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PLATO'S THEORIES OF VICE

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A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I argue that the Socratic dialogues and the *Republic* are home to two different theories of human vice. In the Socratic dialogues, vice is ignorance. But ignorance is not a mere lack of knowledge, as many scholars assume. Instead, it is a substantive, structural psychic flaw: the soul's domination by inferior elements that are by nature fit to be ruled instead of ruling. The inferior elements at issue are appearances—representations of how things strike one to be from certain perspectives. On this picture, particular defects that are often labeled as epistemic vices and moral vices in contemporary discussions, such as closed-mindedness and cowardice, are forms of ignorance.

By contrast, in the *Republic*, Plato does not identify human vice with ignorance. Instead, he operates with what I call *the functional model* of human vice: it is a psychic state, because of which the soul performs its function—living a reason-guided life—badly. The psychic state in question consists in corrupt characters, i.e., deep-seated misalignments among soul parts, because of which a human soul fails to live a reason-guided life. Particular defects, for example, cowardice and closed-mindedness, are aspects of corrupt characters. Ignorance, as the vice of the rational soul part, is a particular defect that is necessary and sufficient for human vice. More specifically, it is a state because of which the rational soul part performs its function badly. One becomes vicious as a result of bad habituation, which amounts to coming to adopt a way of living that inappropriately strengthens non-rational parts. Despite those similarities, cases of becoming vicious are not entirely homogenous. In general, the worse community one belongs to, the less autonomy one tends to have over the development of her character.

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Introduction

Throughout his works, Plato often claims that while it is extremely difficult to become wise and virtuous, it is rather commonplace to become ignorant and vicious. In fact, most human beings are ignorant and vicious to some extents. These claims in part go against our everyday intuition. Admittedly, some of us could agree that becoming wise and virtuous is extremely difficult, if we are convinced that wisdom and virtue constitute a consummate intellectual and moral accomplishment that requires the complete development of the best nature in a suitable environment. However, fewer of us would be ready to accept that most human beings are ignorant and vicious to some extents. After all, it is not immediately clear in what sense not only wicked people whose flaws are conspicuous but also outstanding individuals whom we look up to for guidance are ignorant and vicious.

Perhaps discouraged by the counter-intuitiveness of Plato's claims, his theories of ignorance and vice has not received much scholarly attention. It is common assume that ignorance and vice are simply the absence of wisdom and knowledge. So as long as we have a solid grip on wisdom and knowledge, we will automatically understand what ignorance and vice amount to.

But it is dubious whether ignorance and vice are simply the absence of wisdom and knowledge. Aristotle, for example, notes that many people fall somewhere between virtue and vice: while they fall short of virtue, they are not altogether vicious. They can be akratic: while they are disposed to have correct judgments about what to do in particular circumstances, they act otherwise, under the urge of strong, appetitive desires. They can also be self-controlled: they are disposed to act in accordance with their correct

judgments, in spite of the urges of strong, appetitive desires. Alternatively, they can be somewhere between akratic and self-controlled. If Aristotle is correct, there will be a middle ground between on the one hand, wisdom and virtue, and, on the other hand, ignorance and vice. In fact, Plato agrees on the existence of the middle ground, even though he disagrees with regard to whether the majority are vicious or somewhere between virtuous and vicious. In his view, Socrates, albeit falling short of wisdom and virtue, is not ignorant and vicious.

Since ignorance and vice are presumably not the absence of wisdom and virtue, a solid grip on wisdom and virtue cannot automatically allow us to understand what ignorance and vice amount to. Skeptics, however, might raise the following questions about the value of a focused study on ignorance and vice in Plato. To begin with, while wisdom and virtue are the goals that human beings should strive to pursue, ignorance and vice are the defects that they should escape from. Since inquiry into the former pair can offer us a solid grip on the goals that we should pursue, why do we bother examining the defects that we should run away from? Moreover, Plato's assertion that most human beings are ignorant and vicious could be, like many of his other claims, out of touch with our current circumstances. If this is the case, what is the point of digging into his accounts of ignorance and vice?

In this dissertation, I show that a careful examination of ignorance and vice not only contributes to a better grasp of wisdom and virtue but also is valuable for its own sake. Ignorance and vice could systematically distort one's perception, affection, and evaluation. Hence, even if ignorant and vicious people agree that they should strive to pursue wisdom and virtue, these things might escape their notice. Thus, if most human

beings are, as Plato diagnoses, ignorant and vicious to some extent, they are liable to struggle to discern wisdom and virtue. Accordingly, a careful examination of ignorance and vice enables people to have a clearer sense of their defects and are thus more equipped to correct them. As a result, their perception, affection, and evaluation can become less skewed, which makes them more equipped to discern and pursue wisdom and virtue. Moreover, a careful examination of ignorance and vice is valuable for its own sake. Human beings have many aspects. Some aspects are distinctively human, whereas other are shared with non-human animals. On an influential view, wisdom and virtue constitute the consummate accomplishment of the human aspect. So an examination of wisdom and virtue by itself does not say much about the aspects that we share with non-human animals. An in-depth inquiry into ignorance and vice can accordingly cast light on those aspects. In this way, it contributes to a more comprehensive picture about humanity.

My dissertation shows that in the Socratic dialogues and the *Republic*, Plato develops two different theories of ignorance and vice. Chapters 1 and 2 examine his accounts of ignorance and vice in the *Protagoras* and other Socratic dialogues. Chapter 3 to Chapter 5 inquire into his discussions of ignorance and vice in the *Republic*. Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation. Their main contribution can be summarized as follows.

Chapter 1 argues that in the *Protagoras*, Plato develops a rich account of ignorance. Contrary to the commonplace reading, according to which ignorance is just a lack of knowledge, Plato conceives of ignorance as a substantive, structural psychic flaw: the soul's domination by inferior elements that are by nature fit to be ruled instead of ruling. The inferior elements at issue are appearances—representations of how things strike one

to be from certain perspectives. Understood in this way, ignorant people are characterized by false beliefs about evaluative matters in specific situations and an enduring deception about their own psychic conditions, such as mistaking themselves for knowing what they do not know. On my interpretation, there is—contrary to the common assumption—a *middle ground* between knowledge and ignorance: while Socrates lacks the knowledge that he claims to lack, he is not ignorant, because he is alert to the deceptive nature of appearances.

Chapter 2 contends that the Socratic theory of ignorance¹ paves the way for one of the first systematic accounts of vice in the history of Western Philosophy. According to this account, defects that are nowadays called epistemic vices and moral vices are forms of ignorance. An epistemic vice—wishful thinking about one’s cognitive conditions—is the common core of all other epistemic and moral vices. Moreover, contrary to commonsensical views in both Classical Athens and contemporary world, Socrates conceives vice to be pervasive. He substantiates his position with two sets of resources. On the one hand, he illustrates the pervasiveness of vice by putting forward a more expansive conception of physical illness and an extended analogy between illness and vice. On the other hand, he justifies the pervasiveness of vice with the help of a thoroughgoing socio-political critique, according to which most existing political communities, being sustained by and perpetuating vices at the individual level, are vicious.

¹ As Melissa Lane has correctly pointed out, more work is needed in order to establish that the Socratic dialogues have a more or less unified account of ignorance and vice. I will develop those ideas further in the future.

Chapter 3 turns to Plato's discussion of ignorance in the *Republic*. Ignorance is the vice specific to reason and thus different from incomprehension, which covers a variety of cognitive deficiencies, such a lack of familiarity and true opinions. In my view, Plato operates with what I call the *functional model* of ignorance: ignorance is a state of reason because of which reason performs its function poorly.² The function of reason consists of a cognitive aspect, i.e., grasping truth, and a structural aspect, i.e., ruling the entire human soul. Accordingly, ignorance consists of a cognitive defect and a structural defect. I will further suggest that while the cognitive defect is attested to by genuine falsehood—a cognitive deficiency that involves a complex of ongoing and enduring mistakes about evaluative matters, the structural defect can manifest itself in a distinctive form of self-deception—a disposition to maintain incorrect views about evaluative matters, even when one has access to facts to the contrary.

Chapter 4 argues that in the *Republic*, Plato operates with what I call the functional model of human vice: it is a psychic state because of which a human soul performs its function—living a reason-guided, human life—poorly. I will contend that the state in question consists in corrupt holistic characters, i.e., deep-seated misalignments of the entire human soul, because of which the soul fails to live a reason-guided life. The four major types of corrupt character—the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical—are paradigmatic cases of human vice. Particular defects, such as licentiousness and ignorance, are human vices because they are aspects of corrupt

² I use the word 'function' and its cognates to pick up the Greek word *ἔργον*, which, to a first approximation, refers to activities that are characteristic of something. The function of eyes, for instance, is seeing; the function of a pruning knife is pruning. For a more detailed discussion of Plato's conception of function in the *Republic*, see Section 3. It is worth pointing out that by saying that Plato operates with a functional model of ignorance. I do not mean that he offer a functional analysis of ignorance in terms of its characteristic activities. Rather, ignorance is defined in terms of poor performances of reason's function.

characters. On this account, while human vice is not defined in terms of ignorance, ignorance is still a necessary and sufficient aspect of it.

Chapter 5 examines Plato's account of becoming vicious in the *Republic*.

According to my reading, one becomes vicious as a result of bad habituation, which amounts to coming to adopt a way of living (ἐπιτηδεῦμα) that inappropriately strengthens non-rational parts. There are two basic mechanisms underlying the adoption of shameful ways of living, apprenticeship and conformity, as I call them. Each mechanism represents a different form of interaction among a bad community, individuals' mental life, and actions. In both cases, a bad community is the ultimate source of corruption. Despite those similarities, cases of becoming vicious are not entirely homogenous. The *Republic* is home to one of the first accounts of autonomy in the history of Western Philosophy. Autonomy, in its most complete form, amounts to a competence to form rational desires in light of a comprehensive grip on the evaluative matters and act in accordance with those desires. Autonomy can be cultivated and obtained at many different degrees. In general, the worse community one belongs to, the less autonomy one tends to have over the development of her character. So cases of becoming vicious are, in an important sense, variegated.

Chapter 6 serves as the conclusion of my dissertation. Here I summarize the results from the previous chapters and identify some future research questions.

Chapter 1. Ignorance in the *Protagoras*

1 Introduction

Socrates famously professes to lack the knowledge that he is dedicated to pursuing. In the literature, it is common to infer that Socrates is professing to be ignorant.³ The inference in question is made under the assumption that ignorance *just is* a lack of knowledge. With that assumption, insofar as we understand what knowledge is, we will automatically understand what ignorance is; ignorance does not have to be studied in its own right.⁴

In this chapter, I will challenge the assumption that ignorance just is a lack of knowledge. As I will show, Socrates has a rich account of ignorance, which cannot be fully captured in terms of a mere lack of knowledge. By examining the Socratic dialogues,⁵ and, in particular, the *Protagoras*,⁶ I will argue that he conceives of ignorance as a substantive, structural psychic flaw: the soul's domination by inferior elements that

³ See Mackenzie 1988, 333–4; Brickhouse and Smith 2000, 58–68; Matthews 2006, 103; Bett 2011, 215.

⁴ The previous line of reasoning captures the status of contemporary philosophical scholarship, and in particular, the scholarship on Plato. While many discussions have been devoted to illuminating knowledge (Vlastos 1972, 424–5; Penner 1973; Kraut 1984, 261–2; Nussbaum 1986; Roochnik 1986; Brickhouse and Smith 1997, 2010; Cooper 1999, 89; Clark 2015; Glasscock 2020), considerably less attention has been given to its intellectually impoverished cousin, ignorance.

⁵ By Socratic dialogues, I mean to include *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Alcibiades*, *Second Alcibiades*, *Hipparchus*, *Rival Lovers*, *Theages*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Euthydemus*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Minor*, *Hippias Major*, *Ion*, *Menexenus*, *Clitophon*, and *Minos*. Commentators propose two approaches to understanding the unity of the Socratic dialogues. The first approach argues that those works, in terms of their *chronological order*, fall into the early stage of Plato's philosophical career. So the Socratic dialogues are also called the early dialogues (Vlastos 1991, 46–7). The second approach contends that the Socratic dialogues are unified by their *thematic and non-assertoric continuity*. In all those dialogues, Socrates, as the main speaker, examines primarily ethical matters and refrains from stating his positive theses (Cooper 1997, xii–xviii). Notably, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Scholars who adopt the former, chronological approach might agree that the Socratic dialogues also exhibit a thematic and non-assertoric continuity. Scholars who subscribe to the latter, thematic approach might concede that some Socratic dialogues, such as the *Euthyphro* and the *Crito*, are likely to be composed at a relatively early stage of Plato's philosophical career.

⁶ Harte proposes an interesting account of ignorance in one of the most famous middle-period dialogues, the *Republic* (Harte 2013). But she does not study the Socratic dialogues, which this chapter examines. Vogt tries to construct an account of ignorance by looking at both *Philebus*, which is generally accepted as a late dialogue, and Socratic dialogues like *Apology* and *Ion* (Vogt 2012). But she does not focus on the *Protagoras*.

are by nature fit to be ruled instead of ruling. The inferior elements at issue are appearances—representations of how things strike one to be from certain perspectives. Understood in this way, ignorant people are characterized by false beliefs about evaluative matters in specific situations and an enduring deception about their own psychic conditions, such as mistaking themselves for knowing what they do not know. On my interpretation, there is—contrary to the common assumption—a *middle ground* between knowledge and ignorance: while Socrates lacks the knowledge that he claims to lack, he is not ignorant, because he is alert to the deceptive nature of appearances.

My plan for the chapter is as follows. In Section 2, I contextualize the discussion of ignorance in the *Protagoras* and extract four major claims that structure my ensuing inquiry. In Section 3, I sketch out the impoverished intellectual and practical nature of ignorance by contrasting it with knowledge. Section 4, I argue that Socrates conceives of ignorance as the soul's domination by psychic states that are by nature fit to be ruled, i.e., appearances. In Section 5, I offer a more concrete picture of ignorance by contending that ignorant people are characterized by both false beliefs about evaluative matters in specific situations and an enduring deception about their own psychic conditions. In Section 6, I close the chapter by arguing that in light of the conception of ignorance in the Socratic dialogues, there is a middle ground between knowledge and ignorance, occupied by individuals who are undazzled by appearances.

2 Ignorance in Context

Among the Socratic dialogues, the *Protagoras* contains the most elaborate comments on ignorance (ἀμαθία).⁷ In the *Protagoras*, Socrates' comments on ignorance are embedded in his two-stage challenge to Protagoras,⁸ a famous sophist who claims to be knowledgeable about virtue. According to Protagoras, while virtue is teachable, a part of it—courage—is separable from the rest: many people are exceptionally courageous but unjust, impious, intemperate, and ignorant (320c2–328d2 and 349d2–8). In the first stage of his challenge, Socrates sketches out a notion of knowledge that Protagoras accepts by refuting a popular account of akrasia (351b3–357e8). In the second stage, he argues that based on that conception of knowledge, courage, like the other cardinal virtues, is a form of knowledge and wisdom. Thus, virtue as a whole seems to be teachable. It is therefore not open for Protagoras to assert both that virtue is teachable and that a part of it, say, courage, is separable from the rest (358a1–361d6).

⁷ Socrates does not take ignorance (ἀμαθία) and incomprehension (ἄγνοια) to be synonymous. Admittedly, he thinks that they are closely related. For example, at 360b4–7, he asserts that the confidence and fear of the cowardly, the foolhardy, and madmen are disgraceful and bad because of incomprehension and ignorance (δι' ἄγνοιαν καὶ ἀμαθίαν). Nevertheless, in some other passages, he strongly suggests that ignorance is a special case of incomprehension. At *Lysis* 218a2–b1, he notes that people can have incomprehension and be affected by it in two ways. On the one hand, they can merely have incomprehension without becoming deficient in comprehension (ἄγνώμονες), ignorant (ἀμαθεῖς), and accordingly vicious. Because they are keenly aware of their lack of knowledge about things that they do not know, they in fact love wisdom. On the other hand, people can have incomprehension in such a way that they become ignorant (ἀμαθεῖς) and vicious. Because they mistakenly take themselves to know things that they do not know (*Alcibiades* I 118a4–5), they lack desire for wisdom. Ignorance (ἀμαθία) is a noun that is cognate with the adjective 'ignorant (ἀμαθεῖς)'. So it is not far-fetched to infer that ignorance stands for a state of being affected by incomprehension in such a way that the subjects, mistaking themselves for knowing what they do not know, are vicious. Therefore, ignorance is a special case of incomprehension. I thank an anonymous referee for encouraging me to clarify the distinction between ignorance and incomprehension.

⁸ In this chapter, I often attribute views to Socrates and Protagoras, who are main characters in Plato's *Protagoras*. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that in doing so, I do not assume that the views of those characters represent the views of the corresponding historical figures. My aim is to reconstruct the philosophical positions that the characters in Plato's *Protagoras* espouse rather than figure out the philosophical views that the actual historical figures defended.

Socrates makes references to ignorance (ἀμαθία)⁹ in both stages of his challenge to Protagoras. In the first stage, he does so by refuting a popular account of the phenomena that are nowadays called *akrasia*,¹⁰ according to which akratic agents act contrary to their knowledge (when it is possible for them to act otherwise) because they are overcome by pleasure, pain, anger, or some other passions (ὕπὸ τῶν ἡδονῶν ἡττᾶσθαι, 352b3–353a6). In Socrates' view, akratic agents, insofar as they act badly, cannot act contrary to their knowledge. Rather, they lack knowledge and are ignorant. But, as we will see, this should be understood as leaving open the possibility that some cases of lacking knowledge will not be ignorance. In any case, akratic agents act akratically because of their ignorance (357c6–e8). In the second stage, Socrates infers further claims about ignorance from his arguments in the previous stage. Being weaker than oneself is nothing other than ignorance (οὐδὲ τὸ ἥττω εἶναι αὐτοῦ ἄλλο τι τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἢ ἀμαθία, 358c1–2). Ignorance is like this (ἀμαθίαν ἄρα τὸ τοιόνδε):¹¹ having false beliefs and having been deceived about matters of great importance (τὸ ψευδῇ ἔχειν δόξαν καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων τῶν πολλοῦ ἀξίων, 358c4–5).

In sum, the *Protagoras* contains at least the following claims about ignorance.

⁹ ἀμαθία is used interchangeably with ἀφροσύνη, meaning ignorance or folly. Both of them are identified as the opposites of σοφία or φρόνησις (wisdom). At 332a2–333b6, ἀφροσύνη is identified as the opposite of wisdom. At 358d6–360e5, ἀμαθία is taken to be the opposite of wisdom. Between ἀμαθία and ἀφροσύνη, the former seems to be the primary one, since it figures in Socrates' diagnosis of his contemporaries, such as Alcibiades (*Alcibiades* I 116e2–118c2), the reputedly wise (*Apology* 21b1–22e5), and the majority (*Apology* 29a7–b6).

¹⁰ The phenomena that Socrates focuses on are paradigmatic cases of what are nowadays called akratic actions: one voluntarily pursues what one deems to be bad. These phenomena are often called 'akrasia' or 'weakness of will' by contemporary scholars (Tenenbaum 1999).

¹¹ 358c4–5: ἀμαθίαν ἄρα τὸ τοιόνδε λέγετε, τὸ ψευδῇ ἔχειν δόξαν καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων τῶν πολλοῦ ἀξίων. Notably, the phrase 'ignorance is like this (ἀμαθίαν ἄρα τὸ τοιόνδε)' is in indirect discourse, with the copulative verb εἶναι omitted. The definite article τό before the demonstrative pronoun τοιόνδε strongly suggests that they, as a whole, function as the subject of the infinitive object of that indirect discourse, whereas ἀμαθίαν is in the predicate position. So the phrase 'ignorance is like this (ἀμαθίαν ἄρα τὸ τοιόνδε)' literally means that the thing like this is ignorance.

- (i) Some people who lack knowledge are ignorant (357c6–e8).
- (ii) Being weaker than oneself is nothing other than ignorance (358c1–2).
- (iii) Ignorance is like this: having false beliefs and having been deceived about matters of great importance (358c4–5).

In the following sections, I offer a comprehensive analysis of Socrates' account of ignorance in the *Protagoras* by examining claims (i)–(iii) in order. To begin with, I show that (i) and its immediate context cast light on the impoverished intellectual and practical nature of ignorance by contrasting it with the achievement that features more prominently in philosophical discussions, i.e., knowledge. Then, I argue that (ii), connecting ignorance with being weaker than oneself, illuminates the nature of ignorance. From there, I contend, by outlining what ignorant people are like, that (iii) offers a more concrete picture of ignorance.

3 The Impoverished Intellectual and Practical Nature of Ignorance

The claim that (i) some people who lack knowledge are ignorant (357c6–e8) occurs as Socrates concludes his refutation of a defense for a popular account of *akrasia*. This popular account of *akrasia* is put into the mouths of the 'many', imaginary interlocutors who stand for the average Athenians.¹² After its initial formulation—akratic agents act contrary to their knowledge because they are overcome by pleasure, pain, anger, or some other passions—is shown to be ridiculous at 355a3–356a5,¹³ a possible defense on the

¹² Callard highlights the kinship between the views of many and the views of sophists like Protagoras. Protagoras 'comes to endorse hedonism when and as a result of the fact that' the many do (Callard 2014, n. 9).

¹³ I will not delve into how the many's initial formulation of *akrasia* is shown to be ridiculous at 355a3–356a5. For recent discussions, see Wolfsdorf 2006; Clark 2012; Callard 2014.

many's behalf is proposed at 356a5–7. This defense can be unpacked as follows. Among passions, what is immediately pleasant has a uniquely potent effect on motivation and action. While other passions cannot mislead people who both know what is good for them to do and are able to act accordingly to act contrary to their knowledge, what is immediately pleasant can get them to do so. In the latter kind of cases, akratic agents act contrary to their knowledge, because they are overcome by what is immediately pleasant.

To discharge that defense for the many's account of akrasia, Socrates resorts to the antithesis between appearance and knowledge, or more precisely, between the power of appearance (ἡ τοῦ φαινομένου δύναμις) and the knowledge of measurement¹⁴ at 356c3–357b5. At this point, we might naturally raise the following questions. What is an appearance? What power does it have? What is the knowledge of measurement?

Let us start with appearances. An appearance is a representation of how, from a certain perspective, something strikes one to be. In the current context, Socrates notes that an appearance can represent sensory objects and properties. For instance, a visible object can appear to be (φαίνεται)¹⁵ larger or smaller; a sound may appear to be louder or softer (356c5–8). An appearance can also represent evaluative properties: things can appear to be more or less pleasant and good (356a5–7, 357a5–b3).¹⁶ Notably, Socrates

¹⁴ In the context, Socrates does not distinguish the art of measurement (ἡ μετρητικὴ τέχνη, 356d4 and e3–4) from the knowledge of measurement (ἡ μετρητικὴ ἐπιστήμη, 357a1). In fact, he even calls it ‘an art and a (branch of) knowledge (τέχνη καὶ ἐπιστήμη)’ at 357b4–5. The looseness with his language is consistent with the preliminary nature of his account: it is a sketch of the power that an expertise with regard to measurement has over motivation and actions. For the sake of clarity and brevity, I will call the expertise in question ‘the knowledge of measurement’, or, more briefly, ‘knowledge’.

¹⁵ As Moss points out, in addition to φαίνεσθαι and its cognates, δοκεῖν, εἰκός, and their nominal cognates can mean ‘to appear’ or ‘appearances’ (Moss 2021, 147).

¹⁶ In the context, Socrates operates with the hypothesis that long-term pleasantness is the good, a version of hedonism that the many are revealed to be endorsing (353c1–354e2; see Moss 2014, 296). In addition, he does not dispute with the many that things can appear to be more or less pleasant. Hence, under the hypothesis that long-term pleasantness is the good, things can appear to be more or less pleasant and accordingly good.

ties appearances¹⁷ to perspectives, by which I mean the points of view that people adopt as a result of their standing in certain relationships with the objects that appear to them. As one's perspective changes, appearances change accordingly. For example, an object appears to be larger when seen near at hand and smaller when seen from a distance; a sound appears to be louder when one is closer by and softer when one is further away.¹⁸ Therefore, an appearance represents how, from a certain perspective, something strikes one to be.

Appearances are associated with, but distinct from, belief and knowledge. People often believe what appears to them, unless they think that their appearances are misleading. One's knowledge can agree with appearances, when the latter happen to be veridical. In spite of those connections, an appearance is distinct from belief and knowledge. As Socrates puts it, one cannot voluntarily act contrary to one's occurrent belief and knowledge about goods and bads: 'no one who knows or believes there is something else better than what he is doing, something possible, will go on doing what he had been doing when he could be doing what is better' (358b7–c1). By contrast, one could voluntarily act contrary to one's occurrent appearances. To give an example, feasting on pastries may appear to be particularly good for me, even though I, alert to its health risks, refrain from following my appearance.

In the following passage, Socrates casts the power of appearance and the knowledge of measurement side by side.

¹⁷ Elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, an appearance can represent non-sensory, non-evaluative entities, such as ideas, hypotheses, and claims. At *Protagoras* 351b8–c3, Protagoras insists that it seems (δοκεῖ) to him that there is a distinction between that justice is pious and that piety is just, even though he fails to challenge Socrates' arguments, according to which there is no such distinction. See also *Euthyphro* 12b4–7, *Charmides* 167d7–e2, and *Protagoras* 360e4–5.

¹⁸ These examples are adapted from Socrates' claim at 356c4–8.

If then our well-being depended upon this, doing and choosing large things, avoiding and not doing small ones, what would we see as our salvation in life? Would it be the art of measurement or the power of appearances? While the power of appearance makes us wander all over the place in confusion, often changing our minds about the same things and regretting our actions and choices with respect to things large and small, the art of measurement, in contrast, would make the appearances lose their power by showing us the truth, would give us peace of mind firmly rooted in truth and would save our life.’ Therefore, would these men agree, with this in mind, that the art of measurement would save us, or some other art? (356c8–e4)¹⁹

At 356d8, Socrates claims that the knowledge of measurement renders appearances powerless, or not in charge (ἄκυρον). His claim indicates that succumbing to the power of appearance amounts to the domination of appearances. But what does the domination at issue consist in? To answer that question, it is worth noting that according to Socrates, the power of appearance makes people ‘wander all over the place in confusion’ (356d4–5). In the Platonic corpus, the word ‘to wander (πλανᾶν)’ often characterizes the cognitive instability of individuals who, lacking knowledge, attempt to judge in accordance with appearances. For instance, at *Hippias Minor* 372d3–e3, Socrates confesses that he, in the absence of knowledge, wanders with regard to whether people

¹⁹ Εἰ οὖν ἐν τούτῳ ἡμῖν ἦν τὸ εὖ πράττειν, ἐν τῷ τὰ μὲν μεγάλα μήκη καὶ πράττειν καὶ λαμβάνειν, τὰ δὲ μικρὰ καὶ φεύγειν καὶ μὴ πράττειν, τίς ἂν ἡμῖν σωτηρία ἐφάνη τοῦ βίου; ἄρα ἡ μετρητικὴ τέχνη ἢ ἡ τοῦ φαινομένου δύναμις; ἢ αὕτη μὲν ἡμᾶς ἐπλάνα καὶ ἐποίει ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω πολλάκις μεταλαμβάνειν ταῦτα καὶ μεταμέλειν καὶ ἐν ταῖς πράξεσιν καὶ ἐν ταῖς αἵρέσεσιν τῶν μεγάλων τε καὶ μικρῶν, ἢ δὲ μετρητικὴ ἄκυρον μὲν ἂν ἐποίησε τοῦτο τὸ φάντασμα, δηλώσασα δὲ τὸ ἀληθὲς ἡσυχίαν ἂν ἐποίησεν ἔχειν τὴν ψυχὴν μένουσαν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀληθεῖ καὶ ἔσωσεν ἂν τὸν βίον; ἄρ’ ἂν ὁμολογοῖεν οἱ ἄνθρωποι πρὸς ταῦτα ἡμᾶς τὴν μετρητικὴν σφάζειν ἂν τέχνην ἢ ἄλλην;

Translations of the *Protagoras* are by Stanley Lombardo and Karen Bell, from Cooper 1997.

who go wrong voluntarily are better than those who do so involuntarily, as the issue appears differently to him from time to time.²⁰ Thus, that the power of appearance makes people wander hints that under the domination of appearances, people try to judge in accordance with their ever changing appearances.²¹ On top of that, Socrates asserts that the power of appearance oftentimes makes people ‘change their minds about the same things and regret their actions and choices (356d6–7)’. That is to say, under the domination of appearances, people not only judge in accordance with appearances but also often revise their appearance-based judgments, presumably because, in line with their shifting perspectives, appearances are subject to changes. And the fact that changes in appearance-based judgments lead to regret about earlier actions and choices strongly suggests that those judgments urge individuals who are under the domination of appearance to act accordingly.²² In sum, the power of appearance consists in appearances’ domination over judgments and actions.

The knowledge of measurement makes appearances powerless by enabling its possessors to judge and act in accordance with truth, thereby doing well. To see this point, let us focus on the visual domain. Just like those who lack the knowledge of measurement in the visual domain, namely, optics, people who are equipped with that knowledge have visual appearances, which can be veridical or misleading, depending on

²⁰ See also *Alcibiades* I 117b2–8. For an illuminating discussion of the relationship between wandering, appearance, and belief, see Moss 2021, 213.

²¹ This, as a matter of course, does not mean that the judgments of people who are dominated by appearances cannot latch onto truth: when appearances are veridical, those people can form correct judgments on the basis of appearances. But in such cases, their access to truth is mediated by appearances—they form correct judgments because of how things appear to them.

²² More specifically, it hints that earlier, appearance-based judgments have led to corresponding actions, which one, having revised one’s judgments, regrets. Thus, appearance-based judgments induce individuals who are under the domination of appearances to act accordingly. This inference agrees with the theory of human motivation that Socrates puts forward later at 358b6–d4. Human beings voluntarily pursue what they believe or know to be good for them in relevant situations.

individuals' perspectives. For example, for both those who lack the knowledge of optics and those who have that knowledge, two objects of equal size at the same distance appear to be equal in size, whereas two objects of equal size at different distances can appear to be unequal in size. So the possession of knowledge does not make appearances disappear altogether. What knowledge does, according to Socrates, involves 'showing truth' and 'giving one peace of mind firmly rested in truth'. That is to say, it allows one to reliably grasp truth as truth. To put it differently, knowledge enables one to not only judge in accordance with truth²³ but also hold on to correct judgments in spite of the presence of conflicting appearances. In addition, knowledge is acclaimed to be the salvation of human life (356d8–e4). In the context, Socrates identifies the salvation of human life with that which doing well depends on. Under the hypothesis that long-term pleasantness is the good, a version of hedonism that the many are revealed to be accepting (353c1–354e2; see Moss 2014, 296), doing well amounts to pursuing what is pleasant in the long term and thus good instead of what merely appears to be so. Hence, by calling knowledge the salvation of life, Socrates holds that it enables its possessors to act in accordance with truth, thereby doing well.

The antithesis between appearance and knowledge allows Socrates to refute the possible defense for the many's account of akrasia at 356a5–7, according to which akratic agents act contrary to their knowledge because they are overcome by what is immediately pleasant. The antithesis indicates that as long as one has knowledge, one judges and acts in accordance with truth and, as a result, does well. Akratic agents, pursuing what is

²³ By characterizing a knowledgeable person as judging in accordance with truth, I do not mean to make any further claim about the metaphysics of truth, which the Socratic dialogues do not seem to contain a concrete account of.

actually bad rather than good, act badly. Thus, they cannot be equipped with knowledge. Contrary to the many's claim, akratic agents do not know what is good or bad for them to do.

Socrates' refutation of the possible defense for the many's account of akrasia, paving the way for claim (i) that some people who lack knowledge are ignorant (357d3–e2), illuminates the impoverished intellectual and practical nature of ignorance. According to him, akratic agents, lacking knowledge about what is good or bad for them to do, are ignorant (357d1–e2). The knowledge at issue, as I have shown in this section, enables its possessors to judge and act in accordance with truth. Thus, the ignorant, lacking that knowledge, cannot judge and act in accordance with truth. They have to rely on appearances, i.e., representations about how things strike them to be from certain perspectives. Appearances can misrepresent reality, when one happens to stand in suboptimal perspectives. For instance, two apples of equal size can appear to be unequal in size, if one happens to be at different distances from them. Accordingly, the ignorant are liable to be misled by appearances and, as a consequence, judge and act badly.

4 The Nature of Ignorance

Claim (ii) is that being weaker than oneself is nothing other than ignorance (οὐδὲ τὸ ἥττω εἶναι αὐτοῦ ἄλλο τι τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἢ ἀμαθία, 358c1–2).²⁴ What does this claim say about ignorance?

The first step to unpack claim (ii) is noting that it establishes common ground between the popular account and the Socratic proposal of akrasia. The claim occurs at the

²⁴ A similar formulation occurs at 359d6: τὸ ἥττω εἶναι ἑαυτοῦ ἡυρέθη ἀμαθία οὐσα.

beginning of the second stage of Socrates' two-stage challenge to Protagoras. In the first stage, Socrates paves the way for his eventual rebuttal of Protagoras by presenting and refuting the popular account of *akrasia*. According to that account, akratic agents act contrary to their knowledge (when it is possible for them to act otherwise) because they are overcome by pleasure, pain, anger, or some other passions (ὑπὸ τῶν ἡδονῶν ἡττᾶσθαι, 352b3–353a6), which can be cashed out as being weaker than oneself (τὸ ἡττω εἶναι αὐτοῦ).²⁵ Against the popular account, Socrates argues that knowledge enables one to judge and act in accordance with truth, thereby doing well. Akratic agents, pursuing what is actually bad rather than good, act badly. Thus, they cannot be equipped with knowledge. Instead, they lack knowledge and are ignorant. They act akratically because of their ignorance. Recall that claim (ii), occurring at the beginning of the second stage of Socrates' challenge to Protagoras, states that being weaker than oneself is nothing other than ignorance. So in claim (ii), Socrates can be seen as establishing common ground between the popular account and his own proposal of *akrasia*, after he has refuted the former. In spite of their disagreement on whether akratic agents can have knowledge, the popular account and the Socratic proposal converge on what they conceive to be the cause of akratic actions. What the former takes to be the cause of

²⁵ At 352d7–e1, Socrates declares that according to the popular account, the cause of akratic actions is being overcome by pleasure, pain, or some of the things that he said (ὑπὸ ἡδονῆς φασιν ἡττωμένους ἢ λύπης ἢ ὧν νυνδὴ ἐγὼ ἔλεγον ὑπὸ τινος τούτων). The things that he said refer to passions including anger, pleasure, pain, pain, love, and fear, which are representative of passions that can lead one to knowingly and voluntarily pursue what is bad, according to the popular account. That which is identified as the cause of akratic actions is abbreviated as being overcome by pleasure (τὸ πάθημα ἡδονῆς ἡττᾶσθαι) at 353a5 and 357c7. At 357e2, Socrates picks up the same condition as being weaker than pleasure (τὸ ἡδονῆς ἡττω εἶναι). This interchange between being overcome by and being weaker than strongly suggests that the phrase being weaker than oneself at 358c1–2 is meant to cash out what the popular account takes to be the cause of akratic actions, i.e., being overcome by pleasure, pain, anger, or some other passions. In *Laws*, Plato also uses being weaker than oneself and being overcome by passions interchangeably. For the relevant discussion, see Wilburn 2012, n. 3. For an insightful discussion of the rule of knowledge in the *Protagoras*, see Lane 2020.

akratic actions, i.e., being weaker than oneself, turns out to be what the latter regards as the cause of those actions, viz., ignorance.

The fact that claim (ii)—being weaker than oneself is nothing other than ignorance—establishes common ground between the popular account and the Socratic proposal of *akrasia* strongly suggests that it can be understood in the following ways. First, the claim could mean that being weaker than oneself is defined as ignorance.²⁶ Second, it could mean that being weaker than oneself is identical to ignorance.²⁷ Admittedly, the immediate context of Socrates' comments on ignorance in the *Protagoras* does not give us a decisive reason to favor either of those interpretations of claim (ii).²⁸ A moment of reflection tells us that no matter whether being weaker than oneself is defined as or identical to ignorance, being weaker than oneself can be seen as ignorance, and vice

²⁶ The claim that being weaker than oneself is nothing other than ignorance is a case of the proposition that A is nothing other than B. In the Platonic corpus, that proposition often means that A is defined as B. For example, at *Theaetetus* 160d5–6, Socrates paraphrases Theaetetus' first attempted definition of knowledge at 151d7–e3—knowledge is perception—as that knowledge is nothing other than perception (ἐπιστήμη οὐκ ἄλλο τί ἐστὶν ἢ αἴσθησις). See also *Phaedo* 64d4–5, *Cratylus* 413e3–4, and *Republic* 338c2–3.

²⁷ The proposition that A is nothing other than B can also mean that A is identical to B. At *Phaedrus* 245e7–246a1, Socrates asserts that only the soul can move itself by saying that whatever moves itself, to wit, the self-mover, is nothing other than the soul (μὴ ἄλλο τι εἶναι τὸ αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ κινεῖν ἢ ψυχήν). Both Hackforth and Rowe hold that Socrates identifies the self-mover with the soul at *Phaedrus* 245e–246a1 (Hackforth 1952, 64; Rowe 1986, 177). So the self-mover is just the soul. For a similar use of the proposition that A is nothing other than B, see *Charmides* 164e5–6.

²⁸ A third possible way of construing claim (ii)—it means that being weaker than oneself exemplifies ignorance—should be ruled out in the current context for the following reasons. First, a careful look at the Greek text tells us that the proposition that A is nothing other than B, which is constitutive of claim (ii), barely means that A exemplifies B in the Socratic dialogues, a group of dialogues to which the *Protagoras* belongs. The proposition only means that A exemplifies B at *Hippias Major* 296e8, a work that is of dubious authenticity (for debates about the authenticity of *Hippias Major*, see Woodruff 1982 and Kahn 1985). Second, throughout the Socratic dialogues, all cases of ignorance can be cashed out as being weaker than oneself, which, as I will argue in the rest of this section, amounts to the soul's domination by appearances, which makes one judge and act in accordance with appearances. For example, persistently taking oneself to know what one does not know (*Apology* 21b1–e2) can be understood as holding fast to distorted appearances about oneself, as a result of being stuck in suboptimal perspectives. False beliefs about evaluative matters (*Protagoras* 358d5–360d5) can be seen as judging in accordance with misleading appearances. Nevertheless, if claim (ii)—being weaker than oneself is nothing other than ignorance—means that being weaker than oneself exemplifies ignorance, some cases of ignorance might not be cashed out as being weaker than oneself. For those reasons, claim (ii) is unlikely to mean that being weaker than oneself exemplifies ignorance.

versa. An inquiry into being weaker than oneself provides insight into the nature of ignorance. What, then, is being weaker than oneself?

Being weaker than oneself, I propose, indicates the lack of a natural, normative psychic order. Admittedly, as many scholars have argued, the moral psychology operative in Plato's works has witnessed significant changes. While the Socratic dialogues assume that the human soul is a simple entity which desires what it believes or knows to be the best,²⁹ the middle and late dialogues conceive of the human soul as a composite of distinct parts, each of which is the subject or the host of a certain kind of desire.³⁰ Nevertheless, the following theme runs through the entire Platonic corpus: some psychic states, activities, or parts are by nature fit to be ruled. Whenever they are properly ruled, one is stronger than oneself; whenever they are left without proper regulation, one is weaker than oneself. For example, in the *Gorgias*, where the theory of soul in the middle and late dialogues is not operative in full force,³¹ control and being stronger than oneself amount to ruling pleasures and desires, which are naturally fit to be ruled.³²

²⁹ Both commentators who deny the existence of non-rational motivation and those who argue for its existence in the Socratic dialogues agree that the human soul is a simple entity which desires what it judges to be the best. They disagree on whether non-rational states can influence the soul's judgments of what is best and thus have independent motivational forces. While commentators who deny the existence of non-rational motivation think that non-rational states have no independent motivational forces (Frede 1992, xxix–xxx; Irwin 1995, 209; Penner 1997, 129), those who support the existence of non-rational motivation argue to the contrary (Devereux 1995; Brickhouse and Smith 2000, 179–81; 2010, ch. 2; Singpurwalla 2006).

³⁰ Bobonich 2003; Lorenz 2006; Moss 2009; Kamtekar 2017.

³¹ While Socrates' examination of Callicles involves consideration of motivational states that arise independently from reason, it falls short of arguing that the human soul is a composite of distinct parts, as Plato does in the middle and late dialogues. For a comprehensive discussion of the topic, see Cooper 1999, ch. 2.

³² According to Socrates, a ruler of the city must be ruling herself—she is moderate and self-controlled, ruling the pleasures and desires within her (σώφρονα ὄντα καὶ ἐγκρατῇ αὐτὸν ἑαυτοῦ, τῶν ἡδονῶν καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν ἄρχοντα τῶν ἐν ἑαυτῷ, 491d10–e2). The word 'control (ἐγκρατῇ)' in the phrase 'self-controlled' is cognate with 'stronger (κρείσσων)'. In fact, the phrases 'self-controlled' (or more literally, 'control oneself') and 'being stronger than oneself' are used interchangeably (see Wilburn 2012). Thus, Socrates holds that control and being stronger than oneself amount to ruling one's pleasures and desires. Pleasures and desires, left without proper regulation, become inflamed and insatiable (493a1–494a5), so they are by nature fit to be ruled.

Instead of acting in accordance with one's pleasures and desires indiscriminately, one should only satisfy those that will make one better, thereby being stronger than oneself (503c4–d3). In the *Republic*, the *locus classicus* of the theory of the human soul in the middle and late dialogues, being weaker than oneself is being overpowered by non-rational parts, which are naturally fit to be ruled. One who is weaker than oneself acts in accordance with non-rational desires (431a3–d3). Hence, the phrase being weaker than oneself, in all likelihood, refers to the lack of a natural, normative psychic order: psychic states, activities, or parts that are naturally fit to be ruled, left without proper regulation, dominate the human soul by making one act in accordance with them.³³

In the *Protagoras* and other Socratic dialogues, the human soul is conceived to be the subject or the host of various psychic states and activities. According to Socrates, character virtues or vices, such as wisdom, justice, and ignorance, are excellent or poor states of the human soul.³⁴ The human soul is the host of intellectual efforts and accomplishments: one learns and obtains truth in virtue of one's soul.³⁵ Besides, the human soul is the subject or the host of various cognitive, conative, and affective activities or states. It judges; on account of it, one desires and experiences pleasure, pain, or other passions.³⁶ We might naturally wonder: among those psychic states or activities, which are naturally fit to be ruled?

The antithesis between appearance and knowledge paves the way for the following answer: appearances are by nature fit to be ruled. As we have seen, knowledge renders

³³ The same theme features prominently in *the Laws*, which is commonly held to be the last work of Plato. For a comprehensive discussion of its role in the *Laws*, see Wilburn 2012.

³⁴ *Gorgias* 477b3–8 and 507a5–c7.

³⁵ *Protagoras* 314b1–4 and *Apology* 29e1–3.

³⁶ *Gorgias* 486e5–6, 493a1–c2, and 496e4–9.

appearances not in charge (ἄκυρον, 356d8) by enabling its possessors to judge and act in accordance with truth rather than appearances. So appearances are characteristically dominant among those who are bereft of knowledge. The domination of appearances and the possession of knowledge have opposite impact on human life. While the former makes one susceptible to wrongdoings, regret, and other miseries (356d4–7), the latter is essential to doing well (356d1–e4) and happiness,³⁷ arguably the most important goals of the human life,³⁸ Therefore, appearances should not be dominant. Instead, they are naturally fit to be ruled.

But one might want to know whether there are some other things that are fit to be ruled in addition to appearances. As we have seen, the human soul is the subject or the host of many psychic states and activities, such as desires, erotic love, and pleasure. Among them, are appearances the only kind that are naturally fit to be ruled?

A closer look at the *Protagoras*, in light of other Socratic dialogues, brings forward the following answer—while appearances might not be the only psychic states or activities that are naturally fit to be ruled, they are the *ultimate* ones on account of which other states or activities call for regulation. The many’s initial formulation of akrasia at 352b3–353a6 vividly captures how passions, such as pleasure, anger, fear, and erotic love, can lead one who lacks knowledge astray. At *Gorgias* 491d4–508a8, Socrates contends that indiscriminate gratification of desires makes morally corrupted someone who is yet to acquire knowledge and virtue. Most human beings, if not all, lack

³⁷ At *Gorgias* 507c, Socrates claims that a person who does well (εὖ πράττοντα) is blessed (μακάριον) and happy (εὐδαίμονα).

³⁸ See Bobonich 2011.

knowledge and virtue.³⁹ The fact that they are liable to be misled and corrupted by passions strongly suggests that passions are naturally fit to be ruled. For most people, passions consist of or are based on appearances. As the many exemplify, people, lacking knowledge, tend to be pleased by what appears to be good, pained by what appears to be bad. And when they are motivated by passions, their passions are or involve evaluative judgments,⁴⁰ which are based on appearances.⁴¹ Therefore, it is not far-fetched to infer that other passions should be regulated because they consist of or are based on appearances.

In this way, Socrates conceives of ignorance as the soul's domination by appearances, which makes one judge and act accordingly. As I have argued, being weaker than oneself is the lack of a natural, normative order of the soul: psychic states, activities, or parts that are naturally fit to be ruled, left without proper regulation, dominate the human soul by making one act in accordance with them. Appearances are the ultimate psychic states that are fit to be ruled—other psychic states or activities should be ruled because they consist of or are based on appearances. Being weaker than oneself accordingly comes down to appearances' domination of the human soul, which makes one act accordingly. In the immediate context, Socrates asserts that human beings

³⁹ At *Apology* 21b1–22e5, Socrates tells us that his examination of people who are reputedly wise, such as politicians, poets, and craftspeople, reveals that they regard themselves as knowing things which they do not know and are thus ignorant. That condition plagues not only the reputedly wise but also the ordinary people. At *Protagoras* 357c1–e8, Socrates argues that the many, being ignorant, lack the knowledge that they regard themselves as possessing.

⁴⁰ At 358b3–d4, Socrates declares that one voluntarily acts in accordance with one's judgments of good and bad. Fear is a kind of expectation of something bad (προσδοκία τις κακοῦ, 358d6). Expectation literally means anticipatory belief or judgment. Other passions can presumably be characterized as specific ways of judging things to be good or bad. See Segvic 2000; Moss 2014.

⁴¹ This point can be inferred from the antithesis between appearance and knowledge. As I have argued, knowledge makes appearance not in charge by enabling its possessors to judge and act on the basis of truth instead of appearances. So the evaluative judgments of people who lack knowledge are characteristically based on appearances.

only voluntarily act in line with their judgments.⁴² Thus, the fact that one who is dominated by appearances acts according to appearances strongly suggests that one judges in line with those appearances as well. Recall that being weaker than oneself can be seen as ignorance, and ignorance can be seen as being weaker than oneself. Therefore, Socrates conceives of ignorance as appearances' domination over the soul, which makes one judge and act in accordance with appearances.

5 Ignorance, False beliefs, and Deception

To have a more concrete picture of ignorance, let us now consider the following claim—
(iii) ignorance is like this: having false beliefs and having been deceived about matters of great importance (358c4–5).

We first need to get clear about the phrase 'like this (τὸ τοιόνδε)'. In the Platonic corpus, 'like this (τὸ τοιόνδε)' plays two primary roles. First, it can introduce something that is co-extensive with the subject matter. For example, at *Phaedo* 78b4–7, Socrates declares that we should ask ourselves something like this and then offers a list of questions. The phrase 'like this' introduces the list of questions that are co-extensive with the subject matter—the questions that we should ask ourselves.⁴³ Second, 'like this' can introduce preliminary and somewhat tentative characterizations of the relevant subject matter. For instance, at *Phaedo* 94b8–c1, the phrase 'like this' introduces sketches of what the subject matter—the soul's opposition to bodily affections—is like. When the

⁴² More precisely, one only voluntarily pursues what one knows or believes to be good (358b3–d4). The knowledge and the belief in question are token cases of knowledge and belief, as opposed to branches of knowledge or sets of beliefs. At 354c5 and 358e5, Plato refers to them as suppositions or judgments (ἡγεῖσθαι). For an illuminating discussion on this topic, see Moss 2014, 200–1.

⁴³ I thank an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this way of understanding the phrase 'like this'. For passages in which the phrase is used in the same way, see *Euthyphro* 10a1–3, *Cratylus* 399a6–7, 429a3–5, and *Theaetetus* 181c2–5.

body is hot and thirsty, the soul draws one to not drinking; when the body is hungry, the soul draws one to not eating.⁴⁴

A moment of reflection allows us to see that at 358c4–5, the phrase ‘like this’ should introduce preliminary characterizations of the relevant subject matter, i.e., ignorance. According to Socrates, ignorant people characteristically take themselves to be knowledgeable about things that they do not really know.⁴⁵ They, as I have argued, judge and act in accordance with appearances, which are representations of how, from certain perspectives, things strike one to be. Thus, they suffer from suboptimal perspectives about themselves, which subject them to misleading appearances about their psychic conditions.⁴⁶ The fact that ignorant people stand in suboptimal perspectives about themselves strongly suggests that there is more to ignorance than having false beliefs and having been deceived about matters of great importance. It follows that the phrase ‘like this’ at 358c4–5 is unlikely to introduce something co-extensive with the subject matter, viz., ignorance. Rather, it should introduce preliminary and somewhat tentative characterizations of ignorance. In other words, having false beliefs and having been deceived about matters of great importance give readers some basic sense of what ignorance, conceived to be the soul’s domination by appearances, is like. An ignorant person is characterized by having false beliefs and having been deceived about matters of great importance.

⁴⁴ For passages in which the phrase ‘like this’ is used in the same way, see *Theaetetus* 163d1–4 and *Alcibiades I* 107e9–108a4. I thank an anonymous referee for encouraging me to clarify my interpretation.

⁴⁵ n. 39.

⁴⁶ In the text to notes 53–58, I argue that ignorant people not just stand in suboptimal perspectives about themselves. They are *embedded in* those perspectives, as a result of their being parts of a corrupt society.

But what, exactly, are having false beliefs and having been deceived about matters of great importance? It is tempting to suppose that ‘having false beliefs’ and ‘having been deceived about matters of great importance’ are synonymous or interchangeable.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, a closer look at the Greek text tells us that this is unlikely to be what Socrates has in mind. In characterizing ignorance as having false beliefs and having been deceived about matters of great importance, he shifts from the present infinitive ‘having’ to the perfect infinitive ‘having been deceived’.⁴⁸ The present infinitive in the first half, ‘having (ἔχειν)’, indicates that having false beliefs is an ongoing condition.⁴⁹ The perfect infinitive in the second half, ‘having been deceived (ἐψεῦσθαι)’, signals that the action at stake, being deceived, has been completed with a lasting result that persists into the present.⁵⁰ When one has a false belief, one might realize one’s mistake soon after. In that case, one is not enduringly deceived. Therefore, having false beliefs and having been deceived about matters of great importance are neither synonymous nor interchangeable. Instead, they stand for two distinct characterizations of ignorance.

At this point, it is not hard to see how ignorant people are characterized by having false beliefs. Throughout the Socratic dialogues, ignorant people are often represented as falling prey to false beliefs about evaluative matters in specific situations. For example, Alcibiades, being ignorant, is liable to have false beliefs about what is just, admirable, good, and advantageous for him in specific situations and, as a result, act badly.⁵¹ Akratic

⁴⁷ Kamtekar, for example, glosses over the two conjuncts as ‘ignorance is having a false belief about the most important things’ (Kamtekar 2017, 52–3).

⁴⁸ A similar juxtaposition of the present and the perfect infinitives occurs at *Republic* 382b1–4. ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὅτι τῇ ψυχῇ περὶ τὰ ὄντα ψεύδεσθαι τε καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι καὶ ἀμαθῆ εἶναι καὶ κεκτῆσθαι τὸ ψεῦδος πάντες ἡκιστ’ ἀν δέξαιντο, καὶ μισοῦσι μάλιστα αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ. Several commentators note that the infinitives at issue characterize different aspects of true falsehood, i.e., ignorance (Adam 1902; Harte 2013.)

⁴⁹ Smyth 1956, 1865a.

⁵⁰ Smyth 1956, 1865c.

⁵¹ *Alcibiades* I 117a3–118c2.

agents voluntarily pursue what is actually bad for them, as they, being ignorant, suffer from false beliefs that confuse what is bad with what is good.⁵² So the false beliefs that characterize ignorant people deal primarily with evaluative matters in specific circumstances. Recall that ignorance is conceived to be appearances' domination of the human soul, which makes one judge and act in accordance with them. Appearances, as representations of how things strike one to be from certain perspectives, misrepresent the reality when one happens to be in suboptimal perspectives. The ignorant are not immune from standing in suboptimal perspectives, especially when it comes to evaluative matters, such as good and bad, fine and shameful, and just and unjust. This is why they are subject to false beliefs about evaluative matters in specific situations and, as a result, act badly.

But in what sense are ignorant people characterized by having been deceived about matters of great importance, which, as I have argued, amounts to an enduring deception about those matters? To answer this question, I propose that by matters of great importance (τῶν πραγμάτων τῶν πολλοῦ ἀξίων), Socrates refers to, most prominently, one's own psychic conditions.⁵³ At *Protagoras* 313a1–314a2, he asserts emphatically that

⁵² At *Protagoras* 358b6–d4, Socrates declares that human beings voluntarily pursue what they, at the moment of action, know or believe to be good for them. Akratic agents pursue what is actually bad for them. So they suffer from false beliefs about what is good for them. For comprehensive discussions about akratic actions in the *Protagoras*, see Penner 1990 and Callard 2014.

⁵³ An anonymous referee suggests that Socrates could be more *dialectical* than *doctrinal* about what matters of great importance amount to in the context. More specifically, Socrates could get his interlocutors to agree that ignorant people are characterized by being lastingly deceived about matters of great importance without meaning to settle what, exactly, matters of great importance amount to. So his interlocutors can continue mistaking wealth, honor, or some other things for being supremely important while conceding that ignorant people are characterized by an enduring deception about matters of great importance. Although that interpretative possibility is extremely thought-provoking, it does not seem to square well with the context. Immediately after asserting that ignorant people are characterized by false beliefs and an enduring deception about matters of great importance, Socrates contends that cowardice is a form of ignorance about what inspires confidence or fear (358d5–360d6). It follows that cowards, on his view, are characterized by having false beliefs about what inspires confidence or fear and being lastingly deceived about matters of great importance. If Socrates does not mean to settle what matters of great importance amount to, his interlocutors will be liable to arrive at counter-intuitive accounts of cowardice. Suppose they take wealth to be supremely important. Then cowards will be characterized by having false beliefs about what inspires confidence or fear and being lastingly deceived about what they take to be

the soul is the dearest thing to a person. At *Apology* 29d7–30a5, he encourages his audience to care for wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of their souls, which is of great importance (τὰ πλείστου ἄξια). The same exhortation is rephrased later as ‘caring that one should be as good and wise as possible’ (36c5–d1). Accordingly, by matters of great importance, Socrates seems to have in mind, first and foremost, one’s soul, and, more specifically, whether it is as good and wise as possible.⁵⁴ A closer look at individuals who are diagnosed as being ignorant by Socrates confirms this interpretation: they suffer from deception about their own psychic conditions. Alcibiades takes himself to know evaluative matters, including what is just and unjust, admirable and shameful, good and bad, which he lacks knowledge about (*Alcibiades* I 117a3–118c2). People who fear death, being ignorant, mistake themselves for knowing that death is exceedingly bad, even though no living human being can have that knowledge (*Apology* 28d5–29c1). The majority assume that their education and upbringing equip them with civic virtue, even though they are revealed to lack it under closer scrutiny (*Protagoras* 319a4–320c1). Therefore, the enduring deception about matters of great importance, which ignorant people are characterized with, deals prominently with their psychic conditions, such as the possession or the lack of knowledge and virtue.⁵⁵

supremely important, viz., wealth. But what does cowardice have to do with wealth, as well as other things that Socrates’ interlocutors may mistakenly take to be of the highest importance, such as honor, success, and power? Therefore, Socrates, in all likelihood, has a settled view about what matters of great importance amount to in the context.

⁵⁴ By arguing that an enduring deception about matters of great importance deals prominently with one’s own psychic conditions, I do not mean to rule out the possibility that matters of great importance can include other issues, such as evaluative matters.

⁵⁵ My interpretation of the phrase ‘having false beliefs and having been deceived about matters of great importance’ at 358c4–5 is compatible with two possible ways of taking what ‘matters of great importance’ qualifies. On the one hand, ‘matters of great importance’ could qualify only ‘having been deceived’. On this interpretation, ‘matters of great importance’ prominently refers to one’s own psychic conditions. On the other hand, ‘matters of great importance’ could qualify both ‘having been deceived’ and ‘having false beliefs’. On this interpretation, ‘matters of great importance’, albeit prominently referring to one’s own psychic conditions, must include evaluative matters in specific situations as well.

Why are ignorant people characterized by an enduring deception about their own psychic conditions? Socrates' comments on the nature of appearance paves the way for the following answer: ignorant people suffer from an enduring deception about their own psychic conditions because they are disposed to remain in suboptimal perspectives about those conditions. Recall that the ignorant, being dominated by appearances, i.e., representations about how things strike them to be from certain perspectives, judge and act accordingly. Their appearances and corresponding judgments thus misrepresent the reality whenever they are in suboptimal perspectives. The fact that ignorant people's deception about their psychic conditions is enduring strongly suggests that they cling to misguided judgments and appearances about those issues. Hence, they are disposed to remain in suboptimal perspectives about their own psychic conditions.

But we might wonder: why are ignorant people disposed to remain in suboptimal perspectives about their own psychic conditions? Here, the textual evidence seems to run out: Socrates does not offer a conclusive diagnosis of the phenomena in question. But it is worth pointing out that he oftentimes associates the enduringness of ignorant people's deception about their own psychic conditions with their corrosive social context. For example, in the *Gorgias*, he asserts that Callicles is unable to properly appreciate his flaws due to a love for the common people (513a1–c7),⁵⁶ who, being ignorant, regard those who are adroit at gratifying their appetites as good.⁵⁷ He also observes that the common people can hardly recognize their lack of civic virtue since they, as a powerful,

⁵⁶ Callicles is ignorant. In taking indiscriminate gratification of appetites to be preeminently good and undertaking to live accordingly (489b7–492c8), he makes his soul deprived of organization, correctness, and order, which are characteristic of a wise and virtuous soul. Instead, he is ignorant and vicious (506c5–507c7).

⁵⁷ According to Socrates, the common people (δημος) are ignorant. They mistake pleasures, which appear to be good, for being truly good (521d6–522b1). For an illuminating discussion of the relationship between pleasure and good in the *Gorgias*, see Moss 2006.

collective agent that dominates their cities, vehemently resist and even punish individuals who dare to reveal their deficiency.⁵⁸ In both cases, Socrates implies that a corrosive social context obstructs human beings from properly discerning their defects and, as a result, perpetuates their deception about their own psychic conditions.

In this way, we arrive at a more concrete picture of ignorance. Ignorant people, dominated by appearances, are characterized by the following features. First, they are subject to false beliefs about evaluative matters in specific situations.⁵⁹ Second, they suffer from an enduring deception about their own psychic conditions: for example, they could take themselves to know things that they do not know or regard themselves as instantiating virtues that they lack.

6. Conclusion

In closing, let us return to the case of Socrates, which we have encountered at the very beginning. Socrates famously professes to lack the knowledge that he is dedicated to pursuing. Is he thereby ignorant?

If my interpretation is correct, Socrates is far from ignorant despite his lack of knowledge. Socrates' disavowal of knowledge, as many commentators have convincingly

⁵⁸ The common people's vehement resistance to individuals who dare to reveal their deficiency is often noted by Socrates. For example, in the *Apology*, he tells his audience that if he had attempted to take part in politics in the past, which presumably requires him to challenge the common people's claim to civic virtue, he would have died long ago (31d2–32a3). In the *Republic*, he also notes that the common people refuse to accept individuals who reveal their mistakes (492d5–493e1): they might even want to kill those people (517a1–6).

⁵⁹ Some readers might wonder whether only the ignorant are subject to false beliefs about evaluative matters in specific circumstances. In my view, Plato does not mean to deny the possibility that the knowledgeable and those who are neither knowledgeable nor ignorant suffer from those beliefs. But for those people, such mistakes are *atypical*. Under normal circumstances, the knowledgeable make correct judgments, and those who are neither knowledgeable nor ignorant refrain from making judgments about subject matters on which they have an inadequate grip (*Alcibiades I* 117a3–118c2).

argued, is sincere. He conceives of knowledge to be a comprehensive understanding of evaluative matters, which gives its possessors a systematic, reliable guidance to life.⁶⁰ Even though he has a grip on some truth, he lacks that knowledge.⁶¹ But Socrates' lack of knowledge in no way implies that he is ignorant. Ignorance, conceived to be the human soul's domination by appearances, is characterized by both false beliefs about evaluative matters in specific situations and an enduring deception of one's psychic conditions. In the *Apology*, Socrates suggests that through the practice of philosophy, which involves discussing virtue and other evaluative matters and examining oneself and others,⁶² he has an accurate grasp of his own psychic conditions. For example, he can correctly tell what he knows and what he does not know. Thus, while Socrates might experience occurrent false beliefs, he is free from an enduring deception of his own psychic conditions. In other words, he is not afflicted with one of the two paradigmatic manifestations of ignorance. Therefore, even though he lacks knowledge, he is not ignorant. This inference coheres with Socrates' self-characterizations. While he labels himself as not knowing (οὐκ εἰδώς) the nature of virtues and related qualities,⁶³ he never concludes that he is ignorant (ἄμαθής or ἄφρων).⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Nussbaum 1986; Woodruff 1990; Vlastos 1994; Bett 2011.

⁶¹ Brickhouse and Smith 1994; Vlastos 1994; Bett 2011.

⁶² At 28d5–30b4, Socrates suggests that he cares for the souls of his own and his fellow citizens through the practice of philosophy. At 38a1–7, he notes that the care at issue is achieved through discussing virtue and its kindred matters and examining oneself and others.

⁶³ For example, at *Meno* 71b1–8, Socrates asserts that since he does not know (οὐκ εἰδώς) virtue, he does not know what qualities it possesses. At *Apology* 21d4–6, he declares that he does not know what is fine and good (οὐδὲν καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν εἰδέναι).

⁶⁴ See n. 7: ignorance should not be confused with incomprehension (ἄγνοια): an ignorant person is necessarily vicious, whereas a person who is afflicted with incomprehension is not (*Lysias* 218a2–b1). See also n. 9: ἄμαθία is used interchangeably with ἀφροσύνη, meaning ignorance, folly. He only claims that he will be ignorant if Hippias is wise at *Hippias Minor* 372c2–373a8. But since Hippias is not wise, Socrates does not conclude that he is ignorant.

There is accordingly a middle ground between knowledge and ignorance, occupied by individuals who are undazzled by appearances. As Socrates exemplifies, one, who lacks the knowledge that enables its possessors to judge and act on the basis of truth, does not have to be dominated by appearances and thus ignorant. Instead, one can be alert to the deceptive nature of appearances and refrain from confusing them with truth. With the help of philosophy, which allows one to discuss virtue and other evaluative matters and examine oneself and others, one gradually discovers some pieces of truth, such as that it is wicked and shameful to do wrong, to disobey one's superior, be he god or man (*Apology* 29b6–7). Those pieces of truth, guiding one's judgments and actions, lead one closer to knowledge and virtues.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Some readers might wonder whether non-philosophers can fall into the middle ground between knowledge and ignorance. While the Platonic corpus does not offer a decisive answer to that question, it points to the following direction: some promising young people could well fall into that middle ground. They lack knowledge, but they, unlike the ignorant, are not enduringly deceived about their psychic conditions—they do not hold fast to the misguided conviction that they know what they in fact have no knowledge about. But that condition is far from stable. As Socrates notes deplorably, young people are liable to be corrupted and, as a result, become ignorant (*Theaetetus* 150b6–151a5).

Chapter 2. Vice is Ignorance

1. Introduction

In the previous chapter,⁶⁶ I have argued that the Socratic dialogues, in particular the *Protagoras*, contain a rich account of ignorance. Contrary to the predominant assumption,⁶⁷ ignorance cannot be fully captured in terms of a lack of knowledge. Rather, it is conceived to be a substantive, structural psychic flaw: the soul's domination by inferior elements that are by nature fit to be ruled instead of ruling. The inferior elements at issue are appearances—representations of how things strike one to be from certain perspectives. Understood in this way, ignorance is characterized by both occurrent false beliefs about evaluative matters in specific circumstances and an enduring deception about one's psychic condition, such as mistaking oneself as knowing what one does not know. There is accordingly a middle ground between knowledge and ignorance, occupied by individuals like Socrates who, albeit lacking knowledge, are alert to the deceptive nature of appearances and thus not enduringly deceived about their own psychic conditions.

This rich, Socratic account of ignorance invites a host of questions about the darker side of humanity.⁶⁸ First, according to one of the most celebrated theses of the Socratic moral psychology, virtue is knowledge.⁶⁹ The opposites of virtue and knowledge are vice

⁶⁶ The Contents of Chapter 1 and much of Chapter 2 appear in my paper in *Phronesis* 67, pp. 309–337. I thank the editors and anonymous readers of the journal for extremely helpful comments and discussions.

⁶⁷ See Mackenzie 1988, 333–4; Brickhouse and Smith 2000, 58–68; Matthews 2006, 103; Bett 2011, 215.

⁶⁸ I am grateful to Melissa Lane's suggestion about the inappropriateness of characterizing those defects as constituting 'the darker side of humanity'. At the moment, I am struggling to find a better phrase that can capture ignorance, individual vices, political vices, and psychic illness. But as soon as I find it, I will change the phrase.

⁶⁹ The *Protagoras* is the *locus classicus* of this thesis. To refute Protagoras' assertion that a part of virtue—courage—is separable from the rest, Socrates contends that like all other moral virtues, courage is a form of knowledge (349d–361a). The thesis that virtue is knowledge has attracted an immense amount of scholarly attention. For recent discussions of the topic, see Pangle 2014; Glasscock 2020.

and ignorance respectively. It follows that on the Socratic theory, vice is ignorance.⁷⁰ So one might naturally ask whether the Socratic account of ignorance lays the foundation for a theory of vice. And if so, what kind of theory does Socrates develop? Second, as I have touched on in the previous chapter, ignorance, in Socrates' view, is pervasive: most human beings, no matter whether they are average citizens, renowned craftspeople, or prominent politicians, are ignorant. Since vice is ignorance, vice is similarly pervasive. The Socratic position on the pervasiveness of vice is out of sync with commonsensical views in both Democratic Athens⁷¹ and contemporary world, according to which only a small group of people, who are much more pernicious than average population, are lambasted as vicious.⁷² How does the Socratic position square with commonsensical views?

In this chapter, I will argue that the Socratic theory of ignorance paves the way for one of the first systematic accounts of vice in the history of western philosophy. According to this account, not just defects that are nowadays dubbed as moral vices, such as cowardice and injustice, are forms of ignorance. But, to the omission of many scholars in their passing comments on vice in the Socratic dialogues, defects that are nowadays

⁷⁰ Moss makes this observation as well and calls it a particular instance of Socrates' intellectualism. See Moss 2007.

⁷¹ By Democratic Athens, I refer to the city of Athens that was organized around a democratic constitution, lasting between 508 BC and 332 BC (apart from 411–410 and 404–403). See Ober 2008, 40–41. I am grateful to Melissa Lane for pointing out that Democratic Athens broke down between 411–410BC and 404–403BC.

⁷² In *Nicomachean Ethics* VII, Aristotle asserts that there are six character states, which human beings could fall into. These states, listed from the best to the worst, are godlikeness, virtue, self-control, *akrasia*, vice, and bestiality. Most people are somewhere between self-control and *akrasia* (1152a25–7). So Aristotle takes vicious people to be much more pernicious than average population. Aristotle is famous for his efforts to illuminate and be in harmony with commonsensical views, so his view about the pervasiveness is likely to be representative of average Athenians and Greeks in Classical Greece. The same view about the pervasiveness of vice holds in the contemporary world. When it comes to characterizing individuals' characters, most of us reserve 'vice' and other kindred words for a small group of people who are clearly worse than average population.

labeled as epistemic vices, such as closed-mindedness and gullibility, are forms of ignorance as well. In fact, an epistemic defect—wishful thinking about one’s cognitive conditions—is the common core of all other epistemic and moral defects. Moreover, contrary to commonsensical views in both Democratic Athens and contemporary world, Socrates conceives vice to be pervasive. He substantiates his position with two sets of resources. On the one hand, he illustrates the pervasiveness of vice by putting forward a more expansive conception of physical illness and an extended analogy between illness and vice. On the other hand, he justifies the pervasiveness of vice with the help of a thoroughgoing socio-political critique, according to which most existing political communities, being sustained by and perpetuating vices at the individual level, are vicious.

My plan for the chapter is as follows. In Section 2, I argue that defects that are often called epistemic vices these days are forms of ignorance. And one epistemic defect, i.e., wishful thinking about one’s cognitive conditions, lays the foundation for other epistemic defects. In Section 3, I contend that Socrates conceives of moral defects that are nowadays called moral vices, such as intemperance and cowardice, as ignorance about specific domains of responses that are integral to human flourishing. In Section 4, I show that while Socrates does not accept the unity of vices, he identifies wishful thinking about one’s own cognitive conditions as the common core of all other vices. In Section 5, I suggest how Socrates illuminates the pervasiveness of vice with the help of an extended analogy between physical illness and vice and a thorough-going socio-political critique.

2. Epistemic Vices are Forms of Ignorance

The first step to see how Socrates' theory of ignorance paves the way for the first systematic account of vice is to take a closer look at the Greek word for ignorance and its role in the Socratic dialogues. The Greek word for ignorance, ἀμαθία, is composed of a negative prefix, α-, and a noun root, μαθία. And the noun root is derived from the verb μαθάνειν, which means to learn. So in Attic Greek, the word 'ignorance' literally means a lack of learning. According to Socrates, learning is an intellectual activity that human beings by nature partake of.⁷³ Thus, by attributing ignorance to people, he strongly suggests that they suffer from some epistemic defects. In other words, ignorance crucially involves epistemic defects.

What are the epistemic defects that ignorance involves? To answer this question, let us begin by noting that according to Socrates, ignorant people are characterized as suffering from a wishful thinking about their own cognitive conditions. They mistake themselves as having an adequate grasp of something, even though they lack such a grasp. On the one hand, the reputedly wise, such as politicians, poets, craftspeople, hold fast to distorted appearances that represent them as knowledgeable about what is good for human beings in general and insist that they possess that knowledge. But upon closer scrutiny, none of them actually have the knowledge in question.⁷⁴ On the other hand, while common people do not regard themselves as knowing what is good for human beings in general, they tend to assent to certain skewed appearances. By their own lights,

⁷³ Scott thinks that in Plato's view, human beings by nature partake of learning, which can occur at different levels of cognitive accomplishment (Scott 1995, 15–23). At *Republic* 436a, Plato has Socrates suggest that human beings can learn in virtue of their possession of the rational soul part.

⁷⁴ *Apology* 21b–22e. At 21c, Socrates notes that the reputedly wise, such as politicians, suffer from misleading appearances that represent themselves as being knowledgeable and wise about what is good for human beings in general.

their upbringing and education equip them with a solid grip on some all-important evaluative matters, such as whether a certain war is just. As a matter of fact, however, they lack such a grip on those matters.⁷⁵ In a word, ignorant people suffer from a wishful thinking about their cognitive conditions by holding fast to misleading but presumably gratifying appearances, which represent them as having an adequate grasp of something even though they lack such a grasp. So the wishful thinking in question can be seen as their souls' domination by gratifying appearances about their cognitive accomplishments. Recall that in chapter 1, I have argued that ignorance is the soul's domination by appearances. It follows that the wishful thinking that ignorant people characteristically suffer from is a form of ignorance.

Since Socrates takes ignorant people be characterized by a wishful thinking about their cognitive conditions, he strongly suggests that most human beings, being ignorant, are more likely to have inflated instead of deflated views about their cognitive conditions. Why is this the case?

To answer that question, it is worth drawing our attention to a prevalent assumption about political virtues in Democratic Athens. All citizens partake of political virtues and thus have a solid grip on some all-important evaluative matters. This assumption is brought to light by Protagoras with the help of a myth in the eponymous dialogue.⁷⁶ According to the myth, Prometheus and Epimetheus were in charge of equipping mortal races with abilities that are essential to their survival. Nevertheless, due to the neglect of

⁷⁵ *Protagoras* 322c–323c and 357d–e.

⁷⁶ As Melissa Lane has acutely pointed out, Protagoras is not an Athenian. Plato's portrayal of him doesn't automatically show that the assumption that all citizens partake of political virtues was prevalent among the Athenians. But Plato often characterizes sophists like Protagoras as being adroit at discerning what strikes the majority as good (*Gorgias* 517b–519b; *Republic* 493a–e). This should suggest that many of Protagoras' claims reflect the convictions of the democratic majority. I am grateful to Melissa's comments, and I will explore this question further in the future. For a helpful reference, see Farrar 1989.

Epimetheus, who used up all abilities on non-rational animals, human beings were left unequipped. Practical arts and the use of fire, which Prometheus ventured to steal from Athena and Hephaestus, were not enough to protect the human race from extinction. In the absence of political virtues, human beings were unable to maintain political entities, which are indispensable to their fighting against wild animals. It was only as a result of Zeus' distribution of political virtues among all human beings that political entities can be sustained. From this myth, Protagoras indicates that the preservation of political entities depends on a universal share of political virtues. So all citizens, because of their being members of existing political entities, possess political virtues. And this possession equips them with a solid grip on some all-important evaluative matters, such as whether a certain war is just (*Protagoras* 320d–323d). According to Socrates, sophists like Protagoras and Prodicus observe and teach the convictions of the majority.⁷⁷ Therefore, it is apt to infer that Protagoras' claim—that all citizens partake of political virtues and thus have a solid grip on some all-important evaluative matters—reflects the conviction of the majority in Democratic Athens.⁷⁸

In the *Protagoras*, Plato has Protagoras illuminate how the prevalent assumption about the universal partaking of political virtues comes to be endorsed by individual citizens. On the one hand, an emphasis on political virtues penetrates every stage of education and upbringing in Democratic Athens, as well as many other cities in Ancient Greece. At home, parents, nurses, and tutors seize every opportunity to instill their views about evaluative matters to their children. In school, teachers inspire students to emulate for exemplars of virtue in music and poetry. In public, the city compels young people to

⁷⁷ *Republic* 493a–c.

⁷⁸ Or at least what Plato takes Socrates to regard as the conviction of the democratic majority.

learn and model their lives on the laws, which contain ordinances and prescriptions about how to act in accordance with political virtues (*Protagoras* 325d–326e). On the other hand, there is social pressure against admitting one’s lack of political virtues. As Protagoras observes, if one dares to confess one’s lack of political virtues in public, one will be deemed to be mad (*Protagoras* 323a–c). Presumably, as a result of the emphasis on political virtues in education and upbringing and the social pressure against admitting one’s lack of those virtue, individuals come to adopt the prevalent assumption that all citizens, including themselves, partake of political virtues and thus have a solid grip on some all-important evaluative matters.

In spite of the widespread conviction that all citizens partake of political virtues, the social environment in Democratic Athens is inimical to the acquisition of virtues. As Socrates observes, politicians, lacking knowledge about what is truly good for human beings, fail to instill virtues in people. Instead, they are preoccupied with providing what is most pleasant for their subjects (*Gorgias* 513e–519b). Blind gratification gives rise to incorrect desires and misguided views about evaluative matters.⁷⁹ Accordingly, most people are subject to incorrect desires and misguided views about evaluative matters. What’s worse, they not only live in accordance with those desires and views but also attempt to pass them on to their children and associates (*Protagoras* 325d–326c). As a

⁷⁹ As I will discuss in Sections 4 and 5, Socrates operates with an extended analogy between the well-being and malfunction of human bodies, souls, and cities. At *Gorgias* 518c–519a, Socrates notes that in the cases of human bodies and cities, blind gratification leads to illness and corruption. Accordingly, in the cases of human souls, blind gratification leads to vices. Notably, ill bodies are characterized by incorrect desires and perspectives: they are susceptible to be attracted to and enjoy things that are in fact harmful (505a). Likewise, vicious souls are characterized by incorrect desires and views about evaluative matters: they are liable to desire and admire things that turn out to be detrimental.

powerful, collective agent that dominates their cities, the majority vehemently resist and even punish individuals who dare to reveal their deficiency.⁸⁰

It is accordingly not hard to see why Socrates holds that most human beings, being ignorant, are more likely to have inflated instead of deflated views about their cognitive conditions. Because of the emphasis on political virtues in education and upbringing and the social pressure against admitting one's lack of those virtues in Democratic Athens, individuals come to adopt the prevalent assumption about the universal share of political virtues. However, their social environment is inimical to their acquisition of these virtues. Hence, most people lack political virtues, and, as a result, are devoid of a solid grip on some all-important evaluative matters. In a word, being subject to the corrosive influences of their society, most people in Democratic Athens come to adopt inflated views about their cognitive conditions.⁸¹

At this point, one might raise the following question. Besides the wishful thinking about one's cognitive conditions, does Socrates touch on other epistemic defects?

I have to concede that in the Socratic dialogues, only wishful thinking about one's own cognitive conditions is explicitly and emphatically associated with ignorance.

⁸⁰ The common people's vehement resistance to individuals who dare to reveal their deficiency is often noted by Socrates. For example, in the *Apology*, he tells his audience if he had attempted to take part in politics in the past, which presumably requires him to challenge the common people's claim to civic virtue, he should have died long ago (31d2–32a3). In the *Republic*, he also notes that the common people refuse to accept individuals who reveal their mistakes (492d5–493e1): they might even to kill those people (517a1–6).

⁸¹ At this point, one might raise the following question. Is wishful thinking about one's own cognitive conditions, which amounts to having an inflated view about our cognitive conditions, limited to the Ancient Athenians? I have to admit that a complete answer to this question is beyond the scope of this chapter. But I would like to draw our attention to some similarities between contemporary people and the Ancient Athenians. Along with the development of Internet and social media, many people assume that they have a solid grip on some weighty, evaluative matters, such as climate change and racial injustice. The reality, however, is likely to be more complicated than they assume. In this way, they are susceptible to an inflated view about their cognitive conditions. If that is the case, having an inflated view about one's own cognitive conditions will not be limited to Ancient Greeks alone. And a careful study of the Socratic account of ignorance will cast light on our individual and collective challenges.

Nevertheless, in his characterizations of ignorant people, Socrates hints that other epistemic defects, such as closed-mindedness and gullibility, are forms of ignorance as well. Consider closed-mindedness first. According to Socrates, the reputedly wise, including politicians, poets, and craftspeople, are closed-minded. They, albeit being ignorant, resist to consider reasonable challenges to their positions. For them, those challenges do not appear to be as valuable or relevant as they actually are (*Apology* 21b–e). So closed-mindedness is the soul’s domination by appearances that downplay the value or relevance of reasonable challenges to one’s positions. As for gullibility, Socrates draws a vivid image of gullible persons in the *Gorgias*. As he puts it, the majority, being ignorant, are liable to mistake individuals, who are adroit at providing what appears to be good, for genuine politicians, who alone can offer what is truly good for a political entity.⁸² So gullibility is the soul’s domination by appearances about who is in an epistemically authoritative condition. Ignorance, as we have seen, is the human soul’s domination by appearances. Therefore, closed-mindedness and gullibility are forms of ignorance.⁸³

How do other epistemic defects stand in relation to wishful thinking about one’s cognitive conditions? To answer this question, I propose to attend to the following asymmetry within Socrates’ discussions. As we have seen, wishful thinking about one’s cognitive conditions, which takes the shape in mistaking oneself as having an adequate grasp of something even though one lacks such a grasp, features prominently in Socrates’ discussions of ignorance. By contrast, accounts of other epistemic defects, such as

⁸² *Gorgias* 517b–519b, 521c–522c.

⁸³ I do not mean to offer a comprehensive list of epistemic vices that are touched on in the Socratic dialogues. I only mean to offer a few examples, which allows us to see more clearly what epistemic vices are like according to Socrates.

closed-mindedness and gullibility, can only be extracted from Socrates' discussions upon a closer scrutiny. Why does this asymmetry occur?

Admittedly, Socrates does not explicitly explain why he pays an asymmetrical amount of attention to different epistemic defects. But the nature of those vices points to the following answer: wishful thinking about one's own cognitive conditions, being central to ignorance, lays the foundation for other epistemic defects. Consider again the reputedly wise, including politicians, poets, and craftspeople. According to Socrates, the reputedly wise suffer from wishful thinking about their cognitive conditions: they mistakenly regard themselves as knowing what is good or bad for human beings in general, even though they lack that knowledge. Because of that wishful thinking, they resist to consider reasonable challenges to their positions. In other words, the reputedly wise are closed-minded due to their affliction with wishful thinking about their own cognitive conditions. As for the majority, they, as I have noted, are afflicted with wishful thinking about their cognitive conditions in the following way. They think that they have a solid grip on some all-important evaluative matters, such as whether a certain war is just, even though they lack such a grip. Because of this wishful thinking, they are liable to be deceived by individuals who appear to be without actually being in an epistemically authoritative position. That is to say, the majority are gullible as a result of their affliction with wishful thinking about their own cognitive conditions. In sum, other epistemic vices occur because of wishful thinking about one's own cognitive conditions. The wishful thinking in question lays the foundation for other epistemic vices. And this, I suppose, is why Socrates pays so much attention to examining it.

The inference that the wishful thinking about one's cognitive conditions lays the foundation for other epistemic defects casts light on why Socrates characterizes the wishful thinking at issue as the most disgraceful form of ignorance.⁸⁴ If only one is free from this wishful thinking, one will be free from other epistemic defects, such as closed-mindedness and gullibility, which, in one way or another, obstruct one from pursuing truth and knowledge.⁸⁵ So wishful thinking about one's own cognitive conditions is the most disgraceful form of ignorance in part because of its *epistemic harmfulness*.

It is worth pointing out that epistemic defects that ignorant people suffer from, such as a wishful thinking about one's cognitive conditions, closed-mindedness, and gullibility, belong to what are nowadays called epistemic vices. If one is closed-minded, one will resist considering and accepting reasonable challenges to one's views, which prevents one from pursuing truth and knowledge. If one is gullible, one will be liable to be deceived by specious claims, which impedes one from obtaining truth and knowledge. According to an influential contemporary account, epistemic vices are character traits, ways of thinking, or attitudes that obstruct the pursuit of knowledge.⁸⁶ So the epistemic defects that ignorant people suffer from belong to what are nowadays called epistemic vices.

⁸⁴ *Apology* 29b and *Alcibiades* 118a.

⁸⁵ At *Sophist* 229c, Plato has the Eleatic Visitor make a similar point: wishful thinking about one's cognitive conditions, which takes the shape of mistaking oneself as knowing what one does not know, leads to all mistakes in thinking.

⁸⁶ Cassam 2019, 1–27.

3. Moral Vices are Forms of Ignorance

In the Socratic dialogues, ignorance is not just tied to epistemic defects that are nowadays called epistemic vices, such as closed-mindedness and gullibility. It is associated with moral defects as well. Ignorant people are oftentimes described as cowardly, unjust, intemperate, or impious (*Gorgias* 477b, 505b). How does Socrates understand the relationship between ignorance and moral defects?

In order to examine the relationship between ignorance and moral defects, let us begin by zeroing in on Socrates' discussion of ignorance and a particular kind of moral defect, i.e., cowardice, towards the end of the *Protagoras*.

Socrates' discussion about ignorance and cowardice is embedded in his refutation of Protagoras, according to whom people can be exceptionally courageous but unjust, impious, intemperate, and ignorant (320c2–328d2 and 349d2–8). To establish his argument, Socrates draws our attention to the contrast between cowardly and courageous people. According to him, they differ primarily with regard to their responses in a specific domain, i.e., what is and is not to be feared. This conclusion rests on the following theory of human motivation, which is operative in the context: whenever one voluntarily pursues something, one judges that it is good; whenever one voluntarily avoids something, one judges that it is bad (*Protagoras* 358b–d).⁸⁷ Fear, which urges one to run away from an object, is some sort of judgment that a forthcoming thing is bad (*Protagoras* 358d–e).⁸⁸ From there, Socrates argues that the contrast between cowardly

⁸⁷ More precisely, whenever one pursues something voluntarily, one knows or believes that it is good (358b3–d4). The knowledge and the belief in question are token cases of knowledge and belief, as opposed to branches of knowledge or sets of beliefs. At 354c5 and 358e5, Plato refers to them as suppositions or judgments (ἡγεῖσθαι). For an illuminating discussion on this topic, see Moss 2014, 200–1.

⁸⁸ By implication, the opposite of fear, confidence, is some sort of judgment that a forthcoming thing is good.

and courageous people does not lie in that only the latter voluntarily pursue what they take to be fearful. In fact, they both voluntarily avoid what they regard as fearful. What sets the cowardly and the courageous apart is whether their fear is misguided or correct. More specifically, while the cowardly are liable to mistake what is not fearful for being fearful, the courageous are free from those mistakes. For example, suppose going to a war is honorable and good. Then, this venture should not inspire fear. The cowardly and the courageous have different responses to the venture in question. While the former find the venture fearful and accordingly want to escape from it, the latter confront it with confidence (*Protagoras* 359a–360b). In a word, the cowardly are susceptible to err with regard to what is and is not to be feared, whereas the courageous are characterized by correct responses in that domain. According to Socrates, the cowardly's habitual, misguided responses to what is and is not to be feared occur because of cowardice (*Protagoras* 360c). In other words, cowardice is a moral defect that disposes one to err with regard to what is and is not to be feared.

In the following passage, Socrates argues that cowardice, the moral defect that disposes one to err with regard to what is and is not to be feared, is a form of ignorance.

S: Now then; that through which cowardly people are cowardly, do you call it cowardice or courage?

P: Cowardice.

S: And aren't cowards shown to be so through their ignorance of what is to be feared?

P: Absolutely.

S: So they are cowards because of that ignorance?

He agreed.

S: You agreed that it is through cowardice that they are cowards?

He said he did.

S: So, can we conclude that cowardice is ignorance of what is and is not to be feared?

He nodded.

S: Now, courage is the opposite of cowardice.

He said yes.

S: So then, wisdom about what is and is not to be feared is the opposite of ignorance?

He nodded again.

S: And this ignorance is cowardice?

He nodded again, very reluctantly.

*(Protagoras 360c–d)*⁸⁹

In the passage above, he connects cowardice to ignorance. According to him, a particular form of ignorance, i.e., ignorance about what is and is not to be feared, is responsible for habitual mistakes concerning what is and is not to be feared. So cowardice is ignorance of what is and is not to be feared. In other words, cowardice is a form of ignorance about the relevant domain of responses, i.e., what is and is not to be feared.

⁸⁹ ἔχει, ἔφη τί οὖν; τοῦτο δι' ὃ δειλοί εἰσιν οἱ δειλοί, δειλίαν ἢ ἀνδρείαν καλεῖς; δειλίαν ἔγωγ', ἔφη. δειλοί δὲ οὐ διὰ τὴν τῶν δεινῶν ἀμαθίαν ἐφάνησαν ὄντες; πάνυ γ', ἔφη. διὰ ταύτην ἄρα τὴν ἀμαθίαν δειλοί εἰσιν; ὁμολογεῖ. δι' ὃ δὲ δειλοί εἰσιν, δειλία ὁμολογεῖται παρὰ σοῦ; συνέφη. οὐκοῦν ἢ τῶν δεινῶν καὶ μὴ δεινῶν ἀμαθία δειλία ἂν εἴη; ἐπένευσε. ἀλλὰ μήν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἐναντίον ἀνδρείᾳ δειλία. ἔφη. οὐκοῦν ἢ τῶν δεινῶν καὶ μὴ δεινῶν σοφία ἐναντία τῇ τούτων ἀμαθίᾳ ἐστίν; καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἔτι ἐπένευσε. ἢ δὲ τούτων ἀμαθία δειλία; πάνυ μάλιστα ἐνταῦθα ἐπένευσε.

How does the identification of cowardice with a specific form of ignorance cast light on the nature of cowardice? Let us recall what we have learned about ignorance in Chapter 1. Ignorance is not a mere lack of knowledge. Instead, it is a substantive, structural psychic flaw—the soul’s domination by inferior elements that are by nature fit to be ruled instead of ruling. The inferior elements at issue are appearances, i.e., representations of how things strike one to be from certain perspectives. Understood in this way, ignorant people are characterized by false beliefs about evaluative matters in specific situations and an enduring deception about their own psychic conditions.

By identifying cowardice with ignorance about what is and is not to be feared, Socrates avails us of the resources to draw a more concrete picture of cowardice. First of all, cowardice is the soul’s domination by appearances with regard to what is and is not to be feared. Appearances, as representations of how things strike one to be from certain perspectives, may hit upon reality. So cowardice does not make people err with regard to what is and is not to be feared all the time. What distinguishes cowardly people is that they judge and act in accordance with appearances concerning what is and is not to be feared, even when they, standing in suboptimal perspectives, suffer from misleading appearances. Moreover, cowardly people are characterized by two features. On the one hand, they suffer from false beliefs about what is and is not to be feared in specific situations. For instance, they might judge that going to a noble war is fearful and thus want to escape from it, since they are misled by a distorted appearance that represents the venture as particularly bad. On the other hand, cowardly people are afflicted with an enduring deception about their own psychic conditions in relation to what is and is not to be feared.

Besides cowardice, Socrates oftentimes portrays a vicious person as victims of three other moral defects—impiety, injustice, and intemperance.⁹⁰ In a nutshell, these moral defects are character traits that dispose one to err with regard to the relevant domains of responses. Socrates' discussions of moral vices, by and large, occur in his inquiries into their opposite virtues. At *Gorgias* 505a–507c, he contrasts individuals who have orderly souls with those whose souls are disorderly and corrupt. The former, being virtuous, have correct responses in various domains of responses. For example, they, being pious, appropriately respond to their superiors, and, in particular, gods; being just, they properly treat and interact with other human beings. Hence, moral virtues like piety and justice are character traits that dispose one to have correct responses in the relevant domains. By contrast, individuals whose souls are disorderly and corrupt suffer from moral vices such as impiety, injustice, and intemperance.⁹¹ Instead of having correct responses in the relevant domains of responses, those people are characterized by wrong responses. Presumably, an impious person is disposed to respond inappropriately to one's superior, and, in particular, gods; an unjust person is disposed to treat or interact with other human beings in improper manners. From here, it is not far-fetched to infer that impiety, injustice, and intemperance are moral defects that dispose one to have inappropriate responses with regard to the relevant domains.⁹²

Impiety, injustice, and intemperance are forms of ignorance with regard to their corresponding domains of responses. At *Protagoras* 360d–361b, Socrates asserts that

⁹⁰ *Gorgias* 477b, 505b.

⁹¹ *Gorgias* 477b, 505b.

⁹² Note that the domains of different vices do not have to be entirely distinct. The same behavior could be inappropriate with respect to multiple domains of responses, which correspond to different moral vices. For example, running away from a noble war can be seen as an inappropriate response with regard to not only what is and is not to be feared and how to treat and interact with other human beings.

moral virtues, such as courage, justice, and temperance, are all knowledge. More specifically, he demonstrates that courage is a form of knowledge about a relevant domain of responses, i.e., what is and is not to be feared. So other moral virtues are presumably forms of knowledge about their corresponding domains of responses as well. The opposite of courage, i.e., cowardice, is a form of ignorance—ignorance about what is and is not to be feared. Accordingly, the opposites of other moral virtues, namely, impiety, injustice, and intemperance, are forms of ignorance about their corresponding domains of responses. Moreover, in light of the Socratic theory of ignorance, we can infer that each moral vice is the soul's domination by appearances in the relevant domains. One who is afflicted with a given moral defect, say, impiety, is characterized by the following pair of features. First, one is subject to false evaluative beliefs about specific situations in the relevant domain. Second, one suffers from an enduring deception about one's own psychic conditions in relation to the domain at issue. For instance, one might mistake oneself as having an adequate grasp of some issues in the relevant domain even though one lacks that knowledge.

At this point, we might raise the following questions. Does Socrates think that there can be moral defects other than cowardice, impiety, injustice, and intemperance? If so, why does he put so much emphasis on those four kinds?

A closer reading tells us that Socrates touches on moral defects other than cowardice, impiety, injustice, and intemperance. For example, in the argument where he identifies cowardice with ignorance about what is and is not to be feared, he puts his finger on rashness, another moral vice that falls into the same domain of responses. While cowardice disposes one to be excessive in fear—one is liable to fear what is not to be

feared, rashness disposes one to be deficient in fear—one is liable to lack fear about what is to be feared (*Protagoras* 360b). To give an example, suppose that a financial investment is highly risky and thus should inspire fear instead of confidence. A rash person is liable to lack fear about the adventure and rush into it. In addition, Callicles is diagnosed as being afflicted with greed, or, more literally, *pleonexia*. This defect urges him to get more than what he should get with regard to what he takes to be good, such as power and money. According to Socrates, greed arises from a neglect of justice and temperance.⁹³

Socrates puts more emphasis on cowardice, impiety, injustice, and intemperance presumably because they give rise to particularly troublesome kinds of responses in domains that are central to human flourishing. To see this point, it is worth noting at the outset that while Socrates does not explicitly explain why he puts so much emphasis on cowardice, impiety, injustice, and intemperance, his discussions of those defects often occur in his inquiries into their opposites. So a closer look at the context in which he decides to examine a certain moral virtue can cast light why he is especially interested in a given set of moral virtues and defects. In the *Charmides*, temperance becomes the focal point of inquiry because it is taken to be central to the well-being of individuals, both their souls and bodies.⁹⁴ In the *Euthyphro*, Socrates examines Euthyphro's claims about piety in order to see whether the latter has knowledge about it, which makes one a competent judge of many dilemmas in life.⁹⁵ As we have touched on, cowardice, impiety, injustice, intemperance, along with their opposite moral virtues, demarcate domains of

⁹³ *Gorgias* 483c–d, 490b–492c.

⁹⁴ *Charmides* 156d–157c.

⁹⁵ *Euthyphro* 3b–5d.

responses. For example, cowardice and courage mark off what is and is not to be feared; piety and impiety demarcate what is appropriate to one's superior, and, in particular, gods. So cowardice, impiety, injustice, and intemperance, along with their opposite virtues, mark off domains of responses that are generally deemed to be integral to human flourishing. Moreover, Socrates thinks that those moral defects give rise to particularly troublesome kinds of responses in their corresponding domains. Consider cowardice and rashness. Both are moral defects with regard to what is and is not to be feared. But it is not hard to see that in Socrates' eyes, the responses that cowardice gives rise to constitute more prominent obstacles to human flourishing. Because of cowardice, which disposes them to fear what is not to be feared, people obey unjust orders, run away from defending their cities, and try to defend their lives by all possible means.⁹⁶ Hence, cowardice, impiety, injustice, and intemperance are emphasized because they give rise to particularly troublesome kinds of responses in domains that are central to human flourishing.

Let us take stock. In this section, I have sketched out how Socrates' theory of ignorance paves the way for his accounts of moral defects, which are often dubbed as moral vices in contemporary discussions. Taking impiety, cowardice, intemperance, and injustice to be primary, he characterizes them as moral defects, or vices if you like, that dispose one to have inappropriate responses with regard to the corresponding domains, which are integral to human flourishing. Conceived in this way, each moral defect is a form of ignorance—the soul's domination by appearances—in the relevant domain. A person who suffers from a moral defect is characterized by false evaluative beliefs about

⁹⁶ *Apology* 32a–d, 34b–35d; *Protagoras* 359c–360e.

specific situations and an enduring deception about their own psychic conditions in the domain at issue.

4. The (Dis)unity of Vices?

The Socratic account of moral vices that I have sketched out points to an asymmetry between virtues and vices: while there is a unity of virtues, there is not a comparable sort of unity among vices. Socrates is famous for endorsing the unity of virtues, even though the exact nature of the unity has been a matter of controversy among scholars.⁹⁷ In spite of the controversy, most scholars agree that Socrates, at the minimum, accepts the following sort of unity among virtues: a person, who truly and fully possesses one of the following virtues, i.e., wisdom, courage, piety, justice, and temperance, necessarily has all the other virtues.⁹⁸ As I have argued in the previous section, cowardice, impiety, injustice, and intemperance are forms of ignorance about their corresponding domains of responses, which are integral to human flourishing. A person who suffers from one of these vices is characterized by false evaluative beliefs about specific situations and an enduring deception about their own psychic conditions in the relevant domain. It is not hard to imagine that someone who is susceptible to false beliefs and an enduring deception about their psychic conditions in the domain of treating and interacting with other human beings does not err as much with regard to the domain of what is and is not to be feared. In other words, the Socratic account of moral vices seems to suggest that an

⁹⁷ For a clear summary of the existing controversies about the unity of virtues, see Glasscock 2020, 44–45.

⁹⁸ See Vlastos 1972; Wooldruff 1976; Irwin 1977; Ferejohn 1984; Cooper 1999; Brickhouse and Smith 2010; Clark 2015.

unjust person does not have to be cowardly.⁹⁹ Accordingly, someone who has one of the following vices, i.e., ignorance, cowardice, impiety, injustice, and intemperance, does not necessarily suffer from all the other vices.¹⁰⁰ So while there is a unity of virtues, there is no comparable sort of unity among vices.

In spite of their lack of unity, vices, according to Socrates, share a common core—mistaking oneself as having an adequate grasp of something even though one lacks such a grasp. To see this point, let us zero in on the following passage from the *Alcibiades I*.

S: Don't you realize that the errors in our conduct are caused by this kind of incomprehension, of thinking we know when we don't know?

A: What do you mean by that?

S: Well, we don't set out to do something unless we think we know what we are doing, right?

A: Right.

S: But when people don't think they know how to do something, they hand it over to somebody else, right?

A: Of course.

S: So the sort of people who don't think they know how to do things make no

⁹⁹ The separation of cowardice from other moral vices is hinted in the *Gorgias*. At 477b, Socrates asserts that psychic corruption can be called injustice, ignorance, cowardice, and the like. So a cowardly soul is corrupt. At 505b, he claims that as long as a soul is corrupt, it is ignorant, intemperate or undisciplined, unjust, and impious. Cowardice is omitted from the list of vices that characterize a corrupt human soul. In this way, Socrates can be seen as implying that some corrupt souls, being ignorant, intemperate, unjust, and impious, are not afflicted with cowardice. If that is the case, he will put his finger on the separability of cowardice from other moral vices.

¹⁰⁰ The fact that one who suffers from a moral vice with regard to one domain of responses might not suffer from moral vices with regard to other domains does not imply that one is virtuous with regard to those domains. After all, Socrates endorses the unity of virtues. So if one is virtuous with regard to one domain, one will necessarily be virtuous in other domains. So one who is virtuous in one domain cannot be vicious in any other domains.

mistake in life, because they leave those things to other people.

A: You're right.

S: Well, who are the ones making mistakes? Surely not the ones who know?

A: Of course not.

S: Well, since it's not those who know, and it's not those who don't know

and know they don't know, is there anyone left except those who don't

know but think they do know?

A: No, they are the only ones left.

S: So this is the incomprehension that causes bad things; this is the most

disgraceful sort of ignorance.

(*Alcibiades I* 117d–118a)¹⁰¹

At the outset, Socrates asserts that only when people think they know what they are doing, they set out to do something. In the context, knowing something is not limited to having an expert understanding. One sets out to do something whenever one thinks that one has an adequate grasp of what one is doing. Having an expert understanding is a special case of having an adequate grasp. In light of this more expansive conception of

¹⁰¹ ΣΩ. Ἐννοεῖς οὖν ὅτι καὶ τὰ ἀμαρτήματα ἐν τῇ πράξει διὰ ταύτην τὴν ἄγνοιάν ἐστι, τὴν τοῦ μὴ εἰδότα οἶσθαι εἰδέναι;

ΑΛ. Πῶς αὖ λέγεις τοῦτο;

ΣΩ. Τότε που ἐπιχειροῦμεν πράττειν, ὅταν οἰώμεθα εἰδέναι ὅτι πράττομεν;

ΑΛ. Ναί.

ΣΩ. Ὅταν δε γέ πού τινες μὴ οἶωνται εἰδέναι, ἄλλοις παραδιδόασιν;

ΑΛ. Πῶς δ' οὐ;

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν οἱ τοιοῦτοι τῶν μὴ εἰδόντων ἀναμάρτητοι ζῶσι διὰ τὸ ἄλλοις περὶ αὐτῶν ἐπιτρέπειν;

ΑΛ. Ναί.

ΣΩ. Τίνες οὖν οἱ ἀμαρτάνοντες; Οὐ γάρ που οἱ γε εἰδότες.

ΑΛ. Οὐ δῆτα.

ΣΩ. Ἐπειδὴ δ' οὐθ' οἱ εἰδότες οὐθ' οἱ τῶν μὴ εἰδόντων εἰδότες ὅτι οὐκ ἴσασιν, ἢ ἄλλοι λείπονται ἢ οἱ μὴ εἰδότες, οἰόμενοι δ' εἰδέναι;

ΑΛ. Οὐκ, ἀλλ' οὗτοι.

ΣΩ. Αὕτη ἄρα ἡ ἄγνοια τῶν κακῶν αἰτία καὶ ἡ ἐπονείδιστος ἁμαθία;

knowing. Socrates sketches out three possible cognitive conditions that one can be in with regard to a certain subject matter. First, one has an adequate grasp of the subject matter. Second, one lacks an adequate grasp but correctly recognizes one's deficiency. Third, one lacks an adequate grasp but mistakes oneself as having that grasp. One does not err in the first two scenarios. In the first one, one's grasp prevents one from making mistakes. In the second case, one hands the issue over to someone else who has an adequate grasp. Only the third scenario—mistaking oneself as having about an adequate grasp even though one lacks that grasp—makes one err. Because one does not have an adequate grasp, one is subject to wrong judgments. And since one mistakes oneself as having the relevant grasp, one acts in accordance with one's judgments, even when they are misguided. In this way, Socrates contends that mistaking oneself as having an adequate grasp about something even though one lacks that grasp is the cause of bad things. And in the current context, bad things amount to incorrect responses and actions. So mistaking oneself as having an adequate grasp when one lacks it is the cause of incorrect responses and actions.

Socrates accordingly takes moral vices to share a common foundation—mistaking oneself as having an adequate grasp of something even though one lacks such a grasp. Recall that the moral vices that Socrates deems to be primary—cowardice, impiety, injustice, and intemperance—are defects that dispose one to respond inappropriately with regard to the relevant domains of responses, which are integral to human flourishing. For example, cowardice disposes one to fear what is not to be feared. Injustice disposes one to treat and interact with others in an improper manner. So at the heart of moral vices are inappropriate responses in domains that are integral to human flourishing. As I have

argued, mistaking oneself as having an adequate grasp of something even though one lacks such a grasp is the cause of incorrect responses and actions. Therefore, moral vices share a common foundation: mistaking oneself as having an adequate grasp when one lacks such a grasp. And this common foundation gives rise to inappropriate responses in domains that are integral to human flourishing, which are at the heart of moral vices.

It is worth reminding ourselves that the common foundation of moral vices—mistaking oneself as having an adequate grasp of something even though one lacks that grasp—is wishful thinking about one’s cognitive conditions. As I have argued in Section 2, this wishful thinking is lambasted as the most disgraceful form of ignorance in part because of its *epistemic harmfulness*: it paves the way for other epistemic defects, such as closed-mindedness and gullibility. The fact that the wishful thinking in question is the common foundation of moral vices allows us to understand its being lambasted as the most disgraceful form of ignorance from another angle. In giving rise to inappropriate responses and actions that are at the heart of moral vices, it is *practically harmful*.

In this way, Socrates strongly suggests that at the very bottom of defects on the darker side of humanity is an epistemic defect. More specifically, it is wishful thinking about one’s own cognitive conditions, which takes the shape of mistaking oneself as having an adequate grasp of something even though one lacks such a grasp.

We are now in a better position to appreciate Socrates’ perennial preoccupation with examining his interlocutors’ epistemic states. In his view, most human beings, being ignorant and thereby vicious, suffer from wishful thinking about their own cognitive conditions: they mistake themselves as having an adequate grasp of something even though they lack such a grasp. Since this wishful thinking is the epistemic defect that lays

the foundation of other epistemic and moral defects, attending to and overcoming it is the first step to escape from ignorance and vice.

5. Ignorance, Political Vices, and a Socratic Socio-political Critique

To close this chapter, I would like to draw our attention to the following mismatch between the Socratic theory and commonsensical views. As I have mentioned in Section 1, ignorance, according to the Socratic theory, is pervasive. Since vice is ignorance, vice is similarly pervasive: most people are ignorant and thereby vicious. The Socratic position on the pervasiveness of vice is out of sync with commonsensical views, according to which only a small group of people, who are much more pernicious than average population, are lambasted as vicious.¹⁰² At this point, we might wonder: does Socrates avail himself of resources to illuminate and justify the mismatch between his theory and commonsensical views?

In the rest of this chapter, I argue that Socrates offers us two sets of resources to unpack the mismatch between his theory and commonsensical views in both Ancient Greece and contemporary world. First, he illuminates the pervasiveness of vice by putting forward a more expansive conception of bodily disease and an extended analogy between disease and vice. Second, he justifies the pervasiveness of vice with the help of a thoroughgoing socio-political critique, according to which most existing political communities, being sustained by and perpetuating vices at the individual level, are vicious.

¹⁰² This does not mean that we rarely use words for vices, such as ‘vicious’, ‘unjust’, and ‘close-minded’ to describe specific actions, ways of thinking, and other episodic psychic events. My point is rather that when it comes to describe individuals’ characters, we use those words more restrictively.

Let us begin by taking a closer look at Socrates' conception of bodily disease. According to him, the goodness of something consists in the order and organization among its constitutive elements. For example, a house is good whenever its constitutive elements are properly arranged so that they fit with one another and the whole. So the goodness of a body, i.e., health, consists in the order and organization among its constitutive elements. Disease,¹⁰³ as the opposite to health, amounts to substantive deviation from the order and organization among constitutive bodily elements, which in turn consists in the disorder and disorganization among those elements (503d–504e). In Socrates' view, a healthy and a sick body characteristically differ in their desires: while the former desires things that are beneficial to it, the latter is susceptible to desire things that are detrimental to it (505a). Not only bodies that are clearly sick but also bodies that are commonly deemed to be well are susceptible to desire things that are detrimental to themselves. For instance, some apparently well bodies crave for pastries, whereas others are drawn to heavy drinking.¹⁰⁴ By including bodies that desire harmful things as sick, Socrates thus puts his finger on an expansive conception of disease.

Socrates operates with an extended analogy between bodily disease and vice. As I have noted, he claims that the goodness of something consists in the order and organization among its constitutive elements. Accordingly, the badness of something,

¹⁰³ Admittedly, Socrates characterizes physical corruption as weakness, illness, ugliness, and the like at 477b. A few lines later at 478c–e, he calls the corruption illness.

¹⁰⁴ At *Gorgias* 464d–465a, Socrates notes that children, as well as adults who are similarly foolish, tend to mistakenly regard pastry-bakers who are adroit at providing food that is pleasant instead of good for bodies, as experts who have knowledge about what is good for bodies. By saying so, he strongly suggests that many people regard pastries as good and accordingly desire them. One way in which people desire pastries is through the impulses or urges of their bodies. In other words, their bodies desire pastries. Although pastries are pleasant for bodies, they can be harmful. So the bodies of children, as well as adults who are similarly foolish, are susceptible to desire things that are detrimental to them. Presumably, many of those bodies are commonly deemed to be well. So bodies that are oftentimes deemed to be well can desire things, such as pastries, feast, and heavy drinking, which are harmful to themselves.

amounting to substantive deviation from the order and organization among its constitutive elements, comes down to the disorder and disorganization among those elements. He takes his account of goodness and, by implication, badness, to apply to both bodies and human souls. So their badness, i.e., illness and vice, comes down to states of disorder and disorganization among their constitutive elements. Moreover, Socrates asserts that for both bodies and souls, states of disorder and disorganization are characterized by susceptibility to wrong desires. Just as a sick body is susceptible to desire things that are harmful to it, so a vicious soul is susceptible to desire things that can make it worse instead of better. In this way, he operates with an extended analogy between disease and vice: both of them are states of disorder and disorganization, which make the subjects susceptible to wrong desires.

Building on his conception of bodily disease and the extended analogy between disease and vice, Socrates puts his finger on a more expansive conception of vice. Recall according to the extended analogy between disease and vice, both of them are states of disorder and disorganization, which make the subjects susceptible to wrong desires. Socrates operates with an expansive conception of disease: not only bodies that are clearly sick but also bodies that are commonly deemed to be well are susceptible to desire things that are detrimental to themselves. It follows that he should have in mind an expansive conception of vice: not only souls that are obviously vicious but also souls that are commonly regarded as decent are susceptible to desire things that are detrimental to themselves and accordingly vicious.

That Socrates has an expansive conception of vice is substantiated by his discussion about the appropriate treatments for disease and vice. In line with his expansive

conception of disease, Socrates thinks that appropriate treatments for disease are not limited to more familiar medical procedures, such as surgery and cauterization (479a). They can take the shape of recommendations for lifestyle changes, which are suitable to address minor discomfort, uneasiness, fatigue, and other kindred conditions that are not typically regarded as diseases.¹⁰⁵ In a similar vein, he holds that appropriate treatments for vice are not limited to what are nowadays called punishments, such as imprisonment and fines (480c–d), which are suitable for individuals who are much more pernicious than average population. They can take milder forms, such as persuading the souls to keep away from what they mistakenly desire,¹⁰⁶ which Socrates uses extensively to address individuals who are apparently decent. So these measures are appropriate for minor moral or epistemic blemishes that are not typically regarded as vices.

Although Socrates takes vice to include minor, even apparently innocuous blemishes, he does not think that all instances of vice are on a par. Instead, he suggests that viciousness can occur at different degrees. To see this point, it is worth noting that in Socrates' view, the more severe a bodily disease is, the more intensive its treatment should be. To treat minor diseases, keeping bodies away from what they desire is sufficient. To treat more severe diseases, more intensive procedures, such as surgery and cauterization, are needed. When a body is afflicted with incurable disease, death is the best treatment (512a–b). In a similar vein, Socrates holds that the more vicious a soul is, the more intensive its treatment should receive. For souls that are mildly vicious, admonishments can be enough (478e). For more vicious souls, punishments like fines and

¹⁰⁵ By doing so, Socrates takes disease to include what are nowadays called suboptimal health.

¹⁰⁶ *Gorgias* 505b, 517b–c.

imprisonments are appropriate. For incurably vicious souls, death is the best treatment (512a–b).

One might now raise the following question. While we can concede to Socrates that most people suffer from epistemic or moral blemishes to some extents, why does he lambaste individuals whose blemishes are mild and apparently innocuous as vicious?

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates can be seen as working towards a conception of political vice. At 518c–519a, he notes that like human bodies, cities, which stand for socio-political entities that are comparable to what we call societies and political regimes nowadays, can become sick, and, by implication, healthy. Recall that Socrates operates with an extended analogy between bodily disease and vice: both of them are states of disorder and disorganization, which make the subjects, i.e., bodies and human souls, susceptible to wrong desires. A sick city is in states of disorder and disorganization, which subject it to wrong desires.¹⁰⁷ In this way, Socrates puts his finger on a state of disorder and disorganization of cities, or political vice, which is analogous to vice in human souls.

According to Socrates, most cities are politically vicious. A virtuous city is characterized by politicians who have the knowledge to seek and offer what is truly good for citizens.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, even cities that are regarded as best, such as Athens under the rule of Pericles, lack such knowledgeable politicians. In most cities, politicians assimilate into the ethos of the crowd and work hard to bring about what is pleasant for it,

¹⁰⁷ At *Gorgias* 517b–c, Socrates hints that whenever a city is in a state of disorder and disorganization, it is subject to wrong desires.

¹⁰⁸ According to Socrates, a virtuous city is marked by its order and organization, which only politicians who have the knowledge to seek and offer what is truly good for it and its citizens can bring about (507d–e, 517c–518a).

which, nonetheless, oftentimes diverges from what is truly good.¹⁰⁹ Over time, just as pursuit of bodily pleasures gives rise to and exacerbates diseases, pursuit of what pleases the crowd gives rise to and exacerbates political vices.¹¹⁰

The existence and the pervasiveness of political vice pave the way for a Socratic justification of the pervasiveness of individual ignorance and vice. As I will show, political vice, being pervasive, depends on and perpetuates the ignorance and vice of individuals. Thus, it is apt to infer that the ignorance and vice of individuals are pervasive as well.

At the heart of political vice is political flattery, a craft-like practice which, purporting to bring about what is good for citizens, in fact seeks what appears to be good. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates distinguishes genuine political knowledge from political flattery. According to him, political knowledge, which can be further divided into legislative and judicial knowledge, equips one with an understanding of what is good for citizens. Based on this understanding, one is able to provide care for citizens, which amounts to offering what is truly good for their souls (464b–c). By contrast, political flattery, constituted by sophistry and (conventional) oratory,¹¹¹ makes one adroit at discerning what appears to be good to citizens, which, in Socrates' view, comes down to what is most pleasant at the moment. Because of this adroitness, one is capable of flattering citizens, which is essentially offering what is most pleasant for them, even though pleasure and goodness oftentimes diverge (464c–465a).

¹⁰⁹ *Gorgias* 513a–c, 517b–c.

¹¹⁰ *Gorgias* 518c–519b.

¹¹¹ At *Gorgias* 465c, Socrates asserts that political flattery is divided into sophistry and oratory. At 480c–d, he suggests that oratory can be practiced in a non-conventional way—revealing the wrongdoings and vices of oneself and one's family. In this way, they can receive appropriate treatments, which restore their souls to order and organization.

Political flattery is rooted in the ignorance and vice of politicians. Throughout the Socratic dialogues, practitioners of political flattery—sophists and (conventional) orators—are characterized by professing themselves to have what is tantamount to political knowledge, i.e., knowledge about what is good for human beings in general.¹¹² But upon closer examination, Socrates reveals that they lack the knowledge that they profess to have: they are only adroit at discerning what is most pleasant at the moment, which appears to be preeminently good.¹¹³ Thus, they confuse between apparent goodness and goodness. This confusion attests to their ignorance, which, as I have argued in Chapter 1, is the soul's domination by appearances. Epistemic and moral vices are forms of ignorance. Accordingly, political flattery is rooted in the ignorance and vice of politicians.

Political flattery fosters the growth of misguided views, desires, and ways of thinking within people, thereby perpetuating and exacerbating individual and political vices. Practitioners of political flattery, i.e., sophists and (conventional) orators, claim to offer what is good for citizens, even though they, in the absence of political knowledge, only provide what is most pleasant at the moment. According to Socrates, pleasure is not merely liable to deceive people who lack knowledge about good and bad into thinking that it is good.¹¹⁴ It, when being enjoyed indiscriminately, sows the seed of distorted

¹¹² At *Gorgias* 517c–518c, Socrates notes that practitioners who flatter instead of care bodies, such as pastry-chefs and weavers, regard themselves as providing care for bodies. In a similar vein, practitioners who flatter instead of care human souls, i.e., sophists and (conventional) orators, take themselves to providing what is good for human beings in general, which is what political knowledge is tasked for.

¹¹³ *Gorgias* 464b–465d, 517b–c.

¹¹⁴ To illustrate this point, Socrates offers an example of how practitioners who offer what is pleasant for bodies can deceive people who lack the relevant knowledge into thinking that what they offer is genuinely good. In the eyes of children, who lack knowledge about what is good for their bodies, pastry-chefs, who offer what is pleasant for their bodies, offer what is good for their bodies (521e–522a). They are able to accomplish that because for people who lack the relevant knowledge, pleasure strikes them to be preeminently good.

desires.¹¹⁵ By providing what is most pleasant at the moment rather than what is truly good, political flattery thus fosters the growth of misguided views and desires. Moreover, it, as Socrates hints, afflicts people with incorrect ways of thinking. The rhetorical prowess of sophists and (conventional) orators lends, for example, an impression that to be refuted is to maintain a position that no other people maintain.¹¹⁶ Misguided views, desires, and ways of thinking are the building blocks of ignorance and vice at the individual level. Hence, by fostering the growth of misguided views, desires, and ways of thinking, political flattery perpetuates and exacerbates citizens' vices. A vicious city is constituted by citizens who are by and large ignorant and vicious.¹¹⁷ Accordingly, political flattery perpetuates and exacerbates political vice.

Political flattery not only perpetuates and exacerbates individual and political vices but also is sustained by them. Practitioners of political flattery, i.e., sophists and (conventional) orators, develop their practice as a result of their assimilating into individual and political vices. From the very beginning of their lives, people are instilled with views about evaluative matters by their parents, nurses, tutors, teachers, as well as many others with whom they associate with, who are likely to be ignorant and vicious.¹¹⁸ In order to rise to power in the city, people have to internalize the ethos of the crowd, which constitutes the backbone of political vice.¹¹⁹ Over time, they develop political flattery, which is essentially an adroitness at seeking what pleases the majority people, as well as the city that they constitute. Moreover, the practice of political flattery becomes

¹¹⁵ *Gorgias* 518c–519b.

¹¹⁶ *Gorgias* 473e–474b.

¹¹⁷ At *Gorgias* 517b–519b, Socrates suggests that making a vicious city amounts to corrupting the majority of its citizens. So a vicious city is constituted by citizens who are by and large vicious.

¹¹⁸ *Protagoras* 325c–326c.

¹¹⁹ *Gorgias* 512d–513c.

dominant because of individual and political vices. If a city is not vicious, most citizens will be free from ignorance and vices. As a result, they will not be readily attracted to and gratified by political flattery, which seeks what appears to be good rather than what is truly good.

Socrates' pioneering critique of existing socio-political contexts allows us to understand his decision to lambaste individuals whose epistemic or blemishes are mild and apparently innocuous as vicious in the following way. Ignorance and vice, understood as disorder and disorganization of the human psyche, are intertwined with political vices, which constitute disorder and disorganization on a grander scale. Most existing socio-political entities are vicious to some extent. At the heart of political vice is political flattery, a practice that, albeit purporting to offer what is good for human beings in general, in fact seeks what is most pleasant for the majority and the city that they constitute. Rooted in the ignorance and vices of its practitioners, i.e., politicians, political flattery not only perpetuates and exacerbates but also is sustained by individual and political vices. By lambasting minor epistemic and moral blemishes as vices, Socrates can be seen as alluding to the intricate relationship between individual and political vices. Even though one's vice can be mild and apparently innocuous, it is deeply entrenched in one's socio-political context in such a way that it, arising from one's immersion in a corrupt city, constitutes and contributes to the latter's degeneration in one way or another.

Chapter 3. Ignorance in Plato's *Republic*

1. Introduction

In the first two chapters, I have argued that Socrates, as the main interlocutor of the Socratic dialogues, does not endorse the commonplace assumption that ignorance is just a lack of knowledge. Instead, he conceives of ignorance as a substantive, structural psychic flaw: the soul's domination by inferior elements that are by nature fit to be ruled instead of ruling. The inferior elements at issue are appearances—representations of how things strike one to be from certain perspectives. Understood in this way, defects that are prominent on the darker side of humanity, such as cowardice and wishful thinking, which are nowadays called moral vices and epistemic vices, are forms or products of ignorance.

In the rest of my dissertation, I show that Plato operates with a different theory of ignorance and vice in the *Republic*. In the current chapter, I propose to focus on the Platonic conception of ignorance. What is ignorance according to Plato?¹²⁰ How does it stand in relation to vices?

Ignorance, in Plato's view, is pervasive and hard to overcome. This point is nicely illustrated by the cave allegory in the *Republic*. According to the allegory, most human beings, lacking the appropriate education and thereby being ignorant (ἄμαθεῖς),¹²¹ are just

¹²⁰ One might note that in the first two chapters, I attribute views in the Socratic dialogues to Socrates, whereas in the current chapter, I attribute claims in the *Republic* to Plato. This shift does not imply that the claims in the Socratic dialogues is more representative of the historical Socrates rather than Plato. Instead, I only mean to distinguish the accounts of ignorance and vice in the Socratic dialogues from those in the *Republic* and associated dialogues.

¹²¹ According to Plato, appropriate upbringing and education are integral to the establishment and preservation of a good city (423e–424b). Most cities, nevertheless, are vicious to some extents: even Sparta, which is widely regarded as one of the best cities, instantiates one of the four major types of vice (544c). So most people lack appropriate upbringing and education. In the cave allegory, Plato compares people who lack appropriate upbringing and education to prisoners who have been confined in a dark, underground cave. Those prisoners are described as being ignorant (515c; 518a). It follows that most people are ignorant.

like prisoners who have been confined in a dark, underground cave from birth. With their necks and legs being fettered, the prisoners can only see shadows that are cast on the wall in front of them and accordingly become convinced that truth is nothing other than those shadows. Freeing the prisoners and curing them of their ignorance is extremely challenging. Even if they are released from the fetters, they have to be compelled in order to stand up and leave the cave. What's worse, the pain and irritation that they experience might urge them to kill their liberator, should opportunities arise (514a–519a).¹²²

Since Plato takes ignorance to be pervasive, his account of it casts light on his diagnosis of our day-to-day epistemological defects. Since he finds ignorance hard to overcome, his account of it points to what he takes to be the main challenges to ameliorate, correct, or prevent ignorance. Hence, understanding Plato's conception of ignorance is integral to a better grip on the epistemological and the educational projects of the *Republic*.

In spite of its significance, there are as yet few substantial accounts of Plato's conception of ignorance in the *Republic*. Most scholars who talk about it only do so in passing, in defense of their interpretations of knowledge, belief, or virtue.¹²³ According to some scholars, ignorance is just a matter of having false beliefs.¹²⁴ This proposal, however, falls short of illuminating why ignorance is hard to overcome. Nothing internal

¹²² At 515c–e, Plato notes that in their ascension from the cave, prisoners are subject to pain and irritation. At 517a, he adds that if prisoners have the opportunity to kill their liberator, they will do that. Thus, it is not far-fetched to infer that the pain and irritation that are associated with the ascension urge prisoners to kill their liberator, should opportunities arise.

¹²³ The only exceptions are Nicholas Smith and Verity Harte, whose groundbreaking discussions about ignorance in Plato's *Republic* encourage me to dig deeper in this topic. In spite of the nuanced differences in their accounts, both of them hold that ignorance, or ἀμαθία, is just ἄγνοια, which I will translate as 'incomprehension' in this dissertation (Smith 2012; Harte 2013). In Section 2, I will argue against their position. For discussions about my decision to render ἄγνοια as 'incomprehension', see n. 124.

¹²⁴ Kamtekar 2017, 105.

to the nature of false beliefs explains why at least some of them, and, more specifically, those that are identified with ignorance, often resist efforts to correct them. According to other scholars, ignorance (ἄμαθία) is identical to incomprehension (ἄγνοια).¹²⁵ And incomprehension consists in either, as Gail Fine and Nicholas Smith hold, a complete absence of cognition or utterly misguided beliefs,¹²⁶ or, as Verity Harte argues, a complex, standing psychological condition in virtue of which a human soul fails to get at truth.¹²⁷ This proposal, as I will discuss in greater details in Section 2, neglects to accommodate the fact that ignorance and incomprehension do not always co-occur. For instance, at 506a Plato has Socrates, who is by no means ignorant,¹²⁸ admit that he is in a state of incomprehension about how fine and just things are good.

In this chapter, I will develop a new interpretation of Plato's conception of ignorance¹²⁹ in the *Republic*. Ignorance is the vice specific to reason and thus different

¹²⁵ Throughout this chapter, I translate ἄμαθία and ἄγνοια as ignorance and incomprehension respectively. In the *Republic*, ἄμαθία is the opposite to σοφία, which is the virtue of the rational part of human soul (444b; cf. 442c). So ἄμαθία stands for the vice of the rational soul part. Admittedly, ἄμαθία can be rendered as ignorance or stupidity according to LSJ. But in Plato's view, a person who suffers from ἄμαθία can be very clever: as the cave allegory illustrates, she can be adroit at navigating day-to-day situations (516c–d). For this reason, I render ἄμαθία as ignorance. As for ἄγνοια, it is composed of a negative prefix ἄ, which means a lack of, and a noun root γνοια, which comes from the verb γινώσκω. That verb covers a range of cognitive successes, such as knowing, discerning, and perceiving. Therefore, ἄγνοια literally means a lack of cognitive successes and thus encompasses various kinds of cognitive deficiencies. This point is substantiated by a closer examination of the occurrences of ἄγνοια and its cognates in the *Republic*, which I will offer in Section 2. Hence, in order to preserve the whole range of cognitive deficiencies that ἄγνοια can stand for, I render it as incomprehension.

¹²⁶ Fine 1977; Smith 2012.

¹²⁷ Harte 2013. As it will become clearer later in this chapter, my disagreement with Harte lies primarily in two points. First, while she thinks that ignorance is just incomprehension, I argue that they are different. Second, while she holds that ignorance makes a human soul fail to grasp truth, I contend that in addition to failing to grasp truth, ignorance makes reason fail to rule the entire soul.

¹²⁸ In Plato's works, Socrates is represented as an exemplar of admirable words and actions (*Apology* 28d–e, 32c–e; *Symposium* 220e–221b; *Laches* 181a–b). Accordingly, Socrates is far from vicious by Plato's lights. At 350d, injustice is identified as ignorance and vice. So ignorance and vice presumably co-occur: an ignorant person is vicious, and a vicious person is ignorant. Since Socrates is not vicious, he is by no means ignorant.

¹²⁹ More specifically, I will focus on the ignorance of individual human beings. At 427e, Plato notes that a completely good city is wise, courageous, moderate, and just. Ignorance is the substantive, vicious counterpart of wisdom. Hence, he holds that both an individual human being and a collective agent, for example, a city, can be ignorant. I will explore the ignorance of an collective agent on a future occasion.

from incomprehension, which covers a variety of cognitive deficiencies, such a lack of familiarity and true opinions. In my view, Plato operates with what I call the *functional model* of ignorance: ignorance is a state of reason because of which reason performs its function poorly.¹³⁰ The function of reason consists of a cognitive aspect, i.e., grasping truth, and a structural aspect, i.e., ruling the entire human soul. Accordingly, ignorance consists of a cognitive defect and a structural defect. I will further suggest that while the cognitive defect is attested to by genuine falsehood—a cognitive deficiency that involves a complex of ongoing and enduring mistakes about evaluative matters, the structural defect can manifest itself in a distinctive form of self-deception—a disposition to maintain incorrect views about evaluative matters, even when one has access to facts to the contrary.

My plan for this chapter is as follows. In Section 2, I show that in the *Republic*, ignorance, conceived to be the vice of reason, is distinct from incomprehension. In Section 3, I argue that Plato operates with the functional model of ignorance. On this model, ignorance consists of a cognitive defect and a structural defect. From Section 4 to Section 6, I present a more concrete picture of ignorant people by inquiring into how those defects can manifest themselves and what implications they have for Plato's conception of ignorance. In Section 7, I close the chapter by suggesting how my interpretation casts light on the epistemological and educational projects of the *Republic*.

¹³⁰ I use the word 'function' and its cognates to pick up the Greek word ἔργον, which, to a first approximation, refers to activities that are characteristic of something. The function of eyes, for instance, is seeing; the function of a pruning knife is pruning. For a more detailed discussion of Plato's conception of function in the *Republic*, see Section 3. It is worth pointing out that by saying that Plato operates with a functional model of ignorance. I do not mean that he offer a functional analysis of ignorance in terms of its characteristic activities. Rather, ignorance is defined in terms of poor performances of reason's function.

2. Ignorance vs. Incomprehension

Ignorance and its cognates feature at many crucial junctures throughout the *Republic*. For example, one of the arguments to refute Thrasymachus' assertion that injustice can be more profitable than justice in Book 1 is that an unjust person is ignorant (ἄμαθης) and vicious (348b–350d).¹³¹ In his inquiry into what a good city is like, Plato contends that people become ignorant if they lack a proper immersion in music and poetry (411c–e). In the allegory of the cave, he compares ignorant people to prisoners, who, having been fettered in a dark, underground cave from birth, hold that truth is nothing other than shadows that are cast on the wall in front of them.¹³² In the myth of Er, the concluding myth that summarizes and elevates the central messages that the *Republic* as a whole conveys, he declares that in the interval between two consecutive incarnations, individuals make bad choices about their next lives because of ignorance and greed.¹³³

It is not hard to see that ignorance is a vice. When refuting Thrasymachus' assertion that injustice can be more profitable than justice towards the end of Book 1, Plato notes that a good and wise man (ὁ ἀγαθός τε καὶ σόφος) and a vicious and ignorant man (ὁ κάκος τε καὶ ἄμαθης) differ in their attitudes towards outdoing (πλεονεκτεῖν) others.

¹³¹ Plato notes that someone who is in a state of ἀνεπιστημοσύνη suffers from a misguided sense of competitiveness and is accordingly vicious (κάκος): she wants to outdo (πλεονεκτεῖν) everyone else, not only those who are similarly in a state of ἀνεπιστημοσύνη but also those who are knowledgeable and wise (350a–b). The competitiveness at issue is the root of many wrongdoings (586a–d). Notably, the same person who is afflicted with that competitiveness is picked up as being ἄμαθης at 350b10. This move strongly suggests that ἀμαθία and ἀνεπιστημοσύνη can be used interchangeably to refer to the criticizable epistemic defect that vicious persons are afflicted with.

¹³² Plato compares individuals who lack appropriate education and training to prisoners who have been confined in a dark, underground cave from birth in the cave allegory. The prisoners, in a state of ἀφροσύνη (515c5), vehemently resist efforts that are meant to lead them to see truth. At 518a7, their conditions are picked up by the word ἀμάθεια. Accordingly, ἀμάθεια can be used interchangeably with not only ἀνεπιστημοσύνη but also ἀφροσύνη.

¹³³ 619b8–c1: ὑπὸ ἀφροσύνης τε καὶ λαιμαργίας. In n. 131, I argue that ἀμάθεια can be used interchangeably with not only ἀνεπιστημοσύνη but also ἀφροσύνη. Hence, Plato can be seen as asserting that individuals make bad choices about their next lives because of ignorance and greed.

While the former does not want to outdo those who are similarly good and wise but only those who are unlike and opposed to him, the latter wants to outdo both his like and his opposite. From there, Plato infers that unjust persons, wanting to outdo both their like and their opposite, are ignorant and vicious. Injustice can accordingly be identified as ignorance and vice (350b–d). The close connection between ignorance and vice is reaffirmed in later parts of the *Republic*. For example, at 444b, Plato asserts that the turmoil and straying of soul parts (τὴν τούτων ταραχὴν καὶ πλάνην) come down to ignorance, injustice, licentiousness, cowardice, and, in sum, the whole of vice (τὴν τε ἀδικίαν καὶ ἀκολασίαν καὶ δειλίαν καὶ ἀμαθίαν καὶ συλλήβδην πᾶσαν κακίαν). At 609b, ignorance, injustice, licentiousness, and cowardice are identified as things that make human souls bad. Therefore, ignorance is a vice.

More specifically, ignorance is the vice of the rational soul part. According to Plato, a good human soul is characterized by wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice (442a–444a). Each of those virtues constitutes a distinctive psychic condition that is integral to a good human soul. As the virtue specific to the rational part, wisdom consists in this part's ruling the entire soul in accordance with the relevant kind of knowledge (441c–442c). Notably, ignorance is picked out as the substantive, vicious counterpart to wisdom. It is to wisdom as cowardice, intemperance, and injustice to courage, temperance, and justice (444b). Accordingly, ignorance is the vice of the rational part.

A closer look at Plato's comments on incomprehension (ἄγνοια) and its cognates in the *Republic* strongly suggests that these words refer to a variety of cognitive deficiencies, many of which do not co-occur with ignorance. Admittedly, incomprehension is sometimes associated with ignorant people. At 382a–b, a passage that

we will zero in on in Sections 4 and 5, Plato indicates that genuine falsehood is the incomprehension about the things that are (τὰ ὄντα) that afflicts the ignorant.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, incomprehension and its cognates often refer to a variety of cognitive deficiencies that do not co-occur with ignorance. For example, in sketching out how a virtuous city becomes vicious, Plato notes that its rulers, albeit being wise and virtuous, might fail to comprehend (ἀγνοήσαντες) the geometrical number that controls better and worse births and thus preside civic marriages at the wrong time (546a–d). So incomprehension and its cognates can stand for mere misjudgments. In addition, Plato describes a pedigree dog as being gentle to those with which it is familiar and harsh to those which it fails to comprehend (ἀγνοῆσαι or ἀγνοία) at 376a–b.¹³⁵ In the context, failing to comprehend, or, if you like, incomprehension, picks up the opposite to being accustomed to and familiar with (συνήθεις τε καὶ γνωρίμους) something. And the pedigree dog is presumably not expected to be acquainted with everyone. So incomprehension and its cognates can refer to an innocuous lack of familiarity. Moreover, Plato's Socrates confesses that he is in a state of incomprehension about how just and fine things are good at 506a.¹³⁶ Being in a state of incomprehension about those

¹³⁴ In the context, Plato means to explain what genuine falsehood amounts to. At 382b1–4, he declares that it is to lie /be deceived and to have lied/been deceived about things that are, to be ignorant, and to have and to have acquired falsehood there (τῇ ψυχῇ περὶ τὰ ὄντα ψεύδεσθαι τε καὶ ἐψεύσθαι καὶ ἀμαθῆ εἶναι καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἔχειν τε καὶ κεκτηῖσθαι τὸ ψεῦδος πάντες ἥκιστ' ἂν δέξαιντο). So ignorant people are characterized by genuine falsehood, which deals with the things that are. At 382b7–8, he adds that genuine falsehood is the incomprehension in the soul of someone who has lied/been deceived (ἢ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἀγνοια ἢ τοῦ ἐψευσμένου). It follows that genuine falsehood is the incomprehension about things that are, which afflicts ignorant people. I will come back to this point in greater details in Section 4.

¹³⁵ More specifically, Plato asserts that a pedigree dog is friendly with or hostile to something solely on the basis of whether it is familiar with or fails to comprehend (ἀγνοῆσαι) that thing at 376b4–5. At 376b6, he summarizes the characteristic in question as 'defining what is its own and what is alien to it in terms of familiarity and incomprehension (ἀγνοία).' So incomprehension and its cognates are used interchangeably.

¹³⁶ δίκαιά τε καὶ καλὰ ἀγνοούμενα ὅπη ποτὲ ἀγαθὰ ἐστίν, οὐ πολλοῦ τινος ἄξιον φύλακα κεκτηῖσθαι ἂν ἑαυτῶν τὸν τοῦτο ἀγνοοῦντα.

things, however, does not prevent him from addressing the joint challenge of Glaucon and Adeimantus by arguing that justice is always better than injustice.¹³⁷ As some scholars have pointed out, the vision that the argument exhibits indicates that Socrates, albeit lacking knowledge, has highly accurate opinions¹³⁸ or thoughts.¹³⁹ In light of the divergent meanings that incomprehension and its cognates have, it is apt to infer that these words cover a variety of cognitive deficiencies, such as mere misjudgments, a lack of familiarity, and true opinions that nonetheless fall short of knowledge, many of which do not co-occur with ignorance.¹⁴⁰

At this point, it is not hard to see that ignorance is not identical to incomprehension. Incomprehension can be innocuous. There is nothing shameful about being in a state of incomprehension about entities that one does not have to be familiar with. By contrast, ignorance is the vice specific to the rational part. It, along with cowardice, intemperance, and injustice, makes a human soul bad (609b–c). So ignorance is far from innocuous. For those reasons, ignorance is not identical to incomprehension.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ From Book 2, 368a to the end of Book 9, Plato refutes Glaucon and Adeimantus' joint challenge that injustice can sometimes be better than justice.

¹³⁸ Fine 1990; Vogt 2012, 53.

¹³⁹ Moss 2021, 186–7.

¹⁴⁰ One implication of my interpretation is that incomprehension and opinion (δόξα) are not entirely distinct: opinions can be cases of incomprehension, and vice versa. This implication seems to go against Plato's three-fold division between knowledge, opinion, and incomprehension at 475c–480a. According to many scholars, knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), opinion (δόξα), and incomprehension (ἄγνοια) are different cognitive powers, each of which enables one to engage in a distinct activity over a specific domain. Knowledge, for example, enables one to know what is (τὸ ὄν); opinion enables one to opine that which both is and is not (ἄμα ὄν τε καὶ μὴ ὄν) (see, for instance, Smith 2012; Wedgwood 2018). But a closer look at that passage indicates that while Plato labels knowledge and opinion as powers and specifies the activities that they enable one to engage in (477c–478a), he neither explicitly calls incomprehension a power nor specifies the activities that it enables one to perform. So it is dubious whether incomprehension is a distinct cognitive power. If, unlike knowledge and opinion, incomprehension is not a cognitive power, opinion and incomprehension could overlap. Therefore, although Plato seems to invoke a three-fold division between knowledge, opinion, and incomprehension, only the first two are distinct cognitive powers.

¹⁴¹ A similar distinction between ignorance and incomprehension can also be found in the Socratic dialogues. For a detailed discussion, see Liu 2022, n. 7.

3. The Functional Model of Ignorance

If ignorance is not identical to incomprehension, what does it amount to? In this section, I argue that in the *Republic* Plato operates with what I call the functional model of ignorance: ignorance is a state of reason because of which reason performs its function poorly. The function of reason consists of a cognitive aspect, i.e., grasping truth, and a structural aspect, i.e., ruling the entire soul. Accordingly, ignorance consists of a cognitive defect and a structural defect.

As it will become clear in this section, the functional model of ignorance belongs to a general, functional model of vice: the vice of something that has a function is a state of that thing because of which it performs its function poorly. Therefore, I propose to consider the functional model of vice first. From 339a5 to the end of *Republic* 1, Plato has Socrates examine and refute Thrasymachus' assertion that injustice can be more profitable than justice. In the last of his five arguments against Thrasymachus,¹⁴² Socrates resorts to the functional model of vice. The model crucially rests on the notion of function (ἔργον). As some scholars keenly observe, this Platonic conception of function is an important predecessor to the Aristotelian one,¹⁴³ which has an enduring influence in the history of Western philosophy.¹⁴⁴

According to Plato, the function of something amounts to its characteristic activities, i.e., activities that are peculiar—that only it can accomplish—or proper to it—

¹⁴² For an insightful discussion of these arguments, see Barney 2006.

¹⁴³ See Vlastos 1973, 111–139; Cooper 1986, 145; Barney 2008, 298–302; Korsgaard 2008, 129; Baker 2015.

¹⁴⁴ Aquinas, for example, commented on the function argument in Aristotle's *NE* 1.7. See 1b1 1c10 n2 in *Sententia libri Ethicorum*. Korsgaard draws heavily from the notion of function in Aristotle to address some contemporary issues about the ontology of reasons and the nature of rational motivation. See Korsgaard 2008, 207–230.

that it can accomplish better than anything else does. He establishes this account of function by examining two sets of examples. First, he considers bodily organs, such as eyes and ears, and their functions. Among all things, eyes alone allow one to see; ears alone allow one to hear. Accordingly, seeing and hearing are activities that are *peculiar* to eyes and ears. By calling seeing and hearing the functions of eyes and ears respectively, one refers to activities that are peculiar to eyes and ears—only they can accomplish those activities (352e6-11). So the function of something can include activities that are peculiar to it. Then, Plato examines tools, such as knives and daggers, and their functions. A variety of tools, for example, a dagger and a carving knife, enable one to prune vines. Nevertheless, a pruning knife that is made for the purpose of pruning vines enables one to prune better than other things do. That is to say, pruning is the activity that is *proper* to a pruning knife. By labelling pruning as the function of a pruning knife, one accordingly picks out the activity that is proper to it—it can accomplish this activity better than other things do (353a1-8). So the function of something can involve activities that are proper to it. In sum, Plato holds that the function of something amounts to its characteristic activities, and, more specifically, activities that are peculiar or proper to it.

In light of his conception of function, Plato proposes a general, functional model of vice, which applies to everything that has a function.

S: Does each thing to which a particular function is assigned also have a virtue?

.....

S: And could eyes perform their function well if they lacked their peculiar virtue and had the vice instead?

T: How could they, for don't you mean if they had blindness instead of sight?

S: Whatever their virtue is, for I am not now asking about that but about whether anything that has a function performs it well because of its virtue and badly because of its vice?

T: That's true, it does.

(353b–c)¹⁴⁵

Everything with a function has virtue, and, by implication, vice. An eye, for example, has a function, i.e., seeing. The virtue of an eye is a state of the eye, because of which it sees well. The vice of an eye is a state of the eye, because of which it sees poorly. That is to say, the virtue of an eye is a state of it because of which it performs its function well, whereas the vice of an eye is a state of it because of which it performs its function poorly. The same holds for all other things that have their functions, such as an ear and a pruning knife. In this way, Plato arrives at the functional model of vice:¹⁴⁶ the vice of something that has a function is a state of that thing, because of which it performs its function poorly.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Εἶεν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ· οὐκοῦν καὶ ἀρετὴ δοκεῖ σοι εἶναι ἐκάστω ὥπερ καὶ ἔργον τι προστέτακται;

.....

Ἔχε δὴ· ἄρ' ἂν ποτε ὄμματα τὸ αὐτῶν ἔργον καλῶς ἀπεργάσαιντο μὴ ἔχοντα τὴν αὐτῶν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν, ἀλλ' ἀντὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς κακίαν; Καὶ πῶς ἂν; ἔφη· τυφλότητα γὰρ ἴσως λέγεις ἀντὶ τῆς ὄψεως. Ἦτις, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, αὐτῶν ἡ ἀρετὴ οὐ γὰρ πῶ τοῦτο ἐρωτῶ, ἀλλ' εἰ τῇ οἰκείᾳ μὲν ἀρετῇ τὸ αὐτῶν ἔργον εὖ ἐργάσεται τὰ ἐργαζόμενα, κακία δὲ κακῶς. Ἀληθές, ἔφη, τοῦτό γε λέγεις.

Translations of the *Republic* are by G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve, from Cooper 1997. I make minor revisions at some places.

¹⁴⁶ Plato also proposes a functional model of virtue in the same context: the virtue of something is a state of that thing because of which it performs its function well.

¹⁴⁷ Some readers might worry that since the functional model of vice is introduced in Book 1, where Plato sometimes makes claims without fully establishing them, it might not hold true for the rest of the dialogue. I agree that

much of what Plato says in Book 1 is preliminary. For instance, he asserts that justice is a virtue (353e) without fully establishing it in the immediate context. But a closer look at the rest of the *Republic* allows us to see that his claims in Book 1 are in line with and even substantiated by his discussions in later parts of the dialogue. To give an example, in book 4, Plato expands on his earlier claim that justice is a virtue by locating and characterizing it first in a virtuous city and then in a virtuous human soul. Hence, the fact that

Plato explicitly attributes function to reason. In Book 10, he argues that imitative poetry should be banned in a well-governed city. To substantiate his argument, he points out that most poets, such as Homer and Hesiod, lack not only knowledge but also correct opinions about the subject matters of their works. They are merely adroit at discerning and reproducing how those matters appear to the majority, who similarly lack knowledge and right opinions. In other words, they are proficient imitators of appearances (595a–602c). Appearances, however, are susceptible to distorting truth. For example, a stick, albeit being straight, appears to be crooked when seen in water; excessive lamentation, albeit shameful, can strike people to be innocuous (602c–d, 605c–606b).¹⁴⁸ Being confronted with the deceptive power of appearances, rational activities, such as measuring, counting, and weighing, give people ‘most welcome assistance’. As Plato puts it, those activities are the function (ἔργον) of the rational part of the soul (602d). Therefore, reason has its own function.

The function of reason involves a cognitive aspect, which, consisting in activities such as measuring and deliberating, enables one to grasp truth. As I have noted, Plato identifies measuring, counting, and weighing, as belonging to the function of reason in his argument that imitative poetry should be banned in a well-governed city. What is common among those activities is that they enable one to grasp truth, instead of being confused by appearances. For example, because of measuring, one can discern that a stick that is submerged in water is in fact straight, even though it appears to be bent; with the help of weighing, one can correctly notice that a smaller object is actually heavier than a

the function model is extracted from a context where Plato sometimes makes claims without fully establishing them does not imply that the model itself fails to hold true for the rest of the dialogue.

¹⁴⁸ For a thorough and insightful discussion of Plato’s criticism of imitative poetry, see Moss 2007.

larger one. So the function of reason involves a cognitive aspect, which enables one to grasp truth. Notably, reason is sometimes dubbed as the deliberative part (βουλευτικόν; cf. 441a1, 442a7) in the *Republic*. This move strongly suggests that deliberating is a characteristically rational activity: it is either peculiar to reason—that only reason allows one to deliberate—or proper to reason—that reason enables one to deliberate better than anything else does. As a result of deliberating, one can grasp what is truly good for a city, what is bad and fearful for a human soul, and, in a word, truth in the evaluative domain.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, besides measuring, counting, and weighing, the cognitive aspect of reason's function includes deliberating. Those activities enable one to grasp truth.

The function of reason also involves a structural aspect, which amounts to reason's ruling the entire human soul. At the end of Book 9, Plato compares a human soul, which is constituted by reason, spirit, and appetite, to a composite of a person, a lion, and a multi-headed, multi-colored beast. A lion and a beast not just lack the ability to seek what is truly good for themselves and the entire composite. Left to themselves, they become savage, biting and killing other parts. So when either of them rules the composite, disorder arise and persist. Only a person can make the lion her ally and tame the beast, thereby pursuing what is good for the entire composite. So the person should rule¹⁵⁰ the composite (588c–589b). The comparison of a human soul to a composite of a person, a

¹⁴⁹ At 442b–c, Plato notes that as a result of deliberation, one can grasp what is good for each soul part and the entire soul. At 428b–429a, he suggests that deliberation enables one to find out what is good for a city.

¹⁵⁰ At 444d3–5, Plato declares that to produce health is to establish the components of the body in a natural relation of control and being controlled, one by another (κρατεῖν τε καὶ κρατεῖσθαι ὑπ' ἀλλήλων). Its opposite, i.e., to produce disease, is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν ἄρχειν τε καὶ ἄρχεσθαι ἄλλο ὑπ' ἄλλου). Thus, establishing a natural relation of control and being controlled is the opposite to establishing a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature. So the word 'controlling' is interchangeable with the word 'ruling'. Similar cases can be found at 431a3–d6 and 444d6–10. Having drawn the image of the human soul, which compares it to a composite of a person, a lion, and a multi-headed, multi-colored beast, Plato concludes that the person should have the most control (ἐγκρατέστατος). Thus, he thinks that the person should rule the entire composite.

lion, and a multi-headed, multi-colored beast accordingly conveys the following message: reason can rule a human soul better than other soul parts do. Remarkably, reason is sometimes called the ruling part in the *Republic*.¹⁵¹ The idea is presumably that reason is naturally fit to rule the entire human soul. So it is apt to infer that ruling the entire human soul is a characteristically rational activity and accordingly belongs to the function of reason. Whenever a soul part rules (ἄρχειν) the entire soul, it, first and foremost, determines the latter's long-term, dominant values. More specifically, it directs the soul as a whole to routinely value what it is naturally attracted to and values. To give an example, a timocratic soul, ruled by the victory-loving, spirited part, routinely values what spirit is naturally attracted to and values, i.e., victory and honor, more than everything else (548e–550b).¹⁵² To sum up, the function of reason has a structural aspect, which amounts to reason's ruling the entire human soul by directing the latter to routinely value what it is naturally attracted to and values.

Plato's characterization of the four major types of corrupt character strongly suggests that the rational part of an ignorant person is characterized by poor performances of both the cognitive and the structural aspects of its function. In Books 8 and 9, Plato inquires into human vice by examining the four major types of corrupt character, i.e., the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical. Each of these characters represents a distinctive way in which a human soul is improperly

¹⁵¹ At 442b, Plato asserts that for a virtuous soul, spirit follows its ruler (τῷ ἄρχοντι). Here, the ruler refers to reason. This idea is picked up at 443b: reason is characterized as the ruling part. At 444b, he suggests that reason is fit for rule (ἀρχικοῦ γένους).

¹⁵² As Mark Johnstone correctly points out, this enduring, value-shaping kind of rule of the soul by one of its parts is Plato's main concern when writing about psychic rule in the *Republic*. The value-shaping kind of psychic rule is contrasted with rule by force: a soul part rules by force when it triumphs in some particular instances of motivational conflicts. For comprehensive discussions of psychic rule in Plato's *Republic*, see Kraut 1973; Klosko 1988; Johnstone 2020.

structured and as a result lives badly.¹⁵³ A closer look at individuals who instantiate one of the four major types of corrupt character allows us to see that each of them, being ignorant,¹⁵⁴ has a rational part that is characterized by poor performances of both the cognitive aspect and the structural aspect of its function. For example, a tyrannical man¹⁵⁵ is bereft of any sense of shame or moderation, so his reason fails to see what is wrong with lawless actions. On top of that, he is enslaved by a mad, erotic love, which urges him to satisfy bad appetites by all possible means (572d–575a). In fact, even a timocratic man, who instantiates the least pernicious case among the four major types of corrupt character, is characterized by poor performances of the cognitive aspect and the structural aspect of reason's function. His rational part not merely fails to grasp what is truly good: it mistakes honor and victory for the highest good. It also fails to rule non-rational parts: it is dominated by spirit, which directs the entire soul to routinely value honor and victory more than anything else (548e–549b). While Plato does not deny the existence of other types of corrupt character, he thinks that they are not entirely distinct from the four major

¹⁵³ More specifically, the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical characters are dominated by distinctive kinds of non-rational elements, i.e., spirited desires for honor and victory, appetitive desires for wealth, necessary and unnecessary appetites, and erotic love. In the absence of reason's proper guidance, those non-rational elements are ill-equipped to discern and pursue what is truly good for the entire soul. Instead, they are preoccupied with obtaining what they are naturally attracted to. As a result, those corrupt characters live badly. For a comprehensive discussion, see Scott 2020.

¹⁵⁴ In Books 8 and 9, Plato inquires into human vice by examining four major types of corrupt character. So each of those characters represent a fundamental way in which a human being is vicious. At 350d, injustice is identified as ignorance and vice. So ignorance and vice presumably co-occur: an ignorant person is vicious, and a vicious person is ignorant. This point coheres with by Plato's account of human vice in the *Republic*. According to him, the function of a human being, or, more precisely, a human soul, is living a human life, which comes down to rational activities such as deliberating, ruling, and taking care of things (353d–354a). Thus, the human function is living a reason-guided life. In light of the general, functional model of vice, it is apt to infer that human vice is a state of human soul, because of which the soul performs its function—living a reason-guided life—poorly. It follows that ignorance is sufficient and necessary for human vice. An ignorant person is vicious, and a vicious person is ignorant. Since people who instantiate one of the four major types of corrupt character are vicious, they are ignorant.

¹⁵⁵ I choose to use men to refer to individuals who instantiate the four major types of corrupt character for the following reasons. First, Plato himself keeps calling those individuals men (e.g., 549d, 553a, 561e, and 573b). Second, the fact that Plato's paradigmatic examples of corrupt characters are men hints women are played a more marginal role in their socio-political context.

kinds: they are either partial instantiations or mixtures of the major ones.¹⁵⁶ Thus, features that are common to the four major types should occur to all corrupt characters. It follows that vicious people, being ignorant, have rational soul parts that are characterized by poor performances of both the cognitive and the structural aspects of their function.

So far, I have argued that the rational soul part has its own function, which consists of a cognitive aspect and a structural aspect. Recall that ignorance is the vice of the rational soul part. And Plato proposes a general, functional model of vice, which applies to everything that has its own function. We are now ready to see that in the *Republic*, Plato operates with what I call the functional model of ignorance, in line with his general, functional model of vice. Ignorance is a state of reason because of which reason performs its function poorly. The function of reason consists of a cognitive aspect, i.e., grasping truth, and a structural defect, i.e., ruling the entire soul.¹⁵⁷ An ignorant person is characterized by poor performances of both the cognitive and the structural aspects of its function. So it is apt to infer that ignorance consists of a cognitive defect and a structural defect. Because of the cognitive defect, reason fails to grasp truth; because of the structural defect, reason fails to rule the entire human soul.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ At 544c–d, Plato argues that corrupt constitutions other than the four major ones are somewhere intermediate of those four. Thus, he suggests that other corrupt constitutions are partial instantiations or mixtures of the four major ones. In his view, a city and a human soul are structurally parallel, so they share parallel accounts of virtue and vice (435c–441d). It follows that corrupt characters other than the four major ones are partial instantiations or mixtures of the four major ones.

¹⁵⁷ John Cooper puts his finger on the same point. According to him, ‘Plato assigns to reason a double job: to know the truth and to rule in light of it.’ See Cooper 1984, 6–8.

¹⁵⁸ Plato’s characterizations of the four major types of corrupt character strongly suggest that poor performances of the cognitive and the structural aspects of reason’s function amount to reason’s failing to grasp truth and rule the entire soul. For instance, the rational part of a timocratic man not merely fails to grasp what is truly good: it mistakes honor and victory for the highest good. It also fails to rule the entire soul: it is dominated by spirit, which directs the entire soul to routinely value honor and victory more than anything else (548e–549b). Likewise, the rational parts of the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical characters fail to grasp truth and rule the entire soul. As I have said in n. 36, corrupt characters other than the four major ones are partial instantiations or mixtures of the four major ones. It follows that all corrupt characters, being ignorant, have rational parts that fail to grasp truth and rule the entire soul. Hence, the

4. Genuine Falsehood

At this point, some of us might naturally wonder: what is it like for a human being to be ignorant—having her rational part in a state, because of which it performs its function poorly? To answer this question, let us turn to Plato’s discussion of genuine falsehood.¹⁵⁹

A little bit of context at the outset. Plato’s discussion of genuine falsehood occurs in his inquiry into the upbringing and education of guardians, who are indispensable to the preservation of a well-governed city. From early childhood, guardians should listen to music and poetry that have appropriate contents, styles, rhythms, and modes (377a–403c). Between 377e and 392e, Plato inquires into the appropriate contents of music and poetry, which are based on fundamental patterns about how gods and heroes should or should not be represented. His discussion of ignorance and genuine falsehood belongs to the second pattern. According to this pattern, gods should not be portrayed as either changing themselves or misleading people with falsehood, which prominently involve genuine falsehood and falsehood in words. In the following passage, Plato has Socrates explain what he means by genuine falsehood to Adeimantus.

S: Don’t you know that a genuine falsehood, if one may call it that, is hated by
all gods and humans?

A: What do you mean?

cognitive defect that ignorance involves makes reason fail to grasp truth, and the structural defect that ignorance involves makes reason fails to rule the entire soul.

¹⁵⁹ It is common to render ὡς ἀληθῶς φεῦδος (382a4, 382b7) as true falsehood (see, for instance, Woolf 2009; Baima 2017). While this rendering is correct, it might sound on the edge to an oxymoron. Notably, Plato switches between ὡς ἀληθῶς φεῦδος (382a4, 382b7) and τῷ ὄντι φεῦδος (382c4) in the context. So ὡς ἀληθῶς φεῦδος and τῷ ὄντι φεῦδος are used interchangeably. Literally, the phrases that qualify falsehood (φεῦδος), i.e., ὡς ἀληθῶς and τῷ ὄντι, mean truly and really. And Plato aims to contrast that which is truly or really falsehood with that which is an image which comes after it and is not a pure falsehood (ὑστερον γεγονὸς εἰδωλον, οὐ πάνυ ἄκρατον φεῦδος, 382c1–2), such as falsehood in word. So that which is truly or really falsehood means real or genuine falsehood as opposed to impure falsehood. For those reasons, I decide to render ὡς ἀληθῶς φεῦδος and τῷ ὄντι φεῦδος as genuine falsehood.

S: I mean that no one is willing to lie/be deceived in the most authoritative part of himself about the most authoritative things, but of all places, he is most afraid of having acquired falsehood there.

A: I still don't understand.

S: That's because you think I'm saying something deep. I simply mean that to lie/be deceived and to have lied /have been deceived in one's soul about the things that are, to be ignorant, and to have and to have acquired falsehood there, is what everyone would least of all accept, for everyone hates a falsehood in that place most of all.

A: That's true.

S: Surely, as I said just now, this would be most correctly called genuine falsehood—incomprehension in the soul of someone who has lied/ has been deceived. Falsehood in words is a kind of imitation of this affection in the soul, an image of it that comes into being after it and is not a pure falsehood. Isn't that so?

A: Certainly.

S: And the thing that is really a falsehood is hated not only by the gods but by human beings as well.

A: It seems to me.

(382a–382c)¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Οὐκ οἶσθα, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὅτι τό γε ὡς ἀληθῶς ψευδός, εἰ οἷόν τε τοῦτο εἰπεῖν, πάντες θεοί τε καὶ ἄνθρωποι μισοῦσιν;

Πῶς, ἔφη, λέγεις;

Οὕτως, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὅτι τῶ κυριωτάτῳ που ἑαυτῶν ψεύδεσθαι καὶ περὶ τὰ κυριώτατα οὐδεὶς ἐκὼν ἐθέλει, ἀλλὰ πάντων μάλιστα φοβεῖται ἐκεῖ αὐτὸ κεκτῆσθαι.

Before digging into the relationship between ignorance and genuine falsehood, I would like to make a linguistic comment about the passage above. The passage hinges on the verb ψεύδω, which, meaning to deceive or cheat, have identical forms in the middle voice and the passive voice when it comes to the present and the perfect tenses. More specifically, ψεύδεσθαι can serve as either a present middle infinitive, meaning to lie,¹⁶¹ or a present passive infinitive, meaning to be deceived; ἐψεῦσθαι can serve as either a perfect middle infinitive, meaning to have lied, or a perfect passive infinitive, meaning to have been deceived. It is sometimes difficult to tell whether a particular occurrence of the verb functions as a middle infinitive or a passive infinitive.¹⁶² In order to be faithful to this underdeterminacy, I choose to render ψεύδεσθαι and ἐψεῦσθαι at 382b2 as ‘to lie/be deceived’ and ‘to have lied/have been deceived’ respectively.

In the passage above, Plato makes a somewhat surprising claim about falsehood: genuine falsehood is a cognitive deficiency that afflicts ignorant people. According to

Οὐδὲ νῦν πω, ἢ δ’ ὅς, μανθάνω.

Οἷι γάρ τί με, ἔφην, σεμνὸν λέγειν. ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὅτι τῇ ψυχῇ περὶ τὰ ὄντα ψεύδεσθαι τε καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι καὶ ἀμαθὴ εἶναι καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἔχειν τε καὶ κεκτῆσθαι τὸ ψεῦδος πάντες ἡκιστ’ ἂν δέξαιντο, καὶ μισοῦσι μάλιστα αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ.

Πολύ γε, ἔφη.

Ἀλλὰ μὴν ὀρθότατά γ’ ἄν, ὃ νυνδὴ ἔλεγον, τοῦτο ὡς ἀληθῶς ψεῦδος καλοῖτο, ἢ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἄγνοια ἢ τοῦ ἐψευσμένου· ἐπεὶ τό γε ἐν τοῖς λόγοις μίμημά τι τοῦ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἐστὶν παθήματος καὶ ὕστερον γεγονὸς εἰδωλόν, οὐ πάνυ ἄκρατον ψεῦδος. ἢ οὐχ οὕτω;

Πάνυ μὲν οὔν.

Τὸ μὲν δὴ τῷ ὄντι ψεῦδος οὐ μόνον ὑπὸ θεῶν ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπ’ ἀνθρώπων μισεῖται.

Δοκεῖ μοι.

¹⁶¹ I choose to follow Malcom Schofield, who suggests that if ψεύδεσθαι is in the middle voice, it should be rendered as to lie; if it is in the passive voice, it should be rendered as to be deceived. See Schofield 2007, 144.

¹⁶² For instance, at 382b2, Socrates characterizes ignorant people as ‘to lie/be deceived and to have lied/have been deceived in their souls about the things that are (τῇ ψυχῇ περὶ τὰ ὄντα ψεύδεσθαι τε καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι).’ Some scholars try to determine the exact voice of the present infinitive ψεύδεσθαι at 382b2. On the one hand, Schofield, rendering it as ‘to lie’, implies that the infinitive is in the middle voice. On the other hand, Harte holds that it is in the passive voice (Schofield 2007; Harte 2013). It seems unclear to me whether the immediate context offers any conclusive clue to rule out either possibility. In fact, Plato might have both possibilities in mind: an ignorant person, suffering from genuine falsehood, both lies to herself and, as a result, is deceived.

him, genuine falsehood is an affection (πάθημα) of the human soul. More specifically, it is the incomprehension (ἄγνοια) that afflicts someone who has lied/been deceived (ἐψευσμένου, 382b7–8) in her soul about things that are (τὰ ὄντα). And this person is ignorant (ἄμαθῃ) (382b1–4). Incomprehension, as I have argued, encompasses a variety of cognitive deficiencies, such as misjudgments, a lack of familiarity, and true opinions that nonetheless fall short of knowledge. Hence, genuine falsehood, to a first approximation, is a cognitive deficiency that characterizes ignorant people. At 382b8–c1, Plato distinguishes genuine falsehood from falsehood in word. The latter is not a pure falsehood. Instead, it is some sort of imitation (μίμημά τι) and image that comes after (ὑστερον γεγονὸς εἰδωλον) genuine falsehood. In this way, he departs from modern theories of truth, which take the primary bearer of truth and falsehood to be propositions or propositional items, such as sentences and utterances.¹⁶³ In his view, the primary bearer of falsehood is the soul of an ignorant person.

If genuine falsehood is a cognitive deficiency that afflicts ignorant people, what does this deficiency amount to? The first step to answering this question is noting that the deficiency in question deals prominently with evaluative matters. At 382a8, Plato claims that genuine falsehood is concerned with ‘the most authoritative things (τὰ κυριώτατα).’ A few lines later, he calls the same things ‘the things that are (τὰ ὄντα)’ at 382b2. Recall that Plato’s discussion of genuine falsehood occurs in his elaboration on the fundamental patterns on which the contents of music and poetry should be based. Those patterns deal primarily with how gods and heroes, as exemplars of excellence which ordinary human beings emulate, should be represented. In a nutshell, gods and heroes are and should be

¹⁶³ Harte’s discussion on this point is particularly illuminating. See Harte 2013, 147. For a comprehensive discussion of modern theories of truth, see Glanzberg 2009.

represented as truthful, courageous, moderate, and free from bad actions and violent passions. It is accordingly apt to infer that ‘the most authoritative things (τὰ κυριώτατα)’ and ‘the things that are (τὰ ὄντα)’ refer prominently to evaluative matters. At 392a–b, Plato seems to pick up a similar idea with a slightly different phase—the most important matters (τὰ μέγιστα). According to him, what poets and prose-writers tell about the most important matters (τὰ μέγιστα) concerning human beings is wrong. The matters in question crucially involve evaluative ones, such as that justice is another’s good but one’s own loss and that injustice is profitable. Therefore, genuine falsehood deals prominently with evaluative matters.¹⁶⁴

A closer look at the context allows us to see that genuine falsehood, as the cognitive deficiency that afflicts ignorant people, crucially involves having incorrect views about evaluative matters. In the context where Plato discusses what genuine falsehood amounts to, he aims to establish that gods do not deceive human beings by making the latter believe that gods can appear in all sorts of ways. To substantiate his position, he contends that genuine falsehood is hated by all gods and human beings. One idea behind this contention is that genuine falsehood, as the cognitive deficiency that afflicts ignorant people, is bad simpliciter. According to Plato, gods, being really good, are not the cause of anything bad (379b–c). It follows that gods not only are free from genuine falsehood but also refrain from presenting misleading images about themselves

¹⁶⁴ Woolf holds that the phrases ‘the most authoritative things (τὰ κυριώτατα)’ and ‘the things that are (τὰ ὄντα)’ refer to the Platonic Forms. Nevertheless, these phrases occur in the context where Plato has Socrates explain what genuine falsehood amounts to to Adeimantus and other interlocutors. By this stage of the argument, Plato has not started his discussion of the Forms, which his interlocutors are utterly unfamiliar with. But they seem to understand what Plato means by genuine falsehood. So the phrases in question are unlikely to stand for the Forms. My interpretation is in line with Baima, who calls the things that ‘the most authoritative things (τὰ κυριώτατα)’ and ‘the things that are (τὰ ὄντα)’ refer to ‘normative commitments.’ See Woolf 2009; Baima 2017.

and thus making human beings suffer from it. Had gods presented misleading images about themselves, human beings would have had incorrect views. As I have argued, genuine falsehood deals primarily with evaluative matters. Accordingly, the cognitive deficiency that afflicts ignorant people crucially involves having incorrect views about evaluative matters.

Notably, genuine falsehood is operative not only at the moment but also in the long run. As we have seen, at 382b, Plato characterizes genuine falsehood as follows: ‘to lie/be deceived and to have lied /have been deceived in one’s soul about the things that are, to be ignorant, and to have and to have acquired falsehood there (ὅτι τῇ ψυχῇ περὶ τὰ ὄντα ψεύδεσθαί τε καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι καὶ ἀμαθῆ εἶναι καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἔχειν τε καὶ κεκτηῖσθαι τὸ ψεῦδος).’ He twice switches from a present infinitive to a perfect infinitive. More specifically, he first switches from ‘to lie/be deceived (ψεύδεσθαί)’ to ‘to have lied/have been deceived (ἐψεῦσθαι)’, and then from ‘to have (ἔχειν)’ to ‘to have acquired (κεκτηῖσθαι)’. It is worth pointing out that a present infinitive and a perfect infinitive have different connotations. While the former indicates that the activity in question is ongoing,¹⁶⁵ the latter indicates that the activity in question has been completed with a lasting result that persists into the present.¹⁶⁶ Accordingly, the juxtaposition of present infinitives and perfect infinitives at 382b points to two stages in which genuine falsehood affects ignorant people.¹⁶⁷ On the one hand, present infinitives indicate that genuine falsehood afflicts ignorant people at the moment. Accordingly, ignorant people are

¹⁶⁵ Smyth 1956, 1865a.

¹⁶⁶ Smyth 1956, 1865c.

¹⁶⁷ A similar juxtaposition of present and perfect infinitives occurs in Socrates’ account of ignorance at *Protagoras* 358c. Ignorance, as Socrates puts it, is to have false belief and to have been deceived about matters of great importance (τὸ ψευδῆ ἔχειν δόξαν καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων τῶν πολλοῦ ἀξίων). See Liu 2022.

characterized by ongoing, incorrect views about evaluative matters. On the other hand, perfect infinitives indicate that genuine falsehood has been affecting ignorant people over such a long time that it becomes entrenched. So ignorant people routinely err with regard to evaluative matters.

Our inquiry into Plato's discussion of genuine falsehood allows us to have a better grasp of what an ignorant person is like. An ignorant person is characterized by genuine falsehood, which turns out to involve a complex of ongoing and enduring mistakes about evaluative matters. That is to say, she is characterized by not only incorrect views about evaluative matters at the moment but also a deep-seated susceptibility to err with regard to those matters. Recall that ignorance involves a cognitive defect, because of which reason fails to grasp truth, So genuine falsehood testifies to the cognitive defect.

But ignorance consists of not only a cognitive defect but also a structural defect. Because of the latter, reason fails to rule the entire human soul. At this point, one might naturally wonder: how does the structural defect that ignorance involves manifest itself? Let us turn to this question in the next section.

5. Self-deception

A closer look at Plato's discussion of genuine falsehood allows us to see that an ignorant person actively maintains her mistakes about evaluative matters. As we have seen, Plato unpacks what he means by genuine falsehood as follows: to lie/be deceived and to have lied/have been deceived in one's soul about the things that are, to be ignorant, and to have and to have acquired falsehood there (τῇ ψυχῇ περὶ τὰ ὄντα ψεύδεσθαι τε καὶ ἐψεῦσθαι καὶ ἀμαθῆ εἶναι καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἔχειν τε καὶ κεκτηῖσθαι τὸ ψεῦδος; 382b). The perfect active

infinitive, ‘to have acquired (κεκτηῖσθαι)’, which occurs in the culminating phrase ‘to have acquired falsehood there’, is significant. On the one hand, it, being active in voice, indicates that an ignorant person plays a somewhat active role in her experience with falsehood: she acquires it, or, more literally, procures it for herself. On the other hand, the fact that it is in the perfect tense strongly suggests that the activity that it refers to has been completed with a lasting result that persists into the present.¹⁶⁸ An ignorant person not just obtains and is thus misled by falsehood on some particular occasions. She also keeps on being misled by falsehood in the long run. Recall that the falsehood in question is concerned with ‘the most authoritative things (τὰ κυριώτατα)’ and ‘the things that are (τὰ ὄντα)’. These phrases refer prominently to evaluative matters, such as that justice is another’s good but one’s own loss and that injustice is profitable. Hence, by characterizing an ignorant person as having acquired falsehood, Plato hints that she actively maintains her misguided views about evaluative matters in the long run. How does she manage to do that?

The cave allegory points to the following answer: an ignorant person actively maintains her misguided views about evaluative matters in the long run by keeping on adhering to them, even when she has access to facts to the contrary. In the allegory, ignorant people are likened to prisoners, who have been confined in a dark, underground cave from birth. With their heads and legs being fettered, they can only see shadows of artefacts that are cast on the wall in front of them. In the cave, social interactions among prisoners are centered on those shadows; rewards, such as honors, praises, and political power, are distributed on the basis of individuals’ competence to discern or predict

¹⁶⁸ cf. n. 165.

shadows. Under these circumstances, prisoners become convinced that shadows constitute the entire truth. Their convictions about the truth of shadows are so firm that even when they are liberated and revealed that what they regard as the entire truth are mere shadows of artefacts, they insist that shadows are truer and clearer than artefacts. What's worse, the liberation and revelation make prisoners feel painful, dazzled, and even angry. They tend to run away towards shadows and, if possible, try to kill their liberator (514a–517a).¹⁶⁹ In this way, the cave allegory vividly illustrates how an ignorant person actively maintains her misguided views about evaluative matters in the long run. Just as prisoners stick to their conviction that shadows constitute the entire truth, in spite of their accessibility to facts to the contrary, so an ignorant person keeps on adhering to her misguided views about evaluative matters, even when she has access to facts to the contrary.

The message from the cave allegory is substantiated by Plato's descriptions of the four major types of corrupt character, i.e., the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical. These characters, being ignorant, adhere to their misguided views about evaluative matters, even when their grip is shown to be lacking. For instance, an oligarchic man, being dominated by appetitive desires for money, erroneously values money more than anything else. In spite of his mistakes, he does not allow reason and spirit, which in principle have the relevant cognitive resources, to question the real value of money. Instead, he only allows reason and spirit to engage in activities under the

¹⁶⁹ At *Phaedo* 82d–83e, Plato similarly compares ignorant people to prisoners. Unlike the cave allegory in the *Republic*, where interactions among fellow prisoners are featured, the *Phaedo* passage focuses on how the desires of a prisoner contribute to and perpetuate her incarceration. In other words, the *Phaedo* passage focuses on how the desires of an ignorant person contribute to and perpetuate her own ignorance. In spite of that difference, Plato claims that ignorant people play an active role in the acquisition and maintaining of their ignorance in both the cave allegory in the *Republic* and *Phaedo* 82d–83e.

assumption that money is the most valuable thing. More specifically, he only allows reason to deliberate about or examine how to make more money; he only allows spirit to value or admire wealth or wealthy people or to have ambition about the acquisition of wealth or that which contributes to getting it (553c–d).¹⁷⁰ Accordingly, his reason and spirit become unadapted to question the real value of money. So even if he is shown that money is not the most valuable thing, he is likely to adhere to rather than readily give up his misguided view.¹⁷¹ A similar adherence to misguided views about evaluative matters also occurs to other types of corrupt character. A timocratic man stubbornly attaches himself to pursuits of honor and victory (548e–549a); a democratic man, putting all pleasures on an equal footing, refuses to listen to the truth that while some pleasures are beneficial, others are harmful (561b–c); a tyrannical man is enslaved by a mad, erotic love, which makes him single-mindedly devoted to gratifying appetitive desires, regardless of the arguments, criticisms, or protests that he might encounter (572e–575a).¹⁷² The four major types of corrupt character are representative of other types, which are partial instantiations or mixtures of the major ones.¹⁷³ From here, it is not far-fetched to infer that an ignorant and vicious person keeps on adhering to her misguided views about evaluative matters, even when she has access to facts to the contrary.

¹⁷⁰ As Dominic Scott has convincingly argued, this description actually occurs in the development of an oligarchic youth, but it is still highly relevant to the man that he becomes. See Scott 2020, 89–90.

¹⁷¹ A similar point can be found in an oligarchic constitution. According to Plato, it, though either forces of arms or terrorization, institutes a wealth qualification: those whose property does not reach the stated amount are not qualified to rule (551a–b). The fact that an oligarchic constitution resorts to forces of arms or terrorization to institute a wealth qualification hints that it is ready to suppress or even silence contrary voices, even if the latter turn out to be reasonable.

¹⁷² Corrupt characters keep on adhering to evaluative matters at different degrees. For instance, by characterizing a timocratic man as simply being more stubborn than a virtuous man, Plato does not deny that the former could be moved by truth. By contrast, a democratic man refuses to listen to the truth that while some pleasures are beneficial, others are harmful.

¹⁷³ See n. 155.

At this point, we are ready to see that Plato conceives of ignorant people as suffering from a distinctive form of self-deception. They keep on adhering to misguided views about evaluative matters, even when they have access to facts to the contrary. In fact, as the cave allegory illustrates, their attachment to those misguided views can only be weakened if they are constantly under the influence of someone, who has the power to somewhat compel them to attend to truth.¹⁷⁴ Thus, it is apt to infer that ignorant people are disposed to maintain misguided views about evaluative matters, even when they have access to facts to the contrary. This characterization captures the gist of what is labeled as self-deception today: a self-deceiver maintains incorrect views, even though she has access to evidence to the contrary.¹⁷⁵ Therefore, ignorant people fall prey to what is nowadays called self-deception.¹⁷⁶ Nevertheless, it is worth bearing in mind that the kind of self-deception that ignorant people suffer from is distinctive in the following ways. For ease of presentation, I will call the self-deception in question the Platonic self-deception from now on. First, while the Platonic self-deception is concerned primarily with evaluative matters, that which we call self-deception today covers not just evaluative

¹⁷⁴ In the cave allegory, ignorant people are compared to prisoners, who have been confined in a dark, underground cave from birth and thus regard shadows that are cast on the wall in front of them as the entire truth. The revelation that what they regard as the entire truth are mere shadows of artefacts makes them feel painful, dazzled, and even angry. They, insisting that the shadows are truer, tend to run away towards those shadows and, if possible, try to kill their liberator. The tendency at issue can only be curbed if the prisoners are constantly under the control of someone else, who, in spite of their resistance, has the power to compel them to get closer to and see things that have more truth. In light of the cave allegory, we can infer that the ignorant's attachment to misguided views about evaluative matters can only be weakened if they are under the influence of someone for a long time, who has the power to somewhat compel them to attend to truth.

¹⁷⁵ For a nice survey of contemporary discussions on self-deception, see Deweese-Boyd 2021.

¹⁷⁶ In her article, Harte insightfully draws our attention to the close connection between ignorance and self-deception.

As she puts it, ignorance is a form of (self-) deception. But she does not elaborate on the differences between the Platonic notion of self-deception and paradigmatic cases of self-deception in contemporary discussions. In addition, while I agree that in the *Republic* ignorance is closely connected with self-deception, I don't think that ignorance is a form of self-deception. As I will argue in the rest of this chapter, the kind of self-deception that characterizes ignorant people is rooted in ignorance. More specifically, it is rooted in the structural defect that ignorance involves.

matters but also other aspects of reality, such as historical facts and natural facts. For instance, a self-deceiving holocaust denier refuses to acknowledge the occurrence of the Holocaust, in spite of being confronted with facts to the contrary. Hence, the Platonic self-deception has a narrower domain of subject matters. Second, as I have argued, an ignorant person, suffering from the Platonic self-deception, is disposed to maintain misguided views about evaluative matters. Thus, it is apt to infer that the Platonic self-deception is a disposition of the ignorant. By contrast, the focal point of contemporary discussions on self-deception consists in token cases of doxastic or quasi-doxastic attitudes, such as the belief that the Holocaust never happened and the pretense that not getting enough exercise does not harm one's long-term health.¹⁷⁷

The Platonic self-deception is rooted in the impotence of reason over non-rational parts: instead of ruling non-rational parts, reason becomes subordinated to them. Plato's discussion of the four major types of corrupt character—the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical—is again illuminating. These characters, being ignorant, suffer from the Platonic self-deception. For instance, an oligarchic man, albeit erroneously desiring and valuing money over anything else, does not make enough room for doubts about the real value of money (553c–d). A democratic man, putting all pleasures on an equal footing, refuses to listen to the truth that while some pleasures are beneficial, others are harmful (561b–c). Those cases of the Platonic self-deception occur because the subjects are, instead of ruled by reason, in the grip of non-rational desires. An oligarchic man has trouble taking in doubts about the real value of money because

¹⁷⁷ Many contemporary philosophers hold that self-deception deals primarily with token cases of doxastic attitudes, and in particular, beliefs, see, for instance, Davidson 1986; Johnston 1988; Recently, some scholars contend that the focal points of self-deception are quasi-doxastic attitudes, such as pretense and desires. See Gendler 2007; Egan 2009.

the dominant, appetitive desires for money only allow reason and spirit to engage in activities under the assumption that money is the most valuable thing. A democratic man refuses to listen to truth about pleasures because his unnecessary appetites for potentially harmful indulgences do not permit it to enter his soul.¹⁷⁸ Hence, the Platonic self-deception is rooted in the impotence of reason over non-rational parts.¹⁷⁹

We are now ready to see how the structural defect that ignorance involves can manifest itself. Recall that because of the structural defect, reason fails to rule the entire soul. The Platonic self-deception—a disposition to maintain misguided views about evaluative matters, even when one has access to facts to the contrary—is rooted in the impotence of reason over non-rational parts. Accordingly, the Platonic self-deception attests to the structural defect that ignorance involves. That is to say, the structural defect that ignorance involves can manifest itself in the Platonic self-deception.

¹⁷⁸ Plato's account of how a full-fledged democratic man emerges is illuminating. As he puts it, even after a democratic youth comes to find it shameful to gratify unnecessary appetites for potentially harmful indulgences, his poor upbringing still nurtures some of those appetites, which, over time, become dominant. Those appetites carry along kindred, misguided thoughts and beliefs, which 'close the gates of the royal wall within him' (560a–e). That is to say, the dominance of unnecessary appetites implants kindred thoughts, which do not permit truth about evaluative matters to enter his soul. As Dominic Scott convincingly argues, appetites are ultimately responsible for frustrating any attempt to persuade the young man otherwise (Scott 2020, 96).

¹⁷⁹ Admittedly, the rational parts of manual workers, who presumably stand for the majority of craftspeople, are weak by nature (590c). But Plato suggests that in a good city, those people can be ruled by reason in an extended sense. As he puts it, law is the ally of everyone precisely because it ensures that everyone is ruled by divine wisdom (590c–591a). Thus, people who lack divine wisdom can be ruled by it by adhering to law that is drafted in accordance with divine wisdom. Divine wisdom is presumably the consummate achievement of reason, which requires a comprehensive understanding of the Forms. In this way, Plato hints that people, who fall short of wisdom, can be ruled by reason in an extended way by adhering to law that is drafted in accordance with divine reason. Therefore, manual workers and other non-philosophers are ruled by reason in an extended sense. Their rational parts, with the support of law, do not have to be impotent over non-rational parts. One interesting implication is that in a good city, non-philosophers are not necessarily ignorant. If this is the case, Plato operates with a less pessimistic view about the cognitive conditions of non-philosophers in a good city than some scholars, for example, Chris Bobonich, have attributed to him. I will come back to this point in Section 6.

One might ask: how does the impotence of reason over non-rational parts occur? I have to concede that in the *Republic*, Plato does not offer an explicit and conclusive answer to this question. But his comments on the development of corrupt characters point to a salient possibility.¹⁸⁰ The impotence of reason occurs largely because of one's continuous association with the deeply concerning socio-political contexts. To see this point, consider how a timocratic youth becomes a full-fledged, timocratic man. As Plato puts it, a timocratic youth is constantly subject to a mix of beneficial and harmful influences. On the one hand, his virtuous father dedicates himself to learning and avoids unjust deeds at all costs. Accordingly, his father can be seen as a living exemplar of what reason desires and values, i.e., learning and truth. On the other hand, his mother complains that her husband should care more about money and political power; in his city, just people are scorned and disrespected, whereas unjust ones are honored and praised. Thus, the rest of household and society, to which a timocratic youth belongs, cohere with the values and desires of non-rational parts. According to Plato, while the virtuous father nourishes and strengthens the youth's reason, the rest of his household and society nourish and strengthen his non-rational parts. Hence, each soul part is nourished and strengthened as a result of continuous association with things that are in line with its desires and values. Plato has a rather gloomy picture about the socio-political contexts that most human beings belong to. As the cave allegory illustrates, most human beings lack the appropriate education and are thus ignorant and vicious.¹⁸¹ Most political constitutions are vicious: even the best among existing ones, such as Sparta and Crete, are

¹⁸⁰ I don't mean to deny other possible ways in which reason becomes impotent. My point is only that continuous association with the deeply concerning socio-political contexts is a particularly prominent and worrisome way.

¹⁸¹ See n.120.

corrupt.¹⁸² Vicious human beings and political constitutions are dominated by non-rational elements, which, lacking the cognitive resources to seek and pursue what is truly good, are erroneously attracted to things that often turn out to be harmful, including, for example, honor, money, and bodily pleasures. Human beings are almost inescapably embedded in their socio-political contexts: from there, they obtain many things that are integral to their survival and well-being, such as sustenance, education, and companionship. Therefore, it is not far-fetched to infer that the impotence of reason occurs largely due to continuous association with the deeply concerning socio-political contexts.

In this section, I have argued that ignorant people suffer from a distinctive form of self-deception, which I label as the Platonic self-deception. It is a disposition to maintain incorrect views about evaluative matters, even when one has access to facts to the contrary. The Platonic self-deception is rooted in the impotence of reason over non-rational parts, so it attests to the structural defect that ignorance involve. This impotence occurs largely due to one's continuous association with the deeply concerning socio-political contexts.

6. Two Implications: Degrees of Ignorance and Pessimism

Before closing, I would like to sketch out two implications that our discussions on genuine falsehood and the Platonic self-deception have for Plato's conception of ignorance. First, ignorance can occur at different levels of severity. As I have argued, ignorance consists of a cognitive defect and a structural defect. While the cognitive defect

¹⁸² At 544a, Plato claims that the constitutions of Sparta and Crete, albeit praised by most people, are still corrupt.

is attested to by genuine falsehood, which involves a complex of ongoing and enduring mistakes about evaluative matters, the structural defect is evinced by the Platonic self-deception, which is a disposition to maintain incorrect views about evaluative matters. The nature of genuine falsehood and the Platonic self-deception points to two dimensions in which ignorance can occur at different levels of severity. The first dimension, call it *the errancy of views*, stands for the extents to which incorrect views about evaluative matters depart from what is genuinely fine and good. The second dimension, call it *stubbornness*, i.e., the degrees at which one is likely to maintain those views. Those dimensions are nicely illustrated by Plato's characterizations of the four major types of corrupt character. For ease of presentation, let us focus on a timocratic man and a democratic man. Consider first the errancy of views. Both a timocratic man and a democratic man have misguided views about evaluative matters. Nevertheless, while the former, valuing honor and victory more than anything else, finds it unseemingly to indulge in appetitive pleasures,¹⁸³ the latter puts all pleasures on an equal footing (561b–c). In comparison with honor and victory, appetitive pleasures are further away from what is genuinely fine and good.¹⁸⁴ So a democratic man's views about evaluative matters are more errant. Let us now turn to stubbornness. As we have seen, a democratic man refuses

¹⁸³ To see this point, consider the timocratic constitution, which is structurally parallel to a timocratic character. A timocratic city, such as Sparta and Crete, is keen on physical training and military stratagems, which are conducive to victory in the battlefield. Indulgence in bodily pleasures presumably leads to unhealthy bodies and soft characters, which are unfit for military success. So it should be despised in a timocratic city. In light of the structural parallel between a timocratic constitution and a timocratic soul, it is apt to infer that a timocratic man finds indulgence in appetitive pleasures unseemingly.

¹⁸⁴ At 586e–587e, Plato argues that the life of a philosopher ruler is seven hundred and twenty-nine times more pleasant than that of a tyrant. In this argument, he implicitly appeals to a ranking of different ways of living, along with their characteristic values and desires. The best life is the philosophical life, which is characterized by truth, order, and law. Other ways of living are ranked on the basis of their distance from the philosophical life. A timocratic life, valuing and desiring honor and victory more than anything else, is better than a democratic life, which is dominated by appetitive pleasures and desires. Hence, in comparison with honors and victory, appetitive pleasures are further away from what is genuinely fine and good.

to listen to sound arguments that some pleasures are harmful. By contrast, a timocratic man, albeit being more obstinate than a virtuous man, is not described as so resistant to sound arguments. Thus, a democratic man is more likely to maintain incorrect views about evaluative matters and is thus more stubborn.¹⁸⁵

Moreover, Plato has a less pessimistic picture about the epistemological conditions of non-philosophers in a good city than some scholars have attributed to him. According to the pessimists' picture, even the best non-philosophers in a good city, i.e., warrior-auxiliaries, instantiate a corrupt, timocratic character. They, unable to examine the Forms and appreciate what is genuinely fine and good, are vicious and ignorant.¹⁸⁶ Our discussions on genuine falsehood and the Platonic self-deception militate against the pessimists' picture. Recall that genuine falsehood and the Platonic-self-deception, which testify to the cognitive defect and the structural defect that constitute ignorance, deal primarily with incorrect views about evaluative matters. A closer look at a good city strongly suggests that non-philosophers there, and in particular, warrior-auxiliaries, are not particularly susceptible to incorrect views about evaluative matters. According to Plato, in such a city, poetry, paintings, and other works of art are full of truthful representations of what is fine and good.¹⁸⁷ Laws aim to instill correct patterns of

¹⁸⁵ Towards the end of the cave allegory, Plato contends that one is unable to discern things that surround oneself in two different sets of scenarios. On the one hand, one is adjusting from a brighter life—a life of contemplation, for instance—to a dimmer one—such as a life of politics and a life of money-making. On the other hand, one comes from greater ignorance into greater light and is dazzled by the increased brilliance (518a). The phrase 'greater ignorance' hints that ignorance can occur at different levels of severity.

¹⁸⁶ Bobonich develops a rich and nuanced picture of the epistemological conditions of non-philosophers in a good city along the line of pessimists. According to him, even the best non-philosophers, i.e., warrior-auxiliaries, are unable to examine the Forms and appreciate what is genuinely fine and good. In fact, they are dominated by spirit and accordingly have the timocratic character. Timocratic people, instantiating one of the four major types of corrupt character, are vicious. A vicious person is necessarily ignorant. In this way, Bobonich should agree that warrior-auxiliaries are vicious and ignorant. See Bobonich 2002, 42–58.

¹⁸⁷ At 401b–d, Plato asserts that in a good city, besides music and poetry, other works of art, such as paintings and architecture, should contain truthful representations of what is genuine fine and good.

responses.¹⁸⁸ As a result, people, including non-philosophers, are likely to internalize correct views about evaluative matters.¹⁸⁹ At 430a–b, Plato asserts in the case of warrior-auxiliaries, these views are so entrenched that they are almost ineradicable. Therefore, in a good city, non-philosophers, albeit falling short of wisdom and virtue, are not necessarily ignorant and vicious.

7. Conclusion

In closing, I would like to consider how Plato's conception of ignorance illuminates his epistemological and educational projects in the *Republic*. Since Plato thinks that most human beings are ignorant, his conception of ignorance points to what he regards as the fundamental epistemological defects of the majority. Their reason is in a corrupt state, i.e., ignorance, which makes reason perform its function poorly. The state at issue consists of a cognitive defect, because of which reason fails to grasp truth, and a structural defect, because of which reason fails to rule the entire human soul. The cognitive defect is attested to by genuine falsehood, a cognitive deficiency that involves a complex of ongoing and enduring mistakes about evaluative matters. That is to say, most human beings fall prey to incorrect views about evaluative matters not just at some specific moments but also in the long run. The structural defect is attested to by the Platonic self-deception, which is a disposition to maintain incorrect views about evaluative matters. In other words, most human beings keep on adhering to incorrect views about evaluative matters, even when they have access to facts to the contrary.

¹⁸⁸ At 604a–d, Plato suggests that in a good city, laws aim to instill correct patterns of responses, such as that it is best to keep as quiet as possible in misfortunes and not get excited about them.

¹⁸⁹ At 377a–378e, Plato argues that the opinions about evaluative matters that are developed at a young age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable.

But why are ignorant people so attached to incorrect views about evaluative matters as to be somewhat unresponsive to facts? Plato's answer to this question casts light on what he takes to be the main challenges to ameliorate, correct, or prevent ignorance. The unresponsiveness in question is a manifestation of the Platonic self-deception, i.e., a disposition to maintain incorrect views about evaluative matters. This disposition is rooted in the impotence of reason over non-rational parts, which occurs largely because of one's continuous association with the deeply concerning socio-political contexts. In Plato's view, the socio-political contexts that most people belong to are corrosive. And human beings are almost inescapably embedded in their socio-political contexts: from there, they obtain many things that are integral to their survival and well-being, such as sustenance, education, and companionship. Hence, the main challenge to alleviate, correct, or prevent ignorance is the pervasive and continuous association with the deeply concerning socio-political contexts. To overcome ignorance, we need to not only cultivate our reason but also work together to improve our socio-political contexts.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ The discussion of the ideal city can be seen as containing a somewhat radical proposal along this line—creating a new socio-political context that is entirely free from corrosive elements. To be frank, the practicality of such an ambitious proposal is open to doubt (472d–473b). But it is not hard to imagine that some less ambitious plans, such as better education system and some sort of meritocracy, can make a difference to the existing socio-political contexts.

Chapter 4. Human Vice in the *Republic*

1. Introduction

So far, we have seen that the Socratic dialogues and the *Republic* operate with two different conceptions of ignorance. According to the former, ignorance is a substantive, structural psychic flaw: the human soul's domination by inferior elements that are by nature fit to be ruled instead of ruling. The inferior elements at issue are appearances—representations of how things strike one to be from certain perspectives. According to the latter, ignorance is the vice specific to the rational part of a human soul. More specifically, ignorance is a state of reason because of which reason performs its function poorly. And this function consists of a cognitive aspect, i.e., grasping truth, and a structural aspect, i.e., ruling the entire human soul. Moreover, I have argued that the conception of ignorance in the Socratic dialogues paves the way for a distinctive account of human vice. Defects that are nowadays called epistemic vices and moral vices are forms of ignorance. An epistemic vice—wishful thinking about one's cognitive conditions—is the common core of all other epistemic and moral vices. At this point, we might naturally wonder: does the *Republic* contain a different account of human vice? If so, what is it? How does human vice stand in relation to ignorance, according to this account?

I propose to answer those questions in the current chapter. A little bit of context at the outset. Throughout the *Republic*, Plato makes extensive comments on human vice, sometimes in connection with ignorance. Those comments seem to point to two groups of human vices. On the one hand, his extended discussion on human vice in Books 8 and 9 focuses on four major types of corrupt character, namely, the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical. Each of them, standing in parallel to a corrupt political

constitution, represents a progressively graver deviation from the order and harmony that are characteristic of a virtuous human soul and the corresponding political constitution. On the other hand, Plato occasionally refers to ignorance, injustice, licentiousness, as well as many other particular defects. For instance, he notes that in traditional music and poetry, Achilles, a hero whom human beings emulate, is represented as slavish and arrogant (391c); a lavish way of living, marked by banquets, pastries, and delicacies, leads to licentiousness and physical illness (404b–e). Those two groups of human vices—the four major types of corrupt character and particular defects, such as licentiousness and ignorance—are inter-connected. For instance, a tyrannical person, who happens to be a tyrant in a city, is characterized as being untrustworthy, unjust, friendless, impious, and host and nurse to every kind of vice (580a). Just as human virtue is characterized as health of a human soul, so human vice is characterized as illness of a human soul (444b–e).¹⁹¹

Existing discussions in the secondary literature deal almost exclusively with the first group of human vices, i.e., four major types of corrupt character. The majority of them examine one of those types.¹⁹² A small group inquire into the transition as a result of which someone acquires a worse type of character.¹⁹³ While those discussions provide

¹⁹¹ Those characterizations seem to run throughout the *Republic*. At 544c, Plato calls a corrupt political constitution, which stands in parallel to a corrupt human soul, an ill constitution. So it is not far-fetched to infer that a corrupt human soul is an ill soul. At 392c, slavishness and arrogance—particular defects that are sometimes dubbed as human vice—are called illnesses of soul.

¹⁹² For a comprehensive study of the tyrannical constitution and character, see Arruzza 2019. For papers that focus on the tyrannical character, see Johnstone 2015; Nielsen 2019. For discussions of the democratic character, see Scott 2000; Johnstone 2013. For studies of oligarchic constitution and character, see Jorgenson 2021; Sikkenga 2002; For discussions of the timocratic character, see Wilberding 2009.

¹⁹³ Irwin, 1995; Johnstone 2012. In his latest book, Dominic Scott inquires into both the four major types of corrupt character and the transition as a result of which a person acquires a worse type of soul. See Scott 2020. For a comprehensive discussion of the four major types of corrupt character and the transition, see also Lane, forthcoming.

us with an invaluable insight into the nature and the coming-to-be of major types of corrupt character, they do not automatically address the following questions, which are integral to uncovering the account of human vice that is developed in the *Republic*. As I have noted, human vice stand for both major types of corrupt character and particular defects in the *Republic*. So it is natural to wonder what kind of account of human vice does Plato offer there. More specifically, how do the four major types of corrupt character, which serve as the focal point of discussions of human vice in Books 8 and 9, stand in relation to that which Plato takes to be human vice? In addition, how do particular defects that Plato occasionally refers to, such as ignorance, injustice, and close-mindedness, stand in relation to that which he takes to be human vice as well as the four major types of corrupt character?

In this chapter, I will argue that the *Republic* is a home to a rich and distinctive account of human vice. In my view, Plato operates with what I call the functional model of human vice: it is a psychic state because of which a human soul performs its function—living a reason-guided life—poorly. I will contend that the state in question consists primarily in corrupt characters, i.e., deep-seated misalignments among soul parts, because of which a human soul fails to live a reason-guided life. The four major types of corrupt character are paradigmatic cases of human vice. Particular defects, such as licentiousness and ignorance, are human vices because they are aspects of corrupt characters. On this account, while human vice is not defined in terms of ignorance, ignorance is still a necessary and sufficient aspect of it.

My plan in this chapter is as follows. In Section 2, I will argue that in the *Republic*, Plato operates with what I call the functional model of human vice. In Sections

3 and 4, I will inquire into how the four major types of corrupt character and particular defects stand in relation to one another and human vice. In Section 5, I will examine the relationship between ignorance and human vice.

2.The Functional Model of Human Vice

In Chapter 3, I have argued that Plato's account of ignorance belongs to a general, *functional model* of vice: the vice of something that has a function is a state of that thing because of which it performs its function poorly. The function of something amounts to its characteristic activities, i.e., activities that are peculiar—that only it can accomplish—or proper to it—that it can accomplish better than anything else does. For example, the function of an eye is seeing: eyes alone allow one to see; the function of a pruning knife is pruning vines: a pruning knife that is designed for the purpose of pruning vines enables one to do so better than other things do. Everything that has a function has its virtue and vice. The vice of an eye is a state of the eye because of which it sees poorly; the vice of a pruning knife is presumably a state of the knife because of which it enables one to prune vines poorly. In sum, the vice of something that has its own function is a state of that thing, because of which it performs its function poorly. And this is what I call the functional model of vice.

According to Plato, human beings have their own function, which amounts to the function of embodied human souls.

Socrates: Come then, and let's consider this: Is there some function of a soul that you couldn't perform with anything else, for example, taking care of things,

ruling, deliberating, and the like? Is there anything other than a soul to which you could rightly assign these, and say that they are its peculiar function?

Thrasymachus: No, none of them.

S: What of living? Isn't that a function of a soul?

T: It certain is.

S: And don't we also say that there is a virtue of a soul?

T: We do.

S: Then, will a soul ever perform its function well, *Thrasymachus*, if it is deprived of its own peculiar virtue, or is that impossible?

T: Impossible.

S: Doesn't it follow that a bad soul rules and takes care of things badly and that a good soul does all these things well?

T: It does.

S: Now, we agreed that justice is a soul's virtue, and injustice its vice?

T: We did.

S: Then, it follows that a just soul and a just man will live well, and an unjust one badly.

T: Apparently so, according to your argument.

S: And surely anyone who lives well is blessed and happy, and anyone who doesn't is the opposite.

T: Of course.

S: Therefore, a just person is happy, and an unjust person is wretched.

T: So be it.

S: It profits no one to be wretched but to be happy.

T: Of course.

S: And so, Thrasymachus, injustice is never more profitable than justice.

(353d–354a)¹⁹⁴

In the context of the previous passage, Plato refutes Thrasymachus' assertion that injustice can be more profitable than justice. To do that, he argues that a just person lives well and is happy, whereas an unjust person lives badly and is wretched. Until 353e9, he focuses on embodied human souls and their function. A vicious human soul performs its function badly, and a virtuous soul performs its function well. From there, he immediately asserts that while a just soul and a just person will live well, an unjust soul and an unjust person will live badly at 353e10. Presumably, a just soul and a just person are virtuous, and an unjust soul and an unjust person are vicious. In this way, he implies

¹⁹⁴ Ἴθι δὴ, μετὰ ταῦτα τόδε σκέψαι. ψυχῆς ἔστιν τι ἔργον ὃ ἄλλω τῶν ὄντων οὐδ' ἂν ἐνὶ πράξαις; οἷον τὸ τοιόνδε· τὸ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι καὶ ἄρχειν καὶ βουλευέσθαι καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα, ἔσθ' ὅτῳ ἄλλω ἢ ψυχῇ δικαίως ἂν αὐτὰ ἀποδοῖμεν καὶ φαῖμεν ἴδια ἐκείνης εἶναι; Οὐδενὶ ἄλλω.
Τί δ' αὖ τὸ ζῆν; οὐ ψυχῆς φήσομεν ἔργον εἶναι; Μάλιστά γ', ἔφη.
Οὐκοῦν καὶ ἀρετὴν φαμέν τινα ψυχῆς εἶναι; Φαμέν.
Ἄρ' οὖν ποτε, ὦ Θρασύμαχε, ψυχὴ τὰ αὐτῆς ἔργα εὖ ἀπεργάζεται στερομένη τῆς οἰκείας ἀρετῆς, ἢ ἀδύνατον;
Ἀδύνατον.
Ἀνάγκη ἄρα κακῇ ψυχῇ κακῶς ἄρχειν καὶ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι, τῇ δὲ ἀγαθῇ πάντα ταῦτα εὖ πράττειν.
Ἀνάγκη.
Οὐκοῦν ἀρετὴν γε συνεχωρήσαμεν ψυχῆς εἶναι δικαιοσύνην, κακίαν δὲ ἀδικίαν; Συνεχωρήσαμεν γάρ.
Ἦ μὲν ἄρα δικαία ψυχὴ καὶ ὁ δίκαιος ἀνὴρ εὖ βιώσεται, κακῶς δὲ ὁ ἄδικος.
Φαίνεται, ἔφη, κατὰ τὸν σὸν λόγον.
Ἀλλὰ μὴν ὃ γε εὖ ζῶν μακάριός τε καὶ εὐδαίμων, ὃ δὲ μὴ τάναντία.
Πῶς γὰρ οὐ;
Ὁ μὲν δίκαιος ἄρα εὐδαίμων, ὃ δ' ἄδικος ἄθλιος.
Ἔστω, ἔφη.
Ἀλλὰ μὴν ἄθλιόν γε εἶναι οὐ λυσιτελεῖ, εὐδαίμονα δέ.
Πῶς γὰρ οὐ;
Οὐδέποτε, ἄρα, ὦ μακάριε Θρασύμαχε, λυσιτελέστερον ἀδικία δικαιοσύνης.

that insofar as a human soul is just and virtuous, the person whom it constitutes is just and virtuous; insofar as a human soul is unjust and vicious, the person whom it constitutes is unjust and vicious. Hence, that which makes a human soul virtuous or vicious makes the human being whom it constitutes virtuous or vicious as well. Recall that according to the general, functional model of vice, the vice of something is a state of that thing because of which it performs its function poorly. It follows that the psychic states because of which human souls perform their function badly also make human beings perform their function badly. The human function is essentially the function of embodied human souls.

The function of an embodied human soul consists prominently of rational activities, such as deliberating, ruling, and taking care of things. At the beginning of the previous passage, Plato declares that the function of an embodied human soul consists of activities that one can only perform with one's soul. These activities include, for example, taking care of things, ruling, and deliberating. The activities in question are distinctively rational. On the one hand, in order to take care of or rule something properly, one must examine (σκοπεῖσθαι) what is best for it.¹⁹⁵ The rational soul part enables one to examine better than anything else does.¹⁹⁶ So taking care of things and ruling, both of which entail examination, are done best with the rational part. On the other hand, deliberation is identified as belonging to the function of the rational part. So

¹⁹⁵ At 345d5-e1, Plato declares that every kind of rule, insofar as it rules, doesn't consider anything other than what is best for the thing it rules and takes care of. Thus, to rule or take care of something properly, one must examine what is best for it.

¹⁹⁶ In his discussion of degenerate characters, Plato characterizes an oligarchic person as someone who does not allow her rational part to calculate about (λογίζεσθαι) or examine (σκοπεῖν) anything except how a little money can be made into great wealth (553d2-4). The idea behind his claim is presumably that while reason enables one to calculate and examine better than anything else does, it is directed at wrong issues in the case of an oligarchic person.

deliberation is an activity that is peculiar or proper to the rational part: either only the rational part enables one to perform it, or the rational part enables one to perform it better than anything else does.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, the function of an embodied human soul consists prominently of rational activities.

Rational activities are integral to a distinctively human way of living, which turns out to be the function of an embodied human soul. Having identified rational activities, such as taking care of things, deliberating, and ruling, as belonging to the function of a human soul, Plato adds that living is also a function of a human soul at 353d9.¹⁹⁸ A good human soul engages in those rational activities well, thereby living well. A bad soul, by contrast, engages in those activities badly, thereby living badly. Thus, for human souls, living well or badly depends on engaging in the rational activities at issue well or badly. From here, it is natural to infer that the human function is living a reason-guided life, characterized by rational activities such as deliberating, taking care of things, and ruling.

We are now ready to see that Plato operates with the functional model of human vice, in line with his general, functional model of vice in the *Republic*. According to the general, functional model of vice, the vice of something is a state of that thing because of which it performs its function poorly. The function of human beings amounts to the function of their souls, which consists in living a reason-guided life, characterized by rational activities such as deliberating, taking care of things, and ruling. Thus follows the functional model of human vice—human vice is a psychic state, because of which an

¹⁹⁷ In Book 10, Plato asserts that calculation, along with measuring and weighing, is a function of the rational part of the soul (τοῦ λογιστικοῦ) (602d6-e2). As Moss notes, in this context, Plato uses the word calculation interchangeably with deliberation. So deliberation is a paradigmatically rational activity. See Moss 2008.

¹⁹⁸ I am grateful to Hendrik Lorenz for pointing out that at 353d9, living is identified as a function of a human soul instead of the function of a human soul.

embodied human soul performs its function badly. More specifically, it is a psychic state that makes the soul live a reason-guided life poorly (353e).

3.Vice and Corrupt Holistic Characters

At this point, we might want to gain more traction on the nature of human vice, which, as I have argued, is a psychic state that makes an embodied human soul live a reason-guided life poorly. What does this state consist in?

As I have mentioned in the introduction, throughout the *Republic*, Plato makes extensive comments on human vice, and those comments seem to point to two groups of human vices. On the one hand, his extended discussion on human vice in Books 8 and 9 focuses on the four major types of corrupt character, namely, the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical. On the other hand, he occasionally refers to ignorance, injustice, licentiousness, as well as many other particular defects.

Between the two groups of human vice, corrupt characters play a far more important role in Plato's discussion of human vice. To begin with, they receive much more emphasis in the relevant discussion. From 368a, Book 2 to the end of Book 9, Plato refutes the joint challenge that Glaucon and Adeimantus raise, namely that a vicious and unjust life can be better than a virtuous and just life. Having offered a detailed account of human virtue, he inquires into the four major types of corrupt character, i.e., the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical, as well as their parallel types of political constitutions. In his discussion of each corrupt character, he considers not only what a man who instantiates the character in question is like but also how such a man develops. By contrast, Plato's comments on particular defects are cursory and

scattered. Admittedly, he occasionally touches on some particular defects, such as slavishness and licentiousness, as he refutes the challenge that Glaucon and Adimantus raise. For example, he notes that Achilles is misrepresented as being slavish and arrogant (391b–c). But he does not elaborate on what those defects are in the immediate context. Moreover, Plato suggests that a solid grip on the four major types of corrupt character enables one to grasp what human vice amounts to. Having examined the four major types of corrupt character, Plato takes himself to have offered enough resources to establish that a vicious and unjust life can never be better than a virtuous and just life (588a). In this way, he implies that a solid grip on the four major types of corrupt character enables one to grasp what a vicious and unjust life is like. Recall that human vice is a state that makes one perform the human function badly, and human function amounts to a distinctively human way of living. Accordingly, a solid grip on the four major kinds of corrupt characters enables one to grasp what human vice amounts to. By contrast, it is only until Plato has finished examining the four major types of corrupt character and thus convinced his interlocutors that a vicious and unjust life can never be better than a virtuous and just life that he offers a more focused account of some particular defects, such as slavishness and licentiousness. So he does not rely on explicating the nature of particular defects in order to show what human vice amounts to. Therefore, in comparison with particular defects, corrupt characters play a far more important role in Plato's discussion of human vice.

Since corrupt characters are central to Plato's discussion of human vice, it is apt to infer that a better grip on them is conducive to a better grip on the psychic state that human vice is. So I propose to focus on corrupt characters in this section.

A little bit of context at the outset. In order to refute Glaucon and Adeimantus' joint challenge that an unjust and vicious life can be better than a just and virtuous life, Plato proceeds to examine what an unjust and vicious life and a just and virtuous life are like. Having offered a detailed discussion of human virtue and its cultivation, he turns to human vice at the beginning of Book 8. From there until the end of Book 9, he focuses on the four major types of corrupt character, i.e., the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical, and their corresponding types of political constitutions. In a nutshell, each of those characters represents a progressively graver deviation from the order and harmony that are characteristic of a virtuous human soul. As Plato puts it, a timocratic character is ruled by the spirited part, which directs the entire soul to routinely value and desire honor and victory (548d–549b). An oligarchic character is ruled by the appetitive part, which directs the soul to routinely value and desire money over anything else (553d–555a). A democratic character lacks a ruling part. It, valuing freedom above everything else, is dominated by a succession of desires of a full range of different kinds (561a–e). A tyrannical character is enslaved by a mad, erotic love, which urges it to satisfy unnecessary appetites, some of which are lawless, by all possible means (572d–579e).

Notably, that which Plato calls a character is not exclusively moral, as opposed to intellectual or epistemic. Rather, he conceives of a character (ἥθος) as a holistic, deep-seated structure of the entire human soul, because of which the soul lives in a certain way. To see this point, it is worth pointing out that a character is sometimes referred to as a constitution of the individual soul (κατασκευή; cf. 449a, 544e). According to LSJ, the word constitution (κατασκευή) has a connotation of being permanent or fixed rather than

movable or temporary. The same word is sometimes used to pick up the entire fundamental framework of a city (455a, 462a). So a character, as the constitution of a human soul, presumably stands for the holistic, deep-seated structure of the entire human soul. This line of reasoning coheres with Plato's characterization of the four major types of corrupt character. For example, an oligarchic character is ruled by the appetitive part, which values money over anything else. The rule of appetite puts constraints on the activities that reason and spirit can engage in. Reason is allowed to deliberate about or examine only how a little money can be made into great wealth; spirit is allowed to value or admire only wealth and wealthy people. A tyrannical character is enslaved by a mad, erotic love, which erases senses of decency and shame that reason and spirit might have. Notably, when examining the virtuous character and the four major types of corrupt character, Plato not just takes pains to uncover how each soul part stands in relation to the other parts. He also sketches out the consequent way of living that the soul as a whole adopts. For example, since an oligarchic character is ruled by the appetitive part, which values money more than anything else, it lives the life of a money-lover. More specifically, it, attaching the greatest importance to money, strives to make a profit from everything. It cares for honor and victory only if they conduce to its acquisition and accumulation of wealth. Since it neglects education, it experiences bad appetites. When a reputation for being just is profitable, it holds those appetites in check by compulsion and fear; when such a reputation does not bring about more profits, it unleashes those appetites with impunity (553d–555a). Hence, a character amounts to a holistic, deep-seated structure of the entire human soul, because of which a human soul lives in a certain way.

Corrupt characters, such as the timocratic character and the tyrannical character, accordingly consist in holistic, deep-seated misalignments of the entire human soul, because of which the soul fails to live a reason-guided life. In Plato's view, there is a normative structure among soul parts. A human soul should be ruled by reason, which alone can seek what is truly good for not only itself but also the entire soul. Spirit, as the natural ally of reason, should assist reason's rule (588b–590b). A virtuous character embodies this normative psychic structure. As a result, it lives a reason-guided life, which, valuing what is genuinely good above everything else, avoids things that might obstruct its pursuit of goodness.¹⁹⁹ A closer look at the four major types of corrupt characters indicates that each of them consists in a holistic, deep-seated misalignment of the entire human soul, because of which the soul fails to live a reason-guided life. For instance, instead of being ruled by reason, the timocratic character is ruled by spirit, which values honor and victory more than anything else. Because of this psychic misalignment, the soul fails to live a reason-guided life. Instead, it lives the life of a lover of honor and victory. In particular, it does not shun from honor and victory, even when they might obstruct its obtainment of what is genuinely good (548e–549a).

At this point, one might naturally wonder: why does Plato hold that there are four and only four major types of corrupt character? Admittedly, in addition to the four primary types, he recognizes the existence of other corrupt characters. But he thinks that the latter are not completely distinct from the four major ones. Instead, they lie somewhere among the four (544c–d). That is to say, they are imperfect exemplifications or mixtures of the four major kinds—they share some but not all paradigmatic features of

¹⁹⁹ For example, the father of a timocratic youth lives such a reason-guided, virtuous life (549c).

at least one of the four. Hence, the four major types of corrupt character reveal four fundamental ways in which the deep-seated psychic structure becomes flawed. Under the dominance of some non-rational elements, those corrupt characters are preoccupied with four distinct groups of objects that non-rational soul parts are attracted to: honor or victory, money, freedom, and unnecessary appetites. In this way, Plato puts his finger on the following point. While there are many ways of in which one's soul is improperly structured and thus lives badly, a vicious person must to some extent partake of at least one of the four major kinds of corrupt character.

We are now ready to see that the psychic state that human vice is consists primarily in corrupt characters—holistic, deep-seated misalignments of the entire human soul, because of which the soul fails to live a reason-guided life. Recall that according to the functional model of human vice, human vice is a psychic state of the entire embodied human soul, because of which the soul performs its function—living a reason-guided life—poorly. Admittedly, Plato mentions two groups of human vice—corrupt characters and particular defects. Between those groups, corrupt characters play a far more important role in Plato's discussion of human vice. In particular, Plato hints that a solid grip on the four major types of corrupt character enables one to grasp what human vice amounts to. A closer look at those characters reveals that a corrupt character consists in a holistic, deep-seated misalignment of the entire human soul, because of which the soul fails to live a reason-guided life. Hence, it is apt to infer that the psychic state that human vice is consists in corrupt characters. The four major types of corrupt character—the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical—indicate four fundamental

ways in which the deep-seated psychic structure becomes flawed. So they are paradigmatic cases of human vice.

But how do particular defects, such as cowardice and licentiousness, stand in relation to human vice and corrupt characters? Let us examine this question in the next section.,

4.Vice and Particular Defects

Throughout the *Republic*, Plato's comments on particular defects are somewhat cursory and scattered. Admittedly, he sometimes refers to particular defects to illustrate the harms of traditional education and upbringing. According to him, part and parcel of traditional education and upbringing are music and poetry that misrepresent gods and heroes. Instead of being fine and good, gods and heroes are portrayed as being subject to particular defects. Achilles, for instance, is characterized as slavish and arrogant (391b–c). As a result of bad education and upbringing, young people become cowardly and savage (411a). Most of his comments on particular defects are too succinct to give us a good grip on those defects. It is only until the end of Book 9, where Plato, having shown that an unjust and vicious life can never be better than a just and vicious life, provides us with a more detailed account of particular defects. Hence, I propose to begin our examination of particular defects by zeroing in on that discussion.

To illustrate the nature of particular defects, such as slavishness and stubbornness, Plato refers to a metaphor of the human soul. A human soul, which is constituted by reason, spirit, and appetite, is compared to a composite of a human being, a lion, and a multi-headed, multicolored beast under the covering of a human being. This metaphor

casts light on the normative condition and structure of soul parts. Reason, as the inner person, should obtain an insight into what is truly good and the strength to rule the entire composite. Spirit, as the inner lion, should be cultivated to become the ally of reason and jointly watch over appetite. Appetite is compared to the multi-headed, multicolored beast, so appetitive desires can be diverse and oftentimes at variance with one another. While gentler appetitive desires should be domesticated, more savage ones should be prevented from growing. In light of the metaphor in question, Plato discusses what a variety of particular defects amount to in the following passage.

S: And don't you think that licentiousness has long been condemned for just these reasons, namely, that because of it, that terrible, large, and multiform beast is let loose more than it should be?

G: Clearly.

S: And aren't stubbornness and irritability condemned because they inharmoniously increase and stretch the lionlike and the snakelike part?

G: Certainly.

S: And aren't luxury and softness condemned because the slackening and loosening of this same part that produce cowardice in it?

G: Of course.

S: And aren't flattery and slavishness condemned because they subject the spirited part to the moblike beast, accustoming it from youth on to being insulted for the sake of money needed to satisfy the beast's insatiable appetites, so that it becomes an ape instead of a lion?

G: They certainly are.

A closer look at the passage allows us to see that particular defects can be further divided into two sub-kinds. On the one hand, some particular defects are responsible for deviating from the normative condition of a particular soul part. For example, because of licentiousness, the multi-headed, multi-colored beast, i.e., appetite, is improperly relaxed. Stubbornness and irritability inappropriately strengthen and strain spirit. Luxury and softness, by contrast, unduly slacken and relax spirit. On the other hand, some particular defects are responsible for disrupting the normative structure between multiple soul parts. For instance, flattery and slavishness make appetite dominate over spirit instead of being watched over by the latter. Particular defects are states of the human soul. It follows that both sub-kinds of particular defects—deviation from the normative condition of a particular soul part and disruption of the normative structure between multiple soul parts—are psychic states that are responsible for some sorts of malfunction and misalignment within soul parts.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Οὐκοῦν καὶ τὸ ἀκολασταίνειν οἶει διὰ τοιαῦτα πάλαι ψέγεσθαι, ὅτι ἀνίεται ἐν τῷ τοιοῦτῳ τὸ δεινόν, τὸ μέγα ἐκεῖνο καὶ πολυειδὲς θρέμμα, πέρα τοῦ δέοντος; Δῆλον, ἔφη.
 Ἡ δ' αὐθαδία καὶ δυσκολία ψέγεται οὐχ ὅταν τὸ λεοντῶδες τε καὶ ὀφεῶδες αὔξηται καὶ συντείνηται ἀναρμύστως;
 Πάνυ μὲν οὔν.
 Τρυφή δὲ καὶ μαλθακία οὐκ ἐπὶ τῇ αὐτοῦ τούτου χαλάσει τε καὶ ἀνέσει ψέγεται, ὅταν ἐν αὐτῷ δειλίαν ἐμποιῇ;
 Τί μήν;
 Κολακεία δὲ καὶ ἀνελευθερία οὐχ ὅταν τις τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο, τὸ θυμοειδές, ὑπὸ τῷ ὀχλώδει θηρίῳ ποιῇ καὶ ἔνεκα χρημάτων καὶ τῆς ἐκείνου ἀπληστίας προπηλακιζόμενον ἐθίζῃ ἐκ νέου ἀντὶ λέοντος πίθηκον γίνεσθαι;
 Καὶ μάλα, ἔφη.
 Βαναυσία δὲ καὶ χειροτεχνία διὰ τί οἶει ὄνειδος φέρει; ἢ δι' ἄλλο τι φήσομεν ἢ ὅταν τις ἀσθενὲς φύσει ἔχῃ τὸ τοῦ βελτίστου εἶδος, ὥστε μὴ ἂν δύνασθαι ἄρχειν τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ θερμομάτων, ἀλλὰ θεραπεύειν ἐκεῖνα, καὶ τὰ θαπεύματα αὐτῶν μόνον δύνηται μανθάνειν;
 Ὅμοιον, ἔφη.

²⁰¹ Hendrik Lorenz points out to me that malfunctions and misalignments within soul parts could be responsible for the psychic states that particular defects consist in. Plato does not explicitly deny this possibility. It might well be that the psychic states that particular defects consist in and the relevant malfunctions and misalignment within soul parts are mutually reinforcing.

It is not hard to see that particular defects are human vices because they are aspects of corrupt holistic characters, which human vice consists primarily in. According to Plato, licentiousness is blamed because it lets loose the multi-headed, multi-colored beast, i.e., appetite. Stubbornness and irritability are condemned because they inappropriately strengthen and strain spirit. Recall that human vice is a psychic state, because of which the entire human soul performs its function poorly. And the psychic state in question consists primarily in corrupt holistic characters—deep-seated misalignments among soul parts, because of which a human soul fails to live a reason-guided life. Hence, particular defects are bad because they are aspects of corrupt characters, which human vice consists in. It is worth pointing out that Plato sometimes calls particular defects vices (444b). And the badness of particular defects deserves blame or censure (ψέγεσθαι)—responses that are associated with human vices. Consequently, it is apt to infer that particular defects are human vices because they are aspects of corrupt characters, which human vice consists primarily in.

Notably, different particular defects could be responsible for the same malfunction or misalignment within soul parts. Consider stubbornness and irritability. They are apparently different. Being stubborn is presumably a matter of sticking to one's convictions, even when better counter evidence is available. Being irritable, by contrast, is being liable to be provoked at minor or even non-existent offense. Nevertheless, Plato diagnoses stubbornness and irritability as being responsible for the same psychic malfunction—the inappropriate strengthening and straining of spirit. In addition, he characterizes flattery and slavishness as being responsible for the same misalignment within soul parts, i.e., the domination of appetite over spirit. But flattery and slavishness

are apparently different. Being a flatterer is presumably being disposed to please others to an objectionable extent. Being slavish, however, is being preoccupied with unworthwhile things, such as money and pleasure.²⁰² In this way, Plato strongly suggests that different particular defects are sometimes responsible for the same psychic malfunction or misalignment. But why does he conceive of particular defects in this way?

I have to admit that throughout the *Republic*, Plato does not explicitly explain why he thinks that different particular defects are sometimes responsible for the same psychic malfunction or misalignment. But a closer look at the previous passage on particular defects points to a promising explanation: by taking different particular defects to be responsible for the same psychic malfunction or misalignment, Plato implies that particular defects can be context-relative. Consider stubbornness and irritability again. They are responsible for the same psychic malfunction, i.e., the inappropriate strengthening and straining of spirit. But they constitute different particular defects since they involve divergent contexts, in which the same underlying psychic malfunction manifests as distinct patterns of responses. Stubbornness deals primarily with one's cognitive states, such as beliefs and convictions. With regard to one's cognitive states, the inappropriate strengthening and straining of spirit manifests as sticking to one's own beliefs or convictions. By contrast, irritability is concerned chiefly with offenses. With regard to offenses, the inappropriate strengthening and straining of spirit manifests as being liable to be provoked at minor or even non-existent offenses. Thus, across different contexts, the same psychic malfunction or misalignment can manifest as different patterns of responses and thereby constitute different particular defects. Therefore, some

²⁰² 391c; 486a–b.

particular defects are necessarily embedded in certain sorts of context. In other words, particular defects can be context-relative.

The context-relativeness of some particular defects hints that new contexts could bring about novel kinds of particular defects. Social, cultural, and environmental changes sometimes generate new contexts for human beings to live. For example, without advanced means of transportation, many ancient societies were ethnically homogenous. So most members of those societies did not have the chance to engage in extensive interaction with individuals of other ethnicities. Racism was accordingly rare or even nonexistent. But the fear about and the hostility towards outsiders, which are arguably at the heart of racism, were not entirely absent in ancient societies. They were instead expressed in military aggression and political cliques. By contrast, modern societies, thanks to the significant progress in transportation, are more ethnically heterogenous. And this social change engenders a new context of human living: individuals of different ethnicities become members of the same society and accordingly have ampler opportunities to interact with one another. As a result, the fear about and the hostility towards outsiders can be channeled in misguided perception, attitudes, and behaviors with regard to individuals of other ethnicities. Driven by the fear about and the hostility towards outsiders, people might, for instance, be disposed to perceive people of a certain ethnicity as being unintelligent and treat the latter with condescension. These patterns of responses are characteristic of racism. Thus, it is not far-fetched to infer that new contexts of human living, engendered by social, cultural, and environmental changes, could bring about novel patterns of misguided responses and particular defects. Therefore, the

Platonic account of particular defects is open-ended enough to cover vices that were absent in ancient societies.

5. Vice and Ignorance

Let us consider how human vice stands in relation to ignorance, which, as I have argued in Chapter 3, is the vice specific to the rational soul part. More specifically, according to the general, functional model of vice, ignorance is a state of reason because of which reason performs its function poorly.

It is not hard to see that ignorance is a particular defect. As we have seen, human vice consists primarily in corrupt characters. And these characters are deep-seated misalignments among soul parts, because of which a human soul fails to live a reason-guided life. Particular defects, such as cowardice and close-mindedness, are responsible for particular sorts of malfunction or misalignment within soul parts. Accordingly, they are aspects of corrupt characters. Ignorance is responsible for the malfunction of the rational part. It follows that ignorance is a particular defect, which is an aspect of corrupt characters that human vice consists primarily in.

Ignorance is a necessary aspect of human vice. Recall that ignorance is a state of reason, which makes reason perform its function badly. And the function of reason consists of a cognitive aspect, i.e., grasping truth, and a structural aspect, i.e., ruling the entire soul. A closer look at Plato's discussion of the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical characters reveals that people who instantiate these characters are ignorant. On the one hand, their reason struggles to grasp the relevant practical truth. Even a timocratic person, whose instantiates the least pernicious among

the four major kinds of corrupt character, mistakenly thinks that honor and victory are preeminently good. On the other hand, the reason of timocratic, oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical persons bungles in their ruling over the entire souls. Instead of directing the souls to seek what is truly good, it is subordinated to non-rational parts. As a result, it is susceptible to fail to prevent the souls from pursuing what is in fact harmful. As I have argued, the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical characters represent fundamental ways in which a human soul is improperly structured and thus performs its function badly. Other vicious characters are partial instantiations or mixtures of those four. Since people with timocratic, oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical characters are ignorant, other vicious people are presumably vicious as well. Therefore, all vicious people are ignorant. In other words, ignorance is a necessary aspect of human vice.

Plato's characterization of the human function strongly suggests that ignorance is a sufficient aspect of human vice as well. The human function is characteristically rational. As I have argued, the function of something is the activity that is characteristic of it: either the thing in question alone can perform that activity or it performs the activity better than anything else does. The human function is essentially the function of a human soul. And the function of a human soul is living a reason-guided life, which are characterized by rational activities such as taking care of things, deliberating, and ruling. In other words the function of a human soul, which amounts to the human function, is characteristically rational. As I have argued, Plato operates with the function model of vice in the *Republic*: the vice of something that has a function is a state of that thing because of which it performs its function badly. Since the human function is

characteristically rational, if reason is in a poor state, which makes it perform its function badly, a human being to which it belongs will engage in the rational activities that are integral to her function badly. Therefore, ignorance is a sufficient aspect of human vice.

The fact that ignorance is necessary and sufficient for human vice does not imply that human vice is defined in terms of ignorance. As I have argued, the function of a human being is essentially the function of an embodied human soul, which is living a reason-guided life. Living a reason-guided life entails the contribution of both reason and non-rational parts. Spirit gives one a sense of honor and shame; appetite enables one to respond to bodily needs. In fact, the four major types of character, which are paradigmatic cases of human vice, represent four fundamental ways in which a human soul is dominated by non-rational elements. Therefore, human vice cannot be defined in terms of ignorance.

6. Conclusion

Let us take stock. So far, I have argued that in the *Republic*, Plato operates with the functional model of human vice. The function of a human being is essentially the activity of an embodied human soul, which turns out to be living a reason-guided life. Human vice is a psychic state because of which a soul performs its function badly. The psychic state in question consists primarily in corrupt holistic characters, which are deep-seated misalignments of the entire human soul. The four major types of corrupt character—the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical—are paradigmatic cases of human vice. Particular defects, such as irritability and licentiousness, are responsible for particular sorts of malfunction or misalignment within soul parts. Hence, they are aspects of

corrupt characters, which human vice consists primarily in. Ignorance, as a particular defect, is necessary and sufficient for human vice.

To close this chapter, I would like to draw our attention to the following contrast between the account of human vice in the Socratic dialogues and the account in the *Republic*. In the Socratic dialogues, defects that are nowadays called moral and epistemic vices are forms of ignorance. So human vice is ignorance at its very heart. By contrast, in the *Republic*, human vice is a psychic state because of which a human soul performs its function—living a reason-guided life—poorly. The psychic state at issue consists primarily in corrupt holistic characters—deep-seated misalignment of the entire human soul, because of which the soul fails to live a reason-guided life. Ignorance is a necessary and sufficient aspect of human vice.

Chapter 5. Plato on Becoming Vicious

1. Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have argued that the Socratic dialogues and the *Republic* contain two different pictures of the darker side of humanity. In the Socratic dialogues, human vice is ignorance, which amounts to the soul's domination by psychic elements that are by nature fit to be ruled instead of ruling. Defects that are nowadays called moral and epistemic vices are forms of ignorance. By contrast, in the *Republic*, human vice is a psychic state because of which the soul performs its function—living a reason-guided life—badly. The psychic state in question consists in corrupt holistic characters, i.e., deep-seated misalignments of the entire human soul, because of which the soul fails to live a reason-guided life. Ignorance, conceived to be the vice of reason, is a necessary and sufficient aspect of human vice.

Despite their differences, the pictures of the darker side of humanity that the Socratic dialogues and the *Republic* draw converge on the following point: ignorance and vice are pervasive. Most adult human beings, no matter whether they are popular politicians, reputable craftspeople, or ordinary members of a community, are to some extent ignorant and vicious. Most political regimes, constituted by ignorant and vicious people, are ignorant and vicious. This pervasiveness of ignorance and vice indicates that in our everyday life, the phenomena of *becoming vicious* are rampant.

The *Republic* is home to a rich account of how one becomes vicious. In Books 8–9, Plato offers a series of vivid, thought-provoking vignettes about how people settle in four major types of corrupt character, i.e., the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical. Elsewhere in the *Republic*, he illuminates how in most political regimes,

bad cultural, political, and social institutions corrupt individual human beings.²⁰³ From a philosophical perspective, Plato's discussion of becoming vicious²⁰⁴ contains the following verdict on the human condition: while becoming virtuous is extremely difficult, becoming vicious is easy and commonplace. The verdict at issue in part goes against our modern intuition. Although many of us would agree that becoming virtuous is not easy, fewer would be ready to accept that becoming vicious is commonplace—most human beings either have become vicious or are on their way to become vicious. So a better grip on Plato's view allows us to see where he and we are at variance. From a practical perspective, Plato's account of becoming vicious reveals corrosive influences in a community. And this revelation prepares us to unpack his proposal for preventing vice. Therefore, a better understanding of Plato's account of becoming vicious is philosophically and practically fruitful.

Nevertheless, much less scholarly attention has been given to Plato's account of becoming vicious than that of becoming virtuous in the *Republic*.²⁰⁵ Existing works about Plato's account of becoming vicious often focus on a *particular stage* of the process, namely, the transition as a result of which one settles in a corrupt character.²⁰⁶ It is

²⁰³ At 400e–401d, Plato illustrates how bad music and poetry distort the perception, evaluation, and affection of young people. At 494c–e, he argues that an uneducated crowd in public gatherings like assemblies, courts, and theaters somewhat compel individuals to conform to misguided values and behaviors, which pave the way for corruption.

²⁰⁴ By becoming vicious, I refer to the process as a result of which a person settles in a deviant character. I don't mean to trace the metaphysical origin of vice in the human race.

²⁰⁵ There are a huge number of discussion on Plato's account of becoming virtuous in the *Republic*. For example, see Irwin 1995; Lear 2006; Vasiliou 2008.

²⁰⁶ In her forthcoming book, Melissa Lane she offers a comprehensive discussion of coming-to-be of the four major types of corrupt character rather than focus narrowly on the transitional stage. Have learned a lot from her work, I would like to highlight two further points. First, one becomes vicious as a result of bad habituation, which amounts to coming to adopt a way of living (ἐπιτηδεῖμα) that inappropriately strengthens non-rational parts. There are two basic mechanisms underlying the adoption of shameful ways of living, acculturation and conformity, as I call them. Each mechanism represents a different form of interaction among a bad community, individuals' mental life, and actions. In both cases, a bad community is the ultimate source of corruption. Second, in general, the worse community one belongs to, the less

generally agreed that one settles in a corrupt character as the power struggles among soul parts are resolved, in accordance with the relative strength and alignment of those parts.²⁰⁷ I agree with the predominant interpretation about how one eventually settles in a corrupt character. Becoming vicious involves power struggles among soul parts. But a complete account of the process also requires explaining the mechanisms underneath those power struggles. This is precisely what I aim to accomplish in this chapter.

In this chapter, I inquire into the mechanisms underlying the entire process of becoming vicious in Plato's *Republic*. On my reading, one becomes vicious as a result of bad habituation, which amounts to coming to adopt a way of living (ἐπιτηδεῖμα) that inappropriately strengthens non-rational parts. There are two basic mechanisms underlying the adoption of shameful ways of living, acculturation and conformity, as I call them. Each mechanism represents a different form of interaction among a bad community, individuals' mental life, and actions. In both cases, a bad community is the ultimate source of corruption. Despite those similarities, cases of becoming vicious are not entirely homogenous. The *Republic* is home to one of the first accounts of autonomy in the history of Western Philosophy. Autonomy, in its most complete form, amounts to a competence to form rational desires in light of a comprehensive grip on the evaluative matters and act in accordance with those desires. Autonomy can be cultivated and obtained at many different degrees. In general, the worse community one belongs to, the

autonomy one tends to have over the development of her character. So cases of becoming vicious are, in an important sense, different.

²⁰⁷ One exception is Terence Irwin. According to Irwin, every transition into a degenerate character is settled by a rational choice to cede control over the soul to a non-rational part (Irwin 1995). This position, as Mark Johnstone and Dominic Scott have convincingly argued, overly intellectualizes the transitional stage. It is implausible to assume that all cases of transition into degenerate characters are settled by rational choices to cede control over the soul to a non-rational part. For recent discussion on this topic, see Johnstone 2012; Scott 2020.

less autonomy one tends to have over the development of her character. So cases of becoming vicious are, in an important sense, different.²⁰⁸

My plan for this chapter is as follows. In Section 2, I argue that one becomes vicious as a result of bad habituation, underlying which are two basic mechanisms. In Section 3, I contend that that the worse community one belongs to, the less autonomy one tends to have over the development of one's eventual, holistic character. In Section 4, I close the chapter with some preliminary thoughts on how Plato's account of becoming vicious in the *Republic* casts light on his proposal for preventing vice.

2. Becoming Vicious and Habituation

In a nutshell, Plato thinks that one becomes vicious as a result of bad habituation, which amounts to coming to adopt a shameful way of living. As he puts it, people can acquire virtues as a result of good habituation (518d, 619c). The opposite process, bad habituation, leads one to become vicious (562e, 590b). In other words, one becomes vicious as a result of bad habituation. In addition, Plato asserts that fine ways of living lead one to become virtuous; shameful ways of living lead one to become vicious (444e). It follows that one becomes vicious as a result of bad habituation, which amounts to coming to adopt a shameful way of living (ἐπιτηδεῦμα).

²⁰⁸ In his recent book, Dominic Scott suggests that cases of becoming vicious are not entirely homogenous. His suggestion hinges what he labels as evaluative reason. As he puts it, evaluative reason stands for the impartial activity of reason, as opposed to instrumental or calculative reason, which can serve to find out the means to realize non-rational ends. See Scott (2020), Chapter 5. According to Scott, while a timocratic youth sometimes engage in evaluative reasoning in the development of his character, oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical youths hardly engage in that kind of reasoning. I am largely sympathetic to Scott's suggestion, but I would like to highlight the differences between the development of oligarchic, democratic, and tyrannical youths.

This sketch of becoming vicious immediately invites two questions. First, what is a way of living? Second, how does one come to adopt a shameful way of living?

In the *Republic*, Plato mentions different ways of living that citizens of good and bad communities follow, for example, the life of philosophers, the life of sophists, and the life of farmers. To see what a way of living is, let us contrast the life of philosophers and the life of sophists. According to Plato, even though those two ways of living appear to be very similar, they are entirely different. Individuals who adopt the philosophical way of living—the philosophers—not just attend to and readily discern the ultimate, intelligible reality, which consists in the Forms. They also enjoy and value the Forms more than anything else. In addition, philosophers are unique in their dedication to studying the Forms (500b–d). By contrast, sophists attend to and value the convictions that the majority express in public gatherings. As a result, they acquire a knack for dealing with the majority, which they call wisdom. Sophists are characterized by teaching their knack to anyone who is willing to pay. In this way, they impart specious claims about evaluative matters to others (493a–c). Based on the contrast between the philosophical way of living and the sophistical way of living, it is not far-fetched to infer that a way of living is a holistic pattern of mental life, actions, and communal impact.

A shameful way of living is accordingly a holistic pattern of mental life, actions, and communal impact that inappropriately strengthens non-rational parts or debilitates reason. As I have argued in the previous chapter, there is a normative hierarchy among soul parts: reason, which alone can seek what is truly good for the entire soul, should rule the soul with the help of spirit. Human vice consists primarily of corrupt characters, which crucially involve misalignments among soul parts. That is to say, reason, which

should rule, becomes subordinated to some non-rational element. This condition can be achieved due to the inappropriate strengthening of non-rational parts or the weakening of the rational one. It follows that shameful ways of living, by coming to adopt which people become vicious, are holistic patterns of mental life, actions, and communal impact that inappropriately strengthen of non-rational parts or weaken of the rational one.

Therefore, the question about how one comes to adopt a shameful way of living comes down to how one settles in a holistic pattern of mental life, actions, and communal impact that inappropriately strengthens non-rational parts or weakens the rational one.

In the rest of this section, I want to explore two basic mechanisms underlying one's coming to adopt a shameful way of living. These mechanisms, which I label as acculturation²⁰⁹ and conformity respectively, represent two ways in which a bad community, one's mental life, and actions interact and jointly contribute to one's eventual settlement in a shameful way of living. Admittedly, the mechanisms in question oftentimes overlap and interrelate with each other in real life. I propose to examine them separately, in order to have an unobstructed look at how one becomes vicious.

Let us start with acculturation. This process begins with absorbing bad ideologies from one's community. By bad ideologies, I mean the networks of misguided but dominant public conceptions about evaluative matters.²¹⁰ In the *Republic*, Plato discusses two primary sources of bad ideologies in the community. The first is a bad culture. To see how a bad culture carries bad ideologies, let us focus on bad music and poetry, which are, in Plato's view, prominent components of a bad culture. In the following pair of

²⁰⁹ I am grateful to Ben Morison for suggesting this label. I used to call the mechanisms that it refers to apprenticeship.

²¹⁰ For a recent discussion of ideology, see Haslanger (2017)

passages, Plato illustrates how bad stories, constituting an important element of bad music and poetry, become vehicles of corrosive ideologies.

When a story gives a bad image of what the gods and heroes are like, the way a painter does whose picture is not at all like the things he's trying to paint (377e).....

Since a god is good, he is not—as most people claim, the cause of everything that happened to human beings but of only a few things, for good things are fewer than bad things in our lives. He alone is responsible for good things (379c).²¹¹

According to Plato, bad music and poetry carry bad ideologies primarily by misrepresenting moral exemplars, such as gods and heroes. As moral exemplars whom individual human beings look up to for guidance, gods and heroes should embody correct values. Nevertheless, in bad music and poetry, they are oftentimes represented as subscribing to misguided values and acting wrongly. For example, the goddess Thetis is described as regarding death as a terrible suffering and consequently lamenting the loss of her son, Achilles (388b). Odysseus, the wisest hero, is portrayed as valuing banquet more than anything else and praising it glowingly (390a–b). Based on Plato's account of bad music and poetry, it is apt to infer that other elements of a bad culture, such as paintings, embroidery, and architecture, carry bad ideologies primarily by containing distorted representations of moral exemplars (401a–c).

²¹¹ Ὅταν εἰκάξῃ τις κακῶς τῷ λόγῳ, περὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἡρώωνοίοι εἰσιν, ὥσπερ γραφεὺς μηδὲν εἰκότα γράφων οἷς ἂν ὅμοια βουλευθῇ γράψαι (379e1–3).
Οὐδ' ἄρα, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὁ θεός, ἐπειδὴ ἀγαθός, πάντων ἂν εἴη αἴτιος, ὥς οἱ πολλοὶ λέγουσιν, ἀλλὰ ὀλίγων μὲν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις αἴτιος, πολλῶν δὲ ἀναίτιος· πολὺ γὰρ ἐλάττω τὰγαθὰ τῶν κακῶν ἡμῖν, καὶ τῶν μὲν ἀγαθῶν οὐδένα ἄλλον αἰτιατέον (379c2–6).

In addition to a bad culture, families, friends, associates, and in a word, social connections, constitute another chief source of bad ideologies. In Books 8 and 9, Plato offers vivid images of how in a corrupt community, one's social connections jointly carry bad ideologies. Consider a timocratic youth. Even though he has a virtuous father, the rest of his community is corrupt. His mother complains that her virtuous husband, who is not overly obsessed with honor, power, and money, is unmanly. His servants also urge him to become more manly by taking revenge on people who have wronged him. The rest of his city honors and praises those who meddle in other people's affairs. In a word, the entire community to which a timocratic youth belongs is steeped with an ideology that puts an undue emphasis on honor and power, and, to a lesser extent, money.

Absorbing bad ideologies from a corrupt community, people, especially the youth, become afflicted with a distorted mental life. According to Plato, children and young people readily internalize the ideologies that they are frequently exposed to (377a–b). So if they are exposed to culture and social connections that carry correct ideologies, they will gradually develop a sound mental life.²¹² By contrast, if children and young people are associated with culture and social connections that carry bad ideologies, they will develop a distorted mental life. As those who are born and raised in degenerate communities indicate, they not only struggle to properly attend to and discern evaluative matters but also are subject to incorrect evaluation and affection. For example, they could neglect virtue and education, while mistaking honor, money, or pleasure for the highest good and enjoying those things more than they should. In this way, their souls deviate

²¹² More specifically, they can not only correctly attend to and discern what is fine and good but also praise and enjoy it; when they encounter what is shameful and bad, they can notice, object to, and hate it (401d–402a).

from the normative psychic order: reason struggles to exert control over non-rational parts, which become inappropriately strong.

Suffering from a distorted mental life, young people who are born and raised in a corrupt community engage in the corresponding, bad actions, which exacerbate and perpetuate their mental affliction. To see this point, let us zero in on Plato's discussion of how an honor-loving, timocratic city degenerates into a money-loving, oligarchic city. As the dominant class of a timocratic city, honor-lovers accumulate a surplus of money from their pursuits of honor. They accordingly venture to spend money, which induces them to value and desire money more and more. Over time, honor-lovers become full-fledged money-lovers, who value and desire money more than everything else. And their city degenerates from being honor-loving and timocratic to being money-loving and oligarchic (550d–551b). The degeneration of a timocratic city into an oligarchic city reveals the following psychological fact: one normally pursues what one values, which makes one value and desire it even more. Recall that young people who are born and raised in a corrupt community are afflicted with a distorted mental life: they not only struggle to properly attend to and discern evaluative matters but also are subject to incorrect evaluation and affection. Accordingly, they act on their incorrect values, which strengthens the relevant evaluation and desires. In the end, their attachment to incorrect values and desires becomes so entrenched that they structure their entire lives around those values and desires and are, as a result, dominated by the corresponding, non-rational parts.

Let us now turn to the second basic mechanism underlying one's coming to adopt a shameful way of living, which I call *conformity*. In the following passage, Plato offers a vivid image of conformity by challenging the majority's view about sophists.

S: Or do you agree with the general opinion that certain young people are corrupted by sophists—that there are certain sophists with significant influence on the young, who corrupt them through private teaching? Isn't it rather the very people who say this who are the greatest sophists of all, since they educate most completely, turning young and old, men and women, into precisely the kind of people they want them to be?

A: When do they do that?

S: When many of them sitting together in assemblies, courts, theaters, army camps, or in some other public gathering of the crowd, they object very loudly and excessively to some of the things that are said or done and approve others in the same way, shouting and clapping, so that the very rocks and surrounding echo the din of their praise or blame and double it. In circumstances like that, what is the effect, as they say, on a young person's heart? What private training can hold out and not be swept away by that kind of praise or blame and be carried by the flood wherever it goes, so that he'll say the same things as beautiful or ugly as the crowd does, follow the same ways of life as they do, and be the same sort of persons as they are?

(492a–c)²¹³

²¹³ ἢ καὶ σὺ ἡγῇ, ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοί, διαφθειρομένους τινὰς εἶναι ὑπὸ σοφιστῶν νέους, διαφθείροντας δὲ τινὰς σοφιστὰς ιδιωτικούς, ὅτι καὶ ἄξιον λόγου, ἀλλ' οὐκ αὐτοὺς τοὺς ταῦτα λέγοντας μεγίστους

The majority regard sophists as private teachers like Protagoras and Prodicus who sell their teachings from cities to cities. By contrast, Plato contends that the biggest sophists are precisely the majority in a bad community: they have the power to corrupt all sorts of individuals, no matter whether they are young or old, men or women. The majority corrupt individuals primarily by expressing the distorted, dominant ideologies vehemently in public gatherings, such as assemblies, courts, and theaters. When individuals encounter such expressions, their private training, according to Plato, is ‘washed away by that kind of praise or blame and carried by the flood wherever it goes.’ Notably, individuals’ private training is washed away and carried by the flood of praise or blame instead of being completely demolished. This characterization strongly suggests that the majority’s vehement expressions of distorted ideologies do not immediately destroy one’s existing views about evaluative matters. Rather, they often start off by making one’s views ineffective in actions. That is to say, in spite of contrary beliefs, one is somewhat compelled to match one’s actions with those of the majority, in line with the distorted, dominant ideologies.

Notably, Plato declares that besides matching their actions with those of the majority in public gatherings, individuals in a bad community follow the majority’s shameful ways of living and eventually become the same sorts of persons as the majority are.

μὲν εἶναι σοφιστάς, παιδεύειν δὲ τελεώτατα καὶ ἀπεργάζεσθαι οἷους βούλονται εἶναι καὶ νέους καὶ πρεσβυτέρους καὶ ἄνδρας καὶ γυναῖκας;
Πότε δὴ; ἢ δ’ ὅς.

Ὅταν, εἶπον, συγκαθεζόμενοι ἄθροοι πολλοὶ εἰς ἐκκλησίαν ἢ εἰς δικαστήρια ἢ θέατρα ἢ στρατόπεδα ἢ τινα ἄλλον κοινὸν πλῆθος σύλλογον σὺν πολλῷ θορύβῳ τὰ μὲν ψέγωσι τῶν λεγομένων ἢ πραττομένων, τὰ δὲ ἐπαινῶσιν, ὑπερβαλλόντως ἐκάτερα, καὶ ἐκβοῶντες καὶ κροτοῦντες, πρὸς δ’ αὐτοῖς αἱ τε πέτραι καὶ ὁ τόπος ἐν ᾧ ἂν ᾧσιν ἐπηχοῦντες διπλάσιον θόρυβον παρέχῃσι τοῦ ψόγου καὶ ἐπαινοῦ. ἐν δὲ τῷ τοιούτῳ τὸν νέον, τὸ λεγόμενον, τίνα οἶε καρδίαν ἴσχειν; ἢ ποῖαν ἂν αὐτῷ παιδείαν ἰδιωτικὴν ἀνθέξῃ, ἣν οὐ κατακλυσθεῖσαν ὑπὸ τοῦ τοιούτου ψόγου ἢ ἐπαινοῦ οἰχήσεσθαι φερομένην κατὰ ῥοὴν ἢ ἂν οὗτος φέρῃ; καὶ φήσῃν τε τὰ αὐτὰ τούτοις καλὰ καὶ αἰσχρὰ εἶναι, καὶ ἐπιτηδεύειν ἅπερ ἂν οὗτοι, καὶ ἔσσεσθαι τοιοῦτον;

Nevertheless, merely matching one's actions with those of the majority in public gatherings does not amount to following the majority's shameful ways of living. It is not hard to imagine that one may only match one's actions with those of the majority in public gatherings without following the majority's ways of living. So by asserting that individuals not only match their actions with those of the majority in public gatherings but also follow the majority's ways of living, Plato strongly suggests that conformity to the majority's actions in public gatherings paves the way for adopting the corresponding, shameful ways of living. How does that transition occur?

The first step to answering that question is noting that engaging in bad actions gradually distorts one's mental life. Plato's account of how people settle in major types of corrupt, holistic characters in Books 8–9 nicely illustrates that point. Consider the oligarchic youth, who is trained to value honor and victory more than anything else by his honor-loving, timocratic father. After his father's sudden downfall, the oligarchic youth, partly disillusioned about the quest for honor and victory, partly under economical pressure, turns to money-making. Money-making little by little distorts his mental life: he enjoys, attends to, and values money more and more. Accordingly, he gets readier to engage in money-making. In the end, he becomes a full-fledged money-lover, who, dominated by appetite, values and desires money more than anything else (553b–d).

Public gatherings, such as theaters, festivals, and assemblies, constitute an integral component of civic life in ancient Greece. Through regular participation in those gatherings, individual members of a society learn their duties and rights, enjoy collective glories and successes, and fulfill their civic responsibilities. Frequent absences from public gatherings indicate that one is not a full-fledged member of a society.

In this way, we can infer how conformity to the majority's actions in public gatherings paves the way for adopting their shameful ways of living. As a result of regular participation in public gatherings, one often finds oneself somewhat compelled to match one's actions with those of the majority, in line with the distorted, dominant ideologies. Bad actions gradually distort one's mental life: one, little by little, comes to enjoy, attend to, and value what the majority mistakenly enjoy, attend to, and value. In the end, one becomes so attached to the misguided values and desires of the majority that one structures one's life around them and, as a result, is dominated by the corresponding, non-rational parts.

So far, we have seen that there are two basic mechanisms underlying one's coming to adopt a shameful way of living, i.e., acculturation and conformity. They constitute two ways in which a bad community, one's mental life, and actions interact and jointly contribute to one's settlement in a shameful way of living. On the one hand, acculturation begins with a bad community's corrosion of one's mental life: having absorbed distorted ideologies from the community, one not only struggles to properly attend to and discern evaluative matters but also is subject to incorrect evaluation and affection. A distorted mental life induces one to act accordingly, which in turn strengthens the relevant, misguided evaluation and desires. In the end, one's attachment to incorrect values and desires becomes so entrenched that one structures one's entire life around those values and desires and is, as a result, dominated by the corresponding, non-rational parts. On the other hand, conformity starts off by a bad community's putting pressure on one's actions: in public gatherings, one often finds oneself somewhat compelled to follow the majority, in line with the distorted, dominant ideologies. Bad actions gradually distort one's mental

life. In the end, one becomes so attached to the misguided values and desires of the majority that one structures one's life around them and, as a result, is dominated by the corresponding, non-rational parts.

It is worth noting that the two basic mechanisms underlying one's coming to adopt a shameful way of living—acculturation and conformity—could simultaneously occur to the same people. For instance, a young person can both, as an apprentice, absorb bad ideologies from the community and, under the pressure of the majority, act in line with the dominant ideologies. In both mechanisms, a corrupt community, carrying bad ideologies, is the ultimate source of corruption, even though it can also be influenced by individuals' mental life and actions.

Let us take stock. In this section, I have argued that a person becomes vicious as a result of bad habituation, which amounts to coming to adopt a shameful way of living. A shameful way of living is a holistic pattern of mental life, actions, and communal impact that inappropriately strengthens non-rational parts or weakens the rational one. There are two basic mechanisms underlying coming to adopt shameful ways of living: acculturation and conformity. Each of them stands for a distinct form of interaction among a bad community, one's mental life, and actions. A corrupt community is the ultimate source of corruption,

3. Autonomy and Becoming Vicious

Admittedly, all cases of becoming vicious share two underlying mechanisms, i.e., acculturation and conformity. They are different in the following way. The worse

community one belongs to, the less autonomy one tends to have over the establishment of one's character.

3.1 Self-Control and Autonomy in the *Republic*

To see how cases of becoming vicious differ in the degrees of autonomy that people have over the development of their characters, let us begin by turning to Plato's discussion of self-control. As I will show, in sketching out what a self-controlled person is like, he can be seen as offering an account of autonomy.

To a first approximation, self-control at the individual level is reason's control over non-rational parts. In the *Republic*, Plato resorts to the notion of self-control as he inquires into what a virtuous person is like. One way of being a virtuous person is being moderate. According to Plato, moderation is largely interchangeable with self-control²¹⁴ in everyday usage. So an inquiry into what a moderate person is like comes down to an inquiry into what self-control at the individual level is.²¹⁵ Within the soul of each person, there are a naturally better element and a naturally worse element, which presumably stand for the rational and the non-rational parts respectively. Whenever the naturally better element controls the naturally worse element, which amounts to reason's control over non-rational parts, a person is self-controlled and moderate. Whenever the naturally better element is controlled by the naturally worse element, a person is self-defeated (ἡττω ἑαυτοῦ) and licentious (ἀκόλαστον) (430e-431b). Hence, self-control at the individual level is reason's control over non-rational parts.

²¹⁴ Plato makes this point at 430e. τὸ κρείττω αὐτοῦ, which means self-control, or, more literally, being stronger than oneself, is often used to refer to moderation. For a more detailed discussion of self-control and its opposite, see Chapter 1.

²¹⁵ I don't mean to say that moderation and self-control are identical. In fact, as it will become clearer in this section, self-control can be instantiated at different degrees. People who are not virtuous can instantiate self-control to some extent. By contrast, moderation is a cardinal virtue and can only be instantiated by virtuous persons or constitutions.

But what exactly does reason's control over non-rational parts amount to? Recall that Plato's discussion of self-control occurs in his inquiry into what a virtuous person is like. In this inquiry, he proceeds by first examining what a virtuous city is like and then inferring what a virtuous person is like. The inference at issue is based on his contention that a city and a person, who is tantamount to her soul, are structurally parallel. Each of them is constituted by reason and non-rational parts, which can be further divided into spirit and appetite.²¹⁶ Hence, a closer look at a self-controlled city paves the way for a more concrete picture of a self-controlled person.

In the following passage, Plato asserts that a self-controlled city involves the inferior majority and the superior few. And these groups are characterized by different kinds of desires.

S: Take a look at our new city, and you'll find one of these in it. You'll say that it is rightly called self-controlled, if indeed something in which the better rules the worse is properly called moderate and self-controlled.

G: I am looking, and what you say is true.

S: Now, one finds all kinds of diverse desires, pleasures, and pains, mostly in children, women, household slaves, and in those of the inferior majority who are called free.

G: That's right.

S: But you meet with the desires that are simple, measured, and directed by calculation in accordance with understanding and correct belief only in the few people who are born with the best natures and receive the best education.

²¹⁶ 427e–441d.

G: That's true.

S: Then, don't you see that in your city, too, the desires of the inferior many are controlled by the wisdom and desires of the superior few?

G: I do.

S: Therefore, if any city is said to be in control of itself and of its pleasures and desires, it is this one.

G: Absolutely.

(431b–d)²¹⁷

In a self-controlled city,²¹⁸ the inferior majority, who constitute the non-rational parts, are host to all sorts of desires, pleasures, and pains (παντοδαπὰς ἐπιθυμίας καὶ ἡδονὰς τε καὶ λύπας). In the *Republic*, the adjective 'all sorts of, manifold (παντόδαπα)' is closely associated with the appetitive part. Plato compares the appetitive part to a manifold

²¹⁷ Ἀπόβλεπε τοίνυν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, πρὸς τὴν νέαν ἡμῖν πόλιν, καὶ εὐρήσεις ἐν αὐτῇ τὸ ἕτερον τούτων ἐνόν· κρείττω γὰρ αὐτὴν αὐτῆς δικαίως φήσεις προσαγορεύεσθαι, εἴπερ οὐ τὸ ἄμεινον τοῦ χειρόνος ἄρχει σῶφρον κλητέον καὶ κρείττον αὐτοῦ.

Ἀλλ' ἀποβλέπω, ἔφη, καὶ ἀληθῆ λέγεις.

Καὶ μὴν καὶ τὰς γε πολλὰς καὶ παντοδαπὰς ἐπιθυμίας καὶ ἡδονὰς τε καὶ λύπας ἐν παισὶ μάλιστα ἂν τις εὖροι καὶ γυναιξὶ καὶ οἰκέταις, καὶ τῶν ἐλευθέρων λεγομένων ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς τε καὶ φαύλοις.

Πάνυ μὲν οὖν.

Τὰς δέ γε ἀπλᾶς τε καὶ μετρίας, αἱ δὲ μετὰ νοῦ τε καὶ δόξης ὀρθῆς λογισμῷ ἄγονται, ἐν ὀλίγοις τε ἐπιτεύξει καὶ τοῖς βέλτιστα μὲν φύσιν, βέλτιστα δὲ παιδευθεῖσιν.

Ἀληθῆ, ἔφη.

Οὐκοῦν καὶ ταῦτα ὀρθᾶ ἐνόητα σοὶ ἐν τῇ πόλει, καὶ κρατουμένας αὐτόθι τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τὰς ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς τε καὶ φαύλοις ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ τῆς φρονήσεως τῆς ἐν τοῖς ἐλάττωσιν τε καὶ ἐπιεικεστέροις;

Ἐγώ, ἔφη.

Εἰ ἄρα δεῖ τινα πόλιν προσαγορεύειν κρείττω ἡδονῶν τε καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν καὶ αὐτὴν αὐτῆς, καὶ ταύτην προσρητέον.

Παντάπασι μὲν οὖν, ἔφη.

²¹⁸ To illustrate what self-control amounts to, Plato turns to 'our new city'. The city in question is equipped with the correct education and upbringing that he and his interlocutors have just looked into. It is accordingly wise, courageous, moderate, just, and, in a word, completely good (427e). Since moderation is largely interchangeable with self-control in everyday usage, the city is moderate and thereby self-controlled.

beast²¹⁹ when he reiterates the overarching thesis of his discussion from 368a, Book 2 to the end of Book 9: a just and virtuous life is always better than an unjust and vicious life. And when the adjective ‘all sorts of, manifold’ qualifies the appetitive part, it often captures a specific group of appetitive desires, i.e., unnecessary appetites. These desires are desires for bodily satisfaction which are neither necessary—that they can be get rid of as a result of appropriate education and training—nor beneficial—that they could obstruct our various projects (559b–d). According to Plato, the drones, who lure young people to adopt more deviant ways of living and become more vicious, are full of unnecessary appetites, which are manifold.²²⁰ Hence, by identifying the inferior majority as hosts to manifold desires, pleasures, and pains, Plato implies that those people are characterized by appetitive desires, many of which are unnecessary. By contrast, the superior few, who constitute the rational part of a self-controlled city, are distinguished by simple and measured desires. These desires, as Plato puts it, are directed by calculation (λογισμῷ ἄγονται). In the context, calculation stands for practical reasoning, or if you like, deliberation, about what is good in particular circumstances.²²¹ Thus, the desires of the superior few follow their deliberation about what is good in particular

²¹⁹ When Plato first invokes the comparison of the appetitive part to the beast at 588c, he characterizes it as multi-colored (ποικίλον) and multiheaded (πολυκέφαλον). A few lines later at 588e6, he picks up this comparison by calling the beast manifold.

²²⁰ At 559c, Plato notes that the drones are full of unnecessary pleasures and desires. A few lines later at 559d, he hints that unnecessary pleasures are manifold and multicolored. So the desires that those pleasures satisfy, i.e., unnecessary appetites, are presumably manifold as well. Moreover, in his discussion of a fevered city, Plato suggests that it is full of desires and pleasures that he will later classify as unnecessary. The entities that can satisfy those appetites and lead to pleasures, such as delicacies, incense, and prostitutes, are also characterized as manifold (373a).

²²¹ In the *Republic*, Plato uses rational calculation (λογισμός) to stand for either arithmetic (510c3, 525d1, 526d7, 536d4) or practical reasoning about what is good in particular circumstances (439d1, 440b1, 496d5, 546b2). In the latter case, rational calculation can be used interchangeably with deliberation (τὸ βουλευέσθαι) (604c5–d4). A moment of reflection tells us that in the current context, rational calculation refers to reasoning about what is good in particular circumstances rather than arithmetic.

circumstances.²²² On top of that, Plato claims that the desires of the superior few are in accordance with understanding and correct belief (αἱ δὲ μετὰ νοῦ τε καὶ δόξης ὀρθῆς). His idea is presumably that for the superior few, their desires are rooted in understanding and correct belief. Understanding is the highest cognitive achievement, which equips one with a consummate insight into evaluative matters.²²³ Therefore, the superior few are characterized by desires which, rooted in a consummate insight into evaluative matters, follow their deliberation about what is good in particular circumstances.

In a self-controlled city, the desires of the superior few dictate the actions of the entire city. As we have seen, Plato holds that a self-controlled city involves the inferior majority and the superior few, who are characterized by distinct kinds of desires. At 431c–e, he adds that the desires of the inferior majority are controlled by the wisdom and desires of the superior few. All members of a self-controlled city share the following belief: the superior few should rule the city. By characterizing a self-controlled city in this way, Plato strongly suggests that it is not entirely free from unnecessary appetites and pleasures, which the inferior majority are susceptible to. But all members, even the

²²² By dubbing the desires of the superior few as directed by calculation, Plato does not mean that those people form desires *only as a result of* deliberation. His point is rather that they routinely desire what their deliberation would indicate as good. And if their non-rational impulses conflict with their practical reasoning, their desires will conform to the latter. In a word, the desires at issue follow the deliberation of subjects, i.e., the superior few.

²²³ In a controlled person, her correct, reason-based desires for what is good in particular circumstances are in accordance with understanding and correct belief. Between understanding and correct belief, the emphasis is on the former. After all, correct, reason-based desires for what is good in particular circumstances require correct judgments about the perceptibles. In Plato's view, while knowledge normally deals with the intelligibles, belief or opinion is normally concerned with the perceptibles (477b4–478d9). So the correct judgments about the perceptibles that a controlled person's correct, reason-based desires require are correct beliefs. And Plato notes that people who fall short of being controlled and moderate, for example, slaves, can have correct beliefs (430b6–9). Thus, what sets a controlled person apart from others who have correct, reason-based desires in accordance with correct beliefs is her partaking of understanding. Her correct, reason-based desires for what is good in particular circumstances are predicated on understanding. According to Plato, understanding equips its possessors with a consummate insight into evaluative matters. Only philosophers who is equipped with understanding is best at ruling a city, which requires a comprehensive grasp of evaluative matters.

inferior majority themselves, agree that those appetites should not affect the operation of the city. Rather, the appetites in question should be constantly kept in check by the superior few, who alone should rule. Therefore, a self-controlled city as a whole acts in accordance with the desires of the superior few.

From Plato's portrayal of a self-controlled city, we can infer a more concrete picture of a self-controlled person. Since a city and a human soul are structurally parallel, the same account of self-control applies to them both. Like a self-controlled city, a self-controlled person, or, more precisely, her soul, has a larger, inferior part, i.e., appetite, and a smaller, superior part, i.e., reason. Her reason is characterized by desires which, rooted in a consummate insight into evaluative matters, follow its own deliberation about what is good in particular circumstances. And while she is not entirely free from appetitive desires and pleasures, it is the rational desires that dictate her actions. In a word, self-control at the individual level is a competence to form rational desires about what is good in particular circumstances in light of a consummate grasp of evaluative matters and to act in accordance with those desires.

Plato suggests that human beings can obtain two levels of authority over their voluntary actions. And a self-controlled person enjoys both levels. To begin with, all human beings are authoritative over their voluntary actions in the following sense. These actions spring from and are in accordance with the agents' own desires, unconstrained by coercion, pain, or suffering.²²⁴ But in Plato's view, a person who is authoritative over her

²²⁴ In the *Republic*, Plato contrasts the voluntary (τὸ ἐκούσιον) and the forced (τὸ βιαιόν). At 399b, he notes that the voluntary is not forced. A mental state or an action can occur by force in the following ways. On the one hand, it occurs because of the coercive power that is imposed by something else. For instance, at 515e, Plato suggests that people who lack appropriate education and training can only be led to observe the intelligible reality by force. On the other hand, a mental state or an action can occur by force because of suffering or pain. At 412e–413d, Plato notes that one is deprived of true beliefs as a result of theft, magic spells, or force. Someone loses her true beliefs as a result of force, when she changes her mind because of

voluntary actions in the preceding sense could still lack power over those actions. For example, even though a tyrant acts in accordance with his desires, he is full of slavery and unfreedom (577d). In fact, most human beings, lacking the appropriate education and upbringing exemplified by the ideal city, are compared to prisoners who have been confined in a dark, underground cave from birth (514a–516d). Only a perfectly virtuous person, who has a complete understanding of the Forms, truly lives (490b). In this way, Plato puts his finger on a more elevated form of authority over one's voluntary actions. The form of authority in question is nicely illustrated by the characterization of a self-controlled person. As we have seen, such a person not just acts in accordance with her own desires. She is competent to form and act on rational desires, which are rooted in a consummate insight into the evaluative matters. This competence owes its existence and efficacy to her reason, the part that makes her soul human.²²⁵

Accordingly, Plato can be seen as offering one of the first accounts of autonomy in the history of Western Philosophy.²²⁶ Like Plato, many other philosophers, such as Kant and Frankfurt, have noted that human beings could obtain two levels of authority over

pain or suffering. Therefore, a mental state or an action that occurs by force is constrained by coercion, pain, or suffering.

²²⁵ Towards the end of Book 9, Plato concludes his overarching argument that justice is always more profitable than injustice by resorting to the following image of the human soul. An embodied human soul, constituted by reason, spirit, and appetite, is compared to a composite of a person, a lion, and a multi-headed, multi-colored beast under the covering of a human being. This comparison strongly suggests that among the three constitutive soul parts, reason is what makes an embodied soul human.

²²⁶ Melissa Lane has helpfully pointed out further questions. Is what I call autonomy synonymous with freedom? And how do I situation my interpretation of the Platonic notion of autonomy with related discussions on freedom in Plato? I have to concede that I cannot do full justice to those questions in the current chapter. But I would like to sketch out some preliminary thoughts. As Myles Burnyeat, Andre Laks, and Melissa Lane has noted, while Plato prepares the ground for a new conception of freedom as virtuous self-mastery, he stops short of asserting it as such. Freedom is not an absolute value in Plato. It can become excessive, as evinced by the case of democratic cities and individuals. Autonomy, or as other scholars put it, self-mastery, is always good. My reading brings to light the following feature in Plato's account of autonomy: it can be instantiated at many different degrees. So while a virtuous person instantiates a superlatively high degree of autonomy, non-virtuous people and even vicious ones can instantiate it to some extent. For insightful discussions on Plato's conception of freedom, see Burnyeat 1996; Laks 2007; Lane 2018, de Nicolay 2022.

their voluntary actions. The first level is commonplace: people are authoritative over their voluntary actions, since those actions spring from and are in accordance with their desires. But individuals who have authority in this sense might still lack an elevated form of authority. For instance, a victim of brainwashing can form desires on the basis of her inculcated convictions and act accordingly. But the actions in question do not arise from and testify to the power that makes her a human agent. Scholars often label this more elevated form of authority as autonomy, in spite of their nuancedly different views about what autonomy consists in.²²⁷ The affinity between the Platonic conception of self-control at the individual level and the conception of autonomy strongly suggests that in sketching out what a self-controlled person is like, Plato can be seen as offering a pioneering account of autonomy. Autonomy, in its most complete form, is a competence to form rational desires in light of a consummate insight into evaluative matters and to act in accordance with those desires.²²⁸

Admittedly, only an unqualifiedly virtuous person is *fully* self-controlled and thereby autonomous. Plato hints that autonomy can be instantiated at many different

²²⁷ According to one prominent conception of autonomy, an agent governs her own action if and only if she is motivated to act as she does because this motivation coheres some mental state that represents her point of view on the action (Watson 1977; Frankfurt 1988; Bratman 2007). According to another conception, an agent does not really govern herself unless her motives, or the mental processes that produce them, are responsive to a sufficiently wide range of reasons for and against behaving as she does (Wolf 1990; Nelkin 2007). Some other scholars argue that the essence of self-government is the capacity to evaluate one's motives on the basis of whatever else one believes and desires, and to adjust these motives in response to one's evaluations. It is the capacity to discern what "follows from" one's beliefs and desires, and to act accordingly (Mele 1993). In spite of the differences between those accounts, they all think that autonomy is more than engaging in actions that spring from and in accordance with one's voluntary desires. Thus, autonomy stands for a more elevated form of authority over one's voluntary actions.

²²⁸ At the first sight, my interpretation of autonomy in Plato's *Republic* is very close to what Fred Miller dubs as psychological freedom, which amounts to the rule of reason over the soul, unimpeded by desires. While the ideas that we are getting at are close, I disagree with him with respect to the following point. Miller thinks that psychological freedom is always good. But as the disorder of democratic persons and constitutions indicates, freedom is not an absolute value in Plato. This might be why Plato stops short of labeling virtuous self-mastery as freedom. See Miller 2016.

degrees. As we have seen, a fully self-controlled and autonomous person is competent to form rational desires about what is good in particular circumstances in light of a consummate grasp of evaluative matters and to act in accordance with those desires. Such a person is the polar opposite of a tyrannical person, who, according to Plato, is uncontrolled (ἐαυτοῦ ὦν ἀκράτωρ 579c7-8). In other words, a tyrannical person is completely deprived of self-control and autonomy. The mad, erotic love that enslaves him not just replaces his remanent sense of appropriateness with lawless beliefs and desires. It also drags him to gratify extremely virulent appetitive desires (572e-574e). Thus, he is utterly inept at forming rational desires about what is good in particular circumstances in light of a consummate grasp of evaluative matters and acting in accordance with those desires. Between being fully self-controlled and being completely deprived of control, self-control, I presume, can be instantiated at many different degrees. For example, people can, to different extents, fail to be competent to form rational desires about what is good in particular circumstances in light of a consummate grasp of evaluative matters. While a person fails to form those desires once in a while, another person regularly fails to do so. In addition, people can, at different degrees, fall short of acting in accordance with their rational desires. One person might fail to act on rational desires only at the face of intense passions, another person usually fails to follow her rational desires.²²⁹ Recall that in sketching out what a self-controlled person is like, Plato

²²⁹ The presumption that self-control can be instantiated at different degrees coheres with Plato's illustration of why acting justly is always better than acting unjustly at the end of Book 9. Based on an image that compares the human soul, which is constituted by reason, spirit, and appetite, to a composite of a person, a lion, and a multi-headed, multi-colored beast, he asserts that just actions ensure that within the composite, the person has as much control as possible. Since reason is likened to a person, just actions ensure that reason has as much control as possible over the entire soul, and, in particular, non-rational parts. Recall that self-control, to a first approximation, amounts to reason's control over non-rational parts. Thus, just actions ensure that one, no matter whether one is fully virtuous or not, is as self-controlled as one can

can be seen offering an account of autonomy. Therefore, autonomy, in his view, can be instantiated at different degrees. A person instantiates autonomy to some extent if and only if she can form rational desires about what is good in particular circumstances in light of a correct grasp of evaluative matters and act in accordance with those desires to that extent.²³⁰

3.2 Autonomy and Community

To discover how the Platonic conception of autonomy casts light on the non-homogeneity among cases of becoming vicious, let us compare the development of young people who eventually settle in five major types of character, i.e., the virtuous, the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical.

It is worth noting at the outset that a certain degree of autonomy is not an accomplishment that human beings are born with. As I have argued, a person instantiates autonomy at some degree if and only if she can form rational desires about what is good in particular circumstances in light of a correct grasp of evaluative matters and act in accordance with those desires to that extent. Infants and small children, however, hardly possess a solid grasp of evaluative matters or the ability to act in accordance with rational desires.²³¹ Accordingly, they are not apt for autonomy. So a certain degree autonomy is not an innate accomplishment.

be. Therefore, between being fully self-controlled and being completely deprived of self-control, self-control can be instantiated at many different degrees.

²³⁰ I am extremely grateful to Hendrik Lorenz, Ben Morison, and Melissa Lane for discussions on autonomy in Plato's *Republic*. Given the limited scope of this chapter, I cannot fully address many important questions about autonomy, which I hope to answer more fully in the future. Some of those questions are whether Plato has a notion of freedom, what does he mean by calling guardians the craftsmen of the city's freedom (395c), how does freedom stand to autonomy, and how does a corrupt community erode individuals' autonomy.

²³¹ To have a solid grasp of evaluative matters, one need to have an extensive exposure to them. Infants and small children lack such an exposure. Hence, they hardly possess a solid grasp of evaluative matters. At

As future guardians in a virtuous community exemplify, human beings can be cultivated to acquire certain degrees of autonomy before settling in their eventual characters. According to Plato, the young people in question are immersed in salutary music and poetry, which represent moral exemplars, such as gods and heroes, as instantiating correct patterns of responses. Emulating the excellence of moral exemplars, future guardians are habituated to not only praise and enjoy fine things but also object to and hate shameful ones (401e–402a). In this way, their immersion in salutary music and poetry offers a solid grip on evaluative matters. Moreover, the early education of future guardians embodies the appropriate proportion between music and poetry, which aim to cultivate reason, and physical training, which aims to arouse spirit. As a result, these young people acquire a preliminary case of psychic harmony: reason, leading and working together with spirit, watches over appetitive pleasures and desires (410d–411a). This preliminary psychic harmony hints that future guardians are ready to follow their rational desires in actions. Accordingly, Plato's portrayal of future guardians shows that young people who are born and raised in a virtuous community are cultivated to acquire a high level of autonomy before settling in their eventual characters.

In comparison with future guardians, a timocratic youth belongs to a worse community. Future guardians come from a virtuous community, which, ruled by philosophers, is structured around correct values and desires. By contrast, the community of a timocratic youth is a mixture of correct and incorrect values. Admittedly, the youth has a virtuous father, whose words and deeds are impeccable. The rest of his community, such as his mother, associates, and other citizens, is marked by misguided values. Being

441a–b, Plato notes that while small children are full of spirit from birth, they do not partake of rational deliberation. So it seems that infants and small children barely act on rational desires.

born and raised in a worse community, a timocratic youth has less autonomy than future guardians during the stage of development at which he, albeit not yet settling in a character, reaches the requisite maturity to instantiate some degree of autonomy. As Plato puts it, the youth's grip on evaluative matters is somewhat compromised. Although the words and deeds of his virtuous father acquaint him with what is truly fine and good, he cannot fully appreciate its value. For example, he might think that doing his own work is admirable yet hesitate to act accordingly, due to the disadvantages that his father suffers from. Moreover, a timocratic youth is torn between reason, which his virtuous father cultivates, and spirit and appetite, which the rest of his degenerate community jointly nourish. The psychic tension suggests that a timocratic youth sometimes struggles to carry out the orders of reason in his actions.²³² Therefore, in comparison with future guardians in a virtuous community, a timocratic youth, who is born and raised in a worse community, has less autonomy.

An oligarchic youth, who is born and raised in a worse community than a timocratic youth is, has even less autonomy. In comparison with a timocratic youth, whose father is virtuous, an oligarchic youth has a worse father: his father is a timocratic man, who, controlled by spirit, values and desires honor and victory more than anything else. So an oligarchic youth belongs to a worse community. Under its corrosive influences, he has a worse grasp of evaluative matters than a timocratic youth does. As I have noted, a timocratic youth can tell what is truly fine and good, even though he cannot fully appreciate its value. By contrast, an oligarchic youth, albeit having inherited some half-hearted taste for virtue from his timocratic father, does not have as much exposure to

²³² See 549c–550b for Plato's discussion of how a timocratic youth becomes a full-fledged timocratic person.

virtuous words and deeds. As a result, it is more difficult for him to discern what is truly fine and good. On top of that, compared to a timocratic youth, an oligarchic youth is less apt at acting in accordance with his rational desires. According to Plato, the development of an oligarchic youth is marked by two stages—before the sudden downfall of his timocratic father and after that downfall. During those stages, his soul is dominated by non-rational parts. Reason only serves to find out the best means to accomplish the pursuits that the dominant, non-rational part favors.²³³ By contrast, a timocratic youth often acts on his rational desires. Therefore, an oligarchic youth, being born and raised in a worse community, has even less autonomy than a timocratic youth.

By this time, we have discovered the following pattern. The worse community a young person belongs to, the less autonomy she has during the stage of development at which she, albeit not having settled in a holistic character, reaches requisite maturity to instantiate some degree of autonomy. This progressive decline of autonomy manifests along two dimensions: first, a diminishing likelihood to form rational desires in light of a correct grasp of evaluative matters, second, a diminishing readiness to act in accordance with one's rational desires.

This pattern also holds true in the cases of democratic and tyrannical youths. In comparison with an oligarchic youth, a democratic youth is born and raised in a worse community.²³⁴ Hence, he not just lacks a reliable exposure to virtuous words and deeds, like an oligarch youth does. He becomes associated with virulent drones in his community. These people are full of unnecessary appetites, such as the appetite for heavy

²³³ For Plato's discussion of how an oligarchic youth becomes a full-fledged oligarchic person, see 553a–e.

²³⁴ For one thing, while the father of an oligarchic youth, being timocratic, still has some regard for virtues, the father of a democratic youth is an oligarchic man, who values money above everything else.

drinking and the appetite for luxury, which are oftentimes harmful. As a result of this association, a democratic youth becomes affected and then dominated by unnecessary appetites. Indulging in these appetites erodes the sense of appropriateness that his oligarchic father tries to impart on.²³⁵ Therefore, in comparison with an oligarchic youth, a democratic youth is less apt at forming rational desires in light of a correct grasp of evaluative matters and acting in accordance with those desires. That is to say, a democratic youth is less autonomous than an oligarchic youth. Compared to a democratic youth, a tyrannical youth belongs to an even worse community. His father, being a democratic man, has even less regard for virtue than the oligarchic father of a democratic youth. Under the influences of his corrupt community, a tyrannical youth is enslaved by a mad, erotic love. This love erases his beliefs and desires that still have some sense of appropriateness and replaces them with madness and lawlessness, which go against existing norms and conventions. What's worse, it drags him to gratify his unnecessary and even lawless appetites by all possible means. Hence, a tyrannical youth is less likely to form rational desires in light of a correct grasp of evaluative matters and acting in accordance with those desires than a democratic youth is.²³⁶ Therefore, a tyrannical youth has even less autonomy than a democratic youth.

So far, I have argued that even though all cases of becoming vicious share common underlying mechanisms, they are, in an important sense, different. The worse community a person belongs to, the less autonomy she has during the stage of development at which she, albeit not having settled in a holistic character, reaches the requisite maturity to instantiate some degree of autonomy.

²³⁵ See 559d–561a for how one becomes a democratic person.

²³⁶ See 572d–575a for how a youth becomes a full-fledged tyrannical person.

3.3 Autonomy and Becoming Vicious

In the rest of this section, I am going to make a further point about the non-homogeneity among cases of becoming vicious. The worse community a person belongs to, the less autonomy she tends to have over the development of her character.

To see this point, let us take a closer look at the myth of Er, the eschatological myth about the soul's journey after life that concludes the *Republic*. According to the myth, the disembodied souls, having received appropriate rewards or penalties for their deeds in the previous lives, are led to choose their next embodiment. Each of them is randomly assigned a lot, which determines the order in which it makes the selection. When its turn comes, a disembodied soul picks up from the available life models the one that it favors most. These models include not only different kinds of human life, such as the life of a tyrant and the life of a male athlete, but also the lives of non-human animals, like the life of a swan and the life of a lion. The number of models far outweighs the number of the disembodied souls that are about to make the choice, so even the soul that gets the last lot can find a satisfactory life if it chooses in a proper way (617d-620d). Since a life model constitutes a distinctive way of living, which in turn shapes one's character, each soul can be said to choose its character. Recall that a person is essentially her soul. Hence, by claiming that each disembodied soul chooses its next embodiment, Plato amounts to saying that each person chooses her character. At this point, we might naturally wonder: what does Plato mean by noting that each person chooses her character?

It is worth pointing out that according to Plato, the life choices that disembodied souls make about their next embodiment are essentially of the same kind as the specific choices that a living being makes in its current incarnation.

S: And from all this he will be able, by considering the nature of soul, to reason out which life is better and which worse and to choose accordingly, calling a life worse if it leads the soul to become more unjust, better if it leads the soul to become more just, and ignoring everything in between. We have seen that this is the best way to choose, whether in life or death.....

And we must always know how to choose the mean in such lives and how to avoid either of the extremes, as far as possible, both in this life and in all those beyond it. This is the way that a human being becomes happiest.

(618d5-619b1)²³⁷

The best way to choose both in this life (ἐν τῷδε τῷ βίῳ) and in all those beyond it (ἐν παντὶ τῷ ἔπειτα) is to reason out whether something is better or worse in light of the nature of soul. The choices in this life stand for *specific choices* that a living being makes in its current incarnation, such as the choice of engaging in physical exercises and the choice of listening to music and poetry. All those beyond it presumably represent choices that a disembodied soul makes in the interlude between two consecutive lives. And these choices include a *life choice*, i.e., the choice about the disembodied soul's next incarnation, which shapes its character. In this way, Plato suggests that the best way to make both specific choices and life choices is to deliberate about the effects that things have on one's soul, calling things better if they make the soul more just and calling them worse if they make the soul more unjust. That is to say, the same methods and criteria

²³⁷ ὥστε ἐξ ἀπάντων αὐτῶν δυνατὸν εἶναι συλλογισάμενον αἰρεῖσθαι, πρὸς τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς φύσιν ἀποβλέποντα, τὸν τε χεῖρω καὶ τὸν ἀμείνω βίον, χεῖρω μὲν καλοῦντα ὃς αὐτὴν ἐκείσε ἄξει, εἰς τὸ ἀδικωτέραν γίγνεσθαι, ἀμείνω δὲ ὅστις εἰς τὸ δικαιοτέραν. τὰ δὲ ἄλλα πάντα χαίρειν ἐάσει· ἐωράκαμεν γὰρ ὅτι ζῶντί τε καὶ τελευτήσαντι αὕτη κρατίστη αἵρεσις.....
ἀλλὰ γινῶ τὸν μέσον αἰεὶ τῶν τοιούτων βίον αἰρεῖσθαι καὶ φεύγειν τὰ ὑπερβάλλοντα ἐκατέρωσε καὶ ἐν τῷδε τῷ βίῳ κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ ἔπειτα· οὕτω γὰρ εὐδαιμονέστατος γίγνεται ἄνθρωπος.

govern both life choices and specific choices. Therefore, it is not far-fetched to infer that these choices are essentially of the same kind.

A plausible way to understand the striking similarity between life choice and specific choice is that the latter can be seen as the microscopic version of the former. In the myth of Er, Plato notes that whenever a disembodied soul chooses a model of life, it not only desires to select that model but also acts on its desire. So choices presumably consist in desires and corresponding actions. Human beings, in spite of differences in their innate endowments, can make specific choices, for example, that they should spend more time in study and physical exercises instead of drinking parties. Over time, these specific choices shape people's bodies, minds, and belongings in such a profound way that they can be said to cumulatively bring about people's characters. Recall that in the myth of Er, a life choice controls the character that a disembodied soul adopts in its next incarnation. So specific choices can be seen as the microscopic version of a life choice. From this perspective, each person chooses her character in a mediated way.²³⁸

It is accordingly not far-fetched to infer that one who is born and raised in a worse community has less autonomy over the development of one's own character. As I have noted, a person instantiates autonomy to some extent if and only if she can form rational desires in light of a correct grasp of evaluative matters and act in accordance with those desires to that extent.

²³⁸ A closer look at the choices that disembodied souls make about their next incarnations suggests that many of them do not choose on the basis of proper exercise of reason. For instance, the one who is the first to choose rushes to (εὐθὺς ἐπιόντα) the greatest tyranny in greed (λαίμαργίας) and folly (ἀφροσύνης) without adequate examination (619b-c). Hence, the choices that cumulatively determine the person's moral profile do not have to be rational.

So degrees of autonomy are, first and foremost, measures for the degrees of influence that one has over one's desires and actions. A more autonomous person has more control over her desires and actions. Recall that the worse community one belongs to, the less autonomy one has during the stage of development at which one, albeit not having settled in a holistic character, reaches the requisite maturity to instantiate some degree of autonomy. So during the development of character, one who belongs to a worse community has less control over one's desires and actions. In the myth of Er, Plato conveys the following message. Specific choices, which come down to desires for what is good in particular circumstances and their corresponding actions, cumulatively shape one's character. So specific choices can be seen as the microscopic version of a life choice, which a disembodied soul makes about the its next incarnation. Therefore, one can be said to choose one's character. Accordingly, in a mediated way, the worse community one belongs to, the less autonomy one has over the development of one's character.

4.Preventing Vice

Let us take stock. In this paper, I have argued that underlying one's becoming vicious are two basic mechanisms: acculturation and conformity. Each of them stands for a distinct form of interaction among a bad society, one's mental life, and actions. This, however, does not imply that all cases of becoming vicious are homogenous. Cases of becoming vicious are different in the following way. The worse community one belongs to, the less autonomy one has over the development of one's character.

To close this chapter, I would like to sketch out some preliminary thoughts about how Plato's account of becoming vicious informs us about his proposal for preventing vice. At the outset, it is worth noting that most human beings, even if they have not settled in corrupt, holistic characters, are somewhat affected by bad communities. As we have seen, Plato examines four major types of corrupt character—the timocratic, the oligarchic, the democratic, and the tyrannical—and their parallel kinds of regime. Timocracy, as the least deviant one among corrupt characters and constitutions, is superior to most characters and constitutions.²³⁹ Thus, most communities are corrupt. So human beings are, by and large, born and raised in bad communities. Recall that the two basic mechanisms underlying becoming vicious, namely, acculturation and conformity, stand for different forms of interaction among a bad community, one's mental life, and actions. In both mechanisms, a bad community is the ultimate source of corruption. So the ultimate source of corruption, i.e., a bad community, is ubiquitous. It follows that even if people have not settled in corrupt, holistic characters, they tend to be somewhat affected by bad communities.

Accordingly, preventing vice involves, first and foremost, protecting individuals from the ultimate source of corruption, i.e., a bad community. How can this protection be obtained? As we have seen, the two basic mechanisms underlying becoming vicious, i.e., acculturation and conformity, stand for different forms of interaction among a bad community, one's mental life, and actions. According to acculturation, having absorbed misguided ideologies from bad communities, people become afflicted with a distorted mental life. As a result, they engage in the corresponding, bad actions, which exacerbate

²³⁹ At 544c, Plato notes that timocratic constitutions like Sparta are praised by most people, so they are better than most constitutions.

and perpetuate their mental affliction. In the end, their attachment to incorrect values and desires becomes so entrenched that they structure their entire lives around those values and desires and are, as a result, dominated by the corresponding, non-rational parts.

According to conformity, due to regular participation in public gatherings, one oftentimes matches one's actions with those of the majority, in line with the distorted, dominant ideologies. Bad actions gradually distort one's mental life: one, little by little, comes to enjoy, attend to, and value what the majority mistakenly enjoy, attend to, and value. In the end, one becomes so attached to the misguided values and desires of the majority that one structures one's life around them and, as a result, is dominated by the corresponding, non-rational parts. In light of those basic mechanisms underlying becoming vicious, it is not far-fetched to infer that to protect themselves from the ultimate source of corruption, i.e., a bad community, people should see to it that the community in question does not affect their mental life and actions. More specifically, they should refrain from absorbing misguided ideologies from their communities. On top of that, they should make sure that they do not match their actions with those of the majority in public gatherings.

Communities oftentimes serve to guide our daily lives: many of us consult famous stories and our social connections when we are at a loss about what to do. As we have seen, most human beings belong to bad communities. If, in order to prevent vice, people need to insulate their mental life and actions from their communities, what should they consult in order to guide their daily lives?

Plato suggests that aspiring individuals can use the *Republic* to guide their daily lives. The *Republic* not only offers a vivid image of a virtuous person but also proposes a detailed program for cultivating such a person. Admittedly, the program is embedded in a

virtuous community, which most, if not all, existing communities fall short of. Plato hints that readers can shape their lives in light of the relevant discussions in the *Republic*. In Book 10, he declares that individuals who happen to find themselves in bad communities can resist the temptation of imitative music and poetry by repeating the *Republic*'s arguments that such music and poetry are harmful like an incantation. In other words, people can use the relevant discussions in the *Republic* as antidotes to fend off the spells of imitative music and poetry (607e–608a). Presumably, the same strategy can be adopted to protecting people from being misled by other external goods, such as honor, money, and rule, in their pursuit of virtue (608a–b). Therefore, the *Republic* can be used as a manual to structure the daily lives of individuals who are born and raised in corrupt communities.

Nevertheless, not everyone in bad communities can be reliably helped by arguments in the *Republic*. First, it is dubious whether all people can be moved by those arguments. Consider a democratic man. He refuses to accept any challenge to his conviction that all pleasures are on a par. Thus, even if he avails himself of the *Republic*, he can hardly protect himself from being distracted by external goods such as money, poetry, and feast. Second, people who are somewhat persuaded by arguments in the *Republic* might still struggle to act accordingly. As we have seen, the worse community one belongs to, the less autonomy one has over the development of one's character. One is autonomous at some degree if and only if one can form rational desires in light of a correct grasp of evaluative matters and act in accordance with those desires at that degree. Hence, even if some people can form rational desires in light of the arguments in the *Republic*,

they might have difficulty in acting accordingly, because they are liable to be distracted by external goods, such as honor, money, and rule. As a consequence, insofar as people belong to bad communities, it is doubtful whether they can be helped by arguments in the *Republic*.

To sum up, Plato's account of becoming vicious points to the following proposal for preventing vice. To prevent vice, we should, first and foremost, insulate ourselves from the ultimate source of corruption, i.e., a bad community. More specifically, we should refrain from both absorbing misguided ideologies from our communities and matching our actions with those of the majority in public gatherings. We can instead use the *Republic* as a manual to guide our daily lives. Nevertheless, people in bad communities might fail to be persuaded by arguments in the *Republic*; even if they are persuaded, they might have difficulty in acting accordingly. Therefore, a more effective strategy for preventing vice, in Plato's view, is improving the communities to which people belong.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ The proposal for preventing vice that I have sketched out in this section is preliminary. A thorough treatment of this topic deserves a separate chapter, which I hope to include in the book manuscript that I will work on after defending my dissertation. Another related topic that I would like to examine more carefully is correcting or ameliorating vice.

Chapter 6. Concluding Remarks

In this dissertation, I have argued that the Socratic dialogues and the *Republic* are home to two different theories of human vice. In the Socratic dialogues, vice is ignorance. But ignorance is not a mere lack of knowledge, as many scholars assume. Instead, it is a substantive, structural psychic flaw: the soul's domination by inferior elements that are by nature fit to be ruled instead of ruling. The inferior elements at issue are appearances—representations of how things strike one to be from certain perspectives. On this picture, particular defects that are often labeled as epistemic vices and moral vices in contemporary discussions, such as closed-mindedness and cowardice, are forms of ignorance. An epistemic vice—wishful thinking about one's cognitive conditions—is the common core of all other epistemic and moral vices.

By contrast, in the *Republic*, Plato does not identify human vice with ignorance. Instead, he operates with a functional model of vice, which applies to everything that has its own function, i.e., activities that only it can perform or that it can perform better than anything else does. According to the functional model, the vice of something is a state of that thing because of which it performs its function badly. On this picture, human vice is a psychic state, because of which the soul performs its function—living a reason-guided life—badly. The psychic state in question consists primarily in corrupt characters, such as the timocratic character and the tyrannical character. These characters are deep-seated misalignments of the entire human soul, because of which the soul fails to live a reason-guided life. Particular defects, for example, cowardice and closed-mindedness, are aspects of corrupt characters. Ignorance, as the vice of the rational soul part, is a

particular defect that is necessary and sufficient for human vice. More specifically, it is a state because of which the rational soul part performs its function badly.

In the *Republic*, Plato offers illuminating discussions of how individuals become vicious. In a nutshell, one becomes vicious as a result of bad habituation, which amounts to coming to adopt a way of living (ἐπιτηδεῦμα) that inappropriately strengthens non-rational parts. There are two basic mechanisms underlying the adoption of shameful ways of living, apprenticeship and conformity, as I call them. Each mechanism represents a different form of interaction among a bad community, individuals' mental life, and actions. In both cases, a bad community is the ultimate source of corruption. Despite those similarities, cases of becoming vicious are not entirely homogenous. According to Plato, autonomy, in its most complete form, amounts to a competence to form rational desires in light of a comprehensive grip on the evaluative matters and act in accordance with those desires. Autonomy can be cultivated and obtained at many different degrees. In general, the worse community one belongs to, the less autonomy one tends to have over the development of her character. So cases of becoming vicious are, in an important sense, variegated.

In closing, I would like to sketch out a few related questions that I hope to explore in the future, both in order to turn this dissertation into a book manuscript and develop my research into other areas of philosophy.

First, why does Plato develop two different theories of human vice in the Socratic dialogues and the *Republic* respectively? And relatedly, why does he conceive of the relationship between vice and ignorance in two different ways? It seems to me that Plato's divergent theories of vice are rooted in his changing views about the self, i.e., the

soul. In the Socratic dialogues, Plato thinks that the soul is a simple, non-composite entity, even though it consists of both rational and non-rational elements. Thus, vice is just ignorance, which amounts to the souls' domination by appearances. By contrast, in the *Republic*, he comes to see the soul as a composite of three parts, i.e., reason, spirit, and appetite. In addition, he recognizes the continuity between virtue and vice for human beings and virtue and vice elsewhere. They are tied to the function of things.

Accordingly, he characterizes human vice and ignorance as states because of which a human soul and the rational soul part perform their function poorly.

Second, how does Plato understand badness in the political dimension? And how does badness in the political domain stand in relation to human vice? In my view, he proposes two different accounts of political vice in the Socratic dialogues and the *Republic*. The Socratic dialogues suggest that at the heart of political vice is political flattery, a practice that, albeit purporting to offer what is good for human beings in general, in fact seeks what is most pleasant for the majority and the city that they constitute. Rooted in the ignorance and vices of, politicians, political flattery not only perpetuates and exacerbates but also is sustained by individual and political vices. The *Republic*, by contrast, operates with a functional model of political vice, in line with its adoption of the functional model elsewhere. Political vice is a state of a political entity because of which the entity performs its function—collective human living—badly. A deviant community, being politically vicious, is the ultimate source of individual corruption.

Third, what does Plato's characterization of human vice as psychic disease inform us about his stance on human vice? While, as I have argued in Chapter 4, he does not

conflate moral vices with mental illnesses, does he provide us with enough resources to extract a distinctive account of mental illnesses? If so, how does mental illnesses stand in relation to human vice?

Last but not least, how does Plato's account of autonomy in the *Republic* anticipate contemporary discussions on that topic? If the worse community one belongs to, the less autonomy one has over the development of one's character, do people have different degrees of moral responsibility over their characters? Does Plato, as some scholars assert, think that vicious people are not morally responsible for their characters? Does he really have a notion of moral responsibility?

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