

ARISTIPPUS AND FREEDOM IN XENOPHON'S MEMORABILIA

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Abstract

In Book II of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, in a discussion with Socrates, the hedonist Aristippus speaks very briefly, though quite emphatically, about a kind of freedom (ἐλευθερία) with regards to desires, pleasures and happiness. Much of the later testimony on him suggests a similar concern. My interest in this paper is in understanding the nature of this freedom. In order to do so however I begin with a brief elucidation into some of Socrates' and Callicles' proclamations in Plato's *Gorgias* about their own conceptions of freedom and the larger socio-philosophical contexts within which they are embedded. Though I hope this elucidation offers some interesting insights of its own, my purpose for including it is mostly dialectical and expositional. That is, I want to use it in order to bring out certain key features with I think, later, will, through comparison and contrast, provide for a clearer and hopefully more substantial understanding of Aristippus' particular notion of freedom. In sum, I argue that Aristippus is promoting a unique kind of internal state or condition of the soul, one which apparently allows its possessor to engage in all sorts of pleasures without being worsted by them in any way. Part of Aristippus' motivation here, I argue, is to challenge the popular conception of freedom connected to restraint and abstinence, and the accompanying idea that short-term or momentary pursuit of pleasure necessarily undermines the control of life by reason.

"Not being able to govern events, I govern myself, and apply myself to them, if they will not apply themselves to me." (Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*)

I

In Plato's *Gorgias*, Callicles advocates a life of the maximum pursuit of desires, one which consists in a kind of *absolute freedom*, where there is very little practice of restraint; happiness, as he says, is comprised of luxury (τρυφή), unrestraint (ἀκόλαστος) and

freedom (ἐλευθερία) (492b-c). Moreover, Callicles takes this freedom to be closely connected to *control or rule over others* (491d). As such, it is entirely representative of the popular Greek concept of freedom; the tyrant is typical of this, that is, as most *eleutheros*, for “*eleutheria* is manifested in ruling over others and in not submitting to the rule of others oneself.” (Adkins, 1972, p. 68)¹ In fact, freedom construed in this way is one of the central themes of the *Gorgias* dialogue. Not too far from the start, for example, when he is asked by Socrates what great good his craft is responsible for, Gorgias replies, “The thing that is in actual fact the greatest good, Socrates. It is the source of *freedom* for humankind itself and at the same time it is for each person the source of *rule over others* in one’s own city.” (452d, italics added)

Callicles’ view here prompts Socrates to ask whether or not the Calliclean individual should ‘rule himself’ as well (491d5). Callicles shows blatant confusion at this. He asks Socrates *three times* what he means by this expression.² Socrates tries to get Callicles to understand by offering up the following explanation:

“Nothing very subtle. Just what the many mean: being self-controlled and master of oneself (σώφρονα ὄντα καὶ ἐγκρατῆ), ruling the pleasures and appetites within oneself.” (491d-e)

The fact that Socrates is made to couple temperance (*sophrosyne*) and self-control (*enkrateia*) indicates that he takes them as carrying little difference in meaning.³ This is significant. The tie-in here of the latter with the former signals to us a conception of temperance as a kind of restraint or even near *abstinence* of desire or appetite. It seems clear Plato has something like this in mind since only a little later, following Callicles’ rant on the happy life as one consisting largely of luxury, he makes Socrates respond somewhat rhetorically,

“So then those who have *no need* (δεόμενοι) of *anything* are wrongly said (λέγονται)⁴ to be happy?” (492e3-4, italics added)

As Helen North (1966) points out, this particular definition of temperance, i.e. as a kind of restraint or abstinence⁵ from desires and pleasures, had become the common view

1 For allusions and references to the tyrant in Callicles’ discussion see, among others, *Gorgias* 483dff and 492b.

2 491d: “τιή;”, “τί;”, “πῶς λέγεις;”, “πῶς ἑαυτοῦ ἄρχοντα λέγεις;”

3 Plato also couples them together at *Rep.* IV, 430e; Xenophon does the same at *Cyr.* VIII, 1, 30.

4 Following Dodds (1959, footnote to 492e3), the ‘wrongly said’ (λέγονται) would seem to suggest that this particular desire-restricted or ascetic account of happiness was rather prevalent and not peculiar to Socrates.

5 North points to Euripides and the sophistic movement as initiators of such a conception (69-70). She

by the late fifth century (70).⁶ We no doubt see a sign of this commonality by Socrates' description of it at 491d (above) as 'nothing very subtle (οὐδὲν ποικίλον)' and being 'just as the many (οἱ πολλοί) mean'.

Socrates goes on, in his description of the two sieve-myths (493aff), to warn Callicles about what we might call the disruptive powers of certain desires and pleasures on the soul. He likens the soul, which is presumed to be the agent of the licentious individual's desires, to a sieve which is unable to retain anything due to the fact that it has succumb to thoughtlessness or unreliability and forgetfulness of purpose or untrustworthiness (δι' ἀπιστίαν τε καὶ λήθην) (493c3). He says that the soul with these appetites in it is susceptible to persuasion and to swaying back and forth or general instability.

That Socrates means something like this when he speaks of these desires and their bad effects is perhaps reinforced by his earlier explication to Callicles about what it involves for someone, not to rule others, but to rule himself. It involves "ruling (ἄρχοντα) the pleasures (ἡδονῶν) and appetites (ἐπιθυμιῶν) within (ἐν) oneself." (491d-e). Both the pairing of pleasures with desires and the fact that they need to be ruled, seems to point not simply to desires in general but to an especially insistent and perhaps irrational group, such as those typically associated with large cravings or lusts.⁷ Certainly the expressions employed throughout their discussion in characterizing the handling of desires and pleasures, e.g. see ἄρχειν (to rule) (491d), ἐργεῖν (to shut in, to restrain) (505b), κολλάζειν (to hold in check, keep in) (505b, 491e), seem to insinuate a certain force or energy on the part of the desires and pleasures. Socrates then may be rejecting Callicles' view in part because it allows freedom to *all* desires, including these potentially disruptive ones. The supposition is that the licentious individual like Callicles thinks he is free in his pursuit of such desires but once he exposes himself to them he may become subjugated to certain

also connects the idea of purity and purification in the Pythagoreans and in Orphism to the development of *sophrosyne* as a form of abstinence. It is Plato, she argues, that makes greatest use of these elements in moulding his conception of *sophrosyne*, of which is perhaps suggested by the sieve metaphor in the *Gorgias* (North, 1966, 30-1). More on these sieve-myths upcoming.

6 Perhaps a further indication of this is to be seen in Aristotle who seems at times to be *correcting* the current view that *sophrosyne* is to be defined as a kind of abstinence of pleasure (see, *NE* 1107b6-7, 1119a5-20, 1153a27-35).

7 See Irwin, 1979, 191. It should be noted that I am not making a claim here that depends on the ontological structure and interplay of the parts of the soul, i.e. rational vs. irrational desires, that Plato goes on to develop in the *Republic*. That is, I am not suggesting that, in defending temperance, Socrates is speaking about a kind of order in the soul and about a subsequent control of desires which conflicts with his intellectualist conception of human action and motivation. My point is simply that Socrates, interpreted by Callicles as on the side of *popular* temperance and in line with it, perceives certain desires as disruptive or enslaving.

internal effects largely beyond his control. *Real* freedom, Socrates seems to be suggesting, involves abstaining from those desires productive of subjugating effects on the soul.⁸

We might see a paradigmatic example in Socrates regarding this connection between freedom and avoidance of certain desires due to their bad internal effects in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. Socrates, in speaking to Xenophon after hearing that Critobulus had kissed Alcibiades' good-looking boy, says of sensual passion, "Avoid it resolutely: it is *not easy to control yourself* once you meddle with that sort of thing." (1. 3. 8, italics added) Socrates admonishes Critobulus for his imprudence and recklessness in daring to kiss the very attractive boy. Critobulus, Socrates claims, completely undermines the *kind of power* this kiss will have *over him* -he does not realize that he will *lose his freedom* (ἐλευθερία) and become a *slave* (δοῦλος) and end up doing all sorts of *foolish* things that not even a *madman* (μαινόμενος) would care about (1. 3. 9-11). Socrates' advice to Critobulus in regards to recovering from that kiss is to *take off* and spend a year abroad (1. 3. 13). Xenophon goes on to claim that Socrates had trained himself to *avoid* the fairest and most attractive people (1. 3. 14).⁹

It should be noted that Socrates' intimations here concerning the persuasive effects of certain desires are quite in line with the tradition of popular *sophrosyne* outlined by North. Part of the reason for this emphasis on the constant exercise of restraint or abstinence in the practice of pleasures had to do with, as mentioned, their perceived power of *subjugation*; one restrained oneself so as to avoid becoming *enslaved* by the strength of one's desires and pleasures.¹⁰ North points out many perceived forms of this subjugation; two such forms are particularly relevant here.

First, she says there developed, from the late sixth century onward, a group of antitheses to *sophrosyne* like madness, frenzy, drunkenness, etc. (e.g. *mania, eros*).¹¹ That is, pleasures

8 For a more extended discussion on Socrates' view in the *Gorgias* on desire-restraint and the harmful effects of certain pleasures on the soul (especially with regards to the sieve-myths), see Urstad, 2007. See also Irwin, 1986, who argues that Socrates holds an 'adaptive' account of happiness, which demands that one reduce, and sometimes even abstain from, one's desires in order to fit the circumstances. Irwin claims that this adaptive account made it easy for others to regard Socrates as an ascetic. He finds evidence for this account in the *Gorgias*, among other dialogues.

9 For another typical example in the *Memorabilia*, see 4. 5. 2-11. Concerning the effort of self-restraint in Plato's Socrates see, e.g., *Charmides*, 155c-e.

10 See also Michel Foucault, 1985, Vol. 2. It offers a plethora of examples indicating the "revolt and excess" of the pleasures of *aphrodisia*, and the general perception of *hedonai* and *epithumiai* as a "formidable enemy force" (see, in particular, Chap. 3).

11 North, 1966, 115, n.90. Some examples she gives: Pl. *Phaed.* 241a, *Rep.* 402e, *Xen. Mem.* 1.1.16.

were to be regarded with much caution since if one was not *sophron* towards pleasures, then one was susceptible, in one form or another, to ‘losing oneself’ to, or being ‘overcome’ by, them –which, in turn, meant a *loss of freedom*. Both Socrates’ reference to a soul ‘swaying back and forth’ due to the insatiable desires in it and his warning to Critobulus about becoming a ‘madman’ from kissing the attractive youth might be viewed as representative of this particular form of subjugation.

Second, and closely connected to this, North speaks about a further set of antitheses to *sophrosyne* like folly, foolishness and irrationality (e.g. *aphrosyne*, *nepios*, *anoia*).¹² The dichotomy is such that if one was not acting temperately or orderly, then one was acting foolishly or imprudently in some way. Now the *Gorgias* text is somewhat ambiguous on whether Socrates is specifically trying to exploit something like a lack of rational agency or prudence in Callicles’ position, however, he does appear, at the end of each myth, to set up a kind of exclusive disjunction between the *orderly* (κοσμίως) life and the unrestrained or licentious (ἀκολάστως) one (493c4-d2, 494a). True to the antitheses presented by North, he even calls the opposite (τοἰ ἀνάντιον) of the temperate (σάφρων) soul a senseless (ἄφρων) one (507a). Socrates then may be unconvinced of any integration between prudent, orderly living and the largely unrestrained pursuit of desires. He seems to think that his confident interlocutor’s commitment to resoluteness of purpose and planning for achievements (e.g. 491b) will, in some sense, be distorted by his licentious pursuits.¹³ Socrates’ reference to certain disruptive effects on the soul by insatiable desires perhaps goes some way in explaining this distortion. That is, he may think that these effects will at times be such as to prove obstructive to Callicles’ more longer-term purposes and well-planned life.

2

The discussion between Socrates and Aristippus in Book II of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*¹⁴

¹² North, 1966, see e.g. the preface; also, 120, n.100. Some examples she gives: Xen. *Cryopaedia* 3. 1. 16, Pl. *Protagoras* 332b-333b.

¹³ Aristotle warns against something like this. At *NE* 1119b7-11, he says that the desire for the pleasant is insatiable and indiscriminate, and that if it gets strong enough it knocks out the capacity for rational calculation and trumps long-term goals.

¹⁴ Nothing has survived which was written by Aristippus himself. The testimony of Xenophon is historically proximate to Aristippus and is fortunately free from the later conflation wrought up over the two Aristippi (his grandson was also called Aristippus, but because the latter was taught by his mother, he is often referred to by the epithet ‘the Metrodidact’, ‘Mother-taught’). To what extent Xenophon understands or is accurately reporting the views of Aristippus is perhaps a bit uncertain. That said, Grote, 1865, III, 533, among others, takes the discussions Xenophon puts forth between Socrates and Aristippus in the *Memorabilia* to be based

is, in many respects, remarkably similar to the one between Socrates and Callicles in the *Gorgias*. At the start, Xenophon begins by saying that Socrates was aware that one of his ‘companions’ was rather licentious or unrestrained (ἀκολαστοτέρως) in matters requiring the practice of self-control (ἐγκράτεια) (2. 1. 1). Aristippus goes on to claim that his path to living most pleasantly (ἡδίστα βιοτεύειν) (2. 1. 9) and to happiness (εὐδαιμονία) is through freedom (δι’ ἐλευθερίας) (2. 1. 11).

What does he mean here by freedom? No doubt he purports to stress a certain indifference to political involvement, as he later will go on to claim that he does not close himself into any political community but is instead everywhere an alien (ξένος) (2. 1. 13).¹⁵ But this is not all he means by it. Their discussion is also framed in a hedonistic context, or at least in one which looks to the amount of pleasure accruable by the adoption of certain lifestyles. For instance, Aristippus’ claim about freedom as a path to happiness comes as a reply to Socrates’ question ‘whether rulers or the ruled live *more pleasantly*’ (2. 1. 10, italics added). In this sense, freedom according to Aristippus, –as we can gather from what Socrates infers about him, that he is intemperate in regards to eating, drinking and sex (2. 1. 1), that he has a weakness for high living (2. 1. 15), and that he is indolent in regards to restraining himself from present enjoyment (2. 1. 20)– also has to do with the pursuit of the pleasures of the moment. Aristippus pretty much confirms this a few passages later when he presents the reasons for why he does *not* want to be a ruler; rulers sacrifice a large part of their desires and abstain from many good things (2.1.8-9).¹⁶ We might draw from this then that, for Aristippus, much like Callicles, happiness consists in the largely undeterred pursuit and satisfaction of present-moment desires.¹⁷

on *actual* hearing. In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon does say several times that he is present in the conversation (e.g. 1. 3 8-15, 1. 4, 2. 4-5, 4. 3), however this may of course be nothing more than literary convention. But even if it is, we at least have good reason to assume that his writings were based on conversation which he had heard at different times, and (after his return from Asia) supplemented by discussions with surviving friends of Socrates (see Guthrie, 1971, 23). There is also some reason to suppose that it is some of Aristippus’ actual writings Xenophon has made use of (see Chroust, 1957, 8, and n. 37).

15 Socrates presses him on this arguing that his foreigner’s life exposes him to much potential pain, since without the support of laws, he cannot protect himself against many malefactors (2.1.14-15). But *xenos* can mean either ‘foreigner’ or ‘friend of a guest’. Thus Aristippus could perhaps respond by pointing out that foreigners are typically treated well; that they are normally welcomed into a place and provided with basic material goods such as food and drink, and a place to rest. For more on Aristippus and this general political aspect see Jaeger, 1943, 52ff; Tsouna, 1994, 385-6; O, Conner, 1994, 159-163.

16 Moreover, Vice, who Socrates presumably takes to represent the views of Aristippus (we should notice it is *his* rendition of Prodicus’ fable, 2. 1. 21), makes this sort of total acquiescence towards pleasures quite clear (see 2. 1. 23-25).

17 But see Urstad, 2008, where I argue against the traditional view of Aristippus as someone occupied *only* with the present moment with no rational, overall concern for the future. Indeed, I try to show that he upholds a unique prudential strategy in seeking happiness, one which, while displacing greater emphasis on the present, does not depart from a concern for life as a whole or *eudaimonia*.

Socrates then rebukes that Aristippus' so-called freedom is not really freedom at all, but only a recipe for all sorts of forms of slavery (2. 1. 12-18). Though the forms of slavery spoken of up to this point are mostly of the external and physical variety, in the sense of, for example, being forced to punishment by the stronger people in the community or being struck down on the open road, Socrates does, through the mouth of Virtue in his rendition of Prodicus' fable, go on to warn Aristippus that licentious people are also susceptible to a type of *inner* slavery, for example, they eventually succumb to 'souls without sense' (ψυξαις ἀνόητοι) and general mental distress and hardship (2. 1. 31). He alludes briefly to a capable soul, one which is orderly and efficacious in setting up the proper life and one which will always remain autonomous throughout its exposure to various experiences (2. 1. 19).

We might again see a parallel here with Socrates' warning to Callicles. As previously mentioned, in these sieve-myths, Socrates also speaks about the individual with the unrestrained part of the soul succumbing to general senselessness and distress (493b-494a). Socrates' central point both there and in his discussion with Aristippus, is that the relentless pursuit of certain pleasures may actually, through –to borrow Foucault's description– their 'formidable enemy force',¹⁸ make them one's master, and that therefore abstaining from, or at least pulling back on, one's desires is necessary for avoiding this slavery.

Now, like with Callicles, Socrates' warnings do not appear to shake Aristippus' confidence. He is resolute in his declaration that he is absolutely "no candidate for slavery" (Ἄλλ' ἐγὰὼ τοι, ἔφη ὁ Ἀριστιππος, οὐδὲ εἰς τὴν δουλείαν αὐ ἐμαυτὸν τάττω...) (2. 1. 11) –in fact, so insistent is he about this that he repeats the same thing again. Clearly he thinks that he has an entirely viable way. He explains,

“...but there is, as I hold, a middle path in which I endeavour to walk. That way leads neither through rule nor slavery but through freedom, which is the most certain road to happiness.” (ἀλλ' εἶναι τις μοι δοκεῖμέση τοιούτων ἰόδός, ἢν πειρῶμαι βαδίζειν, οὔτε δι' ἀρχῆς οὔτε διὰ δουλείας, ἀλλὰ δι' ἐλευθερίας, ἢπερ μάλιστα πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἄγει.) (2. 1. 11)

So Aristippus steadfastly believes that one can actually pursue one's present-moment desires, presumably including many of those of the luxurious variety, without succumbing to slavery, and that this is achieved through the application of a kind of freedom. What is interesting then, is that Aristippus *explicitly* shares Socrates' resolution to avoid slavery,

¹⁸ See previous n. 10.

however, does *not* judge, like Socrates does, that to be free entails leading the fully temperate or restrained life. That is, he thinks one can maintain a sense of autonomy or control without abstaining from, or even pulling back on, one's desires. In this sense, Aristippus, not unlike Callicles, might be said to be challenging the conception of freedom connected to restraint and abstinence.

We might also notice that Aristippus claims that the freedom he speaks about is the most certain (μάλιστα) road to happiness (2. 1. 11). This may be significant in that it perhaps signals to us an awareness on Aristippus' part of a conception of happiness concerned with meeting Socrates' worries about self-sufficiency.¹⁹ That it is the 'most certain' path suggests that so long as this freedom is being exercised, disappointment or frustration is not likely to occur, and that therefore one's happiness will be kept invulnerable. So Aristippus might be said to be agreeing with Socrates' identification of self-sufficiency with lack of frustration and complete fulfilment of desires, but disagreeing that it must necessarily follow from this that the most reasonable thing to do is to lower one's desires so as to guarantee their satisfaction. That is, contra Socrates, who might be interpreted as believing that in order to secure the conditions for happiness one must reduce one's desires in the appropriate way, Aristippus here seems to be suggesting that *happiness is made most secure* through the exercise of a kind of freedom that actually allows for the largely unrestrained pursuit of one's desires.

We may get a better sense of how Socrates and Aristippus each conceive of their approach to pleasures and their shared commitment to avoiding slavery by taking a closer look at their respective notions of *enkrateia* and *eleutheria*. In the *Memorabilia*, Socrates seems to conceive of the relationship between the agent and pleasure as one which involves an aspect of *struggle for domination* over his desires and pleasures. The terminology here²⁰, and elsewhere²¹, might be said to draw allusions to a sort of battle for power between two opposing energies. On the one side, it suggests a perception of pleasures, particularly those of sex, with their own power of ascendancy and dominion, threatening rule over the agent, with the possibility of reducing him to slavery. On the other, the agent, the one practicing

19 For appeals to self-sufficiency by Socrates, see, e.g. Xen. *Mem.* 1. 2. 14, 1. 6 and Plato's *Lysis*, 215a6-8.

20 For example, Socrates' talk of the intemperate man being carried away (φερόμενοι) by the desire for women (2. 1. 4) attests not only to Socrates' perception of the forceful nature of certain desires, but also to the fact that his man of *enkrateia* is someone who must exert some amount of struggle in order to maintain control over them.

21 In the *Gorgias*, Socrates also exhorts *enkrateia*, but this time to Callicles (491e). As we have seen, throughout their discussion, Plato employs all sorts of expressions having to do with the handling of pleasures which attest to the perception of these pleasures as potent, antagonistic forces.

enkrateia –here, Socrates himself and the virtue he exhorts Aristippus to adopt– appears as someone who sets himself firmly *against* these pleasures, adopting a kind of adversarial and combative stance towards them.

Considered etymologically –such a description of *enkrateia* as a kind of active form of domination over pleasures involving some resistance and struggle– makes good sense. The word *enkrateia* itself does not crop up before Plato and Xenophon, but the corresponding adjective does. It derives from *enkrates*, which was used of anyone having physical or authoritative power over something else usually yielding resistance. It is in Plato and Xenophon that we see its expansion into a noun and applied for the first time to the ethical domain of the individual, specifically, to the individual’s attempt at control with regards to desires and pleasures.²²

Now a further manifestation of *enkrateia*, one which looks to be a natural concomitant of the perception of pleasure’s so-called ‘formidable enemy force’, takes the form of a kind of frugality or total distance from appetites. Socrates’ subsequent examples to Aristippus suggest something like this. That is, he who practices *enkrateia* is able to stay away or hold off from desires for food, thirst, sleep, comfort, *etc.* (*Mem.* 2. 1. 2-3). Xenophon perhaps gives greater confirmation to this elsewhere when he reports, as mentioned earlier, that Socrates was “the most *enkrates* of all men over sex and bodily appetite...and so trained for needing moderate amounts that he was easily satisfied when he had only little” (*Mem.* 1. 2. 1).

Thus we might see Socrates’ exhorted virtue as a form of self-control *over the* desire for pleasure, that is, as a kind of control meted out *on* desires and from a place *external* to them –perhaps not unlike that of a position of self-protection in warfare. In fact, exactly this sort of warfare imagery concerning desires is precisely what we find in both Xenophon’s *Economicus* (I. 23) and Plato’s *Republic* (VIII 560b-c). In the former, the man of *enkrateia* must guard his estate from armed tyrants (representing gluttonous desires) attempting to take it over. In the latter, the picture Socrates paints is that of a citadel or acropolis-soul trying to protect itself from a throng of desires below.²³ There is clearly then a heavy *externalization* of desire or pleasure (primarily of the bodily sort) built into the notion of *enkrateia*. These sorts of desires are perceived as forces attempting to act on the agent from the outside, as it were. The action of the man practicing *enkrateia* is therefore largely preventative, the attempt

²² See Werner Jaeger, *Paideia*, Vol. 2, 53-4; also, A.A. Long, 1993, 143.

²³ Plato does not speak specifically of *enkrateia* here but rather moderation and the like. However, Plato does couple moderation with *enkrateia* earlier on in the *Republic* (IV, 430e).

at control comes in at a point *before* the acceptance of these desires.

Let us now return to the discussion in the *Memorabilia*. Having listened patiently to Socrates' seven or so instances of the would-be-ruler practicing *enkrateia*, e.g., cases of restraining from desires for food, drink, sleep, sex, *etc.*, (2. 1. 1-6), Aristippus, as we have seen, makes his position clear: he does not want to follow this sort of stance towards his desires. As mentioned, he is resolute in the fact that he does not intend to abstain and sacrifice his pleasures (2. 1. 8-9). Clearly then, Aristippus' policy here is not one of restraint or accepted moderation. When desires surface, Aristippus shows little reserve or hesitation, he simply acquiesces to them.

That said however, Aristippus' relation to pleasure seems to be significantly more complex than that of some simple foolhardy voluptuary. As we have seen, despite surrendering to his desires, Aristippus considers himself absolutely *no* candidate for subjugation or slavery (2. 1. 11). This is due to, as he goes on to say, the possession and exercise of *eleutheria* (2. 1. 11). Aristippus then looks to retain part of the essential feature of self-mastery, or non-subjugation, from Socrates' keynote virtue and shifts it from something exercised outside of one's desires to something exercised within them. That is, he appears to *transform* what we might view as the Socratic principle of self-control *over the* desire for pleasure into control *within the* pleasure; or, put somewhat more broadly, he seems to convert what Socrates might view as the life of moderation and even restraint into the art of moving correctly *within* the life of pleasure.

Of course, Aristippus does not call this, or take it to involve, the virtue of *enkrateia*. After all, this is the very thing Socrates tries to persuade Aristippus that he needs to cultivate (2. 1. 1), and which involves the sort of sacrificing-of-desires policy which Aristippus explicitly sidesteps. Aristippus, instead, calls the particular virtue or good he is trying to offer up as a candidate against Socrates' *enkrateia*, freedom. Nevertheless, the point to notice here is that Aristippus is clearly interested in a kind of autonomy or self-mastery, and, *to that extent*, he is not far from the virtue Socrates exhorts him on.²⁴

Now how exactly does Aristippus conceive of the *nature* of the freedom he speaks of? We get an important clue, I believe, in the *Memorabilia* discussion itself. In the passage already alluded to at 2. 1. 11, Aristippus says that his way of freedom leads neither through *rule* nor slavery. It is this *denial* of ruling (οὔτε δι' ἀρχῆς) as an accompaniment of freedom

²⁴ See Caizzi, 2006, 132.

that is interesting. It is precisely through ruling, perhaps as kings, tyrants or potentates (491d, 492b), that Callicles conceives of the freedom he boasts of (492b-c), and indeed, as many Greeks would. In fact, even Xenophon's Socrates, throughout much of his discussion with Aristippus, upholds a similar conception. He warns Aristippus that if one wants to be free one must initiate a life of active rule since it is obvious that "the stronger have a way of making the weaker rue their lot both in public and in private life, and treating them like slaves." (2. 1. 12-13)²⁵

Thus when Aristippus categorically denies any association between ruling and freedom we may have good reason to think that something quite different is being implied about the latter notion. That Aristippus does not conceive of the exercise of freedom in terms of commanding or oppressing, or in any outwardly physical way, suggests perhaps that he is referring to something more along the lines of a kind of *internal* freedom.

The testimony outside Xenophon seems to not only support such a direction in interpretation but fills it out somewhat. Much of the secondary evidence on Aristippus in this regard points very distinctly to a concern for a kind of inner emancipation or independence of mind, predominantly so in the handling of pleasures.²⁶ What we get, in effect, is a picture of someone who seems to break with the particular tradition in the fifth century –which, as previously outlined, appears very much preoccupied with the kinds of pleasures one ought to stay away from, or from the distance one ought to keep between oneself and certain pleasures –by emphasizing a kind of focus on the internal employment or management of pleasures, *whatever kind they may be*. Consider simply a few examples:

“The one to master pleasure is *not* he who *abstains* but he who *employs* it *without being carried away by it* –just as being a master of a ship or of a horse is not abstaining from using them, but directing them where one wishes.” (Stob. *Ecl.* 3. 17. 17)

“Aristippus, while clothed in purple and anointed with perfumes, was not less temperate than Diogenes²⁷; for just as if somebody had equipped his body with

²⁵ Socrates continues by saying that is the strong (οἱ κρείττονες), the brave and able (οἱ ἀνδρείοι καὶ δυνατοί), those with citizenship, those with friends, and those with weapons who will be far less likely than Aristippus to succumb to slavery (2.1.13-14). (For more on this similarity between Callicles and the Xenophontic Socrates, see, Grote, 1865, 534-535.)

²⁶ Tsouna also characterizes freedom according to Aristippus as a kind of internal good or condition of the soul. She speaks specifically about ‘internal freedom’, ‘psychological independence’ and the conditions necessary for avoiding ‘harm of the soul’ (1994, 378; 2002, 471).

²⁷ Diogenes emphasizes the more physical aspect of temperance or self-control (though he, by no means, ignores the mental). He sees it consisting largely of the heavy training and good condition of the body to prevail over anything; moreover, he appears to have forced himself, through habitual exercise, to learn to

the ability to be untouched by fire, he would be of good cheer even if he entrusted his person to Etna, so too anybody who has *equipped himself well for pleasure will neither, when engulfed in it, get hot nor burn nor melt.*" (Maxim. Tyr. 1. 9)²⁸

By paralleling the effects of pleasure with the effects of something as powerful and destructive as fire, the latter quote attests to the strongly cautionary and admonitory perception of pleasure, as we have seen outlined by North. We might see this as further serving to accentuate Aristippus' tremendous quality of self-mastery; like someone walking straight into a burning fire and not suffering from the flames and heat, Aristippus appears to indulge in pleasures without being subjugated or harmed in any way by their effects.

To bring this out a little more we might consider examining Aristippus in regards to sexual relationships or relationships of passion since it is precisely these sorts of pleasures that, for many –as is vivid in the ancient literature, exert their power in that they are often thought to be accompanied by a kind of madness or loss of control.²⁹ The testimony on Aristippus is filled with references to these sorts of relations with women (and men). For example, in the *Memorabilia*, Socrates starts off his discussion with Aristippus by accusing him of being rather licentious in regards to, among other things, sex (2. 1. 1). This is also hinted at in Socrates' rendition of Prodicus' fable: Vice promises Heracles that if he takes her path he shall meet with the most joyful pleasures of love, while Virtue rebukes that Vice's traveller fills himself with all things before he even desires them and deploys any kind of trick he can, even using men as women, to gain sexual pleasures (2. 1. 30). Furthermore, just in Diogenes Laertius alone, there are six separate references making mention of Aristippus' frequent encounters with different ladies and courtesans,³⁰ above all the much quoted reference to the famously beautiful hetaerae Lais (II 75).³¹ It is somewhat startling that

despise pleasure (DL VI 70-1). Diogenes' lifestyle was predominantly ascetic. On the contrary, in Aristippus, there is little that points to a concern for this constant physical training and exertion as a means of being 'equipped' for pleasure. Rather, not only does autonomy, in Aristippus' case, appear to come almost solely via the mind but it is also, by many accounts, marked by a kind of effortlessness (DL II 66).

28 This claim of maximal flexibility and autonomy, moreover, looks to be extended to almost *all* situations: "He was capable of adapting himself to place, time and person, and of playing his part appropriately under whatever circumstances." (DL II 66)

29 The ancient literature is filled with such examples. In the *Republic* Socrates asks his interlocutor whether or not he can think of a greater or keener pleasure than sexual pleasure. Glaucon says that he cannot –nor, he adds, can he think of a madder one (403a, see also discussion with Cephalus, 329c). In the *Laws*, the Athenian stranger says that the desire for sex, out of all the other desires, is felt most keenly, kindling the fires of passion, and therefore must be kept in check (783a). In Epicurus, see e.g., DL X 118. In Lucretius, see e.g., DRN 4. 1073-1140 and 4. 1141-1150.

30 See II 69, 74, 76, 81, and note the name of one of his dialogues 'To those who blame him for his love of old wine and of women'-84.

31 For categorized testimony on Aristippus' life of luxury regarding the pleasures of food, drink, clothes,

there is so much testimony on these sorts of indulgences and absolutely *no* indication alongside this that Aristippus ever suffers any subjugation or loss of control or, for that matter, even feels slightly intimidated by the effects of any such experiences.

In an elucidation on Aristippus' self-mastery, Guthrie (1969, 495, n.1) perceptibly mentions J.L. Austin's comment on taking two portions of a favourite sweet of which there are only enough portions to allow one for each of the guests:

“I am tempted to help myself to two segments and do so, thus succumbing to temptation...But do I lose control of myself?...Not a bit of it. We often succumb to temptation with calm and even with finesse.”

Indulgence, in other words, need not bring with it any kind of frenzy, madness or loss of control in the agent. This is something Aristippus seems to have clearly understood and it is perhaps best brought out in his reported relationship with Lais: “I possess Lais, she does not possess me.” That is, he enjoys Lais without suffering the madness and lack of control that, for instance, Socrates presumes will afflict Critobulus after kissing Alcibiades' handsome son (1. 3. 9-11).

This is perhaps further highlighted by looking at the contrast in the trepidation reflected in Aristippus' contemporary Antisthenes in regards to sexual attraction. Though probably exaggerated, Antisthenes is reported to have said that he would rather be mad than feel pleasure (DL VI 3); as a precaution to getting too stirred up and therefore subjugated he allegedly only associated with women who were ugly (DL VI 3). While, quite the opposite, Aristippus freely consorted with the most beautiful and seductive hetaerae.³²

We should begin then to get a picture of someone who might adequately meet Socrates' warning about the disruptive effects of certain desires and pleasures. That is, we should gather from all this that there is an independence of mind and a kind of coolness in Aristippus' approach to his excesses that seems to undermine the common perception –mentioned by North and implied in Socrates' myths to Calicles and in his rendition of Prodicus' Fable as reported by Xenophon – of madness, disruption of the soul or general loss of control, as one of the necessary outcomes of pleasure-pursuit or licentiousness. Moreover, it is just this active control or manipulation over his experiences without, in

scents, women, see Mannebach, 1961, frag. 72-83.

³² Grote, 1865, 546, says that “the society of these fascinating Hetaerae was dangerous, and exhaustive to the purses of those who sought it...” That Aristippus was not only successfully able to participate in this manner of life, but to appear to have done so quite smoothly, is, it would seem, further testament to the possession of a kind of composed and equanimous approach.

turn, allowing them any influence over him that marks him with the kind of autonomous freedom that allows for the continued exploration and enjoyment of *all* desires and pleasures –the kind of freedom, in other words, which might give him good reason to think his happiness to be invulnerable.

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