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Posholi, Lerato

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On the Relationship between Moral Virtue and Philosophy in *Republic*

Introduction

In the *Republic* Socrates says that the practice of philosophy should be limited to people who meet a certain set of requirements. The requirements are listed in book VI of the *Republic* as love of truth, quickness in learning, good memory, open-mindedness, justice and gentleness, temperance and courage (*Republic* 487a). These requirements are not only intellectual but also moral. Those who study philosophy must have courage, justice and moderation. It seems then that Plato is committed to the view that a morally virtuous character is necessary for the successful pursuit of philosophy. I shall call this view the necessity thesis. That Plato is committed to such a view is clear from certain passages in Plato's *Republic* where philosophical knowledge is attributed only to those with good characters. It is also clear from some dramatic representations of interlocutors failing to make progress in philosophical inquiry because of certain character defects.

The necessity thesis draws an interesting connection between moral psychology and epistemology. The assumption is that one's moral psychology contributes to one's epistemic success. The basic claim of the necessity thesis is that our success in philosophical pursuits is partly dependent on the goodness of our moral characters. The idea is that only those with sufficiently good moral characters can make progress towards the goals of philosophy. It is on this basis that Socrates prescribes that only those with good moral characters should be allowed to do philosophy (*Republic* 539d), and thus restricts the practice of philosophy to only those who can succeed in it. Most institutions that offer philosophy today do not place any strict intellectual requirements, much less moral, for participation in philosophy. Thus Socrates prescription would seem strange to most contemporary philosophers.

A significant amount of scholarship has focused on the ways in which philosophical inquiry contributes to the development of virtue and knowledge. But there has not been much focus on the relationship between the philosopher's character and their philosophical pursuits. There has not been much scholarship on understanding how the philosopher's

character shapes his philosophical pursuits. In particular, Plato's necessity thesis has not been discussed sufficiently in current scholarship. However perplexing this claim is, it is one that Plato is clearly committed to. The claim that one has to have a certain kind of good character in order to reach the goals of philosophy is a fascinating claim which I think deserves more scholarly attention than it has received.

Part of what is intriguing about Plato's necessity thesis is its apparent strangeness. . That our philosophical success has anything to do with our moral characters, or require a particular sort of moral character, would appear very strange and incredible to most people. But I want to say that even if we do not agree with Plato about the particular virtues or the kind of moral character that he thinks is necessary for the successful pursuit of philosophy, the close connection he draws between moral character and philosophical inquiry is worthy of investigation, and could potentially illuminate the way in which we think about philosophy and our practice of philosophical inquiry.

My objective in this paper is to understand Plato's necessity thesis and to evaluate its plausibility. I divide the project into two main parts. The first part examines precisely what Plato might have meant by the necessity thesis by looking primarily at the *Republic*. The second part of the project evaluates the plausibility of the thesis and considers whether moral virtue is really necessary for progress in philosophy. These two tasks are carried out in five chapters.

In chapter one I sketch out a general account of what the necessity thesis amounts to. I offer two possible interpretations of the necessity thesis. The first interpretation tries to understand the necessity thesis by appealing to the nature of the process of philosophical inquiry and suggests that moral virtue is necessary because of the difficulty and social nature of philosophy. The second interpretation looks at philosophy as an inquiry concerned with knowledge of particular objects and suggests that moral virtue is necessary to achieve knowledge of these philosophical objects. I suggest that both interpretations are plausible but that the latter interpretation suggests a more intimate relationship between moral philosophy and virtue. I propose that an understanding of this intimate relationship between philosophy and virtue requires a deeper understanding of Plato's conception of

philosophy and of virtue, and take up the task of elucidating these notions in chapters two and three.

In chapter two I show that Platonic philosophy is ultimately concerned with wisdom- knowledge of the good- and is thus ultimately ethical. I suggest that given this conception of philosophy, the necessity thesis should be understood as the view that moral virtue is necessary in order to achieve wisdom, and that the necessity thesis should be understood in relation to ethics. I raise one immediate concern with this formulation of the thesis. The concern is that understood this way, the necessity thesis basically says that we need virtue to become virtuous, which seems circular and nonsensical. I propose to look at Plato's theory of virtue to make sense of what he means by the necessity thesis and do just this in the third chapter.

In chapter three I explain Plato's distinction between perfect and imperfect virtue, and characterize the latter as the love of the good and of reason. In light of this distinction, I formulate the necessity thesis as the view that imperfect virtue is necessary for becoming wise. I then go on to evaluate whether the thesis, understood this way, is plausible.

In chapter four I show how imperfect virtue- a close affinity to the good and to reason- is necessary for knowledge of the good. Here I explain that Plato's necessity thesis is based on what I call the similarity thesis. This thesis says that a certain relationship of *likeness* must hold between knower and the object known for knowledge of the object in question to be achieved. I then show the plausibility of the necessity thesis by showing how the likeness between imperfect virtue and the Good makes possible knowledge of the Good.

In chapter five I raise one possible concern with the necessity thesis. The concern is that the thesis is too specific to the Platonic conception of philosophy and thus may not be relevant or plausible in the modern conception of philosophy. To address this problem, I focus on showing the relevance of the necessity thesis in modern ethics and argue that imperfect virtue is necessary for knowledge in modern ethics.

Finally, I conclude by briefly considering what the implications of the necessity thesis are for current thinking about philosophy. I suggest that even if we are not convinced by what I present as Plato's reasoning behind the thesis, the general connection that the thesis draws

between moral psychology and epistemic progress in philosophy, particularly in ethics, is worth further investigation.

Chapter 1: Moral Virtue and Philosophy

In the introduction I attributed the necessity thesis to Plato without explaining precisely what the thesis amounts to. In my understanding, the general claim of Plato's thesis is that a morally virtuous character is necessary for the making progress in philosophy. The thesis therefore draws an important connection between moral character and philosophy. The basic contention is that our moral characters are partly responsible for the progress we make in philosophy. Plato seems to think that the kind of person one is morally is relevant to whether or not they succeed in philosophy. In particular, his claim is that the goodness of one's character or lack thereof can enable or hinder one's progress in achieving the goals of philosophy.

In this chapter, I want to investigate precisely what the necessity thesis amounts to. I offer two interpretations of what Plato might have meant by the necessity thesis.

1.1 Moral virtue and the activity of philosophical inquiry

A cursory look at the *Republic* shows that Plato thought of philosophy as a long and difficult inquiry that aims at knowledge. For example: at 517b Socrates tells us that the form of the Good- which is the final object of philosophy- is reached with great difficulty. The difficulty of philosophy is also illustrated by the prisoner's struggle to move out of the cave, and how he is pained when he is forced to look at true things (515d-e).

Philosophical inquiry is, for Plato, a cooperative activity for Plato. This is clear from the Socratic practice of philosophy. In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates is presented as engaged in philosophical inquiry with other people. In philosophical inquiry there is an exchange of views between people. Philosophy is had in communion with others or with the self as other.

Philosophical inquiry aims at knowledge. As far as philosophy is an inquiry that aims at knowledge, it is no surprise that Plato lists intellectual virtues such as ease in learning, open-mindedness and good memory as part of the requirements for those who go on to study philosophy. Socrates says that these virtues are necessary to facilitate ease in learning and thinking about the difficult subjects of philosophy. For example: philosophers need good memory in order to retain the knowledge that he gets through inquiry (*Republic* 486c).

Given the nature of the activity of philosophical inquiry- its difficulty and cooperative dimension- one possible interpretation of what the necessity thesis means is that moral virtue is necessary for carrying out philosophical inquiry. In other words, moral virtue enables one to successfully engage in the activity of philosophical inquiry. The claim that intellectual virtues are necessary for philosophical inquiry would be accepted by most people. The more interesting, and perhaps controversial, view is the view that certain moral virtues are necessary as well. This is a view that Plato is clearly committed to.

Plato adds some moral virtues to the list of qualities required for those who are to pursue philosophy (*Republic* 487a). Furthermore, in book VII Socrates says that moral virtue is necessary to prevent the possible harm that could result from ill practices of philosophical inquiry.[1] At *Republic* 538c-539a he describes the harm that can result from philosophical practice if one does not have the right character for philosophical inquiry and because of this potential harm recommends that those who are allowed to engage in philosophical inquiry must satisfy certain moral conditions.

What I want to do in the following paragraphs is to consider how the three moral virtues that Plato lists as necessary for philosophy (courage, justice and temperance) would be useful for persevering through difficult philosophical inquiry and for engaging successfully in this cooperative activity.

It is easiest to see why courage is a virtue needed to endure the difficult study of philosophy. Courage is commonly understood as a quality that enables one to confront

[1] Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, revised C. D. C. Reeve, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis, 1992, Rep 538d-539d. In these passages, the youth is presented as failing to successfully carry out philosophical inquiry because they cannot adequately deal with the questions they are challenged with by the sophists. The point is that a morally good person would be able to identify such questions as not aiming at the truth but rather at convincing them of some opinion.

difficult situations. In the *Laches* (192b-194b) courage is defined as a kind of endurance of the soul. The courageous man remains steadfast and confronts whatever difficult situation or adversity that he is facing. He perseveres through difficult situations. Understood as a kind of endurance, courage is then necessary for one to endure the difficult process of philosophical inquiry. The courageous person will make it through the difficult process because their courage enables them to carry out difficult inquiry and not to give up on the process easily.

The second virtue that Plato lists as required for philosophy is justice. Justice is defined in book I as a kind of fairness, as giving to each his/her due (*Republic* 321e). Part of the difficulty of philosophical inquiry is that one is presented with various competing views on one topic. In philosophical inquiry one has to engage with different views on certain philosophical subject matter. One is often presented with many different and competing positions on a certain issue, and is required to consider these positions and to draw their own conclusions about the issue at hand. In order to successfully engage with competing views in philosophy, one has to engage with each position, giving it due praise and criticism. One has to examine each position on the issue fairly before they can draw their own conclusions. We might therefore say that justice is important for philosophy in so far as the philosopher needs to be fair when examining the different philosophical positions that he is presented with in his inquiry. A kind of fairness is required to form one's own opinions on certain philosophical issues.

Justice is also required for the social dimension of philosophy. One needs to be fair and to listen to other people when they share their views and to judge them fairly. In *Republic* I we see that Thrasymachus fails to do this and as a result fails to make progress in his inquiry. He is impatient when Socrates is speaking and cannot wait for his turn. And when he finally speaks, he guides Socrates and tells him not to give certain accounts of justice (*Republic* 336b-d). Thrasymachus is unable to engage fairly with the accounts of justice Socrates gives.

The process of philosophical inquiry is long and difficult and requires dedication and a commitment to truth. One may be tempted to stop before they reach the truth because they would rather pursue other goods. The virtue of moderation (or self-control) in philosophy is required to focus one's attention on the pursuit of knowledge, and not to be

distracted by certain kinds of pleasures and desires. A self-controlled person regulates his pleasures and desires accordingly so that they do not interfere with his philosophical pursuits. In order for the philosopher to inquire into the truth, his other desires- which may distract his activity of inquiry- must be moderated. A moderate character controls the distractions that may deter our attention from the quest for truth (*Republic* 519a)

This brief consideration shows that the moral virtues are useful for successfully carrying out philosophical inquiry. Hence, one reasonable interpretation of Plato's necessity thesis is that moral virtue is necessary for one to make it through the difficult process of philosophical inquiry. On this interpretation, moral virtue is necessitated by the difficulty and cooperative nature of the process of philosophical inquiry. Philosophy as a process of inquiry requires moral virtue.

Although not implausible, the account that moral virtue is necessary for philosophy because of the difficulty of philosophical inquiry and the cooperative dimension of such inquiry does not distinguish moral virtue as specifically necessary for philosophy but for any difficult inquiry. If it is the difficulty of the process of philosophical inquiry that necessitates a morally virtuous character, then it would seem that moral virtue must be necessary for other difficult and intellectually demanding subjects such as mathematics and physics. In other words, the moral virtues would be necessary for carrying out mathematical and scientific inquiries as well. This is an interesting implication. I do not think that it is unreasonable to suppose that a morally virtuous person would be more successful in subjects such as mathematics and physics because they possess certain moral virtues. But I suspect that this would appear odd to most people. So let us briefly consider how virtues such as courage and justice would be necessary for a mathematician or physicist to successfully carry out their inquiries.

Imagine that a scientist has been working on developing a certain theory his whole life and one day, after many years working on this theory, his tests prove that the theory is false. I suppose that it would take courage for this scientist to continue with his scientific inquiry after such a discouraging event. It would also require a certain commitment to fairness from the scientist for him to accept the results of the tests and to accept that his theory is false.

The point here is that some kind of virtuousness would be required to face and succeed through the challenges that may arise when engaging in inquiry.

On the above interpretation, philosophy, as an activity of inquiry, requires one to be morally virtuous to some extent. We need moral virtue to successfully carry out philosophical inquiry. While plausible, this interpretation does not present a more intimate and specific connection between philosophy and moral virtue because it does not distinguish moral virtue as necessary specifically for philosophy. Rather, moral virtue, on this interpretation, is necessary for successfully carrying out any difficult inquiry. My intuition is that there is a more intimate connection between moral virtue and philosophy than between moral virtue and other disciplines. In other words, I think there is a more specific way in which moral virtue is necessary for philosophy but not for other inquiries. We can find evidence for this more intimate connection between moral virtue and philosophy in the *Republic*. To understand this more specific and intimate connection between philosophy and moral virtue we need to distinguish philosophy from other kinds of inquiries.

1.2 Moral virtue and philosophical knowledge

For Plato, philosophy is distinguished by its objects. In *Republic* philosophy is presented as inquiry into the Good (*Republic* 521c). If philosophy is distinguished from other inquiries by its objects, then a possible interpretation of the necessity thesis is that moral virtue is necessary to understand the subject matter of philosophy. On this interpretation, moral virtue is necessary not because of the *activity* of philosophical inquiry, but more specifically in order to achieve *understanding* of philosophical objects. In other words, one has to be morally virtuous in order to understand the objects of philosophical inquiry. This interpretation of the necessity thesis implies that one needs to be a certain kind of knower to achieve knowledge in philosophy. We can find evidence for this interpretation of the thesis in *Republic*.

At 485b-487a, Socrates lists the moral virtues as among the necessary qualities required for philosophy and says that such virtues are necessary for "a soul that is to have an adequate and complete grasp of that which is." Socrates is clearly suggesting here that moral virtue is necessary for understanding the final object of philosophy: the Good. The Good is that

which is. “Plato links the fulfilment of our desire to know with our nature (*physis*), insisting that there is a kinship between the knower and the object of knowledge. It is only someone naturally inclined toward justice who can come to know and grasp what justice is (Rep 443e–444b).”[2] “A vicious person would never know either himself or a virtuous one, whereas a naturally virtuous person, when educated, will in time acquire knowledge of both virtue and vice. And it is someone like that who becomes wise, in my view, and not the bad person.”[3] Plato is here suggesting that knowledge of certain objects can only be achieved by those who have virtuous characters.

Socrates also says that:

> “those who have no clear model of virtue in their souls cannot look to what is true, make constant reference to it and study it as exactly as possible. They cannot establish here on earth conventions about what is fine or just or good when they need to be established.”[4]

The evidence above shows that part of what Plato meant by the necessity thesis is that moral virtue is necessary for understanding philosophical objects. According to Plato, one needs to be morally virtuous to achieve knowledge of the objects of philosophy.

1.3 Conclusion

What I have done is to briefly outline two possible interpretations of the necessity thesis that can be supported by Plato’s views in the *Republic*. On one interpretation, moral virtue is required for successfully carrying out philosophical inquiry understood as a difficult and cooperative activity. On another interpretation, moral virtue is required in order to understand philosophical content, that is, to achieve philosophical knowledge. Both accounts are interesting and reasonable in their own right and together they give a more complete sense of what Plato might have meant by the necessity thesis. But because of the first interpretation’s shortfall- the fact that it does not distinguish moral virtue as required specifically for philosophy rather than other inquiries- I will mostly concern myself with the

[2] Tschemplik A, *Knowledge and Self-Knowledge in Plato’s Theaetetus*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2008, p. 7
[3] Rep 409d
[4] Rep 484c-d

second interpretation from now going forward. My goal in the following chapters is to understand this interpretation of the necessity thesis more precisely before I evaluate its plausibility.

Chapter 2: The Nature of Philosophy

The necessity thesis, as I now understand it, states that moral virtue is necessary for understanding the subject matter of philosophy. This implies that one needs to be a morally virtuous knower to achieve knowledge of the objects of philosophy. This formulation of the necessity thesis captures the unique relationship between moral virtue and philosophy. It suggests that there is something in particular about the objects of philosophy that requires one to be morally virtuous in order to know them. In order to evaluate this thesis, we need to understand more precisely what philosophy's objects and goals are. This is the task I take up in this chapter. My aim is to understand Plato's conception of philosophy in *Republic*.

2.1 The ancient conception of philosophy

Plato's conception of philosophy falls within the broader tradition of ancient philosophy. Hence a useful way for understanding his conception of philosophy is to start by understanding the general ancient conception of philosophy.

The ancient philosophers conceived of philosophy as "a specific discourse linked to a way of life and a way of life linked to a specific discourse".[5] According to this conception of philosophy, "philosophy is above all a way of life, but one that is intimately linked to a philosophical discourse."[6] The theoretical discourses that have come to constitute philosophy today were viewed by the ancient philosophers as means to the more general goal of transforming the self for wisdom. Philosophical discourse did not aim at a purely abstract knowledge but was a means to self-transformation for virtue.[7] Hence for the ancient philosophers, philosophy was not merely theoretical, it was ultimately practical. It was "a practice intended to carry out a radical change in our being."[8]

[5] Hadot P, *What is Ancient Philosophy*, Michael Chase (trans), Harvard University Press, USA, 2004 p. 23

[6] Hadot P, op. cit., p. 4

[7] Futter D, 'Introduction', *Philosophical Papers*, 43 (1), 2014, p. 1

[8] Hadot P, op. cit., p. 176

This conception of philosophy as a way of life is fairly rare today. Only a few traditions or philosophers maintain this conception of philosophy. Examples of such traditions and/or philosophers include the existentialist tradition some of whose members include Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Nietzsche and Marcel.

In the ancient conception, philosophy was viewed as a spiritual exercise and as work on the soul.[9] "The discourses of the philosopher were empty if they did not contribute to curing the diseases of the soul."[10] "Philosophy was studied by ancient philosophers and their students as the best way to become good and to live good human lives."[11] The ancient philosophers *used* philosophical theories in order to strive for virtue. Engagement with philosophical theories through dialogue with others was a spiritual exercise intended to transform the subject who practiced it.[12] Philosophical theories were developed in order to transform the philosopher's character for wisdom rather than to exist independently as systems of theoretical knowledge. All theoretical thinking in the different fields of philosophy was in service of the general goal of achieving wisdom. That all thinking in philosophy ultimately served to inform and guide the practice of a certain way of life is intriguing. It is not so obvious to see how one's theory of causation and similar topics could directly inform or guide one's practice. But this is an idea that the ancients were committed to.

The ancient philosophers make a useful distinction between discourses of philosophy and philosophy itself. Philosophy as a way of life is an existential option, a mode of being and living that flows from one's philosophical theories. Philosophical discourse is part of the philosophical way of life.

The relationship between discourse and the way of life of the philosopher is harmonising- philosophical discourses shape the way of life adopted by the philosopher, and the way of life in turn shapes the philosopher's discourses. The way of life that the philosopher adopts is informed by his discourses and his discourses shape his way of life. Nehamas expresses this point succinctly in the following quote. He says:

> Those who practice philosophy as the art of living construct their personalities through the investigation, the criticism, and the production of philosophical views—views, that is, that belong to the repertoire of philosophy as we have come to understand it… More important, the philosophers of the art of living make the articulation of a mode of life their central topic: it is by reflecting on the problems of

[9] Hutter H, 'Philosophy as Self-transformation', *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques*, 16(2), 1989,p.176
[10] Epicurus
[11] Cooper J, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*. Princeton: University Press., 2012, p. 2
[12] Hadot P, op. cit., p. 6

> constructing a philosophical life that they construct the life their work constitutes. The body of work that reflects on the philosophical life is the very content of the life it composes.[13]

"The ancients assume a seamless connection between philosophical views and the way of life- exemplified by one's actions- of the holders of those views."[14] The idea here is that it is by reflection on philosophical discourses that philosophers construct a philosophical life. In other words the philosopher's way of life is informed and shaped by his thinking on the subjects of philosophy: ethics, logic and science. According to the ancient conception of philosophy, "all thinking in the fields of philosophy was integrated and presented as a single body of knowledge to serve as a means to living the best life."[15]

It is important to notice that for the ancient philosophers "philosophy is discourse and a way of life which tends towards wisdom without ever achieving it."[16] Philosophical discourse was never perfect. The various philosophical theories of knowledge, virtue, justice etc. were never completely satisfactory.

In the ancient conception of philosophy the wise person is unreachable, but the lover of wisdom is considered entirely attainable.[17] The philosopher never comes to possess wisdom.[18] Wisdom is 'not a possession but a process'.[19] "To be good *for a human being* is to inquire into the good constantly and in dialogue with others."[20] It is in the continued inquiry into virtue that we make progress towards wisdom although we never achieve it.

What is clear is that for the ancient philosophers, philosophy was ultimately aimed at achieving the highest virtue: wisdom. The philosophical discourse that has come to constitute philosophy today was a means of achieving this goal of wisdom. This idea that philosophy ultimately aims at wisdom is most clear in Plato. What I want to do next is to discuss Plato's conception of philosophy as a version of the ancient conception of

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[13] Nehamas A, *The Art of Living: Socratic reflections from Plato to Foucault,* University of California Press, 1998, p. 6
[14] Cooper J, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*, op. cit., p. 15
[15] Cooper J, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*, op. cit., p. 7
[16] Hadot P, op. cit., p. 4
[17] Hadot P, op. cit., p. 46
[18] Hadot P, op. cit., p. 46
[19] Gonzalez F, op. cit., p. 34
[20] Gonzalez F, op. cit., p. 34

philosophy. A closer look at Plato's specific conception of philosophy will be useful for achieving a more exact understanding of what he meant by the necessity thesis.

2.2 Philosophy as the ascent to the Good

Earlier on I suggested that a cursory look at Plato suggests that philosophy, according to Plato, is an activity of inquiry that aims at knowledge of certain objects. In this section I look at Plato's conception of philosophy more precisely.

In the *Republic* philosophy is described as an inquiry that aims at knowledge of the Good. Philosophical inquiry is hence described as the "ascent to the form of the good" (*Republic* 521c). The Good is the final object of philosophical inquiry. In *Republic* VI Socrates describes an image of what the Good is (*Republic* 506e).[21] He describes the Good in terms of its function in the intelligible realm and says that the Good is the cause of knowledge and truth, and of goodness and being. He says that although the Good is the cause of these things, it is itself none of these things. It transcends these things in beauty and truth (*Republic* 508c-509b). Plato describes how philosophical inquiry facilitates the ascent to the Good through the powerful allegory of the cave.

In the cave analogy, Plato presents philosophical inquiry as an activity that facilitates the turning of the soul away from the darkness of the cave towards the light of the sun, away from that which is coming to be towards that which is.[22] The point here is that philosophical inquiry directs the soul to study what *is*. Plato insists that no knowledge can be achieved until the soul as a whole is turned towards what *is* (*Republic* 518c). Knowledge, according to Plato, is necessarily of what *is* (*Republic* 477a).

The philosopher is described in the *Republic* as a lover of wisdom. He is distinguished by his desire and pursuit of wisdom (*Republic* 475b). As a lover of wisdom, his activities aim at wisdom. Wisdom is defined in *Republic* as knowledge of the good of the whole (*Republic* 442c). Thus the kind of knowledge that the philosopher aims at is knowledge of the whole,

[21] Socrates says that he's afraid he will not be able to give an account what the good is precisely and that he will look ridiculous trying. He acknowledges his lack of knowledge of the good instead of claiming to know.
[22] Rep 518c

that is, wisdom. The philosopher does not seek knowledge of good things, but the good itself. He is not satisfied until he grasps virtue. Socrates says that the true philosopher:

> …neither loses nor lessens his erotic love until he grasps the being of each nature itself with the part of his soul that is fitted to grasp it, because of its kinship with it, and that, once getting near what really is and having intercourse with it and having begotten understanding and truth, he knows and truly lives…[23]

The philosopher by consorting with the form of the good- the source of truth and goodness- himself becomes as good and wise as humanly possible (*Republic* 500d). The transformative power of philosophical inquiry has something to do with the activity that we are engaged in in this inquiry and the nature of the objects that we are studying. We become wise through inquiry into the good.

Plato's conception of philosophy is ultimately ethical. The final object of philosophical inquiry is the Good. This means that philosophy ultimately aims at knowledge of virtue. The philosopher's inquiries are for the sake of wisdom. Plato did not view philosophy as ultimately concerned with producing abstract theoretical knowledge but rather as concerned with transforming the individual for wisdom. Now that we have expounded Plato's conception of philosophy we can understand the necessity thesis to be saying that moral virtue is necessary for becoming wise. This means that knowledge of the Good can only be obtained by those with good characters. Understood this way, the necessity thesis is restricted to ethics.

[23] Republic 490b

Chapter 3: The Nature of Moral Virtue

In light of the Platonic conception of philosophy, we should now understand the necessity thesis as the view that moral virtue is necessary for wisdom. In other words, one needs to be morally virtuous to become wise. But this seems absurd. How can one be virtuous if one does not have knowledge of virtue? How do we make sense of this? We need to understand Plato's theory of virtue and understand what he meant by the necessity thesis. This is my task in this chapter.

3.1 Virtue as harmony in *Republic*

Generally when we think of virtue we think of certain traits or good qualities that people have such as kindness, compassion, honesty and so on. The prime examples of moral virtues according to the ancient philosophers are courage, temperance, justice and wisdom. Although they considered such qualities as honesty, compassion and friendliness as noble and part of living well, the ancient philosophers commonly classified the four listed virtues as the primary moral virtues. In his discussion of virtue in the *Republic* Plato focuses on these four virtues. What I want to do in the next paragraphs is to elucidate Plato's understanding of virtue in the *Republic*.

In *Republic* Plato argues that the soul has three parts, each corresponding to the three types of desire: rational, spirited and appetitive (*Republic* 439d-e). The soul is basically divided into two main parts: the rational part and the irrational parts. The irrational part of the soul consists of the spirited and appetitive elements, and the rational part consists of reason. In light of this tri-partite theory of the soul, Plato describes virtue as a complex relationship of harmony between the different parts of the soul. "True virtue is a kind of health, fine condition, and well-being of the soul (*Republic* 444e)." This fine condition of the soul consists in a 'natural relation of control' between the parts of the soul (*Republic* 444d).In a virtuous soul "reason provides the knowledge of the right ends to pursue and the means to achieve them, and desire is habituated to want the things that reason determines as

right."[24] Reason governs with knowledge and determines what is best to do, and spirit follows and carries out the declarations of reason.

What is important in this theory of virtue is that the soul of a virtuous person is governed by knowledge provided by reason. For Plato, no one is truly virtuous unless they have knowledge. A virtuous soul must be governed by knowledge of the Good. In other words, this knowledge must be the organizing principle for the soul. All action and thought must be motivated by knowledge of the Good.

3.2 Perfect and imperfect virtue in *Republic*

In book IV of the *Republic*, Plato introduces a different kind of virtue which he calls civic virtue. After defining courage as "the power to preserve through everything the correct and law-inculcated belief about what is to be feared and what isn't", Socrates says that this definition should be properly thought of as a definition of civic courage rather than courage proper.[25] This kind of virtue, I suppose, is to be contrasted with the kind of virtue that we have described above as knowledge governed virtue. We may understand the distinction between the two types of virtue as that between civic and philosophic virtue. Kamtekar refers to the two types of virtue as imperfect and perfect respectively. Broadie dubs them mere virtue and refined virtue respectively. And Gill distinguishes them as pre- and post-reflective virtue. What really is the difference between these two types of virtue?

According to Lutz the key difference is that "those with civic courage stand by correct opinions that they have absorbed from laws, while those with the nobler courage stand by what is proclaimed by reason."[26] In both cases courage is a kind of preservation. The difference is in the motivation one has for this preservation. Those with civic virtue preserve the beliefs that were inculcated by the law while those with true courage preserve the declarations of reason. The civically courageous preserve what they were taught through their education and the philosophically virtuous preserve what they belief through reason.

[24] Cooper J, Plato's Theory of Human Motivation, *History of Philosophy Quartely*, 1 (1), 1984, p. 3-4
[25] Republic 430c
[26] Lutz M, 'Civic virtue and Socratic virtue', *Polity*, 29 (4), 1997, p. 568

Kamtekar also emphasizes that the difference in these two kinds of virtue is in their motivations. She says that "the motivation philosophers have for being virtuous is their knowledge of how virtue is good. Their virtue is informed by their knowledge rather than the laws of the city."[27] Perfect virtue is guided by knowledge whereas imperfect virtue is informed by the laws of the city which are inculcated through education. Perfect virtue is thus restricted to philosophers, because they alone can have knowledge.[28]

For Broadie, the difference is in terms of the view of the value of virtue. Merely virtuous people value virtue as a means to some other desired end such as wealth or honour. Persons of refined virtue value virtue for its sake. They view virtue as fine and good in and of itself.[29] It is reasonable to suppose that lacking the knowledge of what virtue is and why it is good, the imperfectly virtuous will value virtue for all the goods that it brings and fail to see it as intrinsically valuable. This is not necessarily a bad thing. After all, virtue does bring all of the other goods. The important point here is that the imperfectly virtuous value virtue *only* for the goods that it brings and this is because he lacks the knowledge to understand the intrinsic value of virtue. In this sense, his virtue is deficient because he lacks knowledge.

The difference between the two types of virtue can be characterized in terms of knowledge and the lack thereof. An imperfectly virtuous person has the right dispositions but has no independent knowledge of what virtue is and why it is good. In contrast, the philosopher's virtue is a function of their knowledge and understanding. They know what is truly good and why virtue is valuable. Imperfect virtue consists in a set of dispositions to have appropriate responses in particular situations. The imperfectly virtuous has a kind of pre-reflective decency that is developed through habituation in good things that allows him to choose good actions.

The deficiency of imperfect virtue lies in the lack of knowledge. The lack of knowledge prevents one from becoming truly virtuous. Virtue is perfected in knowledge. Aristotle expresses this point beautifully when he says that "without wisdom, virtue is like a body

[27] Kamketar R, 'Imperfect Virtue', *Ancient Philosophy*, 18 (2), 1998, p. 315
[28] Kamtekar R, op. cit., p. 320 In her paper "Imperfect virtue" Kamtekar tries to show how one might value virtue for its own sake without knowledge of what virtue is exactly.
[29] Broadie S, 'Virtue and beyond in Plato and Aristotle', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 43, 2005, p. 98

that moves about without sight, and so is prone to stumble."[30] But what is this knowledge, the possession of which completes one's virtue?

In order to find the kind of knowledge that completes one's virtue we must look at the knowledge possessed by philosophers. The kind of knowledge possessed by the philosopher is described in many parts of the *Republic* as wisdom- the ability to judge well about things that are good and beneficial for the whole.[31] Wisdom is defined as knowledge of the Good. The philosopher's knowledge is described as superior because it has as its object of contemplation the form of the Good itself- the whole of goodness- rather than the many good things. For Plato, no one is virtuous, strictly speaking, who does not have knowledge of the good. One cannot be truly virtuous unless they know what virtue is. The true beliefs that are inculcated through the education program in the *Republic* about what is good are not sufficient to make one truly virtuous.[32] True virtue results from philosophical reflection on the nature and value of the good. Hence perfect virtue is restricted to the philosophers for they alone can possess this kind of knowledge through contemplating the Good.

To summarize, perfect virtue is a psychological condition in which "reason, with its knowledge, determines what is best for the person; spirit identifies with reason's directives, regarding them as objects to strive for and making the person dissatisfied with himself if through his own fault they are not attained; and appetite restrained and moderated by reason and spirit, finds pleasure in the objects that reason determine as good."[33] A truly virtuous person is governed by reason with its knowledge about what is good for the whole soul.

Imperfect virtue, on the other hand, is a kind of pre-philosophical moral decency that is formed through habituation. This kind of virtue gives us stable dispositions to respond appropriately in different situations.[34] It makes us apt to choose, think and behave in certain ways.[35] This kind of virtue is without knowledge, and hence it is a disposition of our

[30] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Joe Sachs (trans), Focus Publishing, Newburyport, MA, 2002, NE 1144b
[31] Rep 428b-e, 441e, 442c
[32] Cooper J, 'The Psychology of Justice in Plato', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (2), 1977, p. 152
[33] Cooper J, 'The Psychology of Justice in Plato', op. cit., p. 151
[34] NE 1106a
[35] NE 1107a

irrational parts: spirit and appetite. What I want to do is to elaborate on this idea of imperfect virtue by looking at how Plato characterizes this kind of virtue in the *Republic.*

3.3 Imperfect virtue as love of the good and of reason

Plato's characterization of imperfect virtue can be found in his discussions of the prospective philosophers' characters. The moral character of these prospective philosophers is described in the discussion of their education and summed up in Socrates' discussion of the character of the products of the moral education prescribed in the *Republic*. Socrates sums up the virtues of the products of the early education program at 401d-402a. He says:

> …education in music and poetry is most important first because rhythm and harmony permeate their inner part of the soul more than anything else, affecting it most strongly and bringing it grace so that if someone is properly educated in music and poetry, it makes him graceful, but if not, then the opposite. Secondly because anyone who receives this education will sense it acutely when something has been omitted and when it has not been finely crafted or finely made by nature. And since he has the right distastes, he'll praise fine things, be pleased by them, receive them into his soul, and being nurtured by them, become fine and good. He'll rightly object to what is shameful, hating it whilst still young and unable to grasp the reason, but, having been educated in this way, he will welcome the reason when it comes and recognise it easily because of its kinship with himself.

Here we see that the virtue possessed by the products of the elementary education consists in their love for the good and love of reason. At 403c Socrates tells us that the moral education ends in "the love of the fine and beautiful". The products of Plato's moral education are described as having the right tastes and distastes (loving good and despising evil) and loving reason. "The decent person, insofar as he is decent, delights in virtuous actions and is pained by bad ones just as a musical person delights in fine and beautiful songs and is pained by worthless ones."[36]

[36] NE 1170a

At this stage though, the philosopher is "not yet able to grasp the reason" and he does not yet possess knowledge of why the things that are good are good. His virtue at this point consists in the right dispositions of the spirited and appetitive parts. These parts of his soul are developed to have a "close kinship" with reason and to "welcome reason" when it comes. Imperfect virtue is thus a disposition of one's spirit and appetite. These elements are shaped to recognize good and to be attracted to it. The desires of the soul are trained to be subordinate to the governance of reason.

That imperfect virtue is a disposition of the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul can be inferred from the fact that Plato's early education program aims to train these two parts of the soul. There is some debate about which parts of the soul the education program aims at developing which I will not go into. But at 411e of *Republic* Socrates suggests that it is the "spirited and wisdom-loving parts" of the soul that are trained to be in harmony with each other through the elementary program. Notice that it is the wisdom-loving parts of the soul and not the rational part that is trained through the moral education. At the stage of elementary education, the youth are said not to have developed their reasoning capacity yet.[37] This is why they do not have knowledge. One interesting thing to note is that nothing is explicitly said about training of the appetitive parts. It seems that this part of the soul must be dominated and controlled by spirit and reason.[38] The education in fine things serves to suppress or moderate the desires of this appetitive part of the soul. Socrates says that "fine things are those that subordinate the beast-like parts of our nature to the human."[39]

Socrates' description of the character of the prospective philosophers suggests that the moral education program culminates in the love of the fine and reason. The prospective philosophers' imperfect virtue consists in their love of good and love of reason. The moral education in the *Republic* seems to focus on getting the prospective philosophers to realise the beauty or fineness of virtue, and to be attracted to all things fine by exposing them to images of the good. It instils in them true beliefs about what is good.

Imperfect virtue involves the ability to distinguish fine things and the disposition to delight in them. "This ability to pick out representations of fine virtue and to distinguish them from

[37] Republic 402a
[38] Republic 442a
[39] Republic 589c-d

vice does not amount to understanding why these judgments are true. However, to the person who is recognizing courage when he sees it, the rational account of courage, when it comes, will have 'the ring of truth' since it harmonizes with his sense of the way things seem to be."[40] The imperfectly virtuous person pursues only those things that *appear* good. They do not really know that these things are good. Knowledge of good is obtained by those who are perfectly virtuous. But since the imperfectly virtuous have been educated in images of the true good, they have an acute sense of what is good. In other words, they have true beliefs about what is good even though they do not truly know what it is.

3.4 Conclusion

In *Republic* Plato neither simply praises nor condemns imperfect virtue. He makes clear the deficiencies of this type of virtue but also represents it as central to the full development of the virtuous philosopher.[41] A proper sense of the fine and desire for the fine is prerequisite for developing the philosopher's virtue.[42] The philosopher's imperfect virtue consists in his affinity to the good and his true beliefs about what the good is.

Now that we have expounded Plato's conception of philosophy and of virtue, we are in a position to state more precisely what Plato's necessity thesis amounts to. As I now understand it, the necessity thesis is restricted to ethics. The claim is that one needs to be of a certain kind of character to have knowledge of ethical objects. Specifically, Plato's view is that imperfect virtue- the disposition to good- is necessary to obtain an accurate understanding of the Good. Knowledge of the Good is possible only for those who are to some extent good.

Plato's necessity thesis, as we understand it now, states that imperfect virtue- a disposition towards the good- is necessary to achieve knowledge of the Good. This means that one has to be good to some extent to become wise. Now that we have this understanding of the necessity thesis, we can evaluate its plausibility.

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[40] Lear G, 'Plato on Learning to Love Beauty', in Gerasimos Santas (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic*, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 106
[41] Lutz M, op. cit., p. 592
[42] Lear G, 'Plato on Learning to Love Beauty', op. cit., p. 105

Chapter 4: Imperfect Virtue and Knowledge of the Good

In this chapter I want to consider Plato's justification for the necessity thesis and to examine the plausibility of the thesis.

4.1 Plato's justification for the necessity thesis: the similarity principle

The underlying principle for Plato's view that imperfect virtue is necessary to reach an accurate understanding of the Good is what I will call the similarity principle. The similarity principle states that knowledge of certain objects can be achieved only when the knower is somehow akin to those objects. The basic claim of the principle is that 'like-knows-like'. In other words, a certain relationship of likeness or similarity must hold between the knower and the object of knowledge if knowledge of the object is to be achieved. For example: one must be good to some extent to know the good. "We can grasp the reality we wish to know only by becoming spiritually similar to it."[43] One is better able to understand the things that they are somehow akin to.

The similarity principle seems generally plausible. We would accept that one has to be musical to produce good music and also accept that one has to be mathematical to understand mathematics. There is also a sense in which one has to be faithful to understand faith. In these examples, it seems that a relationship of similarity must hold between the knower and the object known in order for knowledge to be achieved. The knower must be similar to the objects that he wishes to know. Let us look at how this principle is supposed to work in the case of the necessity thesis

The necessity thesis says that we need imperfect virtue to know the Good. In simpler terms, the claim is that one must be partially good in order to know the Good. Why do we need to be good to have knowledge of the Good? Basically, Plato seems to think that the likeness of imperfect virtue to the Good makes it possible for us to know the Good. In other words, some partial goodness on the part of the knower enables knowledge of the Good. But how does partial goodness- a likeness to the good- enable us to know the Good? We saw in the

[43] Hadot P, op. cit., p. 163

previous chapter that Plato describes imperfect virtue as the love of reason and of the good. What we must ask then is: how does the love of the good and of reason help one achieve knowledge of the Good?

4.1.1 Loving the good and seeing the Good

In order to know the Good, we must direct our learning efforts towards it and study it carefully. The pursuit of knowledge of the Good becomes a vocation only once it is recognised as valuable just in the same way as, say, "medicine becomes a vocation only when the value of health is recognised and used as an organising principle."[44] The love of the good- which is characteristic of imperfect virtue- sets knowledge of the Good as the ideal towards which to strive. Someone who is attracted to the good will fix their attention towards the good. For the lover of good, the good becomes the ideal towards which all their activities aim.

Plato takes it for granted that our activities always aim at the good. In *Republic* Socrates says that:

> "every soul pursues the good and does whatever it does for its sake. It divines that the good is something but is perplexed and cannot adequately grasp what it is or acquire the sort of stable beliefs it has about other things, and so it misses the benefit, if any, that even those other things may give."[45]

Although we always try to pursue what is good, we do not always know what it is. We are not always able to correctly identify it. This failure to correctly identify the Good is, according to the necessity thesis, attributed to one's character. "A person whose moral viewpoint is distorted has desires and emotional responses, which constitute his evaluative perspective, that do not correlate correctly with the descriptive contents of acts and objects that are really admirable or desirable."[46] In other words a person whose moral character is deficient does not have true beliefs about what is good and so his actions are not good. But

[44] Futter D, 'Socrates' Human Wisdom', *Dialogue*, 52, 2013, p. 73
[45] Rep 505 d-e
[46] Futter D, 'The Concept of Persuasion in Plato's Early and Middle Dialogues', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 28 (2), 2009, p. 107

someone who is in some sense good is able to correctly identify the good as such because of their acquaintance with it.

A disposition towards the good is thus necessary for one to correctly identify what the good is. A lover of the good is in some sense good because they have true beliefs about what is good, and these true beliefs constitute their evaluative perspective. These beliefs direct him towards the true good. Because of his dispositions to the good, and his true beliefs about it, he looks for the Good in the 'right places'. If I am inclined towards the good, then my 'vision' is directed towards good things. I am thus able to identify the Good because the Good is to be found amongst good things, since the Good is the organising principle of all good things (*Republic* 509c). It is the goodness of good things.

In contrast to the lover of good, a vicious person's perspective and vision is oriented towards bad things. Thus he looks for the good in the pleasures of the world or in some other place where he will not find it. Because his vision is directed towards evil, he is unable to see the good. Socrates is careful to emphasize that the vicious person is equally keen sighted and so his failure to see the Good is not due to a lack of keen sight. He has the ability to see things clearly (*Republic* 519a). His inability to see the Good is rather because of where his vision is directed. His vision is directed towards - the earthly pleasures. If he can be freed from these pleasures, he would see the good most clearly (*Republic* 519b).

We can see that the love of the good focuses one's attention to the true nature of the good. This love of the good, as is clear from Plato's discussion of the elementary education, is developed by shaping one's desires towards the good. An imperfectly virtuous person has a certain familiarity with the true good which allows them to correctly identify it wherever it appears. Their true beliefs about the Good sets them on the right path to true knowledge of the good. In the *Meno* Socrates tells us that it is not possible to inquire into something that we are not familiar with, for then we will not be able to identify it even if we find it.[47] So the pre-philosophical (true) beliefs we form about the good through habituation are necessary to launch us into inquiry about virtue and to help us identify it as such when we see it.[48] These opinions shape our character to be good, and this kinship with goodness enables us

[47] Wiitala M, 'Desire and the Good in Plotinus', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 21 (4), 2013, p. 654
[48] See Burnyeat M.F., 'Aristotle on Learning to be Good', in Rorty A (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, University of California Press, 1980, p. 71, NE 1095b

to identify true accounts of justice, courage etc. To the person who has true beliefs about justice, the correct account of justice, when it comes, will harmonise with what he knows and have a 'ring of truth' to it.[49]

4.1.2 Love of reason and knowing the Good

To know the Good is to have an accurate understanding of what it is. In order to come to an accurate understanding of it, we must investigate it by means of reason. But as we saw with the example of a vicious but clever person, reason together with the desires of the soul, has to be directed towards the good for knowledge of the Good to be achieved. Reason cannot be turned without turning the whole soul (*Republic* 518c). Once the soul has been turned towards the right objects, reason can begin its investigation into the Good.

Commitment to reasoning well is necessary to achieve an accurate understanding of the Good. The person who is not rational- does not follow the demands of reason- will not be able to come to a true account of the Good. The lover of reason, on the other hand, is willing to follow reason wherever it leads and is thus able to come to a more accurate understanding of the Good. The lover of reason is also willing to revise his beliefs in light of his reasons and is committed to maintaining rational order in his soul. In other words he is willing to subordinate his irrational desires to the determinations of reason. The love of reason- which is characteristic of the imperfectly virtuous person- makes one 'welcoming' of reason and receptive to the declarations of reason about what is good.

The lover of reason is welcoming of reason and is disposed to revise his beliefs and transform his practice in light of reason. Such a person is psychologically moved- made to reflect on himself and his practice- by reason. A person's affective states must be focused onto reason if reason is to inspire any change in the person.[50] Someone whose commitment to non-rational motivations overrides his commitment to reason may understand the reason but fail to be psychologically moved by it.[51]

[49] Lear G, 'Plato on Learning to Love Beauty', op. cit., p. 106
[50] Futter D, 'The Concept of Persuasion in Plato's Early and Middle Dialogues', op. cit., p. 109
[51] Futter D, 'The Concept of Persuasion in Plato's Early and Middle Dialogues', op. cit., p. 105

The love of reason is also important for us to be transformed into virtue by our knowledge of the Good. A lover of reason is receptive to reason, and this receptivity makes it possible for him to receive reason's knowledge into his soul and to be transformed into virtue by this knowledge. This point is captured beautifully by Aristotle in a number of quotes. He says:

> …discourses appear to have the power to encourage and stimulate open-natured young people, and would make a well-born character that loves what is truly beautiful be inspired with virtue, but they are unable to encourage most people toward what is beautiful and good.[52]

> …argument and teaching are perhaps not powerful in all people, but it is necessary for the soul of the listener to have been worked on beforehand by means of habits, with a view to enjoying and hating in a beautiful way, like ground that is going to nourish the seed. For someone who lives by feeling could not hear words that would turn him away, nor could he even understand them; when someone is in that condition, how is it possible to change his mind? And in general, feeling seems to yield not to reasoned speech but to force. So it is necessary for a character to be present in advance that is in some way appropriate for virtue, loving what is beautiful and scorning what is shameful.[53]

The important point in these quotes is that the love of the good and of reason is necessary in order for us to be transformed to virtue by knowledge of the good. In other words, an imperfectly virtuous character is necessary if the transformative power of philosophy is to be effective in one's life. A good character is characterized by "its kinship to virtue, and receptiveness to arguments directed to encouraging virtue."[54] Such a character is able to receive the knowledge of virtue into its soul and to be shaped by it.[55]

The idea is that "one's attitude to the canons of reason can have vital (practical) consequences for the way one lives one's life."[56] "Reason will appeal and be of use to the

[52] NE 1179b
[53] NE 1179b
[54] Burnyeat M.F., 'Aristotle on Learning to be Good', op. cit., p. 75
[55] Burnyeat M.F., op. cit., p. 76
[56] Woolf R, 'Callicles and Socrates: Psychic (Dis)harmony in the *Gorgias*', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, 18, 2000, p. 39

well-brought up student because he is ready to form his desires in light of reasoning."[57] Reason cannot properly influence someone whose outlook is distorted and distorting.[58] The rational activity of philosophy fails to be transformative- reason's declarations fail to be realized in practice- when we do not have a pre-commitment to follow reason and to be governed by it.[59] The transformative power of reason can only be effective if one has an overriding commitment to reason. When we lack the love of reason, when our commitment to reason is trumped by other commitments, we fail to be transformed by reason in the manner in which we should be. We fail to follow reason and hence fail to know the good.

[57] Burnyeat M.F., op. cit., p. 82
[58] Lear J, 'Allegory and Myth in Plato's Republic', in Gerasimos Santas (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Plato's Republic*, Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p. 25
[59] Woolf R, op. cit., p. 29

Chapter 5: The relevance of the necessity thesis to modern philosophy

The necessity thesis says that one needs some partial virtue to become wise. On the Platonic conception of philosophy and virtue, it seems that the necessity thesis is plausible. I showed this by showing how an imperfectly virtuous character helps us come to an accurate understanding of the Good. In this chapter I want to consider the relevance and plausibility of the necessity thesis in modern philosophy.

5.1 The problem of relevance

As we have come to understand it, the necessity thesis states that imperfect virtue is necessary for becoming wise. One possible concern with the necessity thesis is that it might be plausible within Plato's conception of philosophy but not relevant or plausible in the contemporary conception of philosophy. The modern conception of philosophy might differ in important ways to Plato's conception of philosophy and thus render the necessity thesis simply irrelevant.

In one sense it is reasonable that we should adhere to Plato's conception of philosophy in understanding Plato's necessity thesis. The necessity thesis is attributed to Plato. This is why a large part of this project is dedicated to understanding the necessity thesis in relation to Plato. It will not help our understanding of the thesis to impose a conception of philosophy that is contrary to Plato's own conception. However, the project would be less interesting if we completely restrict ourselves to understanding the necessity thesis within Plato's conception of philosophy. The necessity thesis could be true in the given the Platonic conception of philosophy but simply irrelevant in the contemporary conception of philosophy. It is important then to explore the necessity thesis in relation to the modern conception of philosophy.

To consider the relevance and plausibility of the necessity thesis in modern philosophy, we must understand the differences between the Platonic and modern conceptions of philosophy. What I am going to do now is to discuss the modern conception of philosophy

and compare it with the Platonic conception before I look at the plausibility of the thesis in modern philosophy.

5.2 The modern conception of philosophy

In contemporary times 'philosophy' commonly refers to a subject of study- an academic discipline that often finds its home in the university philosophy department.[60] As a subject of study, philosophy is generally understood as an intellectual activity that involves asking and attempting to answer fundamental questions about reality and human existence.[61] Philosophy aims at knowledge of the world and our place in it. As a discipline, philosophy is divided into different branches including metaphysics, logic, ethics, philosophy of science, philosophy of art etc. The different branches of philosophy are distinguished by the specific subject matter that they are concerned with. Each branch of philosophy attempts to answer certain questions related to the subject matter in the different branches. For example: philosophy of science investigates what science is, philosophy of art investigates what art is, ethics investigates what it means to live well etc.[62] The subject matter of philosophy includes a wide range of topics including morality, freewill, causation, justice etc.

As practiced today, academic philosophy is discursive and communal in nature. Philosophical practice is carried out by asking questions and thinking about those questions in dialogue with others. Philosophers attend conferences, give lectures and publish their work, and through this enter into dialogue with other philosophers (and sometimes with the

[60] Perhaps the kind of philosophy that I will be describing here is more closely understood as analytic philosophy since not everything I say here about philosophy will apply to other philosophy traditions. For example subjects such as phenomenology cannot be said to be argumentative in the sense in which I describe philosophy to be above. I do not think that the distinctions between the various traditions of philosophy are relevant to what I am trying to do here. I am simply going to outline a general sense of what philosophy is, as we popularly understand it.

[61] See the Fordham philosophy website http://www.fordham.edu/philosophy/

[62] The types of questions that philosophy is concerned with are generally definitional in nature. In other words they are questions of the form 'what is F', where F is some object or concept. Definitional questions are central in philosophy, but they are by no means the only types of questions raised in philosophy. Philosophers ask all sorts of other non-definitional questions. Questions such as "are we brains-in-vats?", "are we free?", "does God exist?" etc. all fall within the scope of philosophy. But even when the questions are not definitional, any attempt to answer them in a philosophical manner will generally involve defining the central concepts involved in the question being asked. For example when investigating the question of whether or not we have free will, the philosopher has to investigate what concepts such as freedom, choice, consciousness etc. mean. The centrality of definitional questions in philosophy may be attributed to the Platonic tradition. As I said earlier, Platonic philosophy was primarily concerned with definitional questions.

general public). In this sense philosophy is a social activity. Philosophers do philosophy by engaging with other members of their community. The discursive method is in line with the Socratic practice of philosophy as I described it in chapter two.

Philosophical inquiry consists in the study and development of theoretical discourses. These theoretical discourses are formulated in the form of arguments and theories. The goal of philosophy is the production of a coherent system of theoretical knowledge. Philosophers aim at the production of theories. For example there are theories of knowledge, theories of justice, theories of causation etc. that are produced in philosophy. In so far as it aims at theoretical knowledge, philosophy is no different from subjects such as the sciences. It only differs from these subjects in the subject matter that it concerns itself with and hence also the content of the propositional knowledge it produces. That academic philosophy aims at no more than a perfect system of propositional knowledge is clear from philosophy's focus on developing theories.

Of course philosophers sometimes hope that the knowledge they produce will help shape society in similar ways to how science shapes society through its findings. For example an answer to the question of whether or not we are free shapes how we think about moral responsibility and could influence perspectives on societal issues such as punishment and justice. The point is that most philosophers today are satisfied with philosophy even if it does not have any practical implications for them or for society. The propositional knowledge produced through philosophical inquiry is taken to be valuable in and of itself even if it does not help to transform us as human beings. I think this fact that philosophers are often satisfied with studying and producing theories that have no practical relevance to society is part of what makes the question about the value of philosophy so contested.[63]

The success of philosophy in producing knowledge is highly questionable. Philosophy has not had great success in producing satisfactory theories. There is no perfect theory of

[63] The value of philosophy- as an academic subject- is highly contested. At best, philosophy is viewed as important for developing certain critical thinking, analysis and argumentative skills. This is the general 'selling point' of philosophy degrees and courses at university. Every philosophy department highlights the value of philosophy in developing and enhancing one's critical thinking skills. The claim is that philosophy will make one a better thinker and arguer. At worst, philosophy is viewed with extreme skepticism and taken to be a useless subject of study. On this view philosophy is a subject with no relevance to life or society, and thus as something to be studied purely for intellectual entertainment and enjoyment. Having now explained the modern conception of philosophy, I turn now to highlight some of the main differences between the two conceptions.

anything in philosophy. This need not mean that philosophers know nothing at all. In fact I think philosophers know a great deal. However, their knowledge is imperfect and only partial. What I mean is that the philosopher who has been investigating what justice is may not be able to give a completely satisfactory account of what justice is but they have a better understanding of it than the person who has not engaged in such a philosophical investigation. Thus we can say that philosophers have a kind of partial knowledge or 'better understanding' even if they do not produce perfect theories.

5.3 Comparing the modern and Platonic conceptions of philosophy

Now that the general conception of modern philosophy is in place, let us compare it with the Platonic conception of philosophy.

The fundamental difference between the two conceptions is in how they understand the objects and goals of philosophy. In the Platonic conception, philosophical activity is constituted by inquiry into the nature of the Good. Hence all the branches of philosophy are subordinate to ethics. All thinking in the different fields of philosophy aims at knowledge of the Good. This philosophical investigation is for the sake of becoming good. The knowledge that is achieved through philosophical investigation shapes the philosopher's character and their way of life. The transformative power of philosophical inquiry into the Good is important in Plato's conception of philosophy.

In contrast, the modern conception takes philosophy as an activity of the intellect, with no necessary bearing on one's conduct or character. The final end of philosophy, on the modern conception, is not necessarily self-transformation for virtue but rather theoretical knowledge. Modern philosophers generally do not view their philosophical activities as aimed at transforming their way of being or as necessarily capable of transforming their lives. Philosophical inquiry is for most modern philosophers "an exclusively theoretical discourse, with no direct relationship to one's conduct in life."[64] The contemporary conception of philosophy places philosophical discourses as the final end of philosophical inquiry whereas the ancient conception views these discourses as means to the ultimate goal of transforming the individual for virtue.

[64] Cooper J, *Pursuits of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*, op. cit., p. 16

Furthermore, in contrast to the Platonic conception where the ultimate object of philosophical inquiry is the Good, modern philosophy does not have a 'final' object of study that unites all the fields studied in philosophy. Different objects are studied independently in the different fields of philosophy. There is no main object of inquiry that must be investigated if true philosophical knowledge is to be achieved. The assumption is that all the objects of philosophy can be known independently of each other. The Platonic Good is studied only in ethics in modern philosophy.

These differences in the two conceptions of philosophy have important implications for how we understand the necessity thesis. The necessity thesis is, broadly, a claim about the relationship between moral virtue and philosophy. In particular, the thesis claims that moral virtue is necessary for making progress in philosophy. In the Platonic conception, the necessity thesis amounts to the view that imperfect virtue is necessary for wisdom because philosophy ultimately aims at wisdom. But as is clear from our comparison above, the goals of modern philosophy are not necessarily wisdom, understood as knowledge of the Good, but theoretical knowledge. Thus in the modern conception, the necessity thesis would be understood as the view that partial moral virtue is necessary for achieving theoretical knowledge of the objects of philosophy. The point here is that on the modern conception of philosophy the necessity thesis says that imperfect virtue is necessary not for wisdom as such, but for theoretical knowledge of philosophical objects.

Now that we understand what the necessity thesis amounts to in the modern conception, we can evaluate its plausibility.

5.4 Moral virtue and modern philosophy

Can we say that we need to be morally virtuous to make progress in philosophy? To answer this it is helpful to recall the two interpretations of the necessity thesis that I outlined in the beginning.

On the first interpretation of the thesis, according to which moral virtue is necessary for carrying out philosophical inquiry, we can easily say that moral virtue is necessary for progress in modern philosophy. Philosophical inquiry, as practiced in contemporary times, is

a difficult subject. It involves inquiry into very difficult questions that demand long and careful study. It will be accepted then that intellectual virtues such as open-mindedness, intelligence, love of truth and good memory are necessary for philosophical inquiry. According to the first interpretation of the necessity thesis, we also need moral virtues to successfully engage in the process of philosophical inquiry. As far as modern philosophy involves difficult inquiry and is a social activity, we need moral virtue to succeed in this inquiry. Moral virtue is required for the process of philosophical inquiry both the modern and Platonic conceptions. I have already shown how moral virtue is necessary to deal with the difficulty and cooperative nature of philosophical inquiry in chapter one so I will not repeat myself here.

On the second interpretation, the answer to the question of whether or not we need moral virtue for philosophy is less straightforward. The second interpretation states that moral virtue is necessary for understanding the objects of philosophy. The question then becomes: is moral virtue necessary to understand the objects of modern philosophy? In other words, does one need to be morally virtuous to achieve knowledge in modern philosophy? I think the modern philosopher would be inclined to say no to this question. It is difficult to see how one's moral character is relevant to one's ability to come to certain true propositions about the things that they study in philosophy. It is especially difficult to see this connection in fields such as logic, philosophy of science etc. For example: how is one's understanding of causation dependent on their moral character? It seems that one can understand causation and hold certain true propositions about it independently of how their moral character is. The achievement of propositional knowledge, at least in some fields of philosophy, seems independent of one's moral character. So how can we make sense of the necessity thesis ?

According to Plato, true knowledge is necessarily knowledge of the Good. The kind of knowledge we have of such things as causation is merely partial knowledge. In *Republic,* Plato takes this kind of partial knowledge as 'opinion' (*Republic* 477b). He says that this kind of knowledge is better than ignorance but worse than knowledge itself (*Republic* 478c). In other words, partial knowledge is not quite the same as knowledge but it is better than ignorance. Thus, perhaps Plato would concede that partial knowledge can be obtained by someone who lacks virtue. What he would deny, given his commitment to the necessity

thesis, is that perfect knowledge (knowledge of the Good) is possible without moral virtue. Knowledge of the Good, according to Plato, requires one to be moral virtuous.

This response, as outlined here, is very brief and sketchy. A more satisfactory response requires a much deeper understanding and explanation of Plato's metaphysics which is beyond the scope of this paper and not really relevant. The point that I would like to emphasise is that Plato would not consider the knowledge we have of such things as causation as knowledge proper since for him true knowledge is knowledge of the Good (*Republic* 476c-d). So he would not deny that propositional knowledge, which is some kind of partial knowledge, is possible without moral virtue in such fields as philosophy of science, logic etc. But I think that because of his commitment to the similarity thesis, he would maintain that some moral virtue is necessary for achieving theoretical knowledge in ethics. Recall that Plato's necessity thesis is based on the principle of 'like-knows-like'. Knowledge of the Good requires one to be good to some extent because of the principle that 'like-knows-like'. In the next section, I want to show that ethics partly investigates the Good and as such to achieve knowledge of the Good in ethics one needs to be partially good.

5.5 The necessity thesis and modern ethics

In order to evaluate whether partial moral virtue is necessary for knowledge in modern ethics, we need a better understanding of the objects of ethics. In this section I will briefly explain what philosophical ethics is concerned with and then move on to consider whether moral virtue is necessary for ethics.

We have seen that for Plato ethics is the primary field of philosophy. The primary object of study for Platonic philosophy is virtue (the Good). This is evident from Plato's focus on understanding virtue in the dialogues. When we think about ethics today, we are apt to think about right and wrong actions, duties and moral rules of conduct. The question of virtue is not central in modern ethics.

The principal concern in ethics today is the question of "how we should live?" Thus the subject matter of ethics is broad since the question "how should we live our lives?" is a

general one. It goes beyond the everyday question of "what shall I do" now, in such and such a situation. It is a question about the manner of life that one should adopt.[65] Virtue is studied indirectly under this question of 'how to live well'. There is a branch of ethics that is called 'virtue ethics' focuses primarily on the question of virtue. This branch investigates virtue within the broader question of ethics.

Ethics takes as its subject something that concerns everyone directly: the subject of how one ought to live.[66] In order to address the question "how should we live?" students of ethics investigate concepts such as justice, courage, right and wrong etc. Ethics is essentially an investigation of what is good for human beings and how to achieve it. But what does the investigation into these ethical concepts/objects aim at?

For ancient philosophers, ethics aimed at virtue and thus was ultimately practical. In contrast, modern ethics investigates questions of how to live well and produces propositional knowledge. This in itself is not a bad thing. As a kind of inquiry, ethics must have a cognitive goal. In studying ethics we are investigating the truth about ethical matters. We want to know what justice, courage and so on is, and one way to do this is to seek out true propositions about these objects. The problem arises when ethics stops at the level of propositional knowledge and does not then transform the practice or conduct of its subjects.

> What philosophers study makes no more claim to affecting their personal lives than the work of physicists, mathematicians, or economists is expected to affect theirs. And yet there is a lingering sense in most people as well as in a few philosophers, that somehow that is not how matters should be, a sense of puzzlement and even of disappointment that the lives of philosophers do not reflect their convictions.[67]

The concern expressed in this quote about the separation of one's philosophical thoughts and one's conduct is especially pertinent in ethics. I think generally we would be less concerned if one's philosophies- understood as philosophical theories- in fields such as metaphysics and logic did not inform their practice. These fields seem, strictly speaking,

[65] Williams B, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Taylor & Francis, 2011, p. 4
[66] Cooper J, *Pursuit of Wisdom: Six Ways of Life in Ancient Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 5
[67] Nehamas A, op. cit., p. 1

indirectly relevant to one's conduct. For example it is difficult to see how the logician or metaphysician's inquiries could transform them as far as their conduct is concerned. The subject matter of these inquiries often has no direct bearing on the moral conduct of the subjects. Perhaps the principles of logic are used indirectly to justify certain types of moral conduct. But such principles, it seems, have no direct influence of the logician's moral conduct.

In the case of ethics, however, the principal subject matter- the question of how to live well- is of direct relevance to one's conduct. We conduct ourselves in particular ways partly as a function of the way in which we think about what the best form of life is and what we ought to do. Thus it is in this sphere that we should clearly see philosophy's transformative potential. Through ethical inquiry, philosophers can come to particular views of how to live well and these views can and should shape the way of life that they adopt. So ethical inquiry can and should have the transformative effect on those who study it.[68]

When we study ethics, we presumably want to get knowledge of how we should live and to use that knowledge to inform how we act in our daily lives.[69] In other words, we intend, or should intend, for ethical inquiry to inform our life practices. Ethical inquiry is the one kind of inquiry that has the most potential for transforming the inquirer's conduct. This is because of the subject matter of ethics. As we said before, ethics is concerned with the question of *how* to live well. This immediately suggests that ethics can guide us in our conduct- it can tell us how to live well. And by telling us how to live well, ethics can transform our lives. The philosopher must use his ethical theories to guide his practice. As Aristotle says: ethics is not "for the sake of contemplation, as the other kinds of study are

[68] Contemporary fields such as applied ethics and professional ethics courses are an indication, I think, of the awareness of the potential for transforming one's conduct that ethical inquiry has. These fields try to link the theories in ethics with certain practices in order to understand what justifies those practices and whether they are the best practices. To be sure, I am not saying that the ancient conception of philosophy is the understanding that drives these fields. Nor am I saying that the subjects investigating those fields are transformed by them. But I think that these fields show awareness that ethics could be transformative and could be linked to practice is in line with the ancient philosophers' vision of transforming character through philosophical activities.

[69] To be sure, I do not think that we study, or should study, ethics with the expectation that it will give us particular moral codes which are to serve as guides as to how we should conduct ourselves. Now this is not to deny that we do come across certain moral codes that we generally accept, for example that killing is wrong. But in general we do not expect that ethics will bless us with a list of moral codes to follow in every situation that we may come across. This is simply impossible for every situation is different and will be evaluated differently. An important goal of ethics is to develop in its students the capacity to judge each situation and make ethical decisions on what to do. This capacity is what Aristotle calls practical wisdom.

(for we are investigating not in order that we might know what virtue is, but in order that we might become good, since otherwise there would be no benefit from it) (NE 1103b)." "The end in matters of action (ethics) is not contemplating and knowing each of them but rather doing them. It is not sufficient to know about virtue, but one must try to have it and use it, unless there is some other way that we become good (NE 1179b)." The point is that the knowledge we find through ethical inquiry must inform our practice so that we may become good. Having propositional knowledge about what is good is not sufficient for becoming good. One must use that knowledge to guide their conduct. We must engage in ethics in order to be able to "judge beautifully about things that are conducive to living well."[70]

The point I am making here is that modern ethics, as is currently practiced, aims at theoretical knowledge. This is not necessarily a bad thing. But it seems that ethics should be, and is capable of, transforming our practices and helping us live better lives. This is something that I think ethics should be more focused on: making us better people. But for our investigation now, we are interested in whether theoretical knowledge in ethics requires one to have a good character. We have explained what the objects of ethics are and now we can attempt to answer this question.

5.6 Is moral virtue necessary to achieve moral knowledge?

I want to show that partial moral virtue is necessary to achieve ethical knowledge. In other words, I want to say that a good moral character is necessary for an accurate theoretical understanding of the objects of ethics.

The opponent of the necessity thesis would reject the view that moral virtue is necessary for ethical knowledge. He will deny that one needs to be of a good moral character to achieve moral knowledge. In order to reject the thesis successfully, the opponent must believe that a completely evil person can have moral knowledge. It is implausible to maintain that a completely evil person can have moral knowledge. The evil person is constituted by beliefs, inclinations and desires that are bad. These things are what make him evil. He has a particular moral orientation and outlook that is evil. He has false beliefs about what is

[70] NE 1140a

morally good. These beliefs and attitudes prevent him from coming to a true understanding of what the good is. Let me illustrate my point with an example.

Suppose that a Nazi or racist constructs a theory of justice. We may reasonably expect that his theory of justice will be tainted by his moral character. His strong hatred for Jews or black people would make it difficult for him to understand that justice involves equality and fairness, or at least, he would have a hard time understanding that equality ought to be extended to all people. His theory of justice would thus fail to capture some of the central features of justice (such as equality among all people) due to his bad moral character. Examples such as these show that one's understanding of philosophical objects in ethics is partly shaped by their moral character, and thus make it plausible to assume that partial moral virtue is necessary for ethics.

The Nazi/racist example shows that a morally deficient character will fail to have an accurate understanding of the nature of virtue or morality. This is the basic point of the similarity thesis. An unjust moral character is constituted by desires and beliefs that present justice as being contrary to what it truly is. The unjust person is unjust because he believes justice to be something that it is not. His views about what justice is do not correlate with what justice really is. So he cannot give a correct account of what justice is. Our beliefs, which form part of our moral character, must reflect justice as it is in order for us to have an accurate understanding of justice.

Conclusion

In this paper I tried to understand Plato's necessity thesis and to evaluate it. The general claim of the necessity thesis is that moral virtue is necessary to make progress towards achieving the goals of philosophy. I offered two interpretations of the necessity thesis. One interpretation suggests that the necessity thesis states that moral virtue is necessary because of the difficulty and cooperative nature of philosophical inquiry. On this account, moral virtue is needed to successfully carry out philosophical inquiry as an activity. The second interpretation suggests that moral virtue is necessary to achieve knowledge of the specific objects of philosophy. I explained that the latter interpretation captures a more intimate connection between moral virtue and philosophy, and restricted myself to understanding this interpretation more precisely in the subsequent chapters.

I considered what Plato's conception of philosophy is and showed that for him philosophy ultimately aims at knowledge of the Good- wisdom. In light of this conception, I revised the necessity thesis and formulated it as the claim that moral virtue is necessary for knowledge of the Good. I then suggested that the main problem with this formulation of the necessity thesis is that it is self-defeating. It seems to be saying that one needs to be virtuous to achieve virtue. This makes no sense. I looked at Plato's theory of virtue in *Republic* and suggested that the necessity thesis should be properly understood as the view that *imperfect* virtue is necessary for coming to know the Good. This means that one must be disposed to the good and have true beliefs about what it is in order to come to an accurate understanding of it.

I then moved on to explain Plato's reasons for holding the necessity thesis. Here I suggested that the necessity thesis is supported by the similarity thesis and tried to show how the similarity between an imperfectly virtuous character and the Good helps one come to an accurate understanding of what the Good is.

In the last chapter I considered the relevance of the necessity thesis in modern philosophy. I showed that the necessity thesis is relevant and plausible in modern ethics. We cannot have ethical knowledge without being good to some extent.

A large part of this paper was dedicated to understanding the necessity thesis. If we are convinced that moral virtue is necessary for philosophy, then questions of whether certain moral requirements for studying philosophy arise. But even if we are not really convinced by Plato's particular reasons and conception of what kind of moral character is necessary for philosophy, I hope it is at least clear that there is an interesting and important relationship between moral character and philosophy that deserves further study.

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