

THE PROBLEM OF HERMENEUTIC ORIENTATION IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

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A b s t r a c t

Plato's *Republic* is devoted to the question of human virtue. It is not easy to know what constitutes human virtue; nor, indeed, is it easy to know how to acquire this knowledge. Part of the difficulty stems from what I will call the problem of hermeneutic orientation. Schematically, this problem consists in the fact that our inherited conceptual frameworks, as well as the emotional and pragmatic attachments that shape the horizons from within which we begin questioning, orient our reason and delimit the operation of our understanding. As such, any inquiry into the nature of what it means to live a good life will be conditioned by our prior engagements with the world. In this dissertation I will examine the way in which the *Republic* develops and responds to this problem. The importance of developing a response to this problem is grounded in the importance of coming to know the nature of human virtue: since the problem of hermeneutic orientation constitutes a barrier to our knowledge of virtue, if we cannot adequately respond to the problem, then we will be unable to know how best to live. I will argue that Plato uses the problem to point toward the necessity of engaging in philosophy; philosophy itself is to be understood as the dialectical inquiry into the nature of being and virtue.

D e c l a r a t i o n

I declare that this dissertation is my own original work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (by Research) to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university. Where use has been made of the work of others it has been duly acknowledged in the text.

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10th day of January, 2019

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A c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

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The remaining disunity is my own.

The soul loves the Good because, from the beginning, she has been incited by the Good to love him.

Plotinus, Ennead VI: 7, 31 (as quoted in Hadot, 1993: 54)

I am not trying to brush aside the very concrete and burning questions that confront us today. I am trying to win the right perspective in which to see them.

Jacob Klein, The Problem of Freedom (Klein, 1985: 118)

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Abbreviations

Ap.	Plato's <i>Apology</i>
Chrm.	Plato's <i>Charmides</i>
Euthphr.	Plato's <i>Euthyphro</i>
Gorg.	Plato's <i>Gorgias</i>
Lach.	Plato's <i>Laches</i>
Ltr. VII.	Plato's <i>Seventh Letter</i>
Men.	Plato's <i>Meno</i>
Phd.	Plato's <i>Phaedo</i>
Phdr.	Plato's <i>Phaedrus</i>
Prt.	Plato's <i>Protagoras</i>
Rep.	Plato's <i>Republic</i>
Symp.	Plato's <i>Symposium</i>
Tht.	Plato's <i>Theaetetus</i>
Met.	Aristotle's <i>Metaphysics</i>
EN.	Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>

All translations of Plato's dialogues, excluding the *Republic*, are taken from Cooper (ed.) (1997). Unless otherwise specified, all translations of Plato's *Republic* are taken from Sachs (2007). All translations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* are taken from Sachs (1999). All translations of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* are taken from Sachs (2002).

Any reference to a Stephanus page that is not preceded by an abbreviation is a reference to Plato's *Republic*.

Introduction

Plato's *Republic* is devoted to the question of human virtue (cf. 352d5-6). It is not easy to know what constitutes human virtue; nor, indeed, is it easy to know how to acquire this knowledge. Part of the difficulty stems from what I will call the problem of hermeneutic orientation. Schematically, this problem consists in the fact that our inherited conceptual frameworks, as well as the emotional and pragmatic attachments that shape the horizons from within which we begin questioning, orient our reason and delimit the operation of our understanding. As such, any inquiry into the nature of what it means to live a good life will be conditioned by our prior engagements with the world. In the *Republic* Plato has Socrates explicitly discuss the philosophical challenge posed by the pivotal nature of our initial orientations (377a-b; cf. Aristotle, *EN*. II,1: 1103b23-25). It is because Plato was aware of the importance of beginnings – the orienting nature of beginnings – that he has Socrates supervise the storytellers (377b ff.). If the power of reason is disoriented, then recourse to reason can act to rationalise our prejudice. In the work of reasoning, we re-inscribe our initial disorientation, and think ourselves better for our reflection.

In this dissertation I will examine the way in which the *Republic* develops and responds to the problem of hermeneutic orientation. The importance of developing a response to this problem is grounded in the importance of coming to know the nature of human virtue: since the problem of hermeneutic orientation constitutes a barrier to our knowledge of virtue, if we cannot adequately respond to the problem, then we will be unable to know how best to live. Unsurprisingly, I will argue that Plato uses the problem to point toward the necessity of engaging in philosophy; philosophy itself is to be understood as the dialectical inquiry into

the nature of being and virtue. Moreover, I will argue that philosophy is not just a means to the achievement of virtue, but is, itself, the best life for a human being (cf. *Ap.* 37e-38a).

However, to characterise Plato's response in this way is not yet to say very much, for an agreement in words can mask a deeper divergence in understanding. If understood in the wrong way, the claim that Plato's response to the problem of hermeneutic orientation is the life of philosophy – itself understood as a life lived in pursuit of wisdom – can end the inquiry at the very place it should begin in earnest. This is because one's understanding of the nature of philosophy and dialectical inquiry, as well as one's understanding of the nature of the wisdom at which it aims, is likely to manifest the very distortions that are constitutive of one's interpretative horizon. Consequently, we need to work through this response in a fair amount of detail in order to see it at work, responding and adapting to the challenges and provocations it encounters within the *Republic*. In so doing, we will be simultaneously investigating the nature of Plato's understanding of philosophy.

The argument contained within this dissertation does not come close to constituting a comprehensive interpretation of Plato's *Republic*. The *Republic* is a surprising work that resists easy assimilation, yet it is no less beautiful for its strangeness. It is a work of extreme depth that never ceases to reveal new layers of meaning to the reader. It's ability to stimulate endless philosophical reflection is enhanced by Plato's ability to reveal to the careful reader the tight fit of the parts of the dialogue in addition to the overall fit of drama, character and argument – a fit that becomes more noticeable on each new reading. One is reminded of Friedrich Schleiermacher's assertion, repeated by Jacob Klein (1965: 4) that "...if anywhere at all, it is here [in Plato's dialogues] that form and content are inseparable; each sentence can be properly understood only where it is placed, within the connections and limitations that

Plato provided for it.”¹ When taken as a whole and considered alongside some of Plato’s shorter dialogues, the sheer scale of the *Republic* seems to lead to an exponential increase in these connections and limitations, and thus an exponential increase in the hermeneutical responsibilities of the exegete. At the outset, then, almost every commentator must come to acknowledge the necessary partiality of their particular reading and in this regard I am no different. Any interpretation, especially one as short as this, is required to unify itself around a particular set of concerns that, even if displaying a kinship with the concerns motivating Plato, are far outstripped by the breadth and profundity of what Plato’s literary and philosophical artistry manage to accomplish.² Much of Plato’s subtlety and philosophical insight will have to remain unexamined.

Notwithstanding the limited set of concerns that characterise the current inquiry, it is also true that the very form of Plato’s dialogues seems to encourage reflection on the problem of hermeneutic orientation. This is because, unlike the typical author of a modern philosophical

¹ Similarly, Leo Strauss writes: “...by understanding the speeches in the light of the deeds, one transforms the two-dimensional into something three-dimensional or rather one restores the original three-dimensionality. In a word, one cannot take seriously enough the law of logographic necessity. Nothing is accidental in a Platonic dialogue; everything is necessary at the place where it occurs” (Strauss, 1964:60). Cf. *Phdr.* 264b-c.

² We could apply to the entire *Republic* the remark Stephen Halliwell applies to the Myth of Er that concludes the dialogue: “...its densely allusive texture yields a surplus of possible meanings that cannot be adequately encompassed by any single interpretation” (Halliwell, 2007: 445). David Roochnik expresses with admirable clarity the sobering experience, when trying to provide an interpretation of any particular part or aspect of the dialogue, of being confronted with the tight structure and sheer magnitude of the *Republic* and the importance of this structure for understanding the philosophical meaning and import of any of its parts or aspects: one inevitably finds oneself drawn into a movement in which “commenting on each of its parts...[requires] continually invoking the principles by means of which they cohere”, thus necessitating the writing of a commentary that is “far longer than the dialogue itself” (Roochnik, 2003: 1).

treatise, there is no straightforward sense in which Plato offers up his views to his audience; as a writer of dialogues from which he is absent as a character he ostensibly says nothing.³ As such, that which is at stake in a Platonic dialogue is not the self-assertion of either reader or author, but the self-transformation required of the reader who is concerned to follow the *logos*. That is, the extant and distorting subjectivity of the reader – the reader’s hermeneutical orientation – is precisely what is at issue in the dialectical movement of dialogue. Plato’s apparent withdrawal presents a task for the reader – that of being drawn into and participating in the most serious kind of play (*Phdr.* 276b-d; 277e-278b) in which “the readers can be induced to reflect upon their lives with the utmost sobriety” (Kein, 1965: 20).⁴

Chapter Outline

In the first chapter, I will explain the problem of hermeneutic orientation and provide some evidence for the claim that Plato is concerned to address this problem in the *Republic*. I will explore several ways in which the problem emerges in the dialogue and I will argue that our initial orientations can work to delimit our knowledge of what it means to live virtuously.

³ “Plato” is mentioned two times in his dialogues, and both times he says nothing. He is present at the trial of Socrates (*Ap.* 38b), and he is said to be ill and therefore absent from the conversation in the *Phaedo* that precedes Socrates’s death (*Phd.* 59b). Many commentators now recognise, as Griswold writes, that “Authorial anonymity is...an important feature of the dialogues” (2002: 84), although the precise importance of this anonymity is often disputed.

⁴ Jacob Klein’s elucidation of Paul Friedländer’s remark to this effect is apposite: “Paul Friedländer’s remark ‘The dialogue is the only form of book that seems to suspend the book form itself’ could perhaps be elaborated on as follows: a (Platonic) dialogue has not taken place if we, the listeners or readers, did not actively participate in it; lacking such participation, all that is before us is indeed nothing but a book” (Klein, 1965: 6).

In the second chapter, I will trace the beginnings of Plato's response to the problem. Socrates begins to develop this response in his discussion of the elementary education programme in books two and three, but I will argue that the acknowledged shortcomings of this programme point us toward the need to develop wisdom. Since the notion of wisdom in the *Republic* is not strictly uniform, I will spend the second part of the chapter examining how knowledge of the good undergirds the various notions of wisdom developed in the dialogue. However, since it is the case that the problem of hermeneutic orientation prevents the actualisation of reason, the problem is, itself, an obstacle to the development of wisdom. That is, the peculiar, reflexive nature of the problem of hermeneutic orientation is such that it presents an obstacle to its own solution. Thus, chapter two will leave us with the task of uncovering the manner in which wisdom can be developed.

Socrates' answer to the question of how wisdom is to be developed is stated clearly in the text: dialectical inquiry (cf. 533c-d). However, his discussion of what this involves is not very detailed. Thus, in chapter three, I will examine the interactions that take place between Socrates, Glaucon and Adeimantus in *Republic* V and VI in order to begin to uncover the character of dialectical inquiry. We will see that the problem of hermeneutic orientation is dramatically instantiated in these passages and Socrates' response to the disorientation of his interlocutors is thus instructive. I will argue that these passages indicate that dialectical inquiry involves hermeneutic detachment, understood as a state of self-reflexivity in which one suspends one's predisposition to belief-formation in order to inquire into the disorientations of one's own understanding.

In the fourth chapter, I will attempt to deepen the account of dialectic and the way in which it can conduce to the formation of wisdom by showing how it can facilitate the redirection of

our desire. That the development of wisdom requires the transformation of desire is not only plainly indicated in the text (cf. 485d-e; 519a-b), but it follows from the way in which the soul's appetitive desires prevent the actualisation of reason. Drawing on the discussion of the advanced education programme in *Republic* VII, I will argue that the activity of dialectic requires us to direct our *eros* beyond the superficial trappings of the external world and toward the intelligible structures that are responsible for the partial, sensible manifestations of goodness and beauty that usually occupy our attention.

In the fifth chapter, I will complete the argument by showing how the two constitutive components of dialectical inquiry uncovered in chapters three and four are unified in the activity of philosophical dialogue. This will involve showing that the possibility of—what I call—the dialectical “dis-placement” necessary for developing our understanding of virtue presupposes an intuitive awareness of the good that is, nevertheless, poorly understood. I will argue that the process of becoming aware of the gap between one's intuitive awareness of the good and our partial and deformed understanding of it can facilitate a process of ironic self-disruption that stimulates the actualisation and clarification of our pre-philosophical reason and thereby transforms and develops our understanding of the good. This clarification is achieved, in turn, by the repeated examination of the contents and limitations of our own understanding in philosophical dialogue.

1. The Problem of Hermeneutic Orientation

Plato's dialectic, in its search for definition, looks to the discovery not of some privileged formula but of the proper understanding of the several formulas that tradition supplies to the learned.

Kosman, 2007: 126

The structure and aim of this chapter are both relatively simple. On the one hand, I will raise a general philosophical problem. The problem, which can be thought of as a problem of hermeneutic orientation, presents a significant and perhaps ineluctable shortcoming of human knowledge. On the other hand, I will begin to show that this problem is a problem about which Plato was concerned. In fact, I think the problem presents us with a useful lens through which to examine the *Republic*. In particular, we will see that the problem of hermeneutic orientation in the *Republic* is closely connected to the difficulty of cultivating virtue. The majority of this chapter will be given over to the second of these two tasks.

Hermeneutic Orientation and the Hermeneutic Circle

We can begin to formulate the problem of hermeneutic orientation in straightforward terms as follows: whether we are conscious of it or not, our understanding does not operate against the purity of an unprejudiced background. Our character; our political, social, and religious ideas and situations; our experiences; our educational background; our familial and cultural history; and our pragmatic interests all influence how we understand any situation. That is, we bring

with us into any new encounter – be it with other people, a text, a piece of art, an idea or, in short, *anything* that engages our power of understanding – the effects of our prior engagements with the world. We do not bear them as passive possessions; rather, they actively condition the character of our encounters. Even before we find ourselves in the midst of a situation that calls upon our understanding, the collective effects of our past encounters have conditioned us to pay particular attention to certain features of that situation. Perhaps it is better to say that, given what has come before, we always find ourselves already oriented to particular resonances and meanings in any interaction, at the expense of others. We need not go so far as to say that we actively read meanings into situations based upon our particular backgrounds, although this is arguably true on many occasions. It is enough to note that what we understand in any given interaction can never measure up to the possible complexity and richness of all that is contained within the encounter.

On its own, this does not immediately appear to be a problem. It is merely an observation about the inherent limitations and partiality of human understanding. However, when this observation is placed alongside the apparent Socratic paradox regarding the fundamental importance of knowledge for living well, the fact of hermeneutic orientation seems to become an obstacle to the realisation of virtue. Since it appears that every hermeneutic orientation attunes us to certain partial understandings at the expense of others, it seems that every hermeneutic orientation is at the same time a *disorientation*. Given a slightly different formulation, then, the problem of hermeneutic orientation is that our rational capacity seems constitutively shaped by the particularity of our beginnings. Since these beginnings are not entirely rational – for our rational capacity is itself something that requires development⁵ – an exhaustive understanding of anything would seem to require an exhaustive traversal of that

⁵ For Socrates' recognition of this point, see *Rep.* 402e; 441a-b.

which conditions our thought so that we may become completely transparent to ourselves. Only then could we initiate the necessary adjustments of thought which would ensure that that which we think has not been refracted through the multiple opinions, assumptions, and prejudices that distort our view. When taken as a purely epistemological issue, this problem appears intractable: our knowledge of the conditions of our thinking will itself be refracted through the pre-judgements that constitute that thinking, thus rendering elusive any transparent account of their workings. Without a transparent account of their workings, knowledge, and thus virtue, must remain out of reach.

This problem has a long and difficult history, and with it we inherit varied and sometimes conflicting, or at least irreducible, conceptual schemas. If considered a variation of what has come to be known (via a detour through eighteenth century German philology) as the ‘hermeneutic circle’, something of this problem has found significant expression, albeit in slightly different forms, in the works of both Heidegger and Gadamer.⁶ Heidegger’s positive, ontological treatment of the circle in *Being and Time* is well known. His conception of understanding as an ‘*existential*’ – that is, an *a priori*, fundamental mode of human existence (Gelven, 1989: 86) – with an “anticipatory structure” or “fore-structure” (*Vorstruktur*) (Heidegger, 1962: 191-192), allows him to derive the circle from “Dasein’s own potentiality-for-Being” (*ibid*: 195). For Heidegger, the circle becomes the back-and-forth movement of the appropriation, or working-out, in interpretation (*Auslegung*) of that which has already

⁶ In a recent article on the ‘hermeneutic circle’, Jean Grondin writes: “In its most basic form in contemporary hermeneutics, it is the idea that we always understand or interpret out of some presuppositions” (Grondin, 2016: 299).

been understood.⁷ Thus, the “circle of understanding...is the expression of the existential *fore-structure* of Dasein itself”:

In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. (*Ibid*)⁸

According to Gadamer, “Heidegger’s description and existential grounding of the hermeneutic circle...constitute a decisive turning point” (Gadamer, 2004: 293). Rather than bearing the character of a “methodological” circle, for Gadamer the truth of the hermeneutic circle lies in what it reveals to us about the historicity of our understanding and its constitution in and by tradition: “Understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated” (*ibid*: 291). Thus, even while the recognition of human

⁷ “Any interpretation which is to contribute understanding, must have already understood what is to be interpreted” (Heidegger, 1961: 194).

⁸ We might detect, in Heidegger’s requirement that we “make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves”, a hostile relationship to dialectic in Heidegger’s thought that Francisco Gonzalez does much to make manifest. See Gonzalez (2001: 2002b; 2009, especially Part 1, ‘Dialectic, Ethics, and Dialogue’: 8-69). In *Being and Time* itself, Heidegger dismisses dialectic as a “philosophical embarrassment” and claims that Aristotle has surpassed the dialectic of Plato by placing ontology “on a more radical footing” (Heidegger, 1962: 47-48).

finitude opens the path toward Gadamer's rehabilitation of the notion of "prejudice" as that which first enables us to understand at all, it also requires us to relinquish any conception of transparent self-awareness: "To be historically," writes Gadamer, "means that knowledge of oneself can never be complete" (*ibid*: 301).⁹

While the treatments of the hermeneutic circle and the attendant notion of effective history found in Heidegger and Gadamer may be, for the modern reader, the most familiar forms in which something akin to the question of hermeneutic orientation is raised, the original way in which the problem is raised in Plato's dialogues is likely to remain obscure to the reader attempting to approach Plato through their words (cf. *Rep.* 601a). This should not be taken as a claim regarding the profundity (or lack thereof) of their respective readings of Plato. This dissertation is not comparative, and while my reading of Plato diverges at essential points from the many different readings provided by both Heidegger and Gadamer, I owe much to their original and insightful scholarship. However, adequate insight into Plato's understanding and handling of the problem cannot be separated from an understanding of the way in which the problem and its 'solution' emerge in his dialogues. This, in turn, requires that the conceptual development of the problem be grounded in careful textual exegesis.

⁹ Commenting on some of the differences between the treatment given to the circle by Heidegger and Gadamer, Grondin writes: "Ultimately, there is an 'effective history' or what Gadamer calls *Wirkungsgeschichte* at work behind every effort at understanding, an influence of which, as finite beings, we are never totally aware... Where Heidegger stressed the possibility of an elucidation of understanding through interpretation (*Auslegung*), Gadamer points to the limits of such self-understanding and elucidation in light of the overriding influence of history" (Grondin, 2016: 300).

The Problem of Hermeneutic Orientation in the *Republic*

A concern with the problem of hermeneutic orientation emerges in a variety of ways in the *Republic*. Indeed, if Aryeh Kosman's assessment of Plato's dialectic is correct, then the problem of right understanding underlies the very movement of the dialogue.¹⁰ This can be illustrated by example. The first definition of justice articulated in the *Republic* is that of "telling the truth and giving back what one takes" (331c). It is put forward by Socrates as an interpretation of what is said by Cephalus, quickly refuted, and then taken up and adapted by Polemarchus. The adaptation draws on the words of Simonides, who, according to Polemarchus, defined justice as "giving what's owed to each person" (331e). Facing further difficulties, the definition is further refined to "giving to each person what is fitting" (332c).

As Kosman notes (2007: 125), this definition of justice is akin to that presented in *Republic* IV: justice involves the correct integration of the parts of a whole, where this involves assigning to each part that function to which it is best suited and which best enables the functioning of the whole (433a-b; 434c; 441d-e; 443c-444a). Justice is to be identified, in both cases, with fitting apportionment. Although this conception of justice appears to remain unchallenged in *Republic* IV, Polemarchus' understanding of justice in *Republic* I does not. Why is this the case?

It is clear that the answer must lie in the fact that "fitting apportionment" admits of more than one meaning.¹¹ In one sense, this result is interesting because it shows that definitions can be

¹⁰ See the epigraph at the beginning of the current chapter.

¹¹ Characterising Polemarchus' account of justice as "to render to each that which is his due", Kosman writes: "In a sense, what has happened by Book 4 is only that the discourse has provided to its participants the proper

just as vulnerable as concepts to ambiguities of meaning. Indeed, the meaning of a definition is itself parasitic upon an understanding of the concepts contained therein.¹² More interesting, though, is the particular nature of Polemarchus' initial understanding – an understanding that opens him up to Socrates' refutations. After gaining Polemarchus' agreement to the fact that the fitting of medicine and food to bodies is the domain of the medical art and that the fitting of seasonings to delicacies is the domain of the culinary art, Socrates asks what domain belongs to the art of justice (332c-d). Polemarchus replies that the domain of justice is that of fitting benefits to friends and harm to enemies, but subsequently fails to find any unique area in which this benefit is conferred (332d-334a). We need not consider, here, the difficulties that later attend the separation of the merely apparent friend from the true friend (334b-335b), nor the difficulty of reconciling justice with the administration of harm (335b-e). It is Polemarchus' failure to notice the difference in kind between, on the one hand, the medical and culinary arts and, on the other hand, the 'art' of justice, that first leads him away from the truth contained in his definition. Justice is not an 'art' that can be compared with arts such as medicine, cooking, helmsmanship or housebuilding. Rather, justice works through all these arts and is present, to some degree, in every fitting apportionment. An inquiry into justice, as Kosman says, is an inquiry into "the proper modes of being's articulation into differentiated parts" (Kosman, 2007: 131).

Although we cannot definitively identify the source of Polemarchus' misunderstanding, the *Republic* equips us to see, in his confusion, the disorientations of a society that takes its

sense of "render" and "his due", and therefore made possible the appropriation of a truth that otherwise could not be understood properly." (2007: 126).

¹² In fact, we find in the interplay between the meaning of a concept and the meaning of the definition in which that concept occurs, the dialectic of parts and whole that is characteristic of the hermeneutic circle.

bearings from that which is present-at-hand. Having never encountered justice itself, the understanding of Polemarchus is forced to wander around among those arts which combine justice and injustice in such a way as to obscure justice's true nature (333e-334b; cf. 479a). Not only does he rely on the words and opinions of a poet, but his understanding of those opinions is in turn confined by his immersion in the everyday life and opinions of his society (490e ff.; 514a ff.). There can be no privileged definition of, or formula for the attainment of, justice if the understanding into which the formula is taken up is, itself, distorted and distorting.¹³ Attention must be devoted, instead, to the difficult task of attending to the disorientations of one's thinking.

While we are thus invited to consider the problem of hermeneutic orientation on account of the very structure of Platonic dialectic, it is also a subject of explicit reflection in the *Republic*. In what follows, I will show how the problem can be conceptually developed in two, admittedly broad, stages. First, one's initial experiences and orientations structure how one understands and responds to one's future circumstances. This is shown, most clearly in the discussion of poetic education in *Republic* II and III. Second, these initial orientations can mould one's understanding to such an extent that one becomes immune to subsequent persuasion and argumentation.

Stage One: Elementary Education and the Development of Virtue

The problem of hermeneutic orientation follows from the way in which one's understanding is inflected and shaped by one's prior engagements with the world. It is thus coextensive with

¹³ Cf. Lear, 2006a: 25.

the problem of education.¹⁴ In a famous passage from *Republic VII*, Socrates insists that education is not a matter of placing information into an empty soul, but of correctly orienting the soul toward the good (518b-d). Likewise, in the discussion of the elementary education programme in *Republic II* and *III*, Socrates' concern is not primarily with a conception of education as the communication of certain facts and doctrines to the student; rather, he is concerned to influence and mould the character of young souls (377a-b). He is exploring the possibility of developing within their natures a "philosophical quality" – an openness to and love of learning (376b), as well as a love of the beautiful (403c).¹⁵

Following that which has been "discovered by the passage of time", the elementary education programme discussed by Socrates, Adeimantus and Glaucon begins with an education in music and poetry for the soul. This precedes the body's development in "gymnastic exercise" (376e). It is designed to nurture, to the greatest extent possible, those natures best suited to be the guardians of their luxurious city-in-speech.¹⁶ While the possession of a good nature is

¹⁴ Education must be understood broadly as incorporating all the formative elements that work on one's psyche.

¹⁵ These remarks do nothing to diminish the significance of the difference between the programme of elementary education discussed in *Republic II* and *III* – with its focus on correct habituation – and that of a properly philosophical education which Mitchell Miller describes as "the quickening of a 'capacity' for insight that is 'in the soul' (518c) from the beginning" (Miller, 2007: 312). I will bring out some of this difference in chapter two of the current dissertation and it is implicitly at work in chapter four.

¹⁶ The guardians are to be, "by nature", lovers of "wisdom and learning" – that is, "philosophic" – as well as "spirited, quick and strong" (376c). The interpretative limits placed on us by the context of the discussion must be respected. The luxurious city comes into being as a result of Glaucon's *eros* (372c-d). As the second stage in the formation of the city – a city that is supposed to provide an image of the soul (368c-369a; 443c) – it represents the transcendence of the bodily appetites made possible by spirit. The austerity of the education programme to be provided to the guardians thus represents the need to ally spirit with reason. This is the reason for the central focus afforded, in the discussion of elementary education, to the development of piety, courage

important, it is not sufficient to guarantee the steadfast character required of the guardians. In fact, Socrates is explicit about the pivotal role played by education in forming young souls. He tells Adeimantus that “the beginning is the most important thing in every work...especially with anything young and tender. For then most of all each one is moulded, and pressed into the shape anyone wants to stamp onto it” (377a-b). A good education is needed in order to defend nature against corruption (cf. 491e).¹⁷

The receptivity of a young soul to external influence presents both a unique opportunity and a peculiar challenge: a unique opportunity because what a child absorbs at a young age has the potential to shape their way of seeing and experiencing thereafter; a peculiar challenge because a young soul does not yet have the ability to separate truth from falsity (378a; 378d-e). Discernment develops with experience, and a young soul has neither. It is that to which we are exposed as our psyches develop that first works to structure a horizon within which we can begin to make sense of ourselves and the world, and within which we can start to discriminate between the true and the false.¹⁸ As such, when designing an education

and moderation. These are the virtues needed to guard against the potential perversions of *eros* while simultaneously attempting to preserve its innate movement toward transcendence. Without *eros*, wisdom is impossible (474c-475d; 485a-e; 490a-b).

¹⁷ Jonathan Lear takes seriously the potential deformations faced by a young psyche and he has subsequently translated Socrates’ metaphor of the moulding and stamping of young souls into psychoanalytic terms: “For Plato, the human psyche is itself a psychological achievement. The infant does not have a fully formed psyche; at most he or she has the capacity to acquire and develop psychological structures. And this formation is crucially shaped by the social environment. Cultural messages penetrate and mould the psyche in ways that are often not well understood (II.377b; III.401c-e)” (Lear, 2006a: 26-27).

¹⁸ In philosophical hermeneutics, the concept of ‘horizon’ has been used to refer to the way in which understanding always takes place “from a perspective that opens up a space within which some things can easily be seen but which also sets the limits beyond which things cannot easily be seen without additional efforts of

programme, one must take care in selecting only that material which will not mislead a soul into accepting as true that which is antithetical to the development of virtue.

Socrates' concern for the orientation of the soul thus finds expression, in books two and three, in the elimination of many of the greatest stories told by Homer and Hesiod (377b ff.).¹⁹ Along with Adeimantus, Socrates takes the most blameworthy of the deeds of Homer and Hesiod to have been their fashioning in stories "a bad likeness of the sorts of beings gods and heroes are" (377e). Gods and heroes present the first paradigm of virtuous action. Their actions lay out a well-worn path along which we are habituated.²⁰

After setting up guidelines that are to govern the poets' descriptions of the nature of the gods, Socrates turns the discussion towards courage (386a ff.) and moderation (387d ff.). What stories will, if taken into the soul (382a-c), assist or, in turn, obstruct the development of these virtues? I limit my focus here to the discussion of courage. On this point, Socrates is clear: the future guardians are not to be told anything that might develop within them an inordinate fear of death, for terror prevents courage (386a-b). Those terrifying descriptions of Hades found in Homer – descriptions of Hades as a place of gruesome suffering and lifeless

movement" (Nenon, 2016: 248). To take seriously the idea that human understanding is perspectival and partial, and that the historical and material culture into which we are educated and habituated shapes our outlook is to take seriously Gadamer's claim that "we are already affected by history [for] it determines in advance both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation, and we more or less forget half of what is really there – in fact, we miss the whole truth of the phenomenon – when we take its immediate appearance as the whole truth" (Gadamer, 2004: 300).

¹⁹ Lest we forget, it is Adeimantus who first accuses Homer and Hesiod of corrupting the natures and character of the youth (363a-367e).

²⁰ See especially 378b; 386a; 388a; 388d; 391e;

shadows – are not to be told to children, nor to anyone who is to properly fear slavery more than death (386b-387b). Along with the frightening names given to the rivers of the underworld, these stories induce shudders in their hearers – shudders which will soften the souls and sensibilities of those whose profession demands endurance (387c).

In these passages Socrates is not simply concerned with the verbal – that is, propositional – truth or falsity of the stories told by the poets (382a-d). Far more concerning is the way in which these stories can structure one's view of the world. One's worldview is not simply one view among many others that one happens to have; rather, it is one's very means of access to the world. It is an organising perspective in accordance with which one comes to understand and locate everything one experiences. Thus, if one's worldview is dominated by a fear of death, then one will not be able to respond appropriately in situations that require certain kinds of courage. If, for example, Adeimantus considers death a greater evil than dishonour, he is likely to flee when confronted with his imminent death in battle. In thus nourishing a particular perspective on the world, the stories of the poets will have come to impede the development of virtue. More generally, Socrates' concern seems to be that early education can orient the soul away from a full recognition of the possibilities for virtuous living contained within any particular situation.

Stage Two: Disoriented Reflection

We turn now to an examination of the second stage in the conceptual development of the problem of hermeneutic orientation. The basic point that one's nature is insufficient for virtue because one's understanding is influenced by one's past education and experiences is repeated by Socrates in the middle of the dialogue (490e ff.). Further, he stresses that, if not

carefully designed and monitored, these formative experiences don't just have the potential to misdirect the soul, but can render it incapable of hearing the call of philosophy.

At the arithmetical centre of the dialogue, in response to Glaucon's request that he discuss whether and how their city-in-speech might come into being (471c-e), Socrates offers up the scandalous proposal that there will be no rest from evils until "political power and philosophy joins together in the same position" (473c-e).²¹ In order to defend this claim, Socrates is forced to clarify the nature of the people to whom he is referring when talking about "philosophers" (474b-487a).²² Although Glaucon appears to warm to the pursuit of philosophy over the course of the discussion, Socrates is not quite able to win his complete consent to philosophical rule before Adeimantus interrupts (487b). Feeling himself gradually led towards an opinion opposite to the one he holds to be true, Adeimantus counters that, far from being involved in the noble pursuit agreed to by Socrates and Glaucon, those who practice philosophy appear to end up "quite warped, not to say completely depraved", or, at the very least, "useless to their cities" (487c-d). Socrates must respond to both of these charges if philosophy and the city are to be saved.

Adeimantus demands an account of two types of people: those who pursue philosophy who are nevertheless useless to their cities, and those who pursue philosophy who are nevertheless warped and depraved. Socrates responds generously by giving an account of three. On the one hand, Socrates explains that those called 'useless to their cities' are people with philosophical natures. Their lack of use is to be blamed on those who fail to use them, rather

²¹ For the calculation, see Howland, 1998: 633-34, f.n. 2.

²² The extraordinary depth of this stretch of the *Republic* justifies the extensive attention paid to it in the secondary literature. I will return to examine it – at least in part – in chapter three.

than on any of their own shortcomings (488a-489d). On the other hand, he attributes the depravity of the others to their unphilosophical natures whose subsequent pursuit of philosophy can only give birth to illegitimate and mediocre offspring (495d-496a; cf. 490a-b; *Tht.* 150b-151b). However, in between these two accounts Socrates describes a person who, while of philosophical stock, is pulled away from the pursuit of philosophy (490e-495b). Although this account is, strictly speaking, unnecessary for the purpose of responding to the challenge put to him by Adeimantus, he spends far more time discussing it than he spends on the other two combined. Unlike Adeimantus, Socrates recognises that the danger posed to society by the pursuit of philosophy is either misplaced or hardly worth mentioning when compared to the danger posed to the pursuit of philosophy by society. This danger resides in the role played by society in orienting the soul.

This point is dramatically illustrated in a scene from book one wherein we first encounter the *Republic's* battle between philosophy and poetry (607b). Upon arriving in the house of Cephalus, Socrates is reprimanded by his host for not visiting him more often. As Cephalus ages, he has found himself less attached to the pleasures of the body and more inclined to take pleasure in conversation (328c-d). Strangely, given his recently-professed enthusiasm for conversation of the sort Socrates can, but rarely does, provide him, as well as the fortunate happenstance that sees Socrates arrive unannounced at his home precipitating an all-night feast of speeches, Cephalus leaves almost immediately "to take care of the sacrifices" (331d) and does not return. In the short time he engages with Socrates, he refers to the terrifying stories told of the fate meted out to the unjust in the realm of Hades and suggests that the greatest benefit he has enjoyed from his wealth is the assistance it has provided him in living in a "just and holy way" and the peace of mind it has thus given him as he approaches his death. This "just and holy way" includes "not having cheated or lied to

anyone even unwillingly”, and owing no “sacrifices to a god [nor] money to a human being” (330d-331b). Socrates wonders whether Cephalus could possibly understand by justice something as simple as “telling the truth and [giving] back what one takes” (331c-d), at which point Polemarchus steps in to defend this conception of justice (one proclaimed by Simonides, the poet). Cephalus, having clearly told the same stories to his son that he heard in his youth, leaves Polemarchus to continue the discussion and exits the conversation to enact his current understanding of justice.

This passage is rich with allusions to later passages and arguments of the *Republic*. At the end of book three, the guardians are denied private property and are forbidden to possess “mortal gold”, as it leads to many impious deeds and the corruption of the wealth of their souls (416d-417b). The corrupting nature of wealth is addressed again in book four, this time as corrupting even the craftsmen and preventing them from doing their job and thereby undermining the city’s justice. The guardians must thus take precautions to keep both riches and poverty from entering the city for their entrance signals the emergence of *many* factional cities from the *one* which was formerly unified (421c-423b).²³ The relation of wealth to justice, then, while emphasised by Cephalus, is problematised later in the dialogue. We also see Cephalus praising his just life for the *effects* to which justice gives rise: escaping punishment in the afterlife and not departing for Hades in too much fear (331b). He does not stay to hear the critiques of the accounts of justice that praise it for its wages and reputations rather than for what it is in itself – critiques that, in large part, drive the argument of the *Republic* upon his exit. In addition, the challenge that Adeimantus puts to Socrates in book

²³ The expanded discussion of wealth in *Republic* IV commences when Adeimantus interrupts the conversation between Socrates and Glaucon with the description of a superficially happy life belonging to a person who seems very much like Cephalus (419a).

two draws attention to poets who, although praising justice on account of the many wages heaped on the just by the gods (363a-e), warn of the difficulty of keeping to the virtuous path as well as the willingness of the gods to be moved from their wrath by prayer, sacrifices, and gentle vows (364a-365a). We are at least left to wonder whether the sacrifices attended to by Cephalus were not attempts to sway the gods from their anger at any previous indiscretions, rather than pious acts in which the gods are given their due. If we permit ourselves a brief consideration of the former option, then, given the stories of the poets, we can immediately note the irony in the fact that Cephalus' former injustices now necessitate additional sacrifices which *prevent* him from taking pleasure in that which he professes to desire, and which might just, in fact, constitute true piety and justice – philosophical conversation.

However, more important than any single issue that is foreshadowed by, but excluded from, this passage, is the fact that Cephalus' attention to the stories of the poets prevents him from hearing *any* of the arguments surrounding the multiple complexities introduced by his initial introduction of the theme of justice. The stories of Hades, justice, and the gods, added to the reasoning introduced by the conception of justice issuing from Simonides, make the arguments of philosophy quite literally inaudible to Cephalus. We have here a brilliant dramatic representation of one of the central arguments of the *Republic*: stories and images, with the role they play in constituting a hermeneutic horizon and influencing the very working of the soul's internal power of knowing, influence what we actually hear and understand to be communicated by any argument. That is, before we have even heard an argument, stories have the potential to colour our reasoning in such a way that the argument makes very little difference to what we end up thinking or doing. Our attachment to and development within stories appear to constitute a barrier between our understanding and true philosophical argument.

It has been well noted in the secondary literature that, more than the workings of any individual sophist, Socrates takes the tide of public opinion – with its enforcement of common mores, compulsions, and collective narratives in which we read ourselves and make sense of who we are (cf. *Ap.* 25b) – to be the greatest formative, and thus potentially distorting, influence on the developing psyche of any citizen (492a-c).²⁴ However, less often noted is that, given the increased vulnerability of a young soul to external influence, as well as the long-lasting effects of this influence (cf. 378e), any subsequent attempt to transform a soul that has carried away by the tide of public opinion is likely to end in failure. After going through the dangers presented by society to a developing soul, Socrates asks rhetorically:

Now if someone made a quiet approach to a person in that situation and told him the truth, that he had no sense in him and needed some, and that it's not attainable unless one slaves over the acquisition of it, do you imagine it would be as easy as falling off a log to get him to hear that through so much interference? (494d)

²⁴ Myles Burnyeat, for example, writes: "If you are designing an ideal society, as Plato does in the *Republic*, and contrasting it with the corruptions of existing societies, as he also does in the *Republic*, then you need to think about much more than political institutions in a narrow sense. You need to think about all the influences, all the ideas, images, and practices, that make up the culture of a society" (Burnyeat, 1999: 217). And again: "What motivates the proposals [of strict cultural censorship] is [Plato's] profound understanding of the many subtle ways in which the ethos of society forms the souls who grow up in it" (*ibid.*: 257). Jonathan Lear refers to the process through which young souls are shaped by surrounding cultural influences as a process of 'internalisation' (Lear, 1992: 186-190). "For Plato, humans enter the world with a capacity to absorb cultural influences. The young human psyche is like a resin, able to receive the press of cultural influences before it sets into a definite shape...Culture penetrates so deeply, that a fractured polis will produce a fractured psyche" (*ibid.*, 187-188). See also Strauss (1964: 56).

The tide of public opinion serves to form and shape the character and dispositions of one's soul in such a way as to influence *how* what is heard or experienced is actually understood. In fact, as illustrated by the actions of Cephalus, Socrates seems to intimate that the orientation of one's soul can actually influence *what* is heard in the first place. Jonathan Lear articulates this point well: Referring to the comportment of Thrasymachus in *Republic* I and the breakdown in argument that occurs between him and Socrates, Lear speaks about the problem of psychic integration – what I have been referring to as the orientation and formation of the soul – as coextensive with the problem of developing and shaping an outlook:

...looking at the breakdown, it seems clear that what is at stake is not some *particular* form of argument – as though if we made a few adjustments, it would come out all right. Rather, the problem seems to be that rational argument itself is coming too late. Thrasymachus already has an outlook on the world, and he will tend to recognise good and bad arguments in terms of that outlook. The problem then is not just the limitations of elenchus: there is a question of how any good argument could properly influence someone whose outlook is distorted and distorting. (Lear, 2006a: 25)²⁵

Lear later emphasises that “once an ethical outlook has been instilled, it is difficult to induce reflective discomfort” (*ibid*: 26). That is, the fact that our surrounding culture guides the development of our capacity to reason and reflect results in the peculiar situation in which

²⁵ We can find an articulation of this same point in the fragments of Heraclitus: “Eyes and ears are bad witnesses to people if they have souls that do not understand the language” (frag. 107; as translated in McKirahan, 2003).

any attempt to reflect on the norms of our current culture, as well as the ways in which these norms have come to affect our particular ethical outlook, will itself be influenced by those norms (*ibid*: 34). Thus, as Lear writes in another work, "...when a culture is in the grip of a vibrant illusion, philosophical discourse about our ability to step back in reflection can function as ideology, reinforcing our confinement in the name of liberating us from it" (Lear, 2011: 8). Our ability to reflect upon ourselves and our intellectual disorientation is not exempt from the general epistemic problem of recurring partiality and re-inscribed disorientation that is grounded in our beginnings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to note that, in these passages, both Socrates and Lear are concerned with something other than the mere acquisition of specific opinions or beliefs. Rather, they are concerned with the way in which social narratives can affect the operation of our understanding. Once certain views are internalised, they work to regulate the manner in which we make connections between other ideas and experiences. That is, they orient us within our surroundings and in so doing they regulate and filter the content offered up to a soul for reflection. An orientation provides a particular and partial light within which to interpret any phenomenon. Accordingly, many aspects of a phenomenon will remain hidden to a person not oriented toward them. In this vein, Dylan Futter, writing about Wittgenstein, notes that "world pictures aren't themselves determined by the evidence, but are as it were, determinative of what counts as evidence" (Futter, 2016b: fn. 32, 12). Thus, once oriented, a soul is not easily redirected. It is the potential for disorientation contained within the determinative and regulative role played by our initial hermeneutic orientations that Socrates identifies as one of the greatest obstacles to the true development of a philosophical nature.

2. Responding to the Problem of Hermeneutic Orientation

In chapter one I explained the problem of hermeneutic orientation and showed that Plato is exercised by this problem. In the context of the *Republic*, Socrates' concern seems to be that some of the social norms and narratives within which one's understanding develops can orient the soul away from the proper understanding – and thus development – of virtue. In addition, the internalisation of social opinions and norms determines the structure of one's soul and influences the operation of one's understanding and thus, depending on the norms in question, potentially impedes the efficacy of subsequent rational argumentation and persuasion. Commenting on that which is necessary for the education of human beings, Leo Strauss writes: “before men can genuinely listen to a teaching, they must be willing [and – we might add – *able*] to do so; they must have become aware of their need to listen; they must be liberated from the charms which make them obtuse” (Strauss, 1978: 59-60).

In this chapter, I will begin to articulate Plato's response to the problem. I will argue that this response involves the development of wisdom. As in the previous chapter, I have two main aims. First, by investigating some of the limitations of the *Republic's* elementary education programme, I will provide some evidence for the claim that Plato considers the development of wisdom to be of fundamental importance for responding to the problem of hermeneutic orientation. Second, I will examine the unity underlying the various guises in which wisdom appears in the *Republic* in order to show how the development of wisdom does, in fact, constitute an integral part of any meaningful response to the problem. However, in the final section, we will also see that an understanding of the actual content of wisdom is peculiarly

difficult to attain. Thus, it will be the task of the remaining chapters to examine the means by which wisdom can actually be developed.

The Role and Limits of Elementary Education

In their discussion of how best to educate the guardians of their city-in-speech (376d ff.), Socrates and the brothers begin to lay out the first stage in the *Republic*'s extended response to the problem of hermeneutic orientation. The beginning of this response is thus coordinate with the problem's conceptual development. We have already seen the main form this response takes: the content of the stories which begin to shape and mould the character of young souls is to contribute to the inner development of, among other things, piety, courage and moderation. Together with the style of speech and music in which these stories are sometimes presented (392c-398b; 398c-400e), as well as the works of all those artists and artisans whose products constitute the tapestry of our everyday lives (401a-d), they are to infuse "rhythm and harmony...into the inward part of the soul" (401d), thus nourishing within the soul a certain grace and an appreciation for that which is truly beautiful (401e-402a; 403c). When joined to a simple and austere gymnastic training, the gentle and spirited sides of the guardians' natures will be well harmonised (410d-e; 411e-412a), and their souls will be both courageous and moderate (410e-411a).

However, while a good early education – achieved and sustained through political reform – is an important propaedeutic, we are given a number of indications in the *Republic* that it does not constitute a sufficient response to the problem. In fact, some aspects of the elementary education programme described in the *Republic* seem likely to entrench the difficulty. To see why, consider the description Socrates gives of the courage of the guardians and the nature of

their education once the group has begun their attempt to discover the virtues in the city (427d ff.). Socrates characterises the courage of the guardians as “a certain kind of preservation” – the preservation “of the opinion instilled by law through education about what things and what sorts of things are to be feared.” Socrates continues: “By preserving it through everything I [mean] keeping it intact when one is in the midst of pains and pleasures and desires and terrors and not dropping it” (429c-d; cf. 412e; *Lach.* 192b-c).

The description of the courage of the guardians as a certain kind of preservation in the face of various temptations is beautifully rich. On the one hand, it points to the fact that courage involves risking something in an effort to remain true to something else. On the other hand, it acknowledges that only *certain kinds* of preservation are truly virtuous: dogmatic obstinacy when confronted with different perspectives can hardly be considered courageous. The latter point is pertinent when we recall that the problem of hermeneutic orientation emerges precisely because one’s understanding is shaped by the initial opinions about virtue that one accepts as one’s power of understanding is first developing. Rather than subjecting these opinions to scrutiny, we tend to unreflexively cling to them and reflect on the opinions and experiences that we subsequently encounter within the coordinates of our initial perspectives. Thus, one of the limitations of the elementary education programme is the following: although Socrates is careful to formulate the conception of courage that is to be instilled in the potential young guardians in such a way that it excludes certain kinds of preservation, nowhere in the discussion itself does he indicate how subsequent intransigence is to be avoided.

That Plato intends for us to take note of this shortcoming is evidenced by the image that Socrates provides of the nature of the elementary education that is to be given to the

guardians (429d-430b). Socrates likens this education in music and gymnastic training to the careful preparation of wool that is to be dyed. Just like dyers prepare, in advance, the wool that is to be dyed in order to ensure both that it “accepts the pigment as much as possible” and that it “becomes impervious to fading” (429d-e), so too did Socrates, Adeimantus and Glaucon design their education programme in order to best prepare the guardians to “take the laws into themselves like a dye in the most beautiful way possible, so that their opinion about what’s to be feared, and about everything else, would become impervious to fading...” (429e-430a). While the resultant “power of preservation...of a right and lawful opinion about what is and isn’t to be feared” can be identified as a form of courage (430b), Socrates himself makes sure to classify it as a kind of “citizen’s courage”, telling Glaucon that the nature of courage can be gone over in a way that is “still more beautiful” (430c).

By describing the courage of the guardians as a kind of ‘citizen’s’ courage, Socrates does not merely indicate that the true nature of courage transcends his description of it as a certain kind of preservation, but he suggests that it transcends the very nature of the courage that is instilled in the guardians. That is, Socrates indicates that if the guardians are to become truly virtuous, then the civic courage that is imbued in them during their elementary education must be forced to give way to a deeper kind of courage. In fact, courage is a particularly pertinent virtue for the discussion at hand since, when more fully developed, it is of special importance for anyone who is to remain open to the dialectical displacement, and thus potential deepening, of one’s understanding of human excellence. Courage is that virtue on account of which we can allow ourselves to be genuinely challenged: it takes courage to admit, both to oneself and to others, one’s own ignorance; it takes courage to give up one’s

most closely held convictions;²⁶ it takes courage to continue inquiring in the face of one's own failure²⁷ – including one's failure to understand the nature of courage itself (cf. *Lach.* 194a).²⁸

Given a slightly different formulation, the inability of the elementary education programme to provide a completely satisfactory response to the problem of hermeneutic orientation is evidenced by the fact that, rather than facilitating the capacity to offer up one's most deeply

²⁶ Describing the dialectical failure of Laches in the eponymously named dialogue, Dylan Futter writes: "Apparently he has the courage to stand by his convictions but not the courage to abandon them" (2017: 791). Following Charles Griswold (1986. 'Philosophy, Education, and Courage in Plato's *Laches*,' *Interpretation*, 14:2-3, 177), Futter supports his point by referring to Nietzsche: "A very popular error having the courage of one's convictions; rather it is a matter of having the courage for an attack on one's convictions!" (Gesam. Werke, vol. 16, p. 318; Kaufmann trans.).

²⁷ In his commentary on the Allegory of the Cave taken from his lectures entitled "On the Essence of Truth" and given in the Winter Semester of 1933-1934, Heidegger notes that courage is necessary for the "authentic" or *actual* liberation of 'man' from his confinement to that which is immediately given to him in experience, in contrast to the mere "external liberation" that results when his chains are removed and he is turned toward the fire and the figurines carried along above the wall: "The *authentic* liberation demands not only violence but *endurance*, a long *courage* that is sufficient to run through the stages in all their heights, a courage that can endure setbacks." (Heidegger, 2010: 114; emphasis in original; cf. 108-110)

²⁸ The virtue of moderation is open to deepening of a similar sort. While moderation's connection to bodily temperance is emphasised throughout the *Republic* (cf. 389d-391e; 519a-b), it is also the case that a moderate soul – a soul that is not intemperately attached to any particular object or opinion and thus a soul that does not subordinate other, potentially important considerations and activities to the single-minded protection or pursuit of an idea, experience or material possession – is least likely to require the comfort of a wide variety of opinions among which to recline (cf. 372d-e; 390a-b), or to drag an inquiry around on account of a disproportionate attachment to a half-dead conviction, the way Achilles dragged the body of Hector around the tomb of Patroclus (cf. 391b; the reference is to *Illiad* XXIV, 14-18).

held convictions for examination, the virtue of courage emerges here as that virtue on account of which one can hold fast to an opinion thought to be correct. Of course, there is no strict incompatibility between, on the one hand, holding fast to an opinion when tempted by pleasure or when in pain and threatened with death, and, on the other, being willing and able to admit the inadequacy of one's opinions when the need for inquiry calls for one to do so. Indeed, if one's fear of living with a true falsehood (382a-c) is greater than one's fear of dying (cf. 386a-388e), then these two aspects of courage can become two aspects of a uniquely integrated and unified life. However, in order to recognise and separate out the situations in which courage requires one to stand by one's opinions and those in which courage requires one to abandon them – that is, in order to unify, or “draw together” these different “aspects [of courage]...into a single conception” (Futter, 2017: 793) – one needs to exercise something other than either of these aspects singly considered. What is needed is practical discernment, or *phronesis*, understood as “the wisdom of intelligent adaptability that would facilitate appropriate responses to changing circumstances” (*ibid*).

In the middle of the *Republic*, when the conversation begins to focus on wisdom and its development (502c ff.), Socrates himself asserts that without wisdom – understood here as knowledge of the form of the good – the virtues as they were considered in *Republic* III and IV are of no use to their possessors (504e-505b; 505d-506a). What is apparently needed, in addition to the previously discussed education in music and gymnastic training, is a series of mathematical studies that will, if correctly pursued and carried to completion in the practice of dialectic, lead on to the study of that which is even greater than the subject matter of these (503d-504a; 504c-505a; 510b-511e; 519c-d; 521c ff.). The purpose of the overall trajectory of these studies is the development of genuine wisdom – a state of the soul in which one is able to grasp the nature of that which is responsible for all that is (509b), in contrast to the

socially authoritative opinions and hypothetical ‘knowledges’ that often pass for wisdom (516b-c; 532b; 533b-535a).

Thus, what we witness Socrates saying later in the conversation provides support both for the fact that Plato considers the development of wisdom to be of importance for responding to the problem of hermeneutic orientation, and for the judgement that the elementary education programme is not suited to facilitate the full development of this virtue. Indeed, when Socrates asks Glaucon if the aforementioned education in music would be sufficient to draw the soul from becoming to being (521d-522a), Glaucon, having taken to heart Socrates’ earlier cautions, ‘reminds’ Socrates of what Socrates himself had noted just a few pages previously (518d-519a) – namely, that this education was merely a kind of ‘habituation’, incapable, on its own, of bringing the soul to that which is truly first:

[The education in music] was an exact counterpart to gymnastic training, educating the guardians by means of habits, and giving them a certain evenness of temper brought about by harmony rather than knowledge, and a sense of proportion brought about by rhythm, and bringing along in speeches certain other habits closely related to these, as far as storytelling speeches were concerned, and the truer sort as well; but as for a study leading toward anything of the sort you’re now looking for, there was nothing like that in it. (522a)

Without the requisite discernment needed to augment a habitual firmness of conviction with an understanding of when to detach oneself from these same convictions, an education instilled through habit can, in fact, exacerbate the problem of hermeneutic orientation. The

Republic's early education programme, with the emphasis it places on developing the steadfast resolve of the guardians, seems ill-equipped to develop the active disposition that is required of one who is able to hold her own beliefs in suspense, and thus inquire beyond them. It is thus ill-equipped to lead a soul away from its reliance upon social images of virtue and toward a fuller recognition of the possibilities for and requirements of virtuous living. Socrates, himself, leads us onward (522b ff.).

The Role of Wisdom

From the brief stretches of text that I examined in the previous section, it is clear that Plato does, in fact, consider the development of wisdom to be of fundamental importance for responding to the problem of hermeneutic orientation. Indeed, on a purely formal level, his reason for doing so seems rather obvious, since wisdom is itself the highest virtue of the soul. However, the notion of wisdom in the *Republic* is not strictly uniform. In fact, over the course of the dialogue Socrates articulates the knowledge that is constitutive of wisdom in at least three different ways. Perhaps it is better to say that wisdom appears in three different, albeit related, forms or guises. First, at the level of the city, wisdom is the knowledge that is set over the correct functioning of the city as a whole (428b-429a).²⁹ Second, at the level of the individual soul, wisdom is the knowledge that concerns itself with the correct ordering and functioning – that is, with the excellence – of the soul as a whole (441e; 442c; 443c-444a). Third, in its highest and most complete form, wisdom is the knowledge that is set over, and is nourished by, the good (504a-506a; 508d-509a).

²⁹ Cf. Charles Kahn, (1987: 84): "Plato's picture of reason begins at the social level with the wisdom of the guardians in book 4."

Furthermore, the relationship between wisdom understood as knowledge of the good, and wisdom understood as the intelligent, practical discernment and responsiveness required for the full achievement of human excellence is not quite clear.³⁰ How does the ontological knowledge gestured toward in *Republic* VI and VII lessen one's confinement to and dependence on political and cultural codes for moral and practical guidance and improve one's capacity to transcend the re-inscribed partiality of one's pre-philosophical prejudices in order to judge appropriately and align one's actions with the requirements of circumstance?³¹ In order to understand Socrates' handling of the problem of hermeneutic orientation in the *Republic*, we need to investigate this relationship. That is, before we consider the way in which the mathematical and dialectical studies of the advanced elementary education programme can contribute to the development of wisdom, we need to better understand the nature of wisdom and how it relates to the problem.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will argue that the capacity to consider and deliberate about multiple concerns within a wide-ranging perspective constitutes the underlying unity that ties together the conceptions of political and psychological wisdom that are discussed in *Republic*

³⁰ In the wake of Aristotle, it is tempting to construe this relationship as the relationship between wisdom understood as *sophia* and wisdom understood as *phronesis*. However, in the *Republic* Socrates does not seem to mark off two forms of wisdom in this way. In *Republic* IV, for example, Socrates appears to use *phronesis* and *sophia* interchangeably to refer to the wisdom of the rulers in the city (431c-e). Cf. Joe Sachs: "The gradual deepening of the meaning of *sophia* throughout the dialogue supersedes any verbal distinction between practical and theoretical wisdom, and Socrates denies that the two are separable." (Sachs, 2007: 352) Similarly, Charles Kahn writes that the "unity of practice and theory is so fundamental in Plato's thought that he never makes Aristotle's distinction between *sophia*, the theoretical wisdom exercised in contemplation, and *phronesis*, the practical wisdom exercised in action and deliberation" (Kahn, 1987: 82).

³¹ If confined to the political domain, this question can be considered as akin to the question of how theoretical education equips the philosopher king for ruling.

IV. Understood in this way, the development of wisdom is of vital importance for responding to the problem of hermeneutic orientation because this problem is the result of one's failure to transcend the narrow perspectives within which one's understanding first develops. Following this, I will demonstrate the dependence of political and psychological wisdom on knowledge of the good. That is, I will argue that the greater perspective constitutive of political and psychological wisdom – the perspective needed to respond appropriately and virtuously to one's changing circumstances – presupposes insight into the normative structure of our own being.

Political Wisdom

Socrates first claims to catch sight of wisdom in *Republic IV*. However, his initial remarks about its nature are tantalisingly limited. After claiming that the city he has been discussing with Glaucon and Adeimantus is “wise in its very being”, Socrates attributes its wisdom to its being well-counselled (428b; *euboulia*). Good counsel, in its turn, “is a certain kind of knowledge” (*ibid*). The knowledge in question is not to be identified with any one of the particular knowledges within the city that are concerned with the achievement of some specific and limited end – that is, for example, the knowledge of the carpenters, or the smiths, or the farmers (428b-c); rather, the wisdom of the city is the knowledge “by which it counsels...about itself as a whole, and in what way it would interact best within itself and with other cities” (428c-d). Glaucon identifies this knowledge as belonging to those among the guardians who are most complete and fit to rule (*ibid*).

In this interaction, Socrates appeals to a principle to which he returns when discussing the nature of desire in the soul (438c-e; cf. 477b-d): knowledge is differentiated by that over which it is set. Although this may seem somewhat pedestrian, Socrates will ultimately put it

to profound use.³² The knowledge of constructing houses differs from the knowledge of carpentry, or smithery, or farming. This is made possible by the fact that each of these knowledges are themselves *particular* (438d). That is, the knowledge of housebuilding is determinate and operates in a different domain to the knowledge of farming. It is the determinate knowledge that it is precisely because it takes a particular object as its subject matter that differs from the object of any other kind of knowledge. We need to be precise. Although a particular farmer may in fact be able to answer a question about how best to build a house, it is not her knowledge of farming that will enable her to do so. Rather, inasmuch as she is able to answer a question about housebuilding, it is clear that she does not just possess the knowledge of a farmer, but possesses some of the knowledge of a housebuilder as well. Her very ability to answer a question about housebuilding is evidence of that. The knowledge of farming is directed toward the accomplishment of a very particular end and does not just remain silent on questions of housebuilding, but is completely deaf to their articulation.

However, the existence of such a precise delineation of knowledge poses a political problem. If all the different knowledges are so strictly particularised, then there is, strictly speaking, no way in which they can communicate with each other. If a builder and a farmer both identify a particular piece of land as good land on which to build or farm respectively, then, *qua* builder and farmer, they will be unable to come to a decision as to the use to which the land is to be put. The decision about how to use the land must involve considerations that aren't themselves the strict concern of either farmers or builders – questions, for example, of the balance of the city's needs as a whole. Bringing this set of concerns to bear on the question of the use to which the land is to be put opens up, or brings to light, a set of possibilities for the use of the land that are invisible from the perspective of the farmer or builder.

³² What is at stake is nothing less than the question of right perspective.

We can put this point in terms of the particular end over which each of the knowledges are set. The end at which housebuilding aims is the provision of houses. The end at which certain types of farming aim is the provision of food. The end of the city, while incorporating both of these ends within itself, is neither simply the building of houses, nor simply the provision of food. Rather, schematically considered, the end of the city is the satisfaction of many, different human needs for many, different people (369b-c).³³ If the city has plenty of food, but not enough housing, then that which is good for the farmer *qua* farmer – that is, that which enables the farmer to achieve her end – is not good for the city. Conversely, that which is good for the city – giving the land to the builder – is not good for the farmer *qua* farmer, even if it may be good for the farmer *qua* citizen. This judgement itself depends on an expanded awareness and recognition of the possibilities that are contained within any particular situation, as well as the demands imposed on one by a fuller consideration of the city's circumstances.

It follows that knowledge of what is good for the city as a whole, and not merely what is good for a farmer or a builder considered strictly in their capacities as farmer and builder, is required to ensure the correct and harmonious functioning of the city; technical expertise and proficiency is insufficient. Technical expertise may contribute toward the excellence of a city, but only if one knows when and how to make use of it. This latter knowledge is nothing other than the knowledge of when and how it is *good* to make use of one's expertise (405b-407e).³⁴ This knowledge – knowledge that we might term, loosely, 'political wisdom' – is of

³³ I will return to discuss the true end of the city in more depth in the final section, below.

³⁴ Both Laurence Bloom (2017) and Francisco Gonzalez (1998a) draw on Socrates' use of the claim, in *Republic* X (601c-602a), that the user rules the maker to argue for the importance to the philosopher of the knowledge of

a radically different kind to the kinds of knowledge exhibited by carpenters, weavers, farmers, doctors or generals: it is the knowledge that, on account of recognising the set of concerns that drive the city as a whole, is able to integrate all the knowledges that exist in the city into a unified community that is capable of doing justice to its citizens. It is *this* knowledge that counsels about what is best for the city as a whole (both in its internal structure and in its dealings with other cities), since each of the particular technical knowledges, on account of their limited focus, lack the perspective needed to judge what is good for the whole.³⁵

The Soul's Wisdom

Just as wisdom in the city comes into view as a knowledge of what is best for the city as a *use*. See especially Bloom (2017: 149-150) and Gonzalez (1998a: 139-143). In addition, both Bloom (n.d.) and David Roochnik (1996: 32; 92, f.n. 2) point out that Socrates draws upon the distinction between technical knowledge and knowledge of the “most important pursuits” (*Ap.* 22d-e) – that is, presumably, knowledge of *how best to live* – in his discussion of human wisdom in the *Apology*.

³⁵ Aristotle makes this point in the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* when he identifies “the political” (ἡ πολιτική) as prescribing “which kinds of knowledge ought to be in the cities, and what sorts each person ought to learn and to what extent”, that is, as the capacity that “makes *use* of the rest of the kinds of knowledge, and also lays down the law about what one ought to do and from what one ought to refrain” (*EN.* I.2, 1094a-b; emphasis my own). Included in Aristotle’s point is that political wisdom must include knowledge not just of *how* to use particular crafts, but also of whether or not a particular craft, even abstracted from the context of its use, *can* be good for either the city or the soul. Furthermore, as Dylan Futter has pointed out to me, this knowledge must also discriminate between which of the different possible ends that fall within the domain of any one particular craft are best for both city and soul. That is, although the end of the farmer is the production of food, one can still discriminate further between wheat-farming and pig-farming. Both these points emerge explicitly in the *Republic*’s transition from the ‘healthy’ to the ‘infected’ or ‘luxurious’ polis (372e-373c). It is thus that the doctor (373c-d; 405d-408e) comes to prefigure the ruler.

whole, wisdom in the soul appears as a knowledge of what is good for the soul as a whole (441c; 441e; 442c; 443e-444a). Moreover, Socrates uses the nature of the particular craft knowledges that exist in the city in order to throw light on the nature of the soul's desires and their difference from reason. He does so explicitly: in analogy with the particular kinds of knowledge, desires are the particular desires that they are on account of the particular end that they pursue (437d-439b).

The passage in which Socrates and Glaucon separate off reason from desire in *Republic* IV (436b-439d) is difficult and controversial.³⁶ Part of the difficulty stems from the fact that, as was the case in the discussion of the city, Socrates' remarks about wisdom and, in this instance, reason (*to logistikon*) – that faculty, or power of the soul that is properly actualised in wisdom – are quite limited. We are told that reason is able to oppose desire (439c-d; 442a-b), that the soul is wise in the same manner and by the same means as the city (441c) and that reason should rule in the soul because it “is wise and has foresight on behalf of the whole soul” (441e; 442c; 443e-444a). It seems that, rather than setting out a substantial account of the nature of reason, these remarks provide directions for further inquiry.

In contrast, Socrates goes into a fair amount of detail when discussing the nature of desire

³⁶ This passage has received a lot of attention, and has been the subject of much ongoing debate and conversation in the secondary literature. This debate includes, but is definitely not limited to, contributions by Annas (1981: 123-151); Bloom (2017: esp. 31-79); Bobonich (2001); Cooper (1984); Ferrari (2007); Hoffman (2003); Irwin (1995: 203-222); Kahn (1987); Penner (1971); Robinson (1971); Roochnik (2003: esp. 10-50); Shields (2001; 2014) and Woods (1987). There are multiple points of contestation and I cannot deal with them adequately in what follows. Rather, in keeping with the aim of this chapter, I will explore the way in which which reason comes to light as that power within the soul that is capable of taking account of the good of the whole. In doing so, I am indebted to the work of Laurence Bloom (2017; esp. 46-60).

(437a-439b; *to epithumetikon*). After Socrates and Glaucon agree to assume, or hypothesise, that “the same thing isn’t going to put up with doing or undergoing opposite things in the same respect and in relation to the same thing at the same time” (436b-437a) and, in addition, that “[1] nodding ‘yes’ as compared to shaking one’s head ‘no’ [are] among things that are opposite to each other” as well as “[2] having a craving to get something as compared to rejecting it and [3] drawing something to oneself as compared to pushing it away” (437b), Socrates and Glaucon agree to classify desire as just this sort of thing:

...wouldn’t you claim that the soul of someone who desires either has a craving for what it desires, or draws to itself what it wants to become its own, or, in turn, to the extent it wishes something to be provided to it, nods its assent to this to itself as though it had asked some question, stretching out toward its source? (437b-c)

As Laurence Bloom writes, this is an interesting description of desires: “It suggests, cryptically, that Socrates takes desires to be knowledge-like in some way...This particular description of desires as question-answering things actually points to some sort of similarity and point of connection [between reason and desire]” (Bloom, 2017: 48). Bloom goes on to characterise this similarity in terms of the self-reflexivity of both desire and reason. Although it may seem counter-intuitive to refer to desires as self-reflexive – and indeed, there will turn out to be a way in which the self-reflexivity of desire fails to live up to that of reason – that desires are able to take some account of the self is, in fact, what distinguishes the soul ruled by desire from an inanimate object (*Ibid*: 50).

Consider, for example, the complex desire for hot drink – a desire which Socrates takes care

to separate into its two constituent desires: one for drink and the other for heat (437d-e). The desire for heat, we are told, arises due to the presence of cold – that is, due to a lack of heat – while the desire for thirst, we are left to infer, arises due to a lack of drink. The desire for hot drink, therefore, must arise from the simultaneous absence of both heat and drink. However, the mere fact of a particular lack is not enough to explain the presence of a desire. We do not think that a cold drink, for example, desires heat even though it lacks it, nor do we take a piece of dry metal to desire water. Likewise, we do not think that a cold, dry piece of metal – a complex object – has a corresponding complex desire for hot liquid. A certain degree of self-reflexivity, or recognition, is required in order to transform lack into desire (Bloom, 2017: 49).³⁷

³⁷ In his article *Plato's Theory of Desire*, Charles Kahn makes a similar point. Referring to the passage in which Socrates emphasizes that thirst must be construed simply as *desire for drink* and not as *desire for good drink* (437d-439a), Kahn writes: “This passage has sometimes been thought to imply that the appetite (*epithymia*) in question is a “blind craving,” with no cognitive grasp of its object [cf. Annas, 1981: 139]; but, of course, thirst must recognise its object as drinkable and *hence* as desirable. So a minimum of cognition is implied even for the most elemental appetite. (Kahn, 1987: 85). Moreover, Kahn claims, I think correctly, that the “reason why Plato emphasises that thirst as such is a desire for drink as such, and not a desire for hot drink or good drink, is not because he wants to deny a cognitive element to appetite but because he wants to insist upon the appetite’s *indifference* to all considerations other than getting what it wants” (*ibid*: 85; emphasis in original). However, I disagree with the conclusion that Kahn thinks follows from the attribution of a cognitive aspect to desire – or appetite – namely, that “[in] order to establish the distinction between reason and appetite Plato must here define, for the first time, the notion of a desire that is essentially *independent* of any judgement concerning what is good, beneficial, or advantageous (taking these three terms as synonymous)” (*ibid*; emphasis in original). From the fact that desire has limited cognition, it simply does not follow that reason can only be distinguished from desire by severing the cognitive aspect of desire from *any* understanding of the good. Kahn seems to miss what I will argue is an essential aspect of the account of reason in the *Republic*. This is that the distinguishing feature of reason is its capacity to take account of the *whole* in its consideration of what is good. Particular desires, on the other hand, are only able to take account of their own particular lack in their consideration of

Desire is thus first marked out as a motion of the soul toward that which it recognises itself to lack.³⁸ This is very similar to the way in which the technical knowledges and practical arts were first brought to light in *Republic* II: the art of farming arises out of the self-conscious recognition of the human need for food, while the art of building arises from the self-conscious recognition of the human need for shelter (369c-d; cf. *Prt.* 321c-322a). Indeed, the practical arts seem to emerge precisely in order to satisfy particular human desires. Socrates alludes to this connection by way of his use of the example of hunger: it is one of the two “most conspicuous” human desires (437d) and, perhaps precisely on account of being so, it is the origin of the first practical art Socrates mentions in connection with the city (369c-d).

Following the articulation of this first characteristic of desire, Socrates goes on to draw a comparison between the specialised and limited nature of particular desires and the specialised and limited nature of particular knowledges (438c-e). He goes to great lengths to make clear that what makes a desire the particular desire that it is is nothing other than the particular end toward which the desire is directed and that, in addition, insofar as a desire exists in virtue of the particular end toward it aims, it takes no account of any other possible end (437d-439a).³⁹ Laurence Bloom refers to this aspect of desires as their single-mindedness (Bloom, 2017: 48):

what is good. As Paul Hoffman writes, “It is one thing to argue that thirst is the desire for drink and not the desire for good drink. It is entirely different to argue that to desire drink is not to view drink as good. Plato argues only for the first claim” (Hoffman, 2003: 172).

³⁸ Cf. the triadic structure of *eros* as articulated by Drew Hyland in (Hyland, 1997).

³⁹ This strategy of identifying forms, or capacities, of the soul in terms of the end toward which they aim, or the work they accomplish, is repeated by Socrates in the argument from opposites in *Republic* V (477b-d).

A desire nods its assent or shakes in dissent to one and only one thing and takes no further questions on any other topic; that is to say, there is a one to one correspondence between a desire and its object. Thirst, and only thirst, is set over drink and it is set over nothing but drink; so too, hunger is only for food.

As Socrates says, “the soul of someone who’s thirsty, *to the extent he’s thirsty* (καθ’ ὅσον διψῆ), wants nothing other than to drink, and stretches out to this, and sets itself in motion toward it” (439a9-b1; emphasis my own). The point is not that the thirsty soul is unable to take account of anything else outside of its desire for drink – just as one would not claim that a farmer is unable to understand anything outside of the provision of food – but rather that *if* the soul *is* able to do so, it is not in virtue of its desire for drink, since the desire for drink is completely exhausted in its preoccupation with drink. Indeed, the desire for drink is nothing but this preoccupation – a preoccupation which involves the recognition of a particular lack. Again, Bloom puts the point succinctly: “It is not that desires are blind – what makes them desires is, among other things, some sort of awareness that inanimate or soulless objects do not have – it is more to the point to say that they have blinders on” (Bloom, 2017: 50). An important consequence of the single-minded nature of desires – a consequence that is prefigured by the relationship between the particular technical knowledges in the city and the end of the city as a whole – is that a desire is unable to take into consideration the balance of needs of the soul as a whole. In fact, it is unable to recognise anything at all apart from the specific end toward which it aims. A desire for drink cannot recognise coldness, nor can it impel a soul toward heat: “each desire itself is only for the very thing it’s naturally for” (437e).

From the fact that the desires, understood in this way, are single-minded in their pursuit of their own end, and thus incapable of taking into account the balance of needs of the soul, it follows that if the soul is somehow able to consider what is good for the soul as a whole, its capacity to do so cannot be furnished by a desire. Instead, there must exist in the soul some faculty that differs significantly from desire. At this stage, Socrates need not specify this difference in any way other than to say that there must exist in the soul a power capable of detaching itself from the particular ends pursued by desire in order to think through what is best for the soul as a whole. That is, unlike any of the particular desires, it needs to have the capacity to broaden its vision such that it can develop wisdom – that knowledge of the end of the soul on account of which it is capable of deciding if and when to act on any of its desires. Consequently, this is the salient characteristic he assigns to reason (441e; 442c).⁴⁰ Reason, as that which “has forethought on behalf of the whole soul” (441e), comes to light in *Republic*

⁴⁰ This is not the *Republic*’s final word on reason, nor should it be seen as an attempt to articulate that which is most definitive of reason. On this matter, as on many others, I am in agreement with Bloom (2017), whose full ontological treatment of the matter I cannot address here. In brief, Bloom’s account argues that for Plato, desire is an imitation – or contradictory instance – of reason and that, as such, “there is nothing about desire of any significance, nothing with any ‘power,’ that does not already belong to reason in virtue of its being rational” (2017: 73). With this in mind, it may be somewhat misleading to write, as I have written above, that reason is that power of the soul “on account of which it is capable of deciding if and when to act of any of its desires.” Unlike the accounts of reason and desire that are given paradigmatic expression in the writings of Thomas Hobbes and David Hume, for Plato reason is capable of setting its own end *in virtue of the fact that it is reason*, and not, as some modern commentators would have it, in virtue of the fact that reason has ‘desires of its own’. I have stuck with the above formulation because it builds nicely upon the account of wisdom in the city and, with the necessary qualifications, it need not mislead the reader into thinking that reason is merely that which calculates the means by which one can achieve one’s desires, nor that it merely mediates between conflicting desires, nor even that a *direct* conflict between desires is possible. For the impossibility of a direct conflict between desires, see Bloom (2017: 54-60).

IV as that power capable of resisting any of the ‘single-minded’ motions towards the diverse ends set by the desires (439c-d). That is, just as political wisdom emerged as something distinct from each of the practical arts on account of its being set over the good of the whole city rather than the good of any particular part, so too must the soul’s wisdom – that knowledge on account of which the soul can consider the good of the soul as a whole – be distinct from the work of any of the particular desires that take no notice of anything outside of the particular end over which they are set.

So far I have focussed on revealing the unity underlying the way in which wisdom emerges in both the city and the soul. Wisdom has come to light as a knowledge that is capable of dictating the proper limitations and use of the technical knowledges that exist in the city for the sake of what is best for the city as a whole as well as a knowledge that is capable of directing the soul toward the satisfaction of those desires the satisfaction of which it judges to be best for the soul as a whole. This is a knowledge that, on account of considering the needs of the whole city and the whole soul respectively, is able to weigh up a number of diverse perspectives when deliberating about the best course of action and thus makes its possessor well-suited to respond appropriately to the requirements of particular circumstances. It is thus a knowledge that, once sufficiently developed, is of fundamental importance for countering the distortions of perspective that are constitutive of a soul that is under the sway of the problem of hermeneutic orientation. However, in order to fill in this sketch of wisdom, we need to investigate what is in fact good for both the city and the soul. This question leads us into an investigation of the third form in which wisdom appears in the *Republic*: the knowledge that is set over, and is nourished by, the good itself.

In *Republic* VI, Socrates surprises Adeimantus by announcing that there exists something learnable that is of greater importance than that which they have already discussed in connection with the virtues of the city and the soul (504d). After Adeimantus voices his surprise and threatens to ask for details about this greatest study, Socrates rebukes him for attempting to cause trouble, before responding as follows to the as-yet unasked question (504d-505a):

The form of the good is the most important thing to learn about and ... it's by their relation to it that just things and the others become useful and beneficial. You know very well now that I am going to say this, and, besides, that we have no adequate knowledge of it. And you also know that, if we don't know it, even the fullest possible knowledge of other things is of no benefit to us, any more than if we acquire any possession without the good of it. (505a-b1)⁴¹

On the one hand, what Socrates says here fits well with the interpretation of wisdom that I've been developing in this chapter. Knowledge of what is truly good for the city guides the correct and beneficial integration of the technical knowledges of the city and knowledge of what is truly good for the soul guides the correct and beneficial integration of the soul's desires. One will only derive benefit from the knowledge involved in farming if one knows when it is good to employ that knowledge – that is, if one is able to ensure that the activity of farming does not overstep its bounds, thereby preventing the construction of the shelter that is

⁴¹ Grube and Reeve trans. in Cooper (ed), 1997.

also needed for one's survival; one will only derive benefit from the satisfaction of specific desires if one knows which desires are good to satisfy and when it is good to satisfy them; one will only be truly courageous when one knows when it is good to stand by one's convictions on the one hand, and when it is good to detach oneself from them on the other.

On the other hand, this passage also brings into sharper focus a question that has, up until now, been given little attention in this chapter: what is, in fact, good? In order to judge what is truly good for the city and what is truly good for the soul, one needs to know what it means for something to be good. That is, an understanding of the nature of goodness itself is presupposed in any judgement concerning the goodness of any particular thing. Although we have seen that knowledge of what is good for the whole soul and the knowledge of what is good for the whole city are the knowledges that enable one to recognise the appropriate limits of one's desires and the proper use of one's technical expertise respectively, we have also, at least for the most part, left the notion of goodness empty. Socrates himself declares that we do not know it well enough (505a5-6).

However, while we don't yet have an adequate grasp of what is good, our previous reflections on the nature of wisdom have not left us without direction. In order to mediate the political problem raised by the partiality of the technical knowledges, we saw that political wisdom needs to appeal to the function of the city. Borrowing terminology derived from the Aristotelian tradition, we might say that in order to determine what is good for a city, political wisdom needs to take into account the final cause of the city – that is, the end at which it aims and for the sake of which it comes into being. That which is good for the city is that which enables the city to best carry out this function (*ergon*). Similarly, that which is good for the soul is that which enables the soul to best carry out *its* function (353d-e). As

such, if we are able to grasp the function of the city as well as the function of the soul, then we will be able to improve our understanding of that which is good for the city and that which is good for the soul.

We can adjust the formulation of this previous point. Doing so will enable us to clarify the ontological dimension of the knowledge in question. To understand the end at which something aims is to understand one of the most fundamental causes of that thing; it is to understand that in relation to which the thing is unified as the thing that it is (cf. Bloom, 2017: 37-38). We can illustrate this very quickly by citing an example that Bloom takes from Socrates – that of a pruning knife (cf. 333c-d; 352e-353a). To understand a pruning knife is to understand it as something that is capable of cutting vines. If it is no longer capable of performing this function – if, for example, it becomes blunt and is no longer capable of bringing about its own characteristic end – then, strictly speaking, it is no longer a pruning knife.⁴² The *being* of the knife is constituted by its function. As Bloom writes, “what makes a pruning knife is its ability to prune vines. If it were to lose the virtue that enabled this functioning, if it could not prune vines at all, it would cease to *exist* as a pruning knife” (Bloom, 2017: 141). If we generalise this analysis, then it follows that since knowledge of what is good for something depends upon knowledge of that thing’s *function*, then knowledge of what is good for something depends upon knowledge of what that thing *is*. As such, gaining knowledge of what is good for the city and knowledge of what is good for the soul requires coming to terms with that which makes these entities into the entities they are; it

⁴² Cf. Aristotle (*Met.* 1035b23-25): “Now in a sense [the parts] are more primary than the composite, but in a sense they are not (for the parts of the body are not capable of being when they are separated, for something is not the finger of an animal when it is any condition at all, but that of a corpse is a finger in only an ambiguous sense).”

requires knowledge of the normative structure of their being.

Let us begin, as before, with the city. In *Republic II*, Socrates and Adeimantus agree that a city finds its origin in human need: since human beings are not self-sufficient, people “assemble together in one dwelling place as partners and helpers” (369b-c). Thus, from what has been said above, it follows that what is good for a city is, minimally, that which enables it to fulfil the function of satisfying human need. According to Socrates, among these needs are the needs for food, a dwelling place and clothes (369d), as well as, perhaps, companionship and divine grace (372b-c). From the necessity of satisfying these needs, Socrates and Adeimantus outline the structure of an entire community that includes farmers, builders, weavers, leatherworkers, carpenters, metalworkers, herdsmen, couriers and commercial traders, seafarers, retailers and wage labourers of all kinds (369d-371e). Correctly integrated, the work of all of these people will contribute to the satisfaction of human need and, consequently, will be good for the city.

Glaucon objects. A city should cater to the needs of human beings, not to the needs of pigs (372d). Masked by his teasing manner, Socrates, in turn, helps to raise Glaucon’s objection to the level of philosophical seriousness (372e-373c): where, in this city for pigs, can one find comfort, culture and beauty? Which of the city’s resources answer to the demands for human self-respect and dignity? In this city of basic necessity, what does one do with one’s curiosity which, if properly oriented, can elevate one into the realm of philosophy?⁴³ For Glaucon, the function of a city is not merely the satisfaction of our most basic bodily needs; rather, the aim

⁴³ See Jacob Klein’s excellent discussion of the relationship between gossip and curiosity on the one hand, and the ‘turnabout’ or conversion constitutive of philosophy on the other, in his lecture “The Idea of Liberal Education” (Klein, 1985: 159-163).

of a city is to provide the conditions under which citizens can attend to the work of living well (cf. 352d-354c).⁴⁴ Although manifesting itself in a seemingly innocuous and perhaps crudely indulgent outburst, Glaucon's indignation at the manner of life to be lived by the members of this first city helps to bring into the open a question previously passed over by Socrates: in addition to basic human needs, which desires should be included among those that the city ought to satisfy? The implications of this question are significant and resonate throughout the remaining books of the *Republic*.

If the city exists in order to provide the conditions under which human beings can live good lives, then, in order to deepen our understanding of that which facilitates the functioning of the city, we need to face up to the question of what it is that is truly good for a human being. In other words, knowledge of the end of the city, and thus knowledge of its true nature, itself depends upon an answer to the following question: which desires aim at goods the attainment of which contribute to a good life? Or, in other words, which desires aim at goods which contribute to the right and proper functioning of a human being? An answer to this question, in turn, depends upon an understanding of the kind of beings that we are and the kind of work that it is in our nature to do – that which constitutes a good life for a human being surely differs from that which constitutes a good life for a pig, as Glaucon himself seems to suggest.

We do not have to wait long after Glaucon's book two interjection before Socrates and

⁴⁴ Myles Burnyeat provides an interesting and illuminating account of the way in which Glaucon's objection to the austere city designed by Socrates and Adeimantus is fuelled by his contempt for its lack of culture and civilisation (Burnyeat, 1999: 228 ff.). Among other points, he draws attention to, and examines the resonances of, the introduction of couches (*klíne*) into the luxurious city, noting that "the social gathering with couches and tables is as a good a place as any to localise the overall choice which is the main theme of the *Republic*, the choice being living well and living badly" (*ibid*: 233; cf. 232-236).

Glaucon turn to examine the proper articulation and function of the soul (435c ff.). Since the work that properly belongs to a human being can only be achieved when the soul is governed by that within it that is able to take account of what is good for the whole soul, and since reason is that power of the soul that is capable of taking account of what is best for the whole, the function of a human being is that activity in which a human being is engaged when their soul is following reason (441d-442b; 443a-444a).⁴⁵ Of course, to say this is not yet to provide a substantial answer to the question of the function of a human soul. What is needed, in addition, is an account of what it is that we are doing – that is, how it is that we are living – when we are following reason and carrying out its work.⁴⁶ That is, what is needed is an account of the function – or, in other words, the fundamental source and nature – of reason. In fact, it is precisely on account of failing to know the true function of human reason – the proper end and work of a human being – that we are forced to appeal to socially inscribed standards and opinions for practical guidance about how to live.

However, when trying to determine the substance of this knowledge, we come up against the reflexive nature of the problem of hermeneutic orientation. Since reason is that power of the soul on account of which we are capable of investigating and examining ourselves and the world (cf. Bloom, 2017: ix), it follows that we need to use our reason in order to know the true end and nature of reason. However, the problem of hermeneutic orientation is a problem that, on account of misdirecting our souls, prevents the correct functioning of our reason. If our reason is not functioning correctly, then it will be unable to arrive at knowledge of its own nature. Thus while, on the one hand, this knowledge is important for responding to the

⁴⁵ Cf. Aristotle *EN*. 1.7, 1097b-1098a; Bloom, 2017: 22-23, 60-68 161; Halper, 1993: 59-60.

⁴⁶ As Laurence Bloom puts the point, we need to discover reason's end: "What is reason doing in its functioning? What is it set over?" (Bloom, 2017: 161).

problem of hermeneutic orientation since it is a knowledge that is presupposed in the knowledge of how to act virtuously at every instant, on the other hand, it is the very problem of hermeneutic orientation that prevents us from gaining insight into this knowledge. That is, the problem of hermeneutic orientation prevents us from gaining insight into the content of the solution to the problem of hermeneutic orientation. The question we are thus left with is the following: given the problem of hermeneutic orientation, how is wisdom acquired?

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued that Plato thinks that an adequate response to the problem of hermeneutic orientation requires the cultivation of wisdom. Moreover, I have shown why this is the case: knowledge of the nature of goodness is presupposed in any judgement regarding what is truly good for the whole soul. This knowledge is, in turn, a precondition for the possibility of acting virtuously. Since reason is that capacity of the soul that is capable of considering the good of the whole soul, wisdom is, itself, the actualisation of the work of reason. However, because the problem of hermeneutic orientation is itself a barrier to the actualisation of reason, it seems to follow that the problem of hermeneutic orientation constitutes a barrier to its own solution. As such, we must now turn to examine the means by which wisdom can be developed.

3. Self-Examination and Hermeneutic Detachment

In *Republic* VII Socrates gives us an explicit answer to the question of how wisdom is acquired (521c ff.). This acquisition is no easy task; it involves one's complete devotion to a series of interconnected and intellectually rigorous studies that is permeated by, and culminates in, philosophical dialectic (531d-535a). Mitchel Miller provides a succinct summary of the requisite education process: "In its external phases it divides into ten years of mathematics, five years of dialectic, and fifteen years of practical-political experience, all consummated at about age fifty by the 'vision' of the Good" (Miller, 2007: 311-312; cf. 537a-540c). These studies in mathematics and dialectic have the power to reorient the soul and actualise its power of reason (518c-d; 521c-d; 533c-d). However, as Miller also notes, the *Republic's* discussion of these studies is famously – and somewhat frustratingly – terse. Glaucon's own dialectical shortcomings ostensibly contribute to Socrates' disinclination to provide a more detailed description of these studies and the content of their goal (532d-533a; Miller, 2007: 310).

Fortunately, the explicit content of the discussion in *Republic* VII is not all that Plato gives us. As Jacob Klein notes, "answers can be given in a written text by the very action it presents. This is what usually happens in Platonic dialogues and what constitutes their dramatic or mimetic quality" (Klein, 1965: 17).⁴⁷ That is, the Platonic dialogues move at two

⁴⁷ Related to this point, Francisco Gonzalez notes that "Plato's dialogues are ἔργον as well as λόγος, and what gets revealed ἔργῳ is precisely what cannot be revealed as the object of a λόγος" (Gonzalez, 2009: 74; cf.

different levels simultaneously – the dramatic and the argumentative – and what we witness happening at the dramatic level can shed light on the discussions between, and the arguments put forward by, the interlocutors (*ibid*: 18). My interpretation of the response Plato provides to the question of how wisdom is developed will make use of this insight.

In this chapter, I will examine the interactions that take place between Socrates, Adeimantus and Glaucon in the middle books of the dialogue. It is my contention that understanding the way in which Socrates goes about responding to the marked confusion of Adeimantus and Glaucon gives us insight into one of the constitutive aspects of philosophical dialectic. I will argue that these interactions indicate that, given the problem of hermeneutic orientation, the attempt to cultivate wisdom requires hermeneutic detachment. Following the work of Dylan Futter (2015; 2016a; 2016c), hermeneutic detachment can be understood as a state of self-reflexivity in which one suspends one's predisposition to belief-formation and, instead, inquires into the ground of one's own thinking. Subsequently, in chapter four I will, in part, use the explicit discussion of the advanced education programme to investigate a second constitutive aspect of philosophical dialectic.

Socrates' Reticence

The particular stretch of text that we need to examine runs from 504e-507b, but it will take quite a bit of preparatory work before we can understand its significance. The passage in question forms part of the conversation that leads up to Socrates' presentation of the images of the Sun, the Divided Line and the Cave. These images are often taken to be the theoretical and artistic highpoint of the *Republic*. It is likely that no other passage in the history of

Gonzalez, 1998a: 300-301, n. 88).

western philosophy has garnered a comparable amount of attention. However, it is also likely that no other passage has given rise to so many competing interpretations. This is due, in part, to the difficulty of the subject matter. Drawing on an amusing exchange that takes place in *Amphicrates*, a play by the comic poet Amphis,⁴⁸ David Lachterman makes reference to the “ludicrous and impenetrable obscurity” with which Plato’s “Form of the good” had already come to be identified by the “Greek comic poets of the Middle and New Comedy” (Lachterman, 1989-90: 139).

Importantly, the Greek comic poets were not the only ones who struggled to come to terms with this focal point of Plato’s thought. In the *Republic*, it is at the behest of Adeimantus and Glaucon – the brothers of Plato who were themselves not wholly unfamiliar with Socratic conversation and his peculiar method of philosophising⁴⁹ – that Socrates offers up the three memorable images. Socrates provides them as a partial response to Glaucon’s request that he “go over what has to do with good” in “the same way [he] went over what has to do with justice and moderation and the other things” (506d), and after he has teasingly, but resolutely, refused to provide Adeimantus with an account of his “opinion” on the good (506b-c).

⁴⁸ Lachterman recounts that in the exchange, a master “about to embark on the conquest of a young lady” is told by his slave “What good you expect to get from her, sir, I understand less than I do the good of Plato.” [The fragment of Amphis’s *Amphicrates* is printed in T. Kock, *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1880-88), Vol. II, 237]. Ironically, in questioning the pursuit of his master under the assumption that his master’s current course of action is unlikely to lead to anything good, the slave takes the first step toward partaking in the movement of questioning about what is good that seems to be the driving impetus behind many of Plato’s dialogues.

⁴⁹ It is in the company of Glaucon that Socrates had initially descended to the Pireaus (327a), and Socrates charges Adeimantus with causing trouble when asking after the “greatest learnable thing,” since, Socrates avers, he has “*often* heard that the greatest learnable thing is the look of the good” (see 504e-505a; emphasis my own).

Why does Socrates resist these requests? Why does he refuse to furnish Adeimantus and Glaucon with his ‘opinion’ on the good, offering up, instead, a number of provocative but difficult images? Lachterman is surely correct when he writes that “many readers have been baffled or disturbed by Socrates’ reticence and playful evasiveness on the topic of *The Good*, thinking...that at this climactic moment of the dialogue...Plato ought to have had Socrates ‘deliver the goods’” (Lachterman, 1989-90: 153). It is not hard for us to understand, and perhaps share in, this frustration: if the knowledge of this greatest of studies would, more than any other, lead to one’s completion in virtue and thus enable the salvation of both the city and the soul (473d-e), why does Socrates hold back anything of his own opinion on the matter?

The most obvious response is that he does not think that voicing his opinion on the matter would be of much benefit (506c). Wisdom is not the kind of thing that can be placed into a soul (518b-d); it is not the kind of thing that can be “caught” from another, or that can “flow” from the soul of the wise into the soul of the foolish (*Symp.* 175d-e). Unlike receiving an opinion (506c), wisdom is hard-won, and its cultivation requires work of unrivalled difficulty.⁵⁰ This is due to the fact that the problem of hermeneutic orientation is itself a

⁵⁰ See, for example, 498a-499a; 502e-503a; 503d-504a; 511a-d; 515c-516c; 517b-c; 531c-d; 533a-b. This fits well with Lachterman’s own explanation for Socrates’ reticence. According to Lachterman, unlike the ‘teaching’ associated with sophists such as Gorgias – a ‘teaching’ which “purports to *transmit* a settled doctrine or technique that it is the business of the disciple to *absorb* and *retain*” – “Socratic teaching is provocative and evocative, its aim being to turn the soul of the student in the direction of what is genuinely learnable, so that he may call his own inward resources of understanding into play” (Lachterman, 1989/90: 153; emphasis in original). This understanding of Socratic and Platonic teaching has found no shortage of supporters and Heidegger joins ranks with Plato on this point when he states: “...not everyone has the same right to every truth,

barrier to the full appropriation of any particular truth. This was examined in both of the previous chapters: the distortions of one's understanding leave one's soul at odds with the truth it is attempting to grasp.

However, by pressing Socrates for his opinion on the good, Adeimantus and Glaucon seem unaware of the depth of the work required. As we will see in the final section of this chapter, the responses given by Adeimantus and Glaucon to the playful 'withdrawal' of Socrates in the passage in question, betray their own misunderstandings of the matter at hand. In dramatizing their hermeneutic disorientation, Plato indirectly shows us that they are not yet ready to receive the truth they seek. That is, such is the brilliance and subtlety of Plato's art that, when he has Socrates introduce the topic of the greatest learnable thing (505a) – that toward which our souls should be directed if we are to gain an accurate 'measure' of anything else – he incorporates into the responses of Socrates' two chief interlocutors, confusions that derive from an initial failure to correctly orient the soul.⁵¹ Not only is this exactly what we should expect given the problem of hermeneutic orientation, but this particular aspect of Plato's artistry is often overlooked by commentators wholly fixated on an interpretation of the actual images provided by Socrates in the central books.

nor the same strength for it. Every truth has its time. Particular truths, particular human beings find their own time at particular times. It won't do to talk to everyone about everything. Truth has its degree, its rank, and its nobility – in each case according to the way in which man himself is worthy of standing near or distant from beings.” (Heidegger, 2010: 109)

⁵¹ The dramatic action of the *Republic* thus contains a striking repetition: the philosophical point illustrated by the deeds of Cephalus in the beginning of the *Republic* is repeated in the middle of the dialogue, this time in the words of Adeimantus and Glaucon.

The Argument from Opposites

Before we can properly uncover the hermeneutic disorientation of the two brothers and the nature of Socrates' response to them, we need to examine the argument from opposites that takes place just half a book before the discussion turns to a consideration of the good (476e-480a). This argument characterises opinion and knowledge as different capacities, or powers, that relate to correspondingly different objects. Just like the power of sight is set over sights and the power of hearing is set over sounds (477c), the power of knowing is set over that which *is*, while the power of opinion is set over that which appears. However, it is difficult to know exactly what is involved in this distinction. Indeed, this question has recently yielded a number of competing answers and very little consensus. Consequently, we must work through this problem as if from the beginning.⁵²

Being and Appearance

The possible discrepancy between appearing one way but being another is a theme of the renewed challenge to justice that Glaucon puts to Socrates at the start of book two, and its presence pervades the rest of the dialogue. Socrates must show that the being of justice, even once detached from its appearance, is to be preferred to the being of injustice. Injustice, in its turn, is to acquire the appearance of justice because, in a delicious twist, it seems to belong to the *being* of the most complete injustice to wrap itself in the cloak of justice (361a). That is, it

⁵² I will not give this question the full ontological consideration it deserves. This is not because it is irrelevant. On the contrary, a detailed examination of the ontological ground of the distinction promises a deeper understanding of the ground of the problem of hermeneutic orientation. However, the ontological insights it offers up demand greater care than can be accommodated within the bounds of this dissertation. To my mind, the best available account of the ontological ground of the distinction is to be found in Bloom (2017).

seems to belong to the being of injustice to appear as something other than it is. As such, in only seeming to refute the arguments against injustice, Socrates has, by Glaucon's standards, been unjust (357a-b).

However, even while remaining cognisant of these implicit metaphysical issues, the distinction being raised is not unfamiliar. Lachterman notes that the difference between being and appearance emerges quite naturally in a pre-philosophical context. Indeed, it initially has “nothing ‘metaphysical’ about it” (Lachterman, 1989-90: 143). His point draws support from the way in which the distinction emerges in *Republic* I. Polemarchus has just been reduced to perplexity on account of his inability to locate the specific domain in which the just man is of use to his friends (334b; see chapter 1, §2 of this dissertation). In spite of this, he persists in thinking that “justice is benefiting one's friends and harming one's enemies.” However, with the help of Socrates' pointed questions, he amends this definition in order to take account of errors of judgement: it is just to benefit those friends who both *seem to be* and *are in fact* good (334b-335b). “Each of us,” Lachterman suggests, “has or will have had the painful experience of being played false by a seeming friend, of discovering that someone is, as we say, a ‘false friend’” (Lachterman, 1989-90: 143).

Subsequently, when Socrates begins to develop the ontological dimension of the distinction (474a ff.), the context recalls this familiar experience of mistaken judgement. To defend the claim that philosophers should rule both against Glaucon's incredulity and against the multitude Glaucon imagines will run at Socrates with whatever weapons are within their grasp (473e-474a),⁵³ Socrates will separate out the true philosophers from those who

⁵³ It is pertinent to recall that Adeimantus seems to be one among this multitude of people (487b ff.; see chapter 1, §2.2 of this dissertation). In addition, although Glaucon signals his willingness to assist in “defending”

sometimes appear to be philosophers. In addition, he will separate out the nature of the true philosophers from their manner of appearance to the many.⁵⁴

When located in this context, the distinctions Socrates introduces in *Republic* V begin to seem a little more natural.⁵⁵ Just as one needs to pass beyond the forms in which the true helmsman sometimes appears – a mere stargazer or a windbag – in order to understand, in addition to his true use, his true nature as well as the true nature and value of the activity mistaken for ‘mere star-gazing’ (488a-489a), so too does one need to pass beyond the actions and bodies in which beauty, goodness and justice sometimes appear in order to truly grasp their being (476a). On the other hand, just as many people sometimes appear to be wise on

Socrates against the multitude, his own initial astonishment at Socrates’ proposal, as well as the playful remarks Socrates makes that link Glaucon’s erotic nature to his love of the beautiful as it manifests itself in the appearances of “those in their first flowering” (474d-475a), give us a good reason to believe that he, himself, is to be included as one of the “doubters” he will attempt to help Socrates persuade (474b).

⁵⁴ These distinctions are present in the response Socrates gives to Adeimantus’s extended challenge which I briefly examined in chapter one: the true philosophers are to be distinguished from those unphilosophical natures who, although called philosophers, come as unworthy men to a beautiful bride (495e), while true philosophers only appear useless because people are themselves unable to recognise their true use (488a-489c).

⁵⁵ There is a danger in attempting to assimilate that which is strange and paradoxical by nature to that which is more easily intelligible to oneself. In doing so, one does not just risk doing violence to the text, but one misses out on the possibility for self-transcendence contained in the confrontation with the strange and unfamiliar. Gail Fine’s (2003: 66-116) attempt to understand the *Republic*’s distinction between knowledge and belief in the light of modern day coherentism is, perhaps, one example of the tendency to interpret what is radically other in the light of the familiar - a tendency inherent in everyone. With this in mind, what is said here is not intended as an adequate account of this difficult passage. In particular, I leave the ultimate ontological status of the sensible world an open question (see Bloom, 2017; esp.: 81-134).

account of their power or eloquence without *truly* being wise, so too do many things sometimes seem to be beautiful, or good, or just, without being so in truth.

Opinion as “Accepting the Seeming”

In the part of the argument that runs from 474b-480a, Socrates uses the difference between being and appearance self-reflexively to distinguish between the activity of the philosophers and that of the lovers of sights and sounds. That is, not only must true philosophers be separated out from those who merely appear to be philosophers, but it is precisely the activity of searching beyond the appearances, and the requisite redirection of *eros* toward the truth, that separates true philosophers from those who make no attempt to question beyond appearances but, due to their insatiable love of learning, might otherwise appear to be philosophers (475c-e). Thus, in a moment as striking as it is typical of Socrates, by inquiring into the nature of the philosopher Socrates and Glaucon will themselves engage in philosophy. This remains the case even though Socrates later admits that “[the nature of the philosophers] could be brought to light in a still better way if it was only about this that it was necessary to speak” (484a-b).

The first argument Socrates makes (474b-476d) – an argument that then requires a subsequent defence (476e ff.) – contends that the lovers of listening and sights, although *like* philosophers (475e) in having an “insatiable spirit” for studying many things (475c-d), are to be distinguished from philosophers in the way that someone who is dreaming is to be distinguished from someone who is awake (476c). We learn that there is more to this distinction than a straightforward distinction between people who have phenomenological ‘access’ to different ‘things’: for example, “beautiful sounds and colours and shapes” and “the beautiful itself, by itself” respectively (476b). There is a fundamental confusion

embedded in dreaming that cannot be reduced to a straightforward ‘limitation’ on the ‘things’ that present themselves to the dreamer. The dreamer “thinks that a likeness is not a likeness but rather the thing itself that it is like” (476c).⁵⁶

There is a slight ambiguity here that requires clarification. A natural way to understand someone taking a likeness for its original can be provided by way of a variant on some of the literature surrounding Gettier-style problems: I can mistake, for example, a distant image of a barn for a real barn while still maintaining in my mind a distinction between the image of a barn and a real barn. When gazing at what looks like a barn in the distance, I can always pull myself back and ask the question: is that really a barn, or is it merely an image, or perhaps a different object altogether? I need not be capable of answering this question – by, for example, driving closer to the object in question in order to get a better view – in order to ask it; it is enough that I can always hold the distinction between likeness and original in my mind.

Discounting the interesting case of lucid dreaming, this does not seem to be an accurate phenomenological account of what occurs when one is dreaming, or in a dream-like state, and, as such, doesn’t seem to be the kind of mistake that Socrates is describing. When dreaming, the dreamer does not hold in her mind the distinction between image and original. In fact, to be in a dream-like state is to be ignorant of the fact that there *is* anything like an original from which to distinguish the image one is currently seeing; it is to think that the

⁵⁶ Grube and Reeve trans. in Cooper (ed.), 1997.

image is all that there is.⁵⁷ As Socrates says, “[the thinking of the lovers of sights and sounds] is *incapable* of seeing and devoting itself to the nature of the beautiful itself” (476b; emphasis my own). Thus, we must hold this in mind when considering Socrates’ question at 476d – a question which Glaucon noticeably affirms: “wouldn’t we be right in claiming that...[the mental state of the lover of sights and sounds] is opinion, since he’s accepting the seeming?” To opine is to accept the seeming *as a dreamer ‘accepts’ phantasms in a dream*. This is not just to be presented with a pretence, or an image, not recognised as such, but to live in a world framed by that which is not quite real – a world in which it does not even occur to one to ask the question: ‘Is this an image or an original?’

It is difficult to know what it might mean to ‘accept’ that which one experiences in a dream. In ordinary modern usage, the word is surprisingly flexible, although it usually implies *some* kind of active disposition taken by a subject.⁵⁸ Acceptance can be the site for affirmation, submission, and radical reappropriation or subjectivisation. Despite this flexibility, none of these terms seem to capture the disposition or experience of the dreaming person. Dreaming implies a passivity that surpasses even the passivity involved in the ambiguous state of submission. A dreamer seems to be carried along from impression to impression in a state of near oblivion, neither accepting nor doubting what presents itself, but merely ‘existing’ in the

⁵⁷ Jonathan Lear makes a similar point in relation both to dreams and to the psyche of children in an examination of the *Republic*’s elementary education programme (Lear, 2006a: 27-28; 30). The notion of “depth” is important here. The dreamer, like the child, lacks the ability to recognise depth.

⁵⁸ The following is obviously not intended to be a thorough philological analysis of the word English word ‘accept’. Even less is it intended to uncover the original sense of the Ancient Greek words *δοξάζοντος* and *δοξάζειν* that Joe Sachs translates as “accepting the seeming.” Its purpose is to carry forward the analogy of the one who “opines” to the one who “dreams” and bring to sharper focus what this might entail about the disposition of the one who “opines”.

flux of seeming. The ‘acceptance’ of one who is dreaming is the unquestioning ‘existing-within’ that which offers itself up to a mind that has not cultivated the requisite state, or disposition, required to pull itself back from the immediacy of perception. ‘Acceptance’, in this instance, is less an *act* undertaken by a discriminating subject than it is the blindness of the dreamer to her own *inactivity*. If to opine is to ‘accept’ the seeming as a dreamer ‘accepts’ a phantasm, then to opine is to be subjected to a fundamental concealment wherein that which is concealed is both a deeper and truer understanding of that within which one is situated, and *the very possibility of one’s gaining such an understanding*. One cannot separate, here, the inability to see oneself and one’s possibilities from the inability to separate image from original: both arise from a primary state of concealment and inactivity akin to that of the dreamer.

Although the image/original distinction will only be fully developed later in the *Republic* when Socrates offers up the image of the Divided Line, the comparison of someone who opines to someone who is in a dream-like state already suggests a distinction in *kind* between a seeming and that of which it is the seeming.⁵⁹ To wake from a dream is to transition from one kind of ‘reality’ populated with nothing but phantasms to another ‘reality’ of an altogether different kind populated with ‘objects’ the pale resemblances of which we experience in dreams. Likewise, to follow the comparison through to its completion, to live in opinion – to live while accepting the seeming – is to live in a kind of ‘unreal, or phantasmal, reality’. The ‘thoughts’ of the person who accepts the seeming in this unreal reality are wholly confined to nothing but the forms as they *appear* “everywhere in common with actions and bodies and one another” (476a).

⁵⁹ Cf. Bloom (2017: 81-134).

Socrates, not unreasonably, anticipates resistance from “[he who opines] who we claim is accepting a seeming but not discerning anything,” and thus begins an attempt “to calm him down...and persuade him gently, concealing the fact that he’s not in a healthy condition” (476d-e). This last line is significant, for have we not already been given a couple of indications in this short stretch of text alone that Glaucon himself is in the unhealthy condition of being a lover of sights and sounds?⁶⁰ It is Glaucon who is amazed by the proposed paradoxical rule of philosophers and requests on behalf of the “many” a defence of this in argument and Glaucon who is called out by Socrates for being a lover of the appearances of boys in the bloom of youth. Further, it is Glaucon who, towards the beginning of the argument, is apparently unable to distinguish precisely enough between the lovers of sights and sounds and the lovers of the truth although, importantly, he is aware that there must be some kind of difference (475d-e). It is, perhaps, Glaucon’s possession of this awareness, however vague, of the difference between sights and sounds on the one hand and the truth on the other, that sets him apart from the other lovers of sights and sounds and enables him to comport himself with a general good will and harmonious spirit in argument, as well as what enables him to follow, at least in argument, what Socrates thinks will not be “easy to explain to someone else” (475e).⁶¹

One of the things we find, then, in the stretch of argument that runs from 476e-480a, is an attempt by Socrates to conceal from *Glaucon* that he is not in a healthy condition by having Glaucon answer on *behalf* of the lover of sights and sounds (476e). This allows Glaucon to

⁶⁰ Lest we forget, it is Glaucon who is seduced by the prospect of being witness to the many sights and sounds offered by Adeimantus and Polemarchus at the beginning of the dialogue (328a-b).

⁶¹ Although sometimes seduced by sights and sounds, Glaucon has a silver soul (357a; 372c-d; 548d-549a; cf. Rosen, 1965: 470).

partially distance himself from, and thus call into question, the state of mind of those who are in a dreamlike state – a state of mind which is partially his own. In this way, Socrates can gently draw out from Glaucon agreement to a more precise understanding of that of which Glaucon is already, but imprecisely, aware. We find Glaucon agreeing to the fact that knowledge and opinion are different faculties and that opinion accepts a seeming (478a) and stating that, if in fact opinion exists as a faculty, then “there’s no room for what’s knowable and what’s a matter of opinion to be the same” (478b). What’s more, we find him agreeing that all the beautiful ‘things’ that the lover of sights affirms as existing in fact occupy a strange place “between being, proper, and not being” (479c) (like images or seemings in a dream, they are illusory), that such a ‘thing’ – a seeming – is “what opinion is about but isn’t knowable” (479d) and that knowledge is set over the beautiful itself, the just itself “and all the things like that” (479d-480a) – those originals about which the lovers of sights and sounds are in denial. Furthermore, while philosophers always strive after knowledge and thus “devote themselves to each thing itself that *is*” (480a), that which *is* is precisely what has come to light as that which those who opine – those who accept the seeming – are incapable of discerning.

Hermeneutic Attachment and Detachment

The disposition, or state of mind, from within which the person who accepts the seeming operates is well characterised by what Dylan Futter, in a different but related context, has termed “hermeneutic attachment” (Futter, 2015; 2016a; 2016c). In all three of his articles Futter’s focus is on the hermeneutic norms that govern the “relationship between reader and philosophical author” (Futter, 2016c: 1333). If we expand his analysis beyond a focus on philosophical reading and textual exegesis, we can characterise hermeneutic attachment as a

comportment of the self in which one attaches oneself to what appears to the self as given in any situation. One thus makes judgements on that which passes within one's interpretative horizon which are based on, and thus indexed to, these fundamental attachments. In opposition to "hermeneutic detachment" – in which one is able to hold off on forming a judgement on that which passes before one in order to consider the way in which one's attachments may contribute to the distortion of the phenomenon and thus the distortion of the judgement made – hermeneutic attachment is a comportment in which one does not consider whether or not that which one sees passing before oneself is somehow an image caught up in the misrepresentations flowing from one's pragmatic and historical orientations.

To be in a state of hermeneutic attachment is thus to passively 'accept' the phenomena on the basis of which one forms one's judgements. While implying some kind of positive act taken by the person judging, the 'judgement' that is so formed must be read against the underlying concealment to which she who opines is subjected. Ironically, it is often the derivative activity implied by the act of making a judgement from a position of attachment that further conceals from sight the fundamental inactivity that characterises the person who accepts the seeming. Although concealment is inevitable as long as we do not have complete knowledge, to hold oneself in a position of hermeneutic attachment is to be blind to *the possibility* of concealment in a particular situation.

To operate continuously from within the attached perspective is to fall victim to what Jacob Klein calls "mimetic self-sufficiency" (Klein, 1965: 19). As Klein explains, this is the "attitude of the chained men in the Cave as long as they do not turn their heads" (*ibid*); it consists in the inability to understand the appearances that confront us on a daily basis as images that only partially disclose a deeper truth. In order to overcome this problem, we need

to bring the self into view (Futter, 2016a: 101-104). That is, as Futter argues, we need to suspend our inclination to form judgements and beliefs on the basis of what immediately appears to the self as given, in order to inquire into the “psychological, ethical, and epistemic sources of [the] distorting tendencies that are expressed in critical and active judgement” (*ibid*: 102). These sources are responsible for our inability to view the appearances around us in the correct light, since they contribute to determining what the self considers to be self-evident in any particular situation. As long as the sources of these distortions remain unconscious, we will remain bound to appearances and thus unable to move from opinion to knowledge.

Disorientation and Attachment in *Republic VI*

Armed with this conception of opinion as set over appearances and, moreover, as ‘*accepting*’ these appearances, we can begin to unearth both the hermeneutic disorientation of Adeimantus and Glaucon in *Republic VI*, and the significance of Socrates’ responses. However, we must be somewhat cautious. Although both brothers are far from perfect philosophical interlocutors, neither Adeimantus, nor Glaucon are ‘mere’ lovers of sights and sounds. There does seem to be something divine about their character (368a). This ‘godlike’ quality seems to be that in virtue of which they are able to provide a challenge to justice precisely by drawing on the distinction between being and appearance, while remaining unconvinced that the appearance is greater than the being (358e-367e).

However, although they contain this godlike quality – this “philosophic desire” (611d) – it often remains covered over and deformed (611d-e). The Heraclean task to which Socrates puts himself in the conversation is thus to care for this impulse and help lift it out of the

depths in which it is mired (611e-612a).⁶² In particular, there is one striking feature of their responses to Socrates in the middle of *Republic* VI that betrays the imprisonment of their souls: they both seem to be eager to hear Socrates' say *something* about the good – no matter how inadequate – at the expense of turning back to consider those elements of their own understanding that impede their ability to think through the matter clearly. This is the case even though Socrates and Glaucon have just discussed the way in which the person who opines is akin to a dreamer and thus subject to a fundamental concealment *on account of opining*. Thus, at the centre of the dialogue, Plato both gives us an argument that, in part, reveals some of the ground of the problem of hermeneutic orientation, *and* he shows us this problem *at work* by writing up characters who fail to properly 'hear' this very argument. Furthermore, as we will see, Socrates' responses indicate that, given the problem of hermeneutic orientation, the dialectical cultivation of wisdom requires hermeneutic detachment.

Adeimantus

Before Socrates is able to win complete agreement from Glaucon that philosophers (as they have come to light at the end of the fifth book and the beginning of the sixth book) should rule, Adeimantus interrupts (487b). With his interruption comes a digression in which Socrates is forced to further clarify the nature of the philosopher – a clarification that leads to his statement that the philosopher is required to undertake the most rigorous studies and that “the greatest learnable thing is the look of the good...[and] we don't know it well enough” (505a). While noting that there are many disagreements about what exactly it is (505d) and

⁶² According to Eva Brann, the *Republic* is a mythological mime (cf. Klein, 1965: 18) in which Socrates takes the place of Heracles, and whose greatest labour is that of bringing up Glaucon – the Theseus to Socrates' Heracles (Brann, 2011).

briefly showing that there is no straightforward way in which it can be identified with either pleasure or intelligence (505b-c), Socrates is reluctant to say anything about what he himself takes the good to be.

Adeimantus, emphatically agreeing with the refutations Socrates has provided of the views that identify the good with either pleasure or knowledge, is not content to rest with refutations. On a matter as important as this – a matter an adequate grasp of which is a prerequisite for the beneficial character of anything else to be made manifest to the soul (505e-506a) – Adeimantus requires greater certainty than can be provided through a characterisation of what it is not. He wants to know what *Socrates* takes the good to be (506b). Socrates' response, laced with play, is interesting:

That's a man for you...you've done a beautiful job of making it plain all along
that the way things seem to others about these things won't be good enough
for you. (*Ibid*)

In a limited sense this is ostensibly true. Although Adeimantus interrupts the conversation between Glaucon and Socrates with an indictment against philosophy that he puts in the mouth of "someone" (487c), it is clear that he wishes to draw a response from Socrates because he is not sure whether or not to believe what has been said (487d). And yet, even while he holds himself open to the possibility that the charge against philosophy introduced by the 'other' does not do justice to the true nature of philosophy, his response is not to think deeply through the matter himself, but to hear how it seems to Socrates (*ibid*).⁶³ Socrates'

⁶³ I do not mean to imply here a rigid separation between thinking through the matter for oneself, and engaging in conversation with others. However, there is a fine line – a line which seems to me to make all the difference –

extended response is subtle: he agrees with what is said, but disagrees with how it is *understood* (487d ff.). His immediate response, a response that is repeated in the response he gives to the requests from Adeimantus and Glaucon to set forth his own views on the good, is to provide an image (487e-488a). According to Adeimantus, perhaps despairingly so, this is common practice for Socrates (487e): it appears as though Socrates tries hard to make his own views difficult to assimilate – a trait inherited, with a deep awareness of irony, by his student, Plato.

Socrates' reply to Adeimantus at 506b thus gestures towards the irony embedded in the way Adeimantus comportments himself in conversation. While Adeimantus appears unwilling to accept the opinions that "others" claim to be true, he seems simultaneously unwilling to take (or perhaps incapable of taking) the "longer, more rigorous road" up toward adequate insight into the good. Instead, he seeks from Socrates – another, although very peculiar, 'other' – another opinion on the good to fill in the gap left by the refutations provided of the opinions of the 'many'. Adeimantus, aware of the teasing nature of Socrates' response, although apparently impervious to the irony, retorts that it doesn't seem to him just "to be able to state the opinions of others but not one's own, when one has been concerned about these things for such a long time" (506b-c). The replies Socrates gives to Adeimantus, or rather, the questions

between engaging in a true conversation in which one is truly challenged to think and rethink anew one's views on something and a conversation in which one repeats often-heard opinions on a topic and eagerly gathers up the opinions and contra-opinions of the other which can be repeated, when the time is right, in subsequent conversations. Plato gives us subtle indications that it is only in conversations of the latter sort that Adeimantus is capable of engaging. While sincere in his questioning (a trait which prevents him from being a mere eristic), he seems, in fact, to be a sort of container of opinions who is capable of being swayed one way or another depending on the interlocutor with whom he is conversing. See the remarks about opinion formation in Futter (2016: 107-108) and Klein (1965: 104-105).

he poses to him, display a sharp repudiation of opinion: “Haven’t you noticed about opinions without knowledge that they’re all ugly? The best of them are blind. Or do people who hold any true opinion without insight seem to you to be any different from blind people who travel along the right road?” (506c). The conversation at 474b-480a now takes on a pressing significance. Opinion, we recall, ‘accepts’ the seeming. To opine is to leave the ‘reality’ of appearances unquestioned and to be blind to the distinction between image and original. Even the best opinion is blind, because to opine is to dream – to opine just *is* to ‘accept’ the seeming and thus to open oneself up to the danger of making a judgement based on that which one does not know.

Glaucon

As soon as Adeimantus seems to acquiesce in the face of Socrates’ repudiation of opinion, Glaucon takes over (506c-d). Glaucon’s dissatisfaction with Socrates’ reticence to state directly how the good currently appears to him is, perhaps, even more incriminating than the requests made by Adeimantus. First, we must examine closely the implications of his first line of response: “Before Zeus, Socrates,” said Glaucon, “you’re not going to stand down as if you were at the end” (506d). While Socrates has indeed declined a request by Adeimantus to “say what he thinks as he thinks it” (506c), nowhere has he indicated that he is “standing down,” or withdrawing, from *the inquiry*. Indeed, by all accounts, it is precisely his unwillingness to state how the good appears to him, due in part to his own lack of knowledge of the good, that necessitates further inquiry into the good. It is his *refusal* to *accept* the seeming as it seems to him that constitutes his ‘withdrawal’ from direct assertions, but it is this same refusal to rest content with the seeming that opens the space for further inquiry. It is his refusal to ‘accept’ the seeming that signals his *active* disposition and separates him from the state of the dreamers and those fallen prey to hermeneutic attachment. In a telling remark

at 504c, Socrates comments that “sometimes it seems to some people that they’re well enough off already and don’t need to search any further.”⁶⁴ Glaucon’s interpretation of Socrates’ ‘withdrawal’ betrays how far he still has to travel in order to free himself from his attachment to the world of appearances.⁶⁵

Glaucon’s intervention continues: “It’ll be good enough for us if, the same way you went over what has to do with justice and moderation and the other things, you also go over what has to do with the good” (506d). At 504b-e, Socrates, in a clear reference to the passage at 435c-d where he qualified the coming attempt to find justice in the soul with the disclaimer that “we’ll never get hold of this in a precise way along the sorts of paths we’re now taking in our arguments, because there’s another, longer and more rigorous road that leads to it,” had twice referred to this untraveled road and the imprecision attendant upon any inquiry that falls short of taking it, even going so far as to say that “measuredness in such matters that stops short in any respect whatever of what *is* turns out not to measure anything at all, because nothing incomplete is a measure of anything” (504c). It is the person who rests satisfied with this shorter road to whom Socrates refers in the quote in the previous paragraph

⁶⁴ One need only glance at this passage to notice the irony in Adeimantus’ reply: “A great many people feel that way a lot...because of laziness.”

⁶⁵ In contrast, David Roochnik seems to suggest that, by refusing to give in to a beseeching Adeimantus, Socrates withdraws *from the inquiry*, and it is Glaucon’s *eros* that forces him forward (Roochnik, 2003: 56). However, Roochnik does not say too much on this point and so I am not sure whether this signals an irreconcilable difference in interpretation. His interpretation of the potentially subversive nature of *eros* seems to find additional support in the interesting reversal of roles between Socrates and Glaucon. Glaucon is erotic and spirited. Thus, in pressing Socrates to speak about the good in the face of Socrates’ own disinclination, he seems to overturn the ideal of justice: spirit is supposed to *take* orders from reason, not give them. (Cf. Rosen, 1965: 465-466).

(a quote that directly follows on from this passage). Satisfaction, it seems, is the death of inquiry (Gonzalez, 2000: 273), and we have already noted that satisfaction with a road that stops short of a true investigation into what *is* distorts its object in the act of measuring. Despite these warnings from Socrates and Socrates' further disinclination to meet the request of Adeimantus that he say what he thinks of the good as something he thinks, Glaucon's impatience to hear *something* about the good, no matter how inadequate, which is further instantiated in his twice-repeated instruction that Socrates "just speak" (506e; 507a), betrays his unwillingness to step back from his immediate concern with judgement-formation. He does not ask why Socrates thinks that the current trajectory of their inquiry is inadequate to "reach the things that now seem to me to be the case" (506d-e), nor does he wonder whether it is due to distortions within his own thinking that he is unable to gain a clear view of the good. Glaucon's hermeneutic attachment is clearly on display as he eagerly awaits the seemings that he desires from Socrates.

Glaucon does not recognise that Socrates' refusal to give a straightforward account of the good as it appears to him is itself a manifestation of the life of inquiry Socrates lives. Socrates knows that he does not yet adequately know the good (505a), and thus if he were to hand over to his interlocutors a straightforward account of how the good currently appears to him he would be distorting the nature of that which he values more than anything else. Furthermore, if we bear in mind the dream-analogy we went through in the previous section – an analogy that is expanded upon in the Allegory of the Cave – then it would appear that part of what is required for knowledge of the good is the *experience of waking up* – of being freed from one's chains and dragged up a path toward that which is true. This is a deeply personal experience which, while not incommunicable, needs to be *experienced* in order to be

understood.⁶⁶ A description of the good, if processed in accord with the experiences of appearances that constitute the ‘reality’ of a dreaming person, is useless in conveying what the good is. In short, descriptions, and even demonstrations, are unable to convey the way in which they are supposed to be understood.

The *Phaedo* provides us with a nice articulation of exactly this point. After Socrates tells Simmias and Cebes that “other people do not realise that the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death,” Simmias laughs and replies that, on the contrary, “I think that the majority, on hearing this, will think that it describes the philosophers very well, and our people in Thebes would thoroughly agree that philosophers are nearly dead and that the majority...is well aware that they deserve to be” (*Phd.* 64a-b; Grube trans. in Cooper, 1997). In response, Socrates says: “And they would be telling the truth, Simmias, except for their being aware. *They are not aware of the way* true philosophers are nearly dead, nor of the way they deserve to be, nor of the sort of death they deserve” (*Phd.* 64b-c; emphasis my own). If a person’s awareness is confined to seemings-not-taken-to-be-such, then any description of, or argument gesturing toward, that which transcends seemings simply cannot be heard in the right way. Anyone who is dreaming and yet finds themselves ‘agreeing’ to a ‘description’ of, or ‘argument’ regarding, that which *is* is, as Socrates and Adeimantus ‘agree’, no “different from [a] blind [person] who travel[s] along the right road” (506c). This is a fundamental paradox, already mentioned above, to which the

⁶⁶ Cf. Plato’s Seventh Letter, wherein the author writes: “There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightaway nourishes itself” (*Ltr.* VII, 341c-d; Morrow trans., in Cooper 1997). My understanding of the philosophical digression of the *Seventh Letter* is indebted to the scholarship of Francisco Gonzalez (1998a: 245-274; 1998b).

person trapped within their own hermeneutic attachment is subject. As long as they are content to judge in accordance with the attachments that form the coordinates of their own understanding, they are unable to bring their own understanding into question. While they may be able to form ‘agreements’ with others, these agreements are in words only.

In these exchanges, then, Socrates realises that the distinctions established earlier between knowledge and opinion, between what ‘is’ and what ‘seems to be’ have not been fully appreciated; they have been poorly understood, or momentarily forgotten. Even if he was capable of providing some kind of ‘true’ description or account of the good based on how it appeared to him at present, neither Adeimantus, nor Glaucon, have proved themselves capable of hearing it *in the right way*. They have proven themselves too attached to seemings, and thus incapable of recognising the radical difference in kind that exists between seeming and original, between opinion and knowledge. Thus, before going through the two images that end book six and the one that begins book seven, Socrates “reminds” Glaucon of the way in which they have *already* distinguished between “beautiful things” and the “beautiful itself” (507b-c). Before providing the images, then, Socrates gently calls Glaucon back to that which they’ve already gone over in speech, reminding him of the distinction between appearances and forms that the lover of appearances – with whom Glaucon has already been associated – is unable to recognise. Before going through the images, that is, he subtly tries to get Glaucon to call himself and his own understanding into question.

Conclusion

In summary, by examining the hermeneutic disorientation of both Adeimantus and Glaucon, as well as the way in which Socrates responds to them, I have attempted to reveal one aspect

of what is involved in the practice of dialectic that is essential to the cultivation of wisdom. I have argued that, although knowledge of the good is required to counteract the problem of hermeneutic orientation, the good is revealed to us only in the process of a certain kind of inquiry. This inquiry needs to move us from opinion to knowledge – that is, from an understanding confined to appearances to a recognition of the truth of beauty, justice and goodness – and it demands that we channel our intellectual energies into an examination of the distortions that exist within our own understandings. This examination, in turn, can only take place from a position of hermeneutic detachment – a psychological state in which one forgoes one's concern with belief-formation in order to inquire into the sources of our own intellectual and psychological predispositions.

4. Desire and Dialectic

Socrates strongly resists the requests made by Glaucon and Adeimantus to state what the good is as it seems to him (506b-e). We have seen why this is the case: the cultivation of wisdom is not simply a matter of changing a person's beliefs, but of modifying the manner in which beliefs are taken up and understood; that is, it is a matter of modifying a person's perspective and the structure of their soul. As such, instead of attempting to directly assert his own understanding of the nature of the good, Socrates states that is only by actively participating in dialectical inquiry that one might arrive at the requisite insight (533a-d). In the previous chapter we saw that this involves the examination of the prejudices and presuppositions that operate upon one's understanding and prevent the actualisation of reason.

In this chapter, I will deepen this account of dialectic by arguing that the process of dialectical inquiry – that is, the process of modifying the soul and acquiring knowledge of the good – is not a narrowly intellectual, or cognitive process (at least, in the sense in which these terms are currently understood), but engages the desiderative aspect of one's being as well.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ The way in which the Enlightenment transformed the distinction between cognition and desire into a distinction between mutually exclusive and independently-operating aspects of the psyche does not sit well with Plato's text. Charles Kahn, for examples, writes: "In each case – theory and practice, reason and desire – we are only distinguishing two aspects of what is, for Plato, a single principle" (Kahn, 1987: 82; cf. Bloom, 2017). It is important to note that in this quotation, when Kahn mentions 'desire' he is not referring to the part of the soul that was identified in opposition to reason in chapter two and that is, perhaps, more accurately rendered

This is because there does not exist an ‘all-things-considered knowledge’ of the good that can be attained irrespective of the overall state of our soul. Rather, the presence in the soul of untamed passions and appetitive desires prevents us from taking account of what is best for the soul as a whole. As such, the process of examining and ridding ourselves of the distortions that operate upon our understanding is simultaneously a process of freeing our understanding from the narrowing constraints of the single-minded desires described in *Republic* IV.

However, I will argue that, on the one hand, this process of freeing our understanding does not entail the complete elimination of desire – at least, if desire is understood in general terms as the erotic striving of the soul. Rather, it entails the redirection of one’s desire toward that which is *truly* desirable. On the other hand, since Socrates understands the work of reason, itself, as the soul’s erotic pursuit of that which is truly good (cf. 435e-436b; 479e-480a; 581b) I will argue that this redirection is equivalent to the elimination of the narrowly-focused desires that are wholly preoccupied with the partial instantiations of goodness after which they strive. That is, this redirection is equivalent to ‘drying up’ one’s desires for the pleasures that “come through the body” (485d-e). Ironically, the presence of these desires prevent us from knowing that which we truly desire, and thus prevent the actualisation of reason. In the final section of the chapter, I will argue that it is the role of dialectic to accomplish the requisite redirection of desire toward that which is truly good.

‘appetite’ (*to epithumetikon*). Rather, he is referring to something closer in meaning to Platonic ‘eros’ or ‘love’ understood as the “desire for what is beautiful” (*ibid*: 93; *Symp.* 201c), and which he identifies with “rational desire” (Kahn, 1987: 96; 98-101).

The Rule of Desire

That the Socrates of Plato's *Republic* considers the existence of unwieldy passions or desires to be an impediment to virtuous action is widely acknowledged by contemporary scholars. Indeed, given that Socrates explicitly describes vice as the inappropriate uprising of the appetites in the soul (444a-c), it seems that there can be little debate on this point. However, developing a satisfying interpretation of the precise barrier to virtue posed by the desires is slightly more difficult. Nevertheless, it is important that we do so, because our understanding of what to do in response to any given problem will vary according to our understanding of the problem in question.

In this section, I will argue that an interpretation that has seemed attractive to some recent scholars is untenable. This is the view that reason's epistemic capacity is not impeded by the operation of the appetitive desires. A correlate of this view is that the barrier to virtuous action posed by the desires lies squarely within the realm of what some have called the 'will': what often prevents people from acting well is not ignorance regarding what is best to do, but a weak will that succumbs to the pull of desire despite the agent knowing better.⁶⁸ However, I will argue that this interpretation is incompatible with the text of the *Republic*. Socrates does not think that one can achieve knowledge of the highest good while desiring something else, since he takes the operation of desire to delimit an agent's knowledge of value. That is, in contrast to the interpretation I aim to critique, Socrates thinks that desire *does* impede the full development of the epistemic capacity of reason.

⁶⁸ Of course, the view I aim to criticize is compatible with the existence of cases in which an agent acts viciously due to ignorance. Indeed, it is compatible with ignorance being the *only de facto* source of vice. However, as long as the interpretation does not conceptually exclude the possibility that a person can know what is best to do while desiring to do something else, it will be vulnerable to the objections I raise in this section.

The fact that some scholars have assumed that reason's epistemic capacity is not impeded by the operation of the desires is due, in part, to the tendency of contemporary scholars to view the division of the soul in *Republic* IV as Plato's attempt to establish separate, autonomous 'parts' or, at least, 'motivational sources' in the soul that can operate independently of each other, and that can thus provide an explanation for the apparent existence of the puzzling phenomenon of *akrasia*. This conception of the account of the soul in the *Republic* allows commentators to imagine that the rational part of the soul can have an 'all things considered' knowledge of what is best to do even if a desire causally prevents the soul from acting on this knowledge. In other words, the conception of the soul that this interpretation imputes to Socrates implies that a person's reason be fully actualised while the soul itself remains disordered and unjust.

Christopher Bobonich (2001) and Terence Penner (1971) are two authors who explicitly commit themselves to a view of the parts of the soul as separate and independent in this way.⁶⁹ Penner is, perhaps, most clearly paradigmatic in this regard: "Plato [that is, for Penner, the Socrates of Plato's *Republic*] holds that the position in the *Protagoras* – that knowledge

⁶⁹ In addition to Bobonich and Penner, Cooper (1984), Devereux (1992: 778-783) and Irwin (1995: 206-221) are among the scholars who think that the image of the tripartite soul provided in the *Republic* marks an attempt by Plato to explain the possibility of *akrasia*. However, even though Cooper states with some confidence that the theory of the soul in the *Republic* is a self-conscious rejection of the earlier 'anti-akratic' position espoused by Socrates in the *Protagoras* – a theory in which, according to Cooper, "virtue is essentially a property of the intellect" (Cooper, 1984: 3) – a number of scholars have recently pointed out that Socrates' declaration in *Republic* VI that every soul pursues the good, but misses out on any benefit there may be in other things due to its failure "to get an adequate grasp of what it is" (505d-e) – that is, to *know* what is best – complicates, if not disproves, this neat picture of Plato's development (Bloom, 2017: 73-78; Shields, 2001: 140).

cannot be dragged around (*perihelkomenēs*; 352C2) by pleasure, fear, anger, or whatever, that there is no such thing as being overpowered by pleasure into acting against what one things best at the time... – is after all false” (Penner, 1971: 103). According to Penner, ‘Plato’ thinks that knowledge can be dragged around. That is, one’s reason can know that which is good for the whole soul and yet still be ruled by appetite. He claims, in addition, that since “the form of Plato’s argument throughout is in the language of psychological strength”, Plato “has no real grounds for denying that a soul with a weak [that is, easily ruled] *logisitikon* may have knowledge” (*ibid*: 104, f.n. 6).

However, there is a lot of evidence in the *Republic* that suggests that this is incorrect. In *Republic* VII, Socrates suggests that the influence of desire on the soul is, in large part, responsible for the failure of reason to develop knowledge. After telling Glaucon that the power to learn “is present in the soul of each person”, he says:

The instrument by which one learns, as if it were an eye that’s not able to turn away from the darkness toward the light in any other way than along with the whole body, needs to be turned around *along with the whole soul*, away from what’s fleeting, *until it becomes able to endure gazing at what is* and at the brightest of what is, and this, we’re claiming, is the good. (518c-d; emphasis my own)

Socrates could hardly have been more explicit: knowledge of the good is only possible if the *whole* soul is correctly oriented. If the desires remain fixed upon “what’s fleeting” *then the power of reason to know cannot be actualised*. It is simply not the case that knowledge can be “dragged around” by desire; rather, desires drags down *the whole soul* and prevent it from

attaining knowledge. Socrates goes on to compare the desires to “lead weights that...get to be growths on the soul that turn its sight excessively downward” (519a-b). However, Socrates continues, “if, freed from them, it was turned toward things that are true, *this same power* of these same people would have seen them too most sharply, just as it sees the ones it’s now turned toward” (*ibid*, emphasis added). Again, we see Socrates maintaining that the lack of virtue displayed by those souls with penetrating gazes (519a) is due to the weight of desires that prevent the power of reasoning in the soul from adequately catching sight of that which is most real and true. The soul simply cannot see that which *is* if it is constantly forced by desire to look at that which is partial and ‘becoming’.

A similar view can be found in other dialogues. For example, in Socrates’ famous palinode in the *Phaedrus*, the bad horse of the soul “drags its charioteer toward the earth and weighs him down if he has failed to train it well” (*Phdr.* 247b).⁷⁰ As such, many souls are “carried around below the surface” (*Phdr.* 248a), unable to get a view of reality: “After so much trouble, they all leave without having seen reality, uninitiated, and when they have gone they will depend on what they think is nourishment – their own opinions” (*Phdr.* 248b). In this image, desire misleads the soul not by overcoming an all-seeing rational faculty, but by limiting what it is actually able to see. That is, in both the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, what Socrates says indicates that desire does not rule in the soul by overpowering the knowledge of reason; rather, it rules in the soul by *obstructing* this knowledge.⁷¹ Instead of containing a rational

⁷⁰ Translations from the *Phaedrus* are by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff and are taken from Cooper, ed. (1997).

⁷¹ Similarly, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates tells Simmias that “if we are ever to have pure knowledge, we must escape from the body and observe things in themselves with the soul by itself” (*Phd.* 66d-e).

faculty which is able to draw on knowledge of the good despite the interference of desire, the soul affected by desire is said to be entirely dependent on opinion.

We can find further support for the claim that Socrates thinks that the rule of desire in the soul prevents the actualisation of reason in the descriptions of the disordered souls he offers in *Republic* VIII and IX. Of the four disordered souls that Socrates and his interlocutors examine, three are said to be ruled by desire, while one is said to be ruled by the love of honour and victory. I will focus on the descriptions of those souls said to be ruled by desire. The first soul discussed by Socrates and Adeimantus that gives itself over to the rule of desire is the oligarchic soul (553a). Socrates describes this soul thus:

“Don’t you imagine that such a person would then give the seat on his throne to his desiring and money-loving part and make it the Great King in himself, festooning it with tiaras and neck bracelets and scimitars?”

“Indeed I do,” he said.

“As for the reasoning and spirited parts, I imagine that, making them sit on the ground on one side and the other in subjection to it and enslaved, he doesn’t allow the one to reason about or even consider anything else but where there’ll be more money to get out of less, or the other for its part to admire and honour anything other than riches and rich people, or strive for honour on any single ground other than the possession of money and anything else that might contribute to that.” (553c-d)

This is an explicit admission by Socrates that, insofar as reason continues to function in the soul ruled by desires, its function is bent to the service of the Great King. That is, the rule of

desire affects the operation of reason. When desire rules reason, reason is not free to pursue knowledge of the good itself, let alone grasp something of this knowledge; rather, reason is enslaved by desire and forced to consider only “where there’ll be more money to get out of less”. It thus seems that the very work of reason is structured by the particular ends the soul pursues, the character of which will be determined by whichever part rules in the soul. The work of spirit, too, is shaped and transformed on account of the rule of desire. No longer admiring and fighting on behalf of virtue, spirit honours money and considers the possession of money to be the criterion on the basis of which honour should be bestowed.

The democratic city and soul, in turn, define the good as freedom (562b-c). It is while talking about the democratic man that Socrates and Adeimantus distinguish between necessary and non-necessary desires (558d), including among the necessary desires “the desire to eat, up to the point of health and fitness, and for bread and side-dishes” (559a-b), while classifying as unnecessary “the desire that exceeds these and is for foods of kinds other than these, but is capable of being eliminated from most people when it’s curtailed and educated from youth, and is harmful for the body and harmful for the soul as well, for its judgement and exercise of moderation...” (559b-c). Again, unnecessary desires are not said to overrule the soul’s independently formulated judgement, but to harm it – that is, to disfigure the faculty of judgement itself. However, what separates a democratic man from an oligarchic one is their respective relations to unnecessary desires. The oligarchic soul subdues unnecessary appetites in order to pursue a particular desiderative conception of the good – wealth – while the democratic soul, defining the good not as becoming as rich as possible, but as being as free as possible, grants free reign to as many of its desires as possible.

It follows that, although Socrates later calls desire the “gain-loving” or “money-loving” part of the soul, desire doesn’t seem to have a single conception of the good toward which the soul should strive as much as it does an endless number of isolated and incompatible conceptions. Indeed, he admits this, saying that “we had no uniquely appropriate name to apply to it, because of its multiform character, but we took what it has the biggest and strongest instance of in it, and called it the desiring part, on account of the forcefulness of the desires for food and drink and sex...” (580d-e). With this being the case, if, to continue with the image of the soul provided in *Republic* IV, the desiderative faculty comes to rule in the soul, the soul is likely to display, at best, a certain forced restraint for the sake of wealth (554c-e), or a degree of inconstancy – pursuing whatever object appears to the soul as good and abandoning its quest as soon as the desire for that object ceases (561b-d) – or, at worst, complete psychic disharmony – being simultaneously dragged in different directions and stopping at nothing as diverse desires seek their own satisfaction.

This last description belongs to the soul of the tyrant who, completely devoid of shame and good sense, acts in waking life in a manner which accords with most people’s worst dreams (571c-572b; 574d-575a; 576b). In fact, although desire is said to rule in the tyrant’s soul, it is difficult to gauge exactly what this could mean. This is because it seems that the very notion of rule is undermined in the tyrannical soul. It is difficult to speak of rule in the context of the tyrannical soul for the same reason it is difficult to speak about a unified tyrant at all: the tyrant’s soul is completely given over to anarchy and lawlessness (574e-575a). Indeed, Socrates and Glaucon go on to agree that, rather than being ruled by desire, the soul of the tyrant is enslaved by it (577d).

In the light of so much textual evidence to the contrary, it is surprising that commentators have interpreted, in Penner's words, "the language of psychological strength" in the *Republic* as an indication that desire can overrule the independently formulated and complete judgements of reason. The language of psychological strength need not necessarily indicate the ability of desire to *overrule* knowledge; rather, it appears to gesture toward the way in which appetitive desires drag the soul toward mere appearances of the good and thus *impede* knowledge. This is in accordance with the interpretation provided by Charles Kahn, who writes that, if reason does not succeed in specifying the life of virtue as "the good to be aimed at", this is because:

[Reason] has been so 'overpowered' by spirit or appetite that it mis-identifies the good. [...The] domination of the other parts has the consequence of *causing reason to make a mistake* in its recognition of the ends to be pursued. This is what it means for reason to be enslaved. (Kahn, 1987: 88; emphasis in original).⁷²

The language of enslavement and compulsion is, indeed, littered throughout the *Republic*. In the beginning of *Republic* VII, for example, Socrates invites Glaucon to imagine prisoners chained in a cave (514a ff.). When offered their freedom, they don't take it; they have been unable to develop the knowledge that would enable them to recognise it for what it is (515c-e). Socrates tells Glaucon that they're an image of us (515a). Like them, "we are chained to

⁷² Similarly, Christopher Shields, in denying the view espoused by Julia Annas that Socrates' argument for the soul's partition establishes the existence of desire, spirit and reason as separate and independent 'homunculi' in the soul (Annas, 1981: 142-146) writes: "Plato is manifestly not saying that each soul comprises other complete souls (*ad infinitum*?), but only that the single soul, insofar as it has appetites, *also reasons in ways coloured by those appetites*" (Shields, 2014: 28; emphasis added).

our passions and prejudices” (Klein, 1985: 118); like them, our passions and prejudices misdirect our thought; like them, the fact that we are enslaved to our passions leaves us staring at shadows that are far removed from the truth. It is thus a deeply human irony that the democratic soul comes to consider itself free (562b-c) on account of embracing the desires that stunt its growth and prevent its ascent into the sunlight. Not only does the nature of truth remain hidden, but the democratic soul’s misrecognition of the true nature of freedom manifests itself in an oblivious self-confidence and belief that it knows what it does not know.

The Transformation of Desire

Given what has already been established in our current inquiry into the problem of hermeneutic orientation, it should come as no surprise that Socrates thinks that desire rules in the soul by distorting the operation of reason. Desires contribute toward the formation of the horizons within which our understanding operates. They are themselves socially mediated and nourished by the stories and people who surround us⁷³ and, if given free reign, they can form a “guarded perimeter” around the soul through which “true reasoning” simply cannot penetrate (561b-c). However, given the fact that Socrates takes reason to be thoroughly erotic,⁷⁴ the battle between the pull of the desires – or appetites – and the work of reason is

⁷³ See, for example, 389d-392a; 402d-403c; 403e-404e; 423e-426e; 491e-495b; 514a-519b; 549c-550b; 559d-561c; 572d-573b; 603e-607a.

⁷⁴ The reasoning part of the soul is first alluded to by Socrates as ‘τό φιλομαθές’ (435e7) – the love of knowledge or learning. This is an appellation that is directly applied to it in *Republic* IX: “And it’s certainly obvious to everyone that the part by which we learn is always entirely directed toward knowing the truth as it is, and as for money and reputation, it has the least concern about that of any of them...So in calling it learning-loving and wisdom loving [φιλομαθές δὴ καὶ φιλόσοφον], would we be naming it in accord with its leanings?”

not a battle between the forces of passion, on the one hand, and the work of a dispassionate, calculative principle on the other; rather, it is a struggle between the narrowly-focused, single-minded desires that are unable to take account of what is good for the whole soul and thus pursue the mere appearance of goodness, and the erotic striving of reason that is “constantly reaching out toward the whole that comprises all of what’s divine and human together” (486a).

As such, the work of reason is not the negation of *eros*, but its highest manifestation (490a-b); it requires that we channel our desires away from the pleasures of the body, and toward “the pleasure of the soul itself, by itself” (485d). As Lachterman points out, the difference between the “‘possessive’ individual Thrasymachus simultaneously embodies and applauds” – the individual who strives for “the absolute power to make others one’s slaves, to appropriate to oneself their property and their bodies, [and] thereby to satisfy one’s every appetite with impunity and abandon” – and the nature of the just person whom Socrates is concerned to bring to light, is not that the former seeks to satisfy his desires and deepest longings while the latter acts with self-sacrificial self-restraint (Lachterman, 1989-90: 145). The difference, instead, lies in their respective understandings of “what the self or soul truly is” (*ibid*) and thus in their respective ideas of what is best for themselves. On account of knowing herself, the just, wise person knows what it is that she most truly longs for.⁷⁵

(581b). In the centre of the *Republic*, Socrates identifies philosophers as “the lovers of the sight of truth [τούς τῆς ἀληθείας ἦν δ’ ἐγώ φιλοθεάμονας]” (476e), who “devote themselves to and love those things at which knowledge is directed” (479e-480a) and whose desires [ἐπιθυμίας] (485d) have “flowed toward what’s learnable and everything of that sort” (485d). Thus, Pierre Hadot can state that “at the basis of Socratic knowledge is love of the good” (Hadot, 2002: 34).

⁷⁵ Socrates famously appeals to the distinction between what people mistakenly think they want and what they really and truly want in the *Gorgias* (466a-468e). Cf. Segvic, 2000: 5-15; Gonzalez, 2016: 37.

However, understanding the process of taming or transforming the desires – a process that Socrates describes both as a ‘channelling of the desires’ (485d-e) and as a ‘redirection of the whole soul’ (518c-d) – is not without its own challenges. In fact, it is surprisingly difficult to know what it could mean to channel the desires, or to point them in a different direction. This is because, as we examined in chapter two, that which makes a desire the particular desire that it is is nothing other than the particular end toward which it is directed. What separates the desire for drink from the desire for food, for example, is that they seek different ends. Like particular knowledges, the being, or essence, of a desire is determined by its object. As such, a desire cannot be redirected onto a different object, or pointed in a different direction, without it ceasing to be the particular desire that it is.

This is a significant point. Socrates has said that we cannot gain insight into the good unless we redirect our whole soul “away from what’s fleeting” (518d) – that is, away from the objects of the sensible world that are not as truly good and beautiful as they sometimes appear to be (cf. 475e ff.). However, the desires of the appetitive part of the soul are all directed toward things in the sensible world – drink, food (437d), bodies (439e-440a; cf. 442a), sex and money (580e-581a), for example – and are thus entirely bound up with that which is ‘fleeting’. It is the very fact that they *are* directed toward particular things that are, at best, nothing more than partial manifestations or appearances of goodness, that separates the desires from the power of reason to take account of what is truly good for the whole soul. Thus, for the desires to be turned around and redirected away from the particular objects over which they are set and toward the good itself is for the desires to cease being what they are; it is for them to *join in the activity of reasoning and thus to stop existing separately from the reasoning part of the soul*. To transform the desires so that they seek out what is good and

knowable and no longer oppose the work of reason is to eliminate them as a separate part of the soul.

This is an attenuated form of the conclusion argued for by Laurence Bloom (2017). According to Bloom, if we are to reconcile the account of the soul's true nature as simple and indivisible in *Republic X* (608d-612a) with the argument that partitions the embodied soul in *Republic IV* – in other words, if we are to develop an understanding of the unity of the soul toward which the *Republic* points us (cf. Bloom, 2017: xv-xvi) – then we need to recognise the fact that the transformation of the desires required “for knowledge to be actualised” (*ibid*: 63; cf. 518c-d) is simultaneously a process in which “[the desires] become one with...the rational part” (*ibid*: 186).⁷⁶ If it is the case that, in truth, the soul is simple and indivisible, but the presence within us of desires that are firmly concentrated on that which is fleeting and insubstantial artificially induces within us a state of division and conflict, then it follows that, in order to return to our true state – in order to be that which we most truly are – we need to eliminate our desires or, what comes to the same thing, we need to transform them such that

⁷⁶ This goes against the reading of Julia Annas, who complains, in contrast to Bloom, that in *Republic X*, Plato gives us no real grounds for thinking that “immortal simplicity is the soul's true nature rather than its perceived complexity” (Annas, 1981: 346). In doing so, she joins forces with Cross and Woosley who write that the differing accounts of the soul given in *Republic IV* and *Republic X* generate an “irresolvable contradiction” for Plato (Cross and Woosley, 1964: 120). However, as Christopher Shields has argued, this objection rests on a modal fallacy (Shields, 2001; 2014): the account of the soul as simple and indivisible in *Republic X* only contradicts the account of the soul as a divisible composite in *Republic IV* if the latter account establishes that the soul is *essentially* composite. However, the argument in *Republic IV* does no such thing: “Plato's argument for tripartition seems not to describe a condition of the human soul in general, but of the human soul in its normal, sub-optimal condition” (Shields, 2015: 25; cf. 26-27).

they can be absorbed into the reasoning part of the soul. Only once it has returned to its original state can the soul be free to do the work that is most truly its own.⁷⁷

If we think back to the discussion of elementary education in *Republic* II and III, we can see that Plato, in his typically subtle manner, has already prepared us for this insight. As Mitchell Miller has noted, “the formation of the character and disposition that [the ‘music’ and gymnastic] accomplish turns out to be a ‘trimming’ of the soul’s ties to becoming (519a)” (Miller, 2007: 313). On the dramatic level of the dialogue, we are now able to witness this ‘trimming’ taking place within the character of Glaucon. While he had objected to the lack of luxury in the first city that came into view under the care of Socrates and Adeimantus (372c-e), he soon objects to providing the guardians with those luxuries that had been introduced

⁷⁷ The thesis that it is necessary to still the desires in order to arrive at knowledge of the good – or, more generally, that a soul in pursuit of virtue needs to undergo a purgative ascent in order to achieve a deeper and more integrated vision of the whole of what is (cf. 537c-d) – was, in fact, a pervasive and enduring theme in Ancient Greek philosophy and literature. In *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Pierre Hadot’s seminal book on the philosophical and spiritual exercises practiced in Antiquity, Hadot dedicates a chapter to the discussion of what he calls ‘the view from above’ (See chapter 9, ‘The View From Above’, in Hadot 1995: 238-250.). This theme is intimately tied to the view that human perspectives – dragged down, as they are, by our all too human passions and concerns – are inescapably partial and distorting when compared to the perspective of one who is able to rise, “as if...in a balloon, far above everything earthly...in that intermediate zone where the gods float hither and thither” (Goethe as quoted in Hadot, 1995: 238; Hadot takes the quotation from: Goethe J.W. ‘Letter to Schiller’, in *Goethes Briefen*, in *Goethes Werke*, Hamburger Ausgabe, vol. 2, p. 344. Goethe is referring to his experience of reading the *Iliad*.). According to Hadot, the conception of philosophy as the quest for a view from above, or a “flight of the soul” (*ibid*) was common to all ancient philosophical schools, aside from Skepticism, and was practiced by “learning to regard both society and the individuals who comprise it from the point of view of universality” (*ibid*: 242).

into the city on account of his earlier indignation (404c-d).⁷⁸ The process of thinking through the benefits conferred on the city by the courage and moderation of the guardians seems to have redirected his own erotic desire away from the superficial luxuries of his own society. Glaucon's "spirited approval" (Sachs, 2007: 77) of the austere life-style of the guardians thus contains a beautiful irony: the guardians first enter the city in order to fight for and defend its newly developed luxurious life-style, but this very life-style is withheld from the guardians. That is, the guardians are to be deprived of the enjoyment of those very gains for the defence of which which they are first needed. Glaucon's *eros* demands luxury and receives austerity. However, this irony is beautiful because physical austerity is only a perverse reward if physical pleasures cannot be transcended and replaced with pleasure that comes from beauty of a deeper kind (cf. 402c-403c). Glaucon's *eros* seems to have begun to traverse the path that it belongs to Socratic irony to reveal.

Dialectic and the Advanced Education Programme

When Socrates and Glaucon discuss the advanced education programme in *Republic* VII, Socrates indicates quite plainly that it belongs to the power of dialectic to refashion desire:

Then isn't it only the dialectical mode of inquiry that passes on to that [which can truly be known], abolishing the presuppositions, back to the beginning itself, in order that it might be secured, and when the eye of the soul is mired

⁷⁸ In particular, he objects to the provision of a variety of seasonings, delicacies, pastries and prostitutes. Joe Sachs notes: "Glaucon begins to display signs of an education in character himself in response to Socrates' questions. The simple style of life he couldn't stand the look of in the healthy city described in Book II gets his spirited approval in Book III as a choice to reject luxury for the sake of a gymnastic training more serious than that of athletes" (Sachs, 2007: 77).

to the depths of its being in some inarticulate morass, tugs it gently and draws it up above, using the arts we went over to assist it and help in turning the eye of the soul around? (533c-d)

The arts referred to by Socrates are the mathematical arts that, in conjunction with the practice of dialectic, can help to free the soul from its ordinary reliance on sense perception (537d) and, if correctly overseen, can lead to an appreciation of the kinship of all that is (531c-d; 537c). That is, these arts can help disclose a realm of being that is not available to ordinary consciousness. Thus, at the age of twenty, those from among whom the city's guardians will be selected are to be educated in a series of mathematical studies (537b-d), before going on to be trained and tested in the practice of dialectic for five years (537d; 539d-e). After a further fifteen years of political experience, those who have proved themselves worthy will "be led to the end, and required to lift up the brilliance of their souls to look off to the very thing that endows all things with light", namely, the good itself (540a-b).

Importantly, however, the manner in which the mathematical studies are to be undertaken is decidedly 'unmathematical'. While ordinary practitioners of the mathematical arts – that is, "those who concern themselves with matters of geometry and calculation and such things" (510c) – are in the habit of proceeding deductively from hypotheses to conclusions (510c-511a; 533b-c), Socrates intends to use the study of mathematics to disrupt one's certainty in any foundation that is merely hypothetical. To use mathematics to arrive at conclusions that cohere with one's poorly understood foundational assumptions is to use mathematics in such a way that one remains blind to, and reinforces, one's hermeneutic disorientation. As Socrates asks rhetorically:

[In] a situation in which the beginning is what's not known, and the end and the intermediate parts are woven together out of what's not known, what ingenuity could ever turn such concurrence of opinion into knowledge? (533c)

Socrates suggests, though, that it is possible to refocus the mathematical arts. Instead of proceeding on the assumption that one understands the principles by which they operate and using the arts of calculation, geometry, astronomy and harmonics in the service of any preconceived end, one can attempt to study them in order to gain insight into that which underlies their operation and provides them with a foundation (522e-523a; 525a-c; 529a-530c; 531b-c). That is, one can subordinate mathematics to *dialectic*, or – what comes to the same thing – one can use mathematics dialectically (533d). This involves a reversal of the trajectory of our technical thinking, in which one no longer takes the starting points of one's inquiry as true sources of being and intelligibility (511b; cf. 509b), but as *starting points* that themselves require greater clarification and that, consequently, need to be transcended in the process of inquiry (510b-511d; cf. Klein, 1965: 119-122). Instead of attempting to assert the truth and calculate its consequences, one must open oneself to the truth as it emerges in a process of self-disruption and discovery.

Despite the magnitude of this task, the requisite reversal of our technical thinking is not a foreign imposition that alienates our thinking from its natural state. As Jacob Klein explains, this dialectical reversal facilitates the continuation of the *initial* impulse of our *dianoia* (Klein, 1965: 124) – our power of thought whose natural function resides in the search for “clarity about the matter we are dealing with” (*ibid*: 118). In order to illustrate this function, Socrates appeals to things in the visible world – appearances – which give rise to opposite perceptions within us (523a-525a). Depending on the external relations in which it stands, we

can experience what we sometimes take to be the same one thing as both small and large, thick and thin, soft and hard, light and heavy (523d-524a), or even infinitely many instead of one (525a). In such cases, a soul draws upon the intellect in order to understand more clearly the nature of that which strikes the senses (524b), and is forced to conclude that, although these things – largeness and smallness, for example – have been somehow “mixed together” (524c) in what appears before us, they are, in truth, each separate and distinct (524b-c). It is by first separating them out as intelligible ‘objects’ in this way, abstracted from the various contexts in which they appear, that we can begin to ask after the nature of the large and the small (524c), and thus can begin to inquire into the nature of that which structures our confusing and contradictory experience.⁷⁹

Socrates takes the study of number to be paradigmatically suited to draw the soul toward being in this way (525c-d) since, unlike visible or tangible bodies that always appear to us as both one *and* many, it is impossible for the “one itself” to be divided and separated out into smaller parts (525d-e). On account of this contrast between the divisibility of sensible things and the indivisibility of the ‘one’, it follows that the indivisible ‘one’ referred to by mathematicians is not an object of sense experience, but is available only to thought. As such, when contemplating pure number, the intellect cannot take refuge in sense experience and is

⁷⁹ This point has been emphasised by Mitchell Miller. In his study of the five mathematical disciplines that are to be learned – arithmetic (525a), geometry (526c), solid geometry (528a-b), astronomy (528d-e) and harmonic theory (530d) – he stresses that, although the series of disciplines “constitute a series of purgations by which...thought leaves the visible and spatial behind” (Miller, 2007: 321), it is also the case that “the abstraction from the sensible that thought achieves...is at once...thought’s recovery of the sensible in its intelligible structure” (*ibid*: 322). Like the practice of spiritual exercises, the purification of one’s thought effected by this series of mathematical studies is not a flight *from* the world, but a transformation and clarification of one’s vision in the light of that which is truly knowable.

‘forced’ to “use insight itself directed at the truth itself” (526a-b). Furthermore, Socrates suggests that if we persist in this attempt to clarify the presuppositions that underlie all of our thinking – passing from the pure numbers used in calculation and arithmetic, to the intelligible figures, ratios and motions that underlie the practice of geometry, astronomy and harmonics (cf. Miller, 2007: 320-322) – then we might eventually reach that which is truly first in the intelligible realm and “be able to get hold of the good itself by insight itself” (532a-b).

In order to get to this point, though, we need to resist the lure of the methodical, technical procedures of thinking that are characteristic of the mathematical arts as they are ordinarily practiced (510c; 533b-c). This is because their practitioners – urged on by the desire to act for the sake of what they perceive to be of immediate benefit (527d-e; cf. 505d-e) – proceed on the assumption that clarity in the realm of intelligible foundations has been secured and thus set about trying to understand the visible world in terms of these foundations. In doing so, they “tend to thwart” the initial impulse of our *dianoia* – the impulse “to which we owe our admittance to the domain of the intelligible” (Klein, 1965: 124-125). That is, they direct their thought back toward the sensible world of appearances even while the sources of being and intelligibility upon which they depend to perform their task of clarification remain veiled in obscurity. As a result, they remain ignorant of what is truly beneficial since, like largeness and smallness, goodness is mixed up with badness in that which we most immediately experience (476a), and is thus in need of further clarification.

As we’ve been led to expect, throughout *Republic VII* the character of Glaucon embodies this premature urge to return to the realm of the sensible. While Socrates and Glaucon both agree that the art of arithmetic is “not without use for men involved in war” (521d; 522c-e; 525b),

the transparently playful nature of Socrates' reference to Agamemnon's ignorance of number (522d) and his subsequent emphasis on the power of arithmetic to draw the soul towards being and the good (523a; 525c-d; 526a-b) points toward his proper focus. If we are to do justice to our desire to act for the sake of what is good, then we cannot afford to settle for a confused and underdeveloped notion of goodness. Indeed, we are left to wonder if there is any real benefit to be gained from the knowledge of troop formation in the context of an unjust war (cf. 505a-b). Glaucon, though, is not quite able to follow Socrates' initiative. While he continues to agree with Socrates in words (525d-526c), his inability to identify the most beneficial use to be made of geometry (526c-d) and his comical double failure to identify the correct use to be made of astronomy (527d; 528e-529a), betrays his disproportionate concern for matters relating to the military – and the visible world in general – and hence the lopsided nature of his understanding. Glaucon's *eros*, having already been redirected from the luxuries of the fevered *polis* toward the honours of military life, now seems too tied down by this desire and thus appears incapable, at present, of travelling any further (533a).

In fact, Glaucon's desire to descend before having fully clarified his understanding of the good itself results in two different, although related, forms of injustice. On the one hand, his focus on the sensible world prevents him from doing justice to the power of the mathematical arts which, in truth, admit of something far higher than the use to which they can be put in warfare and other such pursuits (cf. 528b-c; 530e-531a). On the other hand, he does an injustice to himself, since he descends before knowing what is truly best for himself. Indeed, in the specific case at hand, it seems that these two forms of injustice are inseparable: Glaucon attempts to make use of the mathematical studies for his own benefit but, ironically, his conception of the benefit to be derived from these studies is itself limited by his own

failure to do justice to the subject matter under consideration. The self-reflexivity involved in this ironic reversal is crucial: it is only by acknowledging the partiality of our current understanding and the persistent obscurity of the foundations of our thought that we can begin the difficult work that is required to transcend the narrowly-focused concerns and desires that delimit our everyday horizons. If we persist with this work for long enough, then we may one day gain insight into what it is that we truly desire.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to deepen our understanding of that which is involved in the process of dialectic. Since the practice of dialectic aims to develop wisdom, this practice must incorporate the transformation of the desires. This is because, as we saw in chapter two, the development of wisdom is equivalent to the actualisation of reason; the actualisation of reason, in turn, requires the redirection of the whole soul. Furthermore, while this seems to entail the stilling of the appetitive desires of the soul, it does not entail the elimination of human *eros*. Instead, by redirecting the soul away from what are, in truth, simply *appearances* of goodness and intelligibility, the dialectical activity recommended by Socrates in *Republic VII* aims to spark insight into the nature of that which we really desire. This is accomplished by reversing of the trajectory of our ordinary, technical modes of thinking in which the poorly understood, hypothetical foundations of our thinking remain unexamined.

5. Philosophical Dialogue: The Pursuit of Virtue

This chapter will consolidate and complete the argument that has taken shape over the last three chapters. This argument has sought to articulate Plato's response to the problem of hermeneutic orientation – a problem that was raised in chapter one. This problem can be understood in terms of the re-inscribed partiality of our understanding; and I have argued that, on account of its posing an obstacle to our capacity to know what is truly good for oneself – that is, on account of its posing an obstacle to the straightforward development of wisdom – it prevents us from living a good life. It is thus a problem that goes to the heart of the human quest for virtue: our prejudices are manifest in the structure of our soul and thus affect the manner in which we reason, desire and choose to act.

In the *Republic*, Socrates uses this problem to reveal the importance of engaging in dialectical inquiry. In chapters three and four, I have shown two aspects of what this entails. First, we need to forego our tendency to pass judgement on the content of our beliefs and experiences and concentrate, instead, on using the peculiar manner in which these experiences appear to us to investigate the distortions of our own understanding. Second, we need to direct our *eros* beyond the superficial trappings of the external world and toward the intelligible structures that are responsible for the partial, sensible manifestations of goodness and beauty that usually occupy our attention. Of course, this is tantamount to saying that one must engage in philosophy (480a). In other words, I have argued that, given the problem of hermeneutic orientation, the life of philosophy is the best life for a human being. Our inquiry has thus connected up with one of the most famous of Socrates' claims.

I will begin this chapter by defending the claim that the life of philosophical inquiry is the best life for a human being against the objection that our ultimate ignorance of what is good renders us incapable of justifying the superiority of this life. This is connected to the overarching aim of this dissertation because the problem of hermeneutic orientation prevents the actualisation of our reason and is thus responsible for our lack of wisdom. As such, if our ignorance of what is good prevents us from knowing that the life of philosophy is the best life for a human being, then the problem of hermeneutic orientation itself prevents us from knowing that we should pursue philosophy. My response to this objection will be formulated independently of the argument that is given to us in the text of the *Republic* and will thus provide independent support for the philosophical position defended therein.

Subsequently, I will argue that the structure of questioning that is proper to the activity of philosophical dialogue best sustains and unifies what we've seen to be two of the constitutive aspects of the practice of philosophical dialectic: the examination of the presuppositions that guide our understanding and the transformation of our desire. Since the *Republic's* discussion of dialectic is quite limited, my argument will involve going beyond what is explicitly said in the dialogue. My goal is to sketch a way in which the dialectic that is instantiated in philosophical dialogue can be seen to constitute a mode of hermeneutic *re-orientation* and thereby contribute to the formation of wisdom. I will argue that the activity of philosophical dialogue facilitates a process of ironic self-disruption that stimulates the actualisation and clarification of our pre-philosophical reason and thereby transforms and develops our understanding of the good.

Philosophy constitutes the good life for a human being (cf. *Ap.* 37e-38a) and it is concretely realised and expressed in the activity of inquiry. This has been disputed by at least one recent Platonic scholar, Alexander Nehamas, who maintains, in contrast, that “the philosophical life is only one among many praiseworthy ways of living” (Nehamas, 1998: 2). His belief that the philosophical life of Socrates is not qualitatively superior to the aestheticism of an Oscar Wilde (*ibid.*: 6; cf. *Rep.* 617d-620d) is grounded in his charge that Socrates – or, at least, the Socrates of Plato’s ‘early’ dialogues – could provide no argument in support of his conviction that his manner of living is truly superior to all others (Nehamas, 1998: 9; 85). Furthermore, Nehamas thinks that, since Socrates was of the view that knowledge of virtue is required in order to live “a good and happy life” (*ibid.*: 67), if Socrates is sincere in his disavowal of this knowledge, then the means by which he managed to constitute himself as a paragon of virtue must remain opaque (*ibid.*: 67-68). He calls this the true paradox of Socrates, and is convinced that it left Plato himself completely mystified (*ibid.*: 85-86).

We can reformulate this concern. In so doing, we will be able to identify Nehamas’s mistake and consolidate our idea of what Plato is up to. Nehamas thinks that, in order to live well, one must unify and organise the elements of one’s life into an integrated whole (*ibid.*: 4). But, in order to do so, one needs a principle of unification – that is, one needs something that can serve to bring the many different aspects of one’s life together into a coherent unity. The ideal that Nehamas identifies for this purpose is that of becoming an *individual*: “that is, someone unusual and distinctive”; someone with “an uncommon and idiosyncratic character...that set[s] one apart from the rest of the world” (*ibid.*: 5). It is clear that this ideal is not shared by Socrates and Plato. Indeed, despite appearances to the contrary, it is not at all clear what good there is to be had in simply making one’s “main purpose...to be like no one

else, before...or after” (*ibid*: 11). Rather, Plato and Socrates believe that a good life is only properly unified by wisdom – that is, knowledge of what is *actually* good. Consequently, it is *this* knowledge that Socrates pursues throughout his life. It is undoubtedly true, as Nehamas claims, that Socrates is a wholly unique figure (cf. *Symp.* 215a ff.), but that is not because he treated idiosyncrasy as an ideal toward which to aspire and around which to organise his life. Rather, Socrates is unique because he remained faithful to the ideal of wisdom while everyone else – both before him and after – did not.

However, it is indeed the case that Socrates failed to achieve the knowledge he took to be necessary for living a good life. Although he persistently sought to unify his life around that which is truly good, he remained conscious of his ultimate ignorance concerning its nature (505a; 506c; *Ap.* 23a-b). Consequently, the puzzle posed by Socrates – the puzzle that Nehamas calls the ‘paradox of Socrates’ – can be generalised and posed as follows: how can the good serve as an organising principle for our conduct if we do not know what it is? This is connected to a further question: how can we claim that the life of philosophy is the best life if, confined to our partial and distorting perspectives, we do not have a clear understanding of what it means for something to be good? The first question is related to the content of the philosophical life; the second question is related to its justification.

Edward Halper takes both of these questions seriously (Halper, n.d.; cf. Bloom, n.d.). Considering his proposed solution to these difficulties will help us to defuse Nehamas’s concern and will provide support for the interpretation of Plato that I have been advancing. We have, in fact, already seen this solution; what remains for me to do is clarify it and elaborate on some of its consequences. We have seen that Socrates considers knowledge of the good to be the only knowledge capable of properly integrating the different aspects of

oneself and one's life.⁸⁰ This is why the development of wisdom is necessary for responding to the problem of hermeneutic orientation. However, in the absence of this governing knowledge, how is one to live one's life? That is, while the attainment of wisdom is sufficient for living virtuously since the manner of one's life will then be determined by the content of this knowledge, how can one best govern one's life – how can one approximate virtue – *without* this knowledge?

Halper's solution, which I believe to be Socrates' solution, involves recognising that knowledge of the good, in addition to being the knowledge that is required in order for one to determine the best ends to pursue, can itself *serve* as an end (cf. Bloom, 2017; n.d.: 11). As such, in the absence of knowledge of the good, the *pursuit* of this knowledge can work to guide one's thoughts and actions: "recognising the value of knowledge of the Good does have practical consequences for one's life; specifically, one who values this knowledge realises as well that he should pursue philosophy" (Halper, n.d.: 6). Halper bases his analysis of this Socratic solution on Socrates' admission in the *Apology* that he is conscious of lacking divine wisdom (*Ap.* 21b; 23a-b). Socrates knows that he does not know how best to live, but his brilliance lies in realising that he can use this very insight – the recognition that he is ignorant of the "most important pursuits" (*Ap.* 22d-e) – to structure his life in pursuit of virtue: "in a profound sense, recognising his own ignorance is akin to the knowledge he seeks but fails to find because it serves to allow him to make crucial life decisions" (Halper, n.d.: 11).⁸¹ Unlike Socrates, the politicians, poets and artisans with whom Socrates converses take

⁸⁰ Halper argues as follows: "The reason that knowledge of the good should be valued is that in order to live a good life, it is necessary to choose the best ends to pursue; one cannot do so unless one knows which ends are best, and one must know what it is to be Good in order to decide which ends are best" (Halper, n.d.: 6).

⁸¹ Similarly, Futter has correctly stressed the fact that the text of the *Apology* does not support the widely held view, famously articulated by Gregory Vlastos, that Socrates' human virtue follows from some "chancy,

themselves to possess the knowledge that Socrates merely seeks (21b-22e). As a result, they do not organise their lives around the search for wisdom and are thus unknowingly confined to acting in accordance with what merely seems to them to be good. This brings out the qualitative superiority of the life of Socrates that Nehamas fails to see: the philosophical life is the only life that organises itself around the activity of striving for a knowledge of that which lies beyond appearances; it is the only life that does not remain transfixed by a dreamlike play of images and is thus the only life of *becoming* good.

Given our previous reflections, it is clear that this solution is not unique to the *Apology*. The Socrates of Plato's *Republic* knows that he does not know the good (505a; 506c), and stresses the importance of sticking to the high road in pursuit of virtue (cf. 621c). We have already looked carefully into some of what this involves and I will offer some additional reflections in the remaining sections of this chapter. It is worth noting in advance, however, that the pursuit of wisdom cannot fail to have other practical implications. Not only does the recognition of the value of a knowledge that we fail to possess present us with an abiding practical necessity – namely, to inquire and to do that which enables us to inquire – but as we make progress in our inquiry – as we gain a better understanding of the intelligible structure of the whole and of our place in it – we will also come to a deeper understanding of what is required of us in any particular situation. That is, the very nature of the activity in which we need to engage on account of our ignorance and hermeneutic disorientation is self-reflexively

patchy, and provisional' elenctically justifiable knowledge" (Futter, 2013a: 63; the embedded quotation is taken from Vlastos, 1985: 28-29); rather, "Socrates is in some sense wise *because* he knows that he is not wise" (*ibid*; emphasis in original). That is, Socrates' recognition of his own ignorance (what Futter calls his "general *aporia*") is the cognitive aspect of his human wisdom and serves to invigorate his activity of philosophy – his erotic quest for true wisdom (*ibid*: 65-67; 69).

transformative. As one strives to free oneself from one's orientation within and by the sensible world – as one goes deeper beyond the appearances – one's ability to deliberate concretely about what is truly good in the light of the whole is transformed and improved. Given the holistic nature of the redirection of our souls, the life of inquiry gradually modifies the shape and character of all of our actions.⁸² Thus, contrary to Nehamas's claim, there is nothing hidden or mysterious about the means that supported Socrates' manner of life. Or, rather, the means by which Socrates was able to live the life of human virtue do not present a mystery beyond the mystery inherent in our very ability to inquire into, and make progress in pursuit of, virtue.

Finally, we can address the problem of how it is possible to justify the superiority of the philosophical life while remaining ignorant of what is, in fact, good. Of course, the foregoing reflections can and should be used for this end. However, as Halper argues, there is another way in which to justify the life of philosophy that is grounded in the very nature of justification and evaluation. If we wish to determine the value of a particular way of life – and, consequently, whether or not it is worth living – “the only means at our disposal is to

⁸² In Alcibiades's famous speech in praise of Socrates in the *Symposium*, he describes Socrates' behaviour in the Athenian army's retreat from Delium as follows: “It was easy to see that he was remarkably more collected than Laches. But when I looked again I couldn't get your words, Aristophanes, out of my mind: in the midst of the battle he was making his way exactly as he does around town, ‘...with swagg'ring gait and roving eye.’ He was observing things quite calmly, looking out for friendly troops and keeping an eye on the enemy” (*Symp.* 221b; Nehamas and Woodruff trans. in Cooper, ed. 1997). The description of Socrates as making his way ‘with swagg'ring gait and roving eye’ in the midst of battle, taking note of friends and enemies alike, is a dramatization of someone who is able to consider the *whole* in all of his actions. It is on account of his ability to calmly keep the whole present to mind that he is able to treat the prospect of death with indifference and act courageously and for the good of all those around him. I am grateful to Dylan Futter for pointing out this particular significance of this description of Socrates.

examine that life” (Halper, n.d.: 10). In addition, we need to have access to a standard of value against which to judge and evaluate the goodness of that life. If we do not know what is in fact good – if we do not have access to a proper standard of value – then we will be unable to correctly evaluate different manners of living, and will thus be unable to identify the best way in which to live. Since we don’t, in fact, know what is good it is clear that we are unable to judge the true value of any particular way of life.

It follows that, in order to determine which way of life is truly valuable, we need to inquire into what makes something valuable; we need to inquire into the good. But this is just to engage in the activity of philosophy. The life of philosophy thus shows itself to be a prerequisite for the correct assessment and choice of lives (cf. *Rep.* 617d-620d). Our choice of life – whether conscious or not – is, in turn, implicit in, and manifested in, all of our actions. The philosophical life is thus shown to be justified not because we are able to examine it and measure it against an independent standard of value, but precisely because we do not know this standard and recognise the importance of gaining insight into it (Halper, n.d.: 10-11). The philosophical life – the life of inquiry into the good – is the only life that makes sense when we recognise our own inability to know what is good when choosing what life is best, and comprehend the far-reaching implications of that choice.⁸³

⁸³ That we can use the very fact that we do not know the good as a way to justify the necessity of the philosophical life has also been argued by Laurence Bloom (n.d.) The life of inquiry is the only life that does not presuppose knowledge of what one does not know: “...it is only in examining the nature of the highest good that this activity avoids assuming knowledge of the highest good. Put a slightly different way, even if we assume that inquiry into the highest good is *not* the highest good, we are left with an imperative to inquire into the highest good. That is, inquiry, through its reflexivity, includes the negation of itself as an assumed good; this is what puts it beyond being assumed” (Bloom, n.d.: 11-12).

The Pursuit of Virtue

The philosophical life is the life that is lived in pursuit of wisdom; that is, it is a life that is unified around the activity of inquiring into the good. This activity involves the displacement of our initial understanding of the good. Appropriating the words of Nicholas Davey, we can say that it involves the “practice of disposing or orienting oneself toward the other and the different with the consequence of experiencing a dis-positioning of one’s initial expectancies” (Davey, 2006: xvi). I will now argue that this dialectical inquiry into the good is best sustained in the activity of philosophical dialogue. The argument in support of this thesis is spread out over the remaining sections of this chapter. First, I will argue that the distinctive importance of the good in our lives is such that an investigation into the nature of the good is simultaneously an investigation into the self and the transformation of one’s desire. That is, inquiry into the nature of the good is self-reflexive. Following Dylan Futter, I will argue that this self-reflexive inquiry can be understood in terms of ironic self-interpretation. Second, I will argue that the process of ironic self-interpretation is best induced and maintained by the structure of dialogical inquiry. In other words, and drawing on the work of Francisco Gonzalez, I will argue that philosophical dialogue facilitates the dialectical displacement and deepening of one’s understanding of virtue.

The Good and Self-Reflexivity

When Socrates tells Adeimantus, in *Republic* VI, that every soul pursues the good and does everything for its sake (505d-e), he gestures toward the unique and far-reaching role that the good plays in our lives. A short while later, when talking to Glaucon, he compares the role played by the good in enabling our capacity to understand to the role played by the sun in enabling our capacity to see and thereby reiterates the pervasiveness of its power: just as the

sun is the source of light in virtue of which the world can be seen, so the good is the source of truth and being in virtue of which the world can be known (507c-509c). Socrates' remarks thus point toward the good as the ground of both our actions and our thoughts. Of course, there is a strong link between what we think and what we do. It is frequently the case that our thoughts are revealed by our actions (cf. 331d).

Given that the good furnishes us with the power to think and to know, there are a number of ways in which we can think through the self-reflexivity that must necessarily characterise any attempt to inquire into it. The self-reflexivity of this inquiry is particularly striking if we consider, for example, that an attempt to know the good is an attempt to know that which makes knowing possible. However, our own point of departure comes from acknowledging the way in which our understanding of the good structures our reflection and thus determines the character and shape of our life. This idea has been at work throughout the current inquiry. Thus, again, my task is to make this explicit and reflect on its consequences.

The first point to note is that, whether or not we are fully aware of it, we all live with a particular understanding of the good.⁸⁴ Cephalus, for example, understands the good to be intimately connected to a specific conception of justice and piety (330d-331b); Thrasymachus thinks that the good is linked to a specific conception of power (343b-344c); the democratic soul identifies the good with a particular idea of freedom (562b-c). These conceptions of the good, in turn, guide – and are made manifest in – our actions. Indeed, it is precisely on account of these understandings that we are able to make choices about what to do and how to live: Cephalus leaves the conversation in order to make sacrifices to the gods;

⁸⁴ Of course, it is frequently the case that we live with numerous, competing conceptions of the good.

Thrasymachus attempts to overpower rather than partner Socrates; the democratic soul grants free reign to as many of its desires as possible.

Furthermore, these conceptions of the good delineate our understanding of the very possibilities that we recognise to be available to us in any particular situation. That is, it is not the case that we act in accordance with our own conception of the good while having complete and unmediated access to the full range of possibilities that are present to us in any situation; rather, our conception of the good determines in advance how we understand our circumstances and the potential they hold. We saw that Glaucon, for example, is too preoccupied with the use to which mathematics can be put in warfare to recognise the use to which mathematics can be put in the service of a higher good. It is not simply that he knowingly ranks victory in war higher than the pursuit of virtue and thus chooses to use mathematics for that end, but rather he seems, in this particular instance, *to understand virtue in terms of military success*, and thus fails to see how the requirements of virtue outstrip one's actions on the battlefield. That the operation of both our reflective and unreflective thought is oriented by a specific, partial conception of the good – which thus serves to structure the horizon within which one understands oneself and the world – is, of course, the root of the problem of hermeneutic orientation.

Since acquiring a horizon is a precondition for the possibility of developing even the most rudimentary understanding of ourselves and the world, it follows that when we begin to reflect upon the nature of the good, we are always already reflecting from within a perspective that is governed by a certain conception (or, perhaps, the interplay of a number of conceptions) of the good. To begin to inquire into the nature of the good is thus not to confront an object that is external to me for the first time, but rather to begin to call to mind,

and wrestle with, my own pre-philosophical understanding of the norms to which I am committed and that shape my actions and thought. Because our limited conception of the good structures the very manner in which we reflect – including the manner in which we reflect on the nature of the good – we cannot inquire into this nature except by way of constantly subjecting our own conception of the good to critical scrutiny. Thus, it is not simply that an examination of one's own understanding of the good is a propaedeutic to genuine inquiry into the good – a clearing of the ground that prepares the way for the attainment of true insight; rather, the attempt to articulate and subsequently examine the principles by which one lives is the very substance of this inquiry.

It may be objected, at this point, that the characterisation of self-examination as constituting the substance of inquiry into the good lands us in an impasse akin to the Socratic fallacy: how does one examine and evaluate one's own conception(s) of the good if one's only access to the nature of the good is given via those very conceptions? That is, in the previous section I argued that the evaluation of competing conceptions of the good life presupposes a knowledge of what is truly good. Further, I argued that our ignorance in this matter provides a justification for the superiority of a particular form of life, namely, inquiry into the good. However, the current argument points to a conception of this inquiry as itself nothing but the examination and evaluation of the conceptions of the good that inform our own perspectives. If inquiry into the good is indeed nothing but an examination of our own conceptions of the good, then we seem to be led in a circle and confined to an impotent relativism that undermines the justification for the superiority of the life of philosophy.

Although he does not directly confront this issue, it seems that Halper would respond to this problem by invoking the principle of non-contradiction: to live an examined life is “to ask

what notion of the Good is implicit in [one's] life and to consider whether or not it can stand without contradiction" (Halper, n.d.: 10). However, although the precise role of contradiction in the Socratic dialogues has been widely debated, it is unclear to me how the discovery that one's own conception of the good cannot stand without contradiction would enable us to get out of the current impasse and thus help contribute toward the development of virtue. At the very least, we would need an account of the subsequent path one's inquiry should take that does not involve simply examining and rejecting one contradictory and partial conception of the good after another.

A more promising solution to the impasse is suggested by what Socrates says to Adeimantus in *Republic* VI:

Every soul pursues the good and does its utmost for its sake. It divines (ἀπομαντευομένη) that the good is something but it is perplexed and cannot adequately grasp what it is or acquire the sort of stable beliefs it has about other things. (505e)⁸⁵

According to Socrates, the soul is nourished by a divine intuition of the good – an intuition that is, nevertheless, poorly grasped.⁸⁶ On account of the soul's failure to properly understand this intuition, the soul is 'forced' (ἀναγκάζεται) to inquire, and act, on the basis of presuppositions, or hypotheses (ὑποθέσεων), that are not truly known (510b). If this is the case, then the above-mentioned impasse need not arise. The standard against which one's

⁸⁵ Grube and Reeve trans. in Cooper (ed), 1997.

⁸⁶ "The soul loves the Good because, from the beginning, she has been incited by the Good to love him." (Plotinus, *Ennead* VI: 7, 31; as quoted in Hadot, 1993: 54).

own hypotheses concerning the nature of the good can be evaluated could be provided by one's own poorly understood, intuitive, 'acquaintance' with the good. Inquiry into the good, rather than simply confined to one's partial presuppositions, would then involve examining these partial presuppositions and evaluating them against an ideal with which one is acquainted, but which has so far transcended one's attempt to understand or embody it. Inquiry into the good would then consist in a kind of self-exegesis: an attempt to clarify one's understanding of what one already 'knows' – albeit confusedly, and in a sense that is difficult to properly specify – by seeing the way in which the notions of the good that are actively at work in one's life fail to do justice to this ideal.

A different way to put this – one that might seem more familiar to scholars who are themselves familiar with the Platonic tradition – is to say that inquiry into the good does not just involve examining one's presuppositions about the good, but involves inquiring into the source of these presuppositions (510b-511d). This source, in turn, is not simply external to these presuppositions; it is not a 'cause' in the modern, scientific sense of the word. This source is that which underlies, but is covered over by, the presuppositions that we often mistake to be self-standing 'sources' themselves (511b). As such, it is already present and at work in all our thinking. It is, perhaps, nothing less than the source of the kinship of all that is (*Men.* 81c-d), and thus that which first makes what we call 'learning' possible (*Men.* 80d. ff.). Articulating the search for knowledge of the good in this way helps to bring to light the way in which the examination of the self incorporates the work of transforming desire. Since we all desire the good, but fail to properly direct ourselves toward it due to our own ignorance, it follows that the genuine recognition of the fact that the nature and reality of the good transcends the limits into which we have heretofore confined it is sufficient for the redirection of our desire. This recognition, in turn, is made possible by the greater

understanding of the good that is attained in the process of self-examination. As we clarify our understanding of that which lies at the root of all our experience, we realise that that which we truly desire is not – or is not entirely – what we thought it was. For Socrates, however deformed our understanding may be, we are never completely alienated from the good.

[Irony Experience and Self-Interpretation](#)

On the model I am advocating, inquiry into the good works as follows. In virtue of the fact that we are souls who are capable of reasoning and understanding, we are all acquainted, however faintly, with the good. However, both practical necessities and social contingencies weigh heavily upon on us, drawing our attention and conditioning our thinking. We begin to assume derivative conceptions of the good as we go about our lives which cast our understanding adrift and leave our originary intuition concealed. However, occasionally, and slightly mysteriously, we come to experience ourselves as disconnected from the principles by which we live. It is not just the case that we experience ourselves falling short of the ideals we espouse, but we get the sense that the way in which we have understood these ideals fails to do justice to what we intuit to be a deeper truth. Consequently, we begin to inquire into our understanding of the good. We try to determine its shortcomings – the ways in which it has been pulled off track – by examining our failure to truly understand what grounds the presuppositions that have, until now, guided our thought and our actions. That we are able to do so is made possible by our realisation that there exists a gap between an intuited but unexplained sense of virtue and our own attempts to think through what virtue requires of us.

Jonathan Lear describes this experience – that is, the experience of falling short of an ideal which is somehow intimately connected to one's sense of self, but which eludes one's

complete understanding – as an experience of irony (Lear, 2006b; 2011). Lear is careful to separate out the existential sense of irony with which he is concerned – a sense of irony he finds in Plato’s Socrates and Kierkegaard’s Johannes Climacus – from what he calls the ‘pretence’ or the ‘ego’ of the concept that is familiar to contemporary thinkers (Lear, 2006b: 448). This ‘ego’ of the concept of irony is the idea that irony simply involves witty expressions and turns of speech such as saying the opposite of, or something different to, what one really means (cf. *Søren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers*, as quoted in Lear, 2011: 5). Against this, Lear argues that the experience of irony is an experience of “erotic uncanniness” (Lear, 2011: 20) that “is made possible by a peculiar gap between pretence and aspiration that is embedded in our lives” (Lear, 2006b: 449; cf. 2011: 11).

Lear explains this by drawing on the notion of ‘practical identity’ defended by Christine Korsgaard.⁸⁷ According to Korsgaard, human beings constitute themselves via a practical identity. This is “a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking” (Korsgaard, 1996: 100; quoted in Lear, 2011: 4). As Lear elaborates, “my practical identity commits me to norms that I must adhere to in the face of temptations and other incentives that might lead me astray” (Lear, 2011: 4); it equips me with “a capacity for facing life’s possibilities” and for responding to them in a way that is consistent with a particular set of ideals (*ibid*: 31). It is frequently the case that we inherit the particular forms in which we understand these ideals; indeed, the *Republic*’s elementary education programme is designed by Socrates to facilitate the best possible transmission of piety, courage, moderation and justice.

⁸⁷ Cf. Korsgaard, C.M. (1996) *The Sources of Normativity*. Cambridge University Press.

Now, as both Korsgaard and Lear note, the structure of human self-consciousness makes it possible for us to examine the extent of our own success in living up to the ideals that are constitutive of our practical identities. Indeed, not only are we able to reflect on the extent to which we have succeeded in remaining faithful to our practical identity, but we are able to question and think through whether or not the ideals to which our practical identity commits us are worth upholding. However, as Lear notes – and as I’ve emphasised throughout this dissertation – when we attempt to reflect in this way, the coordinates of our thinking are still likely to be affected by our understanding of the original ideals which we have internalised (*ibid*: 8-9; 14-15; 17). As a result, this type of reflection remains vulnerable to our inherited and disorienting prejudices. Consequently, if we are to succeed in truly calling the foundation of our ideals into question and breaking through the limits that encircle our understanding of the possible forms that virtuous living can take, then what is needed is not a continuation of this kind of reflection, but a disruption of it.

For Lear, the requisite disruption of our ordinary mode, or modes, of self-reflection is to be found in the experience of irony. This experience can be characterised as the sudden realisation that everything that we’ve previously understood to be constitutive of the ideals toward which we strive are nothing but pale imitations, or fleeting appearances, of the real thing.⁸⁸ To find oneself struck by the irony of one’s situation is not simply to be struck by the

⁸⁸ Jacob Klein describes this experience in terms of the experience of wonder: “...any act of wondering amounts to prescribing pretensions to “reality,” to seeing it suddenly as possibly not being what it pretends to be, in other words, to weighing the possibility of its being but an “image.” For the extraordinary mode of being of an image is precisely to be what it is not. In the serious if primitive act of wondering we exert the fundamental faculty of *eikasia*, a specific human privilege by virtue of which we are able to see an image *as* an image.” (Klein, 1965: 18-19)

sense that, despite one's best intentions, one has committed oneself to the wrong ideals, but to realise that the reality of the ideals in accordance with which one has structured one's life far outstrip one's previous understanding of them; it is the sudden recognition of a previously concealed depth to reality – an experience that Lear describes as more akin to an experience of vertigo than to a process of “stepping back to reflect” (*ibid*: 17).

The juxtaposition of the Allegory of the Cave and Socrates' description of the democratic soul in *Republic* VIII is instructive. The democratic soul values freedom. The Allegory of the Cave suggests that the democratic soul is correct to do so. However, the allegory also indicates that true freedom may not lie in doing what one thinks one wants, but in freeing one's *understanding* – a task that most of us have barely even begun. Thus, as Lear puts it, in the ironic moment,

it is as though as abyss opens between our previous understanding and our dawning sense of an ideal to which we take ourselves to be already committed. This is the strangeness of irony: we seem to be called to an ideal that transcends our ordinary understanding, but to which we now experience ourselves as already committed. (Lear, 2011: 15)

This type of ironic experience involves a version of what Dylan Futter calls ‘object incongruity’ (2013b: 1031). Futter describes object incongruity as consisting in “a discrepancy between what is said about some object and its real nature” (*ibid*). We can expand this slightly to include discrepancies not just between what is *said* about an object and its real nature, but also discrepancies between what is *thought* about an object and its real nature. However, the mere existence of object incongruity is insufficient to bring about an

experience of irony. In order to transform object incongruity into irony one needs to become *aware* of the discrepancy between what is said or thought about an object and the nature of that object. This awareness, in turn, depends upon a knowledge of, or acquaintance with, the object that is independent of that which is said or thought about it.

As illuminating as Lear's analysis of ironic experience is, it runs into difficulties when we begin to uncover the nature of the 'object incongruity' embedded in his account. In attempting to develop a 'naturalised,' 'nonmoralised' moral psychology (Lear, 2011: 43 ff.), Lear argues that unconscious fantasy can ground the experience of irony (*ibid*: 46). Drawing on Freud's conception of the uncanny as "something which is secretly familiar, which has undergone repression and then returned from it,"⁸⁹ he argues that our repressed and unconscious motivations "are not simply a disparate hodgepodge of one-off desires, fantasies and emotions...but they can supply alternative unifying sources of self" (*ibid*). Consequently, Lear proposes that that which breaks through in an uncanny, ironic experience is simply an unconscious worldview "which stands at significant odds with [one's] conscious sense of practical identity" (*ibid*: 46-47). The discrepancy constitutive of object incongruity thus becomes a discrepancy between our conscious and unconscious senses of self.

However, we can note at least two problems with his proposal. First, since the drive toward formal organisation that characterises the unconscious is itself open to social mediation (cf. Fink, 1995: 3-34) the 'return' of unconscious fantasy cannot facilitate the radical questioning of the presuppositions involved in our thought that is involved in the search for wisdom. This is related to a second problem, namely, that by replacing an intuitive sense of the good with

⁸⁹ Cf. Freud, S. (1981) "The 'Uncanny'," in Strachey (ed. and trans.) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth Press. 17: 245.

an unconscious sense of self that is derived from repressed motivations, Lear leaves himself unable to account for the way in which we can experience *virtue* as somehow transcending the ossified modes in which we have come to think about it. Although he claims that the ironic disruption of one's sense of self that is effected when one becomes aware of the alternative sources of self-unity that the unconscious provides can result in a disruption of one's previous and limited understanding of the range of situations in which a particular virtue can be applied (Lear, 2011: 62), his desire to avoid invoking any transcendent ideal of virtue leaves him unable to explain why this disruption should lead to self-improvement rather than relativism.

In contrast, Futter argues that, in the relevant ironic experience, that which disrupts our existent and partial understanding of virtue is our intuitive or innate knowledge of the virtue in question (Futter, 2013b: 1048). That is, the discrepancy constitutive of object incongruity in this instance is not the discrepancy between two different world views, one of which is constituted by repressed desires and motivations; rather, this discrepancy is the discrepancy between the nature of virtue and the good on the one hand and, on the other hand, our incomplete understanding of this nature as it is expressed in our thoughts, speeches and actions.

Futter's argument for this thesis is embedded in his interpretation of Plato's *Euthyphro* and can be briefly illustrated as follows. Euthyphro puts himself forward as someone with knowledge of piety (*Euthyphr.* 4b; 4e-5a). However, when Socrates presses him to share this knowledge (*Euthyphr.* 5d; 6d-e; 9d-e), he finds that whatever proposition he puts forward as definitive of its nature "goes around and refuses to stay put where we establish it" (*Euthyphr.*

11b).⁹⁰ Importantly, though, despite Euthyphro's failure to set down an adequate definition of piety, Socrates never accuses him of lacking the knowledge he claims to have (cf. Futter, 2013b: 1041-1042). Indeed, as Futter notes, it would be completely unreasonable to do so, since Euthyphro himself is able to reject his own definitions of piety as he examines them along with Socrates and realises that they do not adequately express the meaning he intends for them (*ibid*; cf. *Euthphr.* 13c-d). That is, the dialectic does not get Euthyphro to admit that he doesn't know what piety is, since it is precisely his awareness of the nature of piety that enables him to recognise the inadequacy of his own definitions. As Futter remarks:

...knowledge of the object sought enables the enquirer to reject definitions as failing to capture and express this knowledge. The knowledge of the object sought is then a tacit and intuitive awareness which guides the dialectic.
(Futter, 2013b: 1046; cf. 1041-1042)

However, although Euthyphro is in possession of this tacit and intuitive awareness of the nature of piety, it is clear that he does not properly understand it. For one thing, if he truly understood piety then he would be less sure of the ease with which its nature can be stated. Thus, in contrast to both constructive and non-constructive accounts of the elenchus in the early dialogues, the point of the dialectic in the *Euthyphro* seems to be to encourage Euthyphro to turn his attention toward the nature of the virtue that he already intuits in order to sharpen his *understanding* of it (cf. Futter, 2013b: 1049-1050). That is, upon experiencing his failure to express what he thinks he knows, an idealised Euthyphro would begin to draw out from himself a deeper understanding of the nature of virtue (*ibid*).

⁹⁰ Grube trans. in Cooper (ed), 1997.

This picture of Socrates' dialogical goal in the dialogue fits beautifully with his claim in the *Republic* that we all have a divine intuition that the good is something, but are unable to properly grasp it. Furthermore, we can see a similar pattern repeated in other Platonic dialogues. In both the *Laches* and the *Charmides*, for example, the virtues of courage and temperance are tentatively defined by Laches and Charmides respectively (*Lach.* 192b-c; *Chrm* 159b), and are then quickly linked to the good (*Lach.* 192c; *Chrm.* 159b-c). Although both Laches and Charmides agree that the virtues in question are good, their definitions immediately prove unable to capture the full sense of goodness relevant to courage and temperance (*Lach.* 192c-193d; *Chrm.* 159c-160d). However, Socrates' questions soon help them realise that their own awareness of the nature of goodness and the way in which it manifests itself in each of the virtues transcends the narrow straits in which their definitions have constrained it. This realisation, when it manages to hit home, is constitutive of the ironic experience.⁹¹

Socrates never provides a systematic explanation of how it is possible for us to feel ourselves drawn toward an ideal of the good that transcends our current understanding of it. Instead, he furnishes us with mythical imagery and speculative analogies that point toward a deep mystery at the heart of all human experience (cf. *Men.* 81b-d; *Phdr.* 244a-256e; *Rep.* 507a-

⁹¹ Laches articulates the experience of *aporia* that is coextensive with the ironic experience well: "...I am getting really annoyed at being unable to express what I think in this fashion. I still think I know what courage is, but I can't understand how it has escaped me just now so that I can't pin it down in words and say what it is" (*Lach.* 194a-b). In contrast, Charmides seems somewhat unaffected by the dialogical reversal and, instead of feeling puzzled by his inability to properly express that which is within him (*Chrm.* 160d-e), he quickly turns away from examining himself and offers up a definition provided by an external source (*Chrm.* 161b). The failures of both Euthyphro and Charmides to properly experience the irony in which they are caught points toward the difficulty involved in the activity of philosophy.

509c, 611c-612a). Although the ground of the possibility of ironic self-disruption must necessarily remain obscure as long as our understanding of the good is incomplete, our awareness of the gap that exists between our own intuitive, inchoate sense of the good and our poorly developed understanding of its nature undergirds the possibility of ethical improvement. This improvement, in turn, involves the displacement of our derivative conception of the virtues as we find ourselves called back to an insight that we already seem to know.

Philosophical Dialogue

The ironic experience is disorienting: it disrupts our understanding of the ideals to which we are committed and thus disrupts our self-understanding (cf. Futter, 2013b: 1046-1048). That is, in a moment of existential irony we become a mystery to ourselves: we realise that we are unable to fully comprehend the foundations of our being and our thought and we feel distanced from our previous conception of the principles according to which we still strive to live. In this final section, I will argue that the activity of philosophical dialogue sustains the requisite inquiry into the good in the face of an ironic experience and, in addition, contains the potential to first occasion this experience of ironic self-disruption.

In order to develop this argument, we need to examine a point that, although implicit in our consideration of self-examination, has not yet received sufficient emphasis. This is that self-examination requires the articulation of our current understanding of goodness or virtue. That is, not only does the evaluation of our own conception of goodness presuppose an implicit standard against which to evaluate it, but our current understanding must itself be articulated *as something that can be evaluated*. If I am unable to unify my understanding of virtue – if I

am unable either to conceptualise virtue as something that has a particular nature in opposition to ‘pure’, incomprehensible multiplicity, or to identify the specific conception(s) of virtue on the basis of which I choose to act – then I, quite simply, have *nothing* to examine and evaluate.

This point is crucial. Although it is true that, at the very least, an implicit notion of the good is a prerequisite for the possibility of choice and consequently that, insofar as we are able to make decisions, we all *do* assume a working conception of the good in our lives, it can often take a lot of work to reflect upon this notion and make it explicit. This is precisely the work we see depicted in many of Plato’s dialogues: Socrates repeatedly encourages those with whom he converses to make the effort to reflect upon and articulate their current understanding of virtue.⁹² In fact, to engage in philosophical dialogue about virtue just *is* to continuously make this effort to translate what one thinks – and that which is presupposed in what one thinks – into the medium of speech.

However, unlike the conceit of many of Socrates’ interlocutors who initially think that virtue is easy to define,⁹³ to emphasise the importance of making the attempt to articulate one’s understanding of virtue is not to deny virtue’s ultimate transcendence. Instead, to attempt this act of translation in philosophical dialogue is to self-consciously uncover one’s own understanding; it requires the courage to expose one’s thoughts about virtue both to oneself and to another, and to put at risk one’s understanding of the principles that structure one’s way of life. As Nicholas Davey writes, “dialogical engagement is not necessarily easy or

⁹² *Chrm.* 159a ff. *Euthphr.* 5d ff.; *Lach.* 190d ff.; *Men.* 71d ff. *Rep.* 331b ff.; *Tht.* 146c ff. This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

⁹³ *Euthphr.* 5d-6a; *Lach.* 190e; *Men.* 71d-72a. This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

comfortable. It requires a willingness to be subject to the address of the other and to place one's self-understanding before the other's claims" (Davey, 2006: xv). This can be shown by considering two important and related moments that are involved in the practice of offering up an account of one's understanding in philosophical dialogue.

First, the effort involved in articulating one's thoughts about virtue such that they can be communicated and understood by another helps to clarify one's own understanding. Not only does the challenge of providing a coherent account of the ground of our own actions force us to reflect about that which often passes by unnoticed and unexamined, but in so doing, it can also bring to one's attention the gaps and obscurities that characterise one's thinking. Thus, in the activity of dialogue, the task of unifying one's understanding becomes a practical necessity. Moreover, the unification of one's understanding that is effected in the act of translation makes possible the further examination and potential displacement of one's (now explicitly formulated) understanding of virtue. As such, the attempt to discursively objectify one's understanding of virtue is useful not because virtue can ultimately be objectified, but because this objectification can introduce into one's self-understanding the requisite distance required for self-examination.

Second, and closely connected to the previous point, to participate in the activity of philosophical dialogue is to suffer repeated negation.⁹⁴ This is because the plurality of

⁹⁴ As Francisco Gonzalez notes, this point is emphasized by Gadamer: "...all genuine conversation, and certainly all genuine philosophical conversation, involves exposing ourselves and our convictions to what resists, questions, negates or opposes us and them. Gadamer states this point with special clarity in the following passage: 'My own hermeneutical project is, with regard to its fundamental philosophical aim, not much more than the expression of the conviction that we arrive at the things themselves only in conversation. Only when we expose ourselves to a possible opposed view have we any chance of getting beyond the confines of our own

perspectives that constitute the thread of any genuine philosophical dialogue problematizes the totalising claim of any one particular perspective. That is, since the nature of virtue necessarily transcends any one particular perspective and is sometimes to be found not within any plurality of perspectives, but rather in the way in which they fit together to reveal a greater whole (cf. Lachterman, 1989-90, p. 150-153), the play of perspectives that is opened up by philosophical dialogue is ideally suited to occasioning in the interlocutors the sense that the unity that grounds the multiple perspectives articulated in the discussion remains unspoken. The recognition that the object of one's inquiry is strangely present and yet eludes one's attempt to determinately grasp it is, as we have seen, constitutive of the experience of irony.

In order to further clarify the dialectical role played by philosophical dialogue in self-examination, it will be helpful to consider a possible objection. In a recent article, Francisco Gonzalez provides, in part, an appraisal and critique of Paul Ricœur's resistance to taking dialogue as the model for hermeneutics (Gonzalez, 2006b). Ricœur's rejection of dialogue as a model for the development of one's understanding is grounded in his accusation that dialogue is unable to provide the necessary dialectical critique of the presuppositions that guide one's understanding (Gonzalez, 2006b: 314; 318; cf. Ricœur, 1981: 145-164; 197-221). As Gonzalez notes, this accusation is itself dependent upon a distinction Ricœur draws between language as event – “an event that occurs in time as an action of and between subjects” – and language as signification – “an objective content that is timeless and separable from the context and authors of its utterance” (Gonzalez, 2006b: 318; cf. Ricœur, 1981: 198-199). Ricœur thinks that, in dialogue, the objective content of what is said is

assumptions.” (Gonzalez, 2006b: 330; the embedded quotation is taken from Gadamer, H.G. & Kosellek, R. (1987) *Hermeneutik und Historik*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Verlag, p. 30; Gonzalez trans.).

subordinated to an unchecked, contingent and subjective appropriation of the subject matter and, as such, he stresses the need to subject that which is under discussion to the “explanative procedures” and “theoretical methods” of science in order to counter the distorting effects of our presuppositions and prejudices:

...if misrecognition is insurmountable by the directly dialogical route, then the dissolution of ideologies must pass through the detour of procedures concerned with explaining and not simply understanding. These procedures invoke a theoretical apparatus which cannot be derived from any hermeneutics that remains on the level of the spontaneous interpretation of everyday speech. Here again, psychoanalysis provides a good model... (Ricœur, 1981: 84; cf. Gonzalez, 2006b: 331)

However, as Gonzalez argues, Ricœur’s critique suffers from at least two problems. First, the ‘critical’ alternative he proposes – the theoretical apparatus invoked by scientific procedures – is, itself, not free from ideological presuppositions. As Gonzalez writes: “[The objectifying method of science] ...is not presuppositionless nor non-ideological, despite its claims to objectivity and neutrality. It’s ‘objectivity’ can in fact conceal false presuppositions, rather than expose and criticise them” (Gonzalez, 2006b: 331). Moreover, if it is in fact the case that the subject matter under discussion cannot be objectified without suffering distortion – as is the case when the subject matter is the nature of virtue and the good – then the formalised objectification achieved in the sciences is potentially reductive. On the other hand, the diversity of perspectives brought to bear on the subject matter in a dialogue prevents any single objectification from being treated as final or authoritative. Instead, the multiple attempts to articulate, or gesture toward, the nature of that which is under discussion can be

used to spark insight into the subject matter that transcends any single articulation (cf. *Ltr.* VII. 344b).⁹⁵ That is, philosophical dialogue enables a fluidity that is lost in the monological, objectifying methods of science.

This is connected to the second problem with Ricœur's critique. Unlike everyday discourse, philosophical dialogue *does* contain an internal moment of critique capable of 'dissolving' ideologies (Gonzalez, 2006b: 331). That is, "philosophical dialogue as characterised by Plato is *dialectical* in a way that ordinary conversation is not":

If in ordinary conversation we are absorbed in the event and specific context of speaking in such a way that we do not distance ourselves from this event to the extent required for a focus on *what* is signified, this is certainly not the case with a conversation in which interlocutors are forced to address the question 'What is x?' and in which continual refutation keeps them from falling back into unreflective speech acts. (*Ibid*: 320-321; emphasis in original)

The point is not that philosophical dialogue is able to completely eradicate false presuppositions and thus that participating in a dialogue can help us escape the problem of hermeneutical orientation altogether. As we have already seen, the fact that we can never fully escape the problem of disoriented reflection forms the basis for the argument that the life of philosophy is the best life for a human being. Rather, the point is that genuine philosophical dialogue involves a continual confrontation with that which resists easy assimilation. The experience of constantly finding oneself brought up short – of experiencing

⁹⁵ Cf. Gonzalez (2009: 78): "There is in the dialogues a careful balance between making something the object of a *logos* and at the same time revealing how it resists such objectification."

the limitations of one's own understanding – can work to throw light on one's previously hidden presuppositions. As I stressed in chapters three and four, these presuppositions are themselves responsible for concealing a depth to reality, the traversal of which constitutes the goal of the *Republic*'s education programme.

In the *Apology*, Socrates states that “it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day” (*Ap.* 38a). In the *Republic*, we witness Socrates persisting in an hours long discussion of virtue that takes the place of food, festivities and sleep. While it might be said that, in forgoing dinner and the spectacle of an all-night festival, the events of the *Republic* provide us with a dramatic portrait of moderation, Socrates himself appears decidedly immoderate in his appetite for philosophical dialogue. Yet, in opposition to the immoderation of the tyrant, Socrates does not commit himself to any contingent and partial instantiation of goodness – an instantiation that very quickly passes over into its opposite. Instead, Socrates commits himself to participating in the process whereby one's very understanding of goodness can be repeatedly drawn out, evaluated and deepened on account of this very examination.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have affirmed Socrates' contention that the good life for a human being is the life of philosophy. Moreover, by showing how the activity of philosophical dialogue can incorporate the two aspects of dialectic that emerged in the course of our inquiry in chapters three and four, I have provided a sketch of what philosophical activity involves. This activity must be capable of responding to the challenge posed by hermeneutic orientation. That it can do so is made possible by our own intuitive awareness of the good that is nevertheless concealed and poorly understood. This innate awareness of the good makes possible the

ironic, dialectical dis-placement of our partial and derivative conceptions of the good that work to delimit our horizons and thus constrain our thought and our actions. It is by opening ourselves up to this dialectical dis-placement in the activity of philosophical dialogue that we can make progress in our perpetual quest to know and embody virtue.

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