself."[135] Coles, like White, wants to avoid totalizing theories and is skeptical of waiting for a "democracy to come." His project focuses on the roles of individual citizens, arguing that "democratic theory ought to develop significantly…in dialogical and more receptive encounters with democratic struggles in ways that might allow emerging practices and purposes of democratic associational life to call into question and possibly alter our core assumptions."[136] Coles wants to facilitate critical dialogues with the other; these are intended not to find an issue or value that can be used for coalition-building, but to transform subjects. He hopes that subjects engaging the other in spheres outside of traditional political venues can disturb their presuppositions concerning themselves and others. By moving these dialogues out of formal political deliberations, Coles hopes that citizens are less likely to succumb to the temptation to essentialize others for their own political purposes. Using Saul Alinksy's IAF as a model, Coles explicates his theory in practical terms. He states that the IAF "draws together strong and enduring coalitions of poor and middle-class people across lines of race, ethnicity, religion, and neighborhood to address poverty, housing, education,

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[134] Coles, *Beyond Gated Politics*, 215.
[135] Ibid., 214.
[136] Ibid.

public infrastructure, environmental justice, and many other issues."[137] Coles views the IAF as

a valuable model because of its emphasis on relationship building as political activity itself. He

argues that the IAF, rather than building coalitions to affect policy making processes, "draws its

members into bridging relationships that cross lines of difficult difference, proliferate new

democratic practices, and forge new political configurations…"[138]

To facilitate this proliferation of difference, Coles argues for a shift from a voice-based

theory of democracy to a focus on listening and receptivity. He argues that most democratic

theories, responding to the inability of certain groups and individuals to leave oppressive or

unjust institutions, focus on expanding democratic practice by empowering marginalized

voices.[139] His criticism concedes the value of these projects, as critical to the type of dialogical

ethos that he advocates, but argues that these theories ignore the other crucial aspect of a

dialogue: receptivity.[140] Without paying attention to those listening in a dialogue to these newly

empowered voices, it is difficult to see how such empowerment would be successful. An

unreceptive participant creates the same effect as a disempowered voice; it is the intersection of

these two facets that creates a dialogue.

Returning to the IAF, Coles argues that they are most successful when focusing on

practices of receptivity before working to articulate the voice of a marginalized group or

coalition of groups.[141] They focus on cross-cutting dialogues with the idea of listening to those

from various religious, political, and social groups that will bridge difference. Furthermore, in

each community, IAF members must cultivate different methods of receptivity to account for the

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[137] Ibid., 215.
[138] Ibid., 216.
[139] Ibid., 217. Coles focuses on Albert Hirschman's *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univesity Press, 1970) and Mark E. Warren's *Democracy and Association* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) as primary examples.
[140] Coles prefers to use the word receptivity because it "evokes a broader notion of responsiveness and helps attune us to a broader range of practices." Ibid., 220.
[141] Ibid.

variety of compositions of difference in any given context.[142] To facilitate this receptivity, the

IAF focuses on one-on-one meetings with members of the community in which they are

working. In such meetings, active members work, not to persuade the other of the values of the

IAF, but to facilitate the other to share her own perspectives, feelings, emotions, histories, and

responses to various issues facing these communities. "These questions often catch people off

guard. They often open lines of dialogue, paths of relationship, and political possibility that

might otherwise be tight shut."[143] As such, Coles's model works to let others present their own

voices in a system, not of competition and compromise, but of almost unmediated receptivity.

Coles, does not conceive of receptivity purely as a means to expand political discourse,

but as a political activity. By shifting the focus from speech to receptivity, Coles hopes to

reformulate potential answers to political and social problems. The root of a problem may not be

that some group is unable to voice their opinions, but that individuals are unwilling to listen to

such marginalized voices. "If democratic voices are weak in a community, it is probably

significantly because efforts to develop political voice have neither dwelled in nor sufficiently

passed through the arts of listening."[144] To facilitate receptivity as a political process, Coles

argues for the need to literally temporarily relocate oneself to engage in a dialogue with the

other. For even if one is attempting to be attentive and receptive, remaining in the same place,

both conceived physically and metaphorically, can prevent true receptivity. There will always be

voices that one is unable to hear. Furthermore, "the effort becomes not to exit one's place or set

of associational relations altogether but, rather, to escape from the oblivion and gated structures

within which one's self, capacity to receive the others, place, and associations have been largely

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[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid., 221.
[144] Ibid., 223.

confined."[145] This involves moving out of one's comfort zone, and engaging the other not in a neutral public space, but in the other's environment and context. This aids receptivity to move beyond simple listening, and become a broader attunement to the differences in others. By moving the site of the dialogue away from preferred locations, citizens allow themselves to be transformed by the engagement, with the hope of shifting their predispositions when they return to their own homes.[146]

This focus on travelling also allows Coles to mount a strong critique against deliberative democratic theorists. He argues that deliberative theorists focus almost myopically on bringing various groups to the table. In doing so, they "rarely articulate ideals that would have us permanently and strenuously address questions of how to illuminate and respond to the significant exclusions that will probably reemerge in spite of —or because of—the configuration of participants, norms, and modes of the deliberative table itself."[147] He worries that even an expanding public deliberative table may continue to be exclusive to groups or individuals who are well out of the mainstream of political discourse. Attempts to move deliberation to the public sphere still retain the spirit of a single collective table, falling susceptible to Coles's critique. Coles argues that cultivating a truly receptive and generous democratic *ethos*, requires replacing a single table with a multiplicity of proliferating tables. "It calls us both to move the table around and to let the table be moved around us, and it sets in motion an endless multiplication of its being."[148] This proliferation of tables involves subjects moving out from their own locations of privilege, receptively engaging the other in her own context. Multiple moving tables work to break down the idea of a homogenous *demos*, making subjects vulnerable

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[145] Ibid., 224.
[146] Ibid., 225.
[147] Ibid., 230.
[148] Ibid., 231

and exposed to difference in a way that a sterilized neutral deliberative table never can. By being exposed to the actual conditions and circumstances that shape the voice of the other, subjects are exposed to more than they would in a traditional deliberation. This conception of tabling allows subjects to "begin to create a volume of democratic experience and practice that is richer, more just, and more susceptible to moving and to being moved receptively beyond its limits."[149]

These two key tenets, receptivity and tabling, can be expressed in a myriad of practices designed at fostering relationships with both citizens and non-citizens from divergent backgrounds. This section will not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of methods of self-cultivation, but to gesture towards possible engagements in which citizens can participate. One valuable example is that of service-learning, in which formal education is combined with civic engagement to create more politically active citizens. While service-learning is traditionally aimed at complimenting political education with experiences designed to encourage more political participation, Eric Gorham argues that service-learning can be expanded to cultivate students as political actors.[150] Gorham believes that service-learning should be a system that values "how well the student recognizes oneself as a citizen and by how well one helps constitute and maintain public spaces permitting other student-citizens to appear."[151] For Gorham, the value of service-learning is that students shift their conceptions of politics from an object of knowledge, to an activity. This conception of service-learning can also help students cultivate themselves as citizens through exposure to difference. "Service-learning countersocializes students by placing them in situations unfamiliar to them as traditional classroom

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[149] Ibid., 233.
[150] Eric Gorham, "Service Learning and Political Knowledge," *Journal of Political Science Education* 1, 3 (2005): 345-645, "For some students, service-learning become just another way that reinforces what it is they are expected to know about politics without judging political concepts from experiences meaningful to them" (350).
[151] Ibid., 351-2

participants."[152] Similar to Coles's theory of tabling, service-learning moves students outside of their normal environments and thrusts them into situations in which they are citizens rather than students. In these engagements with others in various contexts, students' opinions and perspectives are challenged, forcing them to reconceive their previous political notions.[153]

One can expand this conception beyond service-learning to other programs that foster community engagement intending to benefit both the community as well as participating citizens, such as Teach for America, Americorps, the Peace Corps, and other service and volunteer organizations. Cross-cultural dialogues and face-to-face confrontations with others, though not the intention of these programs, can help citizens cultivate generosity and forbearance towards others. However, caring for oneself should not be limited to participating in formal organizations, but applied to the level of interpersonal relationships. Recalling the discussion of White from Chapter 1, the temptations to otherize extend out of formal political environments and into micropolitical realm. Everyday situations present themselves as potential opportunities to relapse back towards one's prejudices and preconceived identity claims. At the same time, these provide potential sites of dialogue and engagement with others. Shifting towards the micropolitical sphere, also proliferates the number of the sites of dialogue for self-cultivation, but still requires citizens to take advantage of these sites. These sites can range from active dialogue with difference, such as participating in a community forum on a controversial issue or having conversations with those of different political or religious beliefs, to more passive engagements, such as attending a foreign film or art exhibit or hosting one's new neighbors for dinner. The importance isn't on the mode of the engagement, but the manner in which citizens

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[152] Ibid., 352.

[153] Ibid., 359. "In being exposed to a variety of opinions, the individual does not take the position of the other *per se*, but appreciates the other's stance on a subject. Consequently the citizen imagines what others think about a subject, which then informs the reasoning behind their own opinions."

approach these sites. Receptively approaching these engagements can help citizens gain an appreciation for the differences in others, working towards, in White's words, "cultivating a sensibility that sees individuals, families, and ways of life, not collective types."[154]

There is a clear danger in this account, however, of "slum tourism." Writing about his own experiences growing up in a Nairobi slum, Kennedy Odebe warns of the dangers of affluent Western citizens "touring" poor areas to promote social awareness. "Slum tourism turns poverty into entertainment, something that can be momentarily experienced and escaped from. People think they've really 'seen' something—and then go back to their lives and leave me, my family and my community right where we were before."[155] Odebe fears that such engagements will devolve into voyeurism, in which poor or otherwise marginalized groups are treated not as human beings, but as spectacles to be observed and photographed without receiving any real assistance.[156] Instead of the engagement transforming the subject, there is a risk that it may be used as a catharsis, as citizens may believe that they have "done their part."

While I acknowledge that this is a real threat to such a project, especially with Coles's theory stressing the physical relocation of these dialogues to the homes of others, I believe that it is less of a risk when taken in the context of my project. Citizens are engaging in these dialogues not with the general goal of increasing "social awareness" to problems facing undocumented immigrants, starving children in underdeveloped countries, or other marginalized groups, but with the specific goal of cultivating themselves. These citizens are hoping to challenge their own identities and prejudices, and replacing statistics and broad group identities with faces and stories can help in this process. Furthermore, unlike slum tourists, citizens are to engage in these

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[154] White, *Ethos*, 110.
[155] Kennedy Odebe, "Slumdog Tourism," *The New York Times*, August 9, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/10/opinion/10odede.html
[156] For more on "slum tourism," see Manfred Rolfes, "Poverty tourism: theoretical reflections and empirical findings regarding an extraordinary form of tourism," *GeoJournal* 75,5 (2009): 421-442.

dialogues receptively; instead of viewing those encountered as objects, they are to actively listen to the stories and histories of the people encountered. While I concede that not every citizen will be able to immediately approach such engagements with this predisposition, my hope is that a project of reflective self-cultivation will aid citizens in resisting the temptations of voyeurism.

II: Dialogue, Difference, and Self-Cultivation

Cultivating oneself requires gaining self-knowledge. What is valuable about a mirror in self-cultivation is the way in which it represents subjects to themselves, therefore allowing a subject to see herself differently. Furthermore, just as mirrors at a carnival can provide distorted images, the "surface" of these metaphorical mirrors is important as they can alter the reflection. This is why engagement with difference is critical for self-cultivation. Dialogues with one's friends, or within one's comfort zone or identity group, will project a comfortable safe image of oneself. These engagements will not meaningfully change the way that subjects perceive themselves. However, looking at oneself through a different medium can cast the self in a radically different light. Both by exposing different modes of being outside of one's own as well as showing commonalities between identities that once seemed oppositional, these mirrors demonstrate the contingency of identity.[157] This recognition of a contingent identity is critical for developing an *ethos* of forbearance and attunement towards difference. Once identity is problemataized the potential for "increasing tolerance for a range of antinomies in oneself, countering the demand to treat close internal unity," is increased.[158]

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[157] Connolly argues that it is critical for late-modern citizens to recognize that ways that identity can become "branded" or "entrenched," and that "some elements will be crucial to the constitution of your identity, while others will be more like dispensable attributes you can maintain or drop" (Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, 174). What is important here is to remember that subjects are not pure blank slates when cultivating themselves, there are certain aspects of their identity that they will never be able to renegotiate, such as their genes, their sexual organs, the time and place of their birth, etc.

[158] Ibid., 178.

Coles's notions of receptivity and tabling are valuable as they articulate practical ways that one can reflect back upon oneself. By approaching the other in a receptive manner, the other becomes a way for the subject to reflect back upon her own prejudices. This may seem counter-intuitive as Coles's focus seems to be on the other, and allowing her to express her own being. However, Coles argues that this receptivity is also supposed to have a transformative effect on the subject. As argued above, by being receptive to the difference in others, subjects' predispositions are challenged in ways that that are intended to aid them in being presumptively generous while engaging difference. Furthermore, just as the subject sees both the mirror and her own reflection in the mirror, being receptive to others involves seeing oneself in the other's context.[159] By seeing oneself in the other, she is able to see both the contingency of her own identity claims as well as commonalities between herself and those she encounters. This dual aspect, of seeing herself and seeing the other, can help inculcate forbearance and restraint when she encounters difference in other contexts.

Moving the dialogue away from a neutral public table to where the other dwells also facilitates the self-cultivation. On a basic level, this process works to bring citizens in contact with others who can be engaged in dialogue for self-reflection. This can solve the problem of exposing citizens to difference; if they merely engage those in their own associations, friendships, and contexts it is conceivable that their prejudices may not be challenged, but possibly even strengthened. By shifting the site of the dialogue away from just those closest to ourselves, we become vulnerable to difference, therefore allowing ourselves to recognize the contingency of the beliefs we hold. This vulnerability is critical for citizens to be truly receptive; outside of either their own comfortable homes or a neutral deliberative table, citizens are plunged into a world that can be alien to them. They become reliant on the generosity of the host of their

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[159] Ibid., 221.

dialogue, who is able to perceive this unsettling vulnerability.[160] This works to subvert and alter

the previous power relationship of guest and host, as the other becomes the one upon which the

subject is dependent. Furthermore, by engaging the other in her own home, citizens are able to

better see themselves in the other's context, problematizing their conceptions of self and other.

Coles believes that by travelling to the other's home and listening receptively to her, citizens can

get "into her skin," picturing themselves differently. This imagination can help citizens

reformulate their conceptions of identity, allowing them to be more presumptively generous

when encountering difference.

In addition to cultivating democratic citizens, these dialogues can help to pluralize the

demos and sustain an "agonistic" democracy that avoids "antagonism." During one's attempts to

problematize strict identity claims and make present various types of competing identity claims

and modes of being, one must be wary of collapsing into a Schmittian friend/enemy distinction.

Here unfettered agonism coalesces into strict binaries in which groups define themselves as

struggling against some enemy that must be defeated.[161] Deliberative democrats attempt to solve

this problem through institutional frameworks that protect minorities from antagonism.[162] Self-

cultivation can also provide a way to temper antagonism. First, by problematizing strong

identity claims, self-cultivation weakens ties within the "friend" group. Cracks and fissures

emerge and difference can be located even within seemingly homogenous groups. Second,

engaging in cross-identity dialogue brings commonalities forward across seemingly diverse

groups. To use Connolly's language, this helps restrain the urges both to "*ethicize* or

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[160] Ibid., 233.

[161] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. Gorge Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26. "An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity. The enemy is solely the public enemy" (28).

[162] See Dryzek, "Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies," 34. Anything goes…provided it is (a) capable of inducing reflection, (b) noncoercive and (c) capable of connecting the particular experience of an individual, group, or category with some more general principle." By placing certain stipulations on contestation, and by separating deliberation from decision making, Dryzek hopes to diffuse potential violent or antagonist outbursts.

universalize the entrenched contingencies on the grounds that they flow from a true identity" and to "*purge* the entrenched contingency…because it is unworthy of ethiciziation."[163] By exposing the contingencies in identity, cultivating oneself prevents identity from being used to either unite a people against some enemy or to create an enemy out of difference.

There remain, however, dangers to this approach. It can be argued that this approach is vulnerable to the same critique I made of Stephen White in Chapter 1. While this model does provide a method of self-cultivation, it still presupposes that individuals will take it upon themselves to engage in this project. It also requires that citizens already have certain predispositions towards presumptive generosity before engaging in the actions of receptive tabling. Furthermore, those who do not have at least a disposition towards tolerance and pluralism could react negatively to such engagements with others. Instead of listening receptively, they may fall back on their own prejudices essentially negating any positive effect of the dialogue. While this could present a damaging critique to my project, I believe that my particular articulation of an *ethos* of presumptive generosity can confront most of this criticism. My articulation of caring for oneself is linked with an idea of Socratic friendship. As I argued in Chapter 2, Socrates served as Alcibiades's first mirror, using the *elenchic* method to prod Alcibiades into examining himself. Similarly, in a contemporary context, friends should still be used as the first mirror as they can incubate democratic sentiments. Citizens can engage in dialogues within their own social groups and associations that can expose them to difference, while still within comfortable and familiar locations. Citizens can begin to cultivate an appreciation of difference, by engaging those similar to them, before confronting the radically

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[163] Connolly, *Identity\Difference*, 177. Original emphasis.

different.[164] While there is still a danger of such engagements being unsuccessful, using friendship should help to alleviate such concerns.

Another potential danger is that the focus on both attunement towards difference and on micropolitical action can be problematic at the level of politics proper. As noted earlier, winning is important in political decision-making, and often these decisions entail the distribution of limited goods and resources. This seems to preclude an attunement for difference, as political decisions will inevitably benefit some more than, or even at the expense of, others. Dryzek echoes this concern in his critique of Mouffe; "She [Mouffe] scorns consensus as a cover for power, but at least consensus implies that decisions can get made."[165] Furthermore, there is a danger that an almost exclusive focus on micropolitics can have disastrous results. As those concerned with toleration and justice are working to cultivate themselves, there is a risk that they may cede decision making processes to those with malicious intentions.[166] Both of these critiques point to the danger that caring for oneself may not be able to affect change at the level of politics proper. It may remain simply as an aesthetic, rather than political, exercise.

While I find these concerns important, I believe that the dangers should not be overstated. The risk of political apathy exists, but is minimized by the intention of self-cultivation. Caring for oneself is to inculcate in oneself a political *ethos* that is designed to shift one's predispositions upon entering into political relationships. An *ethos* of presumptive generosity

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[164] One can draw clear parallels to other theories of civil association. Alexis de Tocqueville argued that voluntary associations are critical to temper the unrestrained freedom of the people in America. Associations for him serve as a way to protect individuals against tyrannies of the majority. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Francis Bowen (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1994), 194-195. Putnam makes a similar argument about civic associations being incubators for democracy, as they allow citizens to learn political skills in a non-political context. See Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). While an in-depth study of associations, and their relationship to self-cultivation, would be illuminating, it is beyond the scope of this current project.

[165] Dryzek, "Deliberative Democracy in Divided Societies," 222.

[166] Rorty has this fear. See Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

helps citizens restrain themselves others from viewing them as a threat. Though caring for oneself takes place outside of directly political environments, it has explicitly political consequences. Citizens engaging in these practices will approach political problems differently. Instead of rushing to build consensus and inadvertently marginalizing difference to gain political victories, citizens who have engaged in cultivating themselves approach political decisions with forbearance. As Connolly notes, "A democratic culture that disrupts dogmatic identities opens up possibilities for a politics of pluralization: it increases the number of positive identities and changes the tone of contention and collaboration between constituencies."[167] Political debates can become less adversarial; those on the other side of the aisle are viewed not as enemies but as collaborators in a democratic project. This undertaking becomes a perpetual project that resists totalizing political solutions and instead embraces ambiguity and indeterminacy.[168]

Furthermore, I contend that drawing a strong distinction between macro and micropolitical action, and elevating the former at the expense of the latter, is itself problematic. Following White's discussion of Mill in Chapter 1, I argue that the dangers of oppression are not constituted solely in state institutions or actions. Difference can be encountered in a variety of contexts, from waiting in a checkout line in a grocery store to going for a walk at a public park. In these "non-political" activities there exists the risk to fall back upon one's old prejudices. Drawing stark distinctions between the micropolitical sphere and politics proper can mask these potential sites of oppression. As Deleuze and Guattari note, "It's too easy to be antifascist on the molar level, and not even see the fascist inside you, the fascist you yourself sustain and nourish and cherish with molecules both personal and collective."[169] Instead of drawing this binary, I

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[167] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 98.
[168] See Honig, *Political Theory*, 210-211.
[169] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 215. Jayan Nayar also shares this outlook: "Changing the world therefore is a misnomer for in truth it is relationships that are to be changed…to change our relationships, we must

believe that it is necessary to problematize the strict divisions between political activity and apolitical activity, public and private, and macro and micro. Self-cultivation should be understood as a micropolitical activity that both prepares citizens for interactions in formal political ventures, but also helps to temper impulses to force others out of the public sphere.

These tensions illustrate the dangers and challenges of self-cultivation. Citizens must keep these tensions in mind while caring for themselves; they must be continually wary of their own latent fundamentalisms and utilize these dialogues and engagements to inform their political decisions. These tensions and challenges are inevitable as the project of self-cultivation involves questioning and reformulating one's own relationship to herself, as well as challenging the deeply held beliefs that have come to constitute her identity. This may not be a process that every citizen can engage in, as not all citizens will be willing, or able, to challenge these identities. This should not be viewed as a flaw in my argument. I believe that even if only a small number of citizens care for themselves, an *ethos* of presumptive generosity can start shifting presuppositions of political debates. While this project clearly cannot resolve all political disputes, it suggests ways to reformulate political questions.

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change the 'I' that is each of us. Transformations of 'structures' will soon follow." Jayan Nayar, "Orders of Inhumanity," *Transnational Law and Contemporary Problems* 9 (Fall, 1999): 599-631, 630.

Conclusions and Directions for Further Research

In this project I suggest that citizens in late-modern democracies take up the Socratic project of putting everything, even our deepest claims to identity and selfhood, to question. This project should not be seen as a purely critical exercise designed at undermining all foundations for liberal governance, but rather, as a way to reground and reenergize democratic sentiments. By subjecting themselves to continual questioning and critique, citizens can uncover and problematize their own prejudices, working towards cultivating a more generous and receptive citizenry. This citizenry can work both to challenge social oppression and stigmatization in the public sphere and to influence formal decision making processes towards issues previously marginalized. Caring for oneself is intended to be a directly political activity designed to cultivate democratic citizens able to withstand the challenges facing late-modern democracies.

I attempt in this project to advance three arguments. First, citizenship should not be understood simply as something that one checks off on a tax form, but something that must always be worked at, but can never be truly perfected. By caring for themselves, individuals come to understand that citizenship is something that requires continual action upon the self, by the self. Second, in response to the challenges of late-modernity, citizens should cultivate an *ethos* of presumptive generosity based on the active presencing of difference. Self-cultivation works to challenge static notions of identity, inculcating an appreciation of the constant interplay of identity\difference. Third, to cultivate such an *ethos*, citizens must utilize a mirror that allows them to gain greater understanding of themselves. Through the use of Socratic friendship and a dialogue with radical difference, late-modern citizens have a variety of potential mirrors that they can use to cultivate themselves.

There are several potential avenues for future research. The first is a greater examination of the concept of "Socratic friendship." This would involve an investigation of *eros* in Plato's *Symposium*, as well as an examination of the "true rhetoric" of the *Gorgias*. In addition, the *Apology* and *Crito* could be examined to analyze the relationship between citizens caring for themselves and sources of authority. The second avenue is far broader. It involves an investigating a variety of other articulations of caring for oneself to explore techniques other than those discussed in this project. These investigations could include Aristotle's conception of friendship in the *Niccomachean Ethics*, Augustine's work upon the self in the *Confessions*, Nietzsche's theory of self-overcoming, and Heidegger's account of authenticity, among others. These investigations could help provide a more robust account of the care of the self as a political project. Additionally work could be done in the field of political psychology to empirically study the effects of dialogue and exposure on challenging prejudices. While these potential projects remain, I hope, in this current paper, to have gestured towards ways that citizens can cultivate themselves in late-modern democracies and the ways in which this practice can help progress political discourse towards greater toleration, pluralism, and generosity.

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