[*NICANOR and BROMANDER are sitting on a portico, MEMNON approaches on the street*]

BROMANDER: Hail, Memnon!

MEMNON: Hail, my friends. It is a fine day, is it not?

BROMANDER: One could not ask for finer.

NICANOR: It is indeed, but tell us Memnon—are you now heading towards some destination, or merely strolling about for your own pleasure?

BROMANDER: Aye, Memnon, which is it? For, if you are out of doors for no other reason than to enjoy the day, then you may as well remain here and talk with us.

MEMNON: I confess that I am out for pleasure indeed, though still I am minded towards a destination, of sorts: out to the countryside, where one can best savor the air of a fine day. But will the two of you not join me?

BROMANDER: Here we thought we had caught you, Memnon, but now you aim to sweep us along with you in your rambling! Well, we have sat around long enough, and our young friend here could very well benefit from a change of scenery, for he is in an anxious mood despite the pleasant atmosphere of to-day.

MEMNON: And whence comes this anxiety? I did not think such things could grow in a rarefied, sea-born air such as this.

NICANOR: I am quite fine, Bromander only takes my preoccupation for distress. Though, he is not wrong– I do desire to be out of the city now that you have conjured the image for me.

MEMNON: Then, if you are both prepared, let us be off! But this 'preoccupation' then— what has commanded it?

BROMANDER: He is worried about the country and the state, politics and so on; you know how one must forgive the youth for fretting over such things, since they have not yet learned to accept what is out of their control.

MEMNON: Ah, but I often think this is a bias on the part of us older men, that we have learned contentment only as a remedy for frustration, and that perhaps we do well for our ourselves to lend an ear to restless youths, if only that we might absorb some of their animation. It is undeniable, you will admit, that it is not for nothing that he must feel this way– *Vendidit hic auro patriam, dominumque potentem imposuit; fixit leges pretio atque refixit*. So let the young man speak for himself, in any case we shall suffer no shortage of words while we stroll if politics is our subject.

NICANOR: I would not think to go on and on about the sorry state of our affairs, all of the gross wickedness which surrounds us today and the wayward ways of men, since these things are already so apparent to anyone with sense. *The menial porters are in command, and the bad reigns o'er the good*, as you know. But to tell you the truth, I have realized that it is not these bad conditions themselves which preoccupy me, but really it is something else– the fact that I cant seem to do anything about it myself. What I mean

to say that it would not require a change in these conditions–a real victory– to satisfy me, only the chance to fight, but I do not know how I can. I would be happy just to find a meaningful struggle to commit myself to, even if it were against terrible odds.

MEMNON: You are already wise beyond your years to realize such things, *It is not victory but the cause that makes the warrior noble.*

BROMANDER: You see Memnon, what I told him is that if this were really true, he would even now be out seeking political power, whatever the cost, but instead he sits on porticoes philosophizing with old men! Anyone who wants to change conditions must of course first gain power- and there is your struggle, Nicanor: become as powerful as you can, by whatever means, and then you might succeed in manifesting your visions.

NICANOR: But what stops me from pursuing political power is the thought that all of the possible methods for doing so would require me to act ignobly– the politics of our state is a theater of buffoons, wholly the creation of wicked oligarchs, and one only goes up the ladder by flattering them, or else rousing up against them a mob of the disaffected poor. Either case requires flattery and subjection to base sorts, which I can never bring myself to do– *I hate like the gates of Hades the man who says one thing and hides another in his heart.* And yet I feel ignoble myself to sit idly by and accept servitude under the wicked. Ah! *By who knows what hopes the coward was made weak*?

[*They walk in silence for a time*]

MEMNON: I think it is an unavoidable realization, no matter how terrible the implications, in a state as wicked as ours, the only noble political action for men is to form conspiracies against it.

BROMANDER: But surely you do not think that such things can have any sort of chance of success, Memnon? *State is called the coldest of all cold monsters, and coldly it lies;* The last thing I want is for the youth to be swept away by these romantic notions of dying in some hopeless action, for to go to ones death knowingly in vain is never a true act of nobility, only the foolishness of imitators and play-actors.

MEMNON: *Nullum est magnum ingenium sine mixtura dementiae*– but in any case I would not want anyone to hear this phrase, "conspiracy against the state", and run off with it to go do something rash. A conspiracy, mind you, means only "those who breathe together", *con-spiritus,* men who are joined together in some common aim. But let me ask Nicanor now: regarding what is the fitting political orientation for the noble man, is it satisfactory for him to simply be *against* the state, or rather must he act *for* something?

NICANOR: I think he must act, ultimately, for justice, through the establishment of a good order.

MEMNON: Well said; and so it is only because the state stands in the way of justice that good men must be against it, since their real cause is for justice?

NICANOR: Yes, that is right. The rebel without a cause may as well be a wild animal, I think.

MEMNON: Then our problem is not really to determine how to attack the state, but rather how to

build a just order in spite of it.

NICANOR: But how indeed is that possible? There are no unclaimed lands which we might run to and inhabit.

MEMNON: No, not for us, not now. But let me ask you: this ruling class of oligarchs, what is the source of their power?

NICANOR: They rule most of all through the control of money, which is why our friend has given our state the name of a "numismatic oligarchy". The money, which is representative of debt, keeps the people in perpetual servitude, and ever directs the fruit of all of their labors to those who have positioned themselves closest to the fount.

MEMNON: And this sort of money, is it unnatural? I mean, does it function in accordance with, or contrary to, the natural function of money?

NICANOR: Quite contrary to it.

MEMNON: Then we might take heart in the truth that anything contrary to nature is fated to wither and decay.

NICANOR: Well– yes, but over what length of time? It does us no good if there is not a single good free man left by the time this state disappears; besides, one bad order can be replaced by another ad infinitum, and especially so since the condition of the people is so poor from generations of misrule and corruption.

MEMNON: There is no way to know when or how the power of the state will retreat, and there can never be a guarantee that what replaces it will in fact be better, yet still the simple fact that its doom is assured is all we need to know in order to orient our conspiracy.

NICANOR: What do you mean?

MEMNON: I mean that while there are currently no unclaimed territories, there will come a day that much will be up for grabs. Therefore it seems to me that for the noble man, who cannot strive for power under these current conditions without debasing himself, the proper political activity is to prepare the ground for a future time when the authority and power of the state begins to recede, and a conspiracy of the noble can seize an opportunity with real chance of success.

NICANOR: I must admit, it is a fine thing to imagine, and I can not find fault in your reasoning Memnon. But tell me, how can men prepare for a future situation when they are uncertain, to say the least, of what in fact it will involve and when it will come about?

MEMNON: No preparation could ever be complete, and there is no guarantee of success in such an undertaking. Should men today begin to undertake it, it is almost entirely assured that they will not live to see its completion. But yet, this undertaking allows the noble man to live with purpose, as a political animal, without debasing himself in the circus which revolves around our modern state. And there are, you will allow, general conditions which must be met, regardless of the specific future circumstance?

NICANOR: I suppose so, yes. Most fundamentally, we could say that the existence of an aristocracy requires an *aristos* to exist in the first place.

MEMNON: This is an obvious fact, but yet it orients us. To work for the existence of a future *aristos* is no facile matter. Let me hear your opinion: is the capacity for excellence to be found in all men, or only in some? That is: can excellence be taught?

NICANOR: I think that all men, regardless of their station, are made better by teaching, but that nevertheless, *learning hath never made a bad man good,* and only a relative few possess the potential for real excellence.

MEMNON: But whether or not a man has the potential for excellence, he will only ever come to *possess* that excellence if he is taught in some way?

NICANOR: Yes

MEMNON: Then, it seems to me, the best sort of preparation is that which will teach the potential *aristos* to come into their own excellence. For, will the establishment of a future aristocracy not require men of the utmost ability and virtue? It seems to me that all other struggles will be pointless, if men of such type will not exist.

NICANOR: But how can we bring about men more excellent than ourselves? Do not the ancient *aristos* exceed us moderns in body, spirit, and mind? *Aetas parentum, peior avis, tulit nos nequiores, mox daturos progeniem vitiosiorem.* If, over all of this time the higher specimens of men have only degenerated, why should we expect any different in the future?

MEMNON: Ah, but you of all men should know that it is possible for men to bring up generations more excellent than themselves– tell me again, who was your instructor in wrestling?

NICANOR: It was Cleophron, Memnon.

MEMNON: And Cleophron, he is considered a great instructor in wrestling, is he not?

NICANOR: Very much so, many consider him the best.

MEMNON: Yes, and he is considered the best instructor because so many of his students excel in wrestling, or because he is the best wrestler himself?

NICANOR: The former, of course.

MEMNON: And so you see: Cleophron himself is, I am sure, a fine wrestler, yet he has produced wrestlers which exceed his own ability, champions such as Teleutas, and yourself. How then could he do so, if it were not indeed possible to bring about greater excellence than what oneself possesses?

NICANOR: I see your point, Memnon, but wrestling is a sport, something quite different than what we are now talking about, which is the quality of a man's entire soul.

MEMNON: Maybe so, but see: we are just now passing out of the city and into the country, and there is

much walking yet before us, so perhaps it is worth figuring how the two things are different, and how they are similar, since we have the time. What is excellence in wrestling, and what is excellence of the soul?

NICANOR: Well the first is obvious; it is simply the ability to win wrestling contests, but the other is harder to clearly define— men are always judged against novel situations. I suppose we could say that the man of the more excellent soul is the one who exhibits greater virtue.

MEMNON: I think you are right, and have we not already determined that part of virtue is taught?

NICANOR: We have.

MEMNON: And is the ability to teach something different from the thing itself? Just as how excellence in teaching wrestling is different than excellence in wrestling?

NICANOR: That is so.

MEMNON: And we recognize excellence in teaching by the training of students who themselves surpass the teacher?

NICANOR: We do.

MEMNON: And in wrestling, how is this done?

NICANOR: Well, the great instructor is the one who is able to masterfully balance the difficulty of challenge given to the student. When challenges are too easy, the student fails to grow, since the extremity of his abilities are not reached, but when the challenge is too hard, the student likewise is stunted, since he cannot even hope rise to meet the challenge, and so he becomes discouraged. The best teacher keeps the student always at the limit of his ability, so that he is constantly bringing greater and greater feats to familiarity.

MEMNON: And is this not how the virtues are strengthened as well? When we really require them and are spurred on by necessity, we are able to summon them to a greater degree than we otherwise could. The difference is that the student of wrestling has the instructor to formulate these experiences for him according to a system, but there exists no systematic instruction of virtue, and so there are no instructors either, and men rather leave what is most important of all to happenstance. It is no wonder, then, that the virtues on the whole seem to decline with the passing of generations, when men are so careless as to their upkeep and transmission.

NICANOR: But, you will admit, virtue encompasses many more things than wrestling, and it still seems to me that there could not be a systematic cultivation of virtue in the way that there is for wrestling or the arts, since scenarios requiring virtue are always new and different, while arts deal with repeatable situations.

BROMANDER: And there is a further difference: an art can be taught to anyone, but virtue can only be taught to those who already possess some measure of it. When you said that men must have "potential for excellence" in order for it to be possible to teach them excellence, even this is too simplistic. Really, there is not a single type of excellence, but there are many forms of it, and some men achieve excellence

through an abundance of certain virtues, while remaining quite flawed in others. The way I see it is that some men will always be blind to certain virtues; a coward will see bravery as recklessness, an ambitious man will see justice as an obstruction, the intemperate man will see moderation as weakness, and so on. Any attempt to codify the teaching of virtue into a system or school will be doomed to failure, since the attainment of virtue is always an individuated path, and the development of virtue requires a freedom of choice which only begins where codification ends.

MEMNON: You spoke well just now, Bromander, when you said "the development of virtue requires a freedom of choice", because I think you are right, and what you mean, essentially, is that one can only learn virtue for oneself, and this makes it unlike the arts, in which men can gain a high degree of proficiency by exactly following the instruction of a teacher. Nevertheless, are there not ways in which one is influenced by the virtue of another, such as when men learn from living example? Also too, is not friendship the greatest aid to virtue, since true friends spur one another on to be greater? A true friend, it seems, has the same effect on virtue that the instructor has on wrestling skill– ever pushing one to the edge of what they are capable. Therefore, it seems to me that rather than schools, our aim would be better accomplished by associations, which could be the fertile ground for friendships.

NICANOR: Associations of what sort?

MEMNON: The best sort, I think, would be associations based upon those activities which demand the exercise of certain virtues, for then, you see, the men would not only be forming friendships, but would also then be in the very environment for proving themselves to their friends. Of course, no one activity can provide for the growth of all types of virtues, so there will have to be at least two different types: one for the virtues of the spirit, and the other for the virtues of the intellect— the spirit being the part of the soul that strives, reacts, and impels, and the intellect being the part which reflects, knows, and judges. The first we might call the *thumotic* association, and the second the *noetic*. Now what do you think is the best sort of activity to test and strengthen the virtues of the spirit? I mean courage, indignation, magnanimity, fortitude, loyalty, righteousness, and restraint.

NICANOR: The best activity by far for this purpose would be warfare, but of course this is not practical to undertake. Therefore, I would think that all of the activities which approximate or prepare for warfare would be the best.

MEMNON: And what would those be?

NICANOR: Hiking and marching, sports, training in the use of weapons, hunting, field-craft, and anything in which man must endure hardship and the elements, in which he becomes confident in his own ability, coming to know both his own capacity for independence and when he must concede to the powers of nature or others superior to himself.

MEMNON: Well spoken. Now as you of course know, the spirit, whilst giving man the ability to strive and defend, is itself like a blind steed, which must be properly guided by the intellect, that part of the soul which knows and sees. And our future aristos, they must not only be capable of performing great and heroic deeds, but they must know when is the proper time for action and when to remain concealed- furthermore, should they ever achieve success in establishing sovereignty, they will need the wisdom to institute a good and lasting order. So then, what sort of activity might men convene under to strengthen these noetic virtues: wisdom, understanding, practical judgment, discernment, craft, sagacity, and attunement?

NICANOR: The answer to this I am not as confident about, and now the only thing which comes to my mind is associations devoted to the study of the humanities– literature, history, philosophy, and the fine arts, in order to bring about familiarity with human beliefs and institutions, and to learn from all of the examples that these fields of study present.

BROMANDER: Ah, now here I must object to the idea that institutions of learning can be trusted to instill wisdom. Have we not all met scholars, well-studied and full of facts, who nevertheless possess weaker powers of reasoning than many common uneducated men?

MEMNON: Yes, Bromander, such men are all too familiar, to be sure. I do see that this idea of noetic activity is different in a key regard from what you, Nicanor, had previously recommended in the way of thumotic activity. For, in all of those thumotic activities which you proposed, men are placed into struggles with clear objectives, either against each other in sport, or against nature and the elements in the field, but now it seems difficult to imagine how "study" can present the same sort of antagonistic forces which are necessary for strengthening of virtues. But yet, some sort of noetic activity is necessary for our aims, as it would not do to stop only with the thumotic association, and leave the development of the intellect to happenstance, since without their own intellectual guidance, such a band of well-spirited men may become just a tool of an other's intellect, or begin to forget their own purpose in misunderstandings and illusions.

NICANOR: I will have to hear your answer, Memnon, if you can come up with an idea better than mine. It is difficult, since it seems that some men do increase noetic virtue through study of these things, while others never do, no matter how much they engross themselves in the subjects and no matter how many facts they commit to memory.

MEMNON: Yes, there must be some difference there which is important for us to identify. If the virtues of the spirit are developed through struggle against adverse conditions, perhaps there is some sort of struggle on the part of the intellect, which it must engage in to test itself and grow. But what is the antagonistic force to the intellect?

NICANOR: Ignorance?

MEMNON: If ignorance is the antagonist to the intellect, then we would say that struggle against ignorance trains the intellect?

NICANOR: Yes.

MEMNON: But ignorance, it seems to me, is not a force which pushes back against one, it is a privation rather than a resistance. And, of course, the worst and most common type of ignorance to be found in men is that they are ignorant of their own ignorance– they simply go along their merry way thinking themselves to have everything figured out, and thus in no way ever challenge the powers of their intellect, in light of this we could not very well say that abiding in ignorance is a noetic struggle. There must rather be some other condition, which one feels as an actual limit or resistance against one's powers of mind– can you say what it is?

NICANOR: That would have to be perplexity.

MEMNON: Right you are! Perplexity, the condition produced by contradiction, or by what is intelligible yet not understood. The man who is placed in perplexity, and does not shirk from it, must struggle against it with the powers of his intellect, and in so doing thereby increases his powers. And here then we see revealed the problem with most academic study to-day, and why it fails to cultivate noetic virtue: it too often finds perplexity uncomfortable, and something to be avoided rather than faced head-on. Can we now determine which activities are ideal for confronting perplexity?

NICANOR: Mathematics is often quite perplexing.

BROMANDER: Ah, but I think we must specify between different types of perplexity, since we can not say that it is always of the same kind.

MEMNON: So you think that mathematics produces its own sort of complexity, different from others? Do explain, my friend. Is a hard mathematical problem not pure perplexity itself? Something which is intelligible as having a definite answer, yet evading all familiar ways of thinking about it?

BROMANDER: Yes, well– mathematics will not do at all for the *type* of resistance you want to habituate, Memnon. The problems of mathematics are purely *formal*– the problem itself is fully specified, the axioms are fixed, rules of inference explicit, and the solution determinate in advance. The challenge of mathematics is purely in rigor, consistency, precision and deduction– all valuable skills in their own right, but what you require for your *aristos* are powers of *judgement*: reasoning when premises are uncertain, evidence is lacking, and certainty is not guaranteed. That is, you must confront *ontological* perplexity.

MEMNON: You have convinced me of your point quite elegantly, Bromander, and I see that you are correct. The most important intellectual virtues are those which aid judgement under uncertainty- since there are no definite axioms to the whole of life and human affairs. *Ontological perplexity* then, is more narrowly what our chosen activity must produce, and now that Bromander has made it clear that this is the case, the answer is obvious to me. Shall you have a guess at what I am thinking of, Nicanor?

NICANOR: I should rather hear you out this time, for I know not what it could be.

MEMNON: Ontological perplexity– this means nothing else than the perplexity of meaning, does it not?

NICANOR: It does.

MEMNON: And how do we deal with and convey meaning?

NICANOR: We convey meaning primarily through speech- that is, through language.

MEMNON: Indeed. Now what activity presents one with perplexity in language?

NICANOR: I should say: encountering a novel word, which one has not encountered before and does not know the meaning of.

MEMNON: Perplexing, to be sure, but think more broadly on that point.

NICANOR: Ah, I see what you are getting at Memnon: more perplexing than encountering a novel word, would be encountering a whole novel way of speaking, another language.

MEMNON: You have guessed my point exactly, Nicanor. Learning a language, if done properly and with care (and not merely transcribing or translating from one's native tongue) presents one with enormous amount of perplexity. But this is not far enough, because I say that not just any language will do; there are certain languages, ancient ones, which are far more suitable than modern tongues for this purpose.

NICANOR: Do you mean the classical languages?

MEMNON: Yes, and all of the ancient ones of that family, because in the first place they are more concretely exacting than our own, and full of conceptual distinctions which we have since lost, since it is the nature of language to tend towards abstraction and generalizations, and secondly because the grammar, being more complex with a greater amount of inflections and declensions, gives one greater awareness of the "semantic axes" along which meaning can be oriented. These ancient tongues grant us new ways of thinking, and repeatedly confronting new patterns of meaning is surely the greatest exercise of the noetic virtues. It is important, though, that one not reduce this study to the mere collection of words and grammatical rules, but to take time to sit in deep contemplation of their meaning, and begin to really inhabit the language, as it were. You see, the proper functioning of the intellect is to reflect everything without distortions– like the placid surface of the lake up ahead there, which shows the image of the clouds in the sky perfectly with no perturbations, and I believe that our modern languages are so abstracted and confused in meanings, that it is difficult for us to portray clear images in them. Inhabiting a language which is more exacting, precise, and distinguishing allows us to reassess our thoughts in novel ways previously closed to us. But now I will pose to the two of you a different sort of question.

NICANOR: What is that, Memnon?

MEMNON: Shall we continue ahead to the left, around the loop of the lake and back, or shall we rather head upwards to the right, and ascend the hill to the overlook which stands over the city?

NICANOR: Ah, finally you ask a question that is easy to answer! We should, of course, go up to the overlook.

BROMANDER: You will hear no argument from me on this.

MEMNON: Very well, then, to the right. You know– this talk of choosing between paths has made me think of something just now, in regards to our present discussion. I fear that our conception is still not complete.

NICANOR: What else does it need?

MEMNON: Well, we have determined the proper activities of the thumotic association and the noetic, and we have said that the latter is to be the guide of the former– based on an assumption, I suppose, that the intellect is sufficient to guide the spirit. However, just now I began to realize that this is likely not the case.

NICANOR: How so?

MEMNON: When I asked you which of the two paths we should take, and you gave your answer, was it your intellect that decided?

NICANOR: Hm, to be honest Memnon, it is quite difficult for me to say. I certainly did not weigh out the two options in my mind and deliberate over the choice rationally, but rather chose what seemed preferable to me in a rather automatic fashion.

MEMNON: And indeed, even if you had deliberate over the choice rationally, and weighed the two options according to some scale of judgement, ultimately your intellect would still not be responsible for the choice, would it?
NICANOR: Well, that does not seem so obvious to me, I think in that case I would have decided by my intellect.

MEMNON: Perhaps I can demonstrate to you the thought as it occurred to me. Tell me, what is one possible factor by which you might judge the relative merits of the two paths?

NICANOR: I suppose that I might decide based upon which distance is longer or shorter, and compare the two measures. This, however simple, is still undoubtedly an undertaking of the intellect.

MEMNON: Yes, but then what prompts you to ultimately choose one or the other? If you are tired and wish to complete your walk faster, you will choose the shorter path, but if you are out for the purpose of exercise, or simply enjoying yourself, you might choose the longer and more difficult one.

NICANOR: So what you are getting at, then, is that the intellect is not in fact the guide of the spirit? But does not wisdom, a noetic virtue, show us what is good?

MEMNON: It seems to me now that wisdom and all the other virtues of the intellect only serve to illumine or reveal a thing, but that our attraction or repulsion to the thing comes from somewhere else. For if it were otherwise, and right desire was something cognitive, philosophers would always be the most virtuous of men, but hardly is this seen to be the case– see how Merlin was led by a foolish lust to his doom. This being so, must we not then understand how the *aristos* are to cultivate the right sorts of attractions, lest the cultivation of the other virtues be in vain?

NICANOR: So it seems we must identify the virtues of desire, and how to cultivate them.

MEMNON: So it seems, but I myself do not know where to begin, since I am not even sure what desire really is. Is it a faculty of the soul, like the spirit and the intellect? Or is it a force imposed on us from outside ourselves? Or something else altogether?

BROMANDER: I will tell you: this desiring force, what men have otherwise called “will”, is to be found neither within us nor outside us– you will find, upon examination, that neither of these possibilities stands up to scrutiny. For, if the will is put upon us like a spell from an external daemon, it wouldn't matter at all to our own cognizance, for the reason that the idea of will or desire is only intelligible to us in relation to individual bodies; regardless of the origination of the desire, I *feel* it as my own. Yet neither can the will be a faculty or power of the soul: if one is looking for some internal engine or force-producing organ which *pushes* us towards our desires, he will never find it– he will only encounter a constellation of various appetites and drives, none of which require this extra 'willing organ' to be explained.

MEMNON: So do you deny that the will exists?

BROMANDER: Nay, Memnon, I say, in fact, that the will is *all* that exists. You will not find it either inside or outside of the self because the will transcends this barrier, which is nothing really but an advantageous illusion. Will is the substrate of everything– your mistake is to think that the world is made of things that *possess* forces, when really the world is made of forces that temporarily stabilize into things. Is this not exactly the ever-changing, ever-becoming fire which Heraclitus spoke of? *A world of forces, without beginning and without end.*

MEMNON: So you assert, then, that the intellect and the spirit are not merely pushed or pulled by desire, but are rather instantiations of desire itself?

BROMANDER: That is right.

MEMNON: But surely you cannot deny that your intellect recognizes form?

BROMANDER: On a more basic, fundamental reality, these forms do not have any independent existence at all. This intellect of ours which separates experience into persistent entities, and creates meaning out of a maelstrom of force– it is simply an adaptation of advantage like any tooth or claw.

MEMNON: What I mean is, regardless of how forms are intelligible to us, the important fact to us is that they *are* intelligible at all– and if the soul is merely an illusion as you say, then to *whom* are forms made intelligible? But in any case, let us not overwhelm our friend Nicanor with such ineffable things, I do not think an extended foray into metaphysical topics will do any help to resolve his political anxiety. *For it is the mark of an educated mind to expect that amount of exactness which the nature of the particular subject admits.* What is important to us now is the fact that, while we can not find desire coming from any organ or outside power, nevertheless we observe desire to be quite real and identifiable– and perhaps we could say, quite simply, that desire is not a *cause* of action like a motor or engine, but rather a *quality* of his actions, like a vector or direction? After all, we say that what a man desires is what he wishes to move towards, rather than away from.

BROMANDER: Yes, we could say in this context that desire is an orientation, or perhaps an attunement.

MEMNON: And now Nicanor, we can say that a man might be oriented towards good and noble things, or else towards base or ignoble things?

NICANOR: Indeed, Memnon.

MEMNON: And is there not also an *intensity* of desire? That is, two men might desire the same thing, but one desires it to a stronger degree than the other?

NICANOR: Quite true.

MEMNON: Then plainly, our deliberation must be for the end of determining how men are to be oriented towards noble things, and how they can be made to feel a strong, rather than a merely moderate, attraction towards them.

NICANOR: This is clear.

MEMNON: But to what degree is such possible? Are men born already with tendencies towards what they come to desire, or do they learn their desires by experience?

NICANOR: I think that the answer must be both, Memnon. For clearly some desires are endemic to our bodily nature– hunger, need of warmth, and so on, but there are also desires which are clearly learned, such as desire for honor or ability or wealth, and, I think, those highest desires for virtue and justice.

MEMNON: And what about sensual desires, which seemingly could not be given? A desire for bread and wine cannot be explained by hunger alone, does a newborn infant cry for them?

NICANOR: No, you are right, this type of sensual desires must be something else again which is learned.

MEMNON: And so when an older child has come to desire bread and wine, it is because he has tasted of them and knows them? That is, he has an idea of them in his memory?

NICANOR: It must be so.

MEMNON: But yet, bread and wine only can come to be desired because they are pleasurable to our taste, and is not the capacity for pleasing tastes given by nature?

NICANOR: It is.

MEMNON: Now take again our desire for beautiful forms– the capacity to delight in them is given by nature, but the objects of our delight must be learned through exposure to them. Is this not also so?

NICANOR: Nay, it is.

MEMNON: And young children, do they not have a natural desire to move about and exercise their bodies? But the gymnastic and sport contests which they might come to wish to compete in, these are no doubt learned?

NICANOR: Of course.

MEMNON: Now even the desire for honor, of being recognized as excellent by others, even this impulse is given by nature, is it not? For we witness that even many types of higher animals will fight one another for positions of dominance.

NICANOR: Yes, I suppose that is right, and the *way* in which we desire to be honored is learned through customs.

MEMNON: Then it seems that for all of these types of desire, there must be two components: firstly a general orientation and potential which is given by nature, and secondly an object of experience which may become persistent in the memory. But what about virtue, justice, and nobility? Is desire for these things similarly structured?

NICANOR: I should think that the principle, demonstrated by you to apply to such a range of

examples, would hold up for these desires too, but I would have to hear your thought, since I am not so sure.

MEMNON: I think that if a part is given by nature, it must be a desire for order. What did you say just before, Bromander? "This intellect of ours which separates experience into persistent entities, and creates meaning out of a maelstrom of force– it is an adaptation of advantage like any tooth or claw." It seems that our souls are structured by nature to seek order, since life more easily thrives in order than it can in chaos– indeed, life itself is an example of order. Our ideas of justice, nobility, and virtue, then, must be the learned *objects* of this desire for order.

NICANOR: Then the task of our third type of association must be: to habituate men to these right desires.

MEMNON: Indeed. But how could it be done? Can one teach an orientation of desire like he might teach a craft or skill?

NICANOR: No, certainly not.

MEMNON: Then how does one learn to desire virtue?

NICANOR: By looking up to those who embody these virtues, and wishing to imitate them.

MEMNON: So men are made to desire virtue by proximity to virtuous men?

NICANOR: I should say so.

MEMNON: But then, those men who are already virtuous, they must have themselves learned to desire virtue from men before them?

NICANOR: Of course.

MEMNON: But then this chain of virtuous desire must end somewhere– by reason, if we keep reaching back into time we eventually we will reach a point that men must have become more virtuous without an example before them to learn from. Unless it is true that men were first created with perfect virtue, and have only degenerated from that point?

NICANOR: Surely not, that would be ridiculous.

MEMNON: Then we agree that there must have been a period of time, perhaps over many many generations, in which men ascended in virtue?

NICANOR: There must have been.

MEMNON: Then how did this happen? Such knowledge would be invaluable to us.

NICANOR: I suppose that nature herself must have forced this ascent in virtue by harsh conditions, during a time when they were required for very survival and success, in that those who could not summon the virtue died out, leaving the most virtuous to remain and pass on their qualities, and that

this situation continued until a time that men had achieved enough comfort and safety that the original virtues were no longer required for their material flourishing. *Riches brought us luxury, and wealth and license corrupted us to the core.*

MEMNON: Hm, but then we are left with the same problem: if the virtuous men enjoyed greater success and passed on their traits, while the un-virtuous type of men died out, still the virtuous men first *became* virtuous in some way.

NICANOR: Yes, I see.

MEMNON: But we have established that they of course could not have learned virtue from other men?

NICANOR: Aye, we have.

MEMNON: Then they must have seen virtue in something else, which is superior to men.

NICANOR: In gods?

MEMNON: It seems so, my friend. Visions of the gods may very well have been an original source of human excellence– and these visions may be the only way for them to begin a new ascent.

NICANOR: But how could this be done?

MEMNON: It stands to reason that such an occurrence must have two components: the revealing of the god, and the perception of the man. The first is beyond our power to force or compel by any formula or technique– but the second is within our own control.

NICANOR: That we might be made ready to perceive the revealing of a god?

MEMNON: Exactly right. But we will only be made ready to perceive this revealing if we are inhabiting the correct mode of perception, do you think that is right?

NICANOR: I do– obviously there must be a special mode of perception to receive signs of such kind, a mode of perception which is ordinarily lacking in our modern way of life.

MEMNON: Very much so, it seems. To determine this mode of perception and how it might be learned seems now to be the task at hand. We must first of all be outward-looking, rather than inward-gazing, do you agree?

NICANOR: Yes, it makes sense– one could hardly recognize the signs given by a god if he were blind to anything but his own thoughts and feelings, since the signs of gods appear in the external, natural world.

MEMNON: And we call this discipline to remain outward-looking: 'attentiveness'?

NICANOR: Indeed.

MEMNON: But one might be attentive for different reasons and in different ways, is this not true?

NICANOR: I think it is.

MEMNON: For example, might a man be attentive to circumstances because he is looking for some advantage or gain he can extract from them? And this sort of attentiveness will not do at all, or will it?

NICANOR: No, that seems wholly wrong for what we are talking about. I feel he should be receptive, rather than grasping.

MEMNON: I think so as well. And should this attention be one of scrutiny or suspicion?

NICANOR: I do not feel that this is right either.

MEMNON: And should one rush to form interpretations of what he sees? Or should he exercise restraint, and remain silent and attentive as much as he can?

NICANOR: The latter, I am sure.

MEMNON: And should he only recognize that which seems to confirm or flatter his beliefs, or should he be willing to be contradicted or humbled by what he sees?

NICANOR: Again, the latter.

MEMNON: So we have said that man, if he is to made ready to receive the signs of gods, should learn to perceive attentively, receptively, unscrupulously, silently, and humbly– in a word, reverently. So shall we simply say that the aim of this third type of association is to instill men with a reverent perception?

NICANOR: This sounds favorable to me, yes.

MEMNON: And how are men made to perceive things in a certain way? We have already said that such a thing cannot be simply taught like a craft, did we not?

NICANOR: Indeed, we did.

MEMNON: But yet, there does seem to me that there is some relation of perception to a craft, in a way. Tell me if you agree: when a craftsman views the type of object which he crafts, such as when a shoemaker sees a shoe, or a painter sees a painting, or an architect sees a building, will he not see details and forms in these things that others will not?

NICANOR: Undoubtedly he will.

MEMNON: And the more excellent shoemaker will see more and more quickly in a shoe than the novice shoemaker, and a master painter will see more than a novice painter in a painting, and a master architect will see more in a building than a novice?

NICANOR: All true of courses.

MEMNON: Then the perception has grown more sensitive in a certain way for the one is more habituated to the thing?

NICANOR: Yes, the more habituated they are to see a thing in a certain way, the more readily the aspects of the things become apparent.

MEMNON: Then habituation is the method which we seek, Nicanor. And what sort of action is repeatable, so that it might inform habit, which is also based on reverence?

NICANOR: I should think religious ritual fits this description perfectly.

MEMNON: Aye, such is right– ritual is the habituation of reverence, and so I believe that ritual is the type of activity we have been searching for.

NICANOR: Custodianship of ritual performance, then, this is what is to take place in our third type of association?

MEMNON: And what better and higher activity could there be for an association of men who are striving for nobility and excellence? In the performance of ritual there is everything antithetical to the ethos of this modern age; ritual teaches receptivity rather than grasping, seriousness of meaning in speech and movement rather than laxity and irony, shared communal observance rather than self-consciousness of the ego, awareness of presence rather than a search for utility, and a conciliation to observe the proper times and seasons. Furthermore, such an association is greatly advantageous to friendships, since the ritual observances include shared feasting, music and contests, which strengthen the bonds between men, and in such times men feel a great pull towards upright action and speech, and to hold others to the same, since they believe the gods to be present as witnesses to the proceedings. What is it that Homer says? *For even the gods can be turned, by prayer and sacrifice, and friendship among men is sacred.*

NICANOR: All that we have said gives me a kind of hope, or at least a feeling that there is some possible path forward– but I cannot help but think now, as we look out over the vastness of the city, that the material forces are arrayed against us to a degree of near absurdity. How man men of all those thousands below are the kind of man we require? I think there are probably not more than I could count on my hands, and all so dispersed that they are likely never to meet or recognize one another.

MEMNON: Hope, Nicanor, brings only comfort and ruin, but has no bearing upon success. There is of course no guarantee of these things ever coming to pass, whether enough of the right men exist or if even the gods themselves will still see and grant favor to such things, but how would you rather live, my friend? We can either live with full certainty that we have done nothing to secure excellence, or we can act and live with uncertainty of outcome. *Our doubts are traitors, And make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt.* Now come, my friends, let us make our descent back whence we came, for surely we have now earned the bread and wine which we were speaking of before.

[*End*]