Socratic Moral Psychology

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SOCRATIC MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

Socrates' moral psychology is widely thought to be "intellectualist" in the sense that, for Socrates, every ethical failure to *do* what is best is exclusively the result of some cognitive failure to *apprehend* what is best. Until fairly recently, the view that, for Socrates, emotions and desires have no role to play in causing such failure went unchallenged. This book argues against the orthodox view of Socratic intellectualism and offers in its place a comprehensive alternative account that explains why Socrates believed that emotions, desires, and appetites can influence human motivation and lead to error. Thomas C. Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith defend the study of Socrates' philosophy and offer a new interpretation of Socratic moral psychology. Their novel account of Socrates' conception of virtue and how it is acquired shows that Socratic moral psychology is considerably more sophisticated than scholars have supposed.

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Acknowledgments

Many of those who are the targets of our sharpest and most sustained criticism in this book, especially Mark McPherran and Terry Penner, are not only personal friends, but also scholars for whom we have the utmost respect and whose work we read with the greatest interest and enthusiasm. Anyone who has actually engaged in the practices of philosophy or scholarship knows very well that the ones from whom we learn most are usually those with whom we can argue amiably and at length, and who express the clearest and most compelling versions of views with which we do not agree. The galvanizing effects of Daniel Devereux's work on us is evident everywhere in this book. In recent years, a growing number of scholars have joined Devereux and us in rejecting the standard account of Socratic intellectualism, in favor of various views that recognize explanatory roles for the appetites and passions. Among these, Jessica Moss and Rachel Singpurwalla have now made several significant contributions, whose details we will occasionally contrast herein to our own non-standard account. We owe much to all of those whose views we criticize, for their scholarly contributions have not only provided instruction, but have also given us, the authors, reason to debate between ourselves and, in the end, to settle on our own positions.

We also acknowledge with profound gratitude the assistance we have received from friends who were kind enough to read and criticize earlier drafts of parts or all of this book. Such benefactors include (in alphabetical order): Hugh Benson, Thomas H. Chance, Antonio Chu, Angelo Corlett, Daniel Devereux, Zina Giannopoulou, Rusty Jones, Rachana Kamtekar, Mark McPherran, Jessica Moss, Terry Penner, Sarah Raskoff, Naomi Reshotko, George Rudebusch, Daniel Russell, Rachel Singpurwalla, Elliot Welch, and David Wolfsdorf. Finally, we are deeply indebted to the

anonymous readers of the book while it was still in manuscript form. Their many thoughtful and penetrating criticisms forced us to correct many errors and clarify numerous potential sources of misunderstanding. Even when we were not persuaded by their searching criticisms, we were forced to rethink our views and deepen our understanding of what we think is correct.

Introduction

SOCRATIC INTELLECTUALISM

The term "Socratic intellectualism" has come commonly to be used to describe either of two somewhat related features of Socratic philosophy, which may be called "virtue intellectualism" and "motivational intellectualism." Socrates is generally, though perhaps not universally, regarded as a *virtue intellectualist* because he believed that all virtue is in some sense constituted by a certain kind of knowledge. In this respect, Socrates differs from Plato and Aristotle, who recognized aspects to virtue that were non-cognitive, such as having one's appetites or passions in the proper order. Socrates is generally, though, again, perhaps not universally, regarded as a *motivational intellectualist* because he believed that all human actions are in some way directly or immediately the result of what those acting *think* is best for them. Socrates' moral psychology is "intellectualist" because he is committed to the view that every ethical[1] failure involves some *cognitive* failure, for each ethical failure is the direct product of some false belief about what is good for the agent of the failure.

[1] Many ethical theorists these days find it useful to distinguish "moral" from "ethical" concerns, and the argument has been made (e.g. in Anscombe [1958] and, more recently, in Williams [1985]) that the ancients actually did not even have a concept of morality. Whether or not this is true, nothing we say in this book commits us to imputing any *moral* point of view to Socrates. Our focus, then, will be entirely on Socratic *ethical* thought and the psychology of agency ("moral psychology") associated with that ethical thought.

In most of this book we use "Socratic intellectualism" to refer to motivational intellectualism. Although we take up virtue intellectualism in the penultimate chapter, our primary goal is to articulate and defend a more or less new conception of Socratic motivational intellectualism. We can only say that it is "more or less new" because we are not the first to present an alternative to what had been the received view. Credit for that must go to Daniel Devereux, who first explored it in a magnificent paper published in 1995. It is fair to say that from the time we first read Devereux's paper we have spent most of our common research on Socrates seeking to refine and develop the view Devereux presented. This is not to say, however, that the view we defend in this book is exactly the same as what Devereux first proposed. In recent years, however, and after considerable debate between ourselves, our view is now, we think, importantly different from Devereux's. We shall underscore these differences as our discussion unfolds. Nonetheless, the impact of his 1995 paper on us could hardly be exaggerated.

Since Devereux's 1995 paper first forced us to re-evaluate our thinking about Socratic moral psychology, we have published a number of papers on various aspects of this topic. As we noted, however, our thinking about Socratic intellectualism, especially our thinking about how Socrates conceives of the differences between desires, has changed markedly as we have continued to think about it, and so it would be a mistake to think that one understands the argument of this book merely through familiarity with what we have said previously about this topic. In some cases, the revisions of our earlier work are not only numerous, they also involve significant modifications to the positions we advanced. Moreover, our attempt here is to offer more complete arguments than we have previously. Finally, by putting them together as we have, we hope to show how a coherent, single account emerges that

better explains what Socrates says about motivation than do rival accounts. Specifically, the following works appear in more or less revised form as sections of this book:

- "Apology of Socratic studies," *Polis* 20, 2003: 112–31, is revised in Sections 1.1 through 1.5.
- Selections from "The myth of the afterlife in Plato's *Gorgias*," which appeared in M. Erler and Luc Brisson, eds. *Gorgias-Menon: Selected Papers from the Seventh Symposium Platonicum* (International Plato Studies 25), Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2007: 128–37, are revised in Section 4.2.3 and the Appendix.
- "Moral psychology in Plato's *Apology*," forthcoming in *Reason and Analysis in Ancient Greek Philosophy: Essays in Honor of David Keyt*, eds. G. Anagnostopoulos and F. Miller, Jr., supplementary volume of *Philosophical Inquiry*, is revised in Section 2.2.
- Selections from "Is the prudential paradox in the *Meno*?" *Philosophical Inquiry* 30, 2008 (festschrift for Gerasimos X. Santas, ed. G. Anagnostopoulos): 1–10 and "The Socratic paradoxes" (in *The Blackwell Companion to Plato*, ed. H. Benson. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006: 263–77) are pieced together in revised form in Section 3.2.
- Selections from "Socrates on akrasia, knowledge, and the power of appearance," which appeared in C. Bobonich and P. Destrée, eds. *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy: From Socrates to Plotinus*. Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill (*Philosophia Antigua* series, vol. 106) 2007: 1–17, are revised in Sections 3.3–3.4.
- "Socrates on how wrongdoing damages the soul," *Journal of Ethics* 11, 2007: 337–56 is revised in Section 4.1.
- Selections from "The problem of punishment in Socratic philosophy," in M. McPherran, ed. *Wisdom, Ignorance, and Virtue: New*

Essays in Socratic Studies, Academic Printing and Publishing, special issue of *Apeiron* 30, 1997: 95–107 and "Incurable souls in Socratic philosophy," *Ancient Philosophy* 22, 2002: 1–16 are pieced together in revised form in Sections 4.2.1–4.2.2 and 4.2.4–4.2.7.

- "Socrates on educating the appetites and passions," *International Journal of the Humanities* 2.3, 2006: 1999–2008 is revised in Chapter 5.
- "Socrates and the unity of the virtues," *Journal of Ethics* 1, 1997: 311–23 is revised in Section 6.2.
- "Making things good and making good things in Socratic philosophy," in T. M. Robinson and L. Brisson, eds. *Plato:* Euthydemus, Lysis, Charmides, *Proceedings of the V Synposium Platonicum Selected Papers* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2000), pp. 76–87 is revised in Section 6.3.
- "Socratic and Platonic Moral Psychology," forthcoming in J. Hardy and G. Rudebusch, eds. *Grundlagen der Antiken Ethik* [*Foundations of Ancient Ethics*], Vandenhoek is revised in Section 7.1.

TEXTS, TRANSLITERATION, AND TRANSLATIONS

Citations of Platonic texts throughout the book are to the *Oxford Classical Texts*, and are given in standard Stephanus page, section, and line number of the Greek text. We have elected to use transliteration throughout, as our discussion of the Greek is almost always limited to one or two words at a time. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are our own. Those of passages from the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, and *Crito* are taken directly from the translations we provided in Brickhouse and Smith (2002).

A SHORT HISTORY OF THIS PROJECT

We have been writing about Socratic philosophy together since the late 1970s. Consequently, one might well wonder how we could have convinced ourselves that we really had anything new to say about the subject. Frankly, thanks to Devereux's path-breaking 1995 paper, we came to the conclusion that our previous work had uncritically endorsed a mistaken picture of Socratic moral psychology. We call this picture "the standard intellectualist conception" of Socratic moral psychology because, as far as we can tell, some version of this conception was held by every scholar working on Socrates until Devereux published his paper in 1995.[2] So, in a certain sense, what we are doing in this book is the result of a critical engagement with what has seemed to us to be (at least one of) the inadequacies of our earlier work.

Not only was our acceptance of the standard view uncritical prior to reading Devereux, it was also well behind the times, for Terry Penner had already begun publishing what has now become an extraordinary series of papers in which the clearest and most compelling version of the standard conception of Socratic moral psychology is articulated. One element of Penner's recent work underscored the inadequacies of our own earlier presentation of the same view: Penner (in this case working with Christopher Rowe [Penner and Rowe 1994]) argues against the version of the standard view defended by Gerasimos X. Santas (1979: 185–9), whose

[2] In earlier publications, we called the view we criticize in this book "the traditional view," but one of the many authors who has argued for that view has objected to this description (see Rowe 2007: 21 n. 9), though without explanation for why he finds it objectionable. By calling the view we criticize in this book "traditional," we meant only to indicate that it was the view that has been widely shared by scholars for decades now. Perhaps "standard view" will seem less objectionable – in any case, we only mean to indicate the extent to which this view has been accepted and promoted by scholars generally.

influence on us was very great. According to Santas, Socrates believes that everyone always desires what they think is good. Penner, by contrast, insists that it is not what is *thought* to be good that Socrates regards as the target of all desire, but rather what is *actually* good. In Chapter 2, we review the two ways of thinking about good as the object of desire and explain why we have been won over by Penner's formulation. What we defend here, however, is importantly different from Penner's position because we now reject a point that is at the heart of the standard conception of Socratic intellectualism.

Even as we completed our 1994 book, a few topics continued to puzzle us because they did not seem to square with the picture of Socratic philosophy we had developed over the years. One was particularly troubling: we found several passages in the early dialogues in which Socrates seemed to recognize at least some value in certain sorts of punishments that seemed to us to be poorly suited to changing beliefs in any direct way, as the standard view seemed to require. Not long after we began to take this problem more seriously, and attempted to formulate an explanation of how Socrates could accept a role for such punishments in his ethical philosophy, Devereux's paper appeared in print, and the view it presented and the texts it offered in support of that view were illuminating to us, to say the least. Suddenly, it seemed to us that the problem of punishment could have a clear and plausible solution. As we developed that solution in our first paper on this topic, we realized that the new picture Devereux had offered of Socratic moral psychology also allowed us to reveal and resolve several other inadequacies in the standard picture of Socratic moral psychology: we believed that we could now provide more adequate explanations of Socrates' recognition of what Penner has called "diachronic belief-akrasia," and of Socrates' claim that wrongdoing damages the soul, and of his claim that there could be ruined or incurable souls (even in the

afterlife), and of certain things he said about education (especially early education).

In our 1994 book, we argued against a view defended by several scholars that, in the discussion with Callicles, Plato puts a new and very different moral psychology into the mouth of Socrates without in any obvious way marking that new view off from the moral psychology that had been at work in his earlier discussions with Gorgias and Polus. The awkwardness of the view we criticized, from the point of view of the composition of the dialogue, had always troubled us and although we were not actually yet ready, as it turns out, to rebut all of the arguments that could be made in its favor, we never accepted it. Also troubling to us was the consequence of that view regarding whether the *Gorgias* was really appropriate for the study of Socrates, the research project to which we have been dedicated for so long. If Plato really were suddenly putting a new and decidedly different moral psychology into the mouth of Socrates in the final section of the *Gorgias*, then whatever else Socrates said in that section of the dialogue was now tainted as evidence for the philosophy of Socrates. It seemed to us that doubts about validity of one section of the dialogue would potentially cast doubt on other sections as well. In our own research, however, the *Gorgias* (especially the section including Callicles) was so rich in content that much of the philosophy we found in the other early dialogues would be more difficult to understand well without the insights we could gain from comparing what we found in these other dialogues to the lively discussions of the *Gorgias*. Needless to say, we were troubled by the threat of losing what seemed a rich resource for the philosophy of Socrates.

The threat became even more acute with the publication of Mark McPherran's important (1996) book on Socratic religion. Although not primarily concerned with Socratic moral psychology, McPherran

argued that the view of the afterlife presented in the last section of the *Gorgias* was distinctly un-Socratic. Because there was at least a trace of the same view expressed in the speech of the personified Laws in the *Crito*, McPherran's argument led him also to express doubts about whether the speech of the Laws should be understood to express Socrates' own opinions. Subsequent books on the *Apology* and *Crito* have hardened these doubts into doctrine. More recent books, by Roslyn Weiss (1998) and James Colaiaco (2001), flatly deny that Socrates accepted what he presents as the words of the Laws of Athens, and this denial leads to what we believe is an implausible interpretation of the rest of the dialogue and, most importantly, of Socrates' conception of the citizen's duty to obey civil law. These new trends in interpretation threatened to fragment what we had all along supposed was the basic unity of view within the dialogues appropriate to the research project of understanding the philosophy of Socrates.

Although we have rejected this understanding of the *Crito* elsewhere,[3] we provide a direct reply to McPherran's specific challenge in the appendix to this book. We note also that at least one of the two authors of this book has decided that the *Gorgias* does, in the end, provide one indication of being transitional. That evidence is to be found in its critique of poetry, though happily on grounds other than the picture of moral psychology given in that dialogue.[4] Even so, we both continue to think that the moral psychology in the *Gorgias* (and also in the *Meno*, which is also usually treated as transitional) is entirely consistent with what may be found in any of the so-called "early" or "Socratic" dialogues of Plato, and we hope the analyses and the many citations we make to other "early" or "Socratic" dialogues that we offer throughout the book make the case for this consistency compellingly. Indeed, we find (and cite)

[3] For which, see Brickhouse and Smith (forthcoming) and Brickhouse and Smith (2006).
[4] For this argument, see N. D. Smith (2006–2007).

sufficient evidence in dialogues other than the *Gorgias* and *Meno* to make the case we seek to make in this book.

Apart from these specific issues, in recent years there has been a dramatic rise in expressions of skepticism about the general approach to reading Plato's dialogues that we have shared with others in the study of Socrates. In 1996, Charles Kahn published a new form of the old "unitarian" approach to Plato's dialogues. According to Kahn, all of the so-called "Socratic dialogues" represent only Plato's thinking and should not in any way be taken as evidence for the thought of Socrates as a thinker independent of, and prior to, Plato. Moreover, Kahn held that all of the views expressed in the "Socratic dialogues" are not only consistent with the doctrines Plato develops in the great, so-called "middle period" dialogues; the questions explored in the "Socratic dialogues" intentionally point the reader to those "middle period" doctrines as the answers to those questions. At the same time, others were attacking other assumptions vital to Socratic studies, such as hypotheses about dating or grouping the dialogues, hypotheses about the appropriateness of interpreting material in one dialogue in the light of some passages in another dialogue, and so on.[5] As the magisterial but controversial work of Gregory Vlastos, which in many circles simply defined the study of Socrates, came under increasing criticism, some scholars concluded not just that Vlastos had failed adequately to answer the many questions his work addressed, but that the very questions he sought to answer were themselves senseless, because they were based upon the indefensible presumption that a "philosophy of Socrates" could be found in certain Platonic dialogues. As more and more influential scholars began to express similar views, we were forced to re-evaluate our own opposing position. As we looked carefully at

[5] For several discussions indicating such controversies, see Annas and Rowe (2002).

the grounds for all the new skepticism about Socratic studies, however, we found the arguments of the skeptics ultimately unpersuasive. As a result of this study, then, we find ourselves again engaged in the research program of trying to understand and explain the philosophy of Socrates. We offer our defense for this reading of certain of the Platonic dialogues against some of its most recent critics in Chapter 1 of this book. This, then, is the brief history of what led us to write yet another book about Socrates.

CHAPTER 1

Apology of Socratic studies

1.1 INTERPRETING SOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY

1.1.1 A defense of our strategy

I don't know what effect my accusers have had on you, Athenians, but they were speaking so persuasively that I myself almost forgot who I am. And yet they said virtually nothing that's true. (Plato, *Apology* 17a1–4)

At the 2001 Sixth Annual Arizona Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy, in a prefatory remark before commencing with the reading of his paper, Charles Kahn announced that he thinks that scholars everywhere should simply give up talking about "the philosophy of Socrates." These are the accusations as we understand them: "Socratic studies invents a bogus philosopher by the name of Socrates and it does so by means that are completely at odds with proper historical or hermeneutical technique. In doing so, Socratic studies corrupts the minds of students and scholars." On the basis of such accusations, Kahn and other critics of Socratic studies would condemn to death the research program to which many scholars, including us, have devoted their work for many years.

In this book we propose to offer a new interpretation of a central aspect of the philosophy of Socrates. This project, plainly, presumes that there is something to which "the philosophy of Socrates" refers. If recent critics are correct, however, our project is groundless and

ill-conceived from the start; there is no "Socratic philosophy," no "Socratic moral psychology," no "Socratic motivational intellectualism" to interpret, either in novel or standard ways. Because there have been so many recent criticisms of the research program within which our present project belongs, therefore, it behooves us to confront these criticisms squarely before we undertake to explore specific questions of moral psychology.

1.1.2 A defense, not an apology

"*Apologia*" in Greek – the word in the title of Plato's and others' accounts of the trial of Socrates usually translated into English as "Apology" – really meant "defense" and not "apology" in our sense. We propose in this first chapter not to apologize for our views and approaches, but rather to defend Socratic studies against several recent criticisms that have been made of it, including some by Kahn himself. In particular, we shall defend the widespread practice within Socratic studies of focusing predominantly on the Socrates – and the philosophy portrayed as belonging to the character by that name – in a certain group of Plato's dialogues.[1]

Those engaged in the field plainly do not agree on all of the issues surrounding the status of the Socrates of Plato's "Socratic dialogues" in general or on each specific detail. Such differences may be very important ones with respect to the degree to which the familiar criticisms actually apply to scholars working in this field. Accordingly,

[1] In fact, we have become persuaded in recent years – mostly by the excellent work of such scholars as Louis-André Dorion and Donald R. Morrison – that Socratic studies can be considerably enriched by careful study of the works of Xenophon, as well. Indeed, in the particular area on which we focus in this book, moral psychology, recent work by Dorion (2007) makes a good case for attributing a similar view to the Xenophontic Socrates as we attribute herein to the Platonic Socrates. This book, however, is limited to articulating the views of moral psychology given to Socrates in Plato's early or "Socratic" dialogues.

we begin, first, by specifying what we regard as the two main principles shared by Socratic scholars and that constitute the foundations of Socratic studies. We go on to note the kinds of disagreements that are accepted among those who engage in this research program. Then, in the sections immediately following the first one, we consider a few of the recently influential objections to these principles, and explain why we think these objections do not undermine the principles, properly understood. Our conclusion will be that none of the reasons we have considered count against the principles and, thus, against Socratic studies as a research program. We will then close with a brief discussion about Socratic studies as a research program, explaining why we think it merits this characterization, and what follows from regarding it as such. We concede in advance that nothing we say warrants conclusions about the value of alternative approaches. We claim only to achieve the negative conclusion that the criticisms of the foundational principles of Socratic scholarship fail to supply adequate reasons for abandoning our own interpretive approach.

1.2 THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF SOCRATIC STUDIES

1.2.1 The identity principle

The first of the two principles we propose to defend against criticisms in this chapter is what we will call the Identity Principle:

The Identity Principle: Socrates is the same character, with essentially the same philosophical views, in each of a certain group of dialogues by Plato. (This character cannot be assumed to be identical to the character by that name in works by other ancient sources, or in any dialogues by Plato other than those in this certain group.)[2]

[2] We provide and discuss the relevant list of these dialogues in more detail when we discuss what we call the "Relevant Dialogues Assumption," below. We are indebted to Antonio

Critics often argue as though all scholars who accept the Identity Principle accept one very extreme version of it, one that might be called the Journalistic Historical Identity Thesis. By this, we mean the thesis that, in the relevant group of dialogues, in every detail of word, deed, and description, Plato has attempted to present a precisely accurate portrait of the historical Socrates. In fact, as far as we know, no one has ever claimed that Plato is giving a perfectly accurate portrait of Socrates, so any argument aimed at invalidating the principle(s) behind this practice is an argument against no one.

Another, plainly weaker, version of the Identity Principle is what might be called the General Historical Identity Thesis. According to this thesis, the ways in which Socrates is depicted – even if not absolutely accurate in every detail – nonetheless form a generally reliable picture of who the historical Socrates was, how he spoke and argued, and what his philosophy was. This thesis, which even by its most enthusiastic supporters[3] is never held as a matter of historical demonstration (whatever that might be!), functions for many Socratic scholars as an interpretive hypothesis, whose plausibility is defended on various grounds, but whose truth is never claimed (to

Chu for calling our attention to the fact that we must add the words in the parentheses to complete the principle.

[3] Perhaps the most famous and influential of these was Gregory Vlastos (1991). A cautious defense of what we are calling the General Historical Identity Thesis is given in Taylor (2002); a more forceful endorsement of this position is given in the same volume by Penner (2002). Central to Penner's defense of this position, however, is the view of Socratic motivational intellectualism that we reject in this book. Our own position has been taken as committed to the General Historical Identity Thesis but, in fact, the most we have ever claimed about the historical reliability of any of Plato's depictions of Socrates was what we had to say about the single dialogue, the *Apology*, in our 1989 book on that dialogue: "though we cannot assume accuracy on any given point, we believe that the burden of proof must be borne by those who deny it, and not by those of us who are inclined to grant it" (Brickhouse and Smith 1989: 10). We have never taken any stand regarding the historical reliability of any of Plato's other dialogues, and explicitly refused to take any such stand in Brickhouse and Smith (1994: viii–ix).

our knowledge, at least) as simply established or proven by any of the arguments given in its favor.

We will have more to say about the epistemological or evidential value of such hypotheses in Section 1.5. Let us now simply notice that this view is completely invulnerable to refutation on the ground that there are historical anachronisms within the relevant dialogues, since it does not claim that all of the details of the Platonic characterizations are historically accurate. Nor does this thesis deny that Plato might have invented meetings with certain interlocutors, or even whole conversations with interlocutors the historical Socrates may not have ever met. A conclusive refutation of the General Historical Identity Thesis would have to consist in some reason that was sufficient for concluding that Plato's depiction of Socrates would be recognized as wholly, or at least mostly, false and unreliable by others who knew the historical Socrates. Plainly, however, such a conclusive refutation of this thesis would require precisely what most critics claim we *cannot* have: an accurate knowledge of the historical Socrates, or at least a source whose testimony about him was demonstrably reliable.

We can think of several reasons why one might be agnostic about the General Historical Identity Thesis. Indeed, we believe some sort of agnosticism is all that even the most powerful arguments against it have ever managed to support. But, for reasons we will explain in our replies to the criticisms of this thesis, we do not find anything here that warrants putting an end to Socratic studies.

Although it seems plain that the General Historical Identity Thesis is what grounded the research program of Socratic studies in its earliest stages, we believe that the majority of Socratic scholars working within this program now obviously recognize the program itself as sufficiently robust as not to feel the need to make any decision at all about this thesis, preferring instead only

to affirm a version of the Identity Principle that is actually far weaker than the General Historical Identity Thesis. One can maintain the validity of the research program and accept only what we will call the Philosophical Identity Thesis, which claims only that "the philosophy of Socrates" or "Socratic philosophy" is identical to the philosophy given to Socrates in the relevant group of Platonic dialogues. Indeed, we believe most of those now working within the research program that is "Socratic studies" adhere only to this weaker principle. The Philosophical Identity Thesis makes no commitments of any kind about the historical accuracy of the Platonic portrait of Socrates or Socratic philosophy. This thesis, instead, simply insists that there is a philosophy worth trying to interpret and study contained and expressed by Socrates in the relevant Platonic dialogues and that is distinguishable from the philosophy we find in other Platonic dialogues not included in the "Socratic" group.

Those who accept the Philosophical Identity Thesis may actually find questions of historical accuracy irresolvable. Few we know would ever put it quite so starkly as this. Most of us would at least be interested in knowing whether, to what degree, and on what issues Plato is historically reliable in his portrait of Socrates in any of his dialogues. Even the clearest and most undeniable proof (as if such a thing were possible!) of Plato's historical *in*accuracy, however, would have little effect on most Socratic scholarship. Perhaps notes would be added to scholarly works, acknowledging the historical non-identity of Plato's Socrates with the historical Socrates. But then the rest of the book or article would proceed almost exactly as it would have without such proof, since the historical identity and characteristics of the flesh-and-blood Socrates never really made any difference to the enterprise in which such books and articles were intended to play a part. After all, the goal is only to explicate

the philosophical contents of the relevant dialogues of Plato.[4] Plainly, any criticisms aimed at undermining or invalidating Plato's authority as a historical source on Socrates are entirely irrelevant to the scholarly practices founded upon the Philosophical Identity Thesis.

We should recognize, of course, that this version of the Identity Principle gives us no reason for using the name "Socrates" to refer to whose philosophy is under discussion other than the use of that name in Plato and the conventions of the research program itself – conventions that derive from the research program's traditional inclusion of (and historical roots in) scholarship that accepts the stronger General Historical Identity Thesis. But Plato's use of the name and the conventions of a research program may well be sufficiently good reasons for continuing the practice of calling this philosophy "Socratic," especially since that practice has now taken root within the larger research program we call the history of philosophy. Until and unless some anti-historicist provides a compelling reason to *stop* calling this philosophy "Socratic," which merely skeptical arguments about the view of the historical Socrates could never accomplish, the identification of this philosophy as "Socratic" will continue, if only for the lack of any plainly more adequate way to identify it. As we shall argue in Section 1.5, the very robustness

[4] To give just three examples from recent books in the field: we get this from Hugh Benson: "Whose epistemological views, then, am I examining? The short answer to this question is that I will be attempting to uncover the epistemological views of the Socratic character in Plato's early dialogues. No part of my subsequent argument depends on assuming that these views represent the views of either the historical Socrates or the author of the dialogues himself" (2000: 7); George Rudebusch says, "this book's concern is the philosophical ideas in these dialogues, rather than the historical issues of to whom to attribute the ideas or at which developmental stage Plato wrote which dialogue" (1999: 129 n. 1); Roslyn Weiss simply proclaims, "The Socrates referred to is the Socrates of Plato's dialogues. The relationship between this Socrates and the historical Socrates is not a concern of this book" (1998: 3 n. 1).

of a research program confers some evidentiary value upon its principles and practices.

1.2.2 The relevant dialogues assumption

The second principle we wish to defend in this chapter is what we will call the Relevant Dialogues Assumption.

The Relevant Dialogues Assumption: The group of Plato's dialogues relevant to questions about Socrates (or the philosophy of Socrates) is the group generally identified as the "early dialogues" or as the "Socratic dialogues."

Dialogues that are frequently included in the list of the group relevant to the study of Socrates and the philosophy of Socrates are, in alphabetical order: *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic* I.

Some Socratic scholars generally also freely cite the *First Alcibiades*, or the *Theages*,[5] or the *Meno*,[6] or the *Menexenus*. For various reasons, others may steadfastly refuse to include one or another of these dialogues. Still others may exclude some of the dialogues we included on the first list.[7] There is certainly no unanimity among Socratic scholars as to exactly which dialogues should be included on the list, although there is widespread agreement about the majority of works that belong on the list.[8] In any event, precise agreements on this issue are not required within Socratic studies. All that

[5] Mark McPherran, for example, often cites these two dialogues in his work.

[6] Most scholars writing on what is called the "unity of the virtues," or on "Socrates' denial of akrasia," or on "Socratic moral psychology," cite this dialogue, as we will in later chapters of this book.

[7] Vlastos expresses the view, for example, that the *Euthydemus* and *Lysis* are transitional dialogues, which attribute to Socrates' actions, views, or approaches that Vlastos thinks should be identified as Platonic rather than Socratic (1991: 46–7).

[8] See Nails (1993: 273–92; 1995: 58–61).

is required is general agreement about a fairly large sub-set of the ones listed above.

1.3 CRITICISMS OF THE IDENTITY THESIS

1.3.1 First criticism of the General Historical Identity Thesis: contra chronology

Several arguments have recently been made against the ways in which the relevant dialogues have been selected. Most of the criticisms have disputed sorting Plato's dialogues chronologically. Two strategies for sorting the dialogues chronologically have enjoyed wide acceptance: stylometry and content analysis. Socratic scholars have typically proclaimed both methods to yield very similar results, and – because the two methodologies are (or are at least claimed to be) independent of one another – the perceived similarities of their results have been counted as mutually supporting. For the sake of brevity, however, we wish to focus on content analysis and propose to show why this method provides ample support (independent of stylometry) for identifying a group of dialogues of the sort required by the two foundational principles of Socratic studies.

Interestingly, even some of the most vehement critics of chronology end up employing content analyses in such a way as to identify a group of dialogues that would serve well both principles underlying the established practice of Socratic studies. In his introduction to the recent Hackett collection, *Plato: Complete Works*, John Cooper writes,

> I urge readers not to undertake the study of Plato's works holding in mind the customary chronological groupings of "early," "middle," and "late" dialogues. It is safe to recognize only the group of six late dialogues. Even for these, it is better to relegate thoughts about chronology to the secondary

position they deserve and to focus on the literary and philosophical content of the works, taken on their own and in relation to the others. (Cooper 1997: xiv)

Since Cooper plainly says that *only* the "six late dialogues" can safely be recognized as a chronological group, one might suppose that Cooper's argument would have the effect of nullifying the second foundational principle of Socratic studies. Indeed, his associate editor, D. S. Hutchinson, seems to have understood Cooper this way: Hutchinson cites Cooper's introduction without further argument or explanation for Hutchinson's claims that Plato's "early" or "Socratic" dialogues do not provide either "reliable reports of how Socrates philosophized" or any reason for thinking that "it was Plato's intention in these dialogues to represent the philosophy of Socrates" (Hutchinson 1999: 603). But this is not at all what Cooper himself concludes, for on the very next page of his introduction we find him saying this:

One very large group of dialogues can usefully be identified here. These are what we may call the Socratic dialogues – provided that the term is understood to make no chronological claims, but rather simply to indicate certain broad thematic affinities. In these works, not only is Socrates the principal speaker, but also the topics and manner of the conversation conform to what we have reason to think, both from Plato's own representations in the *Apology* and from other contemporary literary evidence, principally that of the writer Xenophon, was characteristic of the historical Socrates' own philosophical conversations. (*ibid*.: xv)

After providing a list of these dialogues (which includes all of those given in our own list, above, plus several of the spuria and dubia), Cooper draws his conclusion:

[I]n these dialogues Plato intends not to depart, as he does elsewhere, from Socratic methods of reasoning or from the topics to which Socrates devoted his attention, and no doubt he carries over into these portraits much

of the substance of Socrates' own philosophizing, as Plato understood it. (*ibid*.: xvi)

Despite his dismissive attitude towards chronology, then, Cooper ends up endorsing a view that looks very much like the General Historical Identity Thesis, for Cooper thinks that the "Socrates" of the relevant dialogues is based on the actual Athenian philosopher who was executed by the city in 399 BCE, and not just the weaker claim that this is the Socrates worth studying philosophically. If Cooper's position is consistent – and we think it is – then it follows that one can jettison the entire apparatus and the methodologies of chronological ordering and nonetheless advocate some version of both the first and the second foundational principles of Socratic studies.

Debra Nails, another distinguished critic of chronology, reaches a very similar conclusion. Having argued that the entire project of chronological groupings of dialogues is indefensible, Nails proposes another approach, which distinguishes two very general groupings of Plato's works. In one we find Socrates arguing in the agora and in the other the style is more suited to Plato's Academy. But the dialogues Nails puts into the "agora" group match up quite nicely with the ones Socratic scholars have all along put into the "Socratic" group.[9]

It should be noted that even Kahn, who also rejects virtually any attempt to order the dialogues chronologically beyond the last six mentioned by Cooper in the passage cited above,[10] is fully committed to dividing the corpus into three groups, just as those engaged in Socratic studies do. Indeed, Kahn thinks that it is appropriate to

[9] See Nails (1995: 203), and compare her groupings with the ones given above.

[10] The exceptions are the *Apology* and *Crito*, which Kahn thinks "are Socratic in an historical sense," and the *Ion* and the *Hippias Major*. These four, Kahn holds, were the first works written after the death of Socrates (1996: 52–3). Another exception is the chronological

subdivide the first group. The result is that, with the exception of one sub-grouping consisting of three dialogues,[11] Kahn's first group is virtually identical to the list most often used as the basis of the Socratic studies program. Of course, Kahn and the participants in Socratic studies see the same list as reflecting very different philosophical projects. Kahn takes these dialogues to be suitable philosophical introductions to the metaphysical and epistemological doctrines explored and defended in the *Republic*. Participants in the Socratic studies program see these dialogues as containing a number of salient doctrines that are different from and, in several instances, incompatible with those developed in the *Republic*. What is important for our purposes, however, is that Kahn is in substantial agreement with Socratic scholars that the dialogues that form the basis of Socratic studies are best understood as forming a single grouping. Like Cooper and Nails, whose lists also differ slightly from those we find employed by most who are engaged in Socratic studies, Kahn's project shows that content analysis – even if it has been extolled as an instrument of chronology – requires no commitment to chronology in order to sustain the field of Socratic studies.

1.3.2 Second criticism of the General Historical Identity Thesis: anti-historicist criticisms

Another common criticism of Socratic scholarship insists that serious study of works by Plato's contemporaries, many of which are quite similar in style and subject,[12] disqualifies any claim Socratic

ordering of the *Meno* and the *Phaedo*. Kahn thinks the *Meno* must have been written before the *Phaedo* (1996: 47).

[11] These are the *Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and *Cratylus* (Kahn 1996: 47).

[12] Kahn (1996: 1–35) surveys the various other ancient authors who wrote Socratic dialogues. The evidence from these other works is only fragmentary, but there is enough of

scholars have made for Plato's historical reliability in any dialogue or group of dialogues. We can see from the outset just how limited this criticism actually is, for it obviously leaves wholly intact the point of view held by those who remain agnostic about historical questions and endorse only the Philosophical Identity Thesis. But it is also worthwhile to give closer inspection to the typical forms the anti-historicist criticism takes in order to see how ineffective it is even against the historicism that is its proper target.

Perhaps there are stronger or more sophisticated versions of this criticism, but let us consider two statements of it that we find representative, one given in E. de Stryker and S. R. Slings' (1994) recent commentary on Plato's *Apology*, and one by Douglas Hutchinson (1999), in his antagonistic review of Mark L. McPherran's (1996) book on Socratic religion. De Stryker and Slings raise the question of whether or not we should regard Plato's *Apology* as historically accurate. Although they concede that there can be no definitive proof either way,[13] they favor a negative answer, and offer this argument for their inclination: "The most conclusive proof that Plato, when writing his *Apology*, did not feel bound to stick as closely as possible to the main lines of what Socrates had actually said in court is, in my eyes, its exceptional literary quality" (de Stryker and Slings 1994: 6).

Insofar as the *Apology* has clearly identifiable literary features or shows the effects of considerable polishing, we may rightly suppose that it did not "stick *as closely as possible* to the main lines of what

it to conclude that there were many inconsistent portraits of Socrates provided. Individual works by Plato – particularly the *Apology* – have also been compared to various works by other authors who do not include Socrates as a speaking character.

[13] De Stryker and Slings (1994: 7–8): "I would dare to assert that there is, on the one hand, no single sentence in the Platonic *Apology* that [the historical] Socrates could not have actually pronounced, and on the other, that the published work contains no passage so specifically un-Platonic that it cannot be Plato's work."

Socrates had actually said in court" (our emphasis). But why should the evidence of Plato's literary artistry lead us to deny that the work captures both the tone and the substance of what Socrates actually said to the jury (which is all that the General Historical Identity Thesis requires)? Why should we not think that someone who witnessed the trial and later read the *Apology* might reasonably conclude, "Well, Plato's literary embellishment is evident, but Plato's version sets down quite well the very points Socrates actually made, however less elegantly." We can think of no reason for holding that literary mastery and basic historical reliability are somehow incompatible. Why, indeed, could a writer as talented as Plato not write works as dramatically engaging and as artistically complex and intricate as his dialogues plainly are, while maintaining quite strict adherence to what he knew as the historical truth?[14]

Now, of course, the literary merits of Plato's *Apology* may well count against the idea that Plato simply wrote down the actual speech Socrates gave word-for-word. It is unlikely that an extemporaneous speech, as Socrates claims his will be (17c2–3) would have such merits. But again, as we said earlier, we know of no one who accepts what we called the Journalistic Identity Thesis, but this is the only version of the identity thesis that could reasonably be affected by the criticism under consideration. There seems to be no reason for thinking that Plato's own additions of literary structure

[14] In making this criticism, scholarly history is repeating itself. Here is what Paul Friedländer had to say about Olaf Gigon's expression of the same sort of anti-historicism in 1947: "A basic mistake of Gigon's remarkable book […] is its contrast of the dialogues of the Socratics as 'literary creation' (*Dichtung*) with the so-called historical reports. In dealing with historic truth, however, Gigon's frame of reference is the authenticity of the dossier or police report – in that case, what is left of Thucydides? – while his idea of literary creation appears to coincide with what we call 'fiction.'" Friedländer goes on to fault Gigon for giving up on Socrates: "How can Gigon, though he knows that Socrates is an 'elemental force,' put aside 'in determined resignation' the inquiry in the historic existence of that 'elemental force' (14f.)?" (1958, vol. 1: 361–2).

and polish to Socrates' speech require any significant distortion of the views Socrates expresses in the *Apology*. And, even more obviously, the criticism applies not at all to the weaker Philosophical Identity Thesis.

Hutchinson's version of the anti-historicist criticism at least has the general form of an induction: "[T]o regard Plato's *Apology* as any kind of accurate report of what Socrates said is anachronistic and naïve, for it ignores the literary genre in which Plato's *epideixis* participated."[15] Hutchinson's critique is based on an assumption that the *Apology* belongs to a genre of rhetorical display pieces.[16] And not just this, but Hutchinson also assumes that the works within this genre were never intended as "any kind of accurate report," even in part. In light of this window on the world of ancient Greek literature, Hutchinson is confident that the genre in which Plato was participating ruled out more or less accurate accounts of the views of the historical Socrates. Given their importance to his understanding of Plato, it is only fair to ask for evidence to support these assumptions.

Of course, no one can claim to know that these guiding assumptions are true, and so Hutchinson's anti-historicist views must be appraised according to the same ancient evidence we use in appraising the historicist views. And what do we learn if we consider such evidence? What we find is that even the most dedicated anti-historicists are unable to show that Plato's works in general or the *Apology* in particular are conventional according to many of the

[15] Hutchinson (1999: 603).

[16] We find it interesting and telling that the several critics of the historicist view tend to put the *Apology* into different genres. For example, see the view developed in Hutchinson (1999) and contrast it with that of Kahn (1996: 88), who classifies it as a "quasi-historical document" within the genre of "the courtroom speech preserved for publication" and with that found in Morrison (2000: 235), who regards the *Apology* as belonging within the genre of parody (*ibid*: 244). It seems that critics of Socratic studies are not themselves able to agree about which ancient genre we should assign Plato's Socratic dialogues to. Of course, we are inclined to count this as evidence against any claim that genre considerations require us to abandon the assumptions of Socratic studies.

tropes they regard as central to the relevant genre. Instead, they find many of the ordinary conventions missing altogether, and many others "transposed" (de Stryker and Slings 1994: 34).

Even if we did have compelling evidence for thinking that Plato intended to write within a certain genre, this is no reason to think that what he wrote is largely fictional, unless, of course, we knew that the rules of the genre *required* fiction. Although we can be sure that some *epideixeis* were fiction, for example, we know of no reason to think that historical inaccuracy was a *requirement* of the genre to which we should suppose Plato's works belonged. There is simply nothing that we know about the relevant genre that precludes even a high degree of historical accuracy. Even where Plato's writings seem to have similar characteristics to those by other authors, he may well have given his works such characteristics for reasons entirely his own.

In fact, the best evidence we have for thinking that Plato's *Apology* belongs to any literary genre is the *Apology* of Xenophon. But Xenophon makes clear that he is trying to set the record straight (Xen. *Ap*. 1), which does imply that others' accounts of Socrates' trial are inaccurate. Xenophon's criticisms of others' inaccuracies would be a senseless complaint if such accounts were universally or even generally recognized as historically unreliable. Critics of Plato's historicist interpreters claim to know Plato's intentions – but they certainly cannot get these in any direct or obvious way from Plato's own words in his dialogues. The best argument of such critics is comparable to evidence of guilt by association; because we know (somehow) that all *the other* members of a certain genre do not tell the truth, we can infer that Plato's works do not tell the truth. But the conclusion is secured only by dubious literary analysis of Plato's works and by poorly supported claims about what is and is not textual evidence of historical truth. It is no support,

moreover, for denying Plato's historical accuracy to note that other reports of Socrates (in any genre) tell conflicting stories about the man. The inference from "They can't all be true" to "They all can't be true," is, of course, a gross *non sequitur*.[17] The problem is figuring out which, if any, have gotten it right, and on what details. For that, some judgment is required, and we may never be able to come to any conclusion on this issue with great confidence. What the historicists do is try to reconstruct a plausible case. And what the anti-historicists do is try to reconstruct a very different plausible case. The final decision as to which is the most plausible is left to those of us interested enough to judge the cases the two sides make.

None of what we have said is intended to deny the application of genre studies to Plato's works. Perhaps, indeed, Plato did wholly intend to write his works within some particular genre; or perhaps he wrote different works intended to belong to different genres. Our point, rather, is that whatever value there might be in the application of genre studies to Plato should not be imagined or expected to have the result of anything close to a demonstration that Socratic studies as it has been practiced in the last decades should be abandoned as a research program.

[17] This appears to be the inference we are invited, nonetheless, to make by Kahn: "Our comparative survey of the Socratic literature is thus designed to correct the misleading historical perspective that is built into Plato's work. But it can do more. At least one feature of the genre can be of decisive importance for an interpretation of Plato's thought. This is the imaginative and essentially fictional nature of Socratic literature" (1996: 2). The same strange inference may be found in Morrison, who says, "The surviving Socratic writings, both whole works and fragments, contain enough anachronisms and inconsistencies and other sorts of historical implausibilities that we can be confident the constraints of this genre were rather loose, and authors were entitled and expected to put a great deal into the mouth of their character 'Socrates' which the historical Socrates never said and never would have said" (2000: 235). Given his overall skepticism, we are left to wonder how Morrison thinks he can judge what Socrates "never would have said." The fallacy in these complaints, at any rate, is obvious: it plainly does not follow from the fact that different witnesses often tell conflicting stories to the police – as often happens – that *all eye-witnesses are liars*.

But we should recall here one item of evidence the anti-historicists must confront,[18] and we find their confrontations with it awkward at best. Let us consider briefly the version of this confrontation we find in Charles Kahn's important recent book:

> Plato's success as a dramatist is so great that he has often been mistaken for an historian. Hence the history of philosophy reports Socrates' thought on the strength of Plato's portrayal in the dialogues. And it is not only modern scholars who fall victim to this illusion. Like Guthrie or Vlastos, Aristotle himself finds the historical Socrates in the *Protagoras* and *Laches*; and the stoics do much the same.[19]

Kahn's explanation for Aristotle's error is that Aristotle "arrived on the scene too late; he was separated from Socrates by the dazzling screen of Plato's portrayal" (1996: 87). Kahn, then, is, in effect, claiming that he understands Plato's intentions better than Aristotle did! In the first place, Kahn's analysis ignores the fact that Aristotle would have been in an excellent position to question others who knew the historical Socrates and who knew how well Plato characterized the views of his great predecessor. That Aristotle would not have taken advantage of such opportunities is simply not plausible.[20] Of course, an alternative story can also be told, according to which Plato's version of Socrates was so massively successful that, even though subsequent authors knew that Plato's works were fictional, they were comfortable talking about the "Socrates" that appears in Plato's dialogues *as if* he was historically real. But the effect of this story, for which we have no evidence, is to affirm the main contention required by Socratic studies – the Philosophical Identity Thesis.

[18] Though they do not always do so – we note there is no mention of Aristotle's testimony either in Prior (2001), or in the anti-historicist criticisms found in either Hutchinson (1999) or Morrison (2000).

[19] Kahn (1996: 3).

[20] For similar criticisms of Kahn's dismissal of Aristotle as a source, see Brickhouse (1999) and Penner (2000, 2002).

Finally, it is worth considering how much the anti-historicists' standards of historical evidence would affect the entire field of ancient history, if applied more broadly than just to debates about the historicity of Plato's Socrates.[21] Anti-historicist arguments generally follow the form:

(1) The historicist reading of Plato is one way to understand what Plato is doing, but
(2) there is some other way of understanding what Plato is doing that is also historically possible and would not support historical inferences from the same evidence, and
(3) we cannot know which of the two ways (the historicist or the alternative given by the anti-historicist) is the truth of the matter, so
(4) we should be agnostic about this evidence as regards its historical value.[22]

As plausible as this argument may seem from some *a priori* epistemological point of view, its more general application would have the effect of bringing to an end virtually all historical inquiry about antiquity. In the words of one prominent critic of Socratic studies, we should remind ourselves "just how slim and fragmentary our evidence for classical antiquity often is, and how dramatically this affects the degree of confidence we are entitled to have in our conclusions" (Morrison 2000: 263). Fair enough. But if this sobering recognition warrants the kind of skepticism that Morrison and other critics have proposed that we apply to the question of the historical Socrates, then it must also warrant the same degree of skepticism

[21] The point we make here was also expressed by several of the participants – most vividly by Jacques Bailly – at the Sixth Annual Arizona Conference in Ancient Philosophy in 2001.

[22] A very forthright example of such an argument – and of its inherently speculative nature – is given in Morrison (2000: 252).

about nearly every other claim historians will ever make about *any* topic, event, or figure in ancient history. The claims of historicist Socratic scholars, we believe, need to satisfy no more stringent standards of evidence than do other historical claims, standards that must rely substantially on admittedly speculative judgments about what makes the best sense of "slim and fragmentary" evidence. Like ancient historians, historicist interpreters of Plato claim only that their account makes better sense of the available evidence than do alternatives. They see themselves as open to refutation as additional evidence becomes available or if a different, more compelling way of organizing the evidence is provided.

Given the testimony of Aristotle, and the anti-historicists' inability to account for it in a credible way, therefore, and given a reasonable application of standards appropriate to the inherently speculative field of ancient history, we are inclined to think that the General Historical Identity Thesis remains a viable and attractive interpretive hypothesis, especially given its role in helping to create and sustain Socratic studies as a research program, about which we will have more to say in Section 1.5. Having granted this, however, let us be clear about our project in this book: our discussion of Socratic moral psychology requires *only* what we have called the "Philosophical Identity Thesis," and in the remainder of this book, it is only this thesis we should be taken as assuming.

1.4 Criticism of the Relevant Dialogues Assumption

1.4.1 Plato's dialogues as hermeneutical monads

Even if successful, the two criticisms we have considered thus far would not seriously undermine Socratic studies. Notice that, even

if we accepted both the anti-chronologists' arguments and the anti-historicists' arguments, it would still be open to Socratic scholars to endorse the Philosophical Identity Principle, as we have now said we do in this book. But another recent criticism, from scholars eager to defend literary readings of Plato, would actually compel the abandonment of Socratic studies. According to this criticism, now particularly popular among some British scholars,[23] Plato's dialogues must be understood as crafted wholes, complete unto themselves, which do and say all that Plato wants without requiring their readers to do extensive reading or study of any of Plato's other works. To interpret these dialogues in such a way as to require their readers to bring to bear passages or arguments from other Platonic dialogues is, according to this view, to accuse Plato of being a "bad writer."[24] It is obvious how this view truly does oppose Socratic scholarship in a fundamental way, for all versions of the Identity Principle rest on the claim that the best interpretation of a collection of certain Platonic works is the hypothesis that aspects of the same philosophy are being expressed or developed in each member of the collection.

1.4.2 An implausible interpretive requirement

We find the interpretive requirement advocated by this criticism a very implausible one in general, but especially implausible when applied to the works of Plato.[25] It is simply absurd to think that one could be a complete expert on *Hamlet*, for example, but know

[23] Not all British scholars, we should note: C. C. W. Taylor has recently made it very clear that he does not find this approach at all plausible for reasons much like those we advance here. See Taylor (2000: 43–4; 2002: 83).

[24] An example of this sort of criticism, which applies the term "bad writer" as the consequence of using other dialogues to interpret something Plato has Socrates say in the *Apology*, may be found in Stokes (1992: 30–1). See also Tigerstedt (1977: 99).

[25] Kahn rejects this approach to Plato's dialogues, comparing it to reading "each dialogue as if it were a complete literary unit and a thought-world of its own, like the individual

nothing about any other Shakespearean tragedy, comedy, or sonnet. Even if we were to grant that Plato's works are fictions, we could compare his dialogues to Arthur Conan Doyle's works involving Sherlock Holmes.[26] One's understanding of Holmes in any one of Conan Doyle's mysteries is clearly enriched by one's understanding of the character of that same name in Conan Doyle's other mysteries. To insist without some additional and compelling reason that the view expressed by the Socrates of any particular dialogue must be understood entirely by consulting only other passages in the same dialogue is to risk seriously misunderstanding the complexity and subtlety of the view at issue, and of the "Socrates" we find exploring that view.

At any rate, the criticism that derives from this interpretive requirement understands Socratic scholarship as claiming that one could not possibly understand some one or more passages in the Platonic dialogues, or even an entire dialogue, correctly without consulting some other dialogue. But that is simply a misunderstanding of the Socratic scholar's use of evidence. Some passages of some Platonic dialogues strike us as puzzling or problematical in some way. We then look for passages in other Platonic dialogues of the appropriate group in order to help us understand. No one will find the interpretation we thereby generate acceptable, however, if it does not make enough sense of the original passage to allow that passage to fit plausibly and naturally within its own argumentative and dialogical context. In other words, the resultant interpretation

plays of Shakespeare or Molière" (1996: 37). We would argue that Shakespeare or Molière scholars generally do *not* treat each of these authors' works in complete isolation from all of the others. And even if some few authors invited such exceptional individuality of understanding for each of their works, we would regard this as by far the exceptional case. Most literary authors we know and admire write in ways that make each of their works better understood as we read and consider their other works.

[26] We are grateful to Antonio Chu for suggesting this parallel to us.

must qualify as one that readers can plausibly apply to the passage even if it were not supported by what Plato more clearly claims in some other work. From the fact that someone finds the initial passage puzzling and cannot immediately interpret it to his or her satisfaction, one cannot reasonably conclude Plato is confused or writing badly. Some puzzling passages may only show just how profoundly paradoxical some of Socrates' doctrines are. Or they may only show that the distance in time and context that we are coming from make it difficult or even impossible for us to understand what Plato's original intended audience would have understood clearly and easily.

In recent years, many scholars have engaged in a kind of procedural approach that might actually have its basis in the interpretive requirement we have been considering. A number of very fine books and journal articles have advanced our knowledge of Plato by focusing deeply on one work and seeking to interpret it with as little recourse or reference to any of Plato's other works as possible. Not only do we find nothing wrong with such efforts, we have often found a great deal *right* with them. After all, even if those engaged in what we are calling Socratic studies are right to think that a certain group of dialogues have deep philosophical commonalities and affinities, it remains true that the works within this group are *different works*, and also true that each one deserves individual attention and reflection. Some defend the practice of focusing on one work at a time on the ground that doing so is particularly well-suited for appreciating the unity of each work.[27] This seems exactly correct to us. Others have endorsed some version of this approach on the ground that the group of dialogues that form the basis of Socratic studies contain so many inconsistencies that they simply should

[27] See, for one excellent example of such an argument, Scott (2006: 3).

not be supposed to display any broad consistent philosophy.[28] This seems *incorrect* to us. Of course, it may also be true that there simply is no essentially consistent philosophy in the relevant dialogues, taken as a group. The proof required for this debate, in other words, is the overall adequacy of the interpretations of the relevant texts. As we have said, those of us who look for guidance in interpreting puzzling passages of one Platonic text by applying what we find in some other text will either end up providing an adequate interpretation of the puzzling text … or not. If not, then our approach has failed us, and our interpretations should not be accepted. But to concede this point is to concede nothing to the interpretive *requirement* that we must take each dialogue as an interpretive unit entirely on its own.

1.4.3 Socrates' calls for consistency

No doubt one of the reasons that the Socrates of Plato's dialogues has become such a role model among philosophers is that he is portrayed as someone for whom consistency of thought, speech, and action was a highest priority. Throughout the dialogues Socratic scholarship has counted as relevant, we find Socrates chastising those who cannot or will not remain consistent, and sometimes contrasting their inconsistencies with his own strong interest in being

[28] See, for a particularly forceful expression of this sort of claim, Arieti (1998: 273). An influential early expression of this view may be found in Grote (1865: 246; see also 278). Very recently, David Wolfsdorf has expressed a version of this view, on the ground that he finds too many "intratextual and intertextual inconsistencies among Socrates' philosophical utterances" (2008: 20). This, of course, begs the question that Socratic scholars attempt to answer with interpretations that resolve apparent inconsistencies, and Wolfsdorf himself goes on to allow that "problems of inconsistency have to be treated on a case-by-case basis" (*ibid.*: 21). In this book (Chapter 6), we address at some length one of the putative inconsistencies Wolfsdorf actually cites (on the unity of the virtues in the *Protagoras* and their disunity in the *Euthyphro*; *ibid.*: 23), and attempt to show that there is actually no inconsistency in the positions Plato gives to Socrates.

consistent – whether by bragging about his actually managing to achieve this goal (e.g. at *Crito* 46b–e, 48b–49e; *Gorgias* 481c–482c, 508b–509b), or by bemoaning his ignorance when he finds himself unable to achieve it (e.g. at *Hippias Minor* 372d–e, 376c). To return to our point about Sherlock Holmes, what is significant, of course, is not only that Conan Doyle gives the same name to an ingenious detective in each mystery. After all, Plato gives the name "Socrates" to the principal speaker in the *Republic* and *Phaedrus* – dialogues that are not usually examined as part of Socratic studies. Rather, just as Holmes is recognizably the *same character* because of the consistency of how he is described and how he goes about his work, so we think the Socrates of the relevant dialogues is the same character because of the consistency of his views, and of his manner of going about his philosophical work.

Those who suppose that Plato the author need *not* be seen as trying to give Socrates a consistent set of views, all the while having his character by that name emphasize such consistency so relentlessly in his conversations, themselves convict Plato of being a bad writer: we always see Plato's Socrates extolling consistency and insisting that others achieve it, but according to such critics Plato himself shows no particular concern for such things in his depictions of Socrates' actions and speech. On their face, Plato's dialogues seem to require their readers to seek consistency in their portrait of Socrates. As he converses with many others and in many different circumstances, is the way he speaks and represents himself consistent or not? If it is, then this very consistency is what Socratic scholarship has sought all along to reveal and to explicate. If not, then this would seem to count as a very serious complication, if not simply an embarrassment, to Plato's project.[29]

[29] It is precisely that there is such a "complication" between what the "early" or "Socratic" dialogues and the "middle" or "Platonic" ones that is confronted by Socratic scholars' groupings of dialogues into those relevant to the study of Socrates, and those that are less

1.4.4 Dramatic relations between the dialogues

Finally, the fact is that Plato sometimes does make reference in his dialogues to other works he has written. These are clearest in dialogues outside the "Socratic" group, of course, but it is also the case that several of those within this group are given historical settings that put them into important historical relations with one another. The *Theaetetus* is set only moments before Socrates has to go off to hear the indictment against him at the king-archon's office; the *Euthyphro* is set just outside the king-archon's office, before Socrates' trial; the *Apology* gives Socrates three speeches at that trial; the *Crito* provides a conversation Socrates has with an old friend during one of his last days in jail; and the *Phaedo* is set on Socrates' last day, and closes with his drinking the hemlock and dying. Of course, what such chronological connections in their dramatic dates is supposed to show us is a matter of interpretation. But it seems plausible to suppose that such a grouping invites some comparison among the dialogues so connected. Even the earliest collections of Plato's dialogues grouped and sorted them, and such groupings and sortings were taken to have some significance for their interpretation, even if this significance was not originally understood in developmentalist terms.[30] We do not know for whom Plato wrote the dialogues, or even if he wrote some for a number of significantly different audiences. But surely one audience for at least some of the dialogues was those gathered

so, or not at all. The argument for such differentiations by content analysis is that Plato maintains such consistency in a certain group of dialogues, and then abandons that consistency (presumably, in favor of consistency in another set of dialogues and doctrines) in a different group of dialogues. This "complication" is often explained developmentally, but it can obviously be explained in other ways, as we find in Cooper (1997: viii–xxx) and Nails (1993). But it is one thing to see the inconsistencies between the two groups as a problem to be explained away, and quite another to insist that Plato's "literary" goals require that we should not recognize such inconsistencies as a problem at all.

[30] For discussion, see Cooper (1997: viii–xii).

in Plato's Academy. The idea that Plato's students and colleagues would read and understand his works entirely independent from one another and in no specific groupings or order is one that cannot be supported by anything else we know about the Academy or those who lived and worked there. Indeed, the best evidence of how those in Plato's Academy read the dialogues must surely be the evidence we get from Aristotle, whose stay at the school lasted nearly 20 years and whose interpretive practices, as we said in the last section, are quite the opposite of those called for by those modern critics who insist that the dialogues be treated as literary and doctrinal wholes.

For these reasons, we find the most dangerous of the criticisms we have considered also to be the least plausible and the least supported by the available evidence. It follows that, unless the critics of Socratic scholarship have better criticisms to make than the ones we have surveyed in this chapter, there is no reason for Socratic scholars to give any ground at all to such critics. Even if we do not and cannot know whether Socratic scholarship understands Socrates or Plato's dialogues rightly, we have certainly been provided with no plausible reasons in the criticisms we have addressed in this chapter for thinking that such scholarship is as naïve or as wrongheaded as its critics have claimed.

1.5 SOCRATIC STUDIES AS A RESEARCH PROGRAM

1.5.1 Criticizing a research program

We have been calling Socratic studies a "research program." In calling it this, we mean to include it within those intellectual enterprises that share certain foundational principles, and then attempt to generate an interesting or useful larger system of knowledge or information on the basis of these shared principles. So far in this

chapter, we have attempted to defend the foundational principles of Socratic studies against some of the criticisms that have recently been made against them. We wish to end our discussion, however, by shifting the focus from the foundational principles themselves to another very important aspect of any research program – the fruit it produces as a result of working from such foundational principles.

Insofar as the foundational principles of a research program are demonstrably flawed in some way, there is plainly a great risk that work within the program will end up falling short of the goal of forming "an interesting or useful larger system of knowledge or information," as we put it, precisely because any information or system that derives from such flawed principles could end up being fatally infected with the flaws of the principles from which that work derives. We might think of the research programs of phrenology or astrology as examples of research programs simply doomed by such fatally flawed foundational principles. Our recognition of this possibility should make any researcher within a given research program attentive to serious criticisms of that program's foundational principles.

But notice that this kind of transference of flaws is neither inevitable nor necessary in any directly logical way – one can, after all, derive true conclusions from false premises without violating the laws of logic. Research programs that go on for some time and are pursued by many researchers[31] begin to generate certain results.

[31] We do not doubt that there would be controversy among critics of Socratic studies and those engaged in such studies about just how long this research program has gone on, at this point. We expect that some critics would be inclined to characterize this research program as one that has enjoyed a very short life, though there can be little doubt that it has gone on now at least for several generations of scholars. (Some would deny even this. Consider, for example, the claim made by Robert B. Talisse [2002: 46]: "The notion of a *Socratic* philosophy, as distinct from what is commonly known as Platonism, has its origins in the work of Gregory Vlastos.") Some in this research program would claim that

These results begin to have a certain evidentiary value of their own, as support for the value of the foundational principles *as* foundational principles – a weight, we claim, that puts a certain burden of proof on those who argue for ending the research practice supported by such principles.

1.5.2 Has Socratic studies proven itself as a research program?

To be more specific about Socratic studies, what we are driving at in these general remarks is this: on the basis of the foundational principles we have defended in this chapter, a very substantial body of research has been produced.[32] The value of these principles as interpretive hypotheses is not simply dependent upon their defenders' ability to explicate their plausibility as simple statements or propositions. We claim that these principles are given considerable justification by the body of scholarly work to which they have given rise embodied in interconnected interpretations of the relevant dialogues of Plato. They are justified precisely because that scholarly work meets the standards required of a successful research program: again, the standards met when an inquiry results in "an interesting or useful larger system of knowledge or information."

We have long conceded that we cannot be sure whether the philosophical views we expose and explicate really do belong to the

Socratic studies goes back all the way to antiquity, perhaps counting Aristotle's distinction between Socrates and Plato as the first contribution to that program. For the purposes of what we have to say about the fruits of research programs, we believe that there is enough such fruit to evaluate in the way we are calling for, even if we count the program itself as a recent one.

[32] So substantial, indeed, as to short-circuit any thought here of providing a bibliography of the works we regard as within Socratic studies. A small indication of this, however, may be seen just in the scholarly works we cite and engage in this book, which is devoted to a single issue within Socratic studies.

historical Socrates,[33] which is the only concession the anti-historicists can claim their own arguments merit. But working from the foundational principles of Socratic studies, that is, working from the assumption that there is a coherent "Socratic philosophy" in Plato's early or Socratic dialogues, we believe that our own books and articles, and those of others at work in this research program, with ever-increasing sophistication and refinement, support the vitality and viability of the foundational principles we and so many others have employed.

1.5.3 The inadequacies of criticisms of Socratic studies as a research program

Those who would call for the abandonment of these principles must do more than argue for skeptical scenarios intended to create doubts about the principles. Such a strategy may be adequate for suspension of belief about individual claims of fact or value, but the situation is considerably different where such claims are recognized as the foundational principles or hypotheses of a flourishing research program. Even if the skeptics can plausibly show that the claims made in these foundational principles do not pass the high evidentiary standards of critical inquiry all on their own, the principles enjoy further support from the research program they motivate. A case in point is the research program embodied in what is called the unitarian approach to the Platonic dialogues, which was particularly dominant in the first part of the twentieth century. It too had a foundational principle, namely, that Plato held the same rich philosophical views throughout his career as a philosophical writer. Although it continues to have contemporary advocates,[34] the unitarian approach

[33] Again, see Brickhouse and Smith (1994: viii–ix).
[34] Recent defenses include Annas (1999) and Kahn (1996).

gradually fell out of favor, though not because the foundational assumption of unitarianism itself came under attack. Rather, many scholars gradually became convinced that the project required too many "epicycles," too many *ad hoc* explanations of passages. The developmentalist view that replaced it did so not because the foundational principles of developmentalism were put up against the foundational principle of unitarianism, and deemed to be more plausible, but rather because many scholars concluded that developmentalism and what we are calling Socratic studies makes better sense of the relevant information. For critics to provide adequate grounds for ending Socratic studies, accordingly, they must be prepared not just to cast doubt on its foundational principles. Either they must disprove such principles decisively, or explain why the research founded on such principles is so without value or promise of such as not to be worth pursuing or refining, or else they must provide a way of understanding Plato's writings that makes better sense of them than Socratic studies does. There is no shortage of criticism in the world of scholarship, of course, but to our knowledge no criticism of Socratic studies has met or even approached meeting any of these criteria of success.

1.5.4 Socrates in the history of philosophy

The Athenians on that jury in 399 BCE condemned the philosopher, Socrates, to death. But he was already an old man and there was little chance that he would have lived for a great deal longer anyway. Athens' tragic loss, as a result of those jurors' judgment of Socrates, was thus tempered by its inevitability, which the jurors only hastened to some extent. As Plato has Socrates tell us in the *Apology*, however, to recognize this fact is not at all to diminish the culpability of the prosecutors for the role they played in obtaining this result,

or those jurors for making the judgment that they made (*Apology* 39b1–6). But research programs can span many generations, and the one we have defended in this chapter is already the product of inter-generational interest, and continues to be renewed in the term papers, masters' theses, and doctoral dissertations of students, and to mature in each new scholarly contribution to the field. So even if the Socrates of each such effort is not all the same in every student's or scholar's account and even if the philosopher who is exposed in such accounts is perhaps but a pale shadow of the intriguing Athenian philosopher whose charisma our studies barely reflect, the students' and scholars' Socrates will go on living and philosophizing as long as the research program in his name continues to bear fruit.

There is some reason to suppose that the jurors at the historical trial were already deeply prejudiced against Socrates, and so it may well have been that the burden of proof at the historical trial fell (however unfairly) on the defendant. For the reasons we have given in this chapter, however, we contend that the burden of proof in the case against Socratic studies lies with the prosecution. It is a burden, we claim, which the prosecutors have not borne nearly well enough to put an end to the research program they have attacked. Aristotle is said to have refused to allow the Athenians to "sin a second time against philosophy"; so should we refuse to allow contemporary scholars to complete the job of the ancient accusers and to "sin a second time" by removing what can appropriately be called "the philosophy of Socrates" from the history of thought.

CHAPTER 2

Motivational intellectualism

2.1 WHAT WE DESIRE

2.1.1 Why do we do what we do?

In the *Gorgias*, we find an encounter between Socrates and Polus, a young follower of the sophist, Gorgias. Polus is impressed with rhetoric because he thinks a person skilled in rhetoric will be able to do whatever he wants – even to the point of becoming a tyrant who can kill off his enemies, or exile them, at will. But Socrates remains unimpressed, for although he allows that tyrants may do such things, thinking they are best, he points out that what we think is best for us is not necessarily what is *really* best for us. What we *want*, however, is what is *really* best for us.

SOCRATES: Now didn't we agree that we want, not those things that we do for the sake of something, but that thing for the sake of which we do them?

POLUS: Yes, very much so.

SOCRATES: Hence, we don't simply want to slaughter people, or exile them from their cities and confiscate their property as such: we want to do these things if they are beneficial, but if they're harmful we don't. For we want the things that are good, as you agree, and we don't want those that are neither good nor bad, nor those that are bad.

(468b8–c7)

Socrates' view on this issue is certainly not supported by ordinary talk about the connection between desire and action (in English or

in ancient Greek), which is probably one reason why Polus seems to remain suspicious of Socrates' conclusions, even as he finds himself agreeing at each step in the arguments that lead to them. Ordinarily, it seems obvious to us that voluntary action directly reflects the agent's desire – whatever we do voluntarily, we do because that is what we *want* to do. Some of us want to do good things: heal the sick, feed the poor, teach the young, create art, music, or literature; others want to do bad things: use or abuse those who are weaker or defenseless, manipulate or control others, "enact our will" on them without concern for or even despite whatever they might will for themselves. Those who want bad things often go on and do what they want – and those who do bad things often do them not just by accident or mishap, but actually because that is precisely what they *want* to do. Those who commit premeditated murder, for example, may be distinguished from manslaughterers on precisely this ground: the latter do not, but the former do, want and voluntarily pursue mortal harm to their victims. Few who consider Socrates' claim that *no one* actually wants what is evil, accordingly, will find it obviously true.

2.1.2 Prudentialism

It may at first seem that the Socratic view becomes more plausible once we remind ourselves that, as what we will be calling his "prudentialism," Socrates did not distinguish ethical good and evil from prudential interest.[1] For a prudentialist, something is good just in case it promotes or secures our interest – and bad or evil just in case it interferes with or prevents us from pursuing or securing our

[1] This view is sometimes called "egoism" in the literature, but this term applied to Socrates is misleading, as Socrates is very clear about the fact that he takes other-regarding interests to be included within one's own proper interest. Accordingly, it may be more accurately said that Socrates actually seeks to render egoism moot as a category.

interest. So *if*, as Socrates and other Greek ethical theorists argue, there is no distinction to be made between ethical good and prudential good, then it does seem to follow, as Socrates tries to get Polus to see, that those who do wrong do not really promote their interest in what they do – they may *think* it is best to act in such ways, but if they actually thereby impede or defeat their pursuit of what is in their interest, they really must not be doing what they *want* even as they do what they think is best.

Situating Socrates' view within the context of Greek ethical prudentialism may make it seem less paradoxical, but the assumptions that drive it are nonetheless worth spelling out in a bit more detail. First, this can only be true about ethical matters, as we have said, only if there can be no gap between what we ought to do, ethically, and what is in our ultimate best interest – in other words, if prudentialism is true:

(A1) X is good = X is conducive to the securing of what is in the agent's interest.

If there really can be cases in which an agent's own best interest conflicts with what would be ethically required, as those who oppose ethical prudentialism contend, then it would seem entirely possible for us to find that our self-interest can be promoted by unethical acts: the tyrant may well promote what is in his own interest by doing evil things.

The prudentialist's conviction that ethical value and prudential value are the same will seem to most of us to be quite implausible. Surely, most of us suppose that any number of cases of unethical advancements of the agent's self-interest can be produced. Indeed, it may even seem that most examples of wrongful actions, especially where these actions are deliberate and go undetected or

unpunished, serve to put the lie to the ethical prudentialist's identification of ethics with self-interest. The bank robber carefully considers the security systems of the bank he plans to rob. With clever planning and a certain degree of daring, he pulls off his heist, finding himself several million dollars richer afterwards. Retiring to a friendly tropical isle with his ill-gotten gains (one, perhaps, that recognizes no extradition agreements with the country in which the robber committed his crime), he lives out the rest of his life enjoying all of the "finer things," and dies happily at a ripe old age. *Surely*, we may imagine, even if crimes don't *always* pay so abundantly, they *might* do so! But the ethical prudentialist claims that authentic ethical wrongdoing *never* pays. More precisely, whatever the payoff of wrongdoing might be, it will *always* be a payoff in a false coin.

2.1.3 Interest as an objective standard

One further assumption underpinning Socrates' counterintuitive view may now be added:

(A2) What is in our interest is an objective matter of fact, and not simply a matter of the agent's subjective desires or satisfactions.

Giddy morons may suppose they pursue their interest by doing what only makes them giddier and more foolish, but sensible evaluation will conclude that such lives are nothing to envy. The addict's high, even secured by a lifetime supply of intoxicants, is no model of surpassing success in the pursuit of self-interest. One may be subjectively and even exclusively interested in what is not *really* in one's self-interest. For what is *really* in one's self-interest, one's own personal *opinion* of what self-interest consists in is hardly decisive. It

may be that a certain degree of subjective satisfaction is required for a truly good life. But what qualifies as authentic self-interest for a given agent, according to Socrates, is an objective fact about that agent.

2.1.4 The relation of desire to objective interest

If we grant this assumption, it becomes easier to see how and why those who do what they think is best may not actually do what is really in their interest. But to reach Socrates' conclusions, we must also add a further assumption:

(A3) We always and only want what is really in our ultimate interest.

Socrates notes that some aims are intermediate or instrumental aims: we do some things *only* because we see them as means to other things that we value. Few regard surgery, for example, as desirable except as a means to some further end, such as better health or cosmetic benefits. We may undergo surgery willingly, but it is not strictly true to say that we *want* the surgery; what we *want* is that for the sake of which we want the surgery, namely, health and ultimately happiness. And if this other end – cosmetic benefit, say – is also purely instrumental to some further end, then it will similarly be true that we do not really want cosmetic benefit, either, but rather only what we take cosmetic benefit to promote: happiness, for example, or being loved. Only what is desired for itself will count as something we really *want*. This was the point we found Socrates making to Polus; just because we find the tyrant busily killing and exiling people, we should not simply assume that he is doing what he *wants*. For the tyrant kills and exiles people because he thinks that, by doing so, he will gain advantage in pursuing something else. The value of

killing and exiling, indeed, is *wholly* instrumental – if they do *not* promote this other interest, and the tyrant recognized that they did not, the tyrant would not kill and exile. Because what is really in the tyrant's interest is an objective matter, it is possible for the tyrant to be mistaken about what is really in his interest, and also about whether or not killing and exiling people promotes his interest. So, the tyrant may do what he *thinks* is best for him; but if it is not *really* best for him, in doing what he thinks is best for him, he is not doing what he *wants*.

It follows from this that desire is also objective, in a sense. One may be mistaken about what one wants:

(A4) Desire is for real (objective), and not just perceived (subjective) self-interest.

The tyrant may not merely *think* that killing and exiling his opponents is best for him; he may also think that killing and exiling his opponents are what he *wants*. Find the tyrant in the act of ordering some further murder or exile and ask him if this is *really what he wants*, and he may insist that it is. But if doing these things is not ultimately in his own self-interest, then from (A3) it follows that the tyrant is mistaken about his own desire.

Philosophers have often argued about whether and to what degree our own mental states are transparent to us – whether and to what degree we are accurate judges of our own mental states. Some philosophers, of course, have argued that we cannot be mistaken about the nature or content of our own mental states. This, for example, is the basis of Descartes' proposed solution to the problem of radical doubt, which he introduced with his example of the evil deceiver. But, on the issue of transparency of desire, Socrates seems to take the opposite position to Descartes.

2.1.5 Socratic eudaimonism

But perhaps the most controversial assumption Socrates makes in his argument with Polus is one that ensures that there can be no conflicts in one's own interest, because ultimately there is but one end for all voluntary action: *eudaimonia* (happiness[2]). This is Socrates' "eudaimonism":

(A5) All voluntary actions aim, either constitutively or instrumentally, at eudaimonia.

This principle entails that there can be no other aims that conflict with our common desire for what is in our interest; for it assures that our interest ultimately consists in obtaining and then preserving the condition of being happy.[3] This, then, is why Socrates says that no one desires bad things or neither good nor bad things. Of course, it certainly *seems* like people sometimes desire things that are not really conducive to their happiness. But as we can now see, Socrates thinks this is the result of their having misidentified a certain action or goal as being in their interest, when in fact it is not. Bad actions are the products of cognitive errors, therefore. Or so Socrates argues in the *Gorgias*.

[2] As many scholars have noted, "happiness" is a potentially misleading translation for this term, especially insofar as "happiness" can refer to a transitory sensation or purely subjective feeling of well-being. As we noted above, Socrates regards this aim of human life to be an objective state. Cooper (1975: 89) proposes translating *eudaimonia* as "human flourishing." For an insightful account of how modern usage of "happiness" is similar to and yet importantly different from *eudaimonia*, see Kraut (1979: 167–97.

[3] See Morrison (2003) for an exception to the general scholarly agreement on this point. White (2002) disputes the claim that the Greeks, including Plato, actually managed to articulate a unified goal that would not admit of fundamental conflicts of values. But see N. D. Smith (2003) for a critique of his argument.

2.2 APPETITES AND PASSIONS

2.2.1 A few texts

One who believes that all actions follow one's cognitive state about his or her overall best interest at the time of action is called an "intellectualist," and we can now see why scholars have generally agreed that Socrates is an intellectualist about motivation. But there are importantly different ways of understanding Socratic intellectualism, and the interpretation of it that we propose in this book is quite different from the account scholars have standardly held. Perhaps the most nuanced and searching version of the standard interpretation has been offered in recent years by Terry Penner, who summarizes his view in this way:

> According to this theory, all desires to do something are rational desires, in that they always automatically adjust to the agent's beliefs about what is the best means to their ultimate end. If in the particular circumstances I come to believe that eating this pastry is the best means to my happiness in the circumstances, then in plugging this belief into the desire for *whatever is best in these circumstances*, my (rational) desire for whatever is best becomes the desire to eat this pastry. On the other hand, if I come to believe that it would be better to abstain, then once again my desire for what is best will become the desire to abstain. Rational desires adjust to the agent's beliefs. In fact, on this view the *only* way to influence my conduct is to change my opinion as to what is best. (1992a: 128; italics author's own)[4]

Three propositions, then, are crucial to what we are calling the standard view of Socratic intellectualism: (1) There are no desires other than rational desires; (2) A rational desire is one that always

[4] Other excellent discussions of Socrates' intellectualism, as it is standardly conceived, may be found in Cooper (1999), Frede (1992: xxix–xxx), Irwin (1977: 76–96; 1995: 75–6), Nehamas (1999: 27–58), Penner (1990, 1991, 1996, 1997, 2000), Reeve (1988: 134–5), Reshotko (1990, 1992, 1995, 2006; though see note 6, below), Rowe (2003, 2006, 2007), Santas (1979: 183–94), Taylor (2000: 62–3), and Wolfsdorf (2008: 33–59).

"adjusts to" the agent's beliefs about what is best for him or her; and (3) The only way to alter intentional action is to alter the agent's belief about what is best for him or her.

Despite the standard interpretation's inattention to them, there are many passages in Plato's early or Socratic dialogues that leave no doubt that Socrates thinks there are conative psychic powers other than the rational desires Penner recognizes here. In the *Gorgias*, for example, Socrates refers to the part of the soul "in which the appetites (*epithumiai*) happen to be" (493a3–4). Somewhat later, Socrates refers to the "filling up of the appetites" (505a6–10). Of course, some commentators will respond that these passages just show that Plato has the character "Socrates" introduce his own, that is *Plato's own*, more complex moral psychology to combat Callicles' hedonism.[5] But there are other passages in the early dialogues that make it clear that Socrates believes that, within the full picture of psychology, we must include some elements that aim at ends other than "whatever is best in these circumstances." In the *Laches*, for example, Socrates says that pleasures, pains, appetites, and fears all provide opportunities for people to display courage (*Laches* 191e4–7). In the *Charmides*, Socrates draws a distinction between appetite (*epithumia*), which he says aims at pleasure, wish (*boulēsis*), which he says aims at what is good, and love (*erōs*), which he says aims at beauty (167e1–5). Earlier in this same dialogue, Socrates himself shows a degree of susceptibility to the effects of *erōs* being

[5] This is the standard claim that is made about the alleged "change" in the moral psychology between the earlier, "Socratic" parts of the dialogue, and the later, "Platonic" part in which Socrates engages Callicles. The great myth of the afterlife, of course, which is alleged to reflect an un-Socratic moral psychology, appears in the last, allegedly "changed" section of the dialogue. Cooper (1999) agrees that the last section of the dialogue reveals a new moral psychology, but in his version Plato reveals a weakness in the Socratic account by having *Callicles* introduce the more "Platonic" account. Our own argument will be that there is no change of moral psychology to explain at all; rather, we contend, scholars have misunderstood the moral psychology that appears in the earlier parts of the *Gorgias* and in the other early or Socratic dialogues.

aroused in him, in the notorious passage in the same dialogue in which he describes himself as struggling for self-control as he suddenly burns with desire (155d4) for the youthful Charmides.[6] The existence of very different kinds of desire is also affirmed in the *Lysis*, where Socrates explicitly argues that the appetites, such as hunger and thirst, and also *erōs*, can be both good and bad, but the experiences of these do not depend for their existence on both good and bad existing (*Lysis* 220e6–221b8).[7]

[6] Socrates' recognition of *epithumiai*, and how these are not to be identified with the desire for the good, is admirably discussed in Devereux (1992: 778–83; 1995). It was Devereux's work that first called our attention to these passages. Most scholars have simply supposed that Socrates recognized only the desire for the good (or happiness, or for whatever is best for the agent). Terry Penner and Naomi Reshotko have developed a somewhat different view and both now acknowledge the existence of the *epithumiai*. Penner sees them as "mere hankerings, itches, or drives [that] cannot automatically result in action when put together with a belief" (1991: 201 n. 45; see also 1990: 59–60; 1997: 124) and Reshotko has recently called them "unintellectualized drives and urges" (2006: 86). Both contend, however, that these phenomena play only an *informational* role in motivation. See Reshotko, for example, who states, "In my view, an appetite never plays a role that is more instrumental than *any other piece of information* that the intellect has used in order to determine what is best to do as motivated by the desire for the good. I hold that appetites are like sense impressions: they are phenomena that help us form judgments, but they do not interact with judgments that have already been formed" (2006: 86; italics ours). Missing from this account, we contend, is what is peculiar to the appetites and passions, namely, that they are "drives" and "urges," that is, that they are psychic events that actually do *drive* or *urge* us towards and away from things, unlike sense impressions, which in themselves do not. We will provide our own account of how this works in detail in the next chapter, but for now, let us note that, although we will be calling these phenomena "nonrational desires," we actually agree with Penner and Reshotko that they cannot be understood as motivating us or leading us to act *independently of* the desire for the good. See especially, Penner (1990: 40): "Let me indicate briefly here how Socrates will argue that if I *act* on a desire to eat this chocolate bar here, it will be a rational desire on which I am acting. The suggestion is that in such cases, the force of the hormonal changes which induce the juices to flow is integrated into the agent's calculation of the degree of expected good to be gained by taking and eating the chocolate bar" (see also 55–61). But the way we understand this is to grant that the *epithumiai* can play a role in an agent's acting as he does, but then to conceive of the role they play in terms of "the agent's calculation of the degree of expected good"; accordingly, every *action* (as opposed to every urge one might feel) must be understood as the result of some judgment one has made about one's good. The difference between the view we offer and the one provided by Penner and Reshotko is that we do not, whereas they do, understand the role of appetites and passions as strictly informational. In our view, they influence judgment by the way in which they represent their aims to the soul.

[7] It is very difficult to square this passage with the view, recently published by Penner and Rowe (2005: see esp. 269), that Socrates identifies all forms of desire in the *Lysis* with

Once we begin to question the standard view, these passages are truly startling. If the standard view of Socratic motivational intellectualism were correct, it would be puzzling for Socrates to make *any* reference to appetites or passions, given their putative lack of any direct role to play in the explanation of human behavior. He might still recognize that people do experience appetites or emotions, of course, but he would not, we should expect, ever suggest that such experiences made any difference to how they might *act*. The passages are clearly intriguing and suggest a way of understanding Socrates' view of motivation that is directly at odds with the standard view. Indeed, in what follows we shall argue that Socrates often recognizes not only the existence of appetites and passions, but that what he says about them requires, contrary to the standard view, that they play a causal, and not merely an informational, role in how people behave.

Let us begin by considering what we find in just one work, one that all scholars recognize as belonging to the group relevant to the study of Socrates: the *Apology*.[8] Although Socrates fails to tell us just how the passions work to affect behavior, the text is nonetheless rich in references to the potentially dangerous effects of passions on the way people act.

2.2.2 *Anger, fear, and shame in the* Apology

Text 1: *Apology* 21b1–23e3. At 21b1, Socrates begins his explanation to the jury of how he has come to have a reputation as a dangerous

the sort of desire that aims only at benefit (in the list from the *Charmides*, this would be *boulēsis*). We are indebted to Sarah Raskoff for pointing this out to us.

[8] Even Charles Kahn, whose skepticism about "Socratic philosophy" we noted in Chapter 1, says that the *Apology* "can properly be regarded as a quasi-historical document, like Thucydides' version of Pericles' funeral oration" and that "there are external constraints that make his *Apology* the most reliable of all of our testimonies concerning Socrates" (Kahn 1996: 88–9).

sophist. The gist of the story is that, having heard about the Delphic Oracle to Chaerephon, Socrates set out to discern the meaning of the puzzling oracle, by seeking out those reputed to be most wise and comparing himself to them. In subjecting these others to elenctic scrutiny, Socrates repeatedly discovers that even – indeed, especially – those who were the most respected for their putative wisdom actually wholly lacked wisdom, and worse, failed to realize how much they lacked it. His first encounter set the tone for many others:

> After conversing with him, I thought that this fellow seems to be wise to many other people and most of all to himself, yet he isn't. And then I tried to show him that he thought he is wise but he isn't. And so, as a result, I became hated by him and by many of those who were there. So, as I went away from him, I concluded to myself that I am, indeed, wiser than this person. I'm afraid that neither of us knows anything admirable and good, but this fellow thinks he knows something when he doesn't, whereas I, just as I don't know, don't even think I know. At least, then, I seem to be wiser in this small way than this one, because I don't even think I know what I don't know. From him, I went to someone else, one of those reputed to be wiser than the first person, and the very same thing seemed to me to be true, and at that point I became hated by that guy and by many others too.
>
> After that I went from one person to the next, and although I was troubled and fearful when I saw that I had become hated, nevertheless I thought I had to make the god's business the most important thing. In searching for the meaning of the oracle, I had to proceed on to all who had a reputation for knowing something. And, by the Dog, Athenians – for I must tell you the truth – the fact is that I experienced something of this sort: Those who enjoyed the greatest reputation seemed to me, as I searched in accordance with the god, to be pretty much the most lacking, whereas those who were reputed to be less worthy of consideration were better men when it came to having good sense. (*Apology* 21c5–22a6)

After interrogating politicians, poets, and artisans, Socrates came to understand that he was, indeed, the wisest of human beings, but only because he alone recognized how ignorant he really was. But

there was a terrible cost to Socrates' inquiry – the growing anger and resentment against him that was building among those whose ignorance had been exposed:

> This very investigation, Athenians, has generated for me a great deal of hatred, which is most difficult to handle and hard to bear, and the result has been a lot of slandering, and the claim made that I'm "wise." (*Apology* 22e7–a3)

The growing anger among his "victims" is also augmented by another factor:

> But in addition to this, the young who follow me around, doing so of their free will, who have complete leisure – the sons of the richest people – enjoy hearing people examined, and they often imitate me, and then try to examine others. And then, I imagine, they find an abundance of people who think they know something but know virtually nothing. That's why those who are examined by them get angry with me and not with them, and say that a certain Socrates completely pollutes the land and corrupts the youth. And when anyone asks them what I do and what I teach, they have nothing to say and draw a blank, but so they don't appear to be confused, they say what's commonly said against all philosophers – "what's in the heavens and below the earth," "doesn't believe in gods," and "makes the weaker argument the stronger." But I think they wouldn't want to say what's true, that they're plainly pretending to know, and they don't know anything. Insofar, then, as they are, I think, concerned about their honor, and are zealous, and numerous, and speak earnestly and persuasively about me, they have filled your ears for a long time by vehemently slandering me. It was on this account that Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon came after me: Meletus angry on behalf of the poets, Anytus on behalf of the craftsmen and politicians, and Lycon on behalf of the orators. The result is that, as I was saying when I began, I'd be amazed if I were able to refute in such a little time this slander you accept and that has gotten out of hand. There you have the truth, men of Athens, and in what I'm saying I'm neither hiding nor even shading anything large or small. And yet I know pretty well that in saying these things I'm making myself hated, which is evidence that I'm telling the truth and that such is the slander against me and that these are its causes. (*Apology* 23c2–24a8)

Socrates' explanation of how he came to be brought to trial is well known. We have quoted the entire passage to make clear just how poorly this passage fits with what the standard view has to say about Socratic intellectualism. Socrates' explanation of how he came to be on trial, it seems to us, requires that he believes that the experience of the passions he mentions – pride, humiliation, and anger – can play a causal role in people doing what they would not otherwise have done, things they also *should not do*. These passions are plainly not playing a simply and strictly informational role, as proponents of the standard view would have to have it. The sequence of events is this:

(1) Socrates interrogates someone, revealing that person's ignorance.
(2) The person's pride is injured, they feel publicly humiliated, and become angry.
(3) The person's anger leads the person to want to slander Socrates.
(4) But the humiliation and their own pride are such that they cannot bring themselves to reveal the truth: that it was their own ignorance that led to their humiliation.
(5) So, instead, they concoct the convenient story – "what's commonly said against all philosophers" – and accuse him of being a word-twisting, atheistic sophist.
(6) These "first accusers" (see 18d7–e2) and the nasty slanders they have bruited about are what led to Meletus making the formal accusation, and to Anytus and Lycon giving support to that accusation.

In the standard account of Socratic motivational intellectualism, passions such as pride, humiliation, and anger explain nothing about how human beings behave except perhaps as sources of information.

But that is not at all the role they play in this passage, since it indicates that people did not always calmly end up believing something new about Socrates, as if they were merely assessing new information about Socrates. Socrates also cautions his jurors at the end of this passage not to allow the anger they may feel to cloud their ability to see that Socrates is doing nothing but telling the truth. This is not at all the sort of advice one gives to those who find themselves mulling inconsistent information; it is, rather, the sort of advice one gives to those whose passions might lead them to behave in ways other than they would if they were deliberating calmly about what judgment they should make in this case.

Moreover, the requirement of the standard view that such passions must "always automatically adjust to the agent's beliefs about what is the best means to their ultimate end," as we found Penner putting it (1992b: 128; quoted above) seems to get exactly backward the way Socrates thinks the relationship between anger and belief works. Rather than anger "automatically adjusting" to what the person believes, the anger seems to have effects on *what the angry person believes*, namely, that he should try to do something damaging to Socrates. Such anger, then, plays a conative role and resists and even impairs good reasoning.

Text 2: *Apology* 29e3–30a3. In this text, Socrates explains that even the threat of death will not deter him from his "mission" in Athens:

> I won't stop philosophizing and exhorting you and pointing out to any of you I ever happen upon, saying just what I usually do, "Best of men, since you're an Athenian, from the greatest city with the strongest reputation for wisdom and strength, aren't you ashamed that you care about having as much money, fame, and honor as you can, and you don't care about, or even consider wisdom, truth, and making your soul as good as possible?" And if

any of you disputes me on this and says he does care, I won't immediately stop talking to him and go away, but I'll question, examine, and try to refute him. And if he doesn't appear to me to have acquired virtue but says he has, I'll shame him because he attaches greater value to what's of less value and takes what's inferior to be more important.

On the face of it, Socrates seems to be cautioning his jurors that they cannot hope that Socrates will be frightened into behaving himself in ways that will keep him out of further trouble. But a supporter of the standard account could always object to this claim that Socrates does not actually explicitly here make the claim that fear *can* lead people to act in certain ways. We will see in the next text we discuss that he actually does make this claim elsewhere. In the present text, however, Socrates characterizes himself as *exhorting* others and also talks about how he *shames* his fellow countrymen.

Now, perhaps those inclined to the standard view of Socratic motivational intellectualism could explain what Socrates means when he says he "exhorts" his fellow Athenians in a way that made no reference at all to an emotional appeal. But we find it simply implausible to suppose that a standardly intellectualist account can be given for what Socrates has in mind when he claims to shame others. In a fascinating recent study, Paul Woodruff describes shame in this way: "Shame is a painful emotion one feels at the thought of being exposed in weakness, foolishness, nakedness, or perhaps even wickedness, to the view of a community whose laughter would scald. Shame is closely related to fear of exclusion from one's group, since derision generally marks the exposed person as an outsider" (2000: 133).[9] Socrates' claim in this passage from the *Apology* to shame some of those he talks with will come as no surprise to

[9] Another recent discussion – in this case, focused on how shame works in the divided soul in Plato's *Republic* – is provided in Moss (2005). Reid (2008) claims that shaming his interlocutors (for the right reasons) is actually a "key objective" of Socratic philosophizing.

readers of Plato's dialogues. We often find Socrates engaging in the very activity to which he refers here in the *Apology*: he bullies some of his interlocutors, cajoles some, and exhorts some. And some he belittles and mocks.[10] In light of the abundance of evidence that Socrates often used shame in his conversations, Woodruff draws a conclusion (though he does not signal it precisely as such) that cuts directly against what the standard view says about Socratic motivational intellectualism: "I believe that Socrates could defend elenchus, but to do so he would have to move outside the limits of what he or his contemporaries would consider rational" (*ibid*.: 140). Indeed, the appeals to shame cannot be explained in neutrally epistemic terms. When people respond to feelings of shame, at least part of what explains their behavior is the fact that they have an unpleasant emotional experience. Socrates makes no secret of the fact that he often seeks to create this experience in others, and to use shame in such a way as to lead them to change their ways. But the process, again, seems to work in the opposite direction from the one required by the standard interpretation: instead of shame adjusting to reason, one's reasoning seems to be influenced by shame.

Text 3: *Apology* 32b1–d4. A little later in his defense speech, Socrates reminds his jurors of two times in the past where, despite great danger to himself, he refused to act in any way he regarded as unjust:

My district, Antiochis, was in charge of the Council, when you wanted to judge as a group the ten generals who failed to pick up those who died in the sea-battle. What you wanted though was against the law, as you all realized some time later on. At that time, I was the only one of the Councilors

[10] We are indebted to Daniel Sanderman (2004) for calling our attention to this aspect of Socratic philosophizing, and to the fact that it provided support for the view of Socratic motivational intellectualism we were developing.

in charge who opposed you, urging you to do nothing against the law, and I voted in opposition. And though the orators were ready to denounce me and arrest me, and though you urged them to do so by your shouting, with the law and justice on my side I thought that, though I feared imprisonment or death, I should run the risk rather than to join with you, since you wanted what's not just. These things happened when the city was still a democracy.

But when the oligarchy came to power, the Thirty summoned me and four others to the Rotunda and ordered us to bring Leon from Salamis to be put to death. They often ordered many others to do such things, since they wanted to implicate as many as possible in their causes. At that time I made it clear, once again, not by talk but by action, that I didn't care at all about death – if I'm not being too blunt to say it – but it mattered everything that I do nothing unjust or impious, which matters very much to me. For though it had plenty of power, that government didn't frighten me into doing anything that's wrong.

The relevance of these passages to our thesis is also plain: although fear can make some people do things they might later regret, in at least these two cases, those in power had not been able to use fear to induce unjust behavior from Socrates. The only way fear could ever play a role in explaining why people behave the way they do, in the standard account of Socratic motivational intellectualism, would be if Socrates understood fear as if it were a purely cognitive condition. This, however, attributes to Socrates a rather implausible conception of fear, which would leave inexplicable the most significant phenomenological features of the fearful reaction.[11] If the standard view were correct, Socrates' claims about his own resistance to fear in the above passage would be incomprehensible and otiose.

Text 4: *Apology* 34b6–d1. In this text Socrates cautions his jurors about how anger might lead them to violate their jurors' oath "to

[11] In Section 7.3, we compare and contrast Socratic moral psychology with that of the Stoics, who do hold that emotions are configurations of belief, so our complaint here would apply to their view.

judge according to the laws" (see *Apology* 35c2–5), and instead cast their vote in anger:

> Well then, men, this and perhaps other things like it are about all I can say in my defense. Perhaps some one of you may be angry when he thinks about himself if he went to trial on a less serious matter than this and he begged and pleaded with lots of tears with the members of the jury, and brought in his children, as well as many other relatives and friends in order to be shown as much pity as possible. But I'll do none of these things, and although in doing this, I appear to him to be running the ultimate risk. Then perhaps when some of you consider this, you'll become more closed-minded about me and, having become angry, will cast your vote in anger.

As we found in the first text we discussed in this section, the passage shows that Socrates is concerned that some jurors might feel that Socrates' own behavior humiliates them for the bad behavior they have displayed in the past. This humiliation will then lead them to feel anger towards Socrates, and this anger could lead them to vote against Socrates despite their better judgment. They would have voted instead for his innocence if only they could maintain a sober and unemotional perspective. The risk to Socrates, then, is that the feelings of humiliation and anger some jurors may feel towards him will induce them to act in a way they would not otherwise act.

Lest some might be inclined to dismiss the passages we have cited thus far as mere aberrations, perhaps unique to the *Apology*, we will see in what follows that references to emotions and/or appetites are not at all unusual in the Socratic dialogues. Moreover, we will now argue that these references can only be explained if Socrates believes that appetites and passions affect cognition and can wield enormous power in a human life. The question we must then face is this: given that Socrates accepted that appetites and passions do play a role in the way we act, why did he also maintain an intellectualist conception of motivation, according to which the way we act *always*

follows what we believe is best for us at the time of action? How is it, in other words, that, according to Socrates, we never act in such a way as simply to follow some appetite for pleasure, or some emotion, independently of what we might believe about what is best for us – given that the appetites and passions do not always or necessarily tend to aim at what is best for us?

CHAPTER 3

The "prudential paradox"

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 The prudential and moral paradoxes

Of the many paradoxical positions attributed to Socrates in Plato's early dialogues, two are perhaps most closely associated with the philosopher. The first is the "prudential paradox," which states that no one ever acts contrary to his knowledge of what is best for him or even contrary to a concurrently held all-things-considered belief about what is best for him, and the second is the "moral paradox," according to which no one voluntarily does what is unjust.[1] Seeing why Socrates would have held these positions in spite of their obvious conflict with common sense will allow us to understand better a number of issues at the heart of the ethical epistemology and psychology we find in Plato's early dialogues and to deepen our understanding of that philosophy. Because the moral paradox depends crucially on the prudential, we shall focus in this chapter on the prudential paradox, and will turn to the moral paradox in the next chapter.

[1] Adopting the labels used by Santas (1979: 183–94).

3.1.2 The prudential paradox

The best-known attribution of the prudential paradox to Socrates outside the pages of Plato can be found in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*:

> Some say that if he has knowledge of how to act rightly, he cannot be akratic; for, as Socrates thought, it would be strange for a man to have knowledge and yet allow something else to rule him and drag him about like a slave. For Socrates was entirely opposed to this view and held that there is no such thing as akrasia; for he thought that no one with the right belief does what is contrary to the best, but if a man does so, it is through ignorance. Now this argument obviously disagrees with what appears to be the case; and if a man acting by passion does so through ignorance, we should look into the manner in which this ignorance arises. For it is evident that an akratic man, before getting into a state of passion, does not think that he should do what he does when in passion. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3.1145b22–31; trans. Apostle and Gerson, modified)

Aristotle notes that Socrates' view "obviously disagrees with what appears to be the case" because it certainly does seem that at least sometimes people act in ways they realize are not in their best interests. Indeed, how many of us have not undergone some experience like this: having that cigarette even though we really want to quit smoking, or drinking "one more for the road" despite our recognition of the dangers of drinking and driving, or succumbing to the lure of that German chocolate cake despite the diet we had committed ourselves to? Each of these examples – and innumerably many others like them – appear to be cases of what is known as "akrasia," often called "moral weakness" or "weakness of will."

Now, perhaps not all apparent cases of this sort are equal, for in some such cases, we may find that the relevant behavior does not seem to have all of the necessary elements to qualify as an authentically *voluntary* action. When addicts engage in their addictive

behavior, no doubt some really do recognize how significantly their addictions thwart their ultimate self-interest, but it is questionable just how much agency they actually exercise as they continue to act in ways that serve their addictions. Cases of akrasia are those where the behaviors continue to be *voluntary*; they are cases in which one *voluntarily* acts in ways that are contrary to what one recognizes as in one's own best interest, among the options available to one at the time. According to Aristotle, Socrates claimed that there was no such phenomenon, and that all apparent cases of it must therefore either be entirely involuntary or else the result of a cognitive error. We are now in a position to understand why Socrates believed this: because Socrates believed that all voluntary actions reflect our desire for what is best for us, any case of voluntary action in which we do not pursue what is best for us, from among the options available to us at the time, must be the result of some mistake of judgment we have made either about what our self-interest consists in or about whether this particular end or course of action rather than the others available will promote our self-interest.

It may be helpful to pursue Socrates' endorsement of the prudential paradox by asking how well Aristotle's understanding of Socrates' position fits with what we find in the pages of Plato. Scholars often claim that Plato's Socrates sets forth reasons against the possibility of akrasia in two passages: *Meno* 77b6–78c2 and *Protagoras* 352b1–358d4.

3.2 THE *MENO* ARGUMENT

3.2.1 Choosing bad things

After twice failing to define "virtue," Meno makes a third effort: "Virtue," he says, "is the desire for noble things (*epithumounta*

tōn kalōn) and the power to acquire them" (77b4–5). After Socrates gets the initial clarification that "noble things" are "good things," he immediately begins to question Meno's assertion that there are people who do not desire good things. Among these people, Meno claims, we can find some who actually desire bad things, mistaking them for good things, while others desire (*epithumousin*) bad things, knowing they are bad things (*gignōskontes hoti kaka estin*, 77c3–7). Scholars are virtually unanimous that Meno's claim that people sometimes knowingly choose bad things is the proposition Socrates targets for rejection.

Socrates' first piece of business is to make sure that Meno really wants to say that there are those who desire bad things even though they know that bad things harm their possessor (77d1–4). Meno concedes that if those who knowingly pursue bad things also know they are harmed by them, they know they are made miserable (*athlious*) to the extent they are harmed (78a1–3). And if they are miserable, they are unhappy (*kakodaimonas*, 78a3). What Meno cannot accept, however, is that there can be anyone who wishes (*bouletai*) to make himself miserable (78a4–5), and so Meno admits, "it is likely that no one wishes (*boulesthai*) for bad things" (78a9–b2).

So what seals Meno's defeat is his admission that no one wishes to be miserable and unhappy. But why is Meno so quick to concede this point? Unfortunately, Plato does not spell out the answer for us. As we saw in Chapter 2, many scholars believe that Socrates accepts only one kind of motivation: desire for what we take to be good for us. If so, since we always desire our own happiness as the ultimate good, we desire anything else only as a good we believe will in some way, either constitutively or instrumentally, promote our happiness. As we have seen, this is sometimes known as Socrates' commitment to intellectualism with respect to motivation. If he is indeed an intellectualist of this sort and if Meno and Socrates are assuming this

theory of motivation in this argument, it is not difficult to see why Meno is defeated. The fact that no one desires what he recognizes to be a bad thing follows directly from the sort of intellectualism about motivation most scholars say that Socrates endorses. According to this way of construing the argument, it appears that Aristotle is right about Socrates' denial of akrasia, at least as we find it in the *Meno*. Socrates denies that one can act contrary to one's knowledge of what is best, because his theory of motivation rules out the possibility of acting in a way that is contrary to what one believes about what is best for one in the current circumstances. Since knowledge implies belief, action contrary to what one knows to be the best course must also be impossible. According to this reading, Socrates rejects what Terry Penner terms "knowledge-akrasia," because he rejects the possibility of "belief-akrasia."[2]

3.2.2 What is Meno's moral psychology?

We might wonder, though, if this is really the correct way to understand the argument. In the first place, even if Socrates is an intellectualist about motivation, why should Meno be? Many people regard such intellectualism as utterly counter-intuitive and suppose instead that it is only commonsensical to think that some desires are non-rational in the sense that they aim at pleasure and the absence of pain independently of how they are thought to bear on our conceptions of the good. Moreover, Meno's initial position, that some people want bad things, knowing they are bad, obviously assumes the falsity of an intellectualistic account of motivation. Why would Meno admit defeat if all that has been shown is that his view conflicts with

[2] This distinction is first proposed in Penner (1990); see also Penner (1997: 117–49) and Reshotko (2006: 79–82).

a theory of motivation he does not accept? It seems most unlikely that he would.

Perhaps, instead, Socrates is relying on a different point. It is interesting to note that, when Socrates initially asks whether people desire bad things, he uses the verb "*epithumein*." When he inquires about whether people want to be miserable and unhappy, however, he switches to the verb "*boulesthai*." Now, ordinary Greek usage can allow Socrates to use the two verbs interchangeably. But Socrates may be using the verbs in the technical senses we find elsewhere in Plato and in Aristotle and thus may be using them to refer to different kinds of desires. After all, we have already seen considerable evidence that Socrates himself distinguishes between types of desires. (See especially, *Laches* 191e4–7 and *Charmides* 167e1–5.) Thus, when he uses "*epithumein*" he may be asking whether anyone ever forms a nonrational desire for what he knows to be a bad thing, and when he employs "*boulesthai*" he may be asking whether anyone ever forms a rational desire to be miserable and unhappy. We do not have to suppose that Meno manages to understand the distinction Socrates introduces in this way. Socrates is seeking to gain Meno's agreement that no one forms a rational desire to be miserable and hence to gain his agreement that no one forms a *rational desire* for bad things, that is, for things that contribute to misery. This would be a sensible thing for Socrates to do in as much as it then follows, as Socrates points out, that *everyone* has a rational desire to be happy and, accordingly, *everyone* has a rational desire for good things. This would be telling because Meno, recall, claimed that virtue is, by definition, the desire for fine things and the ability to attain them. According to this second way of construing the argument, precisely because Meno himself had not yet managed to make the distinction between rational and nonrational desires, and how the objects of desires are represented in those different kinds of desire,

the outcome is that his attempted definition of virtue now seems to him to be wholly indefensible. At the conclusion of the argument we have been examining, Meno is forced to concede that everyone is the same with respect to their rational desire for fine things (78b4–6). Yet plainly not everyone is the same with respect to virtue. The first conjunct in Meno's proposed definition, then, will have been shown to be otiose.

According to this second way of construing the argument, the target proposition is not, contrary to what scholars usually say, Meno's claim that some people knowingly desire bad things. Rather, because *epithumia* could be used in a general sense to refer to any desire or to refer to a specific kind of desire, nonrational desire, Socrates wants to know which one Meno has in mind. Indeed, Socrates is prepared to concede, at least for the purposes of this argument, that one can know that something is bad and have a *nonrational* desire for it. What Socrates is after is Meno's concession that no one ever has a *rational* desire for what is bad, for it is then a short step to a compelling criticism of the first part of Meno's proposed definition of virtue. This is significant because it shows that this passage in the *Meno* fails to provide evidence one way or the other for Socrates' denial of "belief-akrasia," since at least in this passage Socrates is not really concerned with the possibility of acting contrary to the agent's beliefs about what is best.[3]

[3] In his criticisms of an earlier draft of this section, Rusty Jones argued against our alternative reading, claiming that in the conclusion of the argument, 78a4–8, Socrates is using "*boulesthai*" and "*epithumein*" equivalently, and if so, our interpretation of the passage seems implausible. But we think that Socrates is using the terms in the different senses we have identified and that the way he is using them in this passage fits our interpretation perfectly. After gaining the concession at 78a4–5 that no one wishes (*bouletai*) to be miserable and unhappy, Socrates goes on to conclude, at 78a7–8, that "no one wishes *bouletai* for bad things. For what else is it to be miserable than to desire (*epithumein*) bad things and to acquire them." According to our interpretation, this is precisely what Socrates wants to show: no one has a rational desire for bad things and people who are unhappy must have

If this second way of reading the *Meno* passage is correct, we lose the *Meno* as evidence for Aristotle's way of understanding Socrates' denial of akrasia. Unfortunately, the passage in the *Meno* that has attracted so much attention is quite brief, making it difficult to say with complete confidence whether our alternative to the standard reading is successful. Any compelling case for Aristotle's understanding of Socrates' position, accordingly, will have to rest on the evidence drawn from the *Protagoras*.

3.3 THE *PROTAGORAS* ARGUMENT

3.3.1 The power of appearance

In a famous passage in Plato's *Protagoras* (352b3–358d2), Socrates takes up the question of whether "the many" (*hoi polloi*), as Socrates calls them, are correct when they say that knowledge can be "dragged around like a slave" by desire, pleasure, pain, love, and the like. Of course, Socrates makes quite clear at the outset where he stands: "If someone knows what is good and evil, then he could not be forced by anything to act contrary to what knowledge says; understanding (*phronēsis*) is sufficient to aid a person" (352c4–7). As the investigation proceeds, it becomes clear why Socrates is convinced he is right about this. Things can appear to be better or worse than they really are and the "[power of appearance (*dunamis tou phainomenou*)] can often make us wander all over the place in confusion, changing our minds about the same things and regretting our actions and choices" (356d4–7). Knowledge, however, Socrates says, is the *metrētikē technē*, the craft of measurement that "can make the appearances lose their

nonrational desires for them and have managed to fulfill those nonrational desires. What Socrates has shown is that no one *bouletai* bad things, but some do *epithumei* bad things.

power by showing us the truth" (356d7–e1). Later Socrates declares that no one ever does what he even believes to be evil, for "it is not in human nature … to go towards what one believes to be evil instead of good" (358d1–2). If someone does what is evil, accordingly, it must be because, at the time he acted, he was taken in by the power of appearance, which caused him to mistake what is in fact an evil for a good. So goes Socrates' explanation of why *hoi polloi* are mistaken and why there really is no such thing as akrasia, recognizing what is better for one and yet doing what is worse.

It seems clear in the *Protagoras* discussion that by the "power of appearance" Socrates means the power of something that merely appears to be good to convince an agent that it really is good. It also seems clear that whenever the craft of measurement is present in someone he will not be defeated by the power of appearance. What is not clear in the *Protagoras* discussion is just why some things have the power of appearance at all. Nor is it clear in what way the craft of measurement "makes the appearances lose their power." We shall argue, contrary to what is usually said, that, for Socrates, "the power of appearance" is tied to the psychological agency of the appetites and passions. If what we shall argue is correct, Socrates believes that appetites and passions can be either strong or weak and that a strong appetite or passion is more likely to cause an unknowing agent to believe that the pleasure at which it aims is in fact a good. It is appetite or passion, then, that accounts for the object of the appetite or passion having the power of appearance – and the stronger the appetite, the more "convincing" this power will be. Socrates' position, we will argue, is that ethical knowledge is never defeated by the power of appearance because ethical knowledge is incompatible with the possession of strong appetites or passions.

3.3.2 The standard interpretation

As we mentioned in Chapter 2, most scholars claim that, for Socrates, rational desires are the *only* desires a human agent ever possesses, at least in the sense that they are the only psychic events that have a causal role to play in the explanation of what we do. As we mentioned, the standard intellectualist can concede that there are nonrational desires, such as hunger, thirst, feelings of pleasure and pain generally, and these can be regarded as things agents must contend with as they make their way in the world in very much the same way that agents must contend with various physical objects as they make their way in the world.[4] Just as with such objects, nonrational desires are merely things to which one must respond by making a judgment. But, according to the standard view, Socrates rejects the notion that a psychic event ever *causes* a change in one's belief about what it is good to do. Nor do proponents of the standard view accept that the object of such a nonrational desire ever appears good prior to a judgment that it is good. Instead, Socrates believes that whenever something appears good to us, it appears good only because we have *already* judged it to be good and consequently form a rational desire for it. According to the standard view, if, for example, we are thirsty, the water in front of us appears to be good because and only because we have a rational desire for whatever is best for us in the given circumstances we happen to find ourselves in, and we believe drinking the water is best for us in these circumstances. Unless the agent who takes something to be good is either somehow prevented from acting or perhaps is overtaken by the power of an appearance that something else is better, she will always pursue what her single desire, her desire for the good, urges her towards. If we pose our

[4] See again, Chapter 2, note 6.

first question – why does anything have "the power of appearance," the proponent of the standard view can only answer that it is the nature of certain things such as pleasure to appear good and it is the nature of certain things such as pain to appear evil.[5]

Imagine a person P who at time t_1 sincerely believes that course of action X is better than Y and yet at t_2 does Y instead of X. Socrates, of course, rejects the explanation of *hoi polloi* that P was overcome at some point between t_1 and t_2 by some appetite or passion. Instead, Socrates believes that P changes his mind between t_1 and t_2, coming to believe that Y is actually better than X.[6] Now, no one would ever suppose that this is a case of akrasia if P simply gets new, objective[7] information or suddenly remembers something about X or Y, or both, between t_1 and t_2. What convinces most people that there are times when one acts contrary to one's better judgment is precisely

[5] Those inclined to the standard account may differ about how many different kinds of things have the power of appearance. Someone such as Irwin, who believes that Socrates is a hedonist, will argue that only pleasure has the power to appear good. (See Irwin [1977: 102–15; 1995: 81–92].) Others may argue that such things as good looks, health, wealth, and so forth have the power to appear good. (See, e.g., Boeri [2004: 120]). Although she does not accept the standard view, Jessica Moss has also argued that the appearance of goodness is a feature of the sorts of things we desire – not as a *result* of our desire, as we claim, but rather as a feature independent of our psychology. (See esp. Moss [2005; 2008: 35–68]). On either view, there is something about the nature of the object that endows it with the power to appear good. Here, we should distinguish between the potential of something, such as pleasure, good looks, wealth, and so forth, to appear good and their actually appearing good. Such things have their potential by virtue of what they are and the role they can play in satisfying our appetites and passions. But, as we shall see below, we must be careful not to infer that they actually have any power over anyone simply by virtue of being the kinds of things they are, for one's reactions to them will be contingent upon facts internal to the agent (for example, the sated eater as opposed to the hungry one, or the virtuous agent as opposed to a vicious one).

[6] Penner (1996) makes the distinction between "synchronic belief-akrasia" – in which one acts against what one thinks is best at the time – and "diachronic belief-akrasia" – in which one acts in a way that is contrary to what one believed was best before and also perhaps after the action, but not in a way that is contrary to what one believes is best for one at the moment of action. Penner correctly asserts that Socrates only denied the possibility of synchronic belief-akrasia; Socrates did not deny the possibility of diachronic belief-akrasia. (See also Reshotko 2006: 79–82.)

[7] By "objective," we simply mean information that is available to any perceiver. In what follows, references to "new information" should be understood to be "objective" in this sense.

that case in which one acts contrary to what one previously thought is not good for one and yet has received no new information or remembered anything relevant to one's choices. Socrates' answer, of course, is that in such cases, lacking the craft of measurement, one succumbs to the power of appearance. In the case above, at some time between t_1 and t_2, Y *acquires* the power to appear to P to be better than X.

But now the obvious question is: what explains Y's possession of the power of appearance, a power it did not seem to have in some cases only moments before the agent changes his opinion? Wishing not to assign any causal role to nonrational desire in Socrates' explanation, the standard interpretation argues that, for Socrates, the acquisition of the power of appearance is due to the fact that pleasure and pain naturally appear greater or smaller than they really are depending on their proximity to the agent. Indeed, how else are we to understand the question Socrates puts to the many: "Do things of the same size appear larger when near at hand and smaller when seen at a distance, or not?" (*phainetai humin tē opsei ta auta megethē egguthen men meizō, porrōthen de elattō*, 356c5–6). And when *hoi polloi* reply, as they must, in the affirmative, Socrates is quick to add that this is why the craft of measurement is our savior, for it "makes the appearances lose their power (*akuron men an epoiēse touto to phantasma*) by making clear the truth, and gives our soul piece of mind (*hēsuchian an epoiēsen echein tēn psuchēn*), while it remains in the truth and saves our life" (356d7–e2). Socrates' explanation, then, according to the standard view, is like a common-sense account of belief-acquisition by means of perception. Pleasures and pains appear larger when they are closer and smaller when they are remote, and unless we have some well-grounded belief to correct the appearances, we believe that they are as they appear. Finally, if the greater balance of pleasure over pain always constitutes the better course for the agent to pursue, we can

explain P's pursuit of Y instead of X in terms of the pleasure afforded by X appearing to be closer and hence larger. Nonrational desire need not enter the explanatory picture.

3.3.3 Types of proximity

Before we accept the standard account's understanding of Socrates' position, we would do well to take a closer look at just what endows an object with the power of appearance. As we have seen, the clear suggestion of Socrates' account of how the craft of measurement saves us is that proximity to the agent plays a crucial role in the explanation. Socrates' examples – size, depth, number, and sounds (*Protagoras* 356c5–8) – certainly lead one to think that the sort of proximity he has in mind is spatial proximity. A little reflection, however, shows us that it is very unlikely that this is what Socrates has in mind. In the first place, ordinarily we assume that the closer an object is to a perceiver, the more likely his perception of the object is to be veridical. But, *ex hypothesi*, in the phenomenon the many call akrasia, the perceiver makes a mistake of some sort about the object he pursues. It cannot very well be, then, that for Socrates it is the mere fact that Y has actually become closer to the agent that explains why P moves from having the correct judgment that X is better than Y to the incorrect judgment that Y is better than X. The explanation of the phenomenon must also include some account of why it is that, in the case of pleasures, spatial proximity tends to make a perception of pleasure *less* likely to be veridical.

Moreover, as spatial proximity to an object changes, one's perception of the *size* of the object perceived changes. Thus, if Socrates thinks that it is a change in spatial proximity to an object that explains why an agent changes his mind about its value, Socrates must also think that we always correlate the greater size of a pleasurable object

with greater value. Now, no one would deny that this sometimes happens. Consider, for example, P, a glutton who has been told by his physician that eating rich foods endangers his health. P spies at t_1 a chocolate tart C at a distance and forms the judgment that it is not, on balance, in his interest to pursue it. At t_2, however, after C has been placed directly in front of him, P reassesses the matter and decides that he ought to eat it after all. If his spatial proximity to C is what explains his change of mind, it can only be because he now, at t_2, perceives that C is larger than he thought it was at t_1, and he justifiably believes that C will provide him with more pleasure than he did at t_1. All that has really happened, though, is that at t_2 P has new, even if perhaps misleading, information about the tart. The information he has gained at t_2 tells him that there is more pleasure to be gained than he previously supposed. As we have already seen, however, surely the many will not take themselves to have been defeated if Socrates makes his own, alternative account rest on an agent's receiving new information about a pleasurable object. Otherwise the many would have to count as being "overcome by pleasure" every instance in which an agent decides that it is in his interest to pursue something after he has been misinformed that it is not really, on balance, harmful. The many will rightly insist that the phenomenon to be explained occurs only when the agent's information about the pleasurable object remains the same and the agent nonetheless changes his assessment of the object's value.

We can make better sense of Socrates' remarks, then, if we take him to mean that it is temporal proximity that helps explain when an object comes to have the power of appearance and that Socrates wants us to understand temporal proximity as analogous to spatial proximity. Just as spatial proximity alters the appearance of the size of an object, Socrates thinks, so temporal proximity alters the appearance of the amount of pleasure or pain an object will yield.

A pleasurable object that provides immediate gratification always appears greater than does the same object when it can only be enjoyed in the future. The same of course applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to pain. Accordingly, a pleasurable object that can be enjoyed only in the future and that is judged not to be worth the resulting pain may, because it appears sufficiently large, be judged worth the pain when the object provides immediate gratification. To return to the tart, it is the apparent greater pleasure of eating it now, at t_2, that makes C appear to P to be worth the evil of poor health, suffering that will be experienced only in P's relatively distant future. The craft of measurement would "save" P because it would see through the appearances that are distorted by temporal proximity and weigh correctly the good of eating the tart now against the future evil of poor health and determine correctly by which choice the overall good of the agent will be promoted.

It is important, however, that we not assume that Socrates equates the mere availability of a pleasant object with temporal proximity, for Socrates' commitment to eudaimonism requires that, at the time an agent actually pursues an object, the agent must believe that it is good. To help us appreciate this distinction between availability and temporal proximity, let us again consider P, our lover of chocolate tarts. Let us imagine that P has just now finished a very substantial and satisfying meal consisting of many of his favorite dishes. Now suppose that at t_1 P has the chocolate tart C placed directly in front of him, but, already sated and recalling the advice of his doctor, he declines to eat the tart, declaring that he needs to heed his doctor's advice to avoid rich foods. Although C is plainly available, P obviously does not at t_1 judge the pleasure of eating C to be worth the subsequent evil he will suffer. Nonetheless, after a brief interval, during which he has managed to digest enough of his previous meal to lose his feelings of complete satiety, at t_2 we find P devouring C

after all. So, what gave C the power of appearance for P at t_2 that it lacked at t_1 – what has made C appear at t_2 to be worth the subsequent ill-effects, when it did not appear so at t_1? Why, in other words, has P come to believe at t_2 that eating C is a good for him, when he believed otherwise at t_1? Since any object is seen as pleasurable only if it is in some way desired, P has formed a desire of some sort for C at t_2 – one that he lacked at t_1. According to the standard interpretation, it must be a rational desire, a desire formed by P's having discovered some *reason* for thinking that the pleasure of eating C is, on balance, good.[8] But whatever this *reason* might be, there seems to be a change within P with respect to the degree to which P supposes he will achieve pleasure from eating C. In other words, whatever has changed here derives from a change in P's appetite. But this is precisely the sort of change that finds no place in the standard account of Socratic intellectualism.

3.3.4 Nonrational desires and the power of appearance

If we are to avoid what appears to be the implausible arbitrariness of the position the standard interpretation ascribes to Socrates, we must think that Socrates recognizes that nonrational desires have an explanatory role to play in P's decision to devour C at t_2. Because a nonrational desire demands immediate satisfaction, it can explain why the pleasure of C appears to be larger at t_2 than it did at t_1, when P did not possess a nonrational desire for C. Of course, it cannot be the case that P's nonrational desire for C alone causes him to pursue C. Were that the case,

[8] And, according to the alternative account provided by Moss (2005; 2008; see note 5, above), it must be that P has only at t_2 come to perceive the appearance of goodness in C. In other words, Moss must account for the change in P as one that modifies P's ability to perceive what was immediately proximate and equally before him at both t_1 and at t_2.

Socrates' position would be indistinguishable from that of the many, who think that people often *act* from nonrational desire, contrary to what they think best. But if a nonrational desire for the pleasure of C that P comes to have at t_2, a desire he did not have at t_1, explains why the pleasure of C appears to be greater at t_2 than it did at t_1, we can see how it explains why P would form the judgment that pursuing C is good after all, and thereupon form a rational desire to pursue C at t_2.

It is important to notice that nothing about the introduction of a nonrational desire into the explanation of the phenomenon most people call akrasia conflicts with Socrates' commitment to eudaimonism. That is, nothing we have said conflicts with Socrates' view that, whenever we act, we act for the sake of the good as we conceive it and, thus, that everything we do is always motivated by a rational desire. Still, it is only fair to say that, if this account is right, Socrates is not an intellectualist about motivation in the precise way that the standard view makes him out to be, for he recognizes nonrational desires as having a role to play in the explanation of how some actions come to be performed.

We are now in a position to answer the first question we posed at the outset: why do some objects have the power of appearance? Something acquires the power of appearance when it becomes the object of a nonrational desire and so becomes recognized by an agent as a way to satisfy some appetite or passion – for example, as a pleasure or as a relief from some pain. We can also see why Socrates refers to the craft of measurement as our savior, for it allows its possessor to judge correctly whether an apparent good is really worth the cost that must be paid in terms of a subsequent evil. It would be a mistake, however, to infer that anyone who lacks the craft of measurement is doomed to be taken in by objects that have acquired the power of appearance. In the *Apology* (37a6–7), Socrates informs the jury that he "is convinced that [he] has not done wrong to anyone," including presumably

himself. We can infer from this that at least with regard to potential wrongdoing Socrates was never taken in by the power of appearance. Surely Socrates experiences appetites and passions; it is just that in his case his appetites and passions never caused him to wrong someone because doing so appeared good when it was not.[9] Why, then, would some people – perhaps even most people – be susceptible to the power of appearance in such cases and Socrates not? The answer cannot be that Socrates, in spite of his repeated denials to the contrary, really possesses ethical knowledge, the craft of measurement which "makes the appearances lose their power."[10] The craft of measurement would guarantee that Socrates would never make such mistakes; all Socrates claims here is that he thinks he has actually not made such mistakes, though presumably he might still do so. Even so, some explanation of his success so far is called for. A more plausible explanation of this success, we believe, can be found in Socrates' remark to Callicles in the *Gorgias* that we ought never to allow the appetites "to fill themselves up" (505b1–10), for then they become undisciplined and lead their possessors to engage in all sorts of wrongful and illegal actions. Here, the idea seems to be that appetites become stronger the more they are indulged and the only way to make them weaker is to subject them to various forms of correction or punishment.[11] To the extent

[9] An excellent example of a case in which Socrates suppresses an erotic urge may be found at the beginning of the *Charmides* (155d4), where Socrates experiences a surge of desire for Charmides, but manages to conquer it. It plainly does not follow, however, as the standard view would have to have it, that once Socrates masters his lustful reaction, he ceases altogether to feel any such attraction to Charmides – recall Penner's claim that all desires "always automatically adjust to the agent's beliefs about what is the best means to their ultimate end" (1992b: 128). Rather, any physical attraction Socrates continues to have for Charmides will not lead him to change his mind about what is in his best interest.

[10] For the implausibility of the view that Socrates' professions of ignorance are insincere and that he possesses the knowledge he says he lacks, see Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 30–55).

[11] For more on Socrates' views about the need to use punishment to discipline appetites that have grown strong, see Chapter 4. An excellent account of the role of disciplining the appetites (though see notes 5 and 8, above) may be found in Moss (2007).

that an appetite or passion is disciplined, the agent is capable of considering other factors in making a final judgment about whether to pursue the object of the appetite or passion – including factors that may weigh against pursuing the object.

If this is correct, Socrates believes that we can allow an appetite or passion to become stronger or we can make it weaker, where the criterion of strength and weakness is the degree to which the agent is blocked from, or able to consider, alternative courses of action. We will see in the next section how knowledge indemnifies its possessor against the power of appearance. But, for now, we think good sense can be made of the fact that, of those who lack knowledge, some and not others succumb to the power of appearance because those who do succumb have allowed their appetites or passions to grow strong while those who do not, like Socrates, either have not indulged their appetites or passions more than they ought or have received the curative effects of having had their appetites or passions disciplined through punishment. We are not arguing that Socrates never sees things as good when they are not. Rather, because his passions and desires are weak, his initial impulse to pursue what appears good is not sufficiently strong to convince him. Instead of acting on what initially appears good to him, he deliberates and, as he tells us in the *Crito* (46b4–6), acts only on the basis of whatever reason seems best to him in his deliberations.

3.4 KNOWLEDGE AND THE STRENGTH OF DESIRES

3.4.1 Is knowledge of the good compatible with strong appetites and passions?

Let us now turn to the second question we posed: how does knowledge make the power of appearance lose its power? The reasons we

have given for rejecting the standard account of Socratic motivation are heavily indebted to Daniel Devereux's (1995) article, "Socrates' Kantian conception of virtue," although, as we shall see, Devereux cannot very well agree with our view that only individuals with weak nonrational desires can have the craft of measurement. Devereux maintains that knowledge makes the power of appearance lose its power because knowledge is always stronger than the nonrational desire that causes something to appear good. Indeed, Devereux believes that, for Socrates, the craft of measurement and strong nonrational desire are not exclusive and that anyone who possesses Socratic wisdom may well have to contend with a strong inclination to act contrary to his judgment about what is best. Devereux puts the point this way:

> in the *Laches* and the *Gorgias* [Socrates] seems to assume that courage is characteristically manifested in overcoming motivational factors opposed to the agent's rational decision. Knowledge of the good does not eliminate nonrational desire; rather it produces a desire or motivational force that is stronger than any nonrational desire or emotion. (*ibid*.: 404–5)

If Devereux is right, Socrates believes that ethical knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue.[12] Whether one has unruly nonrational desires is irrelevant. In this respect, then, Devereux argues, Socrates' view of virtuous motivation is strikingly different from that of either Plato or Aristotle, both of whom assume that ethical knowledge *requires* the acquiescence of all nonrational impulses. In Devereux's view, Socrates thinks that knowledge saves us because

[12] Devereux (1995: 404–06). Carone argues against the view Devereux proposes (and also the one we provide) on the ground that, if appetites or passions precede beliefs (as causes of them), then "Socrates could hardly contend that knowledge was sufficient for virtue," on the ground that "even a knowledgeable person would then run the risk of being suddenly driven by a desire that originated in a way totally extraneous to his cognitive content" (2004: 89). We do not see why Devereux's view has this weakness, and we offer our own account of the sufficiency of knowledge for virtue in the next section.

it not only "sees the truth" in every situation but its superior motivational strength unfailingly prevents nonrational desire from causing a change in the knower's cognition of what is best.

One important piece of evidence that Devereux cites in favor of his interpretation is a passage in the *Laches* we looked at above (in Section 2.2.1), in which Socrates says that pleasures, pains, appetites, and fears all provide opportunities for people to display courage (*Laches* 191e4–7). Presumably, then, appetites and passions exert some motivational influence on the virtuous agent which he or she must "fight." More evidence, Devereux contends, comes from Socrates' exhortation to Callicles in the *Gorgias* to pursue a life of self-control. There, Socrates says: "for it's not like a self-controlled person to avoid and pursue what isn't appropriate, but to avoid and pursue what he should, whether these are things to do or people, or pleasure and pains, and to stand fast and to endure where he should" (507b5–8). Devereux's point is that, it seems to make little sense to talk about "fighting" and "standing fast" and "enduring" unless that against which one fights, stands fast, and endures exercises some motivational influence on the virtuous agent.

So, according to Devereux, there is nothing about the Socratic conception of virtue that precludes the possibility of the virtuous soul being pulled in different directions by its rational and nonrational desires.

3.4.2 Does a disciplined soul continue to have strong appetites and passions?

It is far from clear, however, that Socrates thinks that "fighting" and "standing fast" and "enduring" against pleasure really require the sort of conflict in the soul Devereux has in mind. If we return to Socrates' exhortation to Callicles, immediately after declaring

that the self-controlled person "stands fast and endures where he should," Socrates links happiness to self-control and self-control to discipline, presumably the discipline of one's nonrational urges:

> So this is how I set down the matter and say that it is true. And if it is true, then a person who wants to be happy must evidently pursue and practice self-control. Each of us must flee away from lack of discipline (*akolasian*) as quickly as his feet will carry him, and must above all make sure that he has no need of being disciplined, but if he does have that need, either he himself or anyone in his house, either a private citizen or a whole city, he must pay his due and be disciplined (*dikēn epiteon kai kolasteon*), if he is to be happy … he must not allow his appetites (*epithumiai*) to be undisciplined or to undertake to fill them up. (*Gorgias* 507c8–e3)

Here, it could not be clearer that having resistible, well-disciplined appetites is necessary for self-control. There is no suggestion here that one who does not allow his appetites to be undisciplined will succeed in doing away with his appetites altogether. Nor should we think that disciplined appetites aim only at what the person regards as best for him among his present options. Rather, despite experiencing his appetites in the typical way, the reason that the self-controlled person "stands fast and endures where he should" is because his appetites are not so powerful as to prevent him from reasoning effectively about what is best. If they were too powerful, he would "reason" that pursuing the lure of pleasure is best for him, and so would act disgracefully. The same analysis can be given of Socrates' claim in the *Laches* that the courageous person "fights against desire and pleasure." To say that Socrates believes that virtue requires that appetites or passions be disciplined and controlled is not to say that he thinks that a virtuous person somehow becomes incapable of feeling hungry, tired, or fearful. Rather, Socrates probably means that, instead of letting his nonrational desires "fill themselves up," the virtuous person responds by quickly mastering them and keeping

his rational capacity alert to all other pertinent considerations. There is nothing about the *Laches* passage that requires that there be any protracted struggle between wisdom and appetite or passion. If so, and if Socrates' exhortation to Callicles in the *Gorgias* commits Socrates to the notion that ethical virtue requires harmony between one's knowledge of what is best and one's nonrational desires, then Devereux cannot be right that knowledge "makes appearance lose its power" just because knowledge is always stronger than nonrational desire. Only if self-control does not require knowledge, contrary to what Socrates explicitly tells Callicles, can knowledge and strong appetite or passion exist together in the same soul.

The *Protagoras* itself also provides evidence regarding the sort of desire that is compatible with ethical knowledge. Recall that, immediately after Socrates' assertion that the craft of measurement "makes the appearances lose their power," he immediately adds, "it makes the soul have peace of mind" (*hēsuchian an epoiēsen echein tēn psuchēn*, 356e1). Here, Socrates wants us to understand that when the "appearances lose their power" they cease to have any significant motivational force. We can make good sense of the additional power of the craft of measurement, the power to produce peace of mind, only if the Socratic knower's *epithumiai* are weak and, thus, disposed to capitulate to knowledge of what is best.

We realize that, as Socrates uses the notion of the craft of measurement in the *Protagoras*, he invites the inference that virtue is the power to measure correctly different appearances of goodness as if they were always commensurable and that happiness consists in a single kind of good. One basis for Socrates calling virtue a craft of measurement in the *Protagoras* is the hedonistic assumption employed in the argument against "the many" (354c3–5, 355b3-c1). We take the argument to show more broadly that virtue is a power not to be misled by what appears good when the correct, all things considered,

judgment would be not to pursue that apparent good. Specifically, for Socrates, virtue is a power to make correct judgments about appearances of goodness in light of the correct conception of happiness. In the remainder of this book, then, we continue to refer to Socrates' conception of virtue as the craft of measurement, though in doing so we are not suggesting that the aim of happiness is as unified as it would be in a hedonistic understanding; it may, instead, include several components that are not directly commensurable.

3.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the *Protagoras* discussion, Socrates assumes that it is the nature of pleasure and relief from pain to appear good. The question, then, is not *when* pleasurable objects appear good. In our view, they *always* appear good. Rather, the question is how and why can they lead us to *believe* that they are good. Someone with a strong nonrational desire is subject to being overcome by the power of appearance, the sort of defeat the many mistakenly call akrasia. We believe that, for Socrates, ethical knowledge is incompatible with strong nonrational desire in this sense. Now, since pleasure and relief from pain always appear good, even if one does not have strong nonrational desires, whenever there are two or more appearances from which to choose, one must still decide which is the appearance of what is really good. Someone who can make these judgments unfailingly, even in the face of the clearest appearance to the contrary, and who can give the correct account of why she judges as she does, possesses the craft of measurement. Thus, we are not denying that, for Socrates, the knower must distinguish the greater good from what merely appears to be the greater good.[13]

[13] In this way, our view differs from the otherwise somewhat similar views given in Carone (2004), Segvic (2000), and Singpurwalla (2006). As we understand them, all three

So, in claiming that the craft of measurement requires weak nonrational desire, we are not suggesting that ethical knowledge somehow prevents its possessor from even experiencing what falsely appears good – an appearance ethical knowledge must then correct. Only if the Socratic knower's nonrational desires are weak in the sense that they always surrender to knowledgeable judgment can sense be made of Socrates' insistence, expressed in both the *Gorgias* and the *Protagoras* itself, that ethical knowledge yields harmony within the soul.

Those with strong appetites or passions are at the greatest risk of being prevented from seeing the truth once the appetite or passions are inflamed and so may find themselves convinced by strong

understand Socrates' view of the appetites and passions as if they actually *were* evaluative beliefs. A similar view appears to be suggested in Reid (2008), who characterizes shaming as consisting in "making others aware of their imperfections." Accordingly, if one who desired a chocolate tart finds one has compelling reasons for thinking that eating the tart would not be good for him, one will simply lose the desire for the tart altogether. In our view, by contrast, the object of an appetite that an agent has deliberately decided not to pursue may well continue to *appear* good to the agent – the chocolate tart will continue to look and smell good to the vigilant but struggling dieter who resists eating it in spite of that desire. Even one with the craft of measurement would not fail to note that the tart looked and smelled good. Rather, such a person would not be inclined to eat the tart because her mind was made up about whether eating it would be a good thing to do, all things considered. In a virtuous person, no resistance is needed because one will be motivated to do something only if deliberation endorses the appearance of goodness with the judgment that the appearance is not misleading. The virtuous person who decides not to eat the chocolate tart does not make such a judgment, even as she recognizes completely accurately all of the appealing aspects of the tart. In the view we argue against here, it looks as if a disciplined or virtuous person would have the same reaction to the tart as one who either did not like chocolate tarts, or one who mistakenly supposed, for example, that it was made of wood or plastic. So, too, this view would seem to require that, once he masters his first lustful reaction to Charmides, Socrates now finds the boy unappealing. This psychologically implausible result is one that we avoid in our own account of the Socratic view, and also provides a good reason for why we regard such desires as *irrational*, for they continue even when opposed by what the agent regards as decisive reasons. On this issue, our view is closer to that of Boeri, who says, "The person having 'the art of measurement' cannot remove the appearance – which does not depend on him – but he will not be ruled by it insofar as he is able to assess it critically" (2004: 120). But see note 5, above: in our view, the appearance *does* in some sense depend upon states internal to the agent. This is why Socrates advises that we keep our appetites and passions in a disciplined condition.

appetites or passions to see illicit pleasures or enjoyments as good. Others, who have not developed strong appetites or passions but who also do not have the craft of measurement, have either right or wrong opinions about their own good but their cognitive states do not depend as much upon their conative dispositions. Those who possess the craft of measurement, however, would always judge correctly, one condition of which is that they have lived in accordance with the advice Socrates gives Callicles in that they have "not allowed their appetites to become undisciplined or to fill themselves up." If our argument is correct, those who fail to heed this advice are likely "to wander all over the place in confusion" (*Protagoras* 356d6–7), always at the mercy of the power of appearance. Maintaining our appetites and passions in a disciplined condition, then, does not guarantee that we will always make the right choices; but it serves, at least, to allow us to continue considering all of the reasons available to us for making choices, and thus allows us to continue making choices, rather than leaving us in a condition where our choices may become foregone conclusions, because our capacity to judge has been diminished by the potent effects of strong appetites or passions.

CHAPTER 4

Wrongdoing and damage to the soul

4.1 THE MORAL PARADOX AND THE RISKS OF WRONGDOING

4.1.1 Damaging one's soul

At *Apology* 30c7–e1, Socrates cautions his jurors about the risk *they* face. The risk Socrates himself faces is obvious but, as he explains it, the danger he faces is far less grave than the one the jurors may inflict upon themselves:

> Rest assured that if you kill me – since I am the person I say I am – you wouldn't harm me more than you harm yourselves. Neither Meletus nor Anytus could do anything to harm me; it isn't even possible. For I don't think it's divinely sanctioned for a better man to be harmed by a worse. Doubtless, he could kill me, or send me into exile, or take away my rights, and doubtless he and others also think these things are great evils. But I don't. In fact, I think that what he's doing now – trying to kill a man unjustly – is a much greater evil. Athenians, at this point I'm far from making this defense on my behalf, as one might think, but instead I'm making it on yours, so that by condemning me you don't make a terrible mistake regarding the gift the god has given you.

Now, the claim that trying to kill a man unjustly is a greater evil than being killed unjustly may seem simply obvious from a moral point of view. But, as we saw in Chapter 2, in Socratic ethics, all goods and evils are not measured on *moral* grounds, but on *prudential* grounds; what is good is *beneficial* to the agent or possessor of

the good, and what is evil is *detrimental* or *damaging* to the agent or possessor of the evil. This aspect of the Socratic view, however, is quite puzzling. As easy as it may be for us – who tend to divorce moral from practical values – to understand why the jurors' *moral* risks are greater than those Socrates faces, it is considerably more difficult for us to understand how or why Socrates thinks they actually face *more damaging* consequences. Exactly what does Socrates think can be more *detrimental* or *damaging* to a person than the risks he faces himself: death, exile, or the loss of his rights as a citizen?

Numerous texts make it plain that Socrates regards the risks that he faces as less dangerous because the damage they threaten would be only to his *body*, whereas the damage done by wickedness is damage done to one's *soul*. In the *Crito*, he puts it this way:

SOCRATES: Come then: If we ruin what becomes better by health and destroyed by disease when we're persuaded by the opinion of those who lack expertise, is our life worth living when this has been corrupted? This is, surely, the body, isn't it?

CRITO: Yes.

SOCRATES: Therefore, is our life worth living with a body in bad condition and corrupted?

CRITO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: But is our life worth living with this thing being corrupted that injustice mutilates and justice improves? Or, do we believe that what justice and injustice concern – whatever it is of the things that make us up – is inferior to the body?

CRITO: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: It is, rather, to be respected more?

CRITO: Much more.

(47d8–48a4)

Socrates makes the same or similar claims in several of Plato's early or Socratic dialogues (see, for examples, *Gorgias* 478c3–e5, 511c9–512b2; *Republic* I.353d3–354a7). Now, plainly one way in which one could connect the commission of evil to consequences

even more damaging than loss of citizenship, exile, or death is to assure that those who do wrong will suffer punishments for their wrongdoing that are even more frightening and terrible than the sorts of punishments Socrates discussed at his trial. And Socrates did seem to think there might be such a connection, although scholars are divided over how committed Socrates was to any conception of the afterlife, and the possibility of punishments to be faced after death.[1] But even if Socrates did think that punishment in the afterlife was inevitable for the wrongdoer, it is plain that such punishment is not the main ground for his claim that wrongdoing is dangerous for and damaging to the wrongdoer, as others have noted.[2] The way in which he discusses the possibility of punishment in the afterlife – even where he seems the most confident about the inevitability of such punishment – seems to presuppose that the damage to be feared has *already been done to the soul*, even before the punishment is inflicted. Consider how Socrates represents the afterlife in the *Gorgias*:

> It is fitting for everyone who deserves punishment from another either to become better and to profit from it or to serve as an example to others in order that others, when they see the suffering that they undergo, will become better out of fear. Those who become better and pay the penalty inflicted on them by gods and men are those who have committed wrongs that are curable. Nonetheless, the benefit comes to them there in Hades through pain and suffering. For it is not possible to be rid of injustice in any other way. But those who have committed the greatest injustices and who have become incurable through these crimes will serve as examples, and they will no longer benefit in as much as they are incurable, but others will benefit by seeing them enduring throughout eternity the most fearful suffering on account of their great crimes. (525b1–c6)

[1] The texts that must be considered for Socrates' views on the afterlife are *Apology* 29a4–b6, 40c5–41c7; *Crito* 54c6–8; *Gorgias* 523a1–527a4. We discuss this issue at length in the Appendix.

[2] See Gerson (1997: 2).

Plainly, the threat of "pain and suffering" in the afterlife could well serve as a motivation for avoiding wrongdoing before death, and it seems obvious that Socrates is using this threat in order to persuade Polus and Callicles to "practice virtue" (see *Gorgias* 527d2). But it is also important to notice that those who will undergo "the most fearful suffering on account of their great crimes" are said to be those souls "who have become incurable through these crimes." As we found in the *Crito* passage we cited above, the practical concern Socrates seems to point to here is not that one will suffer in the afterlife, but, instead, that one might arrive in the afterlife with one's soul *already* damaged beyond all possibility of repair. The most important practical concern, then, is this: injustice *damages* the soul, and the greatest injustice *ruins* the soul. Just as no one would wish to damage or ruin their body, even less should anyone run the risk of damaging or ruining his or her soul.

4.1.2 The moral paradox and damage to the soul

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates argues first against Polus and then against Callicles that the tyrant, the most evil of all people, is not really powerful. The outline of Socrates' argument for this astounding claim is not hard to discern. The tyrant has the ability to harm others unjustly, but his ability to do so is not really power if we think that power is a good thing (468d1–e5). If Socrates is right, doing injustice is never a good thing, since it inevitably yields the very opposite of the tyrant's ultimate goal, happiness. Injustice is, as Socrates tells Callicles, "the very worst thing for the person who commits it" (509b1–5). The reason, of course, is that by acting unjustly the tyrant is actually doing great damage to his own soul, his most precious possession.

In an important sense, Socrates sees the tyrant and all who engage in wrongdoing as acting involuntarily because they are acting from factual ignorance about what they are doing. To be sure, the tyrant who destroys an entire village in an act of vengeance knows that he will be hated for what he has done; that he must always watch his own back, his children will be in danger, and so forth. But he judges that the good he gains for himself is worth the potential danger in which he puts himself and his loved ones. The tyrant's error, which renders his unjust actions involuntary, is the factual mistake of not grasping that, no matter what harm he does to others, he does even greater damage to himself. Were the tyrant to understand both the wrongness of what he did, and also that wrongdoing actually damages the wrongdoer, he would desist from tyranny.

Given the thesis basic to the prudential paradox that every bad action is the result of false belief, it follows that if every evil action is also harmful to the agent, every evil action must be the product of false belief. Not only is action that harms the agent himself the product of ignorance, so is every action that harms another. As we shall see in this chapter, the *Gorgias* is not the only dialogue in which Socrates claims that wrongdoing damages the soul.

As well known as Socrates' views are about how agents risk damaging themselves by committing injustice, there has been very little attention given to explaining exactly how and why Socrates thinks that wrongdoing damages the soul. But there is more than a simple gap in the literature here. In fact, we shall argue, Socrates' view on this issue simply cannot be explained by the standard account of his motivational intellectualism. In fact, we will argue that Socrates' view of the connection between wrongdoing and damage to the soul requires the new account of Socratic moral psychology for which we argue in this book.

4.1.3 Damage to the soul construed as a purely cognitive condition

Let us consider, then, how the standard conception of Socratic intellectualism would apply to Socrates' well-known view that wrongdoing damages the soul. As we noted in Chapter 3, the most vivid and richly detailed studies of Socratic intellectualism can be found in several recent works by Terry Penner. In brief, Penner sums up his view of Socratic moral psychology as follows:

> There is in Plato's early dialogues … a certain "intellectualism" that is quite foreign to the middle and later dialogues … Indeed, that intellectualism, with its implication that *only philosophical dialogue* can improve one's fellow citizens, is decisively rejected by Plato in the parts of the soul doctrine in the *Republic* … For Socrates, when people act badly or viciously or even just out of moral weakness, that will be merely a result of intellectual mistake. (2000: 164–5; emphasis author's own)[3]

As we have seen, in this view, widely held among scholars, all wrongdoing can and must be completely explicated in purely cognitive terms. Because, when we act badly, our wrongdoing always reflects a cognitive error, all ethical correction must accordingly be accomplished in cognitive ways. This, in Penner's version, is why "*only philosophical dialogue* can improve one's fellow citizens." The project of ethical improvement needs to take no account of conative elements in human motivational psychology at all, since these are shared by good and bad alike and differ not at all between even the best and the worst of human beings.

[3] See also Rowe (2006: 166), who characterizes the Socratic position as one in which "Nothing apart from talking and reasoning with us will be necessary, because there is nothing apart from what we think and believe that is even in principle capable of causing us to go wrong," and Taylor (2000: 63), who claims that there is no "possibility of interference by conflicting desires" in Socrates' conception of motivation. Plainly, we are disputing this understanding of Socratic moral psychology.

But suppose we now ask for an explanation of Socrates' belief that wrongdoing actually damages the soul. Since, according to the standard view of Socratic intellectualism, the only thing that *can* go wrong in a soul is that it can acquire and/or maintain the wrong beliefs about what is beneficial and what is harmful, the standard intellectualist picture of how wrongdoing damages the soul must be that wrongdoing gets one to believe false things about benefits and harms.[4] But how does *acting* in certain ways produce certain sorts of *beliefs*? Moreover, since it is plainly an important feature of Socrates' view of the risks of wrongdoing that one can actually *ruin* one's soul by sufficiently evil actions, the standard intellectualist account must also be able to explain such ruinous effects in terms of *beliefs*. On both of these issues, we contend, the standard account of Socratic intellectualism confronts insurmountable obstacles.

Now, it is plain enough that our actions do affect what we believe in some ways. One's actions, obviously, have effects on one's access to information, and one's access to information of various kinds will have effects on what one believes. But can this sort of connection explain the Socratic view that bad actions will *damage* one's soul? It is hard to see how. On the one hand, precisely because, in the standard view, everyone's desires are all the same, the only way to explain why A acts badly whereas B acts rightly is by virtue of wrong beliefs held by A that are not held by B. In other words, A's having the wrong beliefs is necessary *prior to* A's acting badly – so the damage that acting badly does to A's soul can't simply be that A acquires the wrong

[4] See, e.g., Reshotko (2006: 72): "Socrates must think that harming another increases the ignorance of the *agent*," which Reshotko seeks to explain by contending that "harming another in the belief that we will benefit by doing so predisposes us to have many ill-conceived notions about how the world works." We found no satisfactory explanation in Reshotko's statement, however, for how wrongdoing would actually increase one's misconceptions about the world, or "predispose us" to even greater ignorance than what led us to do wrong in the first place.

beliefs he has by acting badly; for A already *had* those wrong beliefs before he acted badly. If it is the mere possession of wrong beliefs that is to explain the damage done by wrongdoing, it seems the damage must be done prior to what is supposed to *do* the damage.

Perhaps, however, we are supposed to imagine that the damage done by wrongdoing can only be done to an *already* damaged soul. So, having some wrong beliefs already, and therefore being already damaged in the soul, the wrongdoer acts badly and thereby increases his store of wrong beliefs, thus damaging his soul even more than it was damaged before. Someone might initially suffer damage to his soul simply by being improperly trained or educated. For example, by attending only to sophists, one might gain the wrong belief that whatever increases one's ability to put others to death is a good thing for one (see *Gorgias* 466d5–468e5, cited above). Then, believing this, one might act badly in order to strengthen this ability. All that is needed now is an explanation of how and why the subsequent bad action must invariably increase the number or variety of one's wrong beliefs.

This explanation, however, seems implausible. Even if some story could be told about how acting badly on the basis of some wrong belief might *sometimes* lead one to acquire one or more new wrong beliefs,[5] it is implausible to suppose that each instance of acting badly would inevitably lead the agent to acquire at least one new wrong belief.[6] And yet if no such story can plausibly be told, the standard intellectualist must conclude that Socrates would be forced to admit that wrongdoing does not *always* or *inevitably* damage the

[5] So see, for example, Reshotko (2006: 72 n. 31): "Of course, only someone who already has ill-conceived notions about how the world works will harm another in the first place. Still, it would be reasonable for Socrates to think that harming another will allow one to develop even more false beliefs than one originally had. One might, for example, begin to believe that there is justification for the harm that was done or that it would be okay to harm further people in a similar fashion."

[6] Perhaps a variant of the standard view could hold that it is not so much *new* wrong beliefs that wrongdoing will inevitably produce, as a strengthening of the conviction with which

soul. But that is what he seems to think, at least for souls that are not already irreparably ruined.

Of course, souls that are already irreparably ruined cannot be further damaged by additional acts of wrongdoing. There is no further damage possible to something that is already irreparably ruined. But, as we shall see, the very idea of a ruined soul is *also* inexplicable, in the standard intellectualist view.[7] What would such a soul be like, according to the standard view? Presumably, it would have to be a soul in which not only too many of the soul's beliefs were wrong ones, but also it would have to be that the soul could not be brought (even by the gods, in the afterlife, presumably) to reject those beliefs in favor of the correct ones. It is difficult to see, however, how the simple possession of wrong beliefs could make it *impossible* for one to enjoy significant improving changes to one's belief-system. So, even if we grant that all wrongdoing involves having wrong beliefs, something must be added to the standard intellectualist picture of Socratic psychology to explain how wrongdoing can damage a soul, and how enough of it can make the soul become incurably ruined and beyond all possibility of benefit.

4.1.4 Gerson's explanation of the damage

In his famous early essay on Socrates, "The Paradox of Socrates," Gregory Vlastos noted the puzzling feature of Socrates' view that wrongdoing *damages* the soul:

one holds current wrong beliefs. But, again, precisely how this would work is anything but obvious. It seems, on the contrary, that the grisly or otherwise unpleasant effects of some sorts of wrongdoing could actually weaken the wrongdoer's convictions. Perhaps this is why none of those who have endorsed the standard view, at least as far as we know, have attempted to give this sort of account.

[7] At any rate, we know of no attempt by anyone who accepts the standard view even to try to explain what a ruined soul might be, so we can cite no examples of a "standard" way of tackling this question.

You may hold any one of a great variety of beliefs about the soul, or none of them, without either gaining or losing any essential part of what Socrates wants you to think about and care for when he urges you to "care for your soul." In particular you don't have to believe in the immortality of the soul. … The soul is as worth caring for if it were to last just twenty-four more hours, as if it were to outlast eternity. If you have but one more day to live, and can expect nothing but a blank after that, Socrates feels that you would still have all the reason you need for improving your soul; you have yourself to live with that one day, so why live with a worse self, if you could live with a better one instead. (1971: 5–6)

As much as Vlastos seems to have understood the upshot of Socrates' view, the passage just quoted does not actually *explain* it. As Lloyd Gerson has put it,

This account seems to me … inadequate. The rather predictable reply if such an account were offered as a piece of advice to an atheist doomed to die tomorrow would be that caring for his soul is the last thing on his mind. And even if this is not the inevitable response from such a person, it is surely a possible response, and one wants to know what Socrates, who wants to claim that "one must never do wrong," can say in reply. Even granted that refraining from wrongdoing is part of caring for your soul, a host of questions arise such as whether on occasion you could care for other things as well or more than the soul, why unqualified refraining from wrongdoing is required for caring for the soul, whether caring for the soul is a defensible prescription under extreme circumstances like imminent death, and even whether taking care of your soul in the long term might not actually require harming it in the short term. *Reculer pour mieux sauter*, as they say. (1997, 2–3)

Gerson thinks the explanation of Socrates' puzzling doctrine can be found in Socrates' identification of the soul with the self (*ibid*.: 7). The reason to care for the soul, accordingly, is that "soul care" amounts to "self care": "He who renounces soul care in fact renounces self care" (*ibid*.). The question, then, becomes, "How does wrongdoing *work* on the wrongdoer?" (*ibid*.) Gerson finds the

answer in the *Republic*, and cites several texts from Books VIII and IX of that work in support of his explanation. "The answer is that wrongdoing consists in the abdication of reason from the role of *archē* ['first principle'] of action in a person" (*ibid*.: 8). This abdication of reason, according to Gerson, "is a loss of self or of self-identity" (*ibid*.). Gerson goes on to say,

> Such subordination … is catastrophic, presumably because it is a sort of self-deconstruction. The "tension" which maintains the unity and identity of the self requires the dominant role of reason in action. As soon as the tension is released, it is difficult to imagine the bootstrapping mechanism whereby it could ever be reconstituted. In short, wrongdoing undermines personal or self-identity … Wrongdoing is absolutely prohibited by [Socrates] because it consists in the subordination of reason to appetite. Such subordination deconstructs a self viewed as an agent of effective rational activity. (*ibid*.: 9–10)

One thing to note about Gerson's explanation is that his reliance on the moral psychology of the later books of the *Republic* is at odds with the standard conception of Socratic intellectualism.[8] According to the standard view, after all, the "dominant role of reason" is one that is assured *even in the most persistent and despicable* of wrongdoers, whereas in the tripartite psychology of the *Republic*, wrongdoing is the result of the nonrational parts of the soul wresting control from the rational part. Recall the *Meno* and *Gorgias* passages we discussed in Chapter 3: according to Socrates, the difference between good and bad people is to be explained by differences in what they believe. In both cases, however, one would remain "an agent of effective rational activity," at least in the minimal sense that their acts would be in accord with their judgment of what is best for them under the circumstances. The wrongdoer's problem, rather, would not be that

[8] We discuss the important differences between the Socratic and Platonic accounts of motivational psychology in Chapter 7.

he had *subordinated* reason to appetite, as Plato does seem to have it in the moral psychology of the *Republic*, but rather that the wrongdoer's reasoning, though still absolutely sovereign in the decision-making process, was simply being done in the wrong, or a bad, way – producing the wrong, or bad, beliefs on the basis of which the wrongdoer acts. Gerson's account of "Socrates' absolutist prohibition of wrongdoing" explains that prohibition entirely in *Platonic* rather than genuinely *Socratic* terms.[9] In other words, Gerson has, at best, only explained how the mature *Plato* might have explained the harm that wrongdoing does to the soul. Given the moral psychology we find in the passages we have cited from the *Apology*, *Crito*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno*, however, Gerson's explanation of the Socratic position does not seem to be a possible one.

Even if we are not troubled by such historicist or developmentalist concerns (about which, see Chapter 1), Gerson's explanation seems inadequate in several other ways. For one thing, in Gerson's account, we are left with no reason for thinking that a *single* act of wrongdoing would not be enough for the most completely ruinous results.[10] Nonetheless, this seems to be precisely Gerson's view:

[9] Gerson seems to recognize this, beginning his paper by saying plainly that he regards the Socrates of Plato's dialogues as representing Plato's – and not the historical Socrates' – thought (1997: 1). When he presents his answer to the question of how wrongdoing harms the soul, he claims, however, "that it is essentially the same answer in the early dialogues, *mutatis mutandis*" (*ibid*.: 8). Whatever the relationship between the Socrates of the early dialogues and the Socrates of the middle dialogues (including the later books of the *Republic*) may be, and no matter how these relate to the philosophy of the historical Socrates, if the moral psychology of the early dialogues is as the standard intellectualist interpretation understands it, it is more than difficult to see how Gerson's "*mutatis mutandis*" could be worked out. The problem seems to be that the moral psychology offered in the later books of the *Republic* appears to be simply and logically incompatible with what we find in the earlier dialogues.

[10] An anonymous referee points out that it may be open to Gerson to drop any suggestion that Socrates' view of the soul is to be compared to Plato's and instead argue, essentially along Stoic lines, that, for Socrates, vice harms the soul by destroying what the soul is essentially – namely, that which leads us to approach the world rationally. Vicious action, then, is *ipso facto* an expression of a harmed soul. Such a clarification, however, would

To put the matter slightly differently, is wrongdoing like an act that *might* lead to death or is it like an act of suicide itself? I think the former alternative is implausible as an interpretation of Socrates' view because the defeasibility of the prohibition would make prudential considerations relevant to deciding whether to engage in wrongdoing or not. But these are specifically what Socrates rejects as relevant … So, I would insist on the latter alternative. (*ibid*.: 10)

The problem here is obvious when we consider the very passages this view is supposed to explain. In each one of these passages, Socrates warns that injustice will damage the soul. In some, but not all, of these passages, he also recognizes that persistent and egregious wrongdoing can make the soul incurable (e.g. at *Gorgias* 525b1–c8) and ruined (e.g. at *Crito* 47d8–48a4). But even when the threat of incurability and ruin is clearest, Socrates seems to recognize that not *all* souls that have engaged in wrongdoing are incurable. In the *Crito* passage, for example, Socrates clearly implies that there are at least some cases in which justice can improve what injustice "mutilates." And as he puts it in the *Gorgias* passage, "Those who become better and pay the penalty inflicted on them by gods and men are those who have committed wrongs that are curable." This, of course, is why Socrates recommends to Polus,

If he or whomever else he may care about commits wrongdoing, he should voluntarily go to wherever he will pay the penalty as soon as possible, to the judge as if to the doctor, eager to take care that the disease of wrongdoing not become chronic and make his soul fester and become incurable … He ought not hide his injustice but bring it out in the open, so that he may pay his due and become well, and it is necessary for him not to act cowardly but to shut his eyes and be courageous, as if he were going to a doctor for surgery or cautery, pursuing the good and noble and taking no account of the pain, and if his injustice is worthy of a beating, he should put himself

solve one set of problems only to generate another, which would have to do with how wrong action damages the soul and the degrees of damage that can be done to a soul. We develop these problems below.

forward to be beaten, and if to be imprisoned, he should do it, and if to pay a fine, to pay it, and if to go into exile, to go, and if to be killed, he should be killed. (*Gorgias* 480a6–d2; see also 478c3–e4, 525b1–c8)

In these passages it seems clear that inasmuch as single acts of wrongdoing are injurious to the soul, multiple or especially egregious acts or wrongdoing, or those that go unpunished, have the potential to continue to have deleterious effects on the soul, and threaten ultimately to ruin it. Gerson's conception of how wrongdoing harms the soul does a better job of explaining what a ruined soul might be like than why wrongdoing damages the soul. We find nothing in Gerson's account to explain why the alleged subordination of reason cannot simply be a temporary phenomenon. Why could not reason, after a temporary *coup d'etat* by the appetites, reassert itself and thereby come, once again, to reign supreme in the soul?[11] So, to frame the questions again, what kind of damage does wrongdoing do to the soul, and how and why does allowing that wrongdoing to "fester" away unpunished have the potential to lead to the soul's becoming "incurable"?

4.1.5 Different kinds of wrongdoers and wrongdoing

Because we all aim for what is beneficial to us, when we go wrong, our wrongdoing is involuntary. This, as we said, is the Socratic

[11] This very issue, moreover, leads us to think that Gerson's account does not even correctly represent the mature Plato's view of the injurious psychological effects of wrongdoing. After all, it seems just as implausible, given the moral psychology of the *Republic*, as it does within the moral psychology of the earlier dialogues, to suppose that any instance of wrongdoing would be akin to "an act of suicide" in the relevant sense. In our view, only in the worst and most extreme cases does Plato fail to allow for some hope of correction and change for the better. Even if reason might occasionally be suborned, there seems to be nothing in Plato's mature psychology that requires that it cannot regain its hold over the soul. In the charioteer myth in the *Phaedrus*, for example, why could the charioteer not temporarily lose control over the wild and unruly horse, but eventually regain control, by pulling "the reins violently backwards" (*Phaedrus* 254b8–c1)?

"moral paradox." This moral paradox is stated most plainly when Socrates chastises Meletus, in the *Apology*:

> Come then. Are you putting me on trial here on the ground that I corrupt the youth and make them worse voluntarily or involuntarily? I say you do it voluntarily. What's that, Meletus? Are you at your age so much wiser than I am at mine that you knew that bad people always do something evil to those who're their closest neighbors, whereas good people always do something good, but I've reached the point of such ignorance that I don't know this, because if I make someone I'm with bad, I'm liable to receive something bad from him, and so I'm doing such an evil voluntarily, as you say? I'm not persuaded by you about these things, Meletus, nor do I think anyone else is! Either I don't corrupt them, or if I do corrupt them, I do so involuntarily, so that, either way, you're not telling the truth! (25d6–26a1)

The standard account of Socratic intellectualism explains the moral paradox on the ground that the wrongdoer has made one or more purely cognitive errors about what is really best for the wrongdoer. It is entirely possible that some cases of wrongdoing actually are simply the result of ordinary ignorance or straightforward miscalculation. This is why Socrates continues his reproach by insisting that, if he really were guilty of any wrongdoing, his own situation would be just such a case:

> If I corrupt them involuntarily, however, the law here isn't to bring people to trial for errors of this sort but to take them aside in private to teach and admonish them. For it's clear that once I understand, I'll stop what I'm doing involuntarily. But you've avoided associating with me and you didn't want to instruct me, and instead wanted to bring me here to trial where it's the law to try those who need punishment, not instruction. (*Apology* 26a1–a8)

Those who make simple cognitive errors, then, should be taken aside "in private to teach and admonish them." But there is a serious problem in this passage for the standard account of Socratic intellectualism: if, as Penner (2000: 164) puts it, Socrates is convinced

that "*only philosophical dialogue* can improve one's fellow citizens," the distinction Socrates makes here in the *Apology* between cases in which instruction is appropriate, and other sorts of cases where a court trial and punishment are appropriate, would make no sense. In the standard view, Socrates would have to believe that no one belongs to the second group.

So what, then, should we make of Socrates' reference to this other sort of wrongdoer – those for whom, in this passage in the *Apology* and elsewhere in the early dialogues,[12] Socrates suggests that more traditional and often corporal punishment is more appropriate? What is the source of this sort of wrongdoing, and why is it more appropriate to punish wrongdoers of this sort? In Chapter 2, we cited several passages in the early dialogues in which Socrates recognizes the effects in human behavior of appetites for pleasure, aversions to pain, and emotions, such as fear or love. In our view, Socrates recognizes that some kinds of wrongdoing aim at the satisfaction of some appetite or other nonrational potential (such as a passion) in the soul. The question is, then, how do the appetites and passions do their work on the soul?

We have proposed that the appetites and passions play a causal role in the formation of our beliefs about what is good for us. In general, we will always see the satisfaction of some particular appetite as good if we believe that the reasons in favor of satisfying that particular appetite outweigh the reasons against it. Socrates believes that, when people act for the sake of pleasure, their appetites are strengthened. As a result, it becomes increasingly difficult for their souls to consider whatever reasons they may have for not taking the pleasure to which their appetite is attracted to be really good. Because the appetites and passions represent their aims to the soul as

[12] We discuss the Socratic theory of punishment in greater detail in the next main section of this chapter.

good things, as benefits to be obtained, one will always be attracted to the objects of these nonrational potentials simply because of the way in which they are represented; for they will always appear to be ways to satisfy our universal desire for what is good for us.

But just because something *appears* to be good does not mean that it really is good. Moreover, it does not follow that refraining from the apparently good thing would be a mistake. So, as Socrates says in the *Protagoras* (357a5–b4), what we need in life is the craft of measurement, which would allow us to render misleading appearances powerless to deceive the soul into thinking that apparent benefits (certain potentially corrosive pleasures, for example) are authentically good choices (see *Protagoras* 356d4–e2).

4.1.6 Losing our capacity for sober judgment

The way the appetites and passions work, however, can make it difficult for one who lacks the craft of measurement to find or consider reasons for suspecting that the apparent benefits they represent to the soul may not be as good as they seem. The more "unruly" and "undisciplined" one's appetites and passions become, in Socrates' view, the less capable we become of finding or considering seriously any evidence that may lead us to refrain from pursuing what our nonrational potentials represent as goods. The result of this process is not that the rational potential in the soul is simply swept aside; for the person with inflamed and undisciplined appetites and passions continues always to act in ways that he actually thinks are best for him. Were he *not* to think that acting as he does is best for him, he would not act in the way that he does. In this sense, then, his decisions and judgments continue to be driven by his desire for what is good for him and also by his beliefs about what actual things in the world and pursuits will satisfy that

desire. As his appetites and passions increase in strength, making it increasingly difficult for the agent to see reasons to resist them, they strengthen his incorrect beliefs about what is really good for him. Intoxicated by the causal effects of the distortions and misleading appearances his appetites and passions create in his soul, the increasingly habitual wrongdoer is not only less interested in considering alternative goals and modes of living, but is also actually less able to do so.

If we are right about this, then we can also see why it is that *even the most innocent forms of wrongdoing* damage the soul. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates gets Callicles to admit that, just as the doctor never allows unhealthy people to pursue those things that contribute to illness, so those suffering from lack of order and organization in the soul must be kept away from what will make their souls worse (505a6–10). When Callicles concedes this point, Socrates adds:

> And about the soul, oh best one, isn't it the same thing? As long as it is bad, being foolish and out of control and unjust and impious, it ought to be kept from its appetites and not turn to anything other than what will be better for it. Do you agree or not? – I do. – For isn't it the case that the soul becomes better in this way? – Of course. – Keeping it from its appetites is disciplining it? – Yes. (505b1–10)

One way to understand wrongdoing, accordingly, is to conceive of it as the very sort of action that will lead to more unrestrained and undisciplined appetites. One might be led to engage in this sort of activity as a result of some simple cognitive error, as we noted earlier. But even so, once one even begins to engage in such activities, one acts in ways that lead the appetites to become more unruly and less disciplined. If the process is caught in early enough stages, of course, simple instruction will be adequate to correct the wrongdoer and help him to avoid making the same error again in the future. But if the process is not stopped soon enough and the wrongdoing

becomes habitual, then a more drastic approach – punishment – becomes warranted.[13]

So we are arguing that wrongdoing damages the soul by making the wrongdoer more and more susceptible to deceiving and incorrect assessments of what is in his own interest, assessments influenced by appetites and passions, which have their effects on the way in which we judge things by representing their intended objects as benefits. The more the appetites and passions are satisfied and allowed to attain their goals, the more habituated we become to accepting their representations of goodness uncritically. Socrates also contends that satisfying appetites makes them more powerful, which makes them increasingly able to convince the soul to accept the appearances they present as truth and to cause the soul not to seek or consider alternative, contrary evidence about what is in one's best interests. In the extreme case, according to Socrates, is the state of ethical and psychic ruin. When this occurs, he says, the soul is incurable. We shall have a great deal more to say about this condition in the next section.

The effects of unruly appetites and passions, then, are what the standard intellectualist picture required but could not explain: a soul that is increasingly subject to false beliefs about how to act and how to live, where these false beliefs have an increasingly strong hold over one's cognitive processes. For this reason, let us be clear, our own account continues to be an intellectualist picture, for in our account it remains true in every case that action always follows belief. This, we contend, is how the Socratic view remains entirely distinct from what we find in the later books of the *Republic*. We have attributed

[13] In the next section, we will consider more carefully and in detail exactly how punishment is supposed to help the wrongdoer. For now, however, it is enough to notice that Socrates' views on moral education and on punishment are designed to remediate and help prevent the kind of damage to the soul that wrongdoing can cause.

a rather different form of intellectualism to Socrates than what we find attributed to him in standard accounts, however. In our version, Socrates should continue to be understood to hold that everyone always desires what is good for them, and that everyone always acts in the ways they think will be best for them. But, we have argued, there are potentials within the soul that have aims other than what is truly beneficial, such as appetites that aim only at pleasure. These potentials function by representing their aims to the soul as benefits to be pursued and acquired, and if these potentials are not kept in check, they can begin to erode the cognitive functioning of the soul in ways that make correct evaluation of actual benefit increasingly difficult to perform.[14] This process damages the soul by making it increasingly difficult for the agent to judge accurately what is in the agent's best interest under the circumstances. Because we do all wish for what is really good, and wish to avoid what is really bad, the consequences of any degree of intoxication and unreliability in our ability to judge what is really good for us will always count as damaging. And, as we shall see in the next section, the worst and most permanent of such consequences are, indeed, ruinous.

4.2 REPAIRING THE DAMAGE TO THE SOUL

4.2.1 The problem of punishment

In the account we are presenting, Socrates continues to be an intellectualist: Socrates believes that we all do what we do because of what we believe to be good or beneficial for ourselves. Because Socrates also believes that it is never good or beneficial for anyone to

[14] We defend the notion that the appetites represent "their aims to the soul as benefits to be pursued and acquired," rather than as pleasures as such in Section 7.1.

do wrong, then all who do wrong do so involuntarily in some sense, for all wrongdoers act in a way that is actually contrary to what they really want. Accordingly, one would expect that there would be no room at all for punishment in Socratic philosophy, unless by "punishment" we mean to refer only to some form of direct cognitive instruction about the good and how it is to be achieved.[15] The standard account of Socratic motivational psychology recognizes no place even for a distinct aversion to pain. The fact that something might be painful, accordingly, is at most a neutral fact about it, *vis-à-vis* its desirability; if one fully accepts that some painful thing is good for one, in the standard view, Socrates would conclude that one would feel no aversion to it at all – for in this view, all desire follows belief. The fact that something is painful, then, would have no effect of its own – would of itself be a matter of utter indifference – with respect to motivation.

[15] Recall, for example, Terry Penner's claim that in Socrates' view, "*only philosophical dialogue* can improve one's fellow citizens" (2000: 164, emphasis author's own). See also Rowe, who regards all of Socrates' references to punishments as merely rhetorical ways of referring to dialectical admonishment: "My conclusion is that the Socrates of the *Gorgias* does not endorse flogging, imprisonment, or any other vulgar sort of punishment. From this point of view, there is nothing 'transitional' about the dialogue" (2007: 36). In other words, nowhere in the early dialogues does Socrates ever endorse or show any indication of approval for such "vulgar" sorts of punishment. We find Rowe's defense of the standard view on this point quite implausible and contrary to the obvious sense of the texts we cite in the next paragraph. Even Moss (2007), who does not subscribe to the standard view of Socratic intellectualism – offering, instead, a very similar view to our own of how "disciplining the soul" works – regards Socrates' apparent endorsement of various forms of physical punishment as a "perhaps deliberate oddity," and hypothesizes that the conditional nature of what Socrates says here in the *Gorgias* ("*if* his unjust acts merit whipping," etc.) may only state a *per impossibile* condition: "Perhaps the conditional nature of the claims about physical punishment at 480c–d … indicates that Socrates is not committed to physical punishment ever being a genuine cure" (232 n. 8). While our own account will not characterize physical punishments as complete cures in themselves, we do not take the form in which Socrates expresses his endorsement of physical punishments as contrary-to-fact conditionals. Rather, we read them in the same way as we read the contrast Socrates makes at *Apology* 25d6–26a8 (quoted in Section 4.1.5, above) between those who have committed errors that deserve instruction as a response, and those who have done wrongs that deserve punishment.

This view of Socrates' philosophy of punishment is simply not supported by the texts themselves. Instead, in a number of places, we find Socrates ready to endorse the uses of punishments whose effects in terms of pain (or in some cases, shame and humiliation) are clear enough, but whose direct cognitive benefits are anything but obvious. Such punishments include whipping (*Crito* 51b5; *Hippias Major* 292b4–11; *Gorgias* 480c8–d1 and perhaps 524c5), imprisonment (*Crito* 51b5; *Gorgias* 480d1), fines (*Gorgias* 480d1–2), banishment (*Gorgias* 480d2), and even death (*Gorgias* 480d2–3 and probably *Euthyphro* 9a1–3, 9c2–4). Socrates characterizes many of these forms of punishment as evils – at least if they were to be inflicted upon him (see *Apology* 37b5–e2). Yet Socrates is also well known for claiming that one ought never to return harm for harm or evil for evil (*Apology* 25c5–26a7, 29b7–9, 37a5–6, 37b2–5; *Crito* 49a4–c11; *Gorgias* 479c8–e9; *Republic* I.335b2–e5). If such penalties are evils, how can he advocate their use? Even if they are not always evils, it would seem that, in order to be proper punishments, they would have to *educate* the wrongdoer in some way. And, as we noted in Section 4.1.5, in his reproach to Meletus in the *Apology* (25d6–26a8), Socrates explicitly distinguishes circumstances in which instruction and punishment are appropriate.

Some wrongdoing, then, appears to be the result of simple ignorance. People may be led astray by quite ordinary and purely cognitive errors, perhaps because of improper education, perhaps because of some innocent error in calculating the costs and benefits of some course of action, or for some other error of this sort. In response to this sort of error, as Socrates urges in the *Apology* for his own case, if indeed he has erred in his ways, the right way to correct the bad behavior is to provide appropriate instruction. But for other sorts of wrongdoing, Socrates thinks that punishments are in order. Let us now consider these other sorts of wrongdoing, and the punishments Socrates regards as well suited to them.

4.2.2 Curable and incurable souls

In the great myth at the end of the *Gorgias*, Socrates tells Callicles what he has "heard and thinks is true" about what happens to a person's soul when his or her earthly life is over (524a8–b1, 523a1–3, 526d3–4). There we learn that, although everyone who has been unjust is punished, the great judges in Hades nonetheless distinguish between those who will actually benefit from the punishment and those who are beyond help:

> It is fitting for everyone who deserves punishment from another either to become better and to profit from it or to serve as an example to others in order that others, when they see the suffering that they undergo, will become better out of fear. Those who become better and pay the penalty inflicted on them by gods and men are those who have committed wrongs that are curable. Nonetheless, the benefit comes to them there in Hades through pain and suffering. For it is not possible to be rid of injustice in any other way. But those who have committed the greatest injustices and who have become incurable through these crimes will serve as examples, and they will no longer benefit in as much as they are incurable, but others will benefit by seeing them enduring throughout eternity the most fearful suffering on account of their great crimes. (*Gorgias* 525b1–c6)

As we have seen, in the standard account of Socrates' motivational intellectualism, ethical improvement requires no improvement in our non-cognitive side, but this view appears to be at odds with the "great myth" Socrates tells Callicles. Indeed, why would Socrates think that pain and suffering can actually *rid* a soul of injustice? According to the standard account of Socratic intellectualism, injustice is *entirely* a cognitive defect. It is hard to see how pain and suffering can change someone's unethical beliefs; for example, the belief that acting unjustly when one can get away with it is preferable to acting justly. Second, if all ethical failure is purely cognitive in origin, why would Socrates think that some people are actually incurable? Since, according to Socratic intellectualism as it is standardly understood,

all wrongdoing is due to a failure to comprehend that wrongdoing most of all harms the agent of the wrongdoing, why would Socrates in the "great myth" think that some people can never be brought to see the harm they have done to themselves by acting badly? After all, if wrongdoing is merely a matter of having the wrong ends, why would Socrates not think that proper education about how to live is always sufficient to correct wrongdoing? Even if human beings cannot always find a way to educate wrongdoers, surely the gods could find a way in the afterlife!

4.2.3 The Gorgias *as a source*

Of course, the passage just cited comes from the closing myth of the *Gorgias*. Though scholars universally recognize how much the *Gorgias* has to say about moral psychology, they have generally contended that the moral psychology we find expressed in the work (by Socrates and also by other characters, especially Callicles) is incompatible with what can be found advanced or assumed by Socrates in the other relevant dialogues.[16] As we said in the Preface to this book, however, one feature of this interpretation of the last part of the *Gorgias* has always bothered us: it imputes to Socrates two distinct and contradictory accounts of motivation within a single dialogue, without plainly signaling that there has been such a shift in Socrates' view.[17] We are now in a position to see that we do not have to assume that a single dialogue endorses incompatible theories of

[16] See, e.g., Cornford (1933: 306–7), Irwin (1977: 123–4; 1979: 222, note on 507b), and Cooper (1999: 29–75). Although Charles Kahn thinks it makes good sense to see the *Gorgias* as having been written before the *Protagoras*, he thinks that the moral psychology implicit in the *Gorgias* leaves open the possibility of acting for the sake of pleasure, contrary to one's conception of the good. See Kahn (1988: 89; 1996: 42–8, 125–8).

[17] See, e.g., Irwin (1979: notes on 468ab, 507b), Brickhouse and Smith (1994: Section 3.5.5), and McPherran (1996: 268–9 n. 72). A very different explanation of this supposed shift is offered in Cooper (1999: 29–75).

motivation. Indeed, our references to other texts in which Socrates talks about the appetites and passions, and about punishment, all show that there is nothing "new" or "un-Socratic" to be found in the discussion with Callicles or in the myth at the very end of the *Gorgias*.

In fact, the standard view of Socratic motivational intellectualism cannot adequately handle the discussion between Socrates and Polus that takes place earlier in the *Gorgias*, a discussion which is usually taken to provide one of the clearest expressions of Socratic intellectualism. Proponents of the standard interpretation, however, seem to have missed that, even when he talks with Polus, Socrates recognizes that there are cases in which just discipline of wrongdoers involves the infliction of *pain*. At 476d9–477a2, Socrates establishes that one punished justly either undergoes something pleasant, or something beneficial. In the context of the argument, it is never in doubt which of the two options applies; the wrongdoer Polus admires so much avoids punishment precisely because it is expected to be *painful*. As Socrates puts it,

> From what we've just agreed to, it is likely that those who refuse to face justice are doing the same sort of thing [as those who avoid medical treatment], Polus. They see its painfulness, but are blind to its benefit and are ignorant of how much more wretched it is to live with an unhealthy soul than with an unhealthy body, and with a soul that's rotten and unjust and impious. And so it is that they avoid facing justice and getting rid of the greatest evil. (*Gorgias* 479b5–c2)

So what kinds of pains does Socrates have in mind as just cases of "paying what is due" here? He mentions "lectures and lashings" at 478e3, flogging at 480c8, and imprisonment, fines, exile, and even capital punishment at 480d1–3. If he really supposed, as Penner has put it on behalf of the standard view, that "*only philosophical dialogue* can improve one's fellow citizens," Socrates' recognition of

such an impressive array of other forms of appropriate discipline would be simply inexplicable.

We can therefore return to our question, so vividly raised by what Socrates says in the myth: why would Socrates suppose that pain and suffering correct some offenders and not others? We believe that, by understanding why Socrates thinks that some people are beyond the possibility of any cure, we gain a deeper insight into his view of how our appetites and passions can affect our beliefs about what is good for us.

4.2.4 Punishment, wrong, and harm

Socrates' intellectualism, no matter how it is understood, does not by itself entail any theory of punishment. Intellectualism, by itself, is compatible with the view that correction of the wrongdoer is not the only – or even the main – purpose of punishment. But certainly pertinent to this issue is Socrates' conviction that it is wrong ever to harm anyone, even in return for harms done to one (*Apology* 25c5–26a7, 29b7–9, 37a5–7, 37b2–5; *Crito* 49a4–c11; *Gorgias* 479c8–e9; *Republic* I.335b2–e5). From this it follows that it is not open to Socrates to accept any form of sanction to wrongdoers that is harmful to the one sanctioned. Protecting others from the wrongdoer, then, cannot be a sufficient excuse for doing something to the wrongdoer that would harm the wrongdoer. But exactly which forms of punishment does this prohibition rule out?

To answer this question, we shall have to look more carefully at Socrates' conception of what constitutes harm. As we said in Chapter 2, Socrates is a eudaimonist and so connects the conception of goodness with *eudaimonia* (happiness). As we shall explain in greater detail in Chapter 6, in Socrates' view, virtue and virtuous activity are the only things that are all by themselves conducive

to happiness; other things may also be conducive to happiness, but only if they serve the interests of virtue. That which is conducive to vice and evil activity, Socrates regards as evil and harmful precisely because it promotes wretchedness – the opposite of happiness. But the specific way in which Socrates conceives of these linkages implies that many things normally regarded as goods can, when employed by vice or ignorance, actually be evils or harms.[18] The good looks of the confidence artist or the robust health of the thief are examples. As long as they remain bent on wrongdoing, it would be better *for them* to be ugly, poor, or physically disabled. Of course, it would be far better for them to aspire to virtue. But it would nonetheless not count as a harm to them if some suffering that frustrated and diminished their ability to carry out their wrongdoings befell them.

We are now in a position to see why what might well count as a wrong or harm for one person would not be a wrong or harm for another; penalties such as imprisonment or banishment, which would take away one's freedom of movement or expression, for example, would be wrong and harmful to Socrates because his actions aim at what is good for himself and his fellow Athenians. This is why he says such punishments would be evil and harmful to him in the *Apology*. To one who perpetrates evil, however, the loss would be right and beneficial, not only for those who might otherwise become victims of the prevented evils, but also for those who would otherwise have done the evil deeds. Imprisonment and banishment that we impose upon the wicked are not only not wrongs, they are not harms to those so punished.

[18] We offer a full discussion of the connections between goods, virtue, and happiness in Socratic philosophy in Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 103–36). On the relationship between virtue and virtuous activity, however, we have changed our view. See Section 6.3.5.

4.2.5 Punishment and ethical correction

Our explanation of Socrates' view of punishment is as yet incomplete. What we have said so far works only for punishments that serve as a kind of restraint, preventing wrongdoers from pursuing further evils. Socrates also endorses certain forms of punishment, for example whipping, whose purpose is surely not simply to *restrain* the wrongdoer. How, then, could Socrates suppose that punishments such as whipping could serve as corrections to wrongdoers when, by the lights of his intellectualism, the relevant correction has to be a *cognitive* one?

As we have seen, there may be any number of reasons why someone might do something wrong. Some agent might simply fail to calculate correctly the consequence of some action, so that the resulting harm is unintended. In cases such as these, education is appropriate insofar as the harm results from some lack of understanding of what sorts of consequences flow from what sorts of acts. Education, not punishment, also seems the appropriate means of correction where the agent falsely supposes that the wrongdoing is actually an example of doing what's right. We see this, for example, where one has simply learned a false or faulty code of ethics to follow.

But there is yet another cause of wrongdoing in which the wrongdoers do intend to wrong and harm some other or others, but this time the error is in thinking that, by doing so, the wrongdoers will achieve some advantage for themselves. As might be expected from what we have already said, the immediate source of this sort of error, presumably, lies in how such persons would conceive of what advantage or benefit consists in; for plainly they do not think that benefit is only to be achieved through good actions. The error here, then, comes from assigning an ethical value to wrong actions that they do not really have: wrongdoers mistakenly suppose that acting

badly will bring them greater benefit than would acting rightly, presumably thinking that the wrongdoing will add value to the wrongdoer's life in terms of some good other than virtue. This is precisely the sort of error Socrates seeks to correct in the first protreptic passage in the *Euthydemus* (278e3–281e5) when he tries to show that none of the things so many other people take to be goods – health, wealth, pleasure, and honor – have any value when taken in isolation from virtue.

Socrates is convinced that there is only one thing that is good in itself: virtue (or the wisdom from which all virtue derives) (*Euthydemus* 281d2–e1). Only this invariably benefits its possessor; these other so-called goods benefit only those who are already good, and actually harm the wicked. Because all actions reflect some calculation of benefit, wrongdoers who take wealth, or honor, or pleasure to be more important than virtue mistakenly suppose that ill-gotten wealth, or honor, or pleasure will benefit them.

If the connection the wrongdoer makes between wrongdoing and its perceived benefits for the wrongdoer were severed, the wrongdoer would no longer be motivated to engage in that sort of wrongdoing. Given the wrongdoer's own conception of benefit, then, if the wrongdoer were to become convinced that a given sort of wrongdoing would actually have the *opposite* consequence from the one to which the wrongdoer was attracted (poverty rather than wealth, for example, or shame rather than honor, or pain rather than pleasure), that sort of wrongdoing would no longer be attractive to the wrongdoer. This, then, provides one possible explanation for why Socrates would count whipping, imprisonment, banishment, and fines or property confiscations as appropriate penalties in some cases. For certain sorts of wrongdoers, such penalties benefit the wrongdoer insofar as they change the cognitive connection the wrongdoer makes between wrongdoing and benefit. Such

corrections are, admittedly, incomplete. It would be better if the wrongdoer came to hold the right general view of what benefit consists in, and the essential place virtue occupies within that conception. But it should now be clear that, *precisely because* the wrongdoer undergoes a favorable shift in beliefs about what particular acts will produce benefits (even if a faulty conception of benefit is retained), an intellectualist account of this sort of benefit, produced for example by the pain of a whipping, can be provided.

4.2.6 Punishment and cure

To the extent that wrongdoers can be made to come to believe that wrongdoing provides them no benefit, or at least that the attempt is not worth the possible cost, they are clearly made better off, for to that extent they are less motivated to engage in further wrongful acts. But this cannot be the only reason Socrates thinks that the infliction of pain as a punishment is a good for the wrongdoer. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates seems to think that effective punishment does much more than merely increase the likelihood that the wrongdoer will find wrongdoing unprofitable. At the end of his discussion with Polus, Socrates reviews why we value the crafts of money-making, medicine, and justice: "Money-making frees us from poverty, medicine frees us from illness, and justice frees us from intemperance and injustice" (*Gorgias* 478a8–b1; see also 479d1–2). He then goes on to explain why punishment makes wrongdoers better off than they would be were they to escape punishment: "Was, then, punishment not the release from the greatest of evil? … for it tempers us and makes us more just, and justice brings about a cure for the evil" (*Gorgias* 478d4–7).

As long as wrongdoers continue to hold the wrong conception of the good, their reluctance to engage in vice is contingent upon

the strength of the link between the punishment received and their beliefs that future wrong action will result in punishment. We can easily imagine situations in which it would only be rational, given a misguided conception of the good, for the previously punished criminal to revert to wrongdoing. Imagine, for example, a thief who has been incarcerated and heavily fined as punishments in the past, but who has excellent reason on a particular occasion to think he or she will not get caught. One might argue, of course, that this would only show that the original punishment was not sufficiently severe and that, had it been so, the criminal would never again dare to act on the surmise that such wrongdoing can sometimes be beneficial. But this is possible only if we think that punishment can instill an irrational fear of getting caught that would always be sufficient – no matter what the criminal's current rational assessment of the likelihood of detection and capture – to deter further wrongdoing. This scenario may be possible in some accounts of human motivation (for example, Plato's or Freud's), but it is not possible in Socrates'. For in such a case, the irrational fear would prevent the criminal from acting in such a way that he or she actually believes is in his or her best interest at the time of action. This cannot happen, according to Socrates.

Before we ask how punishment can actually *cure* the wrongdoer, however, we should remind ourselves of why Socrates thinks that wrongdoing is always bad for the wrongdoer. As we have seen, according to Socrates' intellectualism, the appeals of the appetites and passions can influence the way we judge what is in our best interest at any given time, and this is why our best strategy is to maintain our appetites and passions in a "disciplined" condition, to minimize the ways in which they can disturb our cognitive processes. Socrates' frequent comparisons between vice and disease suggest that he thinks that, just as illness inflames the body and keeps it

from functioning well, so vice infects the soul and keeps it from performing its function of "governing and managing well" (*Republic* I.353e10–11). For Socrates, vice consists at least in part in having one or more false beliefs about how to live. Such disastrous beliefs may be formed by listening to bad advice. But if coming to acquire the worst sort of character were *only* a matter of taking the wrong people too seriously, Socrates would have no reason to say, as he does in the *Gorgias*, that vice, unless treated, becomes "ingrained" (*Gorgias* 480b2).

Given what we have learned thus far about Socrates' conception of the operations of the appetites and passions, we can now understand the process by which a harmful ethical belief can become "ingrained" in a soul: our appetites work in such a way as to represent their aims as benefits for us to pursue. The more we allow ourselves to experience the pleasures of gratifying such appetites, the less we are able to consider reasons for resisting the lure of such pleasures in the future. Our appetite for such pleasures becomes more unruly and less disciplined. The effect is like intoxication: we are increasingly unable to make sober judgments about what is good for us.

We are now in a position to see why Socrates would advocate corporal punishment for certain kinds of offenders. In a famous passage in the *Gorgias* (which we quoted more extensively in Section 4.1.4), Socrates tells Polus that, just as sick people should submit to the painful regimen of the doctor in order to recover their health, so a wrongdoer should submit to the painful punishments meted out by the judge:

> he ought not hide his injustice but bring it out in the open, so that he may pay his due and become well, and it is necessary for him not to act cowardly but to shut his eyes and be courageous, as if he were going to a doctor for surgery or cautery, pursuing the good and noble and taking no account of the pain, and if his injustice is worthy of a beating, he should put himself

forward to be beaten, and if to be imprisoned, he should do it, and if to pay a fine, to pay it, and if to go into exile, to go, and if to be killed, he should be killed. (480c3–d3)

If punishment is actually to cure those who have become convinced that the most violent pleasures are beneficial, then they must first be freed from the intoxicating control that pleasure has over them. We believe that, for Socrates, at least some kinds of wrongdoing aim at the satisfaction of some appetite or passion.[19] Wrongdoers motivated by the appetites or passions will see the satisfaction of some particular appetite as good if they believe that the reasons in favor of satisfying that particular appetite through wrongdoing outweigh the reasons against it. As we have seen, Socrates also believes that, when people act for the sake of pleasure, their appetites are strengthened, and because of this their souls become disinclined to consider whatever reasons they may have for taking the pleasure to which their appetites are attracted as not as good as it appears to be. For example, the more we enjoy chocolate cake, the more powerful must be the reasons we are given if we are to forego it. Pain and suffering help wrongdoers attend to reasons that help them to resist the inflated appearances presented by inflamed appetites by linking their wrongdoing with something they are eager to avoid, namely, pain. Corporal punishments,

[19] Not all kinds, of course. As we have already noted, some could be the result of simple ignorance or false belief – for example, acting in such a way as to harm one's enemies, thinking that doing so is the right thing to do. Socrates is convinced that this is wrong, but acknowledges that most people do not agree with him about this (see esp. *Crito* 49c10–d5). Presumably, those who acted in such ways would be better served by Socratic re-education than by the pain and suffering inflicted by corporal punishment. An excellent discussion of Socrates' renunciation of customary ancient retributivism – highly unusual among the ancient Greeks – may be found in Vlastos (1991: Chapter 7). There remain, of course, retributivist elements in Socrates' discussions of punishments as "just desserts," however. Socrates would never think such desserts were just, however, unless they had beneficial effects on the one punished, if such were at all possible (and if not, then at least on other observers – see Section 4.2.7, below). We are grateful to Angelo Corlett for prompting us to clarify this point.

then, give habitual wrongdoers especially powerful reasons not to engage in wrongdoing even though the satisfaction of their appetites through wrongdoing has weakened their inclination to consider reasons to use judgment at all. If the reasons are sufficiently powerful, the next time they have a desire to engage in wrongdoing, the pleasure to be derived will be seen as a merely apparent good and will fail to motivate them.

Of course, here we must ask why Socrates would count this as a "cure," for surely wrongdoers might still lack the correct conception of what benefit really consists in, and may suppose that profit may yet be possible from future wrongdoing, as long as detection and punishment can be avoided. If we recall Socrates' analogies between medicine and physical training, on the one hand, with legislation and criminal justice, respectively, on the other (*Gorgias* 517e3 ff), we can see that Socrates does not have to suppose that the "cure" of punishment must make the wrongdoer into someone who never could or would perform injustice again. To do this, punishment would have to make the wrongdoer virtuous. But Socrates has seen no evidence that even the most assiduous pursuit of philosophical inquiry can achieve so much. Instead, Socrates must think that punishment "cures" the wrongdoer and "rids" the wrongdoer of injustice, in the same way that medicine cures the body of disease; medicine can only remove the present cause of disease and imbalance – it cannot remove the mortality and vulnerability of the flesh that make us always susceptible to future disease. So, in the same way, punishment can only remove the current source of imbalance and "disease" in the soul – it cannot replace ignorance with knowledge of the good. In saying that punishment should "cure," Socrates should not be taken to mean that the wrongdoer is somehow immunized against all future wrongdoing. A proper "cure" for those intoxicated by undisciplined appetites, then, will only be one

who has achieved at least some temporary sobriety in one's cognitive processes. For better protection against further lapses, the wrongdoer would have to undertake to bring his or her appetites and passions into a disciplined state. Punishment can provide at most only the first step in this process.

We are also now in a position to see why Socrates would have told Callicles that *only* corporal punishment rids some souls of injustice. It is commonplace that Socrates thinks that, just as virtue is knowledge (of some sort), vice is ignorance. But in what way is the vicious person ignorant? According to the standard understanding of Socratic intellectualism, Socrates thinks that vicious people simply hold a mistaken conception of the good, in which case it should be possible to eradicate their vice through education – by teaching that their conception of the good is mistaken. But if what we have argued thus far is correct, Socrates thinks that habitually vicious people are always ignorant in a difference sense: at the time they act, not only does their appetite lead them to mistake an apparent good for a real good, it also causes them to be disinclined to reason about the real value of the pleasure they seek. By giving them an especially powerful reason to avoid wrongdoing, corporal punishment makes the agent disinclined to engage in wrongdoing and, as we have seen, Socrates thinks that appetites that are not filled up become more disciplined, which is to say, more inclined to follow reason's lead.

It is important to recall that Socrates never tells either Polus or Callicles that corporal punishment *necessarily* cures a vicious soul. Rather, he claims that those who are unjust cannot hope to become cured unless they undergo punishment. Nor does Socrates say that a soul, once cured, is somehow immune to further evil. Punishment itself will not prevent appetite from being filled up again by the acquisition of pleasure. Only the craft of measurement would actually

indemnify one against lapses; all punishment can accomplish is to give those whose appetites have become inflamed a powerful *reason* to see an apparent good as just that – an *apparent* good. It is only by undergoing punishment that the wrongdoer can hope to avoid further acts of injustice and, hence, with weakened and disciplined appetites, to be able to judge correctly.

4.2.7 The incurables

Why, then, does Socrates say that some people *cannot* be cured? Because Socrates tells us in the *Gorgias* that we always act for the sake of the good, he must think that in order for punishment to be effective wrongdoers must connect their conceptions of the good[20] with the avoidance of unjust action. What is required, then, is that the agents make the *judgment* that the satisfaction of an appetite at which their action aims is not worth the suffering to which they are liable as a result of such action. Thus, they must form the judgment that the apparent good to which they are attracted is merely apparent. But we have also argued that, when Socrates says that appetites that have been "filled up" become unruly, he means they resist the making of such judgments about the pleasurable object to which they are attracted. Thus, the more wrongdoers engage in injustice, the stronger their appetites become and, consequently, the less able

[20] In the *Gorgias*, Socrates thinks the worst sorts of people are those who succeed in gaining for themselves the life that Callicles wishes to live – one of unbridled pleasure-seeking. Socrates argues that they attain such a goal at the cost of making their appetites "undisciplined" (505e1–5). Nowhere does Socrates say why such a person is worse than those who think, for example, that the good life is one in which one rids the world of persons of different ethnic groups, or one in which one ruthlessly advances one's political ideology. But presumably Socrates thinks that the Calliclean life is worse, not because people who aspire to it do more harm than others, but because they fall hopelessly into the grip of their own appetites. If we are right, Socrates thinks that other sorts of bad people might be able to be brought to change their ways through education. Unless prevented, however, the Calliclean ideal becomes a slave to appetites and utterly loses the ability to control them.

they are even to consider whether the pleasure that attracts them is actually good. If the wrongdoers' appetites are allowed to become sufficiently strong, then *regardless of how much they are made to suffer by means of punishments inflicted on them*, when their appetites are aroused they will fail to see a reason not to pursue the satisfaction of those appetites. Punishment is effective only if those who suffer it exercise their capacity to judge whether their actions are worth the risk of the pain they will suffer if they are caught. Once appetite becomes sufficiently strong, however, it renders one incapable of appreciating reasons, no matter how strong those reasons are, for avoiding injustice.

Socrates tells Callicles that the great judges in Hades, who are able to see what previous actions have done to the souls of the dead, conclude that some souls are beyond redemption:

> This is why [Rhadamanthus, the judge who punishes unjust souls from Asia] stops them, though he doesn't know whose soul it is, and gets hold of the Great King or some other king or powerful person and sees nothing healthy in the soul, but that it has been whipped and covered with scars, the result of lying and injustice, which each of his actions has stamped on his soul and everything was crooked as a result of lying and boasting and nothing was left that is straight because it has been brought up without truth. (524e1–525a3)

But what exactly does it mean to be in a state in which there remains "nothing left … that is straight" in the soul? In what sense has the rational element been destroyed in the soul in which there is "nothing left … that is straight." One way we might imagine a soul in such a condition is to have beliefs produced by its appetites somehow simply overwhelm and replace all contrary beliefs in the soul. By systematically eliminating all reasons opposed to the pursuit of pleasures and the avoidance of what we fear or what might be painful, the soul would be left in a condition such that there would be nothing left in it that could

be called upon to oppose or correct the appearance of good presented by some appetite. The effect of such a process would plausibly qualify as a soul that had "nothing left … that is straight" in it. Moreover, it would make sense that such a soul would have no further capacity to *learn* or acquire new beliefs of the correcting sort, since it would have achieved a kind of coherence in its cognitive system that would be naturally resistant to any new beliefs that conflicted with the ones it had come to hold. The result, then, would be a soul that was completely resistant to ethical education or correction.

The problem with this account of what a ruined soul might be is that Socrates seems to be committed to the view that no one can actually be consistent in this way. Various studies of the Socratic *elenchos* have suggested that Socrates seems to assume, at the start of his elenctic encounters, that his interlocutors – expressing only their own beliefs – can be brought to the realization that their own beliefs are not consistent with some views they have expressed, and which Socrates has targeted for refutation.[21] Socrates even seems prepared to attribute certain beliefs to people at the very moment when those people are most adamantly disavowing the very beliefs Socrates is attributing to them. The most striking example of this is in Socrates' conversation with Polus in the *Gorgias*. Polus is incredulous that Socrates would dare to claim that it is preferable to suffer than to do injustice:

POLUS: Don't you think you're completely refuted, Socrates, when you say such things that no one would agree to? Just ask anyone who's here! […]

[21] In Gregory Vlastos' account, for example, this feature of the Socratic *elenchos* is an *assumption* that Socrates makes. Vlastos refers to it as assumption [A]: "Whoever has a false moral belief will always have at the same time true beliefs entailing the negation of that false belief" (1994: 25). Our account of the *elenchos* (Brickhouse and Smith 1994: 10–29) proposed that Socrates arrived at this view as a result of a kind of induction, based on the responses of many interlocutors over many years of engaging in elenctic argument.

SOCRATES: I think, indeed, that you and I and other people believe that to commit injustice is worse than suffering it, and not to be punished is worse than to be punished.

POLUS: Whereas I say that neither I nor anyone else believes that. But you'd prefer suffering injustice to doing it?

SOCRATES: Yes, and so would you and everyone else.

(*Gorgias* 473e4–474b8)

What Socrates says to Polus here seems to require, at least, that everyone is capable of coming to believe that it is preferable to suffer than to do injustice, if they would consider the subject thoughtfully enough.[22] But the soul of the consistent wrongdoer we have imagined above would be an exception to this rule: such a soul would neither *actually* hold such a belief, nor would it ever come to hold such a belief if it undertook to consider the issue, for such a belief would not find support in or be entailed by any of that soul's other beliefs.

We could of course argue that, when Socrates made his unqualified and universal claim to Polus, he simply was not thinking about the sole exception to his claim – the case of ruined souls. But there is another way to understand how a soul may become ruined, according to which the beliefs Socrates seems ready to attribute to everyone may still be supposed to exist in the ruined soul. In the *Crito* (47a12–48a4), Socrates compares the effects of injustice on the soul to the effects of disease on the body. In certain cases, diseases can so ruin the body as to make life itself no longer worth living (*Crito* 47e4–6). The same can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, for the effects of injustice on the soul; at a certain point, the soul will simply be *ruined* by the injustice it has done (*Crito* 47e7–48a4; see also *Gorgias* 480a6–b2). In *Republic* I, we

[22] Different accounts of what this might mean are offered in Irwin (1979: 151, note on 472ab), Vlastos (1994: 23), and Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 73–83).

are told that the function of the soul is not just to live, but "to manage, rule, and deliberate, and all other such things" (*Republic* I.353d3–6). The ruined soul, then, is one that can no longer perform its function. According to the afterlife myth in the *Gorgias*, it is not the case that the ruined soul will simply cease to exist; we must suppose, instead, that what is ruined is its ability to perform its function, that is, "to manage, rule, and deliberate, and all other such things."

Now, the ability to "to manage, rule, and deliberate, and all other such things" does not *just* rely on one's having the right beliefs – for, as we argued earlier, those who have the right beliefs can be influenced and overwhelmed by powerful appetites. Moreover, deliberation and the like require more than just the possession of beliefs (whether these be good or bad ones); such activities require that the one having beliefs be able to *apply* them to the making of judgments about how to act. Even those who have correct ethical beliefs will nevertheless not be able to "to manage, rule, and deliberate, and all other such things" if they are incapable of bringing such beliefs to bear on any decision they are called upon to make. It is *this* condition, we propose, that Socrates has in mind as the condition of a ruined soul. In conversation with Socrates, perhaps, even one with a ruined soul could be shown to have beliefs that are inconsistent with wrongdoing; but given the next opportunity to engage in the very wrongdoing such beliefs would oppose, the person would be in headlong pursuit of the wrongdoing. It is not that they have no beliefs opposed to such wrongdoing; rather, the ruined soul has simply lost the capacity to "to manage, rule, and deliberate, and all other such things" to such a degree that the beliefs that would stop them from pursuing the wrongdoing have become wholly ineffective as deterrents. Having lost its capacity to "to manage, rule, and deliberate, and all other such things," the

soul can truly no longer perform its function, and is ruined beyond all possibility of repair.[23]

If we are right, then, when Socrates says that there is "nothing left … that is straight" in a ruined soul, he means that whatever might be left in the soul is not able "to manage, rule, and deliberate, and all other such things" well enough for the soul to be able to correct the appearances the appetites present to the soul. No matter how much they are punished, such souls can never again judge that the pleasures to which their appetites still drive them are in fact evils for them. Though they are tortured and left hanging in Hades forever (525c6–7) and so will never actually act on their violent appetites, they are doomed like Tantalus to continue with their unfulfilled cravings, with no hope of recovery.

Socrates claims that not allowing appetites to become "filled up" *disciplines* them. We may suppose that the same effect can also be achieved in the souls of the incurables: because they are prevented from acting on their appetites, over time their appetites will become disciplined; after some long enough period of time, even the most violent appetites might return to an appropriately disciplined level. But because their past life consisted of so many horrific deeds, the resulting violence of their appetites "left nothing that is straight" within the soul. Consequently, were they to be released when their appetites have once again become weak, they would still be incapable

[23] There is no reason to suppose that "ruined souls" would be incapable of *any* form of means–ends reasoning. Such persons might well continue to be able to consider how most effectively to satisfy the calls of whatever appetite happened at any time to have their attention. Our claim is that, by identifying the function of the soul as performing the activities of management, rule, deliberation, and such, Socrates means to identify something greater than simple means–ends reasoning – if fact, it would involve the ability to deliberate about which *ends* might be best to pursue. It is this sort of deliberation, we claim, that is destroyed in "ruined souls," for their ends would always be determined by whatever appetite or passion happened to hold them in their grip at any given time. We are indebted to Martin Tweedale and Jennifer Mackey for helping us to clarify this issue.

of deliberating in such a way as to correct the power of appearance. When they first encounter something to which their appetite (even weakly) inclines them, they will see the pleasurable object as a good. But without the capacity to find and apply reasons that might lead them to judge the object as in fact not good, they will pursue what they ought not. With their very capacity to find and apply appropriate reasons destroyed, they will never again be able to live as a human being. Because they are already irreparably ruined, no further harm to them is possible, and no benefit either. But their sufferings in Hades can at least provide an example to others, who may yet be cured of their injustices. Even the gods cannot correct what has been ruined by the most egregious wrongs.[24]

4.3 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have looked closely at what Socrates thinks happens to those who have allowed their appetites and passions to become "unruly," and what he thinks we can do to help them to be rid of this condition. As physical training helps the body to maintain balance and health, so maintaining our appetites and passions in a disciplined condition helps us to preserve our soul's ability to perform its function "to manage, rule, and deliberate, and all other such things." If errors of judgment, perhaps because of the intoxicating effects of our appetites or passions, have led us to allow our appetites or passions to become "unruly," then the sobering effects of punishment – like the curative effects of medicine on the sick – may be useful. But proper punishment for wrongdoers falls far short of an

[24] Rowe senses that the whole idea of incurable or ruined souls is one the standard view cannot explain, and so not surprisingly claims that Socrates does not really hold the view that such a result is actually possible, unless Socrates means only to refer to souls that do not as a matter of fact ever get "cured" of their injustice (see Rowe 2007: 35 n. 42). In light of the texts we have cited, we find this account implausible.

ideal. Those punished may be made better, but much of what made them go wrong to begin with may remain with them. In endorsing punitive "corrections," Socrates did not imagine that such corrections were ideal solutions to the problem of wrongdoing. But his dim view of his own powers of correction, which aimed for higher goals, left him, realistically, with no clearly better option than those the state legally provided. His pessimism about the human capacity to be made good, however, was not worsened or confused by a contradictory position regarding the goals and methods of criminal corrections. Punishment was, for Socrates, a necessary feature of the human condition and the fallibility of human judgment – a fallibility made especially evident when judgment becomes clouded by the intoxicating effects of the appetites and passions. Punishment is an instrument for the remediation of evils, which though they could become ruinous, could never, in all likelihood, be wholly eliminated.

CHAPTER 5

Educating the appetites and passions

5.1 EDUCATION AND MOTIVATIONAL INTELLECTUALISM

5.1.1 Installing beliefs, or inculcating the right habits?

In the last three chapters, we noted several passages in Plato's early or Socratic dialogues in which Socrates assigns an explanatory role to appetites and passions, and several others in which he proposes ways to manage these psychic forces properly. Such passages call for a complete re-evaluation of Socrates' moral psychology, we have argued, by which Socrates' intellectualism can be explained in such a way as to maintain some explanatory role for the appetites and passions.

In this chapter, we propose to extend our reconstruction of Socrates' moral psychology by focusing on what it means for Socratic education. We begin with a review of how the traditional account of Socratic intellectualism is committed to viewing Socrates' conception of education strictly in terms of changes in belief, whether by inculcating the right beliefs in early education, or by forcing a re-evaluation of one's beliefs in the light of inconsistencies revealed by Socratic examination. We argue, on the contrary, that a complete account of Socratic education must also recognize a role for the proper management of appetites and passions, and we explicate

how Socrates would understand that role. We go on to sketch what the more complete Socratic education would be like, in regard to the appetites and passions. The upshot of our study, we claim, is a new and more adequate picture of Socrates' conception of education.

5.1.2 The traditional view of Socratic intellectualism at work in education

In Socratic motivational intellectualism, as we have seen, those who actually pursue what is bad for or harmful to them have made a *cognitive* error: they have misjudged what is bad for or harmful to them as being something good for or beneficial to them. When Plato has Socrates argue for this view, he also has those to whom Socrates explains it express considerable initial puzzlement and skepticism. Among later ancient philosophers and most contemporary ethical theorists, moreover, Socrates' view has generally been rejected outright. It may seem no surprise *why* Socrates' interlocutors, and later philosophers, have found Socrates' view so difficult to accept. For most of those who have thought about this issue, it just seems obvious not only that we sometimes actually do pursue what is not good, but bad for us – but also that we do so precisely because we desire the objects or activities that we pursue. There are too many things out there that are eminently desirable and strongly desired, but whose actual acquisition, possession, or consumption is not really good for us. If everything we desired was actually good for us, temptation would never be a problem for human beings.

In Chapter 7 we shall say more about the ways in which Plato and Aristotle later accommodated this difficult fact of human life, but for now it is enough to recognize that both Plato and Aristotle understood the appetites and passions as having potency that was at least to some degree *independent* of rational judgment. Neither

Plato nor Aristotle ever doubted that we all really do want – and not just sometimes, but always want – what is good for us. But both Plato and Aristotle thought that these other psychological forces – our appetites for things like drink, food, and sex, and our passions, such as love, fear, and anger – could sometimes simply overwhelm a person, and (as Plato puts it in *Republic* IV at 439b4) drive that person "like a beast" to do or enact what the appetite or passion craves. In accordance with their supposedly more complicated, and supposedly more plausible, moral psychologies, both of these later classical philosophers emphasized the role of habituation in early education (Plato, *Republic* Books II and III; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* II.1–4 and *Politics* VII.14–VIII.7). The goal of such training in both of their views was to habituate the appetites and passions to become less powerful within the soul, and also to become more responsive and obedient to the dictates of reason.

It is not surprising, then, that scholars who have understood Socrates as simply leaving no role for the operation of the appetites or passions in his psychological theory have also recognized no role in Socratic philosophy for dealing with the potentially disruptive influences of such psychological forces within his conception of education. Recall once again Penner's claim that "only philosophical dialogue can improve one's fellow citizens" (2000: 164). As we have already seen, however, many of our texts actually show that Socrates recognized not only the existence of appetites and passions, but also recognized that they could play a role in how we act. In the earlier chapters of this book, we sought to explain how the appetites and passions influence our decision making. Moreover, it is not just that Socrates actually seems to recognize a role for nonrational desires in motivating human behavior; he also seems to make provisions for dealing with such desires in the project of improving one's fellow citizens. As we showed in Chapter 4, Socrates quite explicitly

endorses the uses of various penalties and punishments that simply cannot be adequately understood in standard intellectualist terms. The question for this chapter, then, is: did Socrates also recognize a role in education for dealing with the appetites and passions, and if so, where does he discuss this role and what does he have to say about it?

5.2 SOCRATES ON HIGHER EDUCATION

5.2.1 The Socratic elenchos *as an instrument of education*

If we are right about Socratic moral psychology and the requirement that the appetites and emotions be disciplined, we would expect to find at least traces of this view in what Socrates says about education; for if the appetites and passions can play such an important role in how well we are able to practice good judgment, then we might reasonably expect Socrates to have some views about how the deleterious effects of the appetites can be minimized or prevented altogether.

Now, it is well known that Socrates believes that knowledge of good and evil does provide one with full immunity against the siren calls of the appetites and passions. One who knows what is right, Socrates says, will never choose what is worse. But Socratic philosophy does not supply or even hint at any very promising route to the knowledge that would provide such assurance. Socrates himself, recall, can do no better than to exhort others that "the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being," but, despite being an exemplar of the sort of life to which he thus invites others, he is also famous for saying of himself that the only wisdom he has managed to achieve is awareness of his own ignorance. So one finds little

encouragement in Socratic philosophy for the idea that error-proof knowledge is something we could reasonably hope to achieve.

Socrates' own examined life also featured a famous mode of questioning sometimes called the "*elenchos*," or the "Socratic method." It has been characterized as a method for teaching, and though he quite explicitly denies being a teacher, his disclaimer seems to construe teaching in the somewhat narrow specific sense of teaching *doctrine*. By questioning others as he does, he certainly does attempt to teach others something very important about themselves; for one thing, that they are (at least) as ignorant as he claims to be.[1] Several other sorts of self-discovery may also have been among his aims as well.[2]

5.2.2 Elenchos *as shaming*

In some of Plato's early dialogues, we find Socrates conversing with youths – young men or adolescents; in others, he examines older men. But we never see him engaging in discourse with children. So if the *elenchos* is to be understood as a kind of teaching, despite Socrates' disclaimer, it appears to be a form of higher education, or even adult education. Now, to many, the *elenchos* has seemed to fit well with the traditional conception of Socratic moral psychology.[3] But, in fact, what Socrates himself has to say about what he does in questioning others does not always make it sound as if his sole aims are direct cognitive changes in his interlocutors. As we have noted elsewhere,[4] Socrates does not simply claim to examine

[1] On the various ways in which Socratic questioning is characterized in Plato as a form of teaching, see Brickhouse and Smith (2009: 177–94).

[2] We survey at least some of these in Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 73–85).

[3] See, for example, the most famous analysis of Socrates' style of arguing in Vlastos (1994: Chapter 1). No trace of non-cognitive influence or effect is noted in Vlastos' analysis.

[4] Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 12–14).

others' *beliefs*; he claims to examine their *lives* (see *Apology* 39c7, *Laches* 187e6–188a2, *Gorgias* 482b4–6). And, as we noted in Section 2.2.2, he sometimes characterizes this process as involving *shaming* others, or subjecting them to a kind of corrective punishment (see, e.g., *Gorgias* 505c3–4). In other places, as we said, we see him quite obviously seeking to humiliate his interlocutor through irony, mockery, and sarcasm. The experiences of humiliation and shame, as we showed in Chapter 2, are not purely and simply intellectual ones. Instead, the way in which Socrates seeks to shame some of his interlocutors obviously functions in precisely the way our account of moral psychology proposes: Socrates recognizes that such negative emotional experiences can influence those experiencing them to change the beliefs or activities that led to the person feeling them. The unpleasant experience of shame influences the way people act by inducing them to change their beliefs about what is best for them.[5] As we showed earlier, this is the very opposite of the process required by the standard view of Socratic intellectualism.

5.2.3 Return to the Gorgias *as a source*

In Section 4.2.3 and the Appendix, we respond to a few of the ways in which scholars have argued that the closing myth of the *Gorgias* should not be counted among the sources for Socratic philosophy. If this last part of the *Gorgias* really can be included among our sources for Socratic philosophy, however, the significance of another aspect of the myth may now be noted – but this other aspect itself raises an objection. Simply put, some scholars have counted the very fact that Socrates elects to use a *myth*, as part of his means of persuasion, as inappropriate to the philosophical and methodological

[5] An excellent study of Socrates' use of shame may be found in Woodruff (2000: 143–6 esp.). See also Sanderman (2004).

commitments of Socrates as he is otherwise depicted in the early or Socratic dialogues.[6] Let us now consider more carefully this final objection to our use of the *Gorgias* myth as an instrument of training the nonrational elements that is consistent with Socratic psychology as we understand it.

At *Crito* 46b4–6, Socrates patiently explains to his old friend what Crito must surely have known for a long time already. "I'm not just now," Socrates says, "but in fact I've always been the sort of person who's persuaded by nothing but the reason that appears to me to be best when I've considered it." One problem scholars have noted with the myth of the afterlife in the *Gorgias* is not in its content, but simply in the fact that it is a myth. It is one thing, for Plato, who recognizes the influence of nonrational psychological factors over us, to attempt some persuasion through nonrational appeals like myths, in the later dialogues. But for an intellectualist like Socrates, who is supposed to think that "*only philosophical dialogue* can improve one's fellow citizens," as Penner has put it, it is simply not conceivable that he would resort to the strikingly *un*-philosophical method of trying to improve Callicles by appealing to the sophist's fears of painful punishments in a mythological tale. By working on our fears rather than simply trying to change our minds about some thesis (in this case, that it is prudent to avoid wrongdoing in one's life), scary tales of punishments in the afterlife plainly function in ways the standard account cannot accommodate.

[6] See, e.g., Rowe (2007: 22, n. 9), who finds it inappropriate to put any weight on what Socrates says in this passage because "it allows a *myth* to determine central elements in Socrates' thinking" (italics in original). A similar view of the myth is given by Vallejo, who claims that "it does not address reason, but rather that part of the soul where the passions reside" (2007: 141). This is a reasonable objection only if what we find in the myth is not corroborated in non-mythical passages of our texts, and if the fact that something is presented in a myth disqualifies it as something Socrates is likely to believe is true. As we will see, neither of these conditions appears to be met in regard to the closing myth of the *Gorgias*.

In one sense, all we need to do to respond to this argument is to refer back to our arguments of the last three chapters. There, we argued that Socratic psychology all along recognized the effects of nonrational factors, such as appetites and emotions, on human behavior. If so, then there would seem to be no philosophical reason for thinking that Socrates could not or would not employ our fearful responses to eschatological myths in his attempts to act as the only "true political craftsman" in Athens (see *Gorgias* 521d6–8). Appropriate discipline sometimes works by the application of painful punishments, as we have seen. Just as our aversion to pain can be useful in helping us to gain better control over unruly appetites and passions, so too our capacities for fear, shame, and other emotional reactions can be made to play a useful role in motivating better behavior. This is what we take Socrates to be saying when he says he is attempting to "discipline" Callicles (*Gorgias* 505c3–4), for there is obviously no sense in supposing that Socrates is attempting to put the younger man into a state of *physical* discomfort in these passages, but neither can we see everything in their hot exchanges as the operation of pure reason only. Socrates seems to think that one is much improved both by fearing and being ashamed in the proper manner, and not fearing or being ashamed when one should be (see *Apology* 28b6–c1, d5–9), and so if he can get Callicles to feel shame at his indefensible advocacy of injustice, and fear wrongdoing by telling a myth, his doing so would seem to be entirely in keeping with his own characterization of his mission in Athens.[7]

[7] Note that this use of nonrational techniques serves to chasten undisciplined appetites and passions, rather than to gratify them as a kind of positive inducement to holding the right beliefs. For an argument as to why Socrates could never endorse the latter sort of technique for persuasion, see Moss (2007: 246–7). We share Moss' view that gratifying appetites – even for the sake of inclining the one gratified to hold the correct beliefs about a subject – tends to make the gratified appetites more unruly and uncontrolled, and thus would actually be detrimental to the one persuaded in this way.

It is true, of course, that the *Gorgias* is the only dialogue in the group ordinarily regarded as early or Socratic in which Socrates employs a full-blown myth in his attempt to persuade an interlocutor. But nonrational appeals and extra-logical rhetorical devices of various sorts are nonetheless abundant in the relevant group of dialogues. Is it, for example, "Socrates' dedication to rational justification" (McPherran 1996: 267) that makes him decide to present the arguments for staying in prison by imagining them posed by the personified laws of Athens? And what is the purely "rational justification" of Socrates' pretense in the *Hippias Major* of having to confront a "close relative" (304d3), whom Hippias would not know if Socrates were to name him (290e2), who lives in Socrates' own house (304d3–4) and who insults and abuses Socrates whenever he acts as if he has some wisdom that he lacks (286c3 ff and *passim*)? If Socrates were exclusively dedicated to rational justification, then why does he go along with Critias' suggestion that he pretend to have magical healing powers, as he does with an elaborate tale of having a special leaf and charm in the beginning of the *Charmides* (155b5 ff)? As we discussed in Section 2.2.2, Socrates brags about shaming and reproaching people into changing their ways in several passages in the *Apology* (29d7–e3, 30a1, 30e3–31a2), and acknowledges the risk he faces that his jurors might vote against him not just because they have false beliefs about him, but because they are *angry* at him (31a3–5, 34b7–d1). He also recognizes that anger (23c8–9), ambition (23e1), and a propensity to violence (23e1) in his slanderers have played a role in his coming to have such a bad reputation in Athens.

Moreover, Socrates frequently seems willing, if not to relate whole myths, to employ references and quotes from well-known myths and mythological tales in his own persuasive attempts. Socrates carefully considers various myths of the afterlife when he

considers what death might be like in the *Apology* (40e4–41c7). But earlier in that same work, as he was completing his defense speech, "Socrates' dedication to rational justification" certainly allowed him to compare himself to Achilles (28c1–d4), to quote Homer (34d5), to lend authority to his defense by calling the god at Delphi as a witness (20e7–8), to scoff at Anaxagoras for rejecting the myths that say the sun and moon are gods (26d1–e3), and use beliefs about the relationships between gods and demi-gods, certainly obtained from mythical accounts, in his refutation of Meletus (27c5–d10). In fact, Socrates is often quite willing to recruit some myth or popular tale in order to boost his arguments, and if we are right about his moral psychology, his willingness to do this is entirely consistent with his "dedication to rational justification." Accordingly, we find nothing strange in the idea that he might choose to complete one of his persuasions – especially one with a particularly recalcitrant interlocutor such as Callicles – with a final appeal to a chastening myth. It may be that the myth at the end of the *Gorgias* is something that Plato simply concocted, a tale that was never in fact told by Socrates. As we said in Chapter 1, such historical issues do not seem likely to be solved decisively. Nonetheless, there is no good reason for thinking that the Socrates we find in Plato's early or "Socratic" dialogues (much less the historical Socrates) could not or would not have resorted to such a tactic, or that he could not or would not have believed what he says he believes in that myth. So to the list of ways in which Socrates' own educational practices with adults betrays a recognition of some ways in which the appetites and passions must be engaged, we can now add a further practice: sometimes, Socrates was willing to employ myths and other "likely" fictions in order to make his case with particularly difficult interlocutors more convincingly. In doing so, he shows some recognition of the emotional effects such stories can have on others. These emotional effects go

unrecognized in the traditional account of Socratic intellectualism, but can be understood as entirely in keeping with the rest of Socratic moral psychology as we have represented it.

As we have already seen, of course, Socrates actually recognized yet another form of the proper education of adults, his conception of punishment. As we have argued, he thinks punishment may be understood as a way to counteract and correct the effects of the appetites and passions on wrongdoers. We can conclude, accordingly, that Socrates recognized several different ways in which the education of adults recognized a role for engaging and disciplining the appetites and passions. We now wish to ask, however, whether Socrates had anything to say about *early* education – the education of children, in which, as we have already acknowledged, we never actually find Socrates engaged.

5.3 EARLY EDUCATION

5.3.1 Early education in the Gorgias

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates lectures Callicles about the need to discipline one's appetites. The aim of such discipline, we have maintained, is to prevent this potentially disruptive psychic force from tainting our judgment and fooling us into thinking that some gratification is actually good for us when it is not. No matter what we do, our actions will reflect our judgments (at the time of our action) about what is best for us. Because some things may be attractive to us that are not really best for us. However, we must not only be intelligent about what our range of choices is in any given case and understand what their actual relative values may be, but must also take care to maintain our faculty of judgment in a sober and alert state to avoid error.

But small children are plainly not mature enough to manage all that is needed to make the kinds of careful and well-informed judgments that a good life requires. They need guidance in forming the right beliefs about what is truly valuable and what is only apparently valuable. We would expect, accordingly, that Socrates would recognize an important role in early education for the inculcation of the right beliefs about value. But if we are right that Socrates also recognized that the appetites and passions can have potentially destructive effects on decision making, then we might also expect Socrates to emphasize some element of early education designed to begin laying the foundation for the lifelong basic human need to maintain the appetites and passions in a disciplined form.

Nowhere in Plato's early dialogues does Socrates articulate a view of early childhood cognitive or affective psychology, and so any view on this matter must be speculative. But in the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates state that it takes some time for children to develop what he calls "the rational part of the soul," whereas the appetites and spirited (passionate) parts of the soul are abundantly evident and active from the earliest ages (see *Republic* IV 441a7–b1). The entire point of the earliest education for children, in the *Republic*, is to habituate these "lower parts of the soul" to be moderate and to prepare them for their ultimate subservience to reason.

It is probably not plausible to attribute the full-blown "parts-of-the-soul" theory found in the *Republic* to the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues.[8] Moreover, as we have seen, we cannot attribute to Socrates in the early or Socratic dialogues Plato's later view that the

[8] Plato does have Socrates refer to "that in the soul in which we have appetites" at *Gorgias* 493a2–3 and b1, and his later characterization of keeping the soul in an orderly condition (see 504b4–505b12, 506d5–507a3, 507e6–508a4) may also suggest that he regards the soul to be composed of parts, but he nowhere in the early or Socratic dialogues explains what the various parts may be, nor does he in any way argue or attempt to explain precisely why the soul must have whatever parts it may have.

appetites and passions could motivate human action entirely independently of reason. Instead, as we have been arguing, they motivate by influencing *the way* reason operates rather than working *independently of reason*. So, the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues plainly cannot accept all of Plato's reasons for advocating educating young children in the way Plato does in the *Republic*. But we see no reason for thinking that Socrates could not also recognize that early training of emotions and appetites may not play an important role in training them later to be orderly and disciplined. In fact, despite the differences we have noted in their moral psychologies, these differences seem to compel no substantive differences in the way Socrates and Plato would conceive of early education.

But this so far is mere speculation. Is there any textual support in the early dialogues for thinking that Socrates actually did recognize a role in early education for this sort of habituation-training of the appetites and passions? In fact, there is. In the *Gorgias*, a frustrated Polus expresses incredulity when Socrates acknowledges that he regards all of human happiness to derive from justice and education (470e6–11). Scholars have paid a great deal of attention to the relation claimed in this passage between justice and happiness. But the link Socrates makes here between happiness and education has not been discussed.

The traditional view of Socratic intellectualism would have to understand this link as secured by the role in education of providing the right *information* on the basis of which correct judgments of value can be formed. So, the sort of education to which Socrates must be referring in this passage would be informational education; the inculcation of the correct beliefs about value in the one educated. In our view, however, Socrates might be referring either to this informational element in proper education or to the proper habituation of the appetites and passions that allows one to engage

in unhindered deliberations about value. We believe a convincing case can be made for the latter understanding of this remark over the former, purely informational reading.

One of the most puzzling elements of Socratic intellectualism (in any formulation of it) is Socrates' commitment to the view that all virtue is a kind of knowledge (see Chapter 6 for further discussion). Unless we assume that Socrates' conception of virtue is radically different in the *Gorgias* from what it is shown to be in other early dialogues, we can conclude that the link between justice and happiness that Socrates makes in the *Gorgias* passage under discussion is secured by the knowledge in which justice consists; the same knowledge that Socrates claims would make us invulnerable to error in our judgments of what is best for us (see *Protagoras* 356d4–e2). This knowledge, then, not only ensures that we are in possession of adequate information, on the basis of which we can make the right choices; it also immunizes us against the potentially corrosive and distorting influences of the appetites and passions.

If the link to education and happiness Socrates makes in the *Gorgias* is informational, therefore, it appears to be simply redundant. Justice alone supplies the informational component. But perhaps we might suppose that the link between education and happiness runs *through* justice, as it were. Happiness is achieved through justice and education because it is by giving us the sort of knowledge in which justice consists that we become happy. The problem with this view is that it is not altogether obvious from what Socrates says about the teachability of virtue in the other early dialogues that he regards virtue and hence justice as something that can actually *be* a product of education. In the *Protagoras*, for example, Socrates and Protagoras seem to go in circles on this very issue; and in the *Meno*, Socrates and Meno seem to come to the conclusion that virtue

cannot be taught and indeed that, if it can be acquired it all, it comes only by divine dispensation (*Meno* 100b2–c2).

Moreover, it is clear that Socrates himself does not suppose he actually possesses the knowledge in which virtue consists. In proclaiming his ignorance, as he so often does in the early dialogues, he explicitly disclaims having the virtue of wisdom, without which none of the other virtues can be possessed either.[9] And even if this shows (as we think it does) that Socrates therefore cannot be as happy as he would be if he did possess virtue, there are excellent textual reasons for thinking that Socrates nonetheless regarded himself as a happy man.[10] So, we can conclude that happiness does not necessarily consist in virtue, and hence, happiness does not necessarily consist in justice.[11] Some happiness, then, might derive from education in a way that is independent of whatever role education may play in the development of justice.

But perhaps the traditional conception of Socratic intellectualism could now invoke the distinction Socrates makes in the *Meno* between true belief and knowledge (*Meno* 97a3–98a8), and claim that because true belief will adequately secure right action (when maintained and not replaced by false belief, that is), the happiness that derives independently from education will do so on the basis of the true beliefs education inculcates in the one educated. Such a claim is not implausible, but there are nonetheless grounds

[9] For more on the unity of the virtues, see Section 6.2.

[10] We make this case, and discuss all of the relevant passages, in Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 123–34).

[11] See the relationship between justice and being happy (*eudaimōn*) or blessed (*makarios*) at *Gorgias* 507c9–e1, according to which the aim of happiness requires one to discipline one's appetites and to try to become as just and temperate as possible. Such advice would simply be pointless if (complete) virtue were necessary for happiness, so that one who fell short of achieving the craft of measurement (about which, see Section 3.3) – which would appear to be all of us – but who nonetheless managed to keep one's appetites in a disciplined condition (as Socrates himself seems to have done), would achieve no benefit thereby.

for thinking that this cannot be the entire explanation of the links Socrates makes between education and happiness.

5.3.2 Early education in the Crito

In the *Crito*, Socrates imagines the personified Laws of Athens lecturing him about why it would be terribly wrong for him to escape from prison, as Crito has suggested. One reason the Laws give for this conclusion is that Socrates owes a great debt to the Laws for the education he received from the state (*Crito* 50d5–e1, 51c9).[12] We believe that this remark cannot be understood adequately from the point of view of the traditional conception of Socratic intellectualism. One might seek to understand Socrates' debt to the Laws as deriving from the ways in which it produced virtue in him. Another possibility is that Socrates is in debt to the state for having received a number of right beliefs about how to live. Yet another possibility is that the benefit he received is either only indirectly cognitive or even straightforwardly non-cognitive. We have already shown, however, why the first option cannot be right, for, first, it is not at all clear that Socrates thinks virtue is teachable, and second, Socrates claims to remain ignorant of what he calls "the most important things," and thus cannot qualify as having achieved virtue.

We might plausibly suppose that Socrates regards himself as having a sufficient stock of true beliefs to have managed his life in a way that he can be proud of. Certainly, he shows no lack of self-assurance in his arguments with Crito. Now some scholars have gone so far as to argue that Socrates can be so assured as to suppose that absolutely all of his ethical beliefs are true.[13] But this view

[12] For a careful discussion and analysis of this issue, see Neufeld (2003), to which the account we give herein is indebted.

[13] See Vlastos (1994: 28).

cannot be right either. First, we find Socrates acknowledging how frequently he is deterred from some action he might otherwise take by his *daimonion* (see especially, *Apology* 40a4–6). These alarms would not have sounded unless at least sometimes his action-guiding beliefs were wrong. Then there are numerous texts where Socrates explicitly confesses to confusion and wavering about some subjects (see, e.g., *Hippias Minor* 372a6–e6, 376b8–c6; *Lysis* 218c4–8; *Gorgias* 527d5–e1; and probably *Protagoras* 361a3–c4). But even if Socrates' beliefs are not always or entirely correct, it remains true that he generally seems confident that his own ethical beliefs are superior and more likely correct than those of his interlocutors with which he disagrees.

The question is: is his debt to the state for the education he received to be understood as the source of the right beliefs that resulted in his managing to live a good life?[14] Or would he credit something other than his education as the main source of his sustaining beliefs, and be indebted to the state for his education for some reason other than as the direct source of his good ethical beliefs? The traditional conception of Socratic intellectualism must understand Socrates' debt in the former way. But we contend that this is *not* the best way to understand the debt.

At his trial (at least in Plato's version), Socrates credits the oracle at Delphi as having been the origin of his philosophical "mission" in Athens (*Apology* 20c6–24b2).[15] And the value of this mission to Socrates himself is abundantly clear: he proclaims "the unexamined life" to be not worth living for a human being (*Apology* 38a5–6), and he forecasts as "an inconceivable happiness" the possibility that he might spend all eternity in the afterlife engaged in examining the

[14] That Socrates counts himself as a good man is evident from what he says at *Apology* 41c9–d2; see also 37b2–3. For discussion, see Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 123–34).

[15] See Brickhouse and Smith (1989: 87–100).

souls of the dead (*Apology* 40e4–41c7). These passages make clear that, if any credit is to be given for the beliefs that have led Socrates to live the good life that he has lived, it must go to his having lived a life dedicated to philosophical examination. Neither should we regard the state as the source for Socrates' belief that a life of philosophical examination is best. Instead, Socrates gives credit to the Delphic oracle for this conviction. The state, on the contrary, plainly provided precious little support for Socrates' philosophical activities, and in the end sought to extinguish them altogether. The personified Laws in the *Crito* insist that they were not responsible for the verdict of the jurors (54b9–c2), but it is also true that whatever education he may have received from the state did *not* include persuading him to lead the philosophical life. As he puts it, the manner in which he has lived his life has required him to live as a "private man," avoiding all but the minimum required involvement in civic life (*Apology* 32a1–3).

In both the *Apology* and the *Crito*, Socrates is clear that it is folly to suppose that the views of "the many" are likely to improve a person. Unless, then, he supposes that the actual beliefs or doctrines he received in Athens when he was young did *not* reflect the opinions of the many, it seems unlikely that his debt to Athens for his education can be characterized in terms of beliefs at all. Were his indebtedness a matter of inculcated beliefs, we would have to count the education Socrates received as having been a failure. After all, others received the same education, and Socrates ends up with a mission in Athens designed to reveal just how seriously wrongheaded and ignorant his compatriots were about "the most important things" (*Apology* 22d7). If the Athenian young received only beliefs from the education they received, then Socrates owes no debt for their (luckily failed) inculcation in him. On the other hand, if the Athenian education inculcated those very different opinions by which Socrates

lived, in sharp contrast to his fellow citizens, then he might well be indebted to the state for his education, but Athenian education was, for all or nearly all others, a dismal failure. Either way, it is simply not plausible to suppose that Socrates' debt to Athens for his education derives from any doctrinal content within that education, on the basis of which he formed the correct beliefs about how to live.

Instead, we contend that Socrates' educational debt derives from a sort of education that does not at all guarantee that its recipients will come to hold the correct beliefs about how to live. Rather, we believe the only sense to be made of Socrates' claim to have been benefited by the education he received from Athens is that it managed to habituate him to gain mastery over his appetites and passions, thus allowing him to engage in the "examined life" in a way that was relatively free from their intoxicating and distorting effects on his rational capacities.

The traditional forms of early education in Athens, also later endorsed by Plato for his *kallipolis* in the *Republic*, included *mousikē* (mainly music and literature) and *gumnastikē* (physical education). Plato counts both as valuable for their taming and calming effects on what he calls the "lower parts of the soul," the appetites and passions. Notably included in Plato's explanation of the operations of these forms of early education are mythical tales, which are intended not only to inculcate the correct opinions and values (see, e.g., *Republic* II.378b8–e3), but also to arouse fear, shame, and other emotional reactions in the right ways and in reaction to the right sorts of things and at the right times, as well as to reduce or prevent such reactions when they are not appropriate (see, e.g., *Republic* III.386a6–389a8). Appropriate habituation for children, we may also suppose, might include at least mild forms of the sorts of punishment we discussed in Chapter 4, and for entirely similar reasons, for children who stray too far or too often from what is expected of them. Even if his own

moral psychology was importantly different from Plato's, we see no reason to think that Socrates would not also regard the traditional forms of early education in Athens to provide a good groundwork for one's lifelong need to maintain a certain degree of restraint in one's appetites and passions.

Socrates' own mastery over such things was certainly augmented by the cognitive effects of his philosophical mission. But his preparedness to take on this mission, and his initial ability to resist being distracted from it by the siren calls of the other apparent goods that lead so many others astray, was at least partly due to his having already learned not to give in to every appetite or passion. Traditional Athenian education certainly did not emphasize philosophical reasoning; but it did emphasize self-control, moderation, and steadfastness. Such habits, supplemented by an examined life, could indeed make a good life possible, even for one who remains ignorant of "the greatest things." These good habits, and the philosophical mission they sustained, are what allowed Socrates to be a good man. This, we claim, was why he counted himself in Athens' debt for the education he had received.

5.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have considered and reviewed the various ways in which our new account of Socratic moral psychology helps to explain various things Socrates says about education and also various ways in which he considers himself to be involved in the education of his fellow citizens – even if never as a teacher of doctrines. We have found, in what has been called the "Socratic method" of philosophizing, roles for the remediation of inadequately disciplined appetites and passions. We have also noted a place for a proper habituation of the appetites and passions in the early education provided

in Athens, for which Socrates explicitly says he is indebted to the state.

This, then, concludes our focused examination of Socratic moral psychology and the various ways in which it appears in our texts. In the next two chapters, we move on to two related discussions. First, in Chapter 6, we will turn to the topic that we have called Socrates' "virtue intellectualism," which raises distinct interpretive problems from those we have explored in the last four chapters involving his "motivational intellectualism." Then, in Chapter 7, we will compare the entire picture of Socratic moral psychology with what we find in those who were influenced by and reacting to his thinking.

CHAPTER 6

Virtue intellectualism

6.1 VIRTUE, HAPPINESS, AND KNOWLEDGE

6.1.1 Introduction

As we said in the Preface to this book, references to Socrates' "intellectualism" may either refer to his intellectualism about the nature of virtue or to his intellectualism about human motivation. The two forms of intellectualism are, indeed, connected in Socratic philosophy, though as we have now shown, scholars have not interpreted the motivational side of this connection correctly. In this chapter, we will consider how our new interpretation of Socrates' motivational intellectualism is related to his virtue intellectualism.

Any attempt to clarify Socrates' motivational and virtue intellectualism must at some point come to terms with his position regarding Socrates' well-known claim that all virtue is really nothing but a kind of knowledge – knowledge of good and evil. And, because it is the same knowledge that constitutes each of the several virtues, in some sense all of the virtues turn out to be the same. This is Socrates' famous view of the "unity of the virtues," which will be the main focus of the first part of this chapter. Our conclusions regarding the sense in which the virtues are the same and the sense in which they are distinguishable has not changed appreciably since we first advanced it in

1994.[1] We believe that the discussion is worth revisiting here because in the intervening years a number of important studies have appeared that make far clearer than we did exactly what challenges a successful account of the unity of the virtues must meet. We discuss these studies and their relationship to our view below.

We then turn to the relationship between virtue and happiness. In recent years there has been a great deal of scholarly discussion about whether Socrates believed that virtue guaranteed happiness for its possessor. The view we have defended in recent years has received significant scrutiny. In this chapter, we will have some occasion to explain just how and to what degree we have altered our position on this topic as a result of criticism we have received. We close the chapter by detailing the specific ways in which Socrates' motivational intellectualism and virtue intellectualism are related.

6.2 THE UNITY OF THE VIRTUES

6.2.1 Some scholarly disagreement

At *Protagoras* 329c6, Socrates initiates a discussion with Protagoras about the unity of the virtues. Socrates begins by asking Protagoras to state how he thinks the various individual virtues – piety, courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom – stand in relation to virtue as a whole:

> Will you then explain exactly whether virtue is one thing, and justice and temperance, and piety are parts (*moria*) of it, or whether all of these things I was referring to are different names for one and the same thing? (329c6–d1)

When Protagoras responds that he is convinced that each individual virtue is a part of the whole, Socrates immediately presses him to explain further what he means by "part":

[1] Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 67–72).

Do you mean in the way that the parts of the face, the mouth, nose, eyes, and ears, are parts of the whole, I asked, or like parts of gold, none of which differs from any of the others or from the whole, except in greatness or smallness? (329d4–8)

Protagoras answers that the individual virtues are like parts of the face. Presumably, Protagoras believes that each is an entirely different thing from all of the others. Where Protagoras stands on this issue, then, is fairly clear from the outset, and as the argument develops, it becomes equally clear that he is confused. Exactly where Socrates stands on this issue, on the other hand, is much less clear. To be sure, Socrates seems to think that the virtues form a unity of some sort, but how he conceives of that unity has been a vigorously contested issue in recent Socratic scholarship.[2] Some commentators think that Socrates agrees with Protagoras that each of the individual virtues is a part of the whole of virtue and that he disagrees with Protagoras about whether one can possess one virtue without all of the others.[3] In this view, which has come to be known as the "equivalence thesis," the individual virtues form a unity only in the sense that someone who possesses any one of the individual virtues must possess each of the others as well. Other commentators have argued that Socrates believes that the individual virtues form a unity in the much stronger sense that they are really one and the same thing.[4] This view is often referred to as the "identity thesis."

[2] As far as we know, the only scholar to doubt that Socrates accepts the unity of the virtues is Curtis N. Johnson (see Johnson 2005: 8–9). A somewhat different form of skepticism is expressed in Devereux (1992; see note 5, below).

[3] Examples may be found in Kraut (1984: 258–362), O'Brien (1967: 129 n. 16), Santas (1964), and Vlastos (1981). There are, of course, important differences between the various versions of this general view these scholars have offered.

[4] Penner (1973). He offers further arguments for his view in Penner (1992a). See also Irwin (1977: 86–90), O'Brien (2003), Wolfsdorf (2008: 88–100), and Woodruff (1976). There are also important differences between the various versions of this general view, some of which we will note below. Manuwald (2005) argues against O'Brien's version of this view,

It is understandable that both interpretations have been endorsed by excellent scholars, for both can be supported by what appear on their face to be incontrovertible texts. Unfortunately, these two positions are incompatible. A tempting conclusion, then, is that Socrates simply never developed a settled answer to the question of how the individual virtues stand in relation to the whole of virtue and to each other.[5] Our own assessment is considerably less pessimistic. We believe that Plato's early dialogues endorse a single, coherent position on the unity of the virtues. The defense of this position in our earlier work relied heavily on the requirements Socrates sets for a satisfactory answer to the famous "What is F-ness?" question. Here, however, we give a different defense, one that relies on Socrates' view that virtue is a kind of power (*dunamis*).[6]

6.2.2 *Virtue as a power*

Protagoras apparently shares Socrates' view that a virtue is a power. But Protagoras also believes that the various virtues can be distinguished as *different* powers. To make sure that this really is what Protagoras believes about how the virtues are to be distinguished,

claiming that the *Protagoras* does not actually provide sufficient grounds for telling which view of the unity of the virtues Plato or Socrates held.

[5] Devereux (1992, 2006) argues that the position attributed to Socrates in the *Laches* cannot be reconciled with the position attributed to Socrates in the *Protagoras*. The former position, according to Devereux (1992), is "Plato's attempt to strengthen the Socratic view" (767). Devereux's theory that the *Laches* expresses Plato's account of the virtues and that the *Protagoras* expresses Socrates' position is a further elaboration of the position developed in an earlier essay (1977), where he argues that the *Laches* "speaks for Plato, not for the historical Socrates." We know of no independent reason to count the *Laches* as later than the *Protagoras*. Thus, we count our position on this issue to be superior to Devereux's if we can provide a coherent account of what is said in both of the dialogues and, to that extent, preserve the view that the early dialogues express a single, coherent philosophy. (See Chapter 1.)

[6] We misunderstood Ferejohn's view when we first read it, but now understand the view we give herein to be identical to his. See Ferejohn (1982, 1983–1984).

Socrates asks the following, using the Greek word for "power" four times in six lines of the Greek:

> And does each have its own unique *power*? In the analogy to the parts of the face, the eye is not like the ear, nor is its *power* the same, and this applies to the other parts as well: They are not like each other in *power* or in any other way. Is this how it is with the parts of virtue? Are they unlike each other, both in themselves and in the *power* of each? (330a4–b1; trans. Lombardo and Bell, modified; emphasis ours)

Protagoras replies that this must be the case, and then, as we all know, gets refuted by Socrates, who, at the close of this argument (at 333a5), reminds Protagoras what he had claimed earlier about the parts of virtue being different in terms of their distinct powers. But over the course of the dialogue Protagoras proves himself unable to defend his position against Socrates' arguments to show that every virtue is really the same thing.

The very final exchange between Socrates and Protagoras (361a3–b3) makes it clear that Socrates regards all of the virtues to consist in a single power – knowledge. Insofar as the virtues are this power, then, they are absolutely and entirely all the same. The problem with this result is well known: we find Socrates elsewhere (in the *Laches* and *Meno*) apparently endorsing claims (or encouraging others to concede them) about the various individual virtues being distinct parts of a single whole, or even (in the *Euthyphro*) about individual virtues (in this case, justice) having other virtues (in this case, piety) as proper parts. But before we see how these apparently different views might be reconciled, let us begin by saying something more about what Socrates thinks it means for something to be a power.

At *Laches* 192a9, Socrates is trying to get Laches to provide an adequate definition of "courage." In order to give Laches an example of what he is after, Socrates proffers a definition of swiftness in terms of it being a kind of power:

Then if anyone should ask me, "Socrates, what do you say it is which you call swiftness in all these cases," I would answer him that what I call swiftness is the power (*dunamis*) of accomplishing a great deal in a short time, whether in speech or in running or all the other cases. (192a9–b3; Sprague translation)

When Laches concedes that Socrates' definition of swiftness is correct, Socrates then presses the general to provide a similar definition of courage, in terms that are strikingly similar to those we also saw in the *Protagoras*:

Then make an effort yourself, Laches, to speak in the same way about courage. What power (*dunamis*) is it which, because it is the same in pleasure and in pain and in all the other cases in which we were just saying it occurred, is therefore called courage? (192b5–8; Sprague translation)

As it turns out, Laches is unable to provide an acceptable definition to Socrates, and so Nicias takes over the discussion. Nicias begins by stating that he thinks that courage is indeed a kind of cognition, but it is only a part of virtue as a whole. Specifically, he says that courage is "knowledge of what is to be feared and hoped for in war and everywhere else" (194e11–195a1). But the lengthy and complex *elenchos* Socrates constructs from Nicias' responses yields the conclusion, as Socrates puts it, "According to your [Nicias'] account, courage is not the knowledge of what is to be feared and hoped for, but the knowledge of all goods and evils put together" (199c5–d1). "But this is to say that courage is not a part of virtue after all, but the whole of virtue" (199e2–3).

The conclusion Socrates seems to endorse at the end of the *Laches* fits well with the account given by the identity thesis of what we find in the *Protagoras*. But matters may not be as tidy as they at first appear, for, as Devereux points out,[7] the crucial argument at the end of the *Protagoras*, by which Socrates demonstrates the link

[7] Devereux (2006: 334–5).

between courage and knowledge, relies on the claim that courage is "the knowledge of what is and is not to be feared" (360d1–5), the very definition of "courage" Nicias initially endorses and Socrates seems to reject in the *Laches*. This is a difficulty we shall need to resolve if we are to show that there is a coherent view of the unity of the virtues in Plato's early works. We believe that Socrates' view that virtue is a kind of *dunamis* provides the key.

6.2.3 Virtue and accomplishment

Now, at this point it may appear that our best bet is to defend some version of the identity thesis, since that seems to be endorsed by both the *Protagoras* and the *Laches*. But let us look again at Socrates' definition of swiftness, which was supposed to provide a model for the sort of definition of courage he was seeking from Laches. Swiftness, he said, is the power to accomplish a great deal in a short time. This definition, he declared, would apply equally to all of the varieties of swiftness, "whether in speech or in running or in all the other cases." The *power of swiftness*, then, is absolutely and utterly the same in each and every case. But surely Socrates does not mean to say that, because they share the same power, namely swiftness, speaking swiftly and running swiftly are one and indistinguishable. What makes them *swift* is one and indistinguishable. But running swiftly is not *just* an example of swiftness; it is also an example of *running*. So even if we cannot distinguish the different cases of swift things in terms of their power of swiftness, we may well be able to distinguish them in other ways. Can this also be said of the virtues?

Notice that, if we do attempt to apply this sort of reasoning to the virtues, it will have to be the case that each of them is *a virtue* insofar as they share the exact same *power*. On the basis of all of the discussions of virtue in Plato's early dialogues, we would conclude

that this power consists in something like the knowledge of good and bad. So anyone who wishes to distinguish the putative *parts* of virtue will certainly fail if he or she attempts to do so in terms of their consisting in different powers or in terms of some knowledge other than the knowledge of good and bad. How else, then, might we make sense of talking about the parts of virtue, if not in terms of differences in the power they all share equally?

Let us return again to Socrates' definition of swiftness, "the power to accomplish a great deal in a short time." Notice that there are actually two elements to this definition: the power, and the idea that the application of the power *accomplishes* something. In the case of an application of swiftness in speaking, what is accomplished is swift *speech*; in the case of an application of swiftness in running, what is accomplished is swift *running*. Might there not be differences between the virtues in terms of what they *accomplish*? In other words, can there not be distinctions made between the different virtues as different sorts of *applications* of the same and single power in virtue of which they are all (equally and uniformly) virtues? Moreover, if we can distinguish the virtues as distinct sorts of applications of a single power – as accomplishing different things – then this might also provide grounds for characterizing them in terms of parts and wholes, even to the degree that some individual virtues might be regarded as parts of other individual virtues.

6.2.4 Virtue and accomplishment in the Euthyphro

The one dialogue in which Socrates seems most emphatically to endorse what might look like the non-unity of the virtues is the *Euthyphro*, where Socrates leads a somewhat befuddled Euthyphro through a discussion of the relation between piety and justice. When

Socrates first asks about the relationship between the two virtues, Euthyphro is at a loss:

SOCRATES: See if it doesn't seem necessary to you that all of the pious is just.
EUTHYPHRO: That seems right to me.
SOCRATES: Then is all of the just pious? Or is all of the pious just, but not all of the just is pious, but some of it is and some is something else?
EUTHYPHRO: I'm not following what you are saying, Socrates.
(11e4–12a3)

In order to get Euthyphro to respond to his question, Socrates needs to give some examples of the sorts of relationships he has in mind. He begins with reverence and fear: it is not the case that where there is fear there is also reverence, but it is the case that where there is reverence there is also fear; hence reverence is a *part* of fear (12c3–5). The example of reverence and fear is then supplemented by another:

For I think that fear's more extensive than reverence, for reverence is a part of fear – just as odd is a part of number, so that it's not that wherever there's number, there's odd number, but wherever there's odd number, there's number. (12c6–8)

Euthyphro's response to these examples is much more confident: "Of course" (12c9).

Now that Euthyphro understands what is at issue, Socrates returns to the question of piety and justice:

SOCRATES: This is the sort of thing I was asking about when I was talking back then: Is it that where there's justice, there's also piety, or that where there's piety, there's also justice, but piety isn't whatever justice is? For piety is a part of justice. Should we say this, or does it seem to you to be otherwise?
EUTHYPHRO: No, this appears to me to be the right way.
(12c10–d3)

Now, two points deserve to be made here: first, nothing in what Euthyphro had said thus far in the dialogue can reasonably be supposed to lead in any obvious way to any commitments about the mereology of justice, as it were. Euthyphro's faltering responses indicate that he is now being led by Socrates rather than stating views about a subject with which he takes himself to be familiar and expert. Second, what Socrates is quite obviously leading Euthyphro to assent to is the claim that piety is a *part* of justice. So when Euthyphro provides a somewhat hesitant reply to Socrates' question about whether piety is a part of justice, rather than being identical to justice, it can hardly be said to be a case of Socrates "following the interlocutor wherever he leads," for Euthyphro's reactions are at best tentative. Instead, Socrates eagerly pushes the conversation forward by now asking Euthyphro to provide an explanation of "what sort of part of justice the pious is" (12e1–2). Euthyphro, again in a very tentative mode, replies that it is the part of justice having to do with service to the gods, whereas the rest of justice has to do with service to human beings (12e6–9).

Socrates then presses further, giving several examples of service that do not seem to fit what it might be like for human beings to serve the gods. What these other cases have in common is that each one will "achieve (*diaprattetai*) the same thing" (13b7), but the effect shared is benefit to what is served, and Euthyphro cannot agree that the gods are benefited by the service they receive from human beings. So he decides that it must instead be the kind of service that slaves provide to their masters – a kind of assistance to the gods (13d8). The problem with this account, however, is that services are provided with some accomplishment (*ergon*) in mind (13d11). But Euthyphro is at a loss to explain the "all-noble accomplishment"

(*pagkalon ergon*, 13e12) it is that the gods achieve, using human beings as their servants.

This allows us to see the final point we wish to make about the discussion of piety and justice in the *Euthyphro*. Notice that the way Socrates leads Euthyphro to think about piety being a part of justice is in terms of some distinctive *ergon* that this part of justice is supposed to produce – and not in terms of piety having or embodying some different *power*. Indeed, the power Euthyphro seems to have in mind is something like the power of serving or assisting in *both* cases, and the relationship between this and the knowledge of good and bad we expect to find in a Socratic account of virtue as a whole is easy enough to imagine: one cannot provide proper service without such knowledge, because for all one would know, lacking such knowledge, what was intended as service rendered might turn out to be harmful, either to the servant, or to the one supposed to be served, or both. Since we may assume that the moral psychology we also expect to find in a Socratic account of virtue, according to which no one can know what is good without wanting it, one with the knowledge of what is good would also wish to bring it about. Hence, there could be no better service-provider than the one with knowledge of good and bad. If piety is to be at all different from justice or any other virtue, accordingly, and as we have now said many times, it cannot be in terms of the power at work. But that power might be applied towards different sets of ends, and this is obviously the direction in which Socrates leads Euthyphro for the differentia of piety. That Euthyphro fails to find the differentia – the "all-noble accomplishment" unique to piety – is no indication that there is none to find. If such may be found, however, it provides a way to distinguish piety as a different application of the power it shares with justice.

6.2.5 Dividing the unity: crafts and sub-crafts

Here in the *Euthyphro* and elsewhere, Socrates famously characterizes virtue in terms of craft (*technē*). Each craft consists in some form of knowledge, which is what makes the craft able to do what it does. The knowledge in which the craft consists, then, is the power (*dunamis*) of the craft. Each craft also applies the power in which it consists in certain distinctive ways. Not all crafts produce things, of course, as Plato has Critias insist and Socrates agree at *Charmides* 165e3–166b3. Even so, the different crafts can be distinguished not only in terms of the knowledge in which they consist, but also in terms of what they apply to, whether as product or as subject-matter. So in each case, a craft will be an example of knowledge or power, and of application.

Once we understand this, we have claimed, it is easy enough to see how a single and unitary sort of knowledge could be sorted into different kinds of application. The example we gave in our earlier work on this subject was that of triangulation.[8] The knowledge of triangulation *just is* the knowledge that allows surveyors to determine property borders and such. The knowledge of triangulation is also the very knowledge that is used in various kinds of navigation – for example, coastal or harbor navigation. Of course, there are obvious differences between surveying and navigation, and no one with any knowledge of these skills would fail to notice the differences. But if one required an account of how they were different, in terms of the precise knowledge at work in each case, one would look in vain for any difference between them, as they both use precisely the same knowledge – the knowledge of triangulation. Once we begin to distinguish the various applications of this knowledge,

[8] Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 70–1). Harlan Miller first suggested the example to us.

moreover, we can find some applications that seem to be species of others. The example of this we gave in our earlier work was that of harbor navigation, which would qualify as a species of coastal navigation. Some navigators spend their lives doing nothing but harbor navigation, but this skill is simply a special application of coastal navigation, which is itself simply a special application of triangulation. Hence, there can be "parts" of navigation, if by "part" we mean distinct applications of this skill, just as there can also be distinct "parts" of triangulation, where navigation is one of them.

The way this might work for the virtues is never spelled out in our texts, of course. Instead, the relevant discussions end in *aporia*: Nicias cannot say how courage differs from the rest of virtue, and neither can Protagoras; Euthyphro cannot say how piety differs from the rest of justice. Nicias and Protagoras fail because they supposed they could make out the differences between the virtues in terms of differences in the powers exemplified in each. Euthyphro failed because he could not identify what piety *does* that is different from other cases of justice. But each of these failures can be consistently explained, in principle, in terms of a unity of virtue as a kind of *power*, but a variety of virtues in terms of different applications, some of which are species of other applications and all of which apply the same power in what they do.

6.2.6 The Protagoras *and the* Laches *on courage again*

So how are we to make sense of the fact that in the *Protagoras* Socrates espouses a position about courage that appears to contradict the position he takes in the *Laches*? Recall that, in the *Protagoras*, Socrates identifies courage with knowledge of future goods and evils, but when Nicias stakes out virtually the same position in the

Laches, Socrates goes about constructing an *elenchos* that shows, in Socrates' words, that "we have not yet discovered (*ouk hēurēkamen*) what courage is (199e11). The first thing to be said is that when Socrates talks about "discovering something" he means coming to know what that thing is. Now, Socrates denies that someone knows what something is merely because that person believes what, in fact, happens to be true. A necessary condition for knowledge is that the person's knowledge claim can survive Socratic testing. For example, if a Socratic interlocutor really knows what he claims to know, when confronted by means of the *elenchos* with an apparent contradiction, he must be able to explain it away. Thus, if someone initially claims to know, say, the definition of "X" and then comes to believe that the proffered definition and some other proposition, Y, are incompatible when they are, in fact, both true, the person's knowledge claim about the definition of "X" is defeated. This point can be applied to Nicias' situation in the *Laches* with respect to his claim that courage is the "knowledge of what is to be feared and hoped for in war and everywhere else" (194e11–195a1).[9] When Socrates goes on to point out that this knowledge of future goods and evils is the same knowledge as the knowledge of all goods and evils, past, present, and future, Nicias folds, as indeed he should, for he is unable to explain away an apparent contradiction. If we are right, it was available to Nicias to point out that the knowledge referred to in his definition of "courage" is indeed the same as that constituting the whole of virtue. What marks off that knowledge as courage is the distinctive way in which

[9] It is important to notice that, as Devereux points out (2006: 334–5), both Xenophon (*Memorabilia* IV.6.1–11) and Aristotle (*Eudemian Ethics* III.1, 1229a12–16; *Nicomachean Ethics* III.8, 1116b3–15) attribute this, and hence the *Protagoras* account of courage, to Socrates. As Devereux notes, there is no suggestion in either author that Socrates thinks that courage is to be *defined* as the knowledge of all goods and evils. Of course, Devereux takes this as evidence that only the *Protagoras* expresses Socrates' view, a view Plato undertakes to refute in the *Laches*. Our position shows why the two dialogues express the same view of what courage is.

it is applied to a sub-set of goods and evils. Understood in this way, it is not at all surprising that Socrates in the *Protagoras* would identify "courage" in just the way Nicias does in the *Laches*.[10]

6.3 KNOWLEDGE AT WORK

6.3.1 How many goods are there?

We began our discussion of Socratic motivational intellectualism in Chapter 2 by noting several assumptions that Socrates seemed to be making about why we do what we do. One of them was the assumption of a version of ethical prudentialism:

(A1) X is good = X is conducive to the securing of what is in the agent's interest.

Another of the assumptions we found within Socrates' ethics was his "eudaimonism":

(A5) All voluntary actions aim, either constitutively or instrumentally, at eudaimonia.

It follows from (A1) that if virtue is good, it is good precisely because it is conducive to the agent's interest to be virtuous. And it follows from (A5) that the agent's interest ultimately consists entirely in the agent's happiness. But these two assumptions by themselves will not

[10] Our way of understanding courage as a "part" of virtue, as a particular application of that power common to all of virtue, explains what would otherwise be a problem in the *Protagoras*. As we noted, in his attempt to show that all of the virtues are really one thing, Socrates identifies courage in terms of "future goods and evils," only later to state that he believes that all of the virtues are the same knowledge, the knowledge of all goods and evils. The distinction between the whole of virtue as a general power and a part of virtue as the application of that power shows us why Socrates would think his claims about what courage is and about the unity of the virtues are perfectly consistent.

settle all potential ethical problems. After all, if there are goods other than virtue, it may be that the pursuit or possession of some good other than virtue will be at least as conducive to the agent's happiness as being virtuous would be for that agent in those circumstances. If so, virtue would *not* be in the agent's *best* interest in those circumstances.

Plato has Socrates address this problem in a famous passage in the *Euthydemus*. In discussion with a younger man named Cleinias, Socrates begins by getting Cleinias to agree that all people wish to do well (278e3–279a1). Socrates then encourages Cleinias to enumerate all the things that he takes to contribute to this end, and Cleinias (with some prompting by Socrates) manages to produce quite a list of the "many good things" Cleinias finds conducive to doing well: wealth, health, good looks, good birth, public honors, the ethical virtues, and success (*eutuchia*).[11] But success, Socrates then argues, turns out to be nothing other than wisdom, because with wisdom one "could not make a mistake, but is necessarily correct in what one does and in what happens" (280a6–8). It then appears that Socrates proposes the same sort of analysis for all of the other putative goods, as well. The argument concludes with Socrates' claim that "of all the other goods, none is either good or bad, but of these two, wisdom is good and ignorance bad" (281e3–5).

On the face of it, Socrates' claim here is incredible: even if by "wisdom" Socrates means to refer to omniscience,[12] omniscience

[11] Most translators and commentators translate this term as "good fortune," or even "good luck." But, as we will show in our analysis of this argument, such translations make little sense of the role *eutuchia* actually plays in the argument. In Liddell *et al.* (1996: *s.v.*), the favored translations seem to be "prosper" and "succeed." We think either would apply to this passage in the *Euthydemus*, but will use "succeed" because we think that makes clearest the sense of Socrates' argument.

[12] We are inclined to think, for Socrates, "wisdom" does not mean the same as, or entail, omniscience. For a contrasting view, see Reshotko (1992, esp. 152–3; 2006: 158). We also do not accept that "wisdom is the same as success," as Russell (2005: 42) has it; rather, Socrates' claim seems to be that the best chance to be successful at anything is had by those who are wise. See Wolfsdorf (2006) for discussion.

does not entail omnipotence, so even if one does not make a mistake in what one does, it does not follow that nothing bad can possibly happen to one. Despite the absurdity of this way of understanding of Socrates' claim in this passage (or, in some cases, perhaps because of it!) some scholars have insisted that this really is Socrates' view of the matter.[13] Before we convict Socrates too quickly of this absurdity, however, let us look more carefully at Socrates' argument for the relation between success and wisdom in the *Euthydemus*.

The argument began, recall, with the assertion that everyone wishes to do well (*eu prattein*). That Socrates takes "doing well" to be synonymous with "happiness" (*eudaimonia*) is evident from his willingness to use the terms interchangeably within the argument.[14] But we think it is significant that the argument begins with an emphasis on the activities of agents rather than on things that might simply happen to people. The point of the argument, then, seems plainly stated by Socrates at 279a1–2: "Since we wish to do well, how are we to do so?" Pure fantasy and mere wishful thinking are irrelevant to this argument. Were Socrates or Cleinias now to interject into the argument that commanding fate or becoming omnipotent would surely count as goods, the other would have every right to protest that human impossibilities are irrelevant to the

[13] See, e.g., Irwin (1995: 55–6). Reshotko makes a distinction between "the luck of the draw" and "the luck of the play": "When card players are engaged in a bridge game, no amount of knowledge of what's good and bad in bridge can help them obtain a better hand; which hand they get is completely determined by antecedent conditions over which any individual player has little control. However, given the luck of the draw, there is a great deal of difference between the player who plays his hand guided by knowledge of the goods and bads of bridge and the one who plays his hand at random, trying to 'luck out' and win" (1992: 157); see also Reshotko (2006: 143), where the distinction becomes "superimposed good luck" ["luck of the draw"] and "success good luck" ["luck of the play"]. Reshotko argues that it is only the "luck of the play" ["success good luck"] that Socrates has in mind here. Our own view is that "luck" actually has nothing whatsoever to do with what Socrates discusses in this passage. (See note 11, above.)

[14] He uses "*eu prattein*" at 278e3, 278e6, and 279a2, "*eu prattein*" and "*eudaimonia*" at 280b6, and then uses just "*eudaimonia*" from 280b7 through the rest of the argument.

point at issue.[15] The question is: what good or goods should we pursue, within our natural and necessary human limitations, in order best to pursue our goal of "doing well" in life?

The way Socrates then goes about eliminating *eutuchia* from the list of goods reflects this condition. He observes that skilled flute players have the most success in playing the flute (279e1–2), writing masters have the most success at reading and writing (279e2–4), wise pilots have better success at sea than those without piloting skill (279e4–6), wise generals have better success in war than ignorant ones (279e6–280a1), and wise doctors have better success in curing the ill than do ignorant ones (280a2–3). The point in each of these cases is most certainly *not*, for example, the absurd claim that wise doctors *always* cure their patients, as if Socrates supposed that ancient medicine could actually confer immortality on its beneficiaries! Socrates' claim might be more plainly stated in this way: in all such practices (playing the flute, curing the ill, etc.), *luck* has nothing to do with it! What counts in human agency is skill, wisdom; and what ruins our actions, insofar as getting good results is at all under our control, is the bungling that is the result of ignorance. If we wish to figure out how to "do well" in life, then, we may simply cross "success" off the list of goods to pursue. All the good success that we can procure for ourselves through voluntary action in life can be procured through wisdom. From this conclusion, plainly, it does not follow that wisdom is *sufficient* for happiness or for "doing well," especially if by these we mean to include the sorts of things that are *not* within our voluntary control.

One might expect Socrates to take the same tack in discussing the other putative goods on the list, but instead with these he offers

[15] A contrasting view is argued in McPherran (2005). According to McPherran, what we have translated as "success" (*eutuchia*) should really be understood as "divine providence," and hence (at least mostly – for we might be able to influence the gods to some degree) *outside* the realm of human agency. See note 11, above.

the more familiar distinction between the sorts of things we pursue only as instruments that are useful for attaining some further goal and those that we pursue just for themselves. One who has wisdom, Socrates observes, will always make good use of whatever instruments are available; but one who is senseless would actually be better off without such instruments, for senseless uses of them will only increase the senseless one's wretchedness (*Euthydemus* 281b8–c2):

> It seems likely that with regard to the whole group of things we first called goods, the argument is not about how they are in themselves by nature goods, but rather, it seems it is thus: If ignorance leads them they are greater evils than their opposites, insofar as they are more able to serve an evil leader. But if understanding and wisdom lead them, they are greater goods, but in themselves none of these is of any value. (*Euthydemus* 281d2–e1)

Once Cleinias agrees with this conclusion, Socrates goes on to claim that the other things are neither good nor bad, but only wisdom is good and ignorance is bad (281e3–5). These two conclusions to the argument, it must be said, do not look as if they are making the same claim: the first seems to recognize a category of goods we have elsewhere[16] identified as "dependent goods," that is, things normally taken as goods, but whose actual value depends upon their contribution to or employment by something else. Wisdom would be an "independent good": something that is good just by itself and not by virtue of any dependency on some other good. Socrates' second conclusion, however, seems not to recognize dependent goods as goods at all: "the other things are neither good nor bad." Now, scholars have been drawn in different directions on the difference in the two conclusions. Some, for sure, have taken the second conclusion to be definitive of Socrates' view.[17] But it must be noted that the

[16] Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 103).
[17] See, e.g., Annas (1994), Dimas (2002), and Irwin (1986: 91).

argument that leads to Socrates' two stated conclusions does not at all suggest that what we have called "dependent goods" are *simply* "neither good nor bad." Socrates' argument, rather, showed that such things could actually be significant goods: "if understanding and wisdom lead them, they are greater goods." The problem with such goods is that they can turn out to be bad things if they are not used wisely. But this, as Socrates plainly says, does not show they are simply "neither good nor bad"; what it shows is that "*in themselves* none of these is of any value."[18] Unless we are to convict Socrates of an obvious fallacy, then, we should understand his second statement of his conclusion as one that distinguishes the only two things that have independent value.

6.3.2 Does virtue make things good or does virtue make good things?

In other dialogues, too, Socrates seems quite ready to recognize that there are goods other than wisdom. For example, in the *Apology*,[19] he says:

> I go about doing nothing else than prevailing upon you, young and old, not to care for your bodies or for wealth more than for the perfection of your souls, or even so much; and I tell you that virtue does not come from wealth, but from virtue come wealth and all other good things for human beings. (*Apology* 30a7–b4)

[18] An opposing view to ours has recently been argued in Dimas (2002); he claims that what we are calling "dependent goods" are actually neither good nor bad, but simply "facilitators". On this point, we agree with Russell (2005: 27). But see note 12, above. In the second protreptic passage in the *Euthydemus* (288d5–292e5), Socrates repeats (at 292b1–2) what appears to be the second version of the conclusion to the first protreptic argument, but again, the context of the claim makes clear that the ground for saying that "nothing is good except some kind of knowledge" is that only when used knowledgeably will anything else be good. An opposing view to ours is given in Annas (1994).

[19] See also *Gorgias* 467e1–468a4; *Lysis* 218e5–219a1; and *Meno* 88c6–d1.

If Socrates supposed that wisdom were the only good, as the second version of the conclusion in the *Euthydemus* seems to say, Socrates' claim in this passage in the *Apology* that there are "other good things for human beings" that come from virtue would be nonsense.

The *Euthydemus* appears to argue for a kind of evaluative dependence of "other goods" on virtue[20]; in other words, Socrates appears to say that it is the *goodness* of the "other goods" that depends upon their use by wisdom. Let us call this the "evaluative principle":

Evaluative principle: What is potentially good becomes actually good when, but only when, virtue makes use of it.

The natural reading of the *Apology* passage, however, is that virtue is, in some sense, *productive*: Socrates does not say that the other goods *become good* through virtue; he says that the others *come from*, are *produced by*, virtue. Taken literally, the *Apology* passage indicates that Socrates holds what we might call the "productive principle":

Productive principle: Virtue produces good things.

The general question we wish now to consider, then, is whether Socrates thinks that wisdom just makes the items on the list Cleinias and he have constructed good (as per the evaluative principle), or whether wisdom also actually makes good things (as per the productive principle). We will argue that there is a sense in which Socrates accepts a limited form of the productive principle, but only insofar as that principle is entailed by the evaluative principle.

We shall develop our thesis in stages. In the next section, we will review Socrates' argument in the *Euthydemus*, and explain how Socrates argues for the primacy of wisdom in relation to other goods.

[20] Our substitution of "virtue" for "wisdom" here is warranted by Socrates' view of the unity of the virtues in terms of the knowledge that constitutes their common power. See Section 6.2.6, above.

In particular, we will explain how what we will call the "restricted" version of the evaluative principle – one that does not support any productive role for virtue – does not fully explain Socrates' understanding of the relationship between other goods and wisdom. In Section 6.3.4, we will take a close look at the passage from the *Apology* and argue that its significance has not been fully appreciated by scholars, who appear to be unanimous in trying to interpret the passage in terms of the restricted version of the evaluative principle. In Section 6.3.5, we will defend the plausibility of a qualified version of the productive principle in the light of commitments we are able to identify in other aspects of Socrates' philosophy. The result of our argument, we believe, puts a new light on Socrates' view of the scope and power of virtue.

6.3.3 *The primacy of wisdom in the* Euthydemus

Both of Socrates' protreptic arguments with Cleinias in the *Euthydemus* are explicitly designed to show that it is not the possession of goods other than wisdom that is valuable; it is their wise *use* (see 280e1–2), and, indeed, *only* their wise use is valuable. Of course, the possession of such goods is a necessary condition of their wise use: one can get no use from what one does not have. But even if the specific aim of these arguments is not to ask what it is that brings all such goods into existence, often enough we do find Socrates and Cleinias agreeing that it is actually wisdom that brings such goods into being and not simply and more narrowly agreeing that wisdom makes valuable use of what already exists.

In fact, as we have already noted, it is in virtue of the *production* of success (*eutuchia*) by wisdom that Socrates and Cleinias agree to eliminate success from the list of good things as redundant. Again, Socrates' argument (279d2–280a8) to show that success is not really

an additional good works by showing that, once wisdom is on the list of goods, success is not needed as an addition to the list because wisdom will *bring success about*.

When Socrates argues, therefore, that the inclusion of wisdom on the list of goods makes the inclusion of success on the list redundant, it is not because Socrates thinks that success is not a good thing for its possessor. The goodness of success is not what Socrates is disputing. Socrates is also not saying that all kinds of success are within human powers to achieve, as some interpretations have it. Indeed, some successes are attributable to divine agency, allowing human beings to enjoy benefits they could not otherwise have achieved on their own. So, for example, Socrates' *daimonion* and other gifts from the gods (including Socrates himself, as a gift to Athens) are cases of successful non-human agency. But, as we argued above, the kind of success that is within our power to gain for ourselves need not be added to the list of good things we should try to gain once we have wisdom on the list; for wisdom *produces* all of the success that a human being can produce, given his or her particular circumstances. At least in the case of success, then, Socrates is plainly committed in the *Euthydemus* to the view that virtue is productive in a straightforward sense: it can *produce* something good.

When Socrates turns to the other goods on the list, however, his emphasis is upon defending the evaluative principle. The argument at 280e3–281e5 seeks to establish the evaluative dependency of other goods upon wisdom: the benefit from any of the goods other than wisdom, that is, the goodness of any such goods, is only gained when and if such goods are put to use by wisdom. But the argument only gets this far by stipulating, for the sake of the argument, that in each case the possessor already has all of the relevant items to be used by wisdom: the carpenter already has "all the materials necessary for his own work," and in general those who would benefit

from such things already have wealth and "all the good things we were mentioning just now." But what would a wise person do if he lacked items necessary for virtuous action, items which, if he had them, would be used wisely?

6.3.4 Virtue and productivity in the Apology

Let us return now to the passage in the *Apology* that seems to point to a productive capacity in virtue. It is, for that reason, a passage that has long troubled scholars, who have found the claim it literally makes too absurd to be taken seriously. Burnet, for example, comments:

> We must certainly not render "from virtue comes money"! This is a case where interlaced order may seriously mislead. As Socrates was *en penia muria* (23b9), he could hardly recommend *aretē* as a good investment. (1924, note on 30b3)

Vlastos enthusiastically agrees with Burnet and claims that we must avoid what he calls the "perverse reading of the text (which would make Socrates recommend virtue as a money-maker)" (1991: 220 n. 73); and Burnyeat cautions against our taking this passage to make "the implausible claim that virtue pays in a straightforwardly financial sense" (1971: 210). Other scholars do not even attempt to make a case for such a reading, and simply translate the problem away by converting Socrates' claim into an endorsement of the evaluative principle rather than an explicit affirmation of the productive principle.[21]

[21] See, e.g., Reeve (1989: 33). Our own earlier view of this passage (given in Brickhouse and Smith [1994: 20 n. 33]) was that the sense of the passage is to be understood as an affirmation of the evaluative dependency, but we could not agree with Burnet's reading of the Greek. Irwin also later espoused (without reference to ours) a similar view to the one we offered in 1994 (1995: 363 n. 22). Our argument herein shows that we now reject both the translation Burnet first proposed, as well as the standard interpretation of the passage.

One reason not to find Burnet's remark decisive is that it takes the case of Socrates to be pertinent to what the passage claims. But from the fact that Socrates is poor it does not follow that wealth (as something good) could not be produced by virtue. After all, Socrates would be the first to proclaim that he does not have wisdom, and according to the "unity of the virtues" principle, however interpreted, it follows from this that Socrates has none of the other virtues, either. So, even if Socrates did think that virtue is a "money-maker," it would not follow that he would or should be wealthy.

Moreover, a literal understanding of the passage also does not require as problematical an understanding as the one Vlastos calls "perverse" and Burnyeat calls "implausible." In the context of the passage, it is clear that the kind of wealth Socrates claims comes from virtue is something good for human beings. Accordingly, excessive, unnecessary, useless, or ethically corrosive wealth is not included in what Socrates claims comes from virtue. Moreover, as we have seen in our treatments of the passages we considered in Section 6.3.1, there is no need to understand Socrates as claiming that virtue can produce wealth in some way or degree past what is within human reach. The passage only says that from virtue comes wealth and, we may safely infer, only wealth of a kind that is good for its possessor. If some human being would have little use for wealth and would be better off poor (as for example, perhaps, Socrates himself!), then virtue would not even be a "money-maker" for such a person. It would only be a "money-maker" for a virtuous person who would get some genuine good from the possession and use of money.

There is one more influential commentator whose reading of the crucial passage in the *Apology* needs to be addressed. Although rejecting the interpretation of the passage usually adopted, Irwin agrees that Socrates should not be taken to mean that there are goods other than virtue which Socrates believes are productively

dependent upon virtue. Commenting upon this passage in the *Apology*, Irwin says:

> Socrates' claim is difficult to understand, since he would destroy his whole argument in the *Apology* if he were to advocate virtue as the best policy for accumulating external goods. It would be more consistent with his general view if he meant that virtue is the source of the sort of wealth, health, and so on that is really good for a person. Perhaps he means that the desire for external goods will not distract virtuous people from being virtuous, desire for these assets will not interfere with virtuous people's happiness, and to that extent these assets will be good rather than bad for them. If this is what Socrates means, then he does not admit that virtuous people lose anything of value by being deprived of wealth and health. (1995: 58–9)

We contend, on the contrary, that it is impossible to see how Socrates could explain why he counts "external goods" as *goods* if they, as Irwin suggests, only fail to interfere with happiness.

As we have seen, the passage in the *Apology* is not the only one in which Socrates appears to claim that virtue cannot just make existing things good, but can also make good things. One of the goods we have been calling "dependent goods" is health. In the *Charmides*, Socrates explicitly links virtue to one instance of curing an illness; that is, he indicates that virtue will produce health, at least in this instance. The young Charmides has been waking up with headaches, and Socrates is introduced as a physician who can help him. Socrates claims to have "a certain leaf," which in connection with a "drug" can bring about "a complete cure," whereas "without the drug the leaf [has] no benefit" (*Charmides* 155e7–8). Socrates proposed "treatment," it turns out, is having the soul listen to "fair arguments" that in turn produce temperance in the soul (*Charmides* 156d8–157b1). Here, Socrates does not make the absurd claim that physical health will *inevitably* flow from temperance. If this were true, the virtuous person would never have any need for purely physical cures, such as Socrates' "leaf." Nor is Socrates making the equally absurd

claim that the *only way* one could ever be physically healthy is to be temperate. One might achieve and sustain even a high degree of health without virtue, just as Socrates himself apparently did. To the extent that one's ethical condition deviates from virtue, whatever state of health one enjoys will tend to be unstable and insecure. Nonetheless, it is quite clear that in this passage Socrates is claiming that health can be produced in place of *certain* disorders when temperance comes to be present in the soul, and not just that temperance will make one's existing health into something good for one to have. Health, then, is at least one of the "other good things" Socrates might have had in mind, in the *Apology*, in saying that all such things come from virtue.

Finally, as the discussions of several dialogues (e.g. *Euthydemus*, *Meno*, and *Protagoras*, where the teachability of virtue is in each case a central focus; see also, *Apology* 25c7–e1) serve to emphasize, perhaps the most important way in which virtue can be said to produce good things can be seen in Socrates' frequent insistence that virtuous people would always act in such a way as to make those they act upon *better*. In the best cases, virtuous people will play critical roles in producing other virtuous people, in those they influence via teaching.[22] But even where this much cannot be accomplished, at least *some* good will be produced in others as a result of the virtuous person's agency.

The question is, how exactly does virtue produce good things?

6.3.5 Making sense of Socrates' view

We have argued thus far that there is solid and varied textual evidence not only for the established view – that Socrates accepts some

[22] We are indebted to Thomas H. Chance for calling our attention to this point, in his reaction to an earlier draft of this section.

version of the evaluative principle – but also for the much more controversial view that Socrates also believes that, in some sense, virtue produces good things for the person who possesses virtue and for those affected by the virtuous person's actions. It remains for us, however, to show why this view is not so "perverse" as Vlastos seemed to suppose, and why committing Socrates to it does not require uncharitable interpretation. Let us begin by reviewing at least a partial list of the items on Cleinias' and Socrates' list of candidates for good things.

In what sense could we say that virtue actually produces health and not just say that virtue makes health valuable? Virtue, for Socrates, let us recall, is a kind of *knowledge* – specifically, the expert knowledge of how to live. Suppose that Socrates suspected (as well he might) that the reason for Charmides' daily headaches was that Charmides had begun spending his evenings engaging in drinking excessive quantities of wine and not getting enough sleep. Some purely physical treatment of Charmides' symptoms (the headaches) might help to relieve the symptoms, at least for a while. But the root cause of these symptoms is not a purely physical one. If Charmides is to be truly cured of his headaches, he must stop making the kind of lifestyle decisions that lead him to drink too much wine and not get enough sleep. "Curing" Charmides' soul, then, will, in fact, also lead to the cure of his physical ailment and to the restoration of his health.

Here, we want to be clear that we are not supposing that virtue is partly *constituted* by the craft of medicine or any other non-ethical craft. As Socrates warns us in *Republic* I.345e–346a, just because someone can sometimes achieve some end over which a craft is set, we cannot infer that that person has the craft. There are a number of important differences between the physician and the virtuous person. First, the physician has a craft that is "set over" health. Health is the

ergon of the medical craft; it is that at which medicine always aims. Temperance is concerned with the control of one's desires (*Gorgias* 506c–507c), and a healthy constitution is typically the by-product of the proper functioning of those desires. Second, the physician, unlike the temperate person, knows *how it is* that acts expressing temperance lead to and sustain health in general, for the physician has a body of knowledge that the temperate person may well lack (unless, of course, she is a temperate physician). Finally, though the temperate person knows that temperate actions lead to and sustain health; the physician knows how to cure a great variety of diseases, diseases that can afflict one regardless of whether one possesses virtue. There is no reason to think that the virtuous person would – on the basis of virtue alone – be able to cure all such diseases, even when it might be valuable to do so. Indeed, Socrates makes it very explicit (at *Euthydemus* 292d1–4) that virtue is not the same as *any* of the crafts that produce what we have called "dependent goods."

Obviously, not all physical ailments are the result of vice or ethical error, and so not all can be remedied by temperance. We are not attributing to Socrates the absurd view that virtue is always productive of health, either in the virtuous person herself or in others. Regardless of how carefully the virtuous person tries to ward off disease, there are certain illnesses that can always destroy her or those she might care about. Still, because health is a requirement for most virtuous activities, virtue will send the virtuous but ailing person to a physician to gain the benefit of the physician's expertise, provided of course that the symptoms are recognizable to someone who may lack the craft of medicine. Here, virtue is not productive of health directly – the craft of medicine is – but virtue can be productive of health – indirectly – when, in order to meet the requirements of virtue, the virtuous person calls upon the physician to remove an evil and replace it with a good.

At this point, one might object that even if we are right that virtue can produce some goods on occasion – such as health for Charmides – we cannot be right that *Apology* 30b2–4 asserts what we are calling the productive principle. After all, the *Apology* passage states, "from virtue comes wealth and *all* good things for human beings." But as we have just conceded, there are some maladies that will never be overcome by temperance and which not even the most skillful physician can cure. The same point can be made even more forcefully by using as examples two of the other items on Socrates' and Cleinias' list: good looks and good birth. It is easy enough to see how they *could* be used as goods. Socratic philosophers who happen to be especially attractive can use their attractiveness to lure people close and then seduce them into doing philosophy. The well-born can use their lineage to open doors and create possibilities for doing philosophy that would otherwise be impossible. But obviously virtue cannot produce good looks. For example, no matter how much color he has in his cheeks from a salubrious diet and regular, moderate exercise, even if he somehow managed to achieve true virtue, no one would call Socrates handsome! Nor can virtue ever produce good birth: the child of a slave, born without the benefit of legitimacy, could never be called "well born." Thus, even if Socrates thinks that there is a sense in which temperance can, on occasion, produce health, he cannot very well mean that virtue can produce *all* of the goods on Cleinias' and his list. But if not, so the objection goes, in the *Apology* he cannot very well mean that virtue can literally produce all good things for human beings. If this is right, at least some of the evidence for thinking that there is a productive principle in Socratic philosophy falls apart.

We believe that this objection rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of how Socrates conceives of the demands of virtue and of his view of the sorts of goods the exercise of virtue requires.

The first point to notice is that not all of the items on Socrates and Cleinias' list are required for the performance of every virtuous action. Though it may ordinarily require a modicum of health, courage does not, except in the most unusual cases, require good looks or even wealth, and certainly not good birth. The same is true of philosophical activity: one can engage in philosophy though one possesses almost none of the items on the list. Where virtue does not require them, the items on Socrates and Cleinias' list really are "neither good nor bad." Recall that such things are *only* good when they are useful to virtue.

But there is a second, more significant point to be made in this regard. Virtue issues in noble action, of course. But virtue can only require what is possible *under the circumstances*. From the fact that wisdom is the only thing that is (independently) good, and ignorance the only thing that is (independently) bad, it also does *not* follow that Socrates thinks that virtue is sufficient for happiness, though again, some scholars have made this inference.[23] Here, Socrates frequently made comparisons between virtue, and various crafts are instructive. Consider the general's craft. The general knows what tactical goals must be achieved in order to gain victory in war. As long as he

[23] See Irwin (1986: 91): "In the *Euthyd*. Socrates' attitude to the popular candidates for happiness is highly critical. He agrees with the popular view that it must include all the goods there are; but he claims that wisdom is the only good, and that it is therefore necessary and sufficient for happiness." Irwin's inference ("therefore") is a *non sequitur*, for quite obviously it could well be that something was the only thing conducive to happiness (independently or absolutely), but there might still be other necessary conditions that would have to be met in order for the good thing to bring happiness. Consider: going to the library may be the only way for Jones to consult a certain book he wishes to look at. But it may not be sufficient for laying hands on the book – for that, it must also be that the library has not burned down in the meantime, for example, and that someone else has not checked that book out. The existence of such other conditions does not show that these other conditions are also conducive to Jones' consulting the book: all eternity could pass with the book in its place in the library, and Jones would be not a jot closer to consulting it, if he makes no effort to go to the library and remove the book from its shelf. *Only* if he does that, can he hope to consult the book. But it is still true that doing that is not sufficient for his gaining access to the book.

is a general (that is, as long as he practices the general's craft), he can always be counted on to engage in the right tactics. What actions constitute engaging in the right tactics, however, depends upon the circumstances in which the general finds himself, and what circumstances he finds himself in is determined, in part, by what goods are available to the general, either actually or potentially, to be put in the service of the right tactics. And the judgment about what goods are available potentially depends upon another judgment, namely, the general's judgment about his capacity to make goods out of what raw materials are available. Typically, conditions are favorable when the general has many well-trained, well-equipped troops to achieve his goal. But if the general lacks all that he needs in order to achieve his goals in the surest manner, he will not thereby cease to be a general or to exercise the general's craft. If, for example, he lacks well-trained soldiers but has civilians on whom he can call, he will use them, but only after he has transformed them into the most effective fighters he can turn them into. When he does deploy them, it is true to say that he is engaging in the best tactics, given the fighters he has to work with. If his army lacks weapons, the general will take what he has at his disposal and transform it into what can be used as weapons. But obviously, being a good general does not make him a skilled weapon-maker, nor does it assure him access to the best materials from which to craft weapons. Accordingly, changes in the conditions in which he must operate will necessitate changes in specific tactics. But sending forth civilians, armed with sticks and stones, may still count as the right tactics, for the general will be using what he has to the best advantage and will have made what was available to him into what can be used. The general, of course, may not achieve the goal of defeating the enemy. Indeed, he may fail utterly. But he still employs the general's craft provided that he engages in the right tactics under the circumstances, and, if his

situation requires it, he can make good things to support the activities that constitute the right tactics under the circumstances. This case underscores the very specific way in which "success" (again, *eutuchia*) works in Socrates' argument in the *Euthydemus*. The general will succeed in making the best possible use of what is at his disposal, either directly or indirectly. But despite success in that regard, he may not succeed at all in his objective to win the battle. Human agency, again, can only ensure the former, but not always the latter, sort of *eutuchia*. Even so, however, the best way to pursue the latter sort of success will be to achieve the former sort.

We believe that the craft of virtue, as Socrates conceives it, is not different in this respect. The virtuous agent will always do what is noble,[24] but what action constitutes noble action is crucially dependent upon the circumstances the agent finds him or herself in, which will, in turn, affect the agent's assessment of what can be put in the

[24] In stating this, we amend our earlier claim (in Brickhouse and Smith [1994]) that virtue was not sufficient for virtuous activity. We are indebted to criticisms from George Rudebusch (in Rudebusch 1999: 115–21) and Donald Zeyl (2003) for the impetus to reconsider our earlier account. Because we continue to think that virtue does not make the virtuous person omnipotent, however, we continue to reject Rudebusch's and Zeyl's endorsement of the common attribution to Socrates of the view that virtue is sufficient for happiness. Our own view is that the relationship between virtue and happiness is *nomological* rather than *logical* (as in being necessary or sufficient for happiness). The pursuit of wisdom is the best strategy not because it guarantees happiness and not because there can be no happiness without wisdom. Rather, we call the relation "nomological" because it is a fact about the world that wisdom is the most effective strategy because it is the capacity for success – a capacity which can be frustrated but which does guarantee the greatest success humanly possible under any circumstances. But virtuous people may not have it within their power to wring from especially dire circumstances anything even close to what they really want. The virtuous person does not cease to wish that the children in the school bus not be injured, even as he or she watches helplessly as the bus slides off the cliff. So similarly, circumstances might even deprive the virtuous person of the wherewithal to be able to achieve even enough goodness to maintain any quality of life that the virtuous person would count as happy. Even under the most difficult – or absolutely defeating – circumstances, however, the virtuous person would do the best that any mortal being could do under such circumstances, by acting virtuously, and would thus – even in wretchedness – count as happier in those circumstances than any non-virtuous person would be in those same circumstances. Reshotko (2006: 140–1) dissents from the view we propose here.

service of noble action, as per the evaluative principle. Obviously, circumstances can also determine what can be *made* that can then be put to noble use, as per the productive principle. In claiming that, for Socrates, virtue will produce good things, we are not attributing to Socrates the absurd claim that the virtuous person will know how to make *whatever* she might find useful to support virtuous actions in *any* circumstances – for this would require the virtuous person to know all of the other crafts, which, again, Socrates explicitly denies at *Euthydemus* 292d1–4. Indeed, the production of *whatever* might be useful would require even more than all of the human crafts; it would require being both omnipotent and omniscient. There may, rather, be all sorts of goods that a given virtuous agent in a certain situation would not be able to produce, from which it follows that there are all sorts of actions that would be noble, were they to be performed, but which a given virtuous agent under the circumstances cannot perform. A person who has just had all of her money stolen does not fail to act nobly by not giving money to the needy. If, however, it would be noble to give something despite having only recently been a victim of theft herself, but there is available to her – in a way she would be culpable to miss[25] – some way to obtain some money (for example, she can sell some of her property or perform some simple labor for pay), virtue requires that she do so. That is, in such circumstances, virtue requires that she make money. The virtuous person need not be a wizard or a god, but will surely have the wits to discern reasonably obvious and ready-to-hand ways of creating what she can for use in the service of virtue, including the products of some other craft the virtuous person may have. This is

[25] In this way, our view requires that *ethical* virtue also needs what has come to be known as *epistemic* virtue. Representative recent discussions of epistemic virtue include Zagzebski (1996) and Alston (2005). The relationship between ethical and epistemic virtues is still controversial. For a debate in contemporary virtue ethics as to whether ethical virtue requires epistemic virtue, see N. D. Smith (2008) contra Driver (2001).

why Socrates tells Callicles that the virtuous person can be relied upon to do well and to act nobly:

> The temperate man is not one to pursue or flee from what is not fitting, but the affairs, and people, and pleasures, and pains he ought to flee and pursue, and to endure remaining where he ought. And so it is most necessary, Callicles, that the temperate person, just as we have reported, being just and brave and pious, is completely good, and the good person acts well and nobly in what he does, and the one who does well is blessed and happy. But the base person and the one who acts evilly are wretched. (*Gorgias* 507b5–c5)

As we said above,[26] we do not see Socrates making a logical point here about the connection between virtue and happiness, as if a virtuous person could not possibly suffer any devastating misfortune just by definition or as a matter of logic. Instead, we believe his claim should be understood as an observation about how the world works, which is why we called the connection between virtue and happiness a nomological one. Understanding the law of gravity allows us to make reasonable predictions about what will happen if we drop a dime from a third-floor balcony. But natural laws do not work by giving necessary or sufficient conditions; after all, the dime will only fall to the ground below if it does not get caught in a strong updraft or land on some moving object that will then carry it in a horizontal direction rather than downward.

Moreover, seen in this light it is misleading to construe the knowledge of good and evil that is the basis of virtue as exclusively ethical knowledge. For Socrates, we contend, the knowledge that is virtue includes the knowledge of what one knows and does not know and, in the light of such knowledge, it enables its possessor to make reasonable assessments of what one can *produce* to make virtuous action possible. Why, then, does Socrates bother to go through the

[26] See note 24.

list he does with Cleinias? He is appealing to things conventionally recognized as always good, we claim, and is showing Cleinias that they are not really always good but that their goodness depends upon wisdom. Nothing Socrates says to Cleinias, however, entails that those who lack these items cannot act virtuously. What seems wholly insufficient is what acceptance of the restricted version of the evaluative principle would require; namely, that Socrates believes the virtuous person would be *helpless* in the face of some lack. Again, we are not suggesting that conditions might not render the virtuous utterly helpless in some respect. The fatally ill may not be able to swim to save a life or the enslaved able to spend money on a worthy cause. But if any philosopher ever supposed that knowledge is power, it was Socrates. Not only does knowledge never get "dragged about like a slave" (*Protagoras* 352c1–2), it also would never be without resources to act virtuously if action is at all possible. In this way, the evaluative principle should be understood to entail at least a modest version of the productive principle, for if one is in a position to get the best use possible from what is at hand, one will also use what is at hand to produce what one needs to act virtuously. As we have said, this is subject to the proviso that the virtuous person will produce what she needs to act virtuously by deploying her resourcefulness and perspicacity. We need not assume that she has any crafts or other expertise to support her virtuous aims. And even the virtuous person may find herself mostly or even entirely at a loss to do what she would optimally prefer, were other resources available to her.

We have argued that Socrates believes both the evaluative and the productive principles. In this final point, we also argued that the evaluative principle, properly understood, actually entails some ability to produce good things, for by ensuring that the virtuous person will always make the best use of whatever resources they find

available, it follows that the virtuous person can make productive use of those resources. In making this claim we are not suggesting that the notion of "making the best use of available resources" requires any additional special skill in addition to virtue. Of course, the virtuous person might find herself in a situation in which the only good she can do is to make the best of a bad situation. And sometimes even the virtuous person will find herself in *very* bad situations, with few or no resources. Virtue is no proof against bad things happening to good people; but it is the closest thing to such proof that a human being could hope for. And it is the evaluative and productive principles that make it so.

6.4 Motivational intellectualism and virtue intellectualism

6.4.1 Socratic virtue intellectualism – the standard view

The way in which the standard view conceived of the connection between Socrates' motivational intellectualism and his virtue intellectualism was to note the explanatory absence in both areas of any notice of appetites and passions. In the standard view, recall, Socrates supposedly believed that we could entirely explain all human voluntary action by reference *only* to specific beliefs held by agents about what the agents judge to be best for themselves under given circumstances and the single desire, common to all agents, for whatever is really best for the agent. In this view, as we have already noted in other chapters, there is no place and no need for any reference to be made to the workings of appetites and passions in explaining human voluntary action. But as we have seen, Socrates actually does make reference to appetites and passions in explaining

voluntary actions, and in the foregoing chapters we have tried to explain what role Socrates did assign to these psychological functions in human behavior.

Virtue is realized in virtuous activity, and so the standard conception of Socratic intellectualism also naturally conceived of Socrates' conception of virtue in such a way as to make no reference at all to appetites and passions in what it is to be virtuous and to act virtuously. As we said in the Preface, virtue intellectualism is the view that each of the virtues individually, and all of virtue collectively, are in some sense constituted by a certain kind of knowledge. Non-intellectualists about virtue (such as Plato and Aristotle, about whose views we will have more to say in the next chapter) think that excellence in ethical character (i.e. virtue) may assign some role to knowledge in virtue,[27] but will also insist that the complete analysis of many virtues must also be understood to include some condition or conditions about the virtuous person's appetites and passions. For one thing, the person must have certain appetites and passions but lack others. Moreover, the virtuous person must have their appetites and passions in a condition such that they are wholly subservient and responsive to the dictates of reason. Socrates, those inclined to the standard view claim, does not recognize any such conditions, but claims instead that virtue consists entirely of knowledge alone. In other words, Socrates believes that virtue is to be understood entirely in cognitive terms.

6.4.2 The power of knowledge and order in the soul

In the foregoing chapters, we have made a case against the standard view of Socrates' motivational intellectualism. Because we attribute

[27] Some contemporary virtue theorists, however, claim that at least some virtues do *not* have knowledge as even a necessary condition. See, e.g., Driver (2001).

a very different view to Socrates than scholars have generally understood, and because Socrates' virtue intellectualism is connected with his motivational intellectualism, it may seem simply obvious that our own interpretation of his virtue intellectualism will have to be quite different from what can be found in other studies. In our view of Socrates' motivational intellectualism, Socrates recognized some potential for the appetites and passions to influence the way we form judgments about what is in our best interest. But according to our argument in Chapter 3, this influence does not seem to manifest itself in cases of knowledge: those who know will never be deceived about the real value of some object or course of action, despite the potentially distorting representations of the appetites or passions. Given that our view makes knowledge immune to the influence of appetite or passion, it might seem that our account of Socrates' virtue intellectualism will turn out to be no different from the standard view's after all.

Recall Socrates' insistence to Callicles in the *Gorgias*, however, that the self-controlled soul is a good one (*Gorgias* 507a1–2), and a just and happy one (*Gorgias* 508b1–2). At least in the *Gorgias*, then, Socrates thinks that the virtuous soul will also be one that is "well-ordered." We have seen in the foregoing chapters, however, that the well-ordering of the soul has to do with maintaining one's appetites and passions in a disciplined condition. As we argued in Chapter 3, one advantage of virtue is that the power of the knowledge of good and evil would be tantamount to a "craft of measurement" by which we could make inerrant judgments about what courses of action or objects in the world were in our best interest under any given circumstances. One with such knowledge, we found, would never be deceived by the false impressions of benefit supplied by the appetites and passions. Moreover, as we argued in Section 3.4, such knowledge both presupposes and also assures that one's soul

be in a condition that makes it immune to the distorting effects of nonrational desires. Indeed, as we argued in that section, Socrates makes clear that the disciplined condition of the soul, in which the nonrational desires are kept from distorting our view of what is best for us, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for one's possessing the "craft of measurement": the ethical knowledge by which we can live in the best possible way. In this way, then, our view of Socrates' virtue intellectualism actually does turn out to be different from the standard conception: both views identify virtue with a kind of knowledge, but our view also insists that virtue requires that the virtuous person have his or her appetites and passions in the weak condition that results from discipline and self-control. In our view, this additional condition, however, ends up being one that is supplied by the required knowledge. Although having the soul in a disciplined condition is a necessary (and prior) condition for ethical knowledge, the possession of such knowledge is a sufficient condition for being in a disciplined condition. Accordingly, and in this way, we agree with the standard view that Socrates held the identity of virtue and knowledge.

CHAPTER 7

Socrates and his ancient intellectual heirs: Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics

7.1 SOCRATIC AND PLATONIC MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

7.1.1 Contrasting Socratic with Platonic moral psychology

At the very beginning of this book, we defended distinguishing the Platonic Socrates of the so-called "early" or "Socratic" dialogues from the Socrates who speaks in what are called the "middle" dialogues. Developmentalists, generally, understand the "Socrates" of the middle dialogues to speak for Plato, whereas they take the "Socrates" of the early period either to present an earlier version of Plato's views, or to be Plato's more or less accurate representation of the historical Socrates (or both). This book provides further evidence for developmentalism – which, for the sake of convenience, we have characterized as making a distinction between Socrates and Plato, although, as we said earlier, we are not actually committed to the view that the "Socrates" of whom we speak is the historical philosopher by that name. But the evidence we have provided for the distinction remains somewhat unclear, especially because in one very important respect we have actually made the distinction we claim to be supporting somewhat more subtle and less vivid than it is in the standard accounts of Socratic moral psychology we have criticized. In standard accounts, recall, Socrates recognized no place at all in explanations of voluntary human behavior for appetites and

passions. The only factors that play any role, in that view, are the desire – one shared equally by all people, good and bad – for our own benefit, and the cognitive states by which one judges courses of action as beneficial, detrimental, or neutral.

We have maintained, on the contrary, that appetites and passions actually do play a role in Socratic moral psychology (as well as in the Socratic conception of virtue). The role they play is, however, not one that would ever produce synchronic belief-akrasia. That is, Socrates believes it is never the case that one acts contrary to what one, given the available options, presently believes is best for him or her. Instead, we have claimed that the appetites and passions – especially when one permits them to become unrestrained – play a causal role in how we come to hold the beliefs we have when we act. In brief, we have claimed that in Socratic moral psychology the appetites and passions present the objects to which they are attracted as *benefits* to be pursued. Allowing one's appetites or passions to become unruly and unrestrained allows their presentations to become more compelling, which, in turn, makes one increasingly less able to consider the real values of what our appetites or passions are attracted to as well as the values of other options one might have. Thus, maintaining our appetites and passions in a disciplined state allows us to perform our deliberative functions in the best way, by allowing us more soberly to assess all of our options in accordance with our long-term goals.

Our difference from what we have been calling the standard view, then, is in our recognition of a real role Socrates gives to appetites and passions in our actions. But this difference might be seen as eliminating the very distinction between Socrates and Plato that we support, for most scholars have held that one of the most significant reasons for distinguishing Socrates from Plato is on the very ground that Socrates did not, whereas Plato did, recognize the

causal significance of appetites and powers in motivation. At least one scholar, indeed, regards this difference as *the only* solid ground for making the distinction between Socrates and Plato.[1]

In this section, then, we explain how, on the one hand, our view maintains and supports distinguishing between the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues from the Socrates of the middle dialogues while, on the other hand, rejecting the standard account of Socratic motivation. Because our focus is on the Socratic position in this book, we do not pretend in this section to provide anything like a complete or comprehensive account of what we are calling the Platonic conception of moral psychology.[2] Our goal, instead, is simply to make clear that the Platonic account is actually quite different from the Socratic view as we have interpreted it.

7.1.2 Moral psychology in Plato's Phaedo

The main aim of the arguments in the *Phaedo* is to prove the immortality of the soul. We argue in the appendix to this book that Socrates in the early or Socratic dialogues also accepts that the soul is immortal, though we find no arguments given for this position in these dialogues, and Socrates is careful also not to claim to know what happens after death (*Apology* 29a4–b6). Now, some of the specific details of the arguments for immortality that Plato gives to Socrates in the *Phaedo* may well have no place in, and may actually

[1] See Rowe (2003), who argues against most of the grounds developmentalists have given for the distinction between Socrates and Plato, but then defends the distinction anyway, in virtue of a standard conception of Socratic intellectualism, which he explicitly (26 n. 27) claims to have gotten from Terry Penner.

[2] Indeed, we will only discuss the moral psychology of the *Phaedo*, *Republic* II–X, and *Phaedrus*. Although we believe a discussion of these dialogues will suffice for drawing the distinction we seek to make here, we recognize that other middle period and later dialogues also contain discussions related to our general topic.

be incompatible with, views expressed by Socrates in earlier dialogues, as some developmentalists contend.[3] But our focus in this book is on moral psychology, and so the question we must address here is whether Plato has Socrates say anything on this subject in the *Phaedo* that would clearly break from the view he gives to Socrates in earlier dialogues. Let us, then, examine in some detail what Plato has Socrates say about the appetites and passions in the *Phaedo*.

Now, perhaps the most striking characterization of the appetites and passions in the *Phaedo* is that Plato has Socrates characterize all such desires as entirely somatic rather than psychological:

> As long as we possess the body, and our soul is contaminated by such an evil, we'll surely never adequately gain what we desire – and that, we say, is truth. Because the body affords us countless distractions, owing to the nurture it must have; and again, if any illnesses befall it, they hamper our pursuit of that which is. Besides, it fills us up with lusts (*erōtoi*) and desires (*epithumiai*), with fears (*phoboi*) and fantasies (*eidōla*) of every kind, and with any amount of trash, so that really and truly we are, as the saying goes, never able to think anything at all because of it. Thus, it's nothing but the body and its desires that brings wars and factions and fighting. (66b5–c8)[4]

Could the Socrates we have examined thus far in this book have made such a statement? Several features of the above claim seem problematic from the Socratic point of view. For one thing, the obvious intention of this passage is to show that true philosophers can never be free of the distractions and disturbances caused by appetites and passions until they are entirely free from their bodies, via death: "It's then, apparently, that the thing we desire and whose lovers we claim to be, wisdom, will be ours – when we have died, as the argument indicates, though not while we live" (*Phaedo* 66e1–4).

[3] See, e.g., Vlastos (1991: 53–80), who contends that any reference to separated Forms is un-Socratic.

[4] All translations of the *Phaedo* we provide in this chapter are those of Gallop (1975).

A rational man will "prepare himself in his life to live as close as he can to being dead" (67e1–2), and will thus "cultivate dying" (67e6). We should compare this with Socrates' claim in the earlier dialogues that a prudent man should maintain his appetites and passions in a disciplined condition in order to avoid coming to the afterlife with a damaged (or worse, ruined) soul (see *Gorgias* 526b6–e1). The view here, in the *Phaedo*, seems far more extreme. Here, it seems that the only way to avoid having our judgment disrupted by appetites and passions is to become disembodied altogether, whereas the position we have attributed to Socrates allows one to function at least reasonably well by maintaining the appetites and passions in a disciplined state. In the earlier dialogues, Socrates never characterizes one with disciplined appetites and passions as being in a condition that is "as close as he can to being dead" nor does Socrates ever there suggest that one would be better off without appetites or passions. Indeed, in the accounts of the afterlife he gives in the earlier dialogues, Socrates seems to think that death will not remove one's capacity to experience pain or fear (see *Gorgias* 525b7 and 525b4, respectively), and the very point of such pain or fear is to help one's soul to improve. The afterlife, then, does not promise freedom from at least *some* appetites and passions, and so it does not seem to be a feature of the Socratic view that all appetites and passions are simply bodily, nor would one reasonably look forward to being entirely free of appetitive or passionate desires as a result of the parting of soul and body at death. Similarly, nothing in the earlier dialogues would support attributing to Socrates the view that mere association with the body counts as an "evil" for a soul. The experience of psychological conflict in deliberation is never in the earlier dialogues characterized so sharply as strife between the soul and the body.

Unfortunately, the contrast we have drawn here is, in fact, not consistently maintained in the *Phaedo*. For in other passages in that

dialogue we hear a great deal about appetites and passions a soul can carry with it into the afterlife, particularly in cases other than the true philosopher. The souls of non-philosophers, we are told, end up as ghosts, staying close to the visible world, out of fear of Hades (81c11), and continue to have distinctly bodily desires (81e1), and also seem to continue to retain all of the character flaws associated with bodily excesses (81e6–82a1). As David Bostock puts it,

> In these passages it appears that disembodied souls are capable of pretty well all those conscious activities that embodied souls are capable of: they can perceive (though presumably without eyes), they can feel pain (though without nerves), they can be frightened (though without adrenalin), etc. (1986: 27)

Bostock concludes that, "The *Phaedo*, then, contains two distinct views of life after death" (*ibid*.: 29). Even so, however, the connection of appetites and passions (other than the philosopher's desire and passion for truth, that is) is clearly associated with the body much more clearly than anything the early dialogues would provide, for even in non-philosophers, the explanation given for their continued corporeal urges is explained in terms of the dead soul's incapacity to separate entirely from the body, having been "interspersed with a corporeal element, ingrained in it by the body's company and intercourse" (81c4–6). As such, the *Phaedo* seems clearly to present a somewhat different view of the appetites and the passions than what we find in the earlier dialogues. Association with the body leaves the soul vulnerable to "lusts, desires, fears, and fantasies" that leave even the best of souls "never able to think anything at all because of it." Plato does not have Socrates add, here in the *Phaedo*, that the distractions of appetite and passion can become so great as sometimes to lead one to act akratically. But, without the extreme regimen of living *as if* one is already dead that Plato has

Socrates recommend in the *Phaedo*, it seems not to require much imagination to see how the wild and bestial bodily lusts could drive non-philosophical souls to act in ways the soul, even at the time of action, would regard as improper.

7.1.3 Moral psychology in Plato's Republic

Most scholars agree that in the *Republic* Plato characterizes the appetites and passions as psychological forces.[5] Indeed, in the *Republic* for the first time, these psychological forces are argued to function in such ways as to reveal them to belong to different parts of the soul. The moral psychology given to Socrates in the earlier dialogues certainly did not rule out the idea that there might be different parts of the soul for different psychic functions, and Plato has Socrates all but make such a claim in the *Gorgias*.[6] In the earlier dialogues, however, no argument is offered for such a view, the parts themselves are never clearly identified, enumerated, or distinguished, as they are in Book IV of the *Republic*. The sharp contrast we find between the Socratic and Platonic views of moral psychology, however, does not lie in the details of how many parts of the soul are recognized in each view or in the roles each part is or is not assigned. Rather, the contrast we find derives from the ways in which the appetites and passions actually function in the two views.

In brief, we have argued that Socrates understood the appetites and passions to make presentations of benefit to the soul, which would, other things equal, incline the soul to pursue the aims of the

[5] The psychological account he gives, however, is later somewhat qualified on the ground that the "true" nature of the soul would only be clear if it could be disassociated from the body (IX 611b1–d8). For discussion of the significance of this and other qualifications Plato makes in regard to the psychology he provides in the *Republic*, see N. D. Smith (1999).

[6] See Chapter 5, note 8, above.

appetites or passions as things one would take to be good for one. Being an object of an appetite, in other words, would make something "look good" to us. Other considerations, however, could lead the soul to judge that the aims of the appetites or passions were actually not, despite appearances, good for one. Only if the soul ended up judging that what appeared to be good (because presented as such by an appetite, for example) was actually the best choice one could make in a given situation, would one become fully motivated to act. The stronger the appetite or passion, the more compelling the appearance of good would be. As we have seen, it is for this reason that Socrates cautioned that sensible persons take care not to allow their appetites or passions to become too strong, lest they find themselves increasingly less able to discern or judge soberly and accurately reasons to resist what the appetites or passions might incline them to pursue. But in this way, as we have shown, appetites and passions could never motivate us independently of what we believe is good for us, for although our beliefs about what is good for us might be unstable (particularly in those persons susceptible to strong appetites or passions), we will always act in the ways we presently believe are best for us.

It is generally accepted that the moral psychology we find in Book IV of the *Republic* does not have these features. Specifically, it has seemed to most scholars that, by the time he wrote the *Republic* (or Books II through X of that work), Plato had come to believe that at least sometimes or in some cases, our appetites or passions could lead us to act in ways that were *contrary* to what we believed – even as we acted – were best for us. In a nutshell, Socrates denied but Plato accepted the possibility of synchronic belief-akrasia.

Now, there are different specific ways in which this difference might be drawn, and so we should be as clear as we can about precisely how to draw it. One way we might do so is to understand

the appetites and passions to function in the *Republic* account independently of the desire for what is good for us. In this version, then, Socrates counts all desires as "good-dependent." Again, this is because they always represented their objects as things good for us and thus only contributed to motivation *through* our desire for what is good for us. Plato, by contrast, is sometimes thought to have recognized forms of desire (appetites and passions) that were "good-independent," that had, in other words, aims other than what is good for us.[7] This way of understanding the distinction is compatible with our own understanding of Socratic moral psychology because, although we do recognize roles for appetites and passions in the Socratic theory, we do not understand the roles they play as independent of our desire for what is good for us. In our view of Socratic moral psychology, then, appetites and passions are distinct from the generic desire for benefit, but function in a way that is wholly dependent upon that desire. According to this view, we will never be inclined to do something *unless* we take it as something that is good for us.

Moreover, at least one passage in *Republic* IV seems to stipulate that appetites are attracted to their objects *independently* of our interest in benefit:

> [Socrates speaking] "Insofar as it's thirst, would it be for anything more than that of which we say it is an appetite in the soul (*epithumiai en tē psuchē*)? For example, is thirst thirst for hot drink or cold, or much drink or little, or, in a word, for any particular kind of drink? … But thirst itself will never be an appetite for anything other than what it is naturally of – drink itself – and similarly, hunger for food."

[7] For versions of this way of conceiving of the difference between Socratic and Platonic moral psychology, see, e.g., Anagnostopoulos (2006), Irwin (1995: 209–15), Kahn (1988), Lorenz (2004, 2006), Penner (1990), Reeve (1988, 133–4), and Stalley (2007). Opposing views may be found in Bobonich (1994; 2002: 216–57), Carone (2001), Hoffman (2003), Lesses (1987), and Weiss (2006: 141–54).

"In that way," he said, "Each particular appetite itself will only be for what it is naturally of, whereas an appetite for this or that will depend upon additional factors."

"Let no one confuse us and create disturbance, saying that no one has an appetite for drink, but good drink, nor for food, but good food; for everyone, after all, has appetites for good things. If, then, thirst is an appetite, it is for whatever is good, whether drink or whatever else it is an appetite; and so, too, with other appetites." (IV 437d8–438a5)

Not surprisingly, many scholars have taken this passage to show that Plato understands appetites to function in a way that is "blind" to any goodness in their objects and are, instead, attracted to them simply by their very nature as appetites *for* such things.[8] But several scholars have effectively argued against this interpretation,[9] and propose a different reading of the passage. In the alternative reading, even in Plato's divided psyche, each part of the soul (and each form of attraction, whether deriving from the rational, spirited, or appetitive parts) continues to be good-dependent, just as we find it to be in Socratic moral psychology. Yet Plato also wants to explain how different desires both exist and can come into conflict, and so he needs to show how we can individuate different kinds of desire on grounds *other than* whether or not they should be understood as aiming at what is good for us. What Plato has Socrates doing in the passage just cited, then, is not an attempt to distinguish good-independent from good-dependent desires. Rather, it is an attempt to distinguish between different kinds of good-dependent desires. Plato's point, in the alternative reading, is that thirst should not be understood as

[8] See, e.g., Penner (1990: 55): "akrasia becomes possible because of the possibility of blind desires … desires which don't aim at any expected good whatever, and, *a fortiori*, there can be desires where strength of desire varies independently of the degree of expected good."

[9] See Bobonich (1994; 2002: 216–57), Carone (2001), Hoffman (2003), Lesses (1987), and Weiss (2006: 141–54).

"desire-for-good" on the ground that all desires are desires for goods – for that would reduce all desire to a single sort. Instead, each form of desire (whether rational, spirited, or appetitive) will have its own distinctive sorts of objects to which it is attracted by nature – even though each instance of desire (in the case of thirst, for drink, or in the case of hunger, for food) will also be a case of a desire for something good. "It is perfectly consistent to claim that thirst *qua* thirst is for drink while every time we wish to drink we desire drink as good" (Carone 2001: 120).[10]

Various passages in the *Republic* lend support to understanding Platonic moral psychology as retaining the Socratic contention that all desire is good-dependent. For example, in *Republic* IX.580e5–581a1, we are told that the appetitive part of the soul may also be called the "money-loving" part on the ground that all of one's appetites are satisfied by means of money. But for this to be true, it must be that the appetitive part is able to perform its own, perhaps limited, form of means–ends reasoning, recognizing the instrumental value of money in the pursuit of its natural ends. It is difficult to understand how this could be true if the appetitive part does not regard those things that satisfy its desires as *valuable* (i.e. good things). The same considerations apply at least as clearly for the spirited part of the soul, which also responds to its own judgments of value (see, for example, IV 440c1–d3). Moreover, Plato explicitly continues to endorse the view that everything we do is done for the sake of the good (VI 505d11–e1), which could not possibly be the case if sometimes, when we acted from appetite or passion, we acted wholly on the basis of good-independent desires.

[10] See also Hoffman (2003: 172): "It is one thing to argue that thirst is the desire for drink and not the desire for good drink. It is entirely different to argue that the desire for drink is not to view drink as good. Plato argues only for the first claim."

In this understanding of Plato's moral psychology, each part of the soul participates in evaluation by making actual judgments about what is good. If so, Plato's moral psychology differs markedly from our account of Socratic moral psychology because, in our account of Socrates' position, the appetites function in such a way as to *present* their objects to the soul as putative goods. We are not claiming, however, that the appetites make actual judgments of value. Rather, they function more like sense organs, by making presentations to the soul that will generally be followed by judgments about the world. In our view, the appetites do not themselves consist in, nor do they always cause, such judgments. Just as one *withholds* the judgment that, despite appearances, the stick in the water *really is* bent – because one knows about the potential for optical illusion in such cases – so someone with disciplined appetites may also refrain from making the judgment that some object to which their appetite attracts them is actually a good thing to pursue. Such a person may refrain from making the judgment that, say, eating a piece of chocolate cake is actually good even though one's appetite presents eating that piece of cake as a good thing to do. The cake *looks* good. In brief, the *presentation* of something *as good* is not the same as the judgment *that it is good*. Someone with experience of the way sticks in water appear does not make the judgment that the stick is bent even though it does indeed *appear* bent. That is, she is not tempted or inclined to believe that the stick is bent. In her soul, there is no *tension* between what reason tells her, namely, that it is not bent – and what her eyes tell her, namely, that it is. Reason is sufficiently powerful that the appearance is absolutely impotent with respect to belief generation, so to speak. In our view, the same is true in the case of a virtuous soul with regard to false appearances of goodness. In the virtuous soul, when the chocolate cake appears good, there is no back and forth, no tension. Reason is sufficiently powerful that

the appearance of goodness is powerless against it. Accordingly, the fact that X appears good does not give rise to psychic tension and the sort of back and forth Socrates attributes to the soul, "the many" call akratic in the *Protagoras*. Still, X definitely continues to appear good to the virtuous soul.

So, although the picture of Platonic moral psychology we have sketched herein retains its connection to the Socratic account, as we understand it, by making all desires good-dependent, it does so in a way that is different from our version of the Socratic account. In the Socratic account, appetites make presentations of goodness; in the Platonic account, appetites make actual judgments of goodness.[11]

But if the differences between the different parts of the soul should not be conceived in terms of some desires being good-dependent and others not being good-dependent, then we must provide a different explanation of psychic conflict. One way to do this is to understand the different parts of the soul as having different ways of assessing what is good, and the different assessments each part provides can come into conflict. As Carone has put it,

> The difference between the rational part of the soul and the others is not that the former reasons about what is good and the latter do not. The difference is rather that reason in its full expression knows, or at least can preserve true beliefs about, what is really good for the big picture of the whole soul and even for each part of it (cf. 4.442c6–8). Reason, when full of knowledge, does not distort proportions, whereas the other parts of the soul have

[11] A reasonable question at this point is what makes something appear good to appetite. We believe that, in both the Socratic and Platonic accounts, what is pleasant always appears good. (As we have indicated, the accounts differ about the power of the appetitive part of the soul to make judgments about the appearance.) The fact that a pleasure always appears good because it is a pleasure is consistent with the fact that something may at one time be pleasurable and at another time not, depending upon, for example, the body's constitution or current condition. So, while it is true in either the Socratic or the Platonic account that a piece of cake for which one has an appetite will necessarily appear good *because* it appears pleasurable, it will not appear good if one has already gorged oneself to the point of surfeit on four other pieces.

at most narrow-minded beliefs about the good that can easily mislead a soul in which reason is weak into believing that what they take to be good is also good for the whole psyche when it is not. (2001: 130)

As we have indicated, we accept this account of the moral psychology in the *Republic*, and have already explained one way in which we find it different from the moral psychology we have characterized as the Socratic view. But Carone goes on to argue that the Platonic account is also much more like the Socratic account than scholars have recognized. According to Carone, Plato, too, denies the possibility of synchronic belief-akrasia (*ibid*.: 131–43). Here, we part ways with Carone, in favor of the standard view that Socrates does not, but Plato does, recognize that synchronic belief-akrasia is possible.[12]

The case we need to consider is the episode in Book IV in which a certain Leontius finds himself in a state of psychic conflict as he passes by some freshly executed corpses:

Leontius, son of Aglaion, was coming up from the Piraeus outside the North Wall when he saw some dead bodies lying by the public executioner. At the same time, he had an appetite to look and was also disgusted with himself and made himself turn away. For a while, he struggled and covered his face, but at length, overpowered by the appetite, he opened his eyes wide, ran towards the corpses, and exclaimed, "Look, you wretches! Fill yourselves with the beautiful sight!" (*Republic* IV.439e7–440a3)

Plato makes it abundantly clear what he thinks we should take away from this grisly story: anger, he tells us in Socrates' very next lines, sometimes fights against the appetites (IV.440a5–6). This alone, of course, would not make the case an instance of synchronic belief-akrasia, for, as Carone carefully stipulates, "Most eloquently, Plato does not mention where reason sides in the internal struggle"

[12] As does Hoffman (2003), with whom we are in entire agreement regarding the moral psychology of *Republic* IV.

(2001: 136). For the case to be one of synchronic belief-akrasia, the further detail – that Leontius' *reason* at the very moment when he gazed upon them actually judged that he should not look at them – must be added. Should we, as most scholars have done – or should we not, as Carone insists – understand the case as including that critical additional detail?

Now, in assessing this case it is important not to lose sight of the feature of Carone's account we have so far emphasized as different from the Socratic account, namely, that each part of the soul does not merely make presentations for judgment, but also makes actual judgments. Hence, any case of psychic conflict in the Platonic moral psychology will also be a case of *cognitive* conflict. If we leave the rational part out of the conflict Leontius experiences, it will still be true that Leontius both believes (via his appetitive part) that he *should* look at the corpses, and also believes (via his spirited part – the part responsible for anger) that he *should not* look at them. In this sense, then, the case both is and is not one of synchronic belief-akrasia, since it is a case in which Leontius acts in a way that is opposed to what he presently believes, but also in a way that follows what he presently believes. This is the case precisely because he presently has conflicting beliefs about what he should do.

The question we must ask, however, is whether the case should be understood as one in which the appetite(s), and whatever beliefs they have produced in the soul, have led Leontius to look at the corpses *contrary to what Leontius' own reason tells him as he looks*. If not, Carone will be right to resist understanding this case as one of synchronic belief-akrasia, for it will not be a case in which one acts in a way that is contrary to one's present all-things-considered judgment of one's good – a judgment of a sort that can only be provided by the rational part of the soul. So, what should we suppose Leontius' reason was doing at the critical moment?

Even if Carone is correct in contending that Plato never explicitly tells us what Leontius' reason was doing in this case, the very next lines that follow Plato's account of the conflict as one between anger and appetite make the very point Carone has resisted:

> "And in many other cases, as well" I said, "when someone is forced by their appetites, *contrary to the rational part*, he excoriates himself and his spirit is aroused against that in him which is forcing, and just as if there's a civil war going on inside of him, with spirit acting as the ally of reason. Spirit siding with the appetites, when reason has decreed it must not be done, is not, I suppose, the sort of thing you'd even claim to have experienced, either in yourself or in anyone else." (IV 440a8–b7)

Carone's response to this passage is critical:

> Even if reason is included as one of those factors which are finally "overpowered by his desire", the agent does not need to be acting against what he at that time believes to be best. … Reason is "overpowered" not in the sense that the agent performs the action while at the same time strongly believing that he should not, but in the sense that, at that moment, his reason has been weakened and come to adopt the beliefs of the prevailing part. (Carone, 2001: 138)

If Carone is right about this, then the Platonic moral psychology really is quite similar to the Socratic account, and the sharp contrast between a Socrates who declares synchronic akrasia to be impossible, and a Plato who allows it to be possible, will disappear. But is she right?

We think not. While it is true that one can understand the phenomenon of "being overcome" in such a way, this is not the way that Plato has generally been understood. According to the standard reading, reason is overcome without changing its view of things even as the agent acts. So it is hardly the case that Carone's account of what it is to be "overcome" is *obviously* preferable to the other understanding. What Carone cannot account for, however,

is Plato's characterization of such cases as ones in which reason and spirit are *allied* in their opposition to the appetites. In Carone's understanding, reason would have to be understood as perhaps only initially allied with spirit, but this alliance dissolves and reason comes to be allied (at least momentarily) with appetite instead. In the case of Leontius, Carone's account would have it that "Leontius can still believe that, all things considered, it is better to give in to his ignoble but very painful appetite" (*ibid*.; 139), but the story itself hardly makes it seem as if Leontius has acted in accordance with an all-things-considered judgment. Were this actually what Plato had in mind, the case would have to be explained differently. For example, in Carone's version of the case, we would have to imagine Leontius finding himself convinced that he should, indeed, look at the corpses, even as he feels continued reluctance to do so, out of a lingering sense of shame. We find no such reluctant resignation in the way Plato actually tells the story, however. Plato gives us no indication of any kind that Leontius (even momentarily) has made an all-things-considered judgment that "the beautiful sight" is one in which he really should, all things considered, indulge himself. Instead, the only judgment he expresses is that his eyes are "wretches" and it therefore seems more reasonable to think that, not just his sense of shame but also his considered and current view of what is right gets overpowered by his appetite in this case. There is no reason to think the alliance between reason and spirit is vitiated; instead, the allies are simply vanquished by appetite's superior force.

If this is correct, then one feature of the standard view of the difference between Socratic and Platonic moral psychology was correct after all. Although we should not understand Plato as deviating from Socrates' conviction that all desire is good-dependent, we have noted two important differences between Plato and Socrates:

(1) In the Socratic account, the appetites and passions function more like sense organs than homunculi: they present candidates for judgment as putative goods for one to choose. They do not make or include judgments as a natural part of the way they function; instead, judgment need not follow but may be influenced by the presentations of the appetites. Psychic conflict, accordingly, may sometimes take the form of one faced with conflicting information or presentations, each of which seems credible and deserving to be judged as decisive (without necessarily yet being judged as such). In the Platonic account, the appetites and passions actually present judgments to the soul, so that all psychic conflict will also always be cognitive conflict.

(2) In the Socratic account, synchronic belief-akrasia is impossible. In the Platonic account, it is possible that one can act in a way that is contrary to one's all-things-considered judgment (one, that is, created by the rational part of the soul) as a result of an appetite (or, perhaps, a passion – see *Republic* IV.441b2–c2 for a case in which passion and reason conflict) without any modification in reason's judgment

7.1.4 Moral psychology in Plato's Phaedrus

The main text for establishing the difference between Socratic and Platonic moral psychology is obviously the *Republic*, but some confirmation for the two differences we have identified between the two conceptions can be obtained from the famous account of the soul as a charioteer with two horses in the *Phaedrus*. In this account, whereas the horses and charioteers of the souls of gods are all good (246a7–8), human beings include one noble horse and one that is "opposite in breeding and character" (246b2–3; see also 253d2).

From this, we are told, it follows that in our case driving the soul is "difficult and troublesome" (246b4). Even though only one of the horses is characterized as ignoble, however, Plato has Socrates later allow that many human charioteers may find it very difficult to follow in the train of the gods because they are "troubled by the horses" (248a4), while some cannot maintain a consistent altitude because their horses (plural) are unruly (248a5–6).

But the "good" horse seems rarely to be the real source of his charioteer's troubles. When Plato has Socrates go into more detail, it is the other horse that is depicted as disobedient to reason:[13]

> Now when the charioteer looks in the eye of love, his entire soul is suffused with a sense of warmth and starts to fill with tingles and the goading of desire. As for the horses, the one who is obedient to the charioteer is still controlled, then as always, by its sense of shame, and so prevents itself from jumping on the boy. The other one, however, no longer responds to the whip or the goad of the charioteer; it leaps violently forward and does everything to aggravate its yokemate and its charioteer, trying to make them go up to the boy and suggest to him the pleasures of sex. At first, the other two resist, angry in their belief that they are being made to do things that are dreadfully wrong. At last, however, when they see no end to their trouble, they are led forward, reluctantly agreeing to do as they have been told. (*Phaedrus* 253e5–254b3)[14]

The passage continues to describe the encounter between the beloved boy and his suitor in ways that emphasize how much the charioteer and the obedient horse have to struggle against the ignoble one, as "it tries to make its unwilling partners advance" (254d1–2), and later "it struggles, it neighs, it pulls them forward and

[13] Although Plato talks here of only two "horses," of which only one creates conflict, there is no reason to think that he could not tell a similar story about conflict involving the other "horse" (*thumos*). We owe this point to Jessica Moss.

[14] This and all other translations of the *Phaedrus* are those of Nehamas and Woodruff in Cooper (1997).

forces them to approach the boy again with the same proposition" (254d4–6).

Although this presentation of human psychology is allegorical, we think the most obvious sense of the tale Plato provides here reproduces the more direct account he provides in the *Republic*. For one thing, it seems plain that it is the same general desire that motivates all three of the parts of the soul in this account – in this case, erotic desire. The ways the different elements in the soul seek to pursue the goal of that desire, however, are very varied. Even so, there seems to be no suggestion here that any of the parts are propelled by what has been called "good-independent" desires. The ignoble horse may have a very blinkered and even inaccurate conception of what the good consists in, but there can be no doubt that the horse does what it does because it thinks it would be *good* to have sex with the boy. The struggle is depicted not simply as oppositions of *forces*, but as differences in conceptions about what the person should do. These differences include elements of persuasion and (if often strained) occasional agreement between the different parts. So here, too, we find the different parts of the soul not simply making presentations *for judgment*, but presenting their own judgments about what the (whole) person should do.

Similarly, it is repeatedly explicit in this tale that the rational part of the soul (the charioteer) sometimes finds that its own beliefs are overruled, and that it thinks that what the soul is actually doing is "dreadfully wrong" (254b1). Although Plato eventually has the particular charioteer gain control over his "ignoble horse," the account he has given is one that allows one to act contrary to one's better judgment without that judgment wavering or changing at the moment of action. So in the *Phaedrus*, too, as we found in the *Republic*'s account, Plato clearly recognizes the possibility of synchronic akrasia. Here we have yet more evidence that, in these cases,

reason does not simply change its view of what is best, as Carone's account would have it.

7.2 SOCRATIC AND ARISTOTELIAN MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

7.2.1 Differences about the nature of desire

Although the moral psychology in Plato's later writings is different in a variety of ways from that found in the "Socratic" works, they are not at odds about the intended object of nonrational desire. Throughout the corpus, we have argued, Plato maintains that all human desires seek ends that agents cognize at the time of action as conducing to their good. It is perhaps not too misleading, then, to say that in this respect the moral psychology of Plato's later writings represents a refinement of rather than a rejection of the moral psychology of his earlier "Socratic" writing. If our account is correct, the "refinement" in Plato's later writings, however, provides a different conception of how nonrational desire actually functions in the soul, one that explains how what we are calling "synchronic belief-akrasia" is possible.

Aristotle was of course deeply indebted to Plato's mature reflections about the psychology underlying human motivation. But unlike those scholars, who take Plato and Aristotle to be in agreement that there are good-independent desires,[15] we believe that Aristotle actually holds that all nonrational desires aim at the good[16] and thus, agrees with Plato (and with Socrates) about the intended aim of all desire. We also believe that Aristotle agrees with Plato and disagrees with Socrates on one further point, namely, that nonrational desire can motivate action. If one accepts that position,

[15] See, e.g., Irwin (1987: 329–36).
[16] On this crucial point, we agree with Cooper (1998: 31–32).

it is perhaps tempting to think that Aristotle also sides with Plato against Socrates about the possibility of synchronic belief-akrasia. Indeed, Aristotle seems to invite this understanding of his position in as much as he himself refers to a person who acts wrongly and yet who is not vicious as "unruled" (*akratēs*, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1146b3, b19). In this section, however, we argue that Aristotle actually sides with Socrates and against Plato about the possibility of synchronic belief-akrasia. If we are right, like Socrates (and perhaps because of Socrates), Aristotle thinks that sufficiently strong nonrational desire actually interferes with the power of reason to direct agents to what reason judges to be best.[17] If we are right, then, there is an important sense in which Aristotle presents an account of nonrational desire that is remarkably similar to Socrates' with respect to the way nonrational desire affects reason's power to form judgments about the choiceworthiness of particular objects. In what follows, we shall try to explain why Aristotle would agree with Socrates about such a counter-intuitive notion while not endorsing Socrates' view that all action is motivated by desire formed by reason itself. At the end of this section we address the question of why, if Aristotle agrees with Socrates about the impossibility of synchronic belief-akrasia, he would nonetheless refer to akrasia as a possible condition of the soul, something Socrates is at pains to deny.

7.2.2 Aristotle's account of motivation – some preliminaries

In order better to see the agreements and disagreements between Socrates and Aristotle about moral psychology, perhaps we would

[17] If Aristotle's view about how strong nonrational desire interferes with reason is actually indebted to Socrates, as we think is likely, Aristotle does not say so. Aristotle only says that Socrates seems to be right about the impossibility of not acting contrary to reason's

do well first to lay out, at least in broad strokes, the architecture of the human soul, as Aristotle sees it. We see the foundational elements in I.13 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. There, Aristotle borrows the same basic distinction we find in Plato between the rational and nonrational parts of the soul (1102a26–b14).[18] The rational and nonrational parts themselves admit of subdivisions. Within the rational, we can distinguish one capacity, theoretical reason, whose function it is to reason about and to grasp principles in such disciplines as metaphysics, mathematics, and physics. The excellent condition, or virtue, of this "subdivision" of the rational part of the soul is called *sophia*. The other subdivision of this part of the soul is "calculative" or "deliberative," and it is by means of it that we reason about "what can be otherwise and can be achieved through action." The virtue of this subdivision is called *phronēsis*.

Within the nonrational part of the soul there is what Aristotle terms the "vegetative element" (1102a32–33). It is nonrational in the fullest sense, because its function, which concerns the assimilation of food and the growth of living entities, cannot be influenced by reason at all. Aristotle is quick to dismiss this part of the nonrational soul as irrelevant to ethical inquiry since its function clearly has no bearing on the central question with which ethics is concerned: how we are to live if we are to be happy.

The second major division within the nonrational part of the soul, however, the *epithumētikon*, is fundamental to ethics, for it is the seat of the emotions (*pathē*), such as anger, fear, jealousy, and pity, as well as the desire for physical pleasure (and the avoidance of physical pain), which is *epithumia* proper. Each *pathos* has

grasp of what is best (1147b13–15). The absence of attribution in Aristotle, however, is by no means unusual.

[18] All references to Aristotle's works are to Bekker page numbers, and will be to the *Nicomachean Ethics* unless we specify otherwise.

some pleasure or pain with which it is associated (1105b21–23) and, as we learn in the *De Anima*, each is essentially related to a desire (403a25–b1). Although Aristotle stops short of saying that these desires are desires for the different pleasures and pains with which the various *pathē* are linked, he explicitly says that one sort of nonrational desire, *epithumia*, aims at what appears pleasant, as opposed to a desire formed by reason, wish (*boulēsis*), which aims at the good (414b2–6).[19]

Later in the *De Anima*, Aristotle seems to be asserting something very different about wish and appetite:

> Now mind (*nous*) does not appear to cause movement without desire (*orexeōs*). For wish (*boulēsis*) is a desire, and whenever desire moves according to reason, it moves according to wish. But desire also moves contrary to reason. For appetite (*epithumia*) is such a desire. Therefore, reason is correct. But desire and imagination (*phantasia*) can be correct and not correct. Hence the object of desire (*to orekton*) always moves. But this is either the good or the apparent good, not every good, but the good achievable through action (*to prakton agathon*). (433b22–30)

Here, Aristotle is asserting that even appetite aims at the good or the apparent good. How are we to square this with the assertion noted above that pleasure, not the good, is the object of appetite?

In *Nicomachean Ethics* I.13, Aristotle tells us that the seat of the passions and appetites is related to the rational part in the sense that it is capable of "obeying reason" (1102a26–b14, 25–28) and "of listening to reason" (1103a1–2). Scholars agree that Aristotle accepts the Platonic notion that one of the salient characteristics of a soul that possesses ethical virtue is agreement, harmony, between the different drives within the soul. We can see the sort of thing Aristotle seems to have in mind with the following example. Let

[19] Recall the very similar claim made by Socrates at *Charmides* 167e1–5.

us suppose that someone who possesses the virtue of temperance also enjoys an occasional piece of chocolate cake and that, during a party, she spies a piece of chocolate cake on a table across the room. She quickly finds herself with an appetite for it, only to discover that the host has promised it to someone else. Because she does not want what is another's, reason judges that eating this piece is not good and so her appetite is "persuaded." Now, it would be odd if Aristotle means that reason persuades appetite that eating the cake would not be pleasant. Suppose the temperate person has not eaten anything all day. Surely, eating the cake would be pleasurable. It seems more likely that reason persuades appetite that eating this piece of cake would not be good, in which case reason and appetite are in harmony. In effect, the temperate person says to herself, "Of course, eating the cake would be pleasurable. I haven't suddenly ceased enjoying chocolate cake. But it would not be *good* to eat *this* cake and so I no longer want it." If this is right, when Aristotle distinguishes wish from appetite in the *De Anima*, at 414b2–6, in terms of their different objects, he means that wish seeks what is good after reason has made an all-things-considered judgment about what course of action is best. Appetite, too, seeks what is good but makes its assessments only about objects that appear to afford pleasure. What is pleasant always appears good to appetite, but if appetite has been habituated to "listen to reason," it is always disposed to alter its assessment, not about what is pleasant, but about what is good, with the result that, together, reason and appetite seek (or retreat from) the same object.

We believe the notion that virtuous nonrational desire accedes to reason's decisions stems from a more fundamental agreement between reason and nonrational desire. Ethical virtue, for Aristotle, requires that nonrational desires agree that reason be the element within the soul that finally determines what good goals are. The idea

is that in wanting what is good virtuous nonrational desire allows reason to revise its aims and will shift its attraction to whatever reason dictates is best. Viewing the relationship between nonrational desire and reason in the virtuous soul in this way provides a way of reconciling a pair of claims, both central to Aristotle's ethics, which would otherwise appear paradoxical. The first is the doctrine we have just referred to: the view that the nonrational part manifests ethical virtue when it "listens to" and "obeys" reason. The second is the doctrine that practical reason is concerned with what is conducive to ends (*ta pros to telos*), not with setting ends (e.g. 1144a7–9, 1113b3–4).[20] The apparent paradox arises because the former seems to suggest that practical reason does indeed set the ends and when the nonrational part of the soul possesses ethical virtue it agrees with those ends; whereas the latter seems to suggest that practical reason is limited to finding what satisfies ends set independently by the nonrational part of the soul. We believe the paradox disappears if Aristotle means that in the virtuous soul nonrational desire will always shift its aims to whatever is deemed choiceworthy by practical reason. Scholars have long noted that, when Aristotle says practical reason is concerned with *ta pros to telos*, he need not mean that in the virtuous soul practical reason is concerned exclusively with instrumental means to ends; it may also be with what constitutes ends[21] or with finding instances of ends.[22] According to this interpretation, when ethical virtue is present in the nonrational part of the soul, nonrational desire is satisfied by "listening to" and "obeying" reason because the goal of virtuous nonrational desire will be whatever reason determines to be best. Moreover, when practical

[20] For an excellent discussion of whether, in Aristotle, practical reason establishes ends, see A. D. Smith (1996: 56–74).

[21] See, e.g., Irwin (1999: 322, note on "decision").

[22] This is discussed in Wiggens (1980: 221–40).

reason functions properly and deliberates well about the content of the good, it makes the correct all-things-considered judgments about what is good. Thus, when we act in accordance with a practically wise judgment about what is best for us, we are, *eo ipso*, satisfying nonrational desire that has been habituated to be in the right condition.

In a soul that lacks ethical virtue, by contrast, nonrational desire seeks goals that merely appear good. They are mere appearance because reason plays no role in determining whether the content of the goal, which is always something pleasurable (or painful in the case of avoidance), is in fact good. Indeed, in souls where nonrational desire has been habitually and consistently allowed to motivate action for what merely appears good, reason is actually rendered impotent, at least with respect to its power to discover whether the ends nonrational desire seeks are in fact good. We take this to be Aristotle's point in the following passage:

> For the state of the eye of the soul comes about not without moral excellence, as has been said and is clear. For different reasonings about actions have a starting point, since it is the end and the best thing, whatever it happens to be … and this is not evident except to the good person; for vice turns away the soul and makes it deceived about the starting points of action. (1144a23–36)

As we understand the passage, vice deceives us about the "starting points of action," which is the "end and the best thing" because it has not been trained to want what reason decides is good. Instead, because the vicious nonrational desire is ardent, it fixes on what appears good and blocks reasoning about the appearance. When Aristotle says that "the end," that is, the best thing, "is not evident except to the good person," he means that only the good person, someone whose nonrational desires already *want* reason-determined ends, is able to reach the right determination about what the good is.

It is precisely on this point – that nonrational desire must be deferential to reason if the good and not the apparent good is to be achieved in action – that Aristotle believes Socrates went wrong:

> In one way Socrates was looking in the right place and in one way he wasn't. Because he thought that all of the virtues were forms of practical wisdom he was mistaken. Insofar as the moral virtues are not without practical wisdom, he was right. (1144b18–21)

Aristotle's point is that Socrates was right to insist that ethical virtue cannot be divorced from correct reasoning about the good. But Socrates was mistaken, in Aristotle's view, in thinking that correct reasoning about the good is all that there is to ethical virtue. If Aristotle is right, Socrates' intellectualism ignores the fact that, if we are to employ reasoning about *what is good* at all, we must *already* have our emotions and appetites in a condition that will render them desirous for that which the best reasons support. Someone whose emotions and appetites are not in this condition may well be sufficiently clever to hit the pleasurable target nonrational desire puts before him (1144a23–36), but because such a goal is not something it is reasonable for him to want in the first place, he is apt to go wrong.

If this is correct, when Aristotle says that the vicious "live by passion" (*kata pathos zēn*, 1095a7–8, 1179b26–28), he means that their ends, though appearing to be good, are not set by reason. Unlike Socrates, then, who believes that bad people systematically misjudge what is good but act for a goal reason lays down, albeit mistakenly, Aristotle thinks that, for the vicious, reason plays no role whatever in setting the content of their goals. This is because, as we have just seen, if deliberation is to hit the right target, it is essential that an agent already *desire* that the right target be set, and whether one possesses this basic desire for the right end is a matter of whether

one possesses the right condition of the *pathē*. Because the vicious do not have their *pathē* in the right condition, they lack this basic desire. Aristotle says that their vice "destroys the starting points of actions," for the starting points are the reasons, as adjudged by the rational part of the soul, for undertaking the actions (1140b14–20).

Because Aristotle thinks that a person with strong nonrational desires makes determinations about what is good that are independent of reason, we might think that Aristotle sides with Plato and against Socrates about the possibility of synchronic belief-akrasia. As we noted, this certainly seems to be suggested by Aristotle's references to the *akratēs* as a character type. In fact, as we shall now argue, just the opposite is the case. Instead, for Aristotle, even if one has knowledge that certain sorts of objects ought not to be pursued, strong nonrational desire can prevent one from actually forming the belief that some particular pleasure (or pain) should not be pursued. The result is that synchronic belief-akrasia never occurs.

7.2.3 Aristotle on akrasia

Thus far we have argued that Aristotle is in sharp disagreement with Socrates about the nature of ethical virtue and vice. For Aristotle, virtuous action requires that nonrational desire must already have reached agreement that it is best for reason to determine what actions are to be pursued. For Socrates, no such prior agreement by nonrational desire about how ends are to be set is necessary. This is consistent with Socrates' view that a necessary condition of an agent attaining moral knowledge is that his or her appetites and passions be in a disciplined, harmonious condition.

We now want to argue that Aristotle is actually in fundamental agreement with Socrates that strong nonrational desire affects reason's power to initiate action. Shortly after introducing the topic

of akrasia in Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle cites Socrates' view as one we must take seriously:

> Some say that akrasia is not possible when one has knowledge. For it would be odd, as Socrates thought, when reason is in us for something else to rule it and for it to be dragged about like a slave. Socrates completely resisted this account on the ground that there is no such thing as akrasia. No one acts contrary to the best part while he understands, but instead does so on account of ignorance. (1145b22–27)

Aristotle immediately goes on to take up the view of those who agree with Socrates in one respect and disagree with him in another. Some, Aristotle says, agree with Socrates that no one ever acts against his knowledge of what is best but they disagree with Socrates that no one acts against his belief. Those in this camp think, contrary to Socrates, that akrasia does indeed occur, but only when *belief* is present to be overcome (1145b31–35).

Aristotle quickly makes it clear that those who hold this view have not really shown that akrasia never occurs. We censure people for their akratic acts, but we tend to forgive them when we think they were unconvinced about the matter and have acted on strong passion (1145b36–1146a4). The question Aristotle wants us to confront head on is whether it is possible to have knowledge at some time t that X is the better course and at t fail to do X because we are "overcome" by some *pathos*.

Aristotle then makes a number of preliminary points before starting on his own account of what is actually going on when someone engages in what most people call akrasia. First, Aristotle distinguishes between two senses of "knowing." Sometimes we say that someone knows something in the sense that he is actually attending to what he knows and sometimes we say that someone knows something even though he is, say, asleep or attending to someone else (1146b31–33). Let us call the former "active" knowledge and

the latter "potential" knowledge. Aristotle then draws on his view that rational activity requires a universal premise and a particular premise (1147a24–25). The universal states that all things of a certain sort are to be pursued (or avoided), and the particular states that something that is within our power to obtain (or avoid) is of the sort mentioned in the universal premise. When the premises are combined by the mind, which assumes that we have "active" knowledge of both premises, we immediately act unless something prohibits us (1147a26–28).

Armed with the distinction between types of "knowing," if we can show how someone could "know" but not actually "use" his knowledge of either premise, we can begin to make sense of how one could (in a sense) know at t that X is good for him and yet not do X. To illustrate the point, Aristotle mentions several conditions – sleep, insanity, and drunkenness – that cause someone who knows something, say a mathematical formula, not to be able to think about or to attend to what they know (1147a13–14). Now, people who are experiencing strong passion are in just such a state (1147a15–17). So, when strong passion is present, our powers of cognition in some way fail us in the sense that they are not (or at least not all) actively present for us to call on. If Socrates is correct, what goes wrong is that strong nonrational desire causes reason to make the wrong judgment about whether what it has presented as good really *is* good. Aristotle plainly disagrees with Socrates about how nonrational desire causes error. What is not clear is just how we are to understand Aristotle's view of how error is produced. Does strong passion cause us to move from active to passive knowledge of the universal or the particular premise, or both?

Scholars agree that Aristotle thinks that strong appetite somehow interferes with reason's grasp of the premises. If the grasp of both premises is "active," one necessarily avoids what tempts the akratic,

for, as we would have seen, when the grasp of the relevant premises is active one combines the relevant premises and acts accordingly. To see better how Aristotle conceives of the problem, imagine a person who is severely diabetic and who has just come from the doctor's office, where he has been warned about the serious consequences for his health from acting on his strong desire for sweets. Aristotle thinks our diabetic now has knowledge that can be expressed in a universal premise of some sort that forbids tasting the objects he is attracted to. And when he leaves the doctor's office and reaches into his pocket only to find his favorite candy bar, he has what we might call perceptual knowledge about this particular object that can be expressed as a proposition to be combined as a second premise with the universal. So when his strong appetite for sweet things is inflamed by his awareness that he is holding just such a sweet thing in his hand, which piece of knowledge gets "dragged about"? Is it his knowledge of the universal or the perceptual premise?

Unfortunately, only part of Aristotle's answer is clear:

> Since the last *protasis* is both a belief about a perceptible object and controls our actions, this is what a person has when he is not experiencing a passion or has in the sense of not having knowledge but merely speaks, like a drunken person may quote Empedocles. Because the last term (*horos*) does not seem to be universal and express knowledge like a universal, what Socrates is seeking seems to follow. For it is not when controlling knowledge seems to be present that passions occur, nor is it that [controlling knowledge] that is dragged about on account of passion, but rather perception. Concerning knowing and not knowing and how it is possible for one who knows to be akratic, let this be sufficient. (1147b9–19)[23]

[23] How the term "*protasis*" is to be translated is at the core of a crucial scholarly disagreement about what Aristotle's position is and in what way his position is like and in what way it is different from Socrates'. As we shall see, some scholars take it to mean "premise" and others "proposition." So as not to prejudice the argument by a translation, we leave the term's meaning open for now.

So this much can be agreed upon: Aristotle thinks Socrates was right after all that whenever someone acts contrary to his knowledge of what is best, it is not his reason's grasp of the universal that is "dragged about" and made "inactive." But what could Aristotle mean by saying that it is *perception* and, thus, the akratic's grasp of the "last *protasis*" that strong desire interferes with?

One view scholars have offered in answer to this question is that "*protasis*" refers to the particular premise of the practical syllogism and that it is perceptual knowledge that is "dragged about," that is, that moved from being active to passive knowledge.[24] Most scholars in this camp take the universal premise in the example we are considering to be something like "All sweets are to be avoided." They are driven to this way of understanding the universal because they take the particular premise, the one which is "dragged about," to be "This candy bar is a sweet thing." This interpretation is required, they argue, because they take "dragged about" to mean "dragged *from*" its conjunction with one universal, "All sweet things are to be avoided," and "dragged *to*" another universal, "All sweet things are pleasant." Once conjoined with the second universal, we have our explanation of the akratic agent's eating the candy bar. Seeing, as he does, that this candy is a sweet thing, and since he thinks sweet things are to be enjoyed, the akratic concludes, "This candy bar is pleasant," which, when joined with appetite, now motivates the akratic action.

Although this interpretation has the advantage of explaining in what sense the particular premise is "dragged about" – it is dragged from the syllogism that forbids eating the candy bar to the syllogism

[24] For excellent discussions of different approaches to Aristotle's treatment of akrasia, see Dahl (1984: 162–87) and Bostock (2000: 127–32). Here, we follow Bostock's especially lucid exposition of competing positions and what scholars advance them, though in the end we disagree with the skeptical position Bostock ends up defending (131–2).

that motivated eating it – it has the devastating disadvantage of being unable to explain how the akratic could actively know *and not actively know* the same particular proposition, namely, "This candy bar is sweet." This impossibility has led other Aristotle scholars to look for a different way to understand "last *protasis*." Those who take this line argue that by "last *protasis*" Aristotle means "last proposition," not "last premise." According to this second interpretation, the "last proposition," knowledge of which appetite renders impotent, is the *conclusion* of the first syllogism, which counsels that the candy bar be avoided. What has gone wrong is that strong appetite renders our diabetic unable to *combine* the particular premise "This candy bar is sweet" with the universal "All sweet things are to be avoided," with the result that it is the conclusion – the "last proposition" – "This candy bar is to be avoided," that the diabetic fails to know. According to this interpretation, his appetite prevents his reasoning from the two premises – both of which he actively knows – to a conclusion that would motivate a refusal to eat the candy bar.[25]

The second interpretation is certainly right in claiming that the disputed term can mean "proposition" as well as "premise." But it seems unlikely that this is how Aristotle is using it in this passage. If we return to 1147b13–17, the passage in which the disputed term "last *protasis*" appears, Aristotle is plainly contrasting what the akratic is attending to, the universal premise (*to katholou*), with what is known by perception (1147b15–17). But what is known by perception is clearly the particular premise, not the conclusion, of

[25] Charles, who argues that the akratic's failure is not a failure to grasp one of the premises, nonetheless does not deny that the akratic can actually reach the conclusion that she ought not pursue some object to which she is attracted. Charles denies, however, that, for Aristotle, reaching that conclusion always motivates the agent not to pursue the object. In holding that, for Aristotle, the akratic can actually grasp both premises, Charles' nuanced account is similar to the one we offer below. (See Charles [1984: 109–60]; also Charles [2007: 193–214].)

the syllogism. After all, it would be extremely odd for Aristotle to be asserting a distinction between knowledge of the universal remaining active and knowledge of the conclusion suddenly becoming passive when both premises are active; for when both premises are active, one inevitably draws the conclusion. In other words, if knowledge of both premises is active, knowledge of the conclusion must also be active. On the other hand, if it is perception-knowledge of the particular premise that is "dragged about," we are once again back to the question that plagued the first interpretation: how is it possible for the akratic to know in the active sense and not to know in the passive sense the *same* proposition?

We suggest that both interpretations mischaracterize the universal and the particular premise of the practical syllogism that would have motivated the diabetic not to eat the candy bar. As we have noted, scholars typically take the premises of the syllogism counseling avoidance to be as follows: "All sweet things are to be avoided" and "This candy bar is a sweet thing." But, in fact, nowhere does Aristotle explicitly state what the premises of this syllogism are. All the text actually tells us is that the conclusion of the syllogism, were it accepted by the agent, would yield behavior contrary to what the akratic actually does when he combines both premises of a second syllogism whose premises are: "All sweet things are pleasant" and "This candy bar is a sweet thing." Of course, there are any number of premises that would, if actively known, yield avoidance. But since Aristotle is clearly thinking about behavior that would be in the akratic's best interest, we suggest that what Aristotle has in mind as the syllogism counseling avoidance is something of this sort: the universal premise states, "All unhealthy food is to be avoided," and the particular premise states, "This candy bar is unhealthy food." *As long as* the akratic's "knowledge" of both is active, the akratic refrains from eating the candy bar. Once his appetite is aroused, however, he

ceases to attend to the fact that the candy bar is *unhealthy*. His perceptual knowledge, as Aristotle says, becomes like that of a person who is drunk, and instead he attends to *another* fact about the candy bar, namely, that it is sweet. When the akratic conjoins the proposition expressing that fact with one expressing his belief that all sweet things are pleasant, given his excessive appetite for sweet things, he forms the motivation to eat the candy bar.

According to this third account, it is the akratic's appetite that causes him to cease attending to the fact that the candy bar is unhealthy.[26] This is the piece of perceptual knowledge that becomes passive and is "dragged about." It is crucial to this interpretation that the second premise, "This candy bar is unhealthy," is dragged about, not in the sense that it is dragged from one syllogism to another, as the first interpretation would have it, but that it is "dragged" from being actively known to being passively known. Looked at in this way, we can explain why it is perceptional knowledge that is "dragged about" by appetite without having to explain what proved to be a devastating problem for the first interpretation we considered. If we are right, the particular premise in the two syllogisms, the one urging avoidance of and the other urging consumption of the candy bar, are simply *not* the same proposition.

So Aristotle agrees with Socrates that, whenever someone does what he ought not, there is a sense in which he does not know that what he is doing is wrong. He agrees with Socrates on two further

[26] What we are calling the third account is similar to one discussed by Broadie (1991: 305–6). Broadie, however, finds an account of this sort problematic because it "commits Aristotle to the unrealistic assumption that the feature which makes an object desireable to appetite must *always* differ from the feature in virtue of which it is prohibited by rational choice" (306). We fail to see the implausibility of the assumption, for the feature that attracts appetite will always be pleasure (cognized as good), but the feature that is repelled by choice is never what attracts appetite.

points: whenever someone does what he ought not, it cannot be the case that his knowledge generated by reason and reflected in the universal premise is ever affected by strong appetite. Moreover, at the time the agent does what he should not do, the agent cannot actively believe that he ought not act as he does. In this respect, Socrates and Aristotle agree that there is no such thing as synchronic akrasia and thus, at least in this respect, stand together and against Plato.

According to our account, Aristotle agrees with Socrates that no one acts contrary to an occurrent belief that he is pursuing what he should not. But at this point someone might object that our claim that Aristotle rejects the possibility of synchronic belief-akrasia is simply inconsistent with Aristotle's references to akrasia as a distinct character state. The first thing to notice is that, even though he denies the possibility of synchronic belief-akrasia, Aristotle has reason to distinguish the person he calls "*akratēs*," who suffers from diachronic belief-akrasia, from the person who is thoroughly vicious. In our account, Aristotle's *akratēs* has a right belief with respect to all objects of a certain sort and when the relevant *pathos* is not aroused is able to conjoin that belief with the relevant perceptual belief in such a way as to steer him away from the object. The vicious person has no such right beliefs. Thus, both go wrong, but the motivations behind their errors are quite different. Moreover, even though he rejects the possibility of synchronic belief-akrasia, Aristotle has good reason to distinguish the *akratēs* from the strong-willed person (the *enkratēs*), who is able to syllogize and then act correctly about what is to be pursued and avoided even while attracted to the wrong object. If so, even though he rejects the possibility of synchronic belief-akrasia, Aristotle has excellent reason to pick out the *akratēs* as a unique character type whose failing is that he is unable to maintain a right belief that an object should (or should not) be pursued

once he is afflicted with strong nonrational desire. Accordingly, there is nothing about the rejection of synchronic belief-akrasia that is incompatible with Aristotle's taxonomy of those who fall short of moral virtue.

7.2.4 Concluding remarks

In this section, we have found three important differences between the moral psychology we have attributed to Socrates and the view we find in Aristotle. One of these differences is to be found in how Aristotle understands the ways in which the appetites and passions can be made to modify their targets in virtuous people. The virtuous condition of the soul, according to Aristotle, is one in which the appetites and passions will always modify their choice of targets in accordance with whatever reason determines is best. In Socrates, as we saw, the appetites and passions are not directly receptive in such a way to the all-things-considered judgments of reason. Instead, the *pathē* have their own distinct aims – aims which they will continue to have and to represent as goods to the soul even when these aims are not the same as those judged best by reason. Precisely because the aims of the *pathē* cannot be modified, according to Socrates, it is a necessary condition of virtue that one maintain one's appetites and emotions in a "disciplined" state so that the appearances of good they present to the soul can be overruled by rational deliberation. Even when such a deliberation is complete, however, the virtuous person will continue to be aware that a course of action or aim other than what he has judged best, all things considered, still *appears* attractive. In Socrates', but not in Aristotle's, account of the appetites and emotions of a virtuous person, the agent may continue to feel some attraction to what he has judged not to be in his best interest among his present choices.

A second difference we found between Socrates and Aristotle was in Aristotle's moderation of Socratic intellectualism. For Socrates, the virtues simply *are* knowledge or practical wisdom. As we argued earlier, however, a necessary condition of attaining such knowledge or wisdom is that virtue requires the disciplined condition of appetites and passions. For Aristotle, practical wisdom is a necessary but not sufficient condition of virtue.

The final difference between Socratic and Aristotelian accounts of motivation we found in Aristotle's view of what occurs in the akratic person. In Aristotle's theory, the akratic temporarily loses the ability to make an executive decision by reason, for this capacity has been rendered inactive by the influence of a strong appetite or emotion. The akratic continues to *know* – but now only in the passive sense – that he should not commit the sorts of actions he commits when acting akratically. For Socrates, as we showed earlier in this book, knowledge cannot be pushed aside or made passive in this way: those who know what is good will never fail to act rightly. Every deliberate act, according to Socrates, actually *is* the result of an executive all-things-considered judgment; however, under the influence of strong appetites or passions, we are likely to make such judgments very badly, following only the vivid representations of good presented to us by our *pathē* and failing to consider other options to which our appetites or passions are not attracted.

But even with these differences, it is clear that Aristotle's view of motivation is not as different from that of Socrates as scholars have often supposed. So although we have tried to explain just how different the two philosophers' views are, we are nonetheless inclined to see Aristotle as far more indebted to than at odds with Socrates. Having tried to show how their views are different, we leave it to others to decide which of these views should be regarded as the more plausible.

7.3 SOCRATIC AND STOIC MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

7.3.1. Socrates and the Stoics

No philosophical school dominated the Hellenistic period more than Stoicism, and no philosopher had a greater influence on Stoicism than Socrates. The Stoics took themselves to be the true philosophical heirs of Socrates and sometimes even referred to themselves as Socratics.[27] Epictetus, the early common era Stoic, even goes so far as to say that Socrates should serve as a "model for everything one does" (*Discourses* IV.5.1–2). It is reasonable, however, to ask about the reliability of the sources the Stoics drew upon. On the basis of what did the Stoics think they were articulating the views of Socrates?[28] After all, some Stoics were writing admiringly about Socrates some 600 years after his death. Moreover, as we noted in Chapter 1, there was no shortage of individuals who wrote about "Socrates" in antiquity and it is not always easy to tell from what has come down to us whether these writers took themselves to be developing the views of the historical Socrates or were merely using his name as a mouthpiece for their own views. The problem is compounded by the fact that many biographers in antiquity seem to have been content to write down any and all stories they heard about their subjects, no matter how implausible.

These facts give rise to what is often called the "problem of the historical Socrates," a problem that has divided, and continues to divide, modern Socratic scholarship. Interestingly, there is very little evidence to suggest that the Stoics were even aware of the problem,

[27] See Long (1996: 3).

[28] Although scholars from the Hellenistic age to the present have referred to "the Stoics" and to "Stoic doctrine," there is in fact considerable diversity in what those making up the school actually believed. Nonetheless, there is a set of core beliefs that have come to be considered "mainstream" Stoicism and it is to these that we refer, we hope not too misleadingly, as "Stoic doctrine."

much less bothered by it. They were apparently less interested in the historical Socrates and what he believed than in which of the various doctrines associated with his name they could forge into a coherent ethical outlook.[29] The Socrates the Stoics took themselves to be emulating, in other words, is a kind of amalgam formed of materials from various sources.[30]

But if the Stoics did not think that Plato was the most authoritative source about Socrates the person, they clearly regarded his Socratic dialogues as a wellspring for their own philosophical ideas, especially their views about moral psychology. As we shall see, there are important and obvious points of agreement between the philosophical views apparently endorsed by Plato's Socrates and Stoic doctrines. But there are also less obvious but no less important points of disagreement. Although the influence of Socrates[31] on the Stoics regarding moral psychology is unmistakable, when their doctrines are at odds with those of Socrates it is not always clear whether the Stoics understood that there were real differences or whether they simply misinterpreted what they took to be his views.

We begin with a few points on which Socrates and the Stoics are in agreement.[32] First, they are eudaimonists. They believe that happiness is the only thing pursued for its own sake and never for the sake of anything else, and that contributing to happiness is the only thing that explains the choiceworthiness of anything other than happiness. Second, they agree that the notion of virtuous activity is in

[29] This point is developed persuasively in Long (1996: 3–8).

[30] As Long points out (1996: 7), "Plato, or what we call Plato's Socratic writings, appears to have been widely regarded as neither a more nor less authentic witness to Socrates than Xenophon's writings."

[31] Because we are interested in comparing the views of Plato's Socrates regarding moral psychology with those of the Stoics, from this point we shall simply refer to "Socrates" rather than "Plato's Socrates."

[32] For an interesting discussion that covers considerably more ground than what is attempted here, see Boeri (2004).

some way parasitic upon a condition of the soul they call ethical virtue. Finally, they agree that the excellent condition of the human soul is knowledge.

Underlying these agreements on general points, however, are important differences. For example, although Socrates makes virtue central to his ethical philosophy, his explorations of what virtue is are centered on analyses of virtue-terms and sorting out the relationship between cognitive and conative elements in the virtuous soul. The Stoics, by contrast, connect virtuous activity with much broader metaphysical notions in a way that almost certainly would have mystified Socrates. Consider the following passage from *Diogenes Laertius*, in which he discusses the way Zeno connects virtue with the disposition to "live in accordance with our nature":

> For our natures are parts of nature as a whole. Hence the end becomes the life of following nature, that is, the life of what is in accordance with one's nature is in accordance with the whole of existence, doing nothing which the common law is apt to forbid, coming through all things, which is right reason, and is identical to Zeus, who leads all things. And it is this which is the virtue of the happy person and the good flow of his life, whenever he does all things in accordance with the spirit that is within each person in relation to the wish of the one who administers the universe. (VII.88)

It is hard to imagine Socrates of Plato's early dialogue entertaining such notions. And, even if Xenophon's Socrates believes in providential gods,[33] there is nothing in the Xenophontic corpus to suggest that his Socrates thought that a criterion of right action is always being in accordance with the iron laws of a divine plan that is unfolding over time.

Agreement between Socrates and the Stoics that virtue is a kind of knowledge, specifically the knowledge of good and evil, also masks deeper disagreements. For one thing, as we saw in our discussion of

[33] For example, Xenophon, *Memorabilia* IV.3.12

the *Protagoras*, Socrates understands knowledge as a power of making all and only right judgments of appearances of good and evil. In the *Meno*, we learn that a requirement of knowledge is stability in the sense that someone who possesses knowledge that X is the case cannot be persuaded to change his or her mind and come to believe that X is not the case. For Socrates, then, virtue enables its possessor to make consistently good and stable ethical judgments given the constraints she is under in much the same way that medicine enables a true physician to make consistently good and stable judgments about health. But if such knowledge about ethical matters strikes us as bordering on the fantastical, it is nothing compared with the conception of ethical knowledge the Stoics identify with virtue.

According to the Stoics, in order for an action to count as virtuous it must flow from and only from virtue. But to count as virtuous it is not enough that the action flow from right intention. Even if two persons performed the same action and acted with precisely the same intention, either would fail to perform a virtuous action if either did not possess adequate knowledge of why performing that specific action, to benefit that specific person, at that specific time, and so forth, is good. Moreover, the psychic state from which a virtuous action must proceed must cohere with each of the other virtuous agent's true beliefs, including beliefs about how the activity necessarily fits with the flow of nature itself. To count as knowing that something is good, the virtuous person must be incapable of falling into a contradiction by any argument. It is little wonder that the Stoics refer to their virtuous person as a "Sage."[34] Such a person might as well be Zeus himself, which is in fact just the way Diogenes Laertius characterizes the Stoic Sage in the quotation above. Clearly,

[34] As Tad Brennan points out, "only Sages have such a consistent, virtuous, error-free view of the world that they can never be caught in a contradiction, or even tempted to go back on an earlier position" (2005: 71).

the Stoic notion of the virtuous person's wisdom goes well beyond any notion Socrates entertained of the virtuous person as a kind of ethical craftsman.

But if they differed in their specific conception of the knowledge that constitutes ethical virtue, Socrates and the Stoics agree about the unique constancy of the value of virtue, for both held that virtue alone is the only thing that is always good and vice is the only thing that is always evil. Compare the following passages, the first from Plato's *Euthydemus* and the second from *Diogenes Laertius*, who is commenting on the view of Zeno, the Stoic:

> [Socrates speaking] It seems likely that with regard to the whole group of things we first called goods, the argument is not about how they are in themselves by nature goods, but rather, it seems it is thus: If ignorance leads them they are greater evils than their opposites, insofar as they are more able to serve an evil leader. But if understanding and wisdom lead them, they are greater goods, but in themselves none of these is of any value. (*Euthydemus* 281d2–e1)

> The goods are the virtues – wisdom, justice, courage, temperance, and the rest, and their opposites are evils – ignorance, injustice, and the rest. And what is neither is what neither benefits nor harms, for example, life, health, pleasure, beauty, strength, wealth, good reputation, and noble birth, and their opposites (*Diogenes Laertius* VII.101–2)

The Stoics, for whom the second passage expresses an axiom of ethical philosophy, refer to things such as health, pleasure, beauty, and even life as "indifferents" (*adiaphora*), for in themselves they are neither good nor bad. But they are nonetheless "preferred indifferents."[35] We can invest them with value, as it were, and indeed there are occasions when it is only rational that we do invest them with value. The Stoics' point, however, is not that it is natural to

[35] The preferred indifferents also have their opposites, the "dispreferred indifferents." The Stoics also recognize those things, such as the number of hairs on one's head, which are never a matter of concern. These are the "indifferent indifferents."

prefer health to chronic disease. Rather, they mean that health, for example, comes to have value (*axia*) when but only when it can be instrumental to the living of the virtuous life. Of course, as Socrates well understood, these indifferents, though we have reason to prefer them, can be, and often are, misused by those who lack understanding of *eudaimonia*. Wisdom/virtue, accordingly, is the only thing they are prepared to call "good" because it is the only thing that is always valuable. It is the only thing that can never be misused. By contrast, ignorance is vice because it is the only thing that always runs counter to living in accordance with nature, which in the case of humans is just the exercise of right reason.[36]

So Socrates and the Stoics seem to agree about the value of virtue and the role it plays in transforming items that in themselves have no value into beneficial things. But if Socrates and the Stoics agree that virtue is always to be sought and that it can never fail to be valuable, they differ about its necessity for conferring value upon the preferred indifferents. At the end of his life, so Socrates tells us in the *Apology* (37b2), he believes that he has managed never to do what is unjust. This is remarkable because Socrates also insists that he has never attained knowledge. We can infer from this, then, that at least at the end of his life Socrates thinks that, while right belief lacks the stability of knowledge, it can put things like health and money to ethically appropriate uses. Indeed, in particular cases, it can put such things to the very same uses that the virtuous person would put them, though of course someone who possesses mere right belief would lack understanding of why the use to which these are being put is really good.[37] The Stoics would deny that right belief is ever

[36] For more on this point, see Sellars (2006: 110–14).

[37] We argue that Socrates himself is an example of one who has managed to live a blameless life, even though he lacks the knowledge that is constitutive of virtue. See Brickhouse and Smith (1994: 123–34).

sufficient to use a preferred indifferent virtuously, because, as we have seen, they are wedded to the extraordinary claim that only the Sage, the person who possesses a complete understanding of how action fits into the providential plan of God for the entire universe, can engage in virtuous action.

But there is another point regarding items whose value is conditional on one's ethical orientation where the difference between Socrates and the Stoics is harder to sort out. Obviously, even the possession of ethical virtue cannot immunize one against the loss of a preferred indifferent. Even the best person, the Sage, is subject to reversals of fortune that can take the form of the loss of money, health, fame, and so forth. Even the Sage cannot defend against preferred indifferents being replaced by "dispreferred indifferents," poverty, illness, ill-repute, and so forth. For Socrates and the Stoics alike, the items on the first list are valuable because and only because they enable activities of the right sort and so the loss of these items or even their replacement by their opposites, the "dispreferred," make those same activities impossible. Socrates believes that, although nothing can make a good person do what is unjust while he or she retains her goodness, it is nonetheless true that the replacement of health with chronic and exceedingly painful disease could thwart the performance of the best and most desirable sorts of activities, and, consequently, make death preferable.[38] For Socrates, therefore, virtue is not sufficient for happiness.[39]

We might conclude that Socrates' view on this matter is at odds with the Stoics, for it is often said that they take virtue to be sufficient for happiness. Regardless of what befalls the Sage, her virtue enables her to live a life that is nonetheless in accordance with

[38] See *Crito* 47e3–5 and *Gorgias* 512a2–b2.

[39] See Section 6.3, above, for our arguments concerning this point, which is controversial among scholars.

nature. But consider the following quote from Cicero, quoted by Tad Brennan:[40]

> Since it is by nature that all love themselves, it belongs just as much to the non-Sage as to the Sage to take the things that are in accordance with nature, and reject the things that are contrary to nature.
>
> When one's circumstances contain a preponderance of things in accordance with nature, it is befitting to remain alive; when one possesses or sees in prospect a majority of the contrary things, it is befitting to depart from life … what falls directly under the judgment and selection of the Sage are the primary things in accordance with nature and contrary to nature. (*de Finibus*, 3:60, trans. Brennan)

Here, Cicero is conceding that, when one suffers a "preponderance" of "dispreferred indifferents," one is better off dead. But that, of course, is precisely what Socrates believes.

The Stoics reject the idea that *eudaimonia* can be had in varying degrees. Consequently, they reject the idea that some virtuous actions are more valuable than others. The Sage who saves an entire city through his heroism on the battlefield has not thereby contributed more to his own happiness than someone who displays courage to save a friend from a minor injury. Their view of happiness also leads them to reject the idea that if A, who is a Sage, performs more virtuous actions than B, another Sage who has simply had fewer opportunities to engage in virtuous action, A enjoys more happiness than B. The life of an eighty-year-old Sage, then, is not better than or more choiceworthy than that of a twenty-year-old Sage whose life has been ended by a tragic accident. It follows that, for the Stoics, the loss of an opportunity to engage in virtuous activity is not an evil, and it is on this point that their view does seem to be importantly different from Socrates', who believes that the human good consists in (at least mostly unobstructed) virtuous

[40] Brennan (2005: 218–19).

activity. What would be an evil even to the Sage is to have a mind so clouded with pain that one could not see what virtue demands of one even in one's stricken condition.[41] By cutting short her life no matter what her age to avoid the ravages of disease, the Sage's life must be counted as happy. For Socrates, a long life for a good person is a good thing and it would be a bad thing to have that life end much earlier.[42]

7.3.2 Stoic intellectualism

At this point it should be clear that what Socrates valued and what the Stoics valued, while remarkably similar, were nonetheless importantly different. The same, we believe, can be said of their specific accounts of ethical motivation. To understand the Stoic conception we would do well to start with the distinction between what merely appears to us and what appears to us to be a good or an evil.[43] Appearances of the first sort obviously do not by themselves motivate. On the other hand, we have an appearance of the second sort if we find ourselves attracted or repelled by what appears. Of course, appearance of either sort is insufficient for belief, for we might have some reason to count them as mere appearances. We might say, following the Stoics, that when we do form a belief based on an appearance we "assent to" the appearance and that when we

[41] Hence, Seneca's famous lines: "It is this, that I shall not abandon old age, if old age preserves me intact for myself, and intact as regards the better part of myself; but if old age begins to shatter my mind, and to pull its various faculties to pieces, if it leaves me, not life, but only the breath of life, I shall rush out of a house that is crumbling and tottering" (*Epistle* LVIII, trans. Richard Gummere).

[42] This is why his *daimonion*'s opposition to Socrates' becoming too involved in conventional politics is something Socrates recognizes as a good thing, for it spared him from suffering an early death and thus allowed him to live many more years in the pursuit of his philosophical mission in Athens (see *Apology* 31c8–32a3).

[43] As Tad Brennan points out (see 2003: 260), the Stoics themselves explain motivation by beginning with perception. See *Diogenes Laertius* VII.49.

reject the formation of a belief based on some appearance we fail to assent to it.

Now, the Stoics call an assent to appearance of the second sort a *hormē*, or "impulse." Moreover, it is crucial to the Stoics' understanding of human motivation that all actions are motivated by *hormai* and only by *hormai*, and that all *hormai* are a species of belief or, as the Stoics sometimes say, of judgment. Consider the following passage from Epictetus,[44]

> for all human beings there is one and the same origin [of action]. Just as for assent the origin is the feeling that the thing is the case … so too for impulse toward something the origin is the feeling that it is advantageous (*sumpheron*) to me. It is impossible for me to judge that one thing is advantageous but to desire something else, or to judge that one thing is *kathēkon* but to have an impulse toward something else. (trans. Brennan)

Hence, every action is motivated by some belief, or judgment, that the performance of the action is a good. It is not difficult, accordingly, to see why the Stoics are in agreement with Socrates about the impossibility of what we have been calling synchronic belief-akrasia. Whenever anyone does anything, no matter how destructive to their good, at the time of action they do what they judge to be better than the alternative.[45]

But if the Stoics agree with Socrates that no one acts contrary to an occurrent judgment about what is better, they disagree about whether human motivation can be understood exhaustively in terms of *hormē*, or belief about what is best. To see why, we must first introduce some Stoic terminology. Some *hormai* are passions, *pathē*, which to the Stoics are nothing more than false beliefs that what are really just "preferred indifferents" are actually goods. Someone

[44] This passage is quoted in Brennan (2003: 268).
[45] See Epictetus, *Discourses* I. 28, 5–10.

who acts for the sake of money, believing that the money itself will contribute to their happiness, acts from a *pathos*. Only Sages possess the second sort of motivating beliefs, *eupatheia*, the knowledge that only virtue is good and only vice is evil. Since Sages possess virtue (keeping in mind all that virtue entails), they never possess *pathē*. Finally, both Sages and non-Sages have what the Stoics refer to as "selections" and "deselections" – beliefs about whether "preferred indifferents" (or "dispreferred indifferents") should (or should not) be pursued. Sages, of course, select and deselect as they ought, based on their knowledge of what is truly good and how to put their choices in the service of virtuous activity. Non-Sages select and deselect from a lack of knowledge, thus sometimes making mistakes about what should be valued, how, and when.

In claiming that all actions spring from a kind of belief, the Stoics are not claiming that the source of action is purely cognitive. It is the nature of *hormai* that there be a conative element that is integral to the sort of belief that it is.[46] It is this conative element that directs the agent towards the object of the *hormē*. By making conation integral to every *hormē*, the Stoics can rebut those who say that synchronic akrasia is possible, because it is not possible to be overcome by a desire for what one recognizes at the time of action not to be good.

At this point it might appear that deliberation about competing impulses poses a problem for the Stoic view of motivation. Brennan expresses the concern as follows: because impulses are *per se* practical,

> they do not need any further item in order to produce action. But then it is not clear how the Stoics can make room for evaluative thoughts formulated in the course of deliberation that will be properly tentative and not

[46] For a discussion of this point, see Brennan (2005: 88–9).

lead headlong to action at a premature stage. The problem, then, is how to characterize a thought such as "I should do something about that cut on my foot" in order both to give it both practical content and yet distinguish it from a full-blown impulse.[47]

The problem is to explain how it is that something might appear to be advantageous and yet not motivate.

To this, the Stoics have a ready answer. They need not deny that an agent can deliberate about appearances. But an appearance of something choiceworthy[48] is not the same thing as a belief that it is choiceworthy, for an appearance may fail to rise to the level of a *hormē* if it is juxtaposed in the psyche by a countervailing appearance. This, the Stoics can say, is what is going on when we say, "Such and such appears to be advantageous but we are not sure; we need to think about it." Plainly, if the Stoic account of the Sage, who makes all and only correct ethical judgments, is to be plausible, it must place some space between the appearance that something is advantageous and the knowledge that that thing really is advantageous. Moreover, the account must concede that it is the function of some faculty, call it reason, to deliberate and decide correctly about competing appearances.

So the Stoics can fall back on their distinction between appearances and impulses and maintain that impulses – not appearances – motivate. In order for an appearance to give rise to an impulse, an agent must first have given his assent to it. More troublesome for the Stoics is the familiar phenomenon, which most people call akrasia, where we find ourselves attracted to something after we have formed the judgment that it is not choiceworthy. Here, it is important to notice that we are not talking about deliberation between

[47] Brennan (2003: 280).

[48] By choiceworthy, here, we mean either good, for example virtuous action, or worthy of selection, for example a "preferred indifferent."

two courses of action both of which appear advantageous. Instead, the question is how the Stoics can explain abandoning a *settled* judgment and acting on a contrary impulse, one that is not the product of any further deliberation. Since the Stoics hold that all impulses are beliefs: it is fair to ask, what is it that brings someone to reject a deliberately formed belief in favor of a contrary belief when the impression which formed the basis of that contrary belief had been considered and rejected during the person's previous deliberation? What is it, in other words, that brings the person in the case we are imagining suddenly to believe what he had only moments ago thought not worthy of belief? It is difficult to see how the Stoics can answer this question because, in the case we are now imagining, the belief change is not the product of any new information about what is more beneficial to the agent nor of any further deliberation about what is more beneficial.

The case we are now considering suggests that the Stoics face the same problem that we claim Socrates would face were he actually to hold the sort of intellectualism that is attributed to him in the standard interpretation. According to that view, recall, Socrates holds that we are always motivated by whatever appears to be, all things considered, the most beneficial among salient present options. As we saw in connection with those who attribute the standard form of intellectualism to Socrates, it is not enough to say of the apparent akratic that she lacks knowledge of the better course, because if she did possess knowledge her belief would not shift between competing impressions. The fact that the agent lacks knowledge, of itself, does nothing to answer the question: what *causes* the agent in the case we are now imagining to reverse course?

We argued that Socrates can answer this question because he believes that mere beliefs about what is choiceworthy are not stable and that sufficiently strong nonrational desires can arise in the

psyche, causing someone to abandon a settled judgment about what is the better course, and instead do what only appears to be better. But this way of accounting for abandoning a decision to do one thing in favor of a desire to do the opposite is simply not available to the Stoics. For the Stoics, as we have seen, actions are always motivated by *hormai* and the only thing that would prevent someone who has formed a *hormē* to do X from actually doing X is either a lack of opportunity to act or the introduction of new information between the time the *hormē* to do X is formed and the doing of X. But in the case we are imagining, neither explanation of the failure to X is available. The agent has the opportunity to do X and no new information has been introduced that would bring him to reconsider his decision to X. Yet he comes to believe it is better to do not-X.

There is a final difference between Socrates and the Stoics that is worth considering. Socrates can agree with the Stoics that knowledge is the capacity always to make correct assessments of what is good and evil and of what should be selected and what deselected. But he does not agree with them that someone who possesses knowledge is free from all passion. Socrates can allow that even someone who possesses ethical virtue may sometimes feel anger at some perceived injustice and may for a moment be inclined to think it good to seek revenge against the perpetrator of the injustice. But the passion cannot be so strong that it will motivate, for it is the nature of virtue to assess appearances of what is good in light of the best reasons. Even if the judgment is reached that indeed an injustice has been committed and the perpetrator ought to pay the penalty, Socrates' virtuous person will be motivated by that judgment, together with a rational desire for what is good, and not by the way anger makes seeking vengeance appear good. As we have seen, the Stoics believe that ethical knowledge qualifies its possessor as a Sage and Sages have no false beliefs. Hence, since the passions are just false beliefs,

according to the Stoics, the Stoic Sage carries on his life free of all passion. For this reason, in spite of its obvious and considerable indebtedness to Socratic moral psychology, the Stoics' view of the best life for human beings is importantly un-Socratic.

7.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

7.4.1 Evaluating the Socratic view

In this chapter, we have sought to distinguish the moral psychology of Socrates – that is, the Socrates of Plato's early or "Socratic" dialogues – with the view given in the later works of Plato, in Aristotle, and in Stoic philosophy. We have not made any focused effort to evaluate the Socratic view, relative to those offered by his ancient intellectual heirs, though in the last section we did indicate that we saw one advantage the Socratic view enjoyed over that we found in Stoic philosophy. Even so, it has not been among our primary goals in this book to *defend* the Socratic view against rivals; rather, we have sought simply to articulate what the Socratic position is, and why the relevant texts require our interpretations.

Those wishing to evaluate the Socratic view against its rivals, however, should now be in a reasonably good position to do so. If one believes, for example, that synchronic *knowledge* akrasia is possible, none of the ancient views will seem to get it right. Plato, however, accounts for the possibility of synchronic *belief* akrasia. In deciding whether the Platonic view is more plausible than the Socratic view on this issue, the question is whether one can act in such a way as to violate what continues to be one's salient and active all-things-considered judgment about what is best for one. If this does not seem possible, one could now consider which of the remaining accounts (Socratic, Aristotelian, or Stoic) makes the best sense of the relevant phenomena.

Similarly, in considering motivational psychology one might find it more plausible to suppose that appetites and passions actually count as *judgments* or evaluative *beliefs* (as both Plato and the Stoics have it, though in rather different ways[49]). If so, one will want to reject the Socratic account, according to which the appetites present appearances of value only. Then there is the question of whether it is psychologically more plausible to think that a virtuous person would still feel an attraction to something that, as a result of appropriate deliberation, he had determined would not be good for him. As we have shown, in Socratic (and Platonic) moral psychology, the apparently good item will still appear alluring, though not so much that would in any way interfere with or make it more difficult for the virtuous person to reason about what is best. In the Aristotelian and Stoic accounts, the rejected item will cease to hold any attraction.

In the foregoing sections, we have tried to spell out a number of such differences between the accounts of the various philosophers, so those interested in assessing the plausibility of the different accounts should now be in a good position to do so. We hope, at the very least, however, to have shown how and why the Socratic conception of moral psychology deserves serious attention and should be included among the important options provided to us in ancient Western philosophy. If we have accomplished this much, then we will have added yet another reason to continue Socratic studies as a research program.

[49] As we have seen, Plato allows for the soul to contain contradictory beliefs held by different parts. This is nonsense in the Stoic view.

Appendix: is Plato's *Gorgias* consistent with the other early or Socratic dialogues?

A.1 THE MYTH OF THE AFTERLIFE

A.1.1 Disputes about the place of the Gorgias *within Socratic and Platonic philosophy*

One of the dialogues we identified as included within the "relevant dialogues" group is the *Gorgias*. But, as we indicated in the Preface, one very important passage in the *Gorgias* has been recently challenged as "un-Socratic" on other grounds, and if this challenge cannot be dissolved, then we may not use this passage as evidence for our interpretation of Socratic moral psychology. Contrary to the claims of most other scholars recently, however, we believe the passage is, in fact, entirely consistent with what Socrates says elsewhere on the topic of moral psychology, and we hope our many references to this passage elsewhere in this book make a sufficient case for this claim. But in order to complete our case for using the *Gorgias* as extensively as we do, we must also defend the passage – in which Socrates tells Callicles a myth of the afterlife – as entirely compatible with Socratic philosophy in other ways.

In the *Gorgias*, Polus and then Callicles recommend rhetoric to Socrates on the ground that, without skill in persuasive speech,

Socrates will be at the mercy of anyone who might wish to drag him into court and have him put to death. At the end of the dialogue, however, Socrates turns the tables on Callicles by telling him a "very fine account" (*mala kala logos*, 523a1) of why the worst thing that can happen to one is to arrive in Hades with a soul filled with wrongdoings (522e3–4), which will leave him dizzy and speechless when he is put on trial before the judges in the afterlife (526e4–527a4). Socrates allows that Callicles will probably think it is only a myth (*muthos*), but insists that he himself counts it as an "account" (*logos*, 523a2), which Socrates says he regards as true (523a2, 524a8-b1), and finds persuasive (526d3–4).

As we said, most scholars have argued against including this section of the *Gorgias* in the list of texts appropriate for the study of Socratic philosophy on the ground that the moral psychology assumed in this passage (evident in Socrates' references to the uses of pain and fear in punishments) is incompatible with the intellectualist motivational psychology they find in the other early or Socratic dialogues – and even in Socrates' discussions with Gorgias and Polus earlier in the *Gorgias*. We also discussed this claim in Sections 4.2.3 and 5.2.3, but at least one other allegedly "un-Socratic" element of this myth has also been identified: at the heart of the myth is a conception of the afterlife that, some claim, should not be attributed to Socrates, but which belongs more to the later thought of Plato. If it is true that the myth reflects beliefs inconsistent with those we find given to Socrates in the other dialogues relevant to Socratic studies, then we should not be surprised if other elements of the myth also turn out to be at odds with Socratic philosophy. And, if so, then we must excise this part of Plato's *Gorgias* from the body of texts we use in trying to figure out the details of Socratic philosophy.

A.2 SOCRATES ON DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE

A.2.1 "The most shameful ignorance"

In the *Apology*, Socrates says he regards it as "the most shameful ignorance" to fear death as if they knew it were the greatest of evils, when for all they know it might in fact be the greatest of blessings (29a4–b6). At the end of the *Apology*, Socrates says that death might be one of two things, and makes no claim to find either of the two accounts more plausible than the other. This apparent "agnosticism" about death cannot be squared with the sort of conviction we find in the *Gorgias*, we are told,[1] and so we should not count the myth in the *Gorgias* as reflecting genuinely Socratic views.

We are not persuaded by this position. First, it is worth noting that what Socrates says he regards as the "most shameful ignorance" in the *Apology* is the *fear of death* as if it were the greatest of evils. Plainly, this is not only compatible with what Socrates tells Callicles in the *Gorgias*; in fact, we can see that the "moral of the story," as it were, in both cases, is exactly the same: one should fear vice more than death, since vice – and not death – poses the greatest threat to one's well-being. In the *Apology*, Socrates says that, for all anyone knows, death might even be the greatest of blessings. The same would seem to be true in the *Gorgias* account of those who die with souls unstained by vice.

A.2.2 Does Socrates think that each of the possibilities given in the Apology *is equally probable?*

What about Socrates' final speech in the *Apology*, in which he declares that death might be either total annihilation or a migration

[1] McPherran (1996: 264).

to some other place? Mark McPherran offers five arguments as to why this passage in the *Apology* cannot be squared with what Plato has Socrates say about the afterlife in the *Gorgias* myth. First, McPherran claims,

> Socrates presents his two competing postmortem alternatives in the *Apology* free of any assessment of their relative likelihood, and in context this has the rhetorical effect of suggesting that in his view both are accorded equal probability. After all, were Socrates to have judged the probabilities to be *unequal* … we would expect to hear something about the matter, given that at least most of the jurors he wishes to console would find greater comfort than his actual argument provides were he to reveal that in his judgment (and for whatever reasons he may have) his account of migration is the more likely alternative of the two he presents. (1996: 266–7)

McPherran's argument is based upon two important claims:

(C1) The way in which Socrates identifies the two possibilities in the *Apology* has the "rhetorical effect of suggesting that in his view both are accorded equal probability."

(C2) If Socrates did *not* think the two possibilities were equiprobable he would do a better job of consoling the jurors to whom he is speaking (those who voted in his favor) to tell them of his belief in the migration option.

We do not accept either of these claims. Consider the following case: Mary is planning to work late some night, but confronts her nervous spouse, John, who expresses concern that Mary's staying out so late might not be safe. Mary responds by saying, "Look … don't worry. One of two things can happen: either there won't be any murderers, rapists, or other bad guys lurking about when I leave the office and drive home, or there will be. If there are none, then neither of us has anything to worry about, do we? But if there is one, then you know that my building is extremely well patrolled

(especially at night), and the police also assiduously patrol the streets I use to get home – much more intensely at night than during the day – and so if there is some bad guy who tries to get me, he will be caught in the act and thrown in jail. In a way, that would be an even better result, wouldn't it, since then society would have one less bad guy on the streets to worry about! So, chill out and don't worry. I'll be fine!"

The rhetorical structure of Mary's argument, we contend, though similar in the relevant way to Socrates' final speech to his jurors, should *not* be conceived as having the rhetorical effect of assigning equal probability to the two options she offers. In most cases (assuming that both are rational, and that local conditions are not wildly unusual), it is fair to assume that Mary and John would regard the first alternative as the most likely one. In general, when spouses worry about one another's safety in this way, it is not that they regard their spouse as having a 50–50 chance of being assaulted if they stay out late … but even the smallest chance is ground for worry. Similarly, what Socrates expects his jurors to think is the more likely option (or what they might think *he* thinks is the more likely option) will have everything to do with what the Greeks perceived to be the most common opinion – and nothing to do with the alleged "rhetorical effect" of Socrates' presentation of the two options. It is probably safe to say that the more likely alternative in the minds of Socrates' jurors is the migration option. But whether or not we are right about this, we see no reason to suppose that presenting two options in the way Socrates does provides any significant rhetorical suggestion that the two options are equally probable. In fact, we are inclined to think that a correct rhetorical analysis of Socrates' speech would actually conclude that, if anything, Socrates leaves more of an impression that he favors the migration option over the extinction option. We find it significant that the migration option

gets much more elaboration and detail than the extinction option, thereby putting extra rhetorical weight on it, and also we note that Socrates offers the migration option *after* he reviews the extinction option, "leaving the best wine for last." Of course, neither consideration is decisive, and we are not suggesting that Socrates actually does tip his hand, as it were; we are claiming only that McPherran's analysis of Socrates' argument actually leaves out rhetorically significant aspects that would tend to lead to a different conclusion than what McPherran claims we are forced to by the "rhetorical effect" of the argument.

A.2.3 Consoling the jurors

We also do not accept McPherran's second claim (C2), that Socrates' jurors would be better consoled if he signaled his preference for the migration option. Socrates has, as we noted earlier, already made clear that no one knows what happens after death. But he is aware that people fear death. This is not because they actually know what will happen, but because people *don't* know. To counteract this fear, Socrates creates a constructive dilemma.[2] Either death is extinction or, if it is not extinction, then the soul goes somewhere else. Socrates assumes that his jurors do not *know* which of these two options it will be, and their anxiety on his behalf is based upon fear of the unknown. By forming a constructive dilemma, however, he tries to show them that, according to the best reasoning available to them (that is, thinking of extinction in terms of sleeping, and thinking of the migration of the soul in terms of what they have heard about this in myths), no matter what death turns out to be, there is reason

[2] Our own earlier view of this argument (Brickhouse and Smith 1989: 157–262) was rightly criticized in Rudebusch (1991). In our comments here, we follow Rudebusch's understanding of this passage.

for "good hope" about it. Now, if Socrates were, instead, to lecture them about which of the two options he personally found more probable, he is less likely to reassure his jurors about *their* fears, and more likely to convince them (especially if they are inclined to believe the *other* option) that his own fearlessness is only a product of his own faith in a conception of the afterlife they find themselves unable to share with confidence. The virtue of his argument, as a constructive dilemma that does *not* logically favor either alternative, is that it serves to address the fears of his jurors no matter what conception of death they happen to fear – or favor – the most, without leaving the unfortunate impression that Socrates' own calm attitude is one they can only share if they also share his specific beliefs about the afterlife.

A.2.4 Is Socrates misleading his jurors?

McPherran's second argument immediately follows his first one:

> Also, if Socrates were to leave the impression of equal probability in place while believing the contrary on a matter of such grave moral import, he would be in danger of violating the various legal and moral commitments that oblige him … to tell the truth, to foster care for the soul, and to "hold nothing back" from his jurors. (1996: 267)

We also do not accept this argument. For one thing, as we have already said, even if the logic of Socrates' argument does not favor either alternative, we see no reason for supposing that Socrates has in any way asserted or implied that he finds the two options equally probable. But, secondly, the point of Socrates' argument here and elsewhere is precisely that what might happen to us after death is *not* a "matter of grave moral import"; rather, the only "matter of grave moral import" is how we decide to live our lives; if we do that well,

then *whatever* might happen to us at death will presumably be nothing to fear. Truth is, of course, important to Socrates. But the truth he must tell them is that there is no good reason to fear death – we see no reason for thinking that he must also then go on and confess all of his own personal religious beliefs regarding death, especially if they are not relevant (and likely to be counterproductive, as we argued above) to what he is seeking to do. Even if he is inclined to think that death is migration of the soul to Hades, as he claims in the *Gorgias*, we see absolutely no need for him to tell his jurors this in the *Apology*, and find no fault of openness or honesty in his failure to go into this. "Death is one of two things," and neither is to be feared. That seems enough for what he seeks to do in the *Apology*, and no doubt that sufficiency is why Socrates (and Plato) leave it at that.

A.2.5 Can Socrates believe something without having proved it?

McPherran's third argument goes as follows:

> Finally, if Socrates nonetheless harbored the unexpected judgment that migration is more likely than annihilation in the *Apology*, but is only forthcoming about it in the *Gorgias*, we must suppose that Socrates endorsed a quite startling metaphysical supposition that Plato is willing to portray him as having *declared* but nowhere *proved*. But that scenario is rather at odds with Socrates' well-known dedication to rational justification. (1996: 267)

Our reply to this argument can be brief: we find nothing "startling" here, and nothing "at odds with Socrates' well-known dedication to rational justification." Socrates expresses a number of metaphysical beliefs that he nowhere proves – in the existence of gods, in the divine nature of his own *daimonion*, in the existence of other minds,

and so on. Precisely because Socrates' main philosophical interests are ethical and epistemological, we find nothing at all surprising in the idea that all or nearly all of his many metaphysical beliefs go without proof in Plato's early dialogues. In making this argument, we note, McPherran neglects to mention even one case in which Socrates actually undertakes to offer a proof of some metaphysical belief in Plato's early or Socratic dialogues.

A.2.6 The afterlife in the Gorgias *compared to the afterlife in later dialogues*

McPherran's fourth argument is that the myth of the afterlife in the *Gorgias* has more in common with the great myths of the *Phaedo* and *Republic* than it does with anything we find in the other early or Socratic dialogues (1996: 268). Again, we disagree. If we compare the content of the myth of the afterlife in the *Gorgias* with the migration option in Socrates' last remarks in the *Apology*, we find clear and obvious overlaps. First, there will be judges there (Minos, Rhadamanthus, Aeacus, and Triptolemus in the *Apology*, and the same group minus Triptolemus in the *Gorgias*), and so McPherran's remark that "the *Apology*'s Socrates says nothing about postmortem punishments" (269) is unpersuasive. At any rate, McPherran owes us an explanation of what the judges in the *Apology*'s afterlife account are there to do, especially when they encounter an evil and vicious soul. The issue of punishment does not need to be pursued in the *Apology* precisely because Socrates is talking about what he thinks might happen to *him* and other good people when he or they arrive in Hades. Judgment in the afterlife is also plainly implied in the *Crito*, where Socrates has the personified laws warn that he will receive harsh treatment from the laws in Hades if he seeks to damage the laws of Athens (*Crito* 54c6–8). McPherran dismisses this

obvious parallel as "dubious evidence, since there the personified laws of Athens, not Socrates in his own voice, assume the soul's migration" (1996: 265). Presumably, in the absence of any further argument, McPherran would have to say the same thing about every other claim Socrates gives to the personified laws, including what they say about Socrates' duty to remain in prison. We find this an especially odd position to take, especially when many of the beliefs the laws express in constructing their argument are clearly repeated and endorsed by Socrates in other early dialogues, as the evidence of the *Apology* and *Gorgias* does in this case. Moreover, we find McPherran's view in stark contrast to Socrates' own words – now *not* given to the personified laws – only a few lines later, where he expresses his own agreement with everything the laws had argued with a level of conviction that is actually quite rare in Plato's dialogues (*Crito* 54d2–8).

The myths of the afterlife we find in the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and other later dialogues are more striking in their dissimilarities than in their similarities to the *Gorgias* myth. In the *Gorgias*, there is no trace of a suggestion that the soul might be reincarnated, yet this is the central feature of the afterlife myths in the later dialogues. We agree with McPherran that the later myths show clear traces of "Orphic and Pythagorean sources," but we are unconvinced by McPherran's claim that the *Gorgias* myth, too, reveals a Socrates who thinks that "'death is life and life is death,' [and] that the body is a tomb" (1996: 268).

A.2.7 Back to motivational intellectualism

McPherran's final argument is that the *Gorgias* myth makes reference to a moral psychology that "does not parallel the intellectualist moral psychology of the early dialogues" (1996: 268). In the main

body of this book, we had ample opportunities to compare all that Socrates has to say about moral psychology in the *Gorgias* – both in the closing myth and also before it – with what he says about the topic in the other early or Socratic dialogues. Our conclusion, from that discussion, and now from this one, should be plain: nothing in either the moral psychology of the *Gorgias* myth, or in its eschatology, distinguishes it in doctrine in any way from what can be found in other early dialogues.

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